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Thesis as part of the degree of Master of Arts by coursework and research in journalism and media studies.

Investigating whether Twitter plays any role in SABC's television news production and if so how

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1. Introduction

New media also referred as digital media has revolutionised the way in which news is consumed and produced. As more consumers get access to digital media, its influence and impact are increasingly realised (McCombs, 2005). Growing access to digital media has changed the communication landscape as more news platforms become available. This changing landscape now challenges the supremacy of traditional media's role in shaping public opinion as well as influencing its methods of news production. The impact that technological developments have had on news is profound. Turner and Hamilton write: "In recent years, ubiquitous computation has transformed the landscape of journalism. It has undermined business models, rebalanced the relative power of reporters and audiences, and accelerated the delivery of information worldwide" (Turner & Hamilton, 2009, p. 4).

New forms of news creation and distribution allow the public to bypass traditional news forums and set the agenda (Conway, Kenski & Wang, 2015). This raises questions about how the availability of more opinions will impact traditional news production and whether this new media environment would enable traditional news to become more democratic.

Twitter (defined later) is a social media platform that has accelerated the speed with which information is spread. Traditionally, journalists filtered, organised and interpreted information and packaged it into balanced and structured stories (Hermida, 2013). Now, consumers themselves become creators of news content (Maier, 2010) as well as disseminators. The sociologist Dhiraj Murthy writes, "ordinary people are able to break news, produce content or voice their opinions publicly" (Murthy, 2012, p. 1064). Twitter's immediacy makes it an ideal platform for breaking news (Petrovic et al., 2013). It allows citizens to produce small pieces of content that can be collectively considered as journalism (Hermida, 2010).

Hermida (2013) writes that since Twitter was launched in 2006, it has become an important part of journalistic practices. Harder, Sevenans and Van Aelst (2017) echo the sentiments of Hermida that Twitter is not only used as a source but also as a networked "social awareness system" for assessing the ongoing streams of news.

Some say this has created a more democratic environment, one where users actively participate in the production and flow of news (Hermida, 2013). Others believe that the space is captured by a few elites who dominate the flow of Twitter discussions (Bastos, Raimundo & Travitzki, 2013). This has initiated discussion on the role of journalists in this changing environment.

The popularity of Twitter has triggered growing research into understanding how Twitter impacts on norms and routines of journalism. Questions about how news organisations increasingly integrate the use of social media in news production and how this is changing the nature of journalism have been examined by scholars such as Boczkowski (2004), Maier (2010), Yuan (2011), Goode (2009), Barnard (2016), Watson (2016), Rogstad (2016) and Bouvier (2017).

In South Africa there is mounting research about the impact that the use of Twitter has on journalism. Marenet Jordaan, journalism lecturer at University of Stellenbosch, in a M.Phil. thesis looked at how the use of social media in the newsrooms of Rapport and Mail and Guardian newspapers have impacted on the daily routines and cultures of the newsroom (Jordaan, 2012). Associate Professor in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Dr Glenda Daniels, explored whether the use of Twitter posts has democratised news (Daniels, 2014). Peter Verweij and Elvira Van Noort, media scholars from the Netherlands, analysed how South African journalists' use of the Twitter platform and tweets has changed their practices (Verweij & Van Noort, 2014). Prof Tanja Bosch at the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town, examined how the student-led campaign on Twitter, Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF), set the agenda for mainstream news (Bosch, 2017). Prof Herman Wasserman, Director of the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town, explored how social media such as Facebook and Twitter spreads "fake news" that is widely and quickly disseminated and considered its implications for journalism (Wasserman, 2017).

Findings of these studies mentioned and their significance for the present study will be examined in the Literature review below.

While most research in South Africa examines the impact of Twitter posts on print media, the focus of this investigation is whether and, if so, how tweets impact on SABC's television news production.

To do this, this study utilises relevant features of news sociology theory. In addition, it refers to agenda-setting theory to fill the gaps which sociology of the news does not explain. These approaches enable the researcher to interrogate the various aspects of news creation and they will be explained in greater detail in the Literature review below.

Two words of caution are appropriate: first, this study does not purport to be a critique per se on news theories; it identifies leading theories, explains them, refers to leading criticism of them, and then applies them to the South African issue just identified. Second, the manner in which Twitter has impacted traditional print and broadcasting media has been, at least for purposes of this study, essentially the same. This study does not examine particularly whether Twitter has differentiated in the way in which it has impacted these separate forms of traditional media. So, when reference is made to "traditional media", this is an inclusive and not discriminating concept.

As a producer of television news and current affairs programmes who worked in SABC's newsroom for more than fifteen years I, as researcher, drew on my own experience of the organisation's politics, economics, work culture, routines and editorial decision-making processes to enrich this study.

In discussing the impact that technological developments have had on traditional news production, relevant definitions are needed and will thus first be explained.

1.2 Definitions of key concepts relevant to this study

Traditional media

For purposes of this study traditional media refers to all forms of mass communication broadly before the advent of digital forms of media. Print and broadcasting media, both radio and television, are intended. Traditional media is therefore also mainstream media. Rogstad (2016) suggests that mainstream media

creates a shared public agenda by telling consumers what they should think about. According to Rogstad, mainstream media still remains an important platform for public debate. Karlsson (2011) argues that traditional media is being challenged by the new media that allows the audience to participate.

New media and digital media

What is “new media”? This concept is almost impossible to define since all media was once new. In the 1950s television was new media (Scolari, 2009).

New media is therefore best described as media that did not exist before now – where “now” is an ever forward-moving moment in time (Scolari, 2009, p 945 citing Lister et al.) and is thus an evolving concept. Thomas, Mackay and Salsbury (2012) write that initially scholars defined networked digital computers as another form of medium comparable with traditional analogue systems, such as cinema or television. Ryan (2004) argues that we find ourselves in a post media situation and that medium specific forms and modes of communication are made possible by using various software products.

Digital media derives from digitised communication. Digitised communication is a single technology that can simulate all existing mediums through digitisation. All existing mediums converge into one - the networked digital computer (Heidenreich, 2001). As opposed to traditional media such as print and broadcasting, new media operates on a digitised platform and encompasses the internet and its subsequent digital by-products including, but not limited to, websites, blogs, podcasts, online video, mobile text messaging, and social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Also noteworthy for the purposes of this study are several terms frequently associated with new media: multimedia and multiplatforms, which refer to disseminating information across a traditional channel as well as at least one new channel associated with the internet (Adornato, 2014). Connection and discussion on the online media are offered at a level that traditional media does not match. There is now an avenue for audience to comment after reading a news article, and such comment may lead to a forum of discussion among people who have not met before.

The rigorous social interchange spawned in this way, was virtually absent before the invention of online media. The most ground-breaking aspect of the online journalism is that audiences are able to add to stories and communicate with other readers who are also interested in dialogue. Through this modern method of information dissemination, various opportunities are created for people to choose what they desire to read or view (Olusola et al., 2017).

What is “social media”?

Newman (2009, p. 7) states that “‘social media’ is an extraordinarily difficult term to pin down. Sometimes it refers to an activity (a journalist blogged); sometimes to a software tool (Blogger); sometimes to a platform (you can blog on Facebook). It incorporates the term user-generated content (UGC) and yet much of this content is not really social at all. Social media is also constantly mutating and evolving; just when you think you have nailed it, a new combination emerges, changing perceptions again (Newman, 2009).

Social media has become a routine part of journalists’ job responsibilities, as they use platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for finding story ideas, content, and sources; promoting stories; sharing information while in the field; and interacting with audience members (Adornato, 2014; Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Hermida, 2010). Verweij and Van Noort (2014, p. 99) refer to Rosen, 2012, who notes that what distinguishes old media from new media is that society moved from one-way to two-way (interactive) communication; top-down to bottom-up; closed versus open; institutionalised journalism to individualised journalism; public versus we media. “Twitter is considered a newsy tool, Facebook predominantly used for social events and LinkedIn for professional contacts” (Verweij & Van Noort, 2014).

For the purposes of this study, “social media” will refer to all forms of electronic platforms (such as web sites) through which people create online communities to share information, ideas, and personal messages. “Social media” is therefore a sub-feature of new media.

What is Twitter?

There are various ways to describe Twitter. Lysak, Cremedas and Wolf (2012) define Twitter as a free social networking, micro-blogging platform that allows users to create a public or private profile accounts, to post short messages known as tweets; and that allows individuals or groups to view the tweets of other users, to repost tweets of other users (retweet), and to follow profile accounts of other users. Twitter is like instant messaging or text messaging, but one-to-many, instead of one-to-one. Tweets can be posted and received from computers or cellular phones, provided they are connected to the internet.

Murthy (2012) elaborates on this description and refers to tweets as similar to chat rooms in that dialogue between Twitter users occurs through the at-sign (e.g. a user can direct tweets to another user by prefixing a post with an at-sign before the target user's name) in real time. However, unlike many chat rooms, Twitter is public and permanent. Anyone can post a tweet provided that the person is registered. Unregistered users can only read tweets (Murthy, 2012).

Tweets were originally restricted to 140 characters per single tweet, but since November 2017, the limit was doubled to 280 characters for all languages except Japanese, Korean and Chinese. Twitter describes itself as "a real-time information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting." Tweets are permanent, they are searchable and they are public (McMahon, 2015).

Twitter is therefore, in turn, a sub-feature of social media. It will refer to the free online news and networking service where users post and interact with messages known as "tweets."

2. Aim

As stated, the main aim of this investigation is to examine whether the use of Twitter impacts SABC's news production and if so how?

2.1 Key research questions

1. To what extent does the use of Twitter transform journalistic norms, practices and processes of SABC's newsroom?

2. Does the use of Twitter, as a news source, have any influence on traditional media's content decisions and if so, in what way?

3. **Rationale**

In 2009 Barbie Zelizer noted that journalism's interdisciplinary nature makes it possible for researchers to examine it from a variety of disciplines including political science, history, language and cultural studies (Zelizer, 2009)**.**

Although there are many theories that explain the nature of journalism, no single theory fully explains the issues and challenges thrown up in an ever-changing media landscape.

Since the bulk of theoretical research has focused on conditions and practices based on the experiences of Western journalists, this research uses relevant aspects of sociology theory, such as organisational practices and routines as well as aspects of agenda-setting theory, such as intermedia agenda-setting theory to the unique environment at the SABC.

The SABC is South Africa's only free-to-air public broadcaster. It competes for viewership with other broadcasters to attract advertising income and finance itself. Approximately 80% of its revenue is generated from advertising income. As a public broadcaster the SABC's first priority is not to make a profit. Despite this, it has to be financially self-sufficient. It is required to use income generated from commercial activities to fund its public broadcast activities. Its public broadcast mandate requires it to produce news in all eleven official languages, cover events of national importance and produce public service programmes (SABC, 2017).

SABC News produces 52 television news bulletins and nine television current affairs weekly. SABC News is broadcast on three of SABC's terrestrial channels, SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3. SABC1 broadcasts alternate news in Zulu or Xhosa at 19:00. SABC 2 broadcasts Morning Live from 6:00-9:00 weekday mornings, Venda or

Tsonga news at 17:30, Afrikaans news at 18:30 and alternate Sesotho or Setswana and Sepedi news at 20:00 daily. SABC3 English news is broadcast at 21:00. The news is also available on DStv channels. SABC also has a 24-Hour News service on the SABC DStv channel 404. Its broadcasts are continuous (TV Guide – South Africa, n.d.).

The SABC's News team is not only expected to meet daily deadlines but must also produce news stories in more than one language. SABC news will be discussed in greater detail under SA's Media Landscape.

This study employs in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior editorial journalists in SABC's television newsroom to explain whether the use of Twitter plays any role in the creation of news now. African journalists work in multifaceted conditions where news condition are sometimes similar and other times very different from Northern goals and methods. Paterson (as cited in Mabweazara, 2015, p. 107) notes that African journalists operate in multifaceted conditions "where news production is sometimes strikingly similar to what might be seen in any global news hub … and conversely, sometimes distant from Northern norms in terms of its goals and methods".

4. Background

4.1 SA Media landscape

Broadcasting

The context for this investigation is the rapidly changing media environment in South Africa. Newsrooms, here and abroad, face significant challenges as more and more people get access to new free media platforms. This has forced traditional media to reconsider its business models in an attempt to survive.

In terms of section 6 of the Broadcasting Act No 4 of 1999, South Africa's broadcasting environment is regulated by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). It was established in terms of section 192 of the South African Constitution. ICASA provides guidelines for broadcasting in the public interest and ensuring fairness and diversity of views broadly representing South

African society. In terms of the Independent Communications Authority Act No 13 of 2000, ICASA issues licences to broadcasters and enforces compliance.

South Africa has a three-tier broadcasting system that allows for public, commercial and community broadcasters. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is the only free-to-air public broadcaster, with the State as the sole shareholder.

South Africa has seven licensed free-to-air community TV stations as well as a subscription digital satellite service, called DStv/Multi-Choice, which carries a large selection of channels (Meletakos, 2014).

South Africa's only free-to-air privately owned commercial broadcaster is e.tv. Its license requires it to provide a variety of programme genres including news and current affairs programmes. eNCA is a 24-hour television news broadcaster, owned by e.tv and broadcast on the DStv channel 403.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been challenged by poor leadership, financial mismanagement and interference with its editorial policies in recent years. During the 2016/2017 financial year the organisation received an adverse audit opinion. Irregular expenditure, the 90% local content directive for SABC Radio and TV and the former CEO Hlaudi Motsoeneng's interference news caused audience figures to drop and advertising revenue, sponsorships and TV licence fees to decline. The result was that SABC suffered a net loss of R622m for the 2017/2018 financial year and is now "bankrupt". A subsequent Parliamentary inquiry into the ability of the board to hold office led to the board's collapse and a new board was appointed in October 2017 (Quintal, 2018, p. 2).

Despite these problems SABC news continues to attract large audiences due to its affordability and reach. It remains the primary source of news to most South Africans. SABC1's Zulu news has seen an increase in viewership during 2017 and is watched by 4.3 million adults. SABC2's Afrikaans bulletin follows and has 1.34 million viewers. Although e.tv news viewership has dropped, it is in third place and has 668,154 viewers. Declining viewership of SABC3's English news bulletin forced the channel to move its primetime news from 18h00 to 21h00 in February 2017 (Bratt, 2017a).

The SABC's Annual Report 2016/2017 acknowledged that it was necessary to reposition itself to grow audiences and remain relevant. It plans to grow its digital presence and has identified programming on mobile phones as a priority. Surveys undertaken by SABC found that more than half of the 1.5 million South Africans who watch television on cell phones, do not have access to DStv (SABC, 2017).

Print media

The move to digital has had huge implications for traditional print media. In South Africa, daily newspaper circulation is has declined by about 11.2% and weekend papers by 12% (Harber, 2017). In a Financial Mail article, 17 November 2017, communications analyst Toby Shapshak says the phenomenal growth of social media has virtually destroyed the advertising income that is crucial for the survival of traditional media (Harber, 2017). Facebook attracts 97% of brands and Twitter 90% (Patricios & Goldstuck, 2017).

Online news

The increase in independent online news sites, such as Daily Maverick and Ground-Up, have forced traditional media to find new ways of attracting audiences to survive. To achieve this, most traditional news services now also provide online versions of their news and have established a presence on social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Traditional media have had to embrace social platforms for financial survival (Finlay, 2016).

Social media

The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns proved that Twitter campaigns can move the public debate from the periphery to the centre of where discussions are taking place. Since then, almost no campaign has been launched without a hashtag (Goldstuck & Wronski, 2016).

The SA Social Media Landscape 2018 study (Goldstuck, 2017) found that Facebook is used by 16.3 million citizens and Twitter by 8 million. The availability of a low-

intensity version of Facebook, which some mobile operators provide and which can be used without data charges, has increased the number of people using Facebook.

However, despite more affordable data costs, internet access remains unavailable to most South Africans. Twitter usage continues to be associated with upper income groups and users are defined as a homogeneous and net-savvy generation (Murthy 2011).

For those who have access, “Twitter remains the social platform of choice for engaging in public discourse in South Africa”, according to Arthur Goldstuck, managing director of the leading market research company, World Wide Worx (Fin24Tech, 2017). Although it has less than half of the number of users when compared to Facebook, Twitter users get access to vastly more personalities, news sources and opinion-makers, and users can become opinion-makers themselves (Patricios & Goldstuck, 2017).

A global survey conducted by Nielsen, examining 90% of the world population’s media habits found that most social media users are between 35 and 49 years. Among users, women spend 25% of their time on social media versus men who spend 19% of their time on social media. Women account for 61% of Facebook users who react to a television story. Women are more likely to tweet about holidays and celebrities; men tweet more often about the news, sport and politics (Casey, 2017).

Twitter is mostly accessed ‘on the move’ and most users use it several times a day. More than 50% of users said they read tweets on their timeline daily, 40% send tweets themselves and 37% look at trending topics. When it comes to who they engage with, 55% say they engage with people they know and 53% with people they don’t know. The survey found that 53% of users are 24–35, nearly one third are aged 16–24 and the remaining 18% are over 55 years old (Casey, 2017).

5. **Literature review**

This review commences by identifying and assessing studies of scholars who have examined how new technological developments have influenced traditional media both globally but ultimately also South Africa. Then this study will examine the

findings of scholars who have investigated the changing role of journalists, the reciprocal relationship between new and old media and, specifically, Twitter's impact on traditional media. Since the focus of this study is ultimately how Twitter, which is really a social media micro blogging service, influences the SABC's news production, it will then consider South African studies of the use of Twitter and its influence in a South African news media environment.

Communication scholars agree that technological innovations continue to have a profound impact on journalism as audiences migrate increasingly from print media and television to online news options and social media. Since the new news has become mostly free and freely available, this migration has not only changed audiences' consumer patterns, but has also contributed to traditional media's economic decline (Maier, 2010). It has also profoundly changed the traditional relationship between journalists and consumers (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Napoli, 2011; Tandoc, 2014). Consumers of news have now become able to create content, participate in news production, and connect with other consumers who share the same interests. Traditional media's singular power to create and disseminate news has become diluted (Meraz, 2011**,** Karlsson, 2011). Consumers themselves have become news producers who are able to interact directly with professional journalists (McCombs, 2005; Maier, 2010; Hermida, 2013; Robinson, 2011; Tandoc, 2014; Barnard, 2016; Conway-Silva, Filer, Kenski & Tsetsi, 2017).

The impact that social media has had on journalism is well described by Jude Mathurine, lecturer at the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media studies. He writes, "… (the) use of social media networks (SMNs) broadens the mediascape, muddies notions of journalistic identity, and increases mutual dependence between traditional journalists and the people formerly known as the audience" (Mathurine, 2013, p. 79).

However, while the new technology allows consumers to participate in news production, this has potentially come at the cost of both the professionalism of the industry and the financial viability of traditional media. In this context, Robinson (2011, p. 140) quotes Vunjnovic who writes, "… publishers, editors and managers began frantically trying to make sense of how to 'save' the industry by monetizing digital tools and offerings".

And Anderson (2012, p. 1007) refers to Turner and Hamilton (2009, p. 4) who note: “In recent years, ubiquitous computation has transformed the landscape of journalism. It has undermined business models, rebalanced the relative power of reporters and audiences, and accelerated the delivery of information worldwide ….”. This realisation is shared by many others, including Bouvier (2017) and Newman (2009).

As increasing numbers of individuals turned to free digital options in the US, journalists have lost jobs. A Pew Research Centre Fact Tank in the US, reports that newsroom employment dropped by nearly 25% in less than two years with the greatest decline in newspapers (Grieco, 2018).

This downward trend in newspaper circulation has been a global phenomenon. A similar trend has occurred in the UK. The Guardian reported that Audience Bureau Circulation (ABC) figures showed that between 2000 and 2009 national newspaper circulation declined by 19.7% (Greenslade, 2009).

In 2017 a subsequent Pew Centre analysis of subscription figures of major USA newspapers found that although online subscriptions had increased somewhat, this did not make up for the overall losses in the industry. The total circulation figures were down, marking the 28th consecutive year of declines. As a result, 25% of jobs had been shed in print media over the past ten years. Today nine in ten Americans get at least some news online and over 66% get their news on mobile devices. This constitutes a 24% increase on the previous year (Barthel, 2018).

A Reuters study, analysing digital consumer patterns of more than 70,000 people in 36 countries, and which included many countries in Europe and Asia, showed similar declines in print circulation. Now that news is freely available all the time and mobile access grows, only one in ten consumers pays for news (Newman, 2009).

A 2017 news trends survey by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN-IFRA) found that revenue from circulation figures is the biggest source of income for news publishers. This fact, according to Dean Roper, the head of Insights at WAN-IFRA, is a function of advertisers now migrating to Google and Facebook and leaving the traditional media with mere scraps of advertising revenue (WAN-IFRA, 2017). Trust had become the new currency for success **(**Bratt, 2017b).

These new realities and generally the growing pressure exerted by digital technology, especially social media, on traditional media have resulted in the latter having to explore new ways to claw back lost territory.

The BBC Global News became the first global broadcaster formally to partner with a social broadcast network in 2013. It signed a partnership agreement with Twitter Amplify, a video advertising product that gives broadcasters the opportunity to publish video clips in real time. In terms of this arrangement, the BBC provides the Twitter community with breaking news video clips in an attempt to attract advertising revenue to the BBC and Twitter. James Montgomery, the director of Digital and Technology at BBC Global News, said that the partnership was formed to extend BBC's reach, attract new audiences, and increase its newsgathering capabilities. A year later major networks in the UK and USA followed suit and joined the service (Van Eeden, 2015).

In 2015 The New York Times became the first print media organisation to sign a deal with Facebook, which would host their content in exchange for a share of advertising revenue. This was a sterling example of how the traditional media have had to change its business model to survive (Oremus, 2015).

These examples show that global broadcasters became forced to share their content on social media platforms to regain lost revenue, remain relevant and defend their territory. The importance of attracting advertising revenue to survive is emphasised by many studies that agree that users no longer seem willing to pay for content (Herbert & Thurman, 2007). In the new media environment media organisations were left with no alternative but to join social media platforms to attract lost revenue. Scholars have raised concern that this drive for advertising revenue might blur the lines between journalism's professional obligation to provide the public with balanced information on the one hand, and content that was primarily aimed at attracting advertising revenue on the other (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009).

Examples of how Twitter has affected traditional media and some resulting implications

There have been increasing numbers of empirical studies about the impact of Twitter since its launch in 2006 on traditional media and journalism in that context. Scholars

such as Boczkowski (2009), Maier (2010), Yuan (2011), Goode (2009), Barnard (2016), Watson (2016) and Rogstad (2016) have examined Twitter's impact on journalism. The results have been diverse. Some have found that Twitter's influence has been valuable but not unqualifiedly so; others have reported on Twitter's role in a particular milieu. Some of these studies are the following.

Newman (2009) studied the Iranian uprisings in 2009. Reports of the election uprisings in 2009 were initially covered by citizens who used social media and blogs to report what was happening on the ground as the government tried to block information from getting out. Twitter news reports and images were sent to large media organisations, which were dependant on citizens' versions of events, because foreign correspondents were denied access to the country and the internal media was censored. Since the reports from Twitter accounts could not be confirmed, traditional media was presented with the dilemma of trading speed for accuracy. Newman's study confirmed that although social media in this case did not replace the value of a well-crafted news story, it did extend the speed with which news was made available and shared. It also extended newsgathering and image-capturing possibilities.

Similar studies support that Twitter has fundamentally changed the speed with which information is disseminated. It is an essential tool for news breaking and reporting in real time, especially during violent protests or in countries where governments try to block information (Bruns, Highfield & Burgess, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

Twitter has certainly become an important platform in political communication. It is used by traditional media as a news source during elections; it breaks news; it helps to stimulate debate; and it serves as leads for story angles and as a basis for profiles of political participants. Researchers have done numerous studies to examine the relationship between Twitter and traditional media during campaigning (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2016; Rogstad, 2016; Conway-Silva et al., 2017). These studies have not been large enough to make generali**s**ations; yet they do uncover some trends about the relationship between traditional media and social media that can be applied to South Africa's media environment, and specifically the SABC.

In the milieu of democratic party-politics, studies have examined the interaction

between Twitter and traditional media. A study during the Barack Obama and Mitt Romney presidential campaign in 2012 examined whether the tweets posted during the election campaigns were used as a news source by traditional media; or whether, conversely, the stories that appeared in traditional media were used as a source of information for discussions on Twitter. The result of the study showed that there was in fact an interdependent relationship. In some instances, politicians bypassed the media by breaking news on their Twitter handles, which then set the agenda for the traditional media. In other instances, newspapers defined the issues that politicians discussed on Twitter (Conway et al., 2015)**.**

Similarly, a computer-assisted content analysis was conducted by Conway-Silva et al. (2017) during the 2016 US presidential primary season. It examined the relationship between the major newspaper agendas and campaign agendas. Specifically, it analysed the issues that were emphasised by political parties on Twitter feeds from the US presidential candidates and their campaigns and compared their emphasis to the issues that were emphasised by the major newspapers. The study also investigated the overall relationship between the Twitter agenda, the newspapers and the frontrunners, and investigated whether presidential candidates could use the power of Twitter to influence the agenda of newspapers.

The findings suggest the presence of some intermedia and reciprocal relationships between Twitter and newspapers. They suggest that newspapers have a greater influence on the Twitter agenda. Despite this, candidates' tweets predicted the news agenda on various issues that were not necessary raised by their political parties. This was also the case in the 2012 study (Conway et al., 2015). The 2016 study (Conway-Silva et al., 2017) confirmed that candidates can and do use Twitter platform to influence the newspaper agenda. The results of this study combined with the 2012 study (Conway et al., 2015) confirm that traditional news continue to set the agenda during political campaigns (Conway-Silva et al., 2017).

In the USA, it is a matter of common knowledge and observation that political parties increasingly use Twitter to garner support, elicit debate and promote their candidates. Given this trend, Lefky, Brewer and Habegger conducted a study in 2015 to examine whether television's coverage of political candidates' Twitter campaigns could influence voter opinion. The study analysed the coverage given to

political parties and their candidates' use of Twitter during various campaigns (2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014), as well as coverage of former US Senator and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's vociferous use of Twitter in the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination. It used a multi-method approach to analyse the effects of television news coverage of Twitter in a campaign context. The conclusion of the study was that coverage of participants' tweets had a limited effect: the coverage of candidates' tweets could conceivably influence voter opinion about whether a particular politician was liked or not, but it ultimately did not influence voters' opinion of the bigger issues at stake (Lefky, Brewer & Habegger, 2015).

A survey study has compared public perception of campaign messages in the 2016 USA Presidential Election that appeared both on social media platforms like Twitter and traditional media. The aim was to establish whether campaign messages sent through traditional media were perceived as more persuasive than those that appeared on Twitter. The results proved that campaign messages sent through Twitter, regardless of who the candidate was, were just as effective with potential voters as those that appeared in traditional media.

The findings suggest that Twitter will play an increasing role in future presidential campaigns and could provide some insight into the rise of Donald Trump's political success at the polls (Morris, 2018).

Mr Trump's use of Twitter has itself been the subject of comment. Recently, *The Independent* carried an article by Buncombe about his Twitter use. It commented that he is a prolific user of Twitter; and that there should be no doubt that he knows all too well that his tweets are widely disseminated, including by the traditional media. Mr Trump has posted 36,800 tweets since joining Twitter in 2009 and currently has 53.4 million followers. He uses it deliberately to capture attention and to set the agenda for the mainstream news on the media, often to deflect negative attention from himself and instead to focus positive attention on himself. In doing so he not only speaks directly to his supporters and bypasses the traditional media, but he is also given a degree of legitimacy because the mainstream media then writes about his tweets (Buncombe, 2018).

A Norwegian study, where most of the population have internet access regardless of income, compared 1 500 tweets that had been retweeted with the most read newspapers. The aim was to examine the relationship between Twitter and traditional media. Although there was some overlap in stories, some debates that were often ignored in the mainstream media were covered on Twitter. They included discussions on topics such as environmental issues or animal welfare – topics that are associated with higher educated people. The study found that 10% of the Twitter population represented 90% of tweets, which indicated that Twitter was dominated by an elitist group. Twitter users were mostly people with connections to organisations and, as other research suggests, it is dominated by a growing media-savvy politically connected elite (Rogstad, 2016). The study also found that mainstream media impacted more on social media than vice versa. Twitter often covered the same issue but framed it differently. In addition, mainstream media changed its focus when its coverage was criticised on Twitter. Despite most South Africans not having access to the internet, the findings are comparable with the findings of the #Fees Must Fall study which will be discussed later. It showed that Twitter can influence the debate and focus of coverage of stories on traditional media.

The power of Twitter to promote more diverse opinions and challenge the mainstream media's constraint to be critical of those in power, was tested in a comparative study of the coverage of the 2010 BP oil spill on the Gulf Coast. The study examined whether geographical, social, political and economic factors influenced the way in which the oil spill was being reported and framed in the press and on Twitter. It tested whether Twitter, as a virtual network, could report on the oil spill without being affected by economic issues that inhibit communities reliant on an industry. The particular community investigated was homogeneous, and power was tightly controlled by a small elite group. One of the key issues examined was to find out if they were more likely to be uncritical of environmental issues in order to cover up community conflicts. The results found a striking similarity between journalists and Twitter users locally and nationally in both tone and attitude towards the oil spill. The conclusion was that, in this instance, Twitter did not serve as an alternative medium and information flow remained undemocratic. The majority of those who used Twitter shared similar backgrounds and perspectives as those who were

reluctant to take on a big oil company. As with previous studies, this study confirmed that, despite the millions of active users, the discussion on Twitter continues to be dominated by elites (Watson, 2016; Meraz, 2009; Daniels, 2014; Barnard 2016).

Another consequence underscored by Twitter, that journalists became inclined to tweak news stories so as to appease their target market, had already surfaced before Twitter, apparently concomitantly with the rise of digitalization. A 2000 research study by John Pavlik concluded that journalists had relinquished some control and often customised news stories so as to attract audiences (Pavlik, 2000). Also, Deuze concluded that already pre-Twitter social media had begun to challenge the traditional role of journalists to filter, re-organise and interpret information, as this new platform – social media – now allowed audiences that are mostly like-minded and middle class to influence story angles (Deuze, 2005).

In the USA, the traditional media's tweaking of news stories, ironically by means of Twitter, to fit readers' preferences seems well-documented. A content analysis of tweets posted by six newspapers and three television broadcasters in the USA in 2009 proved that most of the tweets were similar to the newspapers' headlines, and that the tweets were posted to attract audiences (Armstrong & Gao, 2010).

In Australia, a 2017 online study with 358 Australian journalists empirically tested how audience feedback affected journalists' perception of their roles. It concluded that Twitter allowed them to know in what topics their audiences were interested and what they expected from them. This has increased their inclination to produce stories which the Twitter audience expects, rather than performing a public service by providing news that audiences need to know to act as responsible citizens (Hanusch & Tandoc, 2017). Although some journalists were sceptical at first to engage audiences and take into account their feedback, this has changed and is influencing journalistic practices (Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton, 2011; MacGregor, 2007).

In 2016 Jonathan Bright, a research fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, examined whether consumers who receive news by social media have perceptions of the news agenda that are distinctly different from those consumers who get their news straight from traditional news media. He investigated why Twitter users prefer sharing certain types of stories, and whether editorial choice of story types was influenced by the

story types that Twitters users were sharing. Bright concluded that crime stories are less likely to be shared on social media than science and technology stories. The implication is that social media amplifies certain topics and ignores others. Therefore, those who rely on Twitter only could have a different perspective of the important news stories of the day. In addition, his findings suggested that even though users make choices about what to share, their decisions are influenced by story type decisions made by traditional news editors. In that sense, social media can in fact amplify the power of the traditional media to set the agenda (Bright, 2016).

The impact that social media could have on the practices and values upheld by the professional journalist was tested in a study with six focus groups consisting of journalism students from University of London in 2011–2012. Seen from a journalistic perspective, the study concluded that social media can provide journalists with a platform to promote themselves or as a source for breaking news or new angles. However, it cannot replace the value of professional journalism's checks and balances nor its ideals of objectivity and accountability and maintaining rituals and practices in loyalty towards the profession (Blaagaard, 2013).

An Italian study of 2016 focused on journalists' use of Twitter and how it impacted on their norms and practices. The aim was to identify how journalists have responded to the technological changes created by a participatory media environment. The authors argued that in an Anglo-Saxon context findings of similar studies suggest that old dynamics and culture of journalism persisted in the new media environment, and that the changes brought about by new media were less disruptive than expected. The authors refer to Singer (2005) and Lasorsa et al. (2011), who found that although there had been some adjustments, journalists have by and large normalised their blogs and their presence on Twitter. The objective of the Italian study was to verify whether the findings of studies in a North Atlantic system would differ if applied to a different context. The main area on which the scholars focused was whether the use of Twitter changed journalists' gatekeeping role, their newsgathering and their engagement with sources. Through the analysis of 23,515 tweets published by journalists of different media outlets, the study found that Italian journalists had reinterpreted their traditional rules and practices. Engagement on

Twitter were mostly with each other and the political elite rather than with their audience, and they paid little attention to the tweets from the public. They were reluctant to share content that originated from outside of the traditional news world. The conclusion of this study is that Italian journalists have defended their territory and that the impact of Twitter on the norms and practices of journalists there was less than expected (Bentivegna & Marchetti, 2018).

One has thus seen that Twitter has undoubtedly brought about marked changes to the known milieu of traditional media. For one, the speed and immediacy of news gathering, and delivery is here to stay, juxtaposed with issues of accuracy. Second, news itself has changed from a series of sequential snapshots in time to an ongoing, evolving process. This process has established Twitter as a new news source. Third, Twitter has further advanced the change, already introduced by digitalisation, to the boundaries and relationship between the journalist and her audience; that field is no longer distant but now inter-active and synergistic. Audience focussed news stories become a regular criterion. Fourth, social media and particularly Twitter has brought with it an intermedia relationship which built on the interdependency of the traditional media and new media. Fifth, Twitter has challenged journalists' commitment to their traditional norms, routines, and practices. Sixth, in the party-politics of liberal democracies, Twitter's role appears less marked. Although its role during elections cannot be denied, traditional media continues to have a greater influence not only on the political agenda, but also on voter choice. Seventh, given that Twitter is by definition access constrained, its news content is potentially elitist.

At a more general level, it would appear that Twitter allows traditional media to get a better understanding of audiences' needs their likes and dislikes. Twitter can in fact amplify the image of a broadcaster, if users share stories they see on traditional media, but traditional media still cater for their tastes.

Ultimately, the impact of the advent of Twitter on the political agenda seems insignificant and its impact on news contents appears to depend on the cultural context. And in this context, it cannot be denied that Twitter is currently dominated by elite groups and has not, in fact, democratised the media environment.

This study now turns to the main focus of its research, being the relevant South

African environment.

South Africa - examples of how the use of new media has affected traditional media and its implications

By way of introduction, it must be said that this country too has not remained immune to these winds of change. Here also the rise of new media has compelled traditional media concerns back to the financial drawing board, and to devise innovative strategies to remain relevant. As mentioned in the background to this study, traditional South African media, as media everywhere, face a challenge to survive in the new technological environment. Print media is the hardest hit; circulation figures decline, and retrenchments continue. Since early 2000 print media have had to duplicate their news online to reach and even create a presence on social media to survive.

Research and findings into the use and influence of Twitter in Western society cannot, without more, be applied to the South African context. Verweij and Van Noort (2014) note that the digital divide in South Africa, which has deprived the majority of South Africans from access to the internet, influences the nature of public debates. Verweij and Van Noort however, reason that international examples cannot necessarily be replicated in the context of the South African media milieu where a digital divide exists and where the government of the day has on occasion sought to control the public debate.

A 2017 ICT Africa report, 'The State of ICT in South Africa' (Gillwald, Mothobi & Rademan, 2018), found only 53% South Africans have internet access, and according to the 2018 Social Media Landscape Report, 8 million South Africans used Twitter. Twitter continues to be the most popular platform for public debate in SA (Patricios & Goldstuck, 2017).

The following research studies address the South African experience of and with Twitter. These studies are a window into Twitter's contribution, good and bad, given its unique characteristics and its international track record, to the local condition.

In 2014**,** Verweij and Van Noort examined how journalists' use of Twitter in South Africa contributed to the public debate in an environment where the majority party,

the African National Congress, in an attempt to gain lost power, attempted to control the media. They selected 500 journalists to participate. Their conclusions showed that South African journalists' Twitter use was comparable to that of journalists in the UK and The Netherlands. A group of top twenty of these journalists in South Africa influenced the direction of the discussions but did not have complete control over the debates. These journalists did not only use Twitter to find sources and break news, but they also engaged in discussions with one another and invited public debate. In this example Twitter did strengthen the independence of public discussion in a context where the government aimed at increased control (Verweij & Van Noort, 2014). So, although in South Africa too, the Twitter platform is elite given limited internet access, this is case where nonetheless a public interest result was attained.

Bosch (2015), analysed the student-led "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign in 2015. Students used Twitter to garner support to have the statue of British colonialist/capitalist Cecil John Rhodes removed from campus. Bosch found that discussions on Twitter referred to as #RMF set the agenda for the mainstream media and soon led to demonstrations on other campuses to stop the increases in fees.

Tinus de Jager, a student in journalism at Monash University South Africa, analysed journalists' tweets during the #feesmustfall campaign that followed shortly after the #RMF protests**.** De Jager concluded that in the instance of campaign-driven tweeting, the journalists' traditional news breaking, and agenda-setting or gatekeeping role was overtaken by the students' tweets of the day's developments (De Jager, 2016).

Both these studies demonstrated that hashtag-campaigns can successfully overtake the mainstream media's agenda. Here then is an example where, contrary to the international experience, Twitter set the agenda for mainstream media and not the other way around.

In 2014 Daniels, examined whether the use of Twitter by journalists in Wits' newsroom contributes to greater public engagement and greater diversity of views, thereby deepening democracy; or whether Twitter mainly exists as a consensus seeking platform. The research was framed through the radical democracy theory lens. A multidimensional method was applied using a content analysis of tweets as

well as interviews assessed through some discourse analysis. Daniels' study found that most journalists used Twitter for breaking news, sharing opinions and promoting their stories.

Ostensibly contrary to the conclusion of Verweij and Van Noort, although the possibility of more engagement existed, this seemed minimal, implying elitism in Twitter feeds. Daniels also found that information on Twitter is harder to control and manipulate than traditional news. Journalists became brands or trademarks on Twitter. In the final analyses, journalists used Twitter to break and disseminate news, promote their own brand and give opinions. Daniels concludes: "Although the use of social media and tweeting was central to newsroom's practices in this study, some regarded is as disruptive and others as exciting" (Daniels, 2014, p. 309).

Wasserman explored whether journalists' use of Twitter as a news breaking source could be at the expense of accuracy. This study thus squarely raised the speed versus accuracy debate. He referred to Bakir and McStay, 2017 who define fake news as either false or deliberately misleading. Wasserman notes that the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, which spread news quickly and widely, seems to have exacerbated concerns about their influence on political debate and public discourse. He cites the spread of fake stories during the 2016 US presidential elections and how these may have influenced the political debate and public discourse. Most of the fabricated stories favoured Donald Trump, which could have influenced his surprising win at the polls. In the new media milieu, where the spread of information on Twitter is instantaneous and wide, verification of facts has become crucial. Wasserman argues that new media has created what he calls "echo chambers" where a particular rumour is amplified as a fact without it being verified (Wasserman, 2017).

His study focuses on the manifestation of fake news in South Africa and how it could be used to leverage a particular position and shift political discourse. Wasserman cites as example the creation of fake Twitter accounts created by the UK-based public relations firm Bell Pottinger in response to the allegations of state capture against President Zuma and the Guptas. Thousands of tweets were posted to denounce the Public Protector's findings of state capture and create a false narrative

of “white monopoly capital”. A vicious Twitter campaign was also launched against journalists that portrayed them as puppets of “white monopoly capital”.

The mainstream media also became victims of the fake propaganda campaign when the Sunday Times ran stories about a “Rogue Unit” of corrupt officials within the South African Revenue Services (SARS). The newspaper had to apologise when it was discovered that the story was false and had been planted with the aim of discrediting the former Minister of Finance who was an opponent of former President Zuma.

Wasserman concludes that the rise of fake news in South Africa highlighted the need for journalists to do a thorough introspection of the extent to which they engage and listen to communities across the spectrum. He has raised critical questions about the relationship between journalism practice and its relationship with broader society (Wasserman, 2017).

As seen elsewhere, political parties in South Africa are increasingly capitalising on the opportunities presented by social media. They no longer need to rely solely on traditional media to gain access to their supporters. During the 2016 local government elections, the ANC planned to spend R50 million on a covert campaign, known as the War Room, aimed at setting a pro-ANC agenda and defaming DA and EFF campaigns. The ANC intended to use paid Twitter accounts to spread fabricated news to accomplish its goal. It planned to set up a seemingly independent news site and to use paid celebrities to spread its message on social media. The plan was exposed when a public relations expert, and key member of the War Room, brought an application to the high court claiming she was not paid for work done as part of the campaign. The ANC denied the claims but paid R1 million in a settlement agreement (Comrie, 2017).

Locally therefore the active participation of Twitter in party-politics appeared more marked than in the US.

In 2012, Jordaan investigated whether the professional use of social media affects processes and cultures of news selection and presentation at the Rapport, and Mail and Guardian newspapers. This investigation therefore touched on the extent to which Twitter had affected journalists’ traditional norms, routines, and practices.

Using a social constructionist approach as theoretical framework, she applied multiple methods to social media use and the influence it might have. Her findings suggest that journalists did not regard social media as a threat. They welcomed its immediacy and the possibility to interact with their audience and to initiate debate. They did not feel threatened by its presence and felt that there would always be a need for news to be analysed and contextualised.

They did not believe that it challenged their role as gatekeepers of news, and the majority felt that they used it more out of curiosity or to check what was trending rather than as a news source that could influence their agenda. The participants in Jordaan's study came from similar backgrounds and most had a tertiary education and, although they did not grow up with social media, the majority accepted it as part of newsroom culture. They agreed that it had not influenced their news routines and that they preferred to use documents, first hand encounters with sources, or attend public events to gather information rather than to rely on social media (Jordaan, 2012). These conclusions resonate with those of the international studies to which reference has been made.

These local studies show, it is suggested, that when compared to the seven observations above that summarise the Twitter experience internationally, the South African experience of Twitter has, by and large, followed suit.

In this evolving new media environment, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has to comply not only with its public broadcast mandate as set out in the background to this study, but also has to compete for survival in an increasing competitive and changing media environment. In addition, the SABC has also been having, in the recent past, chronic challenges on multiple fronts: poor leadership, financial mismanagement and political interference in editorial policies. This has caused audience figures to drop and advertising revenue, sponsorships and TV licence fees to decline.

The result was a net loss that doubled from R412 million in 2016 to R977 million in 2017 (SABC, 2017). A subsequent Parliamentary inquiry into the ability of the board to hold office led to the board's collapse and although a new board was appointed in

October 2017, there have been freewheeling resignations and yet fresh appointments ever since.

Business Day reported that in the 2016/17 financial year, the SABC recorded a loss of R977m, attributed partly to the 90% local content policy of former COO, Mr Hlaudi Motsoeneng (Quintal, 2018). For the 2018/19 midyear performance, the SABC reported an underperformance of R293m against budget (Quintal, 2018).

Nowhere more acutely felt were these maladies than in the News Division. It has battled with increased political interference and editorial disputes. The SABC's financial constraints, whatever their provenance, have resulted in the newsroom cutting jobs. But demands on news output have not decreased commensurately; if anything, they have increased. In October 2018, Business Day reported that the SABC board announced that it had no alternative but to retrench workers to remain sustainable (Phakathi, 2018, p. 4).

In the SABC's 2017 Annual Report, the News Division admits that the compounding challenges had made it impossible to deliver on its mandate. It recognises that it has to radically rethink its positioning; although corporate strategy changes were proposed to a corporate strategy which had not been updated since 2004, these were since rejected by ICASA (SABC, 2017)**.**

In an attempt to claw back audiences and attract advertising revenue, the SABC's news department created a website back in 2000 and a Twitter handle in 2011, but neither Corporate SABC nor the news department has an up-to-date editorial policy in place that deals with digitalisation, nor even a formal digital strategy (Minnaar, 2018).

Although existing research investigates the relationship between traditional media (in this instance print media) and social media, none of the academic databases consulted, including EBSCO Host, SAGE Premier Online and SA ePublications, SABINET Online, Taylor & Francis online and Rhodes Journalism Review, examine whether Twitter plays any role, in particular, in the SABC's television newsroom. If it does play a role, what is that role?

Before investigating whether Twitter plays any role in SABC's television news production and, if so, in what ways, it is necessary to explain the theories relied upon to answer the research questions posed. The answers to the research questions posed are grounded in two theories: the theory of sociology of news and, to a lesser extent, elements of agenda-setting theory. These are now discussed below.

6. **Theoretical approaches**

From a theoretical perspective, there are various ways to approach news production and the dissemination that takes place in newsrooms. Theories are formulated to analyse and predict phenomena and, in some circumstances, to extend existing knowledge within the limits of the field of study (Abend, 2008; Swanson & Chermak, 2013). Self-evidently, such theories of news production are not static. They have had to adapt and adjust to keep abreast of the changes brought about by technology and economics (Steensen & Ahva, 2015).

One such theory is founded in in sociology. In a general sense, sociology is the study of human social relationships and institutions. Sociology's subject matter is diverse, ranging from crime to religion, from the family to the state, from the divisions of race and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture, and from social stability to radical change in whole societies (What is Sociology? n.d.)

A slice of sociology in the general sense is sociology of news. It is described by Zelizer as an examination of the relationships, work routines and interactions that take place among those that are involved in news production. She explains how organisational structures and internal and external elements of news production influence one another. Sociology of news production interrogates the dynamics of news making on every level (Zelizer, 2004).

Two theoretical approaches have been chosen for this research. They are sociology of news theory and agenda-setting theory. Sociology of news theory has been explained. Agenda-setting theory seeks to explain how and why news topic choices are made. Although some tenets of these theories overlap, each has its own unique features.

Applied then to this study, these theories assist in disentangling and interrogating the processes and dissemination of news production in the SABC's newsroom as it is currently occurring.

6.1 Sociology of news theory

Sociology of news theory falls under the rubric of sociology of the media. It treats journalism as a cultural practice that evolves as technology evolves and technological changes occur (McNair, 1998, p. 125; MacGregor, 1997; Cottle, 2000; Gans, 1979).

Since its conception there have been many different approaches within the sociology of news theory (Couldry, 2004), but two major streams of thought have been prevalent. One was introduced by David Manning White, a professor of journalism with a PhD in English. He maintains that news is a result of the power and influence exerted by news editors, who act as gatekeepers of the information that will be shared with the public (White, 1950). The second stream was articulated by Warren Breed, a sociologist, who takes a different approach, and who believes that news organisations are themselves the main influencers of news production (Reese & Ballinger, 2001). Building on the foundations of White and Breed, there have since been many studies that have explored the influence which evolving technological changes have since had on news production (Gans, 1979; Goode, 2009; Karlsson, 2011; McNair, 2017).

Michael Schudson, one of the early leading scholars of sociology of news theory, identifies important lenses through which the nature of journalism may be examined and better understood. Raetzsch notes that Schudson's analysis of journalism and news production is never only about what journalists and their institutions do. It is also about a dialogue with society, its norms, values, shortcomings and possibilities. Journalism is embedded within society. Schudson agrees with Gans (1979) and Tuchman (1972), that the role of the journalist is to view society through a particular set of values that allows the journalist to make sense of society. This endeavour implies a social construct between the journalist and her audience. But still the journalist does not simply hold up a mirror to society; she acts as interpretive agent and makes meaning of society to itself (Raetzsch, 2017).

These sociologists maintain that journalists construct a news story out of multiple news sources, such as press releases, public relations copy and interviews. The news production process thus involves multiple social actors who compete for control and power of a news story. The task of a journalist is to fit them into categories that make sense and to narrate and contextualise them into an integrated whole (Raetzsch, 2017).

Three tenets of news sociology

Steensen & Ahva (2015) suggest that Schudson's classic typology of news sociology has three essential tenets: First, Schudson points to how a country's and media company's *political values* affect news policy and production. Second, *economic organisational influences* are identified and how these impact a news organisation's resources and affect its production rituals are discussed. Third, and most important for this investigation, the production processes of news making and how these are influenced by social and cultural arrangements, such as workflow *routines, practices,* power play and bureaucratic dynamics, are analysed (Steensen & Ahva, 2015).

This study will not further discuss the issue of how *political values* affect news policy and production. It next explains how *economic organisational influences* impact on news production. Then the sociological theory of newsroom routines will be discussed and some opinions of Schudson's critics will be examined. This will be followed by a look at how new technology has changed newsroom's routines and practices. This section will be concluded with a discussion on how the BBC's convergence to a multimedia company affected its newsroom practices and routines, it being suggested that its experience is a valid comparator to the SABC.

The sociological approaches of Tuchman and Gans, despite small differences, share Schudson's fundamental approach. These three scholars critiqued production processes in newsrooms in the US at a time when media organisations were still characterised by oligopolies. Their critique was conceived in a bygone time now referred to as the legacy era (Stonbely, 2015).

Their work product, although historical, is relevant for the present discussion since it highlights elements of news production that could still today apply to the SABC's newsroom environment.

Economic organisational influences that impact on news production

Schudson and Tuchman reason that all news production is embedded in a larger context. They identified how journalists could be both influenced and restricted by the organisational values, including commercial values, and constraints within which they operate. They do not necessarily produce the news of the day but rather a standardised product that meets the priorities of their organisation, such as attracting large audiences and advertising revenue. This environment disincentivises journalists to think critically. Their value decisions are instead based on prioritising the organisation's imperatives of ensuring regular news output.

Schudson says too that, "in the US, market constraints on freedom of expressions are more threatening to diversity of public expression and debate than state control is," and Klinenberg agrees with him (Schudson, 2005, p. 1).

Schudson's theory emphasises the importance of the organisational milieu within which news production occurs. This approach maintains that organisations transformed as a function of many factors, including technological drivers. But Schudson believes that in many instances however, new technology was not the determinant of organisational change; instead, the determinant of change was the organisation's own policy decisions, as informed by its vision and expectations from shareholders.

Boczkowski (2004) concurs with Schudson that the driving force behind traditional print media organisations to become multimedia organisations was fundamentally economic: the need to remain relevant and keep up with competition. Barnard writes that as companies struggled economically, budgets were cut, and journalists were expected to use new technology such as Twitter to work quickly and produce more with less (Barnard, 2016).

Others too stress the importance of the economic influences. Yuan writes that media companies, driving to attract advertising revenue, put pressure on newsrooms to include social media in their news programmes to grow audiences and to focus on issues that attract affluent audiences. This results in a fragmented media market that serves the interests of a distinct audience segment at the expense of reflecting the needs of society as a whole and promoting civic empowerment (Yuan, 2011).

Although this type of interference was not new, Klinenberg suggests that what was new was the unapologetic way in which it was done (Klinenberg, 2005). In another example Adornato describes how newsrooms in the US adopt social media because they believe the interactivity would attract viewers and advertising revenue (Adornato, 2016).

A point may be flagged here for later elaboration, namely that the SABC has lagged behind these developments in the western world. It became shackled by a host of problems mentioned earlier and identified in the national press: political interference in decision-making; management instability; lack of credible management vision; the constraints imposed by its public broadcast mandate; and financial constraints. In addition, it has had to reconcile the requirements of a public broadcaster with the populist approach of its competitors (Blignaut, 2018).

Newsroom routines and practices that impact on news production

Schudson and Tuchman criticise the conception of professionalism as practised in the US, which, they say, has made journalists vulnerable. Schudson says, “media biases derive not from intentional ideological perversion but from professional achievement under the constraints of organisational bureaucratic routines and practices; news organisations and routines produce bias regardless of ownership or outlook of the individual reporters” (Schudson, 2005, p. 48).

Such an attenuated form of professionalism has encouraged journalists to compromise their independence and to internalise organisational imperatives by following trite routines and maintaining the status quo. News content was largely determined by standard news subjects such as politics, economics, international events, sport and weather. They are produced on time to an organisation’s pre-determined template (Cottle, 2000).

Reporting often favoured politicians and key players who frame issues narrowly rather than producing balanced reports about complex social issues which were too time-consuming in a deadline driven environment.

Although these journalistic practices may be mere innocent responses to demands of efficiency, they lead to presentations of the perspectives of the powerful and their

narrow definition of events, implying the concomitant marginalisation of poorer social groups and interests (Goldenberg, 1975; Gitlin, 1980). Cottle quotes Hall et al., who maintain that the news media routinely reproduce the voices of the powerful who, in turn, become the “primary definers” of events. They command the discursive routine and practices, and ultimately the organisational norms (Cottle, 2000).

In this contest for the ear of the journalist, the source supplier who gets in first will depend on (1) the particular supplier’s incentives; (2) power; (3) the ability to supply suitable information; and (4) geographic and social proximity to the journalists (Gans, 1979, p. 117).

Schudson believes this profit-driven approach leads to five distortions: news becomes event driven; it is mostly negative; it is detached; and it focuses on officials rather than uncovering the challenges of society (Schudson, 2005). Tuchman, 1978 elaborates on this concept and argues that journalists construct reality by engaging in “strategic ritual” and covering official events and prioritising government officials in their reports, and this “reaffirms and reinforces these organisations’ public legitimacy”.

Schudson states that news is not only about events and developments in society, but rather about how to make meaning of those events. Gans however differed and tried to show that journalists’ professional norms were compatible with the values he identified in the news. He maintains that reporters reflect a broader mainstream. News inevitably reports on those at the top of the hierarchy and those at the bottom who threaten them (Steensen & Ahva, 2015).

Critics’ views of Schudson’s sociological approach

Discussion and criticism of Schudson have been varied. Schudson himself later revised his theories to acknowledge the changes brought about by technology. Raetzsch (2017) analyses Schudson’s take on new technology and journalism. Schudson reasons that in the new online environment, society now presents the journalist with a participatory presence that might beguile the unwary into accepting such presence as the acceptable norm.

But Raetzsch challenges this. The journalist is necessarily integrated within the cultural, sociological and semantic texture of society, and her mandate extra-legitimises her status as such. In the execution of this mandate, technology is the journalist's servant, not her master. The journalist should not succumb to technology but should in-span it in the better execution of the contributing facets of society. Mainstream media are no longer the only game in town. The world of online sources has opened a Pandora's box of news and matter, clamouring for the journalist's attention. The journalist senses the bigger picture and captures it with a wider lens (Raetzsch, 2017).

Sociology scholars such as Boczkowski (2004), Anderson (2013), Cottle (2007), Klinenberg (2005) and Zelizer have called for a wider range of theoretical approaches. They believe that Schudson downplays the role of technology and the changes brought about by digital convergence, audience quantification and commercial pressures. Stonbely (2015) cites Cottle, who recognises five features of Schudson's approach that Cottle believes no longer apply. First, Cottle mentions the emphasis on journalists' routines that result in organisational constraints. This according to Cottle ignores the power that individual journalists have.

Second, Cottle criticises Schudson's theory that journalists are homogeneous. Cottle says this overlooks today's heterogeneous journalistic field. Third, newsrooms place too much emphasis on the power of officials and ignore how the treatment of a story could weaken their authority. Fourth, Schudson's theory does not examine the relationship between a journalist and the audience. Fifth, Schudson approaches newsrooms as if their role nay duty was to inform citizens in a democracy as opposed to simply giving a fair and balanced report of news events. Cottle agrees that Schudson's approach is important but only within the context within which it was developed. Cottle agrees too with Zelizer and Boczkowski that it was important to revise Schudson's theory to reflect the new fluid participatory environment (Stonbely, 2015).

Brian McNair agrees with Schudson's critics and argues that the form and content of journalism is closely linked to the available technology. But he reiterates Schudson's plea that journalists today should, more than ever before, scrutinise sources and

challenge authoritative voices, or in common parlance, speak truth to power, to build trust in journalism and uphold the spirit of liberal democracy (McNair, 2017).

Undurraga, a post-doctoral scholar in Science and Technology Studies in London, analysed the main economic newspaper in Brazil using Schudson's theory. He points to limitations of Schudson's sociology of news approach and says Schudson fails to consider norms and practices in peripheral countries, and only focuses on conditions in European and the US. Undurraga agrees with Zelizer (2009) that Schudson's approach is dated and does not sufficiently acknowledge the changes brought about in the newsroom by technology, convergence, citizens and audience quantification (Undurraga, 2017.)

Raetzsch notes that Schudson's theory should be seen within its historical context. He agrees with Schudson's critics that journalism scholars have to look beyond specific institutions and professional routines, to attain a deeper understanding of how different publics are forming. This means developing a more open and inclusive analytical framework that addresses the new dynamics of public articulation outside of journalists and their institutions (Raetzsch, 2017). In Steensen and Ahva, Seth Lewis and Oscar Westlund also add their voices to critics of Schudson, proposing a sociotechnical framework that will balance the emphasis on sociocultural practices of the past (Steensen and Ahva, 2015).

A new sociological approach of news in non-Anglo-Saxon countries?

Scholars from Greece and Ireland have applied sociological theories to investigate the media in Greece. Siapera, Papadopoulou and Archontakis (2015) support Gitlin (2009) and McChesney (2003) who propose a different sociological approach. Gitlin and McChesney disagree with Schudson's theory that places the organisation at the centre of the sociological theory of news. Their departure point is journalists and their agency. Gitlin and McChesney claim that the crises in journalism are a result of journalists' reluctance to act as watchdog, to distinguish fact from lies, and to present a diversity of opinions. McChesney believes that the decline of journalism is partly due to the focus on profit and commercialisation.

These scholars believe that to save journalism, a public policy is needed that is aimed at restoring the trite democratic principles of journalism. McChesney says

changes brought about by new technologies and broader participation have made new solutions possible. These should come organically from within journalists themselves and their practices. These scholars disagree with theories that propose a top-down solution such as changing business models but suggest that instead journalists themselves should come up with solutions (Siapera, Papadopoulou & Archontakis, 2015).

New media's impact on newsroom routines and practices

"Journalism is transitioning from a more or less coherent industry to a highly varied and diverse range of practices" (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 192).

As discussed above, sociology of news theory views traditional newsrooms as following certain predictable bureaucratic routines and practices to manage information, and to ensure a steady inflow of information used for news programmes at set times.

The advent of technology has turned this on its head. Suddenly there was no longer any need to tap into well-trodden sources for information; information was everywhere, and too much of it, all the time. Audiences now become sources themselves, especially for breaking news. They were often relied on to send images until the journalists could reach the location. The challenge became how to sieve and verify the information (Singer et al., 2011).

This has profoundly changed news-gathering. The practice of issuing a few news bulletins a day was now passé. Ongoing, rolling news outflows, each building on the former, were demanded. And each needed to be re-energised with the latest information. Sue Robinson adds to this concept and writes that a news story has now become a fluid productive process. Journalists must continuously update and re-angle a story as it develops. This makes it necessary to reconceptualise and restructure internal resources and routines (Robinson, 2011).

The form of news information enabled by the new technology introduced new vistas of news consumption. A photograph of a car bomb in Kabul, images of a US aircraft crashing in the Hudson River, and visual reporting of a fatal shark attack in Fish Hoek in the Western Cape could in traditional media reporting, to be true, already

have been the picture(s) that spoke a thousand words. But now the picture was immediate, as it was happening, and demanding to be broadcast immediately (Petrović et al., 2013).

Journalists' ability to participate in editorial decisions has also become re-ignited. They now increasingly participate in suggesting stories and reporting live. Since the avalanche of information had become so great, more heads were needed to keep up with a developing story, and then to verify it. Journalists slid comfortably into that role (Adornato, 2016).

Cottle (2000) explores how sociological approaches examine who gets coverage in the news. Traditionally, newsrooms often mirrored the same range of voices as those most audible in government, according to Bennett (1990). They, and their viewpoints, informed the public discourse and would also sit comfortably with a (powerful) provider of advertising revenue.

New technology has weakened this power of traditional media to decide who gets on or in the news. As the world has seen, tweets initially posted by citizens during the protests in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and South Africa soon became headlines in traditional media (Murthy, 2012).

Cottle believes Schudson's approach to source identification disregards the importance of cultural factors that explain how social groups are visually represented and defined (Cottle, 2000). This is an important part of news access. It focuses on symbols and textual structures of news presentation and could reinforce cultural myths that portray groups or individuals who do not qualify as elite, as "Other". Numerous studies have observed that so-called outsider groups can be stereotyped or even demonised (Cohen & Young, 1981).

From another perspective, Hladík and Štětka (2015) write that new technology enables elites to use social media to bypass traditional media and to speak directly to their supporters. In February 2013, US President Barack Obama used social media to speak directly to his followers during a golfing trip to Florida. Traditional media, afraid of lagging behind, willingly relied on the Presidency's version in their coverage. Obama's successor, President Trump, is a known prolific tweeter who uses Twitter to lash out at traditional media, which he accuses of "fake" reporting.

Recently the Independent wrote: “Mr Trump has weaponised Twitter, using it not just to reach the masses but to control the news agenda through bluster and distraction.” Communication analysts have noted that Trump’s tweets are not only strategic but also effective. He now has a huge following and the traditional media report on his tweets (Buncombe, 2018).

South Africa is no different. Malusi Gigaba, Minister of Home Affairs, invited citizens to engage with him directly on Twitter about reports that he had been captured by the Guptas (Modise, 2018).

Similarly, the leader of Economic Freedom Front (EFF), Julius Malema, often bypasses the traditional media (whom he accuses of promoting white supremacy) to make comment on Twitter first, well knowing that the mainstream media will report on them (Malema, 2018).

Using social media to speak directly to fans and supporters has become common practice among society’s cultural elites and politicians. According to Hladik and Stetka, the pressure of immediacy of news reporting, budget cuts and limited access to newsmakers often caused journalists willingly to disseminate the statements made by politicians and those with clout (Hladík & Štětka, 2015).

Routines and practices: conclusion

The advent of the new technology has brought with it an Arab Spring and many other events and images in which the strongholds of the powerful have been weakened. The powerful is no longer the exclusive repository of news and news commentary – with strings attached. The news platforms established by social media have created a groundswell of news material that could only be ignored at the risk of traditional media being tarred with the “fake news” brush. News on social media can no longer be ignored (Meraz, 2009). The challenge for traditional newsrooms has become the ability to retain but challenge the voices of the powerful decision-makers and, at the same time, to present a platform for the “Other”; all the while dealing with the instantaneity of the social media news. The times they are indeed a’ changing.

In the context of a public broadcaster, these challenges are more nuanced, and to SABC’s position as such this research returns below.

Routines and practices: a real-life example: changes in BBC's news production as a result of convergence to multimedia

In the present context, the BBC analysis is an instructive comparator. Like the SABC, the BBC is a public broadcaster. It thus has both a public broadcasting mandate and a commercial mandate. It needs to remain commercially competitive. The SABC is likewise positioned. Towards the end of the nineties, the BBC became a fully converged multimedia digital terrestrial broadcaster with a 24-hour television news service. Increased competition forced the BBC, as a major public broadcaster, to embrace digital technologies or lose market share. These changes were part of strategic aims to increase revenue, cut jobs and improve revenue, demonstrating that the socio-political context determines the direction for development and incorporation of new technology. Today SABC is in a similar situation. It is not only struggling financially but also competes in an increasingly competitive environment. Recently it took steps to merge radio and television news and its stated commitment to adopt a digital first approach sounds promising.

The multimedia approach of the BBC had far reaching consequences for journalists. As part of the restructuring, the spatial outlay of the news department became less linear to help multi-media production. Meetings were held together, and information shared. Technology influenced the routines and practices of journalists. It enabled journalists to write, edit and broadcast from their desks. Although some journalists were positive about becoming multi-skilled, it had implications for cameras and editors. Jobs were cut and some people were re-skilled or re-designated.

This flattened structure threatened some journalists, who had expectations of moving up in the news hierarchy. Now there was more competition among journalists themselves. Journalists felt that pressure to produce more quantity at greater speed compromised their quality. The 24-hour service meant that packages were continuously updated and re-purposed for radio or television. This meant in turn that journalists no longer had ownership of their stories. Although they had information and research at their fingertips, they did not have the time to scan the internet and so they relied on their old sources as usual. This prevented them from making new contacts and from including a greater diversity of people in a package. News broadcasts became more event-driven. The pressure to deliver news as it happened

meant there were more live interviews and less depth in their packages.

Here one has thus seen in action the impact of economic organisational influences on news production, as also the impact of journalists' changed routines and practices on news production.

The conclusion drawn from this study was that new technology was incorporated for strategic and competitive advantage, but it did not create the new opportunities that the BBC had promised. Although it facilitated multi-media new working practices, cost savings and efficiency gains, it did not deliver new directions in programme-making.

In the view of Cottle and Ashton, however, it was not the new technology that determined how these practices were implemented on the ground. It was rather the pressures that journalists were working under, finances, and strategic initiatives that shaped the implementation of technology. They underscore Schudson's theory that technological changes were driven by economic forces rather than technology itself (Cottle & Ashton, 1999).

Sociology of news theory only partly explains how newsrooms make selections concerning the news stories to be included in news programmes. Accordingly, agenda-setting theory will be used to examine the validity of the assumption that Tweets could have an impact on the agenda-setting power of traditional broadcasting. Elements of agenda-setting theory will be explored to determine how new technology and social media can affect traditional media content.

Agenda-setting

Building on David Manning White's gatekeeping theory,[1] McCombs and Shaw (1972) conceived the notion of agenda-setting more than fifty years ago. Their theory

[1] Gatekeeping, first introduced by Lewin in 1947 explains how news content that eventually appear in a news bulletin is selected (McQuail, 2010; Reese & Ballinger, 2001; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001). It describes how enormous amounts of potential news stories move through "gates". Gatekeepers in newsrooms consider, select and shape news stories that ultimately form our reality. (Adornato,2016).

explains how traditional news outlets, such as radio, newspapers and television, set the agenda for their followers.

In a nutshell, the theory holds that the more coverage a story is given, the more important it becomes in the public eye. Further, issues that are covered more often are regarded as more important. For example, the more exposure the economy enjoys in the mass media, the more salient a public issue it becomes. These authors argue that although the media cannot tell the public *what* to think, they can determine what it thinks *about* (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). In other words, the choices made by journalists to cover some issues instead of others can influence what issues the public views as important (Parmelee, 2014). Issues that are given more importance by, for example, the order in which a news story appears on television, are more likely to be remembered and regarded as important. Rogstad (2016) writes that by the order in which news stories appear on television, traditional media sets the agenda by suggesting a hierarchy of significance that influences what the public regards as more important. The media is able to create a shared vision of what is important and in this way builds public consensus of the important issues of the day (Lippmann, 1922; McCombs, 1997; McCombs, 2004).

During the 1968 United States presidential election campaign, McCombs and Shaw investigated the relationship between mass media and the public's perception of "important" voting issues. Their findings discovered a very strong relationship between the voters' perceptions of salient issues and those issues discussed most by the media. Voters' beliefs of key issues also matched key issues identified by the media. These landmark findings disproved prior theories that voters only absorb the information that reinforces their own beliefs (McCombs, 1997).

A 2004 study expanded the agenda-setting theory and concluded that there is a connection between the amount of coverage an issue receives and the attitudes of the audience. More attention caused stronger attitudes (McCombs, 2005).

Framing

By 2007 agenda-setting theory had developed into a more complex proposition to include "framing" or "attribute agenda-setting". Framing or attribute agenda-setting describes which attributes are emphasised over others (McCombs, 2005). It

examines the style, angle and thrust of a story, elements which ultimately enable the user to interpret it meaningfully. It is used to deconstruct complex issues and make them more accessible. Selecting only some aspects and images of a news story may influence which attributes are highlighted and thus influence how positively or negatively consumers think and talk about the news event on traditional media. In this way, framing could result in stereotyping, image building and transferring beliefs about status (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; McCombs, 2005). McCombs notes that agenda-setting research by Ghanem (1996) found that continuous reporting on crime increases the public's concern about crime as the most important issue facing a country (McCombs, 2005). Another aspect of agenda-setting that researchers looked at was who set the agenda for the media. The outcome was that traditional news journalism was mostly homogeneous as a result of the uniform norms and practices of journalism and the interaction of journalists and news organisations.

Intermedia agenda-setting

What followed was the development of a particular dimension of agenda-setting theory, referred to as "intermedia agenda-setting". This theory explains the involuntary synergetic exchanges of information available on various media platforms. It describes how say print media could influence content decisions made by a newspaper or a television channel and vice versa. It occurs within traditional media, such as radio, television and print (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs & Lennon, 1998). Elite media newsrooms usually have a strong intermedia influence on one another and they can often determine the agendas of smaller entities (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Lim, 2006; Meraz, 2009; Harder, Sevenans & Van Aelst, 2017). Ying notes that, 'intermedia agenda-setting' deals with the influence that mass media agendas have on one another, which concerns how media agendas are being shaped, instead of how they are shaping the public's agenda (Ying, 2012, p. 21).

Networked agenda-setting & orientation

Conventional models of agenda-setting hold that mainstream media influences the public agenda by leading audience attention, and perceived importance, to certain "saliences", or major issues. In 2014, McCombs, Shaw and Weaver revisited the

conventional agenda-setting theory and clarified important aspects of agenda-setting theory that could influence agenda-setting. Two of those that are relevant to this study will be briefly explained. They are the need for orientation (NFO) and networked agenda-setting.

The agenda-setting ability of the press is influenced by the need for orientation (NFO). This suggests that individuals have a need to make sense of their world. During elections, for instance, when there is uncertainty about the outcome, the need for relevant information increases and the use of newspapers and television increases commensurately. The increase or decrease in media use influences the media's agenda-setting ability.

Networked agenda-setting effects depend on which types of media are consumed by individuals and how frequently they do so. McCombs believes that in the new diverse social media context agenda-setting theory still applies, but in a much broader context. Whereas before the issue importance of the moment flowed from the news media to the public, now – with such a multitude of agenda offered by social media – the flow of issue importance, and the transfer of issue importance from one agenda to another, will be prevalent. The flow-down into the public agenda of important news items has now changed from a stream to an avalanche. Within the emerging agendas more issues will surface as more important in the eyes of the public. The public agenda that will ultimately emerge about what is important will be a highly filtered version of what competing agendas found to be most important. McCombs accordingly believes the same core processes still apply but in a much broader context (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014).

Agenda-setting in a social media context

Today's media landscape is crowded with social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, where citizens have their say and participate in news production. Many studies have since examined whether their presence has extinguished the traditional media's hold over setting the agenda or at least reduced it (Meraz, 2009; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004). Social media's agenda is a much broader public conversation. The agenda-setting process on social media originates from diverse sources beyond that of the media agenda. Some conversations on Twitter are noise, but others

originate from tweets posted by advocacy groups or news incidence that triggers spikes. Occasionally discussions on Twitter are about events such as sport and politics that individuals experience and are passionate about.

All these influence the social media agenda. The social media agenda is therefore the product of various users' activity and the reinforcing effects of their retweeting. The agenda is not the result of a newsrooms' prioritisation but rather the result of individuals' patterns (McCombs et al., 2014).

Evidence provided by studies shows that a strong intermedia relationship exists between traditional media and social media posts on Facebook and Twitter, one that is often reciprocal and symbiotic. (Messner & Distaso, 2008; Bastos et al., 2013; Bright, 2016; Goode, 2009; Conway-Silva et al., 2017; Scott & Tewksbury, 2002).

Social media, and specifically posts on Twitter, have weakened the agenda-setting prerogative that traditional news media have enjoyed (Rogstad, 2016). McCombs et al. write that although agenda-setting still applies, "these emerging agendas are defined by wider ranges of content and communication channels" (McCombs et al., 2014, p. 788).

Whereas traditional media functioned in a top-down process whereby news editors finally decide which stories to cover, which attributes to emphasise and in which order they are to be arranged, the Twitter process is reversed. It is a bottom-up process. The following two examples provide evidence of how Twitter can change public discourse.

Examples of Twitter's influence on traditional news

Donald Trump's Twitter campaign in 2016 is one example. Followers of Trump's campaign from around the world, his supporters as well as those who oppose him, intentionally or unintentionally amplified him every time they clicked on, liked, replied or retweeted a tweet he had put out. High activity and engagement by users on Twitter is identified as valuable content and pushed to the top by Twitter algorithms. This in turn increased Trump's coverage on traditional media who identified the public interest as a signal of its newsworthiness. Conway et al. suggest the idea of

“reverse agenda-setting” (Conway et al., 2015, p. 364). In this instance the public determined the news agenda (Feezell, 2018).

In another example Gwen Bouvier, assistant professor in media studies at Örebro University Sweden, examined how social media can be used to escalate issue importance and bring it to the attention of traditional media. In 2016 news organisations around the world reported on a story of two women that were travelling from Ireland to the UK. The aim of their trip was to lobby for the legalisation of abortion in Ireland. They were part of a movement of many groups who work together to bring about change. They created the hashtag #twowomentravel and documented their experience by posting tweets regularly.

They acquired support from celebrities and their trip attracted 40 000 tweets within two days. News organisations around the world covered the story based on the popular tweeting feed. Bouvier concludes that this study shows how media savvy individuals can use social media to self-promote and create pseudo-events that lead to trending topics, eventually onto traditional media. It proves that traditional media, bogged down by the need to produce content that attracts niche groups and advertisers, could compromise halloed journalistic values of balanced reporting and allow trending topics to set the news agenda (Bouvier, 2017).

The impact of this inter-media relationship between users of social media and traditional media has fundamentally changed the way in which journalists practice their trade. Journalists now frequently use Twitter and Facebook as part of their stock routines and practices. Hermida (2010) describes how Twitter has become an “awareness system” that journalists use to monitor what the public is interested in. As seen in the Trump example, high level of Twitter activity often leads to news coverage and trending topics[2] on Twitter. It often influences the news line-up or focus of a story (Adornato, 2016**)**. Meraz writes that in some cases there is a two-stage agenda-setting process happening. The traditional media-agenda stimulates debate on social media, which in turn triggers debate on traditional media (Meraz, 2011b).

[2] Trending topics on Twitter, refers to a hashtag-driven topic that is particularly popular on Twitter at a given time. A hashtag is a keyword that is preceded with a #sign. Trends are determined by algorithms that monitors popular topics in real time and not topics that have been popular for a while (Doctor, 2012).

Edson Tandoc Jr. writes that journalists have changed their norms to include social media. It has affected their news judgement which now takes into account what stories did well on social media (Tandoc, 2014). The majority of studies however suggest that although there is a reciprocal relationship between Twitter and traditional media, traditional media continue to have a greater influence on Twitter's agenda and not the other way around (Newman, 2009; Conway-Silva et al., 2017).

The concept of this reciprocal relationship has been the focus of many research papers, as more and more media organisations try to find ways to include social media.

Twitter's influence on news formats

A Radio Digital News Association (RTDNA) / Hofstra University study survey done among television news managers across New York about Twitter use in the newsroom, found that in 2009, 70% of the participants used social media. A year later 91% were using it (Adornato, 2014). In a similar study, Lysak et al. (2012) found that television managers at network affiliated television stations in the US regularly use social media for news and information gathering that ends up on traditional broadcasts. Broadcasters were continuously trying to find new ways to integrate social media on news programmes without compromising ethical standards and accuracy (Lysak et al., 2012). News organisations are moving away from news that comes across as "preaching". They use Twitter, Facebook and blogs to connect with their audience and make them part of the conversation (Hermida, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Singer et al., 2011).

Conclusion and relevance of agenda-setting for this study

Scholars such as Kim, Kim and Zhou (2017) describe McCombs's theory as one of the major theories of communication research. Despite McCombs critics' claim that agenda-setting theory is outdated, McCombs believes that the core message of transfer of issue salience from one agenda to another still holds. In a 2018 interview, McCombs says **"**for most of the time, the media is a chorus, but occasionally there is a soloist. Most often the soloist will come from the dominant organisations but occasionally a soloist will come from Facebook or Twitter" (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018, p. 69). Traditional media's ability to set the agenda therefore still prevails.

What has changed is that the participants who compete to set the agenda have been extended (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018). Studies on Twitter's influence on agenda-setting are ongoing. That it influences traditional agenda-setting is well established, but exactly how it does this, is unclear (Lysak et al., 2012).

These theoretical approaches and their analyses have, it is hoped, identified and acknowledged methods of examining news-making, and have shown those methods in their application. This study now proceeds below to apply those identified and acknowledged methods, and their application, to the news-making process at the SABC.

Assumptions

Against what has gone before, this study now proclaims three assumptions (aka propositions), which it will subject to verification or rejection in the remainder of this examination.

The first theoretical assumption for this examination is that traditionally broadcasters adopted set patterns of news gathering routines and practices, but that the introduction of new technologies, such as social media, have turned these routines and practices on their head.

In light of the findings above, the second assumption is that traditional media gives access to powerful voices at the expense of powerless voices, and that the influence of new technology and social media could change this.

The third theoretical assumption relevant to this thesis is that prior studies have shown that Twitter has had a profound impact on the agenda-setting power of traditional broadcasting through its ability to disrupt traditional agenda-setting patterns.

The three assumptions above, will form the basis for the analysis of the current study. In the next section the methodology, research, design and sample that is used for this investigation will be considered.

7. Methodology

Since the primary goal of this study is to investigate whether Twitter plays any role in the creation of SABC's news and if so how, a qualitative exploratory study was conducted, as it was considered to be the most appropriate methodical approach (Cresswell, 2007, p. 24).

7.1 Research design

A research design is defined by Johann Mouton as is a blueprint of how one intends conducting the research (Mouton, 2001, p. 55). Different ways to investigate communication phenomena have evolved over many decades.

Quantitative research involves an empirical, value-free method that is based on deductive[3] reasoning. Reality can be explained in terms of quantitative and universally valid laws. Observations are measured in numerical terms and findings are made according to objective results. It is usually used in communication research where a hypothesis is formulated and then rejected or accepted based on objective findings (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 30). One weakness of this approach, and one that would affect this study, is its failure to take context and underlying meaning into account.

Krippendorff (1989, p. 403) defines a qualitative content analysis as *"a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use"*.

The focus of analysis of qualitative or interpretive research is that reality is subjective and that the content has a latent or hidden meaning. It uncovers emotions, experiences, and relationship that cannot easily be observed (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 220).

It interprets opinions, beliefs, or norms in a social context. It allows us to understand a topic from the perspective of the population involved. It helps us to make sense of a complex phenomenon in terms of its validity within a social context.

[3] Deductive reasoning draws conclusions from a particular premise; it begins with a general assumption and arrives at a conclusion about the initial generalisation (Mouton, 2001).

Qualitative research is inductive[4] and findings are not always applicable outside of the context. Qualitative research methods are primarily used in case studies and for in-depth analysis of interviews, recorded or documented communications (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 30).

Given that this study explored subjective beliefs and opinions of how the use of Twitter posts influenced SABC's news creation practices, a qualitative approach was used (Matveev, 2002, p. 60). As Rossetto suggests, the interviewer actively engaged with and listen to the interviewees and paraphrased if necessary to ensure that a rapport was built between built with the interviewee (Rossetto, 2014, p. 483).

To interpret research, either an inductive or deductive approach could be used. Inductive reasoning is ideally applied when the researcher aims to move from specific responses or opinions to formulating general conclusions or trends. David Thomas, says, "The general inductive approach provides an easily used and systematic set of procedures for analysing qualitative data that can produce reliable and valid findings" (Thomas, 2006, p. 37).

Inductive reasoning was used for this study as it allowed for the subjective interpretation of the text data through systematic classification of coding and identifying of themes and meanings. The researcher could make sense of belief systems, attitudes, and lived experiences within this context. It enabled the researcher to move from the specifics of views expressed in interviews to extrapolating possible trends (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 86).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with selected senior SABC editorial staff members who agreed to be interviewed.

The limitations of the scope of this study do not make it possible to accurately generalise about the findings, but the results enable to conclude more narrowly on the key questions posed at the outset.

[4] Inductive reasoning involves making inferences from specific observations (Mouton, 2001).

7.2 Sample

Sampling involves selecting units of analysis from an accessible population. Before identifying a sample to investigate, it is important to draw a distinction between the target population and the accessible population. In this study, the former refers the total complement of journalists who produce SABC's English news content. To interview all possible subjects would have been unfeasible for this study. Therefore the sample that was used was from an accessible population. Since the aim of the study was to understand the lived experiences of key journalists in SABC's newsroom at a particular point in time, the findings cannot be generalised to the whole population (Du Plooy, 2001).

Ted Palys notes that "to say that you will engage in purposive sampling signifies that you see sampling as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where and how to do research" (Palys, 2008, p. 1). Purposive sampling,[5] also known as selective sampling, was used to select the editorial staff. All of them were known to the researcher. Their participation was voluntary, and they were informed of the objectives of the study. They were briefed about the aims of the study and the type of questions that would be asked. Interviewees were informed that their names will be listed but given an undertaking that their opinions, if used, would not be connected to a specific individual. To do this each interviewee was given a code name to disguise them if they were quoted.

A brief description of how the news production process at SABC occurs and the role of the participants in the news making process will first be given. It motivates the selection of this particular sample of participants.

News production operations at SABC

The SABC news production follows a set routine to gather and produce news. Sally de Vasconcellos, copy editor of SABC News and one of the interviewees below, provided the information below in an interview, followed up by an email exchange. The input desk is mainly responsible to gather news. Potential stories are put on a

[5] Purposive sampling, known as group sampling is selected when the objective of the study requires researchers to use their own judgment to select a sample (Du Plooy,2001).

diary and presented to the editorial team a few times a day. A teleconference is held to discuss the diary. It is attended by the input desk, national television news editor, executive producers of various language desks, a representative from the digital office, representatives from the 24-Hour News team, and from the nine regions.

The diary consists of stories suggested by the regions, press releases, events diary, journalists, PR companies, or members of the public. The stories are discussed and some stories are prioritised and others cancelled. Stories could get earmarked for a specific bulletin or for SABC's online News. They could also be given to the 24-Hour News service or the morning bulletin, Morning Live on SABC2.

Stories are sometimes treated differently to cater for a specific audience. The passing of Mr Pik Botha would for instance appear on all the bulletins but the 24-Hour News service or the Afrikaans bulletin may treat it somewhat differently. It could be the top story in the Afrikaans bulletin but not necessary on the Sotho or Zulu bulletins. Stories compete with one another and get ranked according to audience interests.

Once a provisional diary is finalised, assignment editors will assign stories to journalists. They go to the location with a camera person. They usually do the story in English. Some journalists cover the story in English as well as another language in which they are proficient.

Once they get back to the SABC they edit the story with an editor and send the visuals and up-sounds and introductions to the English desk where a copy editor checks the language and structure of the story. The various language groups then translate the text that had been checked by the English desk and copy editors could re-angle it for their audience.

If it is a developing story the English desk would update the story continuously until the story goes to air. This usually happens when the journalist who covered the story earlier sends them new information. It could also be updated as a result of the bulletin editor or executive producer of a news bulletin, who continuously monitors

the developments on Twitter and other sources. The bulletin editor and executive producer are finally accountable for what goes out on air.

Many journalists will send tweets to promote the story on their Twitter handle. Some are registered on the SABC's digital office's Twitter list. A registered journalist's tweets will automatically be received on the SABC's news Twitter handle #SABCNews.

One news team is responsible for the production of all the different bulletins. The duration of the bulletins on SABC1, 2, and 3 is twenty-four minutes. This includes advertising breaks, weather and sport. The 24-Hour News channel is continuous and has three-hour blocks or "shows".

Interviews

Six senior SABC employees were interviewed. Their job descriptions are provided. Some were previously news producers, but all are senior journalists.

Sally de Vasconcellos – Executive Producer of SABC3 bulletin until December 2017 now freelance English copy editor.

Nyana Molete – National TV News Editor

Eben Jansen – Executive producer SABC News until February 2018 now executive producer The Agenda broadcast on SABC's DStv channel 404.

Khosie Thom – Bulletin editor

Ronel van Zyl – Assignment editor

Erika Tersteege – Bulletin editor

7.3 Data collection

In-depth one-on-one interviews[6] were done to collect data. This allowed participants to speak freely about their use of Twitter and talk openly about whether they believed that it played any role in news creation.

Open-ended questions are typically designed to learn the opinion, beliefs and experience of the interviewee without leading interviewees to a specific answer (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 158).

Media scholar, Kwansah-Aidoo (2001, p. 528), who interviewed a West African journalist in an agenda-setting study notes, “in-depth interviews afford participants ‘room to elaborate’ in ways that provide proper understanding of the context within which respondents made their claims and enhanced the validity of the conclusions drawn”.

An interview guide was developed with initial questions. They were broad and used to ensure some consistency between interviews. This helped to increase the reliability of the findings. The initial questions were followed with open-ended, detailed questions about the use of Twitter.

At the beginning of each interview the researcher explained the purpose of the study. All interviewees gave permission for the interviews to be recorded on condition of anonymity. The first few questions were about the person’s career and role at the SABC. Once the researcher felt the interviewee was comfortable, the purpose of the interview was explained again and the voice recorder was then switched.

The following questions were put to all the participants:

1. Describe your use of social media?
2. How has your use of social media changed over the course of your career in relation to your role in the newsroom?
3. Can you think of examples of these changes?

[6] In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. In-depth interviews are useful when trying to obtain detailed information about a person’s thoughts and behaviours and when attempting to explore new issues in-depth (Du Plooy, 2001.

4. How would you characterise how journalists use Twitter in your newsroom?
5. Can you give examples?

Throughout the interview participants were asked to elaborate on their ideas and give examples of their opinions. All the interviewees knew the interviewer beforehand and seem to speak openly and truthfully.

Despite the advantages of one-on-one interviews, there are limitations because they are prone to bias, which implies that these findings cannot be generalised. Even so, the information is valuable to identify trends and themes that could be used in future research (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

7.4 Analysis

According to Prof Will van den Hoonaard from Toronto University, “analysis involves the breaking down of interview data, whereas interpretation illustrates a new way of understanding the interview data while remaining faithful to the original data” (Van den Hoonaard, 2002).

The analyses were done manually. Five of the six interviews were conducted from 12–26 February 2018 and an additional interview was done on 15 October 2018. The duration of each was about 45 minutes and all interviews were recorded. The recorded interviews were transcribed into a word document between 29 February and 2 March 2018 and 20 October 2018.

The interviewees are called A, B, C, D, E, F and all are referred to in the male gender to protect their identity.

The transcripts were read carefully to determine meaningful units or segments of analysis. A unit is a sentence or a paragraph that expresses a single opinion or feeling. Each unit was given a code that identified it. The purpose of coding as per Du Plooy, “is to convert the content into data that can be analysed. It helps analysts to compare transcripts with each other and determine how frequently a topic is expressed. It helps to establish the presence or absence of themes” (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 220). Initially pre-coded categories were identified based on the research questions and theory.

Following this, a higher level of interpretation was undertaken. Transcripts were re-read and codes that dealt with facets of related topics were renamed, adjusted and classified together. Quotes from interviewees that substantiated their opinions were identified.

Finally, the codes that appeared in the various interviews were compared with each another. The researcher established to what extent the sentiments and beliefs expressed by the various interviewees were similar or different and what issues they felt strongly about. Inferences were drawn relating to the research questions and based on the interpretation of the interviews.

8. Discussion

The discussion and findings that follow answer the key research questions posed at the outset. To summarise, this study examines whether Twitter plays any role in news production of SABC News and if so how. This research considered the effects that digitisation and social media have had on mainstream journalism. It discussed the state of SA's media landscape and the SABC as public broadcaster. The Literature review section examined empirical findings of and implications of Twitter's influence on journalism abroad as well as the findings of studies that explored the impact the new media has on mainstream media in South Africa.

Theoretical approaches chosen for this study were sociology of news and agenda-setting theory. Their key features were critically analysed, and assumptions were drawn. The methodology followed was semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with six senior journalists in the newsroom. A qualitative content analysis was applied to analyse the interviews. Themes related to the sociology of news and agenda-setting that were relevant to the questions posed in the research were pre-identified. These were then used to examine the answers provided by the interviewees to the questions posed.

It is appropriate now to return to the two key research questions. They were:

1. To what extent does the use of Twitter transform journalistic norms, practices and processes of SABC's newsroom?

2. Does the use of Twitter, as a news source, have any influence on traditional media's content decisions and if so how?

To answer the first question, the third tenet of sociology of news theory, namely journalists' routines and practices, **is** next considered. The findings of the interviewees' responses are presented below under the same rubrics as covered in the discussion on new media's impact on newsroom routines and practices.

Twitter's impact on SABC's news routines and practices

Newsgathering

Interviewees agree that Twitter has changed newsgathering. A, F, D, and G explain that tweets provide them with additional information. This has extended their story diary from which stories are selected. The input team now encourages everyone to participate in newsgathering to ensure that they don't miss an important story. A, recalled how a tweet from a journalist on eNCA made the newsroom aware of a Parliamentary committee oversight visit to Eskom which was not on their diary.

B explains that journalists as well as any staff member are now encouraged to suggest stories that appear on Twitter to the newsroom to make sure SABC news beats the competition. Journalists are more actively involved in the process of newsgathering than in the past. The digital news office also monitors tweets throughout the day and make suggestions to diary meetings. A believes Twitter's ubiquitous nature has forced SABC to see newsgathering as an ongoing process that require everyone to help monitor developments all the time.

Source

All the interviewees use Twitter as a news source. B says that although there was scepticism about Twitter in the newsroom initially, this changed from about 2014. A and D say that tweets are regarded as any news tip.

The interviewees all argue that Twitter has become a critical tool in news production. Interviewee A described it as “an indispensable tool” and interviewee B said that “initially there was resistance, but since 2010 I kept pushing and pushing and eventually everyone realised this is the way to go. Since then SABC has changed a lot.”

Two of the **six** interviewees say they continuously monitor tweets as well as the broadcasts of main news organisations throughout the day. They check how SABC’s news stories compare with what other news organisations are tweeting or broadcasting. Others say they consult it two or three times a day to ensure that they do not miss a breaking story. SABC’s newsroom also has a WhatsApp group where journalists share information and send tweets of news developments or breaking stories.

The interviewees use tweets as sources to re-angle and update stories or follow up on secondary angles. A and C remarked that most of SABC’s own journalists would cover a story and then continuously tweet about any new development on their own timelines throughout the day. This information would be used to update stories in later bulletins. D says some journalists have not adapted to the culture of providing ongoing news and knock off once their story is filed. Editors on duty are then responsible to monitor tweets and update the story.

Interviewees are aware that politicians increasingly bypass the news and tweet to speak directly to their followers. The politicians know that journalists follow Twitter and will report on it.

Tweets from reliable sources also help the news desk to break stories that happen unexpectedly. Tweets from traffic authorities about an accident or images posted on Twitter from viewers enable the SABC to produce a story even before a journalist arrives at the scene. A recalled that after a tip-off about the police’s raid on the Gupta home in Saxonwold the SABC sent a journalist to the scene immediately. He tweeted about the incident and sent images via twitter until a camera man arrived. Interviewee E recalled that when Capitec’s share price dropped, they used live tweets on air from Viceroy, the organisation that released a scathing report on Capitec. At the time Viceroy was only responding through Twitter. C mentioned that

they often broadcast Twitter images of extreme weather conditions in winter before reporters are able to arrive on the scene.

Self-promotion

None of the interviewees currently tweet. Interviewee B noted that he tweeted in the past. “I used to be very active on Twitter back then. But now I have taken a step back. Twitter is very in your face and the twitterati hunt in packs and the backlash came at a great expense to me personally.”

C said, “all the journalists in the newsroom are on Twitter. They understand the pressure and competition. Some only use tweets as a news source, but **Chriselda** Lewis, Aldrin Sampear and Mangoba Mchuna are among the general journalists that tweet to spread information as it happens. They promote and update their own stories and in doing so create a strong following and build relations with their audience. Sometimes they will put breaking news tweets “on the WhatsApp group that we have in the newsroom”. F claimed that Twitter has become a driving force. It is expected that the general reporters “are on Twitter.”

Speed and immediacy

Twitter has brought about a fundamental change in the speed with which SABC can disseminate information. There was consensus among participants that Twitter posts are extensively used in the newsroom to track the development of a story or to get immediate reaction from stakeholders. Interviewee A said, “Twitter allowed journalists to be more effective”. C noted how they recently put tweets from the EFF’s Julius Malema in real time on air on 26 January at 21:00 in anticipation of President Cyril Ramaphosa’s cabinet reshuffle. The analysts in the news studio were asked to react to Mr Malema’s comments as they happened. According to C, “this was not exceptional but was happening regularly”. B added, there is a whole range of stakeholders who will immediately react to an important story. We don’t have to send a camera, because the tweets from stakeholders allow us to get reaction in real time, and this adds value to the broadcast.”

Interviewee D believes that it is because of the immediacy of Twitter and other social media, that the SABC has invested in technology that allows news increasingly to

cover news events live. In doing so the SABC tries to keep up with the immediacy of news and competition from other news organisation. The Esidimeni hearings, probing the deaths of 143 mentally ill patients, were covered live recently. SABC journalists covering the story would tweet in real time about the proceedings. Currently most news broadcast also broadcast tweets in real time to allow the viewers to voice their opinions. D said that journalists would tweet during court hearings. This allowed the newsroom to receive and update information as it happens.

But at the cost of accuracy? Fake news

The interviewees are all very aware of the dangers of broadcasting a tweet without verifying the source. Social media and specifically Twitter make it imperative that news producers check the facts before it is broadcast. Interviewee D said that they take a cautious approach: “I regard Twitter in the same way as I would regard any news tip.” He believes that SABC as a public broadcaster has an additional responsibility to ensure the news is accurate. He claimed that the use of Twitter posts forces them to balance immediacy with accuracy all the time.

Interviewee B said “many boo-boos” have happened as a result of the broadcasting of fake news tweets. Now he believes that it is more important to broadcast accurate and credible news than to break news first. The SABC’s role as public broadcaster is to be the custodian of accurate and quality news.

B agreed and referred to a story that the SABC broadcast in October 2017 during the Black Monday march in support of farm killings. SABC news reported that some marchers carried the old South African flag. They used images and information that were tweeted in response to the march. It was later established that the images of the old flag were in fact archive footage and not taken during the march. The SABC apologised to the organisers, but the reputational damage was done.

They differ as to whether Twitter allowed for a greater diversity of voices. Interviewee B said, “My experience online is that a very diverse group is on social media. The perception is that it is elitist. Lower LSMs are also on Twitter. There are more voices and more diverse voices.” Interviewee D disagreed and said that “although Twitter allows for more voices it does not enable more diversity.”

Democratisation

Whether Twitter has democratised news sources or whether it remains elitist, is ambivalent. The interviewees follow analysts, political parties, some politicians, selected SABC journalists and the major broadcasters such as eNCA, CNN, and BBC on Twitter. A, B, D and G claimed that Twitter has made it possible to get more diverse comments. F and G believe it has given a voice to the voiceless. When the interviewer pointed out that not everyone has access to Twitter, they agreed, underscoring the essentially elitist nature of the source; but reiterated that Twitter made it possible for journalists to get reaction from people beyond their personal contact base quite easily. A and E said Twitter was not only a source for breaking news but it also gives them access to opinions that were not included previously. In this sense, A believes, “it has levelled the playing field.”

D also claimed that in a sense Twitter helps to hold news organisations to account. “We work in a particular political environment where there has often been some unspoken pressure to give a story a specific slant. There is still a culture of self-censorship. Some journalists fear repercussions if they don’t kowtow to the ruling party. Twitter has changed this. It has democratised news gathering. On Twitter people are free to be honest and say it as it is. “We are mindful of this and you do take it into account. No-one wants to be painted in a bad light in a medium that can go viral.” A agreed, “Twitter helps to keep them in check but some reporters especially from the regions insist to follow and cover politicians regardless if he or she is making news or not.”

Daily workflow

Four of the **six** interviewees mentioned that the presence of Twitter and the need to produce content for the 24-Hour News service have changed the daily routines and practices of news production. Traditionally, the English bulletin on SABC3 was regarded as the flagship bulletin. Bulletins on SABC’s terrestrial channels have one daily deadline. In the past the entire day was focussed on it. F says now the focus seems to be on SABC’s 24-Hour News service on DStv channel 404.”

A remarked, “previously we had the whole day to mull over the content of packages that were broadcast on the terrestrial channels. But 24-Hour News has changed this.

There is more stress on journalists because the same team has to produce content for the 24-Hour News channel and the traditional bulletins that produce news in for the various language groups." The interviewees believe tweets enabled them to consistently update and repurpose their stories for the 24-hour channel as well as the bulletins on SABC 1, 2 and 3. It has increased their news output. But it also has a downside. "We are a public broadcaster. Our approach should not only be to update news developments. Our mandate requires us to contextualise a story and provide coverage in a balanced and fair manner. Somehow I believe our content has been diluted and we have lost some of the old depth because we are expected to be slicker and quicker".

B added that, "viewers want a new brand of news. People are inundated with information. This has forced us to think how viewers consume news and what we can bring to complement what people know. They want more analyses, insights, pictures – things they can't get on their phones. News on 404 is approached as a show. It is an ongoing process with news stories, analyses, live interviews, debates and polls to encourage our viewers to participate. SABC has spent a considerable amount on investing in technology which allows us to do more lives of news events as they happen or include tweets on a ticker tape during the broadcast of the 24-hour news bulletin. Twitter has allowed us to make news more interactive." Everyone agreed that the use of Twitter posts in real time allows more people to have their say. Interviewee C said, "People become part of the conversation."

In B's opinion, "Our bulletins have morphed into live interactive shows and that is how we build our brand. I can quite proudly say that the attitude to Twitter has changed from night to day. Now everyone realises news is all this stuff that must come together but the most important thing is to provide accurate news."

G argued that the approach on the terrestrial bulletins differs remarkably from the 24-Hour News bulletin on DStv channel 404. The terrestrial bulletins continue to follow the traditional structure. They mostly contain coverage of political, economic, international, sport and weather news. "It is quite difficult to explain how the use of Twitter has changed this. The duration of the bulletins make it almost impossible to provide viewers with in-depth news of the day. The packages on terrestrial bulletins

usually only have introductions with one or two up-sounds. In later bulletins, we may use reaction from tweets in a story."

Four of the six interviewees believe Twitter has become fashionable and interfere with the depth of the news. F says, the danger is that "we race to be first with information rather than focus on delivering accurate, fair and balanced news in the interest of all our viewers."

Two interviewees, A and C noted that Twitter forced journalists to become multi-skilled. A said, "reporters constantly tweet to promote their own stories and update information. C remarked, "journalists can now not only file their scripts, do interviews and package their stories, but they have to tweet and update the information as it develops and provide all the various language desks with information." A claims technological changes affect the need for camera and editing departments. Some journalists who are multi-skilled produce complete stories on their laptops".

Intermedia agenda-setting and framing

With regard to the second research question, that which examines whether the use of Twitter, as a news source, has any influence on traditional media's content decisions and if so how, intermedia agenda-setting theory was applied. The results are the following**.** Five of the six interviewees believe that Twitter has not affected journalistic values, but they have mixed opinions whether and how tweets have affected content decisions. A claims that "they always keep their mandate in mind during planning meetings." D said, "our focus is not on Twitter because we are a public broadcaster. We have to first and foremost produce news and information in the interest of all our viewers."

One of the interviewees stressed that news content is old within three hours. It is difficult simultaneously to satisfy the news needs of viewers who have followed news developments on Twitter during the day and also provide the day's main news to those who have not had access to Twitter.

Another interviewee believes that SABC's news content has to reflect the dynamics of the country. Allowing popular discussions on Twitter to influence the news content compromises their responsibility to serve all the people of South Africa. When using

popular content on Twitter, they must remain ever-vigilant so as to balance the needs of all South Africans.

Three of the six interviewees believe trending topics help them to identify the prominence of a topic. Interviewee C cited the land expropriation issue as an example. “Someone on the desk would see what viewers are saying. We would then include a balanced selection of the tweets during the bulletin. This could affect our line-up.” A believes, “Twitter provides us with secondary angles that we would not have had in the past, to follow-up,” and E adds that “trending topics could become top stories because it tells you what people want to see first.” C believes, “there is now much more participation on the news. We look at Twitter to see what the feeling is about a subject. Everyone has an opinion and it becomes part of the conversation.” F believes that tweets could influence how a story is presented and framed.

The interviewees concur that monitoring tweets helps them in the development of news content. Interviewee B said, “We still do the basics ourselves. Our reporters do the interviews and file the story. I do my own research on Twitter to see what the competition is doing and if we have covered all the angles. If I have questions I will go and see the journalist and we will discuss whether it is necessary to change some angles. Some journalists do not like to be second guessed, but news creation has become a team effort.” C remarked that some bulletins would occasionally put together a short overview of 3-5 trending stories that viewers talk about. One example he cited was Prince Harry’s engagement. Responding to the preferences of their audience helps SABC to build a much more personal relationship with them.

Three of the six interviewees believe technological changes have changed news consumption patterns: “Viewers now expect us to provide them with insights into news they can’t google. Prime-time has become all the time.”

What is evident, however, is that there is a marked difference between how Twitter posts impact on SABC’s 24-Hour News service in comparison with the terrestrial services on SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3. Tweets are regularly used during broadcasts on SABC Digital news and trending topics are included in news “shows” (as they are called). News on SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 use tweets to update

information but very rarely produce packages about trending topics. Izak Minnaar, Editor of SABC Digital News, said in a telephonic interview that SABC 24-Hour News has the time and flexibility to make substantial use of technological developments and social media. SABC's terrestrial channels use it as best they can, but time constraints prevent them from incorporating it into their broadcasts. Minnaar remarked that SABC Digital news supply the SABC 24-Hour News service with tweets that run on the ticker tape during broadcasts. Tweets from registered SABC journalists automatically appear on SABC's Twitter handle, and SABC Digital News offers original stories which they produce to the SABC News' broadcasts. Important national events that are streamed live are often shared between various news bulletins. (Minnaar,I., personal communication, 15 October 2018).

9. Findings and conclusions

The analysis of the interviews confirms that Twitter is used by all the participants and that it is regarded as an important informal tool in SABC's news production. The study was able to conclude that in the cut and thrust of news production at the SABC, Twitter plays a meaningful role and is used regularly. Specifically, many practices otherwise taken for granted are now being revised. Twitter has greatly affected newsgathering, news deadlines, sources, the speed of news turn-around, participation in news, news content, the relationship between journalists and viewers, the need to verify facts and has to some extent allowed more diversity of opinions. It has broadened newsgathering and, if only to an extent, democratised opinions on the news. It has underscored intermedia agenda-setting, and it has revisited the interactive nature of the journalist's relationship with her source.

Journalists are now under increasing pressure to produce news for multiple purposes. They are acquiring new skills to accommodate technological developments and to adapt their practices. Some journalists send complete stories via Twitter to the newsroom. This has improved the speed with which stories are disseminated. Despite these shifts, and within them, interviewees have remained committed to upholding the traditional core values of journalism, as well as the SABC's statutory mandate as the public broadcaster.

This becomes more difficult in an increasingly competitive environment. Not only must the SABC, as the public broadcaster, produce news relevant to those who do not have access to technology, but it needs also to cater for all the language groups and for those privileged enough to have access all the time.

All the participants were aware of the opportunities that Twitter avails and most are excited about the opportunities it affords. They admit that new technology and the use of new media have increased their output. It enables them to do more with less, although this could have consequences for job security. Despite the lack of leadership from the top, they keep balancing the need to remain competitive and relevant with the challenges of a public broadcaster as best they can.

The findings illustrate that SABC has taken initial steps towards becoming a multimedia organisation. The SABC leadership has yet to decide on an official strategy and, flowing from that, an official policy on how to use Twitter in a way that would accommodate new media within the unique and sometimes opposing requirements of a public broadcaster.

Earlier in this study three assumptions were made. It was there anticipated that these assumptions would be subjected to verification or rejection, as the case may be. In the light of the interviews, the material there provided, and the application of the theories of news to the answers given, this study is in a position now to verify or reject each of those three assumptions.

As to the first assumption, this study verifies that the introduction of new technologies and specifically the use of Twitter impacted on traditional media's set patterns, routines and practices. As to the second assumption, this study verifies that the use of Twitter posts enables journalists to use a greater diversity of voices but they do not always use this facility. And finally, as to the third assumption, the study verifies that Twitter does impact on the agenda-setting power of traditional media.

In sum, social media and specifically Twitter is profoundly changing the SABC's news processes. These changes have ongoing implications for the news production process.

Although this study was too limited in scope to arrive at a definite conclusion or to establish a general principle, it will hopefully contribute to further research about the changes wrought by social media on the new news landscape.

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