

Abstract:

This research explores the level to which investigative journalists in South Africa use social media applications to further their investigations. As social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter are instant tools for news agencies and reporters, investigative journalists are also benefitting from the use of these tools. This paper will explore how these tools are used by investigative journalists in South Africa, for what purposes and explore the challenges that may arise. Emphasis is placed on Facebook and Twitter as the research found that these social media applications are the most commonly used applications by investigative journalists in South Africa. This research is located within two theories namely Jurgen Habermas's (1989) theory of the public sphere and John Arundel Barnes's (1954) social network theory. These theories explore how social media applications create networks that are beneficial for investigative journalists for a variety of reasons. The discussions that take place on social media applications contribute to the digital public sphere – a platform where people can come together to discuss issues of relevance to them. Investigative journalists form part of the digital public sphere and this adds value to investigations. This research further delves into the change of relationship investigative newsrooms have with their 'audience' because of social media applications. Social media applications, such as Twitter and Facebook, have led to consumers of news no longer being passive viewers or listeners of news, but rather having an opportunity to voice their opinions, provide feedback and share information that influences investigations. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to ascertain which investigative journalists are using social media in their investigations followed by in- depth interviews across the country.