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## Social media and journalism: a study of Whatsapp use in newsroom convergence at Nation Media Group in Kenya

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**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Graduate School of Media and Communications**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISM: A STUDY OF WHATSAPP USE IN  
NEWSROOM CONVERGENCE AT NATION MEDIA GROUP IN KENYA**

By

Bernard Mwinzi  
559163

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation.

Nairobi, Kenya

20/02/2023  
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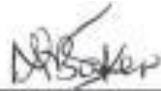
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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University  
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Executive Master's in Media Leadership and Innovation

Members of the Capstone Project Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the  
project of BERNARD MWINZI-559163, find it satisfactory and recommended that it  
be accepted.



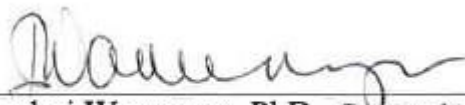
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Member,  
Capstone Project Evaluation Committee

20/02/2023

## DECLARATION

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISM: A STUDY OF WHATSAPP USE IN NEWSROOM CONVERGENCE AT NATION MEDIA GROUP IN KENYA**

I, **BERNARD MWINZI-559163**, declare that this capstone project does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my capstone project, which is the product of my research endeavours.

---

Signature

---

Date

## DEDICATION

To the great family of journalists around the world who every day wrestle with immense technological, cultural, financial, political and regulatory pressures.

*Journalism will, in the end, save journalism.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is as a result of support from several sources, among them the entire teaching fraternity of the Aga Khan Graduate School of Media and Communications, whose dedicated support, critique, guidance and scholarly insight helped me gain insights into the workings, motivations, challenges, and the future of mass media in Kenya; and my classmates, who allowed banter the space to heat up emotions, fire up the intellect, and scour the bottoms of academic barrels.

## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate how news organisations can tap into the interactivity, convenience and fast speeds of the social, multi-media networking site WhatsApp to aid in both news gathering and processing, as well as convergence. It is prompted by the fact that Kenyan media are at a crossroads. As they transition from analogue technologies, they are faced with the dilemma of choosing which new habits and processes to adopt. To make matters worse, even before they settle on the right technology, they are being forced to adopt the concept of convergence, where the various print, audio, and visual platforms operate as one, gaining material from the same pool and distributing it to various platforms. But does it have to be this hard? Can New Media technologies, especially social networking sites based on Web 2.0 platforms, make news gathering and convergence easier for traditional media houses? Using the case study approach, it will glean insights from a purposive sample of seven respondents drawn from the talent pool of one of the region's largest media companies, the Nation Media Group. The research takes qualitative research and a case study method to sample a news correspondent in the field, a news editor based in Nairobi, a Web publisher based at the Nation Media Group headquarters in Nairobi, a Web producer, a content aggregator, a photographic editor, and a media manager. It seeks to answer the following questions using interviews and document analyses: (i) How is WhatsApp used to ensure efficient convergence and collaboration of platforms at Nation Media Group? (ii) In what ways can the use of WhatsApp be improved to allow better, faster, convenient and reliable filing of news and information at Nation Media Group? and (iii) What are the professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group? The findings of this study will be analyzed and presented thematically and will be of significance to the Kenyan and regional media landscape as they are likely to find application in any modern newsroom. They could also help bring down the cost of setting up converged desks in newsrooms, sometimes running into tens of millions of shillings, to a negligible fraction of that expenditure. The *Daily Nation*, Kenya's largest print title by circulation, will provide an ideal site for the study because of its multi-media channels and wealth of expertise. Also, as the Nation Media Group in the last quarter of 2022 embarks on an ambitious newsroom re-organisation project, the cross-referencing of the experiences on the ground and the untapped potential of WhatsApp would make for interesting observations.



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## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**New Media:** The various digital communication channels that have the characteristics of being manipulated, and are networkable, dense, compressible and interactive. They include the various Internet-based media channels, among them social networking sites and applications, and the various computer technologies that can be used in the transmission of information, including computer multimedia technologies, computer games, CD-ROMs and flash drives (Salman et al., 2011).

**Media companies:** Refers to organizations whose core competencies are the creation and dissemination of information content to various audiences using relevant channels available to those audiences. The information includes entertainment, news, education, data and promotional messages. The channels that are used to disseminate the information to the public include newspapers, magazines, TVs, the Internet and radio (Picard, 2014).

**Newsroom convergence:** The use of the different broadcasting and communication technologies so as to break the various walls that exist between the print, TV, radio and Web channels. Media organizations are currently implementing a major shift towards convergence, and the Nation Media Group plans to create a hub where, as Quinn (2013) says, news from different locations, channels and technologies can be collected and accessed from one location.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explored the digital disruptions happening in the media scene in Kenya and contextualize them within the experiences of Nation Media Group, the site of my study. I also gave the social and academic statements of the problem, as well as the content, contextual and methodological scopes. Finally, I justified why it is important to carry out the study.

#### 1.2 Background of the Study

This study is aimed at understanding how social media is appropriated for media convergence in Kenyan media houses. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how the social networking application WhatsApp is appropriated by one of Kenya's leading news organisations, Nation Media Group, for media convergence in the newsroom.

'Media convergence' is the use of the different communication technologies to break the various walls that exist between the print, TV, radio and Web channels (Quinn, 2013. 'Social media', on the other hand, refers to a category of sites that is based on user participation and user-generated content. It is the collection of tools and online spaces available to help individuals and businesses accelerate their information and communication needs. (Schultze 2009).

The phrase 'social networking sites' refers to websites and mobile applications that allow users to create digital connections with people with whom they would wish to share content. It ensures that users can create a public or semi-public profile, connect

with other people and be able to view the contacts that an individual has (Ahn 2011). Some of these platforms are LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

Journalism scholars contend that social media has impacted journalism in various ways. A June 2022 study by Pew Research Centre noted that two-thirds of journalists surveyed (67%) felt social media had a very (26%) or somewhat negative (41%) impact on the state of journalism in the US, and that, conversely, only about one-in-five (18%) characterized it as having a positive impact. Still, noted the study, many journalists were using social media platforms in the course of their work. “The survey asked about 11 social media sites, finding that 94% of journalists use at least one of them professionally – most often Twitter and Facebook,” noted authors Jeffrey Gottfried, Amy Mitchell, Mark Jurkowitz and Jacob Liedke. “Overall,” they continued, “69% of journalists say Twitter is their first or second most used social media site, while about half (52%) put Facebook in their top two. Smaller shares say Instagram (19%), LinkedIn (17%) or YouTube (14%) – among other sites asked about – has such prominence in their social media diet.”

WhatsApp, the core focus of this study, is a cross-platform instant messaging application that is used to send messages, documents, images, videos, user locations and contacts through the Internet to other users who have the application installed in their smartphones and, recently, desktop computers (Yeboah, 2014).

From an academic point of view, there exists little awareness in Kenya on how various forms of New Media have been used to promote the concept of convergence in media companies in the country. This means there is an information gap on the efficiency, or lack thereof, of using social networking sites as news gathering tools. It also means that, where newsrooms use these tools as agents of convergence, they

employ them haphazardly, without a strong academic or professional research backing on their use. That, therefore, means there is little awareness on the value of the social networking application WhatsApp in the modern newsroom. Little wonder, then, that the app is viewed more as an informal means of communication, even when used in newsrooms, instead of being used as a way of improving the convenience of messaging by affording journalists the prospect of real-time communication, instant feedback and multimedia capabilities.

There is also no documented evidence on how social networking sites have impacted the speed of collection, analysis and distribution of news content in the country, and this is made worse by the fact that there has been little focus on how media houses are using this technology to improve the efficiencies of their processes.

### 1.3 Rationale of the Study

The media industry in Kenya has seen a lot of growth in the last three decades. Githaiga (2011) asserts that this may be as a result of the expansion of the democratic space, which in itself evokes the close linkage between media and democratic tenets. This is because both broadcast and print media were severely constrained before the liberalization of the media industry in the 1990s. As a result, the number of licensed broadcast outlets and the quality and vibrancy of publishers generally have risen steadily since then. Broadcasting channels, both radio and television, have seen tremendous growth catalyzed by the analogue-to-digital migration of 2015 and the reasonably lower charges for starting-up and running TV and radio stations.

A 2019 Media Council of Kenya report (State of the Media Report, 2019) noted that there was a significant growth of community radio stations compared to other media

platforms soon after the migration. The Kenyan market had 356 radio stations at the time, the survey noted, and 66 of the 467 TV stations on air at the time of the study were local. These numbers are expected to have risen by considerable margins at the time of this study, four years later.

On the contrary, despite print media facing fewer possibilities of external interference, especially political, it has not grown at the same pace as broadcast, in particular at the mainstream level. It remains dominated at the top by *The Standard*, the *Daily Nation* and *The Star*, the last which joined the fray in 2006. A 2019 report by the Kenya Audience Research Foundation (KARF) found that there were 44 newspapers and 62 magazines in Kenya with an average newspaper readership and reach of between 9% and 9.5% of the population. The report further revealed that as print media dwindled, online media appeared to be growing, with a reach of 27% to 30% of the audience during the review period, representing the biggest month-on-month growth in the survey.

A year later, the *State of the Media Report, 2020*, by the Media Council of Kenya, indicated that a significant percentage of people accessing television, radio, print and social media did so in search of news. Figures at the time showed that 45% of people surveyed listened to radio for news, 41% watched television for news and 17% were on social media in search of news during the week the survey was carried out.

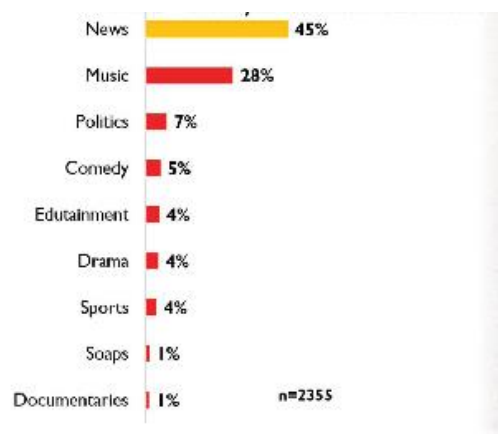
Compared to other markets, these figures indicated that there was a huge potential for digital media services in the country as Internet and smartphone penetration grow year-on-year. In the US, for instance, a 2020 Pew Research Centre study found out that the vast majority of adults got a significant amount of the news they consumed online, via smartphone, computer or tablet, and that the online space has



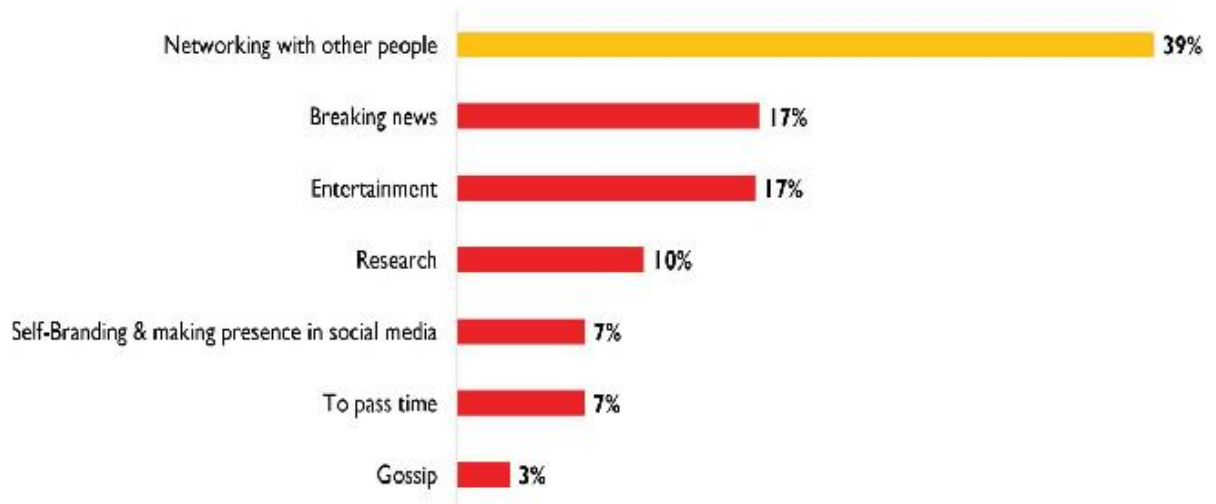
become a host for the digital homes of both legacy news outlets and new, “born-on-the-web” news publishers.

The study found out that as digital consumption of news rose, the daily US newspaper circulation, which combined print and digital offers, had fallen 6% from the previous year, and that public radio listenership had fallen 9%. But, while print and radio numbers were falling, TV appeared to be holding tight, and in fact was the only other medium, alongside digital publishers, that recorded a growth in audience numbers.

“Viewership for network local affiliate news stations... increased in two key time slots – evening (4pm to 7pm) and late night (11pm to 2am) – according to ComScore Station View Essentials data,” noted the study. Local TV average audience for late night and evening time slots rose by 4%, even though researchers found that the average audience for the morning news slot had dropped by the same margin in the year under review.



*Figure 1: Types of radio programmes listened to*



*Figure 2: Reasons for social media use*

With the broadcast and print media background in mind and the changing trends, I now interrogate the social media and internet landscape to provide context for this study.

#### *Internet and Social media use in Kenya*

Since the advent of the Internet and the resultant social media boom in Kenya, there has been exponential growth in their access and use. There are varying reports on the numbers of internet users, but all reports indicate that every year there are more people accessing the Internet and making use of social media for various uses, with news and information access being key. A report by Digital for Africa (2020) established that Kenya had at least 22.28 million internet users at the time, which represented about half of the entire population. Out of these, 8.8 million accessed and used social media as at January 2020. The survey further reported that the number of social media users had risen by one million (13%) in the ten months from April 2019 to January 2020. These reports, and these ever-increasing numbers, are proof that social

media and the Internet continue to provide endless opportunities and form a significant foundation for this research.

But when this social media explosion is studied in the context of media and newsroom convergence it reveals interesting perspectives. For instance, Wambui Wamunyu and Siguru Wahutu argue in a 2019 research paper (*Old Habits, New Realities: Digital Newsrooms in Kenyan Commercial Media Houses*) that “journalism curricula rely on predefined, non-contextualised norms and are yet to fully incorporate digital technologies”, and that even though there is a hybridisation of traditional and newer approaches in training, organisational structures and narrative forms in the Kenyan media landscape, “traditional sourcing cultures are retained, as is the engagement with audiences as consumers, rather than co-producers, of news”.

Likewise, a study by Mwangela (2012) on how social media have changed newsroom operations in Kenya found out that 90% of journalists used social media to contact or otherwise interact with sources and disseminate their stories. “A running theme through this was the ease and speed that social media affords journalists in their quest to get in touch with newsmakers or their readers,” noted Mwangela. “Respondents pointed out that it was a lot easier to gain access to important sources with social media handles more quickly by approaching them directly, than they would by using other channels.”

On the adjustments that media organisations had made or needed to make to accommodate social media as a news gathering tool, Mwangela noted that respondents were in agreement that the establishment of semi-autonomous digital operations with their own reporting structures was the single biggest new development that the two

media firms cited in the study (The Standard Group and Nation Media Group) needed to make to accelerate progress in the digitization of their operations.

He noted: “Both the Nation Media Group and the Standard Media Group have vibrant online departments staffed with journalists whose key duty is to handle the companies’ online presence, including official social media handles. In addition, these online departments have created different social media pages and accounts to cater to different audience segments. In the case of the Nation Media Group, respondents indicated that reporters are equipped with smartphones so they can submit breaking news and story updates from the field back to the office as may be necessary. Data collected indicates that the provision of free Wi-Fi in the office environment also makes it easier for journalists to log onto and use social media from their mobile phones. Respondents felt this was important, with a few pointing out that some offices in other sectors have actively curtailed access to social media during working hours. Their having access to free Wi-Fi then makes it easier for journalists to post to social media.”

But is this enough? Is the provision of the hardware and software needed to be a digitally savvy journalist enough, or do media organisations need to re-imagine the structural and policy constraints that make the use of social media as a news gathering tool haphazard and unreliable?

To answer these questions, this study was carried out in Nairobi County and sited at Nation Media Group, the largest media company in East and Central Africa with interests in TV, radio, print media and digital channels of broadcasting. The company was formed in 1959 by His Highness the Aga Khan as a print media company and is listed at the Nairobi Securities Exchange as a public company, meaning that majority of its stake is owned by the general public. The company has more than 1,500

employees operating in various parts of the East African region, where it has various media interests.

The Group runs the largest publications in the East African region, including the *Daily Nation*, which is the largest newspaper in the region, the *Business Daily*, the *Daily Monitor* in Uganda, *The Citizen* in Tanzania, the Kiswahili tabloid *Taifa Leo*, and the highbrow regional weekly, *The EastAfrican*. To match the growing technological advancement and penetration of smartphones and the Internet in the region, the company has also ventured into digital journalism, where content is published on its websites, Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as in e-Paper formats. The company also owns TV outlets that broadcast on the digital platform and can also be accessed over the Internet from any part of the world. It also owns several radio stations which are accessible on both terrestrial and online channels. The Nation Media Group has a board of directors, which is the highest body of authority in the company.

#### 1.4 Current Literature Review

##### *1.4.1 Situating the Study Within the Field*

The communication field is so vast that scholars often approach it from different perspectives. For purposes of this study, I limited myself to two broad categories – forms of communication, and branches of communications. Forms of communication relate to how meaning flows within, between and among individuals, while branches of communication relate to different categories under which communication is subdivided. I briefly illustrated the forms of communication, then the various branches of communication on which I anchored my study.

Communication is categorized as intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public and mass (Steinberg, 2007). Intrapersonal communication takes place within oneself while interpersonal communication involves passing of information between two entities. Group communication, Steinberg points out, involves three to 12 individuals, while public speaking is communication in a group of individuals that are “too many to qualify to be a group”. Finally, mass communication is the transmission of information to a large, heterogeneous audience from a single source, often using a medium.

Branches of communication, on the other hand, include such endeavours as political communication, cultural communication, organizational communication, as well as mass communication. McNair (2011) defines political communication as a branch that involves conveyance of information among politicians, policy makers, the media, and citizens. Often, this kind of communication involves communication from the authorities to the citizens, among citizens for grass-rooting, and from the citizens upwards to authorities for better governance.

Cultural communication entails communication that takes place within the context of understanding how people from varying cultures and sub-cultures communicate and understand the intricacies and dynamics of the world around them (Carbaugh, 2013), while mass communication is the broadcast of information to a wide range of anonymous and heterogeneous audiences (Steinberg, 2007). Finally, organizational communication takes place within an organization as the stakeholders send, receive and interpret meaning through such mediums as emails and social media. According to Steinberg (2007), organizational communication can either be formal or informal, where formal communication occurs through officially designated channels of messages.

This study is confined to journalism and news production in a media company and mainly focused on the channels adopted – in this case WhatsApp -- by personnel such as news reporters, and how they have aided the production of news content as well as accelerated workflow efficiencies. It also seeks to know how any ethical, quality control and process concerns around its use are managed within editorial structures.

In summary, communication is a very important aspect within an organization as it shows how information is shared between various departments. In the case of news media companies, new media tools are affecting how information is shared between various channels of publishing, and while there might be questions about what this means for the industry in the long term, what is indisputable is that these technologies have broken the bureaucracies that for centuries dominated organizational communication in media firms. This study seeks to give an understanding of how a specific instrument of new media – WhatsApp – is aiding convergence of newsroom processes by allowing collaboration and sharing of information across various multi-media platforms.

#### *1.4.2 Media Convergence*

The term ‘New Media’ refers to the various mass media communication tools that use digital technologies in the dissemination of information (Salman et al., 2011). Such technologies include, crucially, the Internet, and the digital devices linked to this electronic superhighway offer interactive user feedback as well as creative participation of all players in the communication process. Conversations on various New Media channels involve dialogue, also known as social networking, even though, broadly, these formats include online newspapers, social networking sites, blogs and other online communication platforms (Salman et al., 2011).

Social networking sites are online platforms that offer people a stage to create public profiles as well as a chance to interact with each other. The platforms allow people with similar personalities, career interests, activities and backgrounds to share various forms of media content. To ensure that social networking sites are interactive, they are built on the Web 2.0 digital media platform, which allows for dynamic interaction among users (Farooq, Jan, 2012).

It is not easy to study social media without coming across the term ‘social networking’ because the two go hand in hand. The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines ‘social media’ as “forms of communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content such as videos”. On the other hand, it defines ‘social networking’ as “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions” and “specifically the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business”.

Social media can be traced to the early 1970s but its robustness became more evident around 2004, when Web 2.0 applications that facilitated user-generated content were developed. This new technology gives users the freedom to interact or collaborate with each other as creators, also known as ‘prosumers’, of user-generated content in an online community.

To better understand these terms, Cohen (2009) views social media as “a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting” while social networking is “a tool and utility for connecting with others”. As the technology evolves, however, these two definitions are increasingly getting blurred, or rather merged, and such applications as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram and Twitter now effortlessly straddle the media and social networking divides.



Still, even when viewed within this contextual framework, there seems to be a lack of a clear definition of what exactly social media is. In all the definitions provided above, there is an aspect of consumer-generated content, where users are given an opportunity to create and share content. However, social media sites have not only become platforms for conversations through consumer-generated content, but also other content generated elsewhere by professionals, such as news stories on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Telegram and WhatsApp, among others. Therefore, for purposes of this study, social media applications are Web-based platforms that facilitate easy access to, and distribution of, user-generated information, and also the distribution of professional content. Also, since this study will anchor specifically on the use of WhatsApp as a tool for newsroom convergence, I feel the imperative to define the application within the bounds of this study as a cross-platform messaging application that is used to send prompt messages, documents, images, videos, user locations and contacts through the Internet.

#### *1.4.3 Social Media and Media Convergence*

Journalism is defined as the process and activities of gathering, assessing, creating and distributing news and information. It involves the professional creation, writing and presentation of newspapers, magazines and the various forms of broadcasting (Borden, 2013).

Before we embark on how social media is used in journalism, we perhaps need a short detour into the evolution of journalism from medieval times to the adoption of social media as standard newsroom and consumer practice. Journalism has undergone several tremendous revolutions that have threatened its existence. The validity and existence of traditional media such as newspapers has been constantly put to test

through the ages, particularly by the technological advancements that led to the introduction of radio and television. At the time of these advancements, just as now, there were divided opinions on how the media industry should react to the new changes. Some shunned away from that debate -- and the technology -- while others reluctantly agreed with the new developments and found ways of assimilating them into their daily professional practices. Dimitrov (2014) notes that TV and radio deeply changed the profession of journalism, and thus turned out not to be the ultimate death knell to the trade that many had proposed they would be.

In the midst of the chaos of technological advancements and disruptions, and despite the fears of thousands of journalists around the world, journalism didn't die as many had anticipated. Instead, the on-scene reporter was born, and this new breed of journalist went on to become a standard feature of the news industry for decades. At the same time, an army of opinion shapers and analysts started interpreting the news on radio and TV, and the same editorializing was quickly adopted by newspapers, giving birth to the newspaper and magazine columnists that soon became icons of authority for millions of news consumers around the world. There, thus, are indeed parallels between the fears and experiences across the industry then and now, when social media is dividing opinions on what real journalism truly is, and whether it has a future or validity.

In his arguments in "Do Social Media Spell the End of Journalism as a Profession?", Dimitrov (2014) argues that "journalism is both an occupation and a profession". An occupation, he continues, "is a job that requires the majority of a person's working time and provides them with a majority of their income" while a profession is "an enhanced occupation that requires special selection by designated bodies in order to join".

However, social media advocates have refuted Dimitrov's view of real journalism, which in his definition is anchored solely on traditional media like newspapers. They argue that with the advent of computer or mobile phone user-generated content, this power has now been extended to the hands of anyone who has an internet connection. Yet that argument raises a fundamental question: Does democratization of power to generate content mean the death of professionalism in journalism is nigh? What does the mantra, by Shirky (2018), that "if anyone can be a publisher, then anyone can be a journalist" mean for the industry? Does it mean that if someone sends out a post to a WhatsApp group concerning a road accident one has just witnessed, one becomes a part of the journalism sphere?

These rapid changes in the media industry have led to the adjustment of how media companies, especially traditional, legacy ones, operate. Many have integrated aspects of new media in their operations in order for them to remain relevant as consumption increasingly shifts to the mobile phone. Indeed, the mobile phone's functionality as a deliverer of news now serves the needs of the billions of people around the world who now access content through it (Xigen Li, 2015).

Media companies are organizations whose core competency is the creation of information content and dissemination of the same to mass audiences using relevant channels. They disseminate information such as entertainment, news, education, data and promotional messages to their audiences via a rich mix of channels such as magazines, newspapers, television sets, the Internet and radio sets (Brito, 2013).

News organizations have already begun assimilating new media formats into their profession. This digital convergence has not only changed how they disseminate content to their audiences, but also how they produce it. Newsrooms now have such

important and central editorial positions as online content creators, online editors, social media managers and audience engagement editors whose domain is strictly online.

It is evident that besides newsrooms, convergence is taking place in all areas of traditional journalism. For example, some television networks in Kenya such as K24 have integrated Twitter, Facebook and recently WhatsApp into their programming. The product of this content-source integration is beamed to audiences using such techniques as scrolling bands of tweets, Facebook comments and WhatsApp messages.

#### *1.4.4 Review of Theories*

This section entails the review of various theories that aided in guiding the research. They contain various propositions which are relevant to the key research questions to this study. These theories are aimed at showing how various forms of new media can be used in business organizations to influence the communication strategies of such organizations, and in this case communication within a media house.

##### *1.4.4.1 Media Convergence Theory*

Rarely discussed within media scholarly circles, this theory is the brainchild of American media scholar Henry Jenkins, who explores the three concepts of convergence, participatory culture and collective knowledge within the context of old and new media. His Convergence Theory points out five key areas within which media converge. First, there is economic convergence, where a company controls several products or services within the same area of specialization or industry. For instance, the Nation Media Group publishes newspapers, runs digital content platforms, and at the same time broadcasts on radio and television.

The second proposition is organic convergence where an individual could watch TV online while at the same time chatting with a friend on a mobile phone, and perhaps even be listening to music in the background. The third is cultural convergence, and here Jenkins offers two perspectives; where specific media content flows across different kinds of media in different forms, like a novel being turned into a movie or a television series; or participatory culture, where media consumers are given the ability to comment, share, remix and otherwise have a role to play in shaping culture. This now happens on such new media platforms as YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp, and the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other Web-based applications that facilitate end-to-end user interactions.

The fourth tenet according to Jenkins entails global convergence, where geographically distant cultures influence one another despite differences in terms of physical location. In movies, for instance, the American culture is engraved in Hollywood, Nigerian attitudes in Nollywood, and Indian ways of life in Bollywood. All these have a magnificent influence on culture from a global perspective.

Lastly, Jenkins explains technological convergence as being the merging of various technologies in the execution of a mandate. For instance, viewers can now watch their favourite television programmes from terrestrial and satellite receivers, and on online platforms such as YouTube and such Video-on-Demand platforms as *ViuSasa* for Citizen Television in Kenya and *Nation.Africa* for Nation Media Group.

In agreement with Jenkins' opposition of convergence as only constituting technological combinations, José van Dijck (2013) recognizes cultural convergence as constituting other factors such as economic and political circumstances when he identifies a culture of connectivity and refers to it as "a socio-technical ensemble" where

an online ecosystem is inevitably shaped by past circumstances. On the effect of convergence on journalism, Jenkins argues:

In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms. Right now, convergence culture is getting defined top-down by decisions being made in corporate boardrooms and bottom-up by decisions made in teenagers' bedrooms. It is shaped by the desires of media conglomerates to expand their empires across multiple platforms and by the desires of consumers to have the media they want where they want it, when they want it, and in the format they want.

Taking the position that media convergence is not just a journalist's transformation, he looks at what this means to the audience, arguing that the diversity of platforms available to the user has resulted in a change of consumption culture.

The relevance of this theory, especially the cultural (participatory) convergence tenet, is to help in understanding how social media can be used by newsroom prosumers – who act as both content producers and consumers. Consumers, for the purposes of this discussion, are not necessarily external for a news organization. Reporters, editors, photographers, graphic designers and media managers are all media consumers, and their roles have been affected by the concept of convergence. Jenkins argues that convergence is both a top-down and bottom-up phenomenon, and that when new technology is rolled out, the inventors and users have a way of influencing or determining how it is used or applied in various settings.

#### 1.4.4.2 Altercasting Theory

This theory was first coined by Eugene Weinstein and Paul Deutschberger in 1963 and discusses the concept of persuasion by looking at how people are convinced to adopt various practices and policies, and also explains how the people are forced into

specific social roles so as to incline them to behave in accordance to the requirements of those roles. It also shows how various tactics are used to persuade people to adopt new ways of doing things (Murray & Thomson, 2009).

The theory assumes that when a person takes on some specific social roles and responsibilities, the social pressure that comes with such roles and responsibilities ensures that the person behaves in a specific manner that is consistent with that role. People, therefore, have to change so as to fit in the new social roles (Mirsadeghi, 2013).

There are two types of altercasting. The first is Manded altercasting, where a new role is created and allocated to the person being persuaded. The role is based on the skills and personality characteristics identified in the person for whom the role is being created. This is based on the notion that the personality and skills set of the person allow them to fit into the new role (Malle, 2011).

The second is Tact altercasting, where the society acts in a way to push the person into accepting the specific role that is expected to be taken up by the person. An example of this is when a parent pushes his or her children to accept specific roles and responsibilities. This is a more passive method of altercasting as it forces people to accept specific roles and responsibilities (Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011).

As Harnisch et al. (2015) argue, to successfully create altercasting, various processes can be combined. These include the structural distance, where a closer distance to the influencer of change promotes altercasting as compared to when the distance is far. The evaluation distance means that if a more superior role is offered, there is a high likelihood that the person is going to accept that role as compared to when the role is lower. When there is a good alignment of feelings, needs and interests,

there is a high chance that the altercasting is going to be accepted as compared to when this alignment is not present. In other cases, the fact of whether the person is seeking help or the person is offering help also determines the success of the altercasting process (Harnisch, Bersick, & Gottwald, 2015).

Based on this study, this theory is in agreement with the key research question three that poses: What are the professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group? Since the use of social media in the newsroom is a new thing that ought to be adopted by either an individual or as a group personnel, there is need to develop professional and ethical guidelines for its use. For this reason, I agree with Tact Altercasting as defined by Harnisch, Frank, and Maull (2011), that the society acts in a way to push the person into accepting the specific role that is expected to be taken up by the person; or rather, it forces people to accept specific roles and responsibilities.

However, this theory can have both positive and negative effects on an entity. A 1971 article in the *American Journal of Nursing* examined how nurses were able to deal with difficult cases of psychiatric patients, and suggested that the medical practitioners had to use unusual methods of persuasion such as altercasting. Instead of demanding something directly from a patient, nurses were required to understand deeper their patients' needs in order to know the role to take on, and thereafter persuade the patients. In line with media organisations, this same approach could be applied by embedding some clauses in the organizational policies that ensure journalists adhere to, based on their regular, on-the-job interaction with WhatsApp.

On the other hand, the negative effect of this theory is that altercasting is usually associated with manipulation; since its main aim is to subtly influence someone in to



assuming a specific role. This may be viewed as trapping or forcing people to perform certain roles without their will.

#### 1.4.4.3 Domestication Theory

This theory describes how various forms of new technology are tamed to become part of the lives of a given society. This allows people to adapt, accept and start using this new technology to improve the various aspects of their lives and aid the efficiency and effectiveness of their production processes (Fassbender, 2015).

Domestication had its origins in a number of traditions and interests, one of them being media studies at the end of the 1980s, when researchers put a lot of effort into understanding media audiences (Haddon, 2007). However, the most cited reference to the concept of domestication is that of Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley in 1992, when they used the idea of taming wild animals and used it to refer to the idea of unwinding technology for human use.

Domestication, however, is achieved through a rigorous process. The first is to ensure that the new technology is integrated into the daily lives of people, giving them a chance to make the new technology part of their daily existence and use it where applicable. At this stage, argues Fassbender, the technology may be modified so as to fit the situations in the lives of the people using it. When successfully integrated, a transition, or transformation, is experienced in the lives of the people. After the technology has been domesticated, it can be considered to be useful, reliable, and trustworthy, and be considered to be part of life of the lives of the people in that society.

The second process involves adaptation of the users and changing of the user environment so as to move to an environment where the new technology can be applied

in the day to day lives of those using it. This ensures that in every aspect of life, the new technology is usable in making life more effective and efficient.

The third stage involves the implementation of the technology to improve the production processes in industries and to shape the next generation of technologies in the delivery of services to end users. This helps in ensuring that there is progress in improving the current technology to adapt to changes in needs and demands in the society (Fassbender, 2015). Lastly, the fourth stage entails conversion into the cultural postures of a population.

This theory has been very important in ensuring technologies, such as mobile phones, are adopted to become part of the cultural norms of societies. The theory also shows how people in various organizations have been able to adopt technologies from outside environments, integrate the new technologies into their ways of living, and plot progress in the use of this technology as well as its continuous improvement to meet the changing needs of the people (Grabot, Vallespir, Samuel, Bouras, & Kiritsis, 2014).

However, the Domestication Theory is criticized for relying on a qualitative approach and detailed case studies, which tends to prove it uneasy to turn it into prescriptive lessons of the type required by policy makers (Harwood, 2011). On the other hand, as Harwood notes, its wide descriptive nature becomes the basis of its strength as it propels the processes and complex interplay of artifacts and cultural values to be explored in a more detailed manner than individualistic methods of quantitative studies.

As technology advances in the external business environment, organizations are able to adapt to it and use it to improve their production processes and the management

of their internal communication processes to ensure efficiency in service delivery. As the theory shows how technology can be adopted and integrated in the day to day activities, it is relevant to this study on the basis that social media, specifically WhatsApp, having been widely accepted as part of the larger society through integration, has found acceptance within media institutions as well. This is in line with the second key research question, which poses: In what ways can the use of WhatsApp be improved to allow better, faster, convenient and reliable filing of news and information at Nation Media Group?

#### *1.4.5 Review of Related Previous Research*

A number of studies similar to the topic of study have been carried out in the past, all trying to understand how various instruments of new media have impacted the society and business organizations. Below are some studies that are closely related to the topic of study, and which have touched a lot on new media.

##### 1.4.5.1 Implication for Media Convergence on News Learning

In exploring this concept, Gumus and Ozad (2011) compare traditional forms of media broadcasting with various forms of new media. They start by analysing the various traditional media instruments and their effects on the industry, then go on to compare this with the Internet, which is used to represent modern media instruments. By doing this, the researchers hope to find out the most effective media tool between the Internet and various traditional media instruments. The study also aims at finding out the various formats that users of the different media instruments prefer in the presentation of media content in either the traditional or modern instruments. The study tries to understand how the convergence of traditional and new media instruments has

affected the process of learning within the societies where this has been implemented (Gumus, 2011).

The main gap with the study is that it does not go into details about the impact of specific instruments of new media on particular sub-sets of the society and its sub-cultures. Also, the study mainly focuses on how the Internet, as an instrument of new media, has affected the process of learning by converging it with various instruments of traditional media. It does not focus on how instruments of new media have affected organizational communication in media houses and how it has impacted convergence of various channels of publishing in sharing of information and breaking the various walls that exist between these channels. This is the gap this study hopes to plug.

#### 1.4.5.2 The Impact of New Media on Traditional Mainstream Mass Media

This article by Salman, Ibrahim, Abdullah, Mustaffa, and Mahbob (2011) focuses on how the development of new media has impacted various forms of traditional media broadcasting in various parts of the world. The paper tries to focus on how the Internet is not expected to replace newspapers, in the same way radio and other forms of broadcasting did not replace traditional forms of broadcasting such as newspapers. Specifically, the paper focuses on the Malaysian market, showing how various forms of new media, including the Internet, have not replaced legacy media.

The paper compares the traditional forms of media broadcasting with the various forms of new media, showing how the traditional forms have changed their layout to remain competitive, and also how the content of these media tools has not changed over time, even with the advent of new media. The changes in the layout have included development of online versions of channels such as newspapers and radio to ensure that

they are embracing new technology to remain competitive. The article shows how, especially in countries such as Malaysia, new media and traditional media broadcasting tools will continue to co-exist (Salman, Ibrahim, Abdullah, Mustaffa, and Mahbob, 2011).

The main drawback in this article, for purposes of this study, is that it does not focus on more modern forms of new media which use the Internet as a channel to improve efficiency and effectiveness of communication. Also, the article does not focus on an organizational environment, specifically a media house, to show how organizational communication (in this case news gathering and processing) has been affected by various forms of new media.

#### 1.4.5.3 New Media and Convergence: A Development Communication Perspective

This article by Mitra (2011) tries to understand how New Media tools have transformed society, how new technology in communication influences the various socio-cultural bearings of societies (Mitra, 2011). The main gap in the article is that it does not show the impact of new media in the communication strategies of a media company. It does not show how new media affects the convergence of various channels of news gathering and processing, and does not focus on one specific aspect, strength or adaptability of new, social media tools and how these can be applied in professional settings.

#### 1.4.5.4 Digital Convergence in News Rooms: Cross-Media News Production

In studying digital convergence in newsrooms, Sakulsri (2019) examines in a case study the relationship between cross-media news production and quality

journalism. The main goal is to analyse various types of content production in order to clearly understand the main reasons behind newsroom strategies in Thailand. Sakulsri's study takes a qualitative approach which uses 30 interviews with different cadres of journalists from different media outlets across Thailand. It also involves textual analysis and observation of newsroom operations.

The findings indicate that editors and reporters have encountered significant tensions and challenges as a result of this technological disruption. In order to cope with the new dynamics in the production of content as well as maintain quality, a cross-platform strategy is effective under certain situations, the study finds. Specifically, media practitioners interviewed for the study suggest that using New Media teams to act as bridges between teams serving the new and old platforms could be crucial in attaining acceptable levels of convergence and effective deployment of tools. This finding, in a nutshell, promotes the expansion of news production while fostering the quality needed for broad, 360-degree news coverage, and these two have proven extremely crucial in the current highly competitive and dynamic media space.

In concluding her study, Sakulsri argues that it is through further incorporation of cross-media work practices and cross-media content strategies to improve the link between the old and new media that journalists and editors will secure better opportunities to achieve their goal of quality journalism (Sakulsri, 2019)

The main gap in this study is that in as much as it has indicated the dynamics advanced and strategies incorporated in the newsroom in order to bridge the gap between the old and new media production of news content, to converge operations, she does not indicate specific tools of new media employed in the production, and does not clearly specify the specific channels employed in communication within the newsroom.

#### 1.4.5.5 The Utilization of WhatsApp in Journalistic Practices

To explore the use of WhatsApp in journalism, Andini (2019) carries out qualitative research with the aim of understanding how the application has changed the process of news gathering. His study employs a case study in which journalists and editors are the main participants.

Andini points out the four most common practices in news gathering: scrutiny, telephone conversations, research and discussions. According to him, most journalists have become much dependent on this new media tool for engagement with both their superiors as well as sources of their news with much confidence due to its end-to-end user encryption feature. This enables the confidentiality of information being communicated.

Andini further cites Edwards, (2016) to indicate the benefit of WhatsApp in the news gathering and processing enterprise. He posits that WhatsApp gives one the ability to access and sieve through large amounts of data with efficiency, but notes that special care should be taken in the process of advancing this technological revolution since WhatsApp is changing the dynamics of interaction between journalists and their sources, the latter of whom seem to be more willing to engage over this platform than any other, thus creating long-term relationships even outside newsrooms or beyond news gathering exercises.

His findings indicate that WhatsApp has become crucial in newsrooms as a communication and coordination tool, with editors sending instructions and receiving content via the application. His data analysis ranks the use of WhatsApp into two broad categories: personal, where the tool is used personally by reporters, editors and other

newsroom leaders in fulfilling their duties, either in office or in the field; and WhatsApp Group, where the platform is used for sharing newsworthy content to members. The WhatsApp group also offers a platform for discussion for news gathering, where reporters and editors discuss more about a news story that has been compiled and explore the need to make changes, such as ascertaining the accuracy of the content, angles as well as adding more data for in-depth coverage.

#### *1.4.6 Rationale for the Study Based on Literature Review*

Literature review reveals that use of social media journalism is an under-researched area, especially in Africa. While there has been growth in the incorporation of social media in the Kenyan media scene, how these tools, and specifically WhatsApp, are being used in the newsroom as a tool for professional communication and media content production has not been subjected to any empirical studies.

Even though there have been numerous other studies related to the topic of research, they have not addressed the biggest headache in media organisations today: that of using technology to converge their newsrooms. Most of these researches have focused on the broad concept of new media without going to specific details on how these inventions have affected organizational communication. Also, most of the studies have focused on the Internet, the information expressway upon which social media tools are predicated, as an instrument of new media; trying hard, and sometimes inadequately, to compare this with other instruments of legacy channels.

This is a scholarly oversight, as social media tools have become prominent instruments of news gathering and dissemination in newsrooms around the world. While the Internet is a channel as far as journalism is concerned, the mobile phone and



its installed applications have become a giant newsroom, complete with gathering, processing and dissemination capacities. The implications of this are huge for the media industry as it changes, completely, the strict structures of newsrooms, takes the power away from the editors and copy takers and places it in the hands of field reporters, and disrupts the norms of the traditional flow of information in a media house. Add a ubiquitous, fast, convenient, cheap, and easy-to-use social media application to this mix, and things start to get a bit heady for media managers and executives. This study, therefore, identifies the huge informational gap in the field of new media and their effects on news organisations.

There has been, in my view, minimal focus on social media and how it can, or has been, used to disrupt traditional organizational communication strategies, especially in media houses. Other studies have focused on how various instruments of new media have affected various aspects of the society at large rather than on specific aspects of that society. This means that such studies have shown a general impact analysis of the various forms of new media on the society without giving specifics on what aspects have been impacted by new media channels.

This study is different. It works with varied cadres of journalists, from the lowest to the highest, from newshounds to news producers, to understand how new media instruments, and specifically the social networking application WhatsApp, have impacted newsroom convergence in media companies, and specifically at Nation Media Group. It moves away from the generalisations of past studies to the specifics, looking at the impact of one social media tool on a specific media house, and answering Fassbender's Domestication Theory questions in relation to mass media and emerging technologies.

As evidenced from the literature reviewed above, my argument is that there is need to investigate the use of social media in journalism; specifically, the use of WhatsApp in newsroom convergence. Further, the findings of this study will be significant in examining ways in which use of WhatsApp can be improved to allow better, faster, convenient and reliable filing of news and information. Those findings will also be crucial in exploring the relevant professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool, and the data analysis will provide information that could be necessary in the quest to inform policy making on social media use in newsroom convergence, particularly in the Kenyan media context.

### 1.5 Problem Statement

There is little collaboration between various channels in Kenyan media houses, which means that various forms of separation exist between print, radio, TV and internet-based journalism. Also, in the Internet Age where news spreads fast, there is painfully slow transfer of news materials from the field to the media houses for processing, hence making it hard to have a real-time transfer of content from the field to the audiences.

Communication between journalists in the field and their head offices has been ineffective and slow for a long time due to lack of a communication channel that can offer a cheap and real-time experience. Various traditional means of communication, including e-mails and telephone calls, do not offer adequate real-time communication among the staff of media companies, for lack of either time or resources, and this tends to have a negative effect on the speed and accuracy with which news is processed. With the increasing penetration and use of New Media technologies in the country, and especially social networking sites and applications like WhatsApp, it has been hard to

measure what benefits media organizations can gain by assimilating these into their daily standard operations.

While there is substantial research and information on how social media networking sites are used by news consuming audiences, there is scant research into how these sites are officially utilized by the news-making organizations. Thus, there is an informational gap on how WhatsApp and other social networking sites and applications have impacted the efficiency of distribution of news within media companies in Kenya, and little knowledge also exists on how various organizations in different sectors can use social networking sites to improve the efficiency of internal communication among employees by ensuring that there is real-time sharing of information within the organization. This study limited itself to the journalistic application of these new forms of media.

## 1.6 Objectives

### *1.6.1 Main Objective*

Journalism in Kenya is at a crossroads. There is a lot of competition among the established legacy outlets, and while this is getting out of hand, technology has presented an even bigger threat as social media platforms fight for the same audiences with the structured, sometimes slower, traditional channels. There is little focus on how these threats can be harnessed and turned into opportunities, and while media organizations run Twitter and Facebook accounts, these are on the same extreme end of dissemination, meaning there is little focus on the other, more important and highly rigid extreme; gathering.

The study focuses on how media organizations can harness social media, specifically WhatsApp, to gain a competitive advantage in the gathering of multimedia material, and hence, crucially, aid the all-important concept of convergence. This is important and quite timely as it comes at a time when internal and external consumers of information in media houses are making a major shift towards smartphone technology, where WhatsApp is domiciled. Moreover, little research has been done in this area because the use of WhatsApp in organizations and media houses has been spontaneous and informal, neither thought through nor incorporated into the organizations' communication structures.

The findings of this study will be crucial in plugging the knowledge gap that exists in the industry on the use of social networking sites as gathering, rather than publication or dissemination, tools in media houses. It turns the microscope inwards, studying the internal audiences and processes of media organizations rather than the external ones, which tend to receive the bulk of research attention.

While the study is sited at the Nation Media Group, it has the potential of finding easy applicability in every other major media organization in the country and beyond as these share the same risks and opportunities. Also, because they operate in the same technological and competitive environments, these media organizations tend to have identical challenges, and the answers to these challenges could find ready use across the industry.

### *1.6.2 Specific Objectives*

Many organizations have started using WhatsApp as a communication tool as it ensures real-time sharing of information and hence it is important to study the impact

of the use of the multi-media messaging platform on media organizations, which are facing immense pressure to stay relevant at a time when citizen journalism is eating into their traditional audiences. Specifically, the study focuses on Nation Media Group and its use of WhatsApp as the first port of call when sharing multimedia news by journalists in the field before the news can be analysed and shared with the general public. This way, the study shows how WhatsApp is being used as a convergence channel in media houses in the country, and also reveals what other organizational processes have been improved, or need to be improved, by editorial leaders. It further recommends policies that would ensure professionalism and ethics in the use of this New Media tool.

### *1.6.3 Research Questions*

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. How is WhatsApp used for media convergence at Nation Media Group?
- ii. In what ways can the use of WhatsApp be improved to allow better, faster, convenient and reliable filing of news and information at Nation Media Group?
- iii. What are the professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group?

### *1.7 Methodology*

Next, I introduce the research methodology that I used in the phases of data collection, analysis and reporting of the findings based on the research questions raised above. I start by defining the research approach used in the study, the research method and, subsequently, the sampling and data generation and analysis techniques. I further discuss the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

### *1.7.1 Research Approach*

This study used the qualitative approach, which, as defined by Creswell (2011), “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. This approach is supported by the arguments of Jwan and Ong’ondo (2011), who note that qualitative research is guided by the principles that research can be subjective, particular, and context-based, and therefore it need not necessarily be based on simple random samples and be generalizable.

These scholars corroborate each other in the argument that context in the natural setting is a crucial aspect of qualitative research, and this approach was hence suitable for my study as it aimed at studying in detail the use of WhatsApp as a tool of convergence in the newsroom. The approach also aided a deeper understanding of ways in which this crucial tool that has become part of communication at the Nation Media Group can be improved to be more effective and accepted across the media industry in Kenya as a professional means of communication. The study required interacting with a few participants in order to facilitate easier analysis of the huge volume of data generated. This is in line with Litchman’s suggestion that qualitative research involves in-depth study and examination of a few individuals, and at times just one person. As Maxwell (2013) implies, this deliberate, personalized qualitative gathering of information could also help one gain a deeper understanding of the different human relationships through the study of their behaviours in their natural, newsroom setting. Inductive reasoning was then used to draw conclusions from the information I gathered, hence allowing me a descriptive analysis of the findings, explanation of the data, and its interpretation.

Adopting the approach in this study enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of how New Media, specifically WhatsApp, is shaping newsroom convergence at the Nation Media Group by collecting qualitative data from respondents, recording it, analysing it and trying to get a deeper understanding of the various relationships of people at company's various newsrooms, particularly on the matter of convergence.

### *1.7.2 Research Methods*

The case study method was implemented in the study. Yin (2002) defines case study research as an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. I adopted an explanatory dimension in order to help answer the various questions raised for the research. I also understand that the questions raised for the study are too complex to explain using surveys or experimental methods, and hence, as Baxter and Jack (2008) argue, such line of questioning requires a method that can explain a link between the topic of study and real-life situations. This was achieved through collection of data at Nation Media Group, which was used as evidence. This was then analysed to come up with a logical conclusion. The method was suitable as it allowed for thorough interrogation of the research questions to acquire the desired information.

### *1.7.3 Sampling*

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study. I used this method because of its intentional selection of informants at the Nation Media Group based on their ability to explain the concept of convergence at the company.

Furthermore, this research site is sampled purposively since it contains the participants who meet the requirements necessary for matters under investigation.

Unlike in quantitative sampling, this study applies a non-probability sampling technique that involves selection of representative samples from the population based on a probability that is unknown. The assumption is that the reporters, editors, managers, producers and photographers chosen for this study will offer in-depth yet specific perspectives as they are knowledgeable on specific aspects about new media and the process of convergence at Nation Media Group. For purposes of this study, the population will only have the editorial employees of Nation Media Group based at Nation Centre, ignoring the diversity of the company's footprint in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. The selection of the seven participants for the sample will be based on their knowledge of New Media, including the impact of WhatsApp on organizational communication, and specifically an understanding of how this New Media has impacted convergence of various channels at Nation Media Group.

#### *1.7.4 Data Generation Techniques*

Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data for the study.

##### *1.7.4.1 Focus Group Discussions*

FGDs were used to generate data for the study. According to Cohen et al. (2007), focus groups are a form of group interviews, though not in the sense of a backwards-and-forwards between interviewer and group.. In these groups I brought together the specifically chosen sector of the population at the Nation Media Group to discuss themes and approaches to convergence at the company, and in so doing ensured that



their interactions yielded data that complemented the content I had generated from the interviews earlier.

#### 1.7.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Another technique that was used to generate data was semi-structured interviews, defined as verbal exchanges where the interviewer attempts to elicit information from the interviewee by asking questions (Clifford et al., 2016). The difference between these semi-structured interviews and structured ones is that the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions but allows for flexibility and for the conversation to unfold according to the important emerging themes in the interview. The interviews allowed my participants to give facts and arguments they consider important and continuously evolved to capture all relevant issues as raised by the interviewees.

#### 1.7.4.3 Document Analysis

An analysis of documentary sources was also used to generate data for the study. Document review was vital and relevant in this research because it helped me to supplement and cross-check evidence collected through interviews and observations, especially on the existence or not of guiding policies and principles on the deployment of WhatsApp as a newsroom tool. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011), citing Yin (2003), underscore the importance of document review:

“A researcher ought to only use raw documents as data... by raw documents we mean those being produced by the participants during the period of data generation or a short duration before the data generation”. Documents relevant to the objective of the

study were collected from academic libraries, Nation Media Group's internal library and human resource repository, and from the Internet.

#### *1.7.5 Data Analysis*

My study takes a qualitative approach and, consequently, qualitative analysis was applied. The data was analysed thematically to ensure that it was captured in detail. The theming was based on the three questions that this study sought to answer.

#### *1.7.6 Trustworthiness of the Study*

Trustworthiness was maintained in the study so as to ensure that there are high quality results that can be relied upon by media managers and scholars to make future decisions. This was achieved by implementing various strategies that ensured the data was from reliable sources and was correctly reported as collected. These were:

##### *1.7.6.1 Credibility*

The first strategy to ensure trustworthiness of this study is its credibility, which ensures that the various issues that are being researched show consistency between what the realities at Nation Media Group are and the various views and perspectives of the participants in the research. Peer checks and participants' checks were carried out to ensure that the data collected was correctly analysed.

##### *1.7.6.2 Conformability*

The other method was conformability of all the data that was collected and analysed. This was aimed at ensuring that the data actually meant what I interpreted it to be, and I achieved that by properly siting the study at Nation Media Group so as to ensure that enough validation processes were carried out, and also to ensure that there

was enough sorting out of the data collected so as to achieve a data saturation point (Malcolm, 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), conformability is the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Conformability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data. I ensured I left an audit trail that detailed the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

#### 1.7.6.3 Transferability

The transferability of the study is also important in ensuring its trustworthiness. To achieve this, I ensured that the context of the research was well described and the various assumptions that I made in setting up the context were well explained beforehand (Malcolm, 2013).

#### *1.7.7 Ethical Considerations*

Various measures were put in place to ensure that ethical considerations were implemented in this study. These measures were aimed at ensuring that there was respect for the individual rights of the people who participated in the study, ensure that the study was carried out for the benefit of the broader journalistic and scholarly society in which it is situated, and to ensure that justice was practised during the study, as Miller, Mauthner, Birch, and Jessop (2012) advise. I ensured that all the participants received full disclosure of the nature of the research they were participating in, the various risks that could be exposed to by participating in the study, as well as the benefits that either they or the field of journalism would receive from participating in

the study. The other ethical consideration was confidentiality, and all the participants' personal details are kept confidential during and after the study.

## 1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study

### *1.8.1 Scope*

This study was conducted at the Nation Media Group in Nairobi, Kenya over a period of three months. It sampled a population of seven editorial employees of Nation Media Group based at Nation Centre and deliberately ignored the diversity of the company's footprint in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. Study participants were selected based on their knowledge of the concept of New Media, including the impact of WhatsApp on organizational communication, and specifically an understanding of how this New Media has impacted convergence of various channels at Nation Media Group. Academically, I will limit myself to two broad categories of communication – forms of communication, and branches of communications. Forms of communication relate to how meaning flows within, between and among individuals, while branches of communication relate to different categories under which communication is subdivided. At the same time, the study is based within the confines of journalism as defined by various scholars (as the collection, production and distribution of news and information to a wide and varied audience).

### *1.8.2 Limitation*

The study is limited in various ways, the most crucial of them being geographical, financial and spatial. The study only explores the experiences of one media organization in Kenya, but there could be many more varied experiences around the region, and indeed around the globe, on how WhatsApp is disrupting internal

communication within newsrooms. Also, the study is limited by financial considerations, given that it is a scholarly examination of the industry rather than a commercially motivated and financed exploration. Also, the study took place within three months, and while its findings paint a picture of how the industry is assimilating various forms of New Media into its operations, more details and insights could, perhaps, have emerged had it benefited from a longer time-period of research and analysis.

### 1.9 Structure of the Document

This study is presented in three chapters: Introduction, Findings and Discussions, and Conclusions and Recommendations. Chapter 1 captures the introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study as well as its objectives and study questions. Chapter Two discusses the findings of the study and the substantive issues arising from those findings, while Chapter 3 gives conclusions from the data and offers recommendations.

### 1.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the subject under study and situated it within its academic scope, highlighted its objectives, discussed the scholarly arguments and findings that are intrinsic to my study and defined the various key concepts, showing their contextual definitions in regard to the topic. I then presented a situational analysis of the study, placing it in the field of journalism and communication to show how the trade, as practised at Nation Media Group, a legacy company going through the transformative and disruptive processes of convergence, is evolving. In addition, I have

analysed the various key theories that relate to the field of study as these in the end, helped in the creation of a framework that acted as the foundation for the study.

Next the chapter has provided a wide review of various literature that is relevant to the study by evaluating various dimensions and aspects explored by scholars on the topic under investigation. Further, I provided the rationale of this study based on the previous relevant researches by indicating the academic gap that need to be filled. In the next chapter, I discussed in detail the methodology of the study. I have highlighted and rationalized the qualitative approach that was adopted in the research and outlined the case study method to used. The chapter has also discussed the sampling method to be used and the data generation techniques and analysis methods. I have discussed how I intend to ensured trustworthiness in my study and the measures that I undertook to ensure ethical considerations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the findings from my interviews with my purposive sample at Nation Media Group. Specifically, I discuss their views on the use of WhatsApp as a convergence tool at the company's integrated newsroom, examine the safety, security and ethical considerations that editors and reporters have to grapple with, and explore ways in which this social media tool could be deployed better, more efficiently and more securely to aid in the convergence of the company's multimedia, multi-platform operations. Towards the end, I discuss recommendations on how the tool could be deployed better, more securely and more professionally at the Nation Media Group.

#### 2.2 Findings

##### *2.2.1 How WhatsApp is used to ensure efficient convergence and collaboration of platforms at Nation Media Group*

This study found out that WhatsApp has become a popular messaging platform among journalists at the Nation Media Group, who use it as a means of facilitating communication and collaboration across newsrooms, within specialised desks, for interviews with sources, and filing multimedia content from the field. All the respondents in the study said they routinely use WhatsApp as a tool to aid their newsroom operations.

The study found that WhatsApp is being used at Nation Media Group as a means of facilitating communication and collaboration among journalists, editors, and other newsroom staff. All cadres of editorial staff at the Group use WhatsApp to share information, ask for feedback, and collaborate on story ideas, while editors use the social media platform to communicate with reporters and keep track of the progress of stories. This, said one editor, helps to streamline the newsgathering process and enables newsrooms to produce more timely and accurate news coverage.

One of the main advantages of WhatsApp for newsrooms is its ability to facilitate real-time communication, the respondents said. Journalists in the Group use WhatsApp to share information and receive feedback from editors and other staff members in real-time. This allows for more efficient newsgathering and improves the speed and accuracy of news coverage. For example, journalists covering a breaking news story are encouraged to use WhatsApp to share updates and receive feedback from editors, which helps to improve the quality of coverage.

When asked to describe how Nation Media Group currently uses WhatsApp to gather and process news and information, one of the respondents, who has managed the newsgathering function for the Group's website, noted:

Today, WhatsApp is arguably NMG's biggest content discovery, gathering, processing and distribution tool. The Meta platform's instant-messaging capability has made it the preferred channel for breaking news. In the newsroom chatroom, for instance, both reporters and editors share news alerts, story tips and content lead which are immediately acted upon. Once verified and confirmed, news alerts and, in some cases, breaking-news stories are filed on the same platform for processing and publishing. Both local and foreign newsgathering teams use the IM app to file multimedia content—audio, photos, video, text, graphics, data and links. While much of the processing and publishing is done using computer programs, WhatsApp creates room for cursory crowd-editing—editors are able to spot and expose errors of facts, language and context. They also



seize the chance to add other forms of value to stories, including angle suggestions, sources, research materials, story formats and templates. Once published on the website, newspaper, TV and radio, content is shared using WhatsApp, with editors and reporters acting as agents of distribution. Instant feedback, suggested gaps, errors and possible follow-ups are shared on the same platform.

While there have been concerns about how editors can determine which information shared from reporters, correspondents and editors in the field is credible and should form the basis of a news report, this technological innovation seems to have leap-frogged other content sharing platforms at Nation Media Group. Indeed, one of the respondents noted that “WhatsApp is a content-filing tool like any other”, and that “all information relayed through it must undergo the laid-down rigorous process of verification”. It is only after fact-checking and approval does content filed via WhatsApp get published or included in the Group’s coverage on print, digital and broadcast platforms.

WhatsApp may be fast in delivering the information, but that does not mean fact-checks are overlooked or rushed, (Editor).

On the social media tool’s ability to facilitate collaboration among journalists across platforms, respondents noted that staff at the Nation Media Group use WhatsApp to share information and collaborate on story ideas every day, and that this engagement helps to improve the quality of news coverage as the application offers them a great platform to explore, debate, critique or otherwise evaluate content ideas. For example, journalists on complex or long-form feature stories and investigations often create small WhatsApp groups through which they share updates, concerns, risks, advice, backgrounding resources, interviewee contacts, and even post-publication reviews.

At the same time, the respondents noted, membership of the main WhatsApp channel at Nation Media Group comes from all the platforms, and therefore the

discussion of daily coverage reaches editors on broadcast, print and digital ends. Content shared from the field by regional editors or correspondents, as well as breaking-news alerts, crucial documents, photographic evidence of major events, running commentaries of diary events, as well as blow-by-blow coverage of such events as sporting tournaments, addresses to the press, parliamentary committee hearings, court sessions and tragedies and calamities is shared on the platform first before it is transferred to the official content management systems for the various platforms for processing and distribution.

On the issue of how the use of WhatsApp as a newsroom tool has impacted the structures and processes of traditional newsgathering at Nation Media Group, participants in the study noted that deployment of the social media platform “has rendered some structures and processes obsolete but complemented others”. In content filing, for instance, photos, audio and videos are delivered directly to producers without first being filed in the traditional content repositories. At the same time, WhatsApp has complemented email as a content delivery channel, enabling fast-paced filings.

The entrenchment of the app has also impacted the power balance in the newsroom with weighty decisions, once reserved for the Editorial Director, managers and senior editors, being made by junior editors and producers. Sensitive breaking-news alerts delivered via WhatsApp have, for instance, been approved and published by junior editors, with some being recalled by top managers after damage has already been done.

*2.2.2 In what ways the use of WhatsApp can be improved to allow better, faster, convenient and reliable filing of news and information at Nation Media Group*

This study found out that WhatsApp is used by editorial staff and Nation Media Group to improve the efficiency of the newsgathering process. While there are other channels of communication, including email and such content management systems as NCS, reporters and editors use WhatsApp to share information and receive feedback from each other in real-time, and this flawless exchange, one of the editors noted, has helped to streamline the newsgathering process.

In the cut-throat race to be the first with the news, this study also sought to find out whether there are instances when multimedia news is generated exclusively on WhatsApp, and if so, what percentage of content is shared with editors exclusively on the platform. The respondents noted that while this content is shared on the platform, scarcely can it be regarded as “a complete multimedia story”, but only breaking-news alerts, edited text and photos as elements. Most elements of a multimedia story require special software to edit and produce, and the application does not have such capabilities.

Still, on the matter of enhancing efficiency by breaking down the traditional walls that slow down editorial processes, one editor noted that the use of WhatsApp has impacted the content verification process at Nation Media Group. The tool, he said, necessitated the setting up of an additional layer of a fact-checking team in charge of approving breaking-news alerts and other fast-paced pieces of information. There is a dedicated team of editors that approves alerts before they are published on social media, on the *Nation.Africa* site, on SMS, TV, radio and other platforms. He noted that:

But the traditional fact-checking and verification process remains in place, and once news has been broken, all the additional content has

to go through the laid-down process, including quality checks. Additionally, and as mentioned earlier, WhatsApp chatrooms have enabled crowd-editing.

When prodded on what should be done to mainstream WhatsApp as a news gathering tool, alongside the official CMS, at Nation Media Group, the respondents cited structural and process limitations, and a slow approval, processing and publishing regime. A reporter noted that WhatsApp seems to struggle to send large data files like videos, and often downgrades the quality during pursuing. This, ultimately, affects the publish ability of the shared content. Further, he added that:

I have noticed that sometimes using WhatsApp to submit videos affects the quality of the video and so I usually use platforms like WeTransfer so that I just share the link via WhatsApp and the recipient downloads and processes from their end, but this depends on very strong and stable internet because when you are out for fieldwork and need to send something urgently, unstable internet might present a challenge.

### *2.2.3 Professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group*

While WhatsApp is used widely at the Nation Media Group as a content sharing tool, this study did not find any professional and ethical policies around its use at the company. It's use, therefore, is governed by individual preferences and the assimilation of existing editorial guidelines on the discipline of verification. The company has a social media policy that governs how staff use social media platforms at the corporate and individual level, but that policy does not anticipate the uses of social media tools as extensions of official newsgathering and content sharing platforms. This oversight, along with that of failure to adopt and integrate the tool into newsroom content management systems, will form the bulk of recommendations from this study.

At the same time, while WhatsApp claims user-to-user encryption, there have been concerns about privacy, especially in group chats. Editorial staff are aware of this and this study sought to understand how they ensure the privacy and security of the content shared on the newsroom chat, and also how they ensure the privacy and security of reporters, correspondents and editors on the chat. One of the respondents said:

I use the disappearing WhatsApp message and ‘view once’ functions, which ensure that anything sensitive I send disappears after 24 hours. The WhatsApp encryption function works and one cannot take, say screenshots, when these settings are active.

### 2.3 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the findings from my interviews with my purposive sample at Nation Media Group. Specifically, I explored their views on the use of WhatsApp as a convergence tool at the company’s integrated newsroom, examined the safety, security and ethical considerations that editors and reporters have to grapple with, and discussed ways in which this social media tool could be deployed better, more efficiently and more securely to aid in the convergence of the company’s multimedia, multi-platform operations. I have also explored, as part of the efficiency and reliability question, how editorial staff determines which information shared from reporters, correspondents and editors in the field is credible and should form the basis of a news report, and also sought to understand how editorial staff ensure the privacy and security of the content shared on the newsroom chat, as well as that of reporters, correspondents and editors on the chat.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I briefly discuss the conclusions on this study based on the three research questions identified earlier: (i) How is WhatsApp used to ensure efficient convergence and collaboration of platforms at Nation Media Group? (ii) In what ways can the use of WhatsApp be improved to allow better, faster, convenient and reliable filing of news and information at Nation Media Group?, and (iii) What are the professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group? I also discuss my recommendations on how the social media tool could be deployed more efficiently as a convergence tool, the lack of standard operating procedures on its use at the Nation Media Group, and what needs to be done to enhance observance of editorial ethics and policies.

#### 3.2 Conclusions

This study found out that WhatsApp is used informally at the Nation Media Group as a newsroom convergence tool. Even in the absence of official policy on its use, participants in the study noted that it is the most preferred tool to share, discuss, critique and otherwise enrich content from the field. They cited one of its main advantages as its ability to facilitate real-time communication among editorial cadres. Journalists in the Group use WhatsApp to share information and receive feedback from editors and other staff members in real-time. This allows for more efficient newsgathering and improves the speed and accuracy of news coverage. For example, journalists covering a breaking news story are encouraged to use WhatsApp to share

updates and receive feedback from editors, which helps to improve the quality of coverage.

The participants in the study expressed a general agreement that WhatsApp is an effective tool for facilitating communication and collaboration among newsroom staff at the Nation Media Group. They noted that the tool allows for real-time communication and collaboration, which helps to improve the speed and accuracy of news coverage. Participants also highlighted the convenience of WhatsApp, as it allows for easy and quick communication among staff members who are often working in different locations.

However, credibility of the content shared from the field is a constant headache for editors, who often have to struggle between holding an enticing breaking story or publishing and being damned. This study found out, as part of the efficiency and reliability question, how editorial staff determines which information shared from reporters, correspondents and editors in the field is credible and should form the basis of a news report. Respondents cited constant fact-checking and corroboration as the first step to ensuring this, even as they said the first draft from the field puts the reporter on the steering wheel of reliability and factuality. A reporter said:

I always fact-check by talking to contacts and experts that I know from where the information has come, say, a hospital or the Environment ministry that I have covered before, and also look at what other credible media houses have said on the same. This is why sometimes I will sit on a story until I am completely sure and have dotted all the i's and done extensive boots-on-the-ground journalism to verify the information.

### 3.3 Recommendations

Based on document analysis, interviews and relevant literature review, the study makes the following recommendations:

#### *3.3.1 Adoption and integration of WhatsApp into official CMS at Nation Media Group*

WhatsApp has enabled a meeting of minds that runs the content factory that the Nation Media Group newsroom has become. For example, in the newsroom's main chatroom, *Nation.Africa*, are editors and managers drawn from print, digital and broadcast. Jointly, they gather (planning, tips, leads, angle suggestions, sources, formats, etc) raw material to create different products that are delivered to their respective target audiences. News products from the various platforms are in turn shared and broadcast using the application. But, while the company has a content management system (CMS) that it updated two years ago as part of its convergence drive, WhatsApp remains the most dominant and preferred platform by reporters, correspondents and editors when sharing multimedia content from the field? Crucially, this creates a design-and-user problem; what is recommended officially remains on paper while and unofficial channel thrives in the underground. This raises the fundamental question of whether WhatsApp should be integrated into the official content management system at Nation Media Group, and this study recommends the official adoption of the tool as a newsgathering and sharing channel because, as one participant put it, it is instant, can work in poor network conditions and uses less data compared to email, Google Drive and others. This recommendation is in line with Jenkins' (2006) Media Convergence Theory, in which he argues about how social media can be used by newsroom prosumers – who act as both content producers as well as consumers. Consumers, for the purposes of this study, are not necessarily external for a news organization.



Reporters, editors, photographers, graphic designers and media managers are all media consumers, and their roles have been affected by the concept of convergence. Jenkins argues that convergence is both a top-down and bottom-up phenomenon, and that when a new technology, in this case WhatsApp, is created, both the manufacturers and the users of the product influence the way it is used.

### *3.3.2 Ensuring quality and speed in the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at Nation Media Group*

Quality and speed in the execution of decisions in the newsrooms comes with a heavy responsibility on editorial leadership, and participants in the study noted that one of the main risks is content from unverified sources. It is quite a challenge, especially when viral ‘forwards’ prove impossible to verify. This has seen editors ignore some only to turn out to be credible and, therefore, lost chances. Over time, despite some losses, editors have learned to stick to editorial guidelines for fact-checking, which have lent the Group credibility. To address these speed and verification challenges, this study recommends that Nation Media Group should give editorial staff who use WhatsApp as a content sharing tool the technological support to do so. Such support includes wireless internet gadgets for fieldwork as well as development of capacity on the CMS so that reporters, correspondents, producers and editors could upload and download longer videos directly to the system, thereby bypassing the quality suppression concerns on WhatsApp, after which an editor is prompted to safely and securely process the content. As one reporter noted, organisations like The World Investigates have a dedicated channel within their system where reporters can upload videos for processing securely. This is in line with Fassbender’s (2015) arguments in his Domestication Theory, in which he argues that domestication of any new technology or innovation is achieved

through a process. The first is to ensure that the new technology is integrated into the daily lives of the people in the society, in this case the editorial staff at the Nation Media Group, thereby giving them a chance to make the new WhatsApp technology part of their daily professional lives and use it where applicable. Editorial staff at the Nation Media Group have already added the new technology into their daily routine and integrated it in their various operations, albeit informally. At this stage, argues Fassbender, the technology may be modified so as to fit the situations in the lives of these members of editorial staff, and when that happens, a transition, or transformation, is experienced in the professional lives of those members of staff. After the technology has been domesticated it can be considered to be useful, reliable, and trustworthy, and be considered to be part of life of newsroom tools.

### *3.3.3 Developing professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group*

One of the glaring findings from this study was the absence of professional and ethical policies on the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group. The news operation requires a systemized discipline of verification that follows standard operating procedures, and this oversight exposes the organization to credibility and factuality risks. Indeed, when prompted on whether they are aware of any instances when a WhatsApp alert sent to the newsroom turned out false, and if so at what point – during editing, production or after publishing – it was detected, one editor responded: “Yes. Several, and all of them were after publishing. In almost all the cases, we had attributed the information to the sources who, it merged, had misled our reporters. We had to retract and publish corrections and clarifications. At the same time, privacy and security of both content and staff remains a big challenge on WhatsApp, and one of the

participants in the study said the company has suffered content leaks and some of its reporters exposed to hostile news subjects. While the organization has taken steps to address this, including ensuring integrity of the chatroom membership, encouraging direct messaging and side chats in cases involving sensitive information and watermarking content to stop theft, this, the respondent felt, was not enough. To address these privacy, security, and operating gaps, this study recommends the mainstreaming of WhatsApp as a newsgathering tool, alongside the official CMS, at Nation Media Group. To achieve that, the company should first recognise WhatsApp as an official newsroom tool and issue a guidelines manual on its use, including SOPs. NMG should also set up structures that support WhatsApp news processes. This recommendation is in line with the Altercasting Theory, and in particular with the Key Research Question 3, which poses: What are the professional and ethical policies around the use of WhatsApp as a content sharing tool at the Nation Media Group? Since the use of social media in the newsroom is a new thing that ought to be adopted by either an individual or as a group personnel, there is need to develop professional and ethical guidelines for its use. For this reason, I agree with tact altercasting as defined by Harnisch, Frank, and Maull (2011), that the society acts in a way to push the person into accepting the specific role that is expected to be taken up by the person; or rather, it forces people to accept specific roles and responsibilities.

## PROJECT DOCUMENT

### Introduction

WhatsApp has become an important tool for news gathering and distribution for journalists, but while the use of this social media tool in journalists' working and personal lives has a greater impact, it is always difficult to draw a distinct line between professional and personal conduct. WhatsApp has enabled a meeting of minds at Nation Media Group newsrooms, but the quality and speed in the execution of decisions by reporters, correspondents and editors comes with a heavy responsibility on editorial leadership. This document sets out Nation Media Group's focus in the use of WhatsApp as a newsgathering and sharing tool and provides key guidelines to help NMG journalists in the use of the social media platform without undermining their professionalism and compromising the company's credibility as a purveyor of authoritative, truthful and non-biased news and information. The policy and guidelines are designed to be read in conjunction with NMG's general Editorial Policy Guidelines and Objectives and the Policy Guidelines for Broadcasting.

### Policy Framework

The general slant of all NMG platforms is that of a content provider. It therefore follows that information published on these platforms must always meet the NMG quality standards as defined in the Editorial Policy Guidelines and Objectives, the Policy Guidelines for Broadcasting, and the Nation Stylebook. Editors responsible for publishing any content generated and shared to them using WhatsApp will ensure that processes are put in place to ensure NMG products, particularly social media accounts and websites, provide timely and accurate information. However, for the avoidance of

doubt, the company puts priority on accuracy over speed of publishing, therefore unverified pieces of information shared on WhatsApp must not be published until a sufficient level of verification has been met. NMG accounts have also been developed to play the role of a clarifier, especially during times of fast-changing news events. The nature of communication on WhatsApp and other social media tools is such that often inaccurate information is easily spread and believed by the public. In performing this role, NMG platforms will make it clear what facts have been confirmed, at what time and by who. Nation News Editor(s) will be responsible for ensuring that the NMG platforms conform to this policy.

#### *WhatsApp and News Gathering*

The overall principle is that journalists using WhatsApp as a news gathering tool apply the same journalistic principles as they would to any other method of news gathering. Nothing should be reported until it has been independently verified. NMG journalists should always be open and transparent in their dealings with sources and colleagues on WhatsApp. The only exception to this would be where there is an overriding public interest not to do so.

#### *Sharing of News Content*

NMG distinguishes itself by the way its news content is managed and published. Journalists must, therefore, take extreme care to ensure any news they send to editorial leaders conforms to established standards. All NMG staff should be mindful of the information they share to colleagues on WhatsApp and should be careful of who might have access to it. They should act in a manner which does not bring NMG into disrepute

by, for instance, only sharing tips with editors and not publishing on the platform any content that has not been verified.

#### *Political Activities on WhatsApp*

NMG journalists should never indicate their political allegiance or inclinations on their WhatsApp accounts. The risk of breaching this requirement lies in profile information or through joining political groups on the platform. Such a disclosure can damage the Group's reputation as an unbiased source of news. Whenever others add you onto groups, take the initiative to ensure membership in such a group conforms with these guidelines.

#### *Offensive Material on the Group Chat*

Incitement to violence or anti-social behaviour or comments likely to cause extreme offence, for example racist, religious, gender or ethnic insults or stereotypes, are not allowed on any Nation Media Group branded space. Neither is material which is likely to put a child or teenager at substantial risk of harm. Members of staff are discouraged from sharing this material on the newsroom WhatsApp channel unless for immense public-interest purposes as outlined in the company's Editorial guidelines.

#### *Upholding NMG's Core Values*

Material shared on the newsroom WhatsApp channels must remain independent of vested interests or external influences. NMG is publicly quoted and its structure, ownership and editorial policies are public documents. Its news and information outlets are committed to being comprehensive and accurate in content and their commentaries

fair and considered. Their constant objective is to ascertain and verify the truth of what they publish insofar as this can be established.

### *Fact-checking and Accuracy*

Veracity and accuracy in reporting are an integral part of NMG's editorial policy and reporters and correspondents will only share for publishing content that they believe to be true, fair and accurate. Editors, on the other hand, must ascertain the factual accuracy of articles and news alerts shared on the newsroom WhatsApp chat through, for instance, cross-checking of facts and asking for more evidence, such as audio and video recordings, from those sharing the content for publishing. All sides of a story should be reported, and whenever it is recognised that an inaccurate, misleading or distorted report has been shared for publishing on WhatsApp, the sharer should correct this promptly on the chat and by reaching out on phone or personally to the duty editor.

### *Unnamed Sources*

As per the NMG editorial policy, unnamed sources should not be used in all WhatsApp stories and alerts unless the pursuit of truth will best be served by not naming the source or in the event the source requests his/her anonymity to be respected. When material is used in a report from sources other than the reporter's, these sources should be indicated in the story. If unnamed sources are quoted, the article should indicate the reason why the source did not want to be disclosed.

### *Confidentiality*

NMG journalists should generally identify themselves when using WhatsApp to contact sources, and should not obtain or seek to obtain information or pictures and share them for publishing through misrepresentation or subterfuge.

#### *Sharing Photographs, Videos and Documents*

Unless in the public interest, private documents or photographs should be shared for use with the express consent of the owner. Public interest includes detecting or exposing crime or serious misdemeanour or anti-social conduct; protecting public health or safety; preventing the public being misled by some statement or action of an individual.

#### *Obscenity, Taste and Tone in WhatsApp Reports*

Journalists should not post on the newsroom WhatsApp chat anything that is obscene, vulgar or offensive. A story, photograph, drawing or cartoon of questionable taste should have significant news value to justify its sharing and eventual usage. Generally, what is in good taste is to be determined by the prevailing social norms. But the following basic tests should be applied.

- (i) Is the depiction of a particular scene and the language used likely to be regarded as filthy, revolting, repugnant, dirty or lewd?
- (ii) With regards to pictures, the following should offer guidelines:
  - (a) Is it vulgar and indecent?
  - (b) Is it mere pornography'?
  - (c) Is its publication meant merely to make money by titillating the sexual feelings of adolescents and adults among whom it is intended to



circulate? In other words, does it constitute an unwholesome exploitation of sex for the sake of money?

(d) Is it invasive of anyone's privacy? If this is the case, a further question should then be asked as to whether the use of any such photo is nonetheless justified by a clear and indisputable public interest in doing so.

(iii) In the same vein, sharing of photographs showing dead or mutilated bodies, bloody incidents and abhorrent scenes should be avoided unless the publication of such photographs will serve the larger public interest.

### *Plagiarism*

Sharing someone else's work without attribution, whether deliberately or thoughtlessly, is a serious ethical breach. Do not download content from the Internet, other WhatsApp chatrooms or elsewhere and pass it as yours.

### *Discrimination*

In general, avoid prejudicial or pejorative references to a person's race, tribe, clan, religion, sex or sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness, handicap or political orientation in the newsroom WhatsApp group. These details should be eschewed unless they are germane to the story. Everyone should be accorded equal treatment as news subjects or sources and journalists should not deliberately deny the right of any group to exposure in the media.

### *Recording Interviews and Conversations on WhatsApp*

Except in rare and justifiable cases, journalists should not tape anyone in the course of an interview without that person's knowledge and agreement. An exception

may be made only if the recording is necessary to protect the journalist in a legal action or for some other compelling reason such as coverage of public meetings and if other approaches don't work. On the other hand, the use of WhatsApp for interviews, speeches or at press conferences with the knowledge of the subject is encouraged to protect against error and to protect against possible charges of misquotation.

*Conclusion*

This document will be reviewed frequently, at least once a year to ensure that it is always alive to emerging trends on social media networks.

*Declaration*

I confirm that I have read, understood and accepted to abide by and adhere to the policy guidelines set above in my employment with the Company:

Name of Employee  
Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Witness  
Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Could you describe how Nation Media Group currently uses WhatsApp as a tool for gathering and processing multimedia content?
2. How do you determine which information shared from reporters, correspondents and editors in the field is credible and should form the basis of a news report?
3. In the cut-throat race to be the first with the news, are there instances where multimedia news is generated exclusively on WhatsApp? If so, what percentage of content would you say is shared with editors exclusively on WhatsApp?
4. How has the use of WhatsApp as a newsroom tool impacted the structures and processes of traditional newsgathering at Nation Media Group?
5. Related to that, how has WhatsApp impacted the content verification process at Nation Media Group?
6. The Nation Media Group runs print, broadcasting and digital content services. How is WhatsApp used as a convergence tool across these platforms?
7. The Nation Media Group has a content management system (CMS) that it updated two years ago as part of its convergence drive. How has this been integrated with WhatsApp feeds in the newsroom?
8. What, in your view, is the most preferred platform by reporters, correspondents and editors when sharing multimedia content from the field? Why?
9. Are you aware of any instance when a WhatsApp alert sent to the newsroom turned out false? If so, at what point – during editing, production or after publishing -- was it detected, and what were the consequences?
10. WhatsApp claims user-to-user encryption but there have been concerns about privacy, especially in group chats. How do you ensure the privacy and security of the content shared on the newsroom chat? In the same vein, how do you ensure the privacy and security of reporters, correspondents and editors on the chat?
11. Could you explain/discuss any editorial decision-making challenges you have encountered in the course of using WhatsApp as a newsroom content gathering and sharing tool? How have you handled them?
12. What, in your view, should be done to mainstream WhatsApp as a news gathering tool, alongside the official CMS, at Nation Media Group?