

# Influence of Mobile Phone Usage on Journalism Practices in Rwanda

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**Abstract:** *Mobile phone presents significant technical innovation to the news industry as it can be a powerful reporting tool. Journalists that are aware of it can use their mobile phones for reporting, shooting videos and photos, recording audio clips, processing contents and disseminate it. However, it is not yet clear to what extent the mobile phone is affecting journalism practices in Rwanda, where media organizations have not yet enough equipment while the mobile phone can be a substitute. This survey study intends to assess the place of mobile phone in news production. The study dealt with journalists operating in Rwanda that are members of Rwanda Association of Journalists of which 235 respondents were randomly selected. The findings have revealed that participants to the study are aware and have a very positive perception of the role that the mobile phone may play to streamline journalists' tasks. Nonetheless, the integration of the gadget in journalistic tasks is still low. Poor quality of content generated with mobile phones, lack of basic skills in this field that is still in its childhood, the mindset of editors and reporters are the major obstacles that hinder significant usage of the mobile phone by journalists in Rwanda.*

**Keywords:** Journalism practices

## 1. Introduction

Mobile phone is rapidly moving beyond voice telephony and simple text-based communication into more complex multi-platform delivery systems. Smartphone is now a multimedia device that enable journalists to produce, with just one machine, content for which they would previously have needed half a dozen or so (Quinn, 2009). With a mobile phone, recording, editing and publishing live has become child's game, needing minimal preparation to timely publish news content. Hence, this gadget allows reporters to overcome barriers of time and space and provides more possibilities to perform more easily their tasks (Robaino, 2012). On the other side, citizen journalists are taking advantage from this device either to share content to media outlets or to publish on their own. Due to its effectiveness in promoting media performance by creating new possibilities for journalism these days, news organizations are increasingly requiring their reporters to have more awareness of its role in journalism practices and upgrade their mobile skills so as to perform any journalistic tasks with mobile devices (Wenger, Owens, & Thompson, 2014) as whenever new technologies are introduced, the expectation is that change particularly improved efficiencies. Having a single tool for gathering and circulating information means reporters no longer need to carry a lot of stuff like notebooks, pens etc. Smart phones have not only reduced the time needed for gathering news but also allowed journalists to circulate news very quickly. Before mobile phones, it was very stressful for journalists to meet deadlines, especially if they were covering an event at a far off place. Nowadays, there is no question of missing deadlines as reporters are connected wherever they go. Smartphones have become very essential for journalists and have become the ideal tool for contacting sources with impunity. Journalists can

use a mobile phone for everything, be it reporting and filing a story, shooting videos and photos, recording audio clips, processing contents, uploading it etc. Anything can be done with its help. Thus, mobile phone has proved to be a big help to journalists. Thanks to it, everything from reporting to filing and circulating is done by a reporter himself or herself.

In Rwanda where the lack of adequate equipment for media organizations is one of the most challenging concerns (Rwanda Governance Board, 2016), increasing numbers of media professionals own mobile phones. The possession of mobile phone is also getting higher within the media audience so that the access to media content may be increased thanks to mobile phone. However it is not yet clear how many journalists have integrated the device into their reporting assignments since, to Baig (2016) most journalists carry mobile recording studios with them without even being aware that every smartphone can be used for multimedia reporting from audio clip productions, taking pictures, recording video interviews, or even creating a blog. Hence, the question is to which extent Rwandan journalists are taking advantage from the mobile phone for a better performance in their job.

The paper aims at examining the influence of mobile phone usage on journalism practices in Rwanda.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study finds expression in the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology. Formulated by Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Gordon, the theory proposes performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions as the four key

constructs that determine usage intention and behavior (Venkateshetalii, 2003). The first three are direct determinants of usage intention and behavior, and the fourth is a direct determinant of user behavior. Gender, age, experience, and voluntariness are seen as mediating factors. Performance expectancy is the degree to which an individual believes that adopting the innovation will help to attain gains in job performance. Effort expectancy is the degree of ease associated with the use of the innovation (Williams etalii, 2015). Social influence is the degree to which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system and facilitating conditions is the degree to which an individual believes that an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system (Wang etalii, 2015). The theory fits well with the topic as the more the mobile phone provides facilities to the job of journalists, the more it should be adopted in this regard.

Traditionally, recordings for professional uses have been done using special devices, designed for recording. Professional video cameras are designed to make high-quality videos, photo cameras to make optimal pictures, and sound recorder to make perfect sound recordings. Today mobile phones seem to end this fragmentation, as the various tasks previously done by separate devices are done, though not yet exactly with the same results, by the mobile phone. Ling (2004) rightly points that the mobile telephone pops up in new settings and, in some ways, recasts those settings. Hence, mobile phones allow journalists to swap their heavy camera equipment for a smaller device. To reach this objective, Nokia has produced mobile phones capable of taking images of the same quality as high definition television cameras and this will open up huge possibilities for journalists (Gruen, 2010). One way the mobile phone is recasting journalism is the convergence of all recording tasks: the phone as video camera, the phone as photo camera, and the phone as sound recorder. As new media and popular culture scholars, Jenkins (2006) and Ling (2004) remark that cell phones are no longer telecommunication devices. The mobile phone has proven to be an efficient image and sound recording tool, an efficient device for reporters for photo and the sound recording. With the mobile phone, there are two options to record sound: simultaneously with the video and as a stand-alone mp3 file that can be used on radio or as a voiceover for a video clip. This functionality is very helpful because it enables the reporter to kill at least three birds with one stone (Huber, 2011). In the era when most journalists both in developing and developed countries increasingly work on a freelance basis and for multiple outlets, the same audio file can be used for a radio report (or as a podcast), a Web TV report, and for a written paper or magazine either on-or offline.

Though mobile phone is appreciated for recordings of all kinds, phone manufacturers seem to have neglected the sound recording functionality, compared to what they offer for videos and pictures. For image functionalities, they offer the users a number of options, including putting the flash on or off, zooming in and out, color and light settings, and the possibility to switch on the external lamp

when it's dark, among others (Chan etalii, 2013). For the sound, the entire user is offered is a button to start and stop recording. The built-in microphone is not equipped with a noise filter, which is disturbing for the viewers or listeners and irritating for the reporter (Chan)

Journalists carry their mobile phones with them all the time to places they would not carry their more traditional video cameras. So, the mobile phone is more convenient since the best camera is the one in your handbag or pocket when breaking news occurs (Chase, 2010). With breaking news, it is easy to report about it with a mobile phone. A reporter can phone the news desk with a news item, where a producer or editor will write a quick few sentences. The reporter can also send a text message to the news desk, or perhaps use voice recognition software to speak the news into their phone and then transmit the data to the news desk. It is also easy and quick to attach a still image or video to the text message. In a situation, if a reporter has to fend in the news jungle, better to have this mobile phone rather than nothing at all. A mobile reporting is perfect for breaking news since with breaking news, the latest news is often distributed. The most important thing as a journalist is that with his mobile phone, if one is aware of it, he/she able to report on an event whenever and wherever he/she, even in the most difficult conditions just with his/her phone (Huber, 2011).

Apart from several advantages that mobile phone may offer in journalism, discretion is a major advantage. With practice, it's possible to take a photograph with a Smartphone practically unnoticed. In events or places where journalists are clear targets, mobile phones can mean safety (Goujard, 2016). Mobile phone has real potential to capture people's thoughts in places where one would not have a full crew and this makes it so exciting. Thus, with mobile reporting, the safety of journalists is enhanced. Using a smartphone for instance instead of big and heavy reporting equipment allows them to be less noticeable and better able to blend in with the crowd (Matt, 2014). With smart phone, the days of needing big cameras and expensive gear to report news events are long gone. Raw footage from places where traditional media would normally be denied access from informs the world and shapes opinion (Lieb, 2009).

Today, a growing number of people are equipped with mobile phones devices that have a camera, web browser and access to social media apps such as Twitter. Hence, the use of mobile phone technology amongst citizens has been most prevalent at times of crisis, natural disasters and large national events (Bivens, 2008). As for Gordon (2007), equipped with their mobile phone, citizens have numerous options for documenting and reporting directly events that otherwise would not be reported. With a smartphone and a few key accessories, anyone can now be a citizen journalist and produce quality content. (Highfield, 2011). Mobile phones are also often the only technology to which people in low and middle- income countries have access as it not expensive. Thus, they facilitate not only professionals but also allow everyday citizens to participate in reporting. Thanks to mobile phone, audience can bring material to media organizations, create its own

content or share it with others (Espiritusanto, 2011). Like other information and communication technologies, mobile phones and related software applications are new tools in the global effort to improve communication and to capture, access, and share information. Smartphones, together with the range of social media platforms has made every citizen of the world more powerful. It is impossible for reporters and Journalists to be at every international incident as it happens, so citizen journalism helps to solve this. This trend has embraced technology and helped to provide a voice to those who otherwise can't be heard (Ross & Cormier, 2010).

Lorenzo Dus and Bryan (2011) have also studied the role of mobile phones in citizen journalism. The authors conclude mobile phone enables and facilitates two-way communications between people who have traditionally been considered producers and users of media.

Mobile phones help journalists report quickly from the field. Nic Fulton, former chief scientist at Reuters Media, found mobile phone helped Reuters' reporters create complete stories and file them for distribution without leaving the scene. To him reporters should be aware that with a modern smartphone, reporters can shoot and upload video, images and text immediately after they are recorded or taken. To Dr Clark, the director of the master's program in photojournalism and multi-media at Ateneo University in the Philippines, journalists' trainer for World Press Photo based in Dhaka a mobile phone is very helpful for reporters aware of it. The cheapest and easiest way to communicate information and news is through SMS text messaging. In most countries text messaging is less expensive than making a phone call or using voicemail services. Text messages can be sent to large numbers of mobile phones at one time and/or posted on a Website. SMS is the main news delivery channel for many people in the world for receiving information on news-breaking events as well as for live reporting (Wallace, 2013). Jasmine News Wire, for example, is an innovative news service in Sri Lanka that, since 2005, has been delivering news to its subscribers via text message and on the Web. In the Eastern Indian state of Orissa, a journalist started an SMS based news service in the Oriya language which is spoken by some 31million people. Odisha.com partnered with SMSGupShup, a free group messaging service, to deliver the SMS. Many larger media such the BBC and CNN have been offering SMS news alerts in the last few years as well for urgent updates or topical news on specific subjects. However, given the number of mobile subscribers of major news outlets and the costs associated with sending a large volume of SMS, many mainstream news media have to consider how to monetize text news services.

While in most areas of the world voice calls are more costly than text messaging, they are still relatively inexpensive. With the assistance of some free or low-cost applications, a phone call can become a recorded audio file that can be published online. There are a number of companies that provide applications for mobile phones to create instant podcasts.

The fact that many more mobile phones globally have FM-radio capabilities (though precise data on the prevalence is sparse) indicates that convergence with radio, and specifically community radio, is an additional area media organizations need to explore. Radio is still the most available form of mass media worldwide. If mobile telephony is added to this medium as a delivery channel for radio, there are new opportunities for engagement and participation that have not been explored (Bivens).

Online news used to be accessed only with stationary computers with a fixed Internet connection, confined to places such as home or work. Contemporary ICTs increasingly offer always-on connection, disentangling accessing limits from space, time and device, and consequently becoming increasingly intertwined into the rhythms of everyday life (Mortensen). American researchers investigated accessing of news with mobile devices in relation to other news media, and found that the mobile had found a niche in the interstices of everyday life. Such interstices occurred, for instance, when people commute to and from work (Dimmicketalii, 2012). In addition, users can make a call to the newsroom to ensure material they had sent had arrived.

Reaching real-time audiences is a key consideration for newsrooms, as is the ability to measure content performance through real-time statistics. One of the more useful features of smartphone is their ability to create a direct link from newsroom to reporter as news is happening. Smartphones can broadcast live in a simpler and less expensive way than traditional equipment, and live stream apps have made the process easy.

In February 2010, students from Canadian and American university journalism programs reported from the field during the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver in Canada. They used iPhones with VeriCorder software to create multimedia stories that were submitted wirelessly from the field to the newsroom (Llamas, 2011). Two months later, journalism students Erica Zucco and Brian Pellet from the University of Missouri working as television covered the show for the Daily Buzz web site using only an iPhone. The students recorded, edited and posted video during the show solely from their iPhones. Their teacher, Professor Karen Mitchell, said the future of journalism was shifting, and becoming more and more focused on mobile (Hurst, 2010).

### **3. Methodology**

This research used descriptive research design. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire and focus group discussions. Participants to the research were selected using lottery method. They included 235 journalists the questionnaire was submitted to as well as 10 editors that were part of focus group discussion.

### **4. Results and Discussions**

Although mobile phone is widespread among Rwandan journalists and though they have a positive perception towards mobile phone effectiveness in journalism related

tasks, its adoption in journalistic tasks remains at a lower level to both media professionals and citizen journalists to perform journalistic tasks. Though 82.13% of the participants to the research strongly agree that the mobile phone can efficiently record audio clips for media content purposes, only 1.28% of them use it for this purpose anytime there is a need. As far as the usage of mobile phone to record audio clips for media content purposes by type of media outlet is concerned, journalists working for radio are ahead as 16.5% of them have exploited the mobile phone in this sense.

The mobile phone may not only be exploited to record audio clips for media but also for shooting video for media content. The utilization of mobile phone by Rwandan journalists for shooting video for media outlets is still also low despite a positive perception of its effectiveness in the area. Only 10% used their mobile phone to produce video clips for the media they work for. Journalists working for online are more active in shooting videos for media they work for. As for capturing pictures for media content, though there is a positive perception of the role that mobile phone can play to capture photos for media, the participants to the survey don't take enough advantage of the mobile phone they all own to capture pictures they may need for their media outlets. They prefer use ordinary cameras as they are not sure to capture good pictures with their phones. They prefer use ordinary cameras as they are not sure to capture good images with their phones. The personal level of using mobile phone to process media content among journalists operating in Rwanda is also very low since only 19% use their phone for this purpose. Only reporters working for online media seem, to exploit accordingly this gadget in this sense, since 64.06% of them use mobile phone to process content for media.

For journalists that are aware of it, mobile phone can also be a magnificent tool to report lives for media. Though there is a positive perception of the role that mobile phone might play to make more easier live reporting for media, the exploitation of this tool in this sense by the journalists in Rwanda is not yet at a satisfactory level since only 1.70% of the respondents use the mobile phone in excellent way to report live whereas 42.13% of respondents have never used their mobile and 27.66% have rarely used their mobile phone to report live to the media outlet they work for. Regarding the usage of mobile phone to report live by type of media, findings have shown that reporters working for online are ahead to report live using mobile phone as 17.19% of reporters working for online have already used it in this purpose.

Whenever an incident happens, citizens capture live and send it to reporting authorities or share it on social platforms themselves as mobile phone is an efficient gadget that citizen journalists rely on to share content or story ideas with media professionals. Hence, mobile phone seems to have streamlined civilian journalism than ever. Nevertheless, even though 85.96% of respondents strongly agree that mobile phone is an efficient gadget that streamlines citizen journalism, only 17.87% of the respondents to the study have excellent connection with

civilian journalists and have gotten content from them using their mobile phone.

Though mobile journalism offers a diversity of opportunities to journalism practitioners and though they have a certain awareness of it, the significant integration of mobile phone into journalism practices is still at its infancy in Rwanda. The usage of mobile journalism practices in Rwanda faces challenges such as lack of required skills among who would want to take advantage of it since most of the participants to the research use it for calls and sms to get connected with friends and families. Rwandan editors' mindset also slows down the usage of mobile phone within the media they work for since they discourage their use in reporters' media related assignments under the pretext that they offer lower quality products. Limited human and financial resources also delays massive adoption of mobile phone usage in journalism practices in Rwanda. Besides, shortcomings of the mobile phone in terms of quality discourages some of those who would want adopt it in the day to day journalistic tasks. The quality of most of mobile phones that they own doesn't allows them to trust them in the fulfillment of their responsibilities of collection, processing and disseminating news.

Although the telephone is widely used among media professionals, findings have shown that, apart from its routine usage, very few of them have integrated the mobile phone in their profession related activities. Most journalists in Rwanda commonly use their mobile phone for calling their information sources. However, citizen journalists seem to be ahead in exploiting mobile phone to get connected to media professionals.

## 5. Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made in assessing the influence of mobile phone usage on journalism practices in Rwanda. Large part of media professionals operating in Rwanda have a very positive perception of the influence that the mobile phone may have on journalism practices in Rwanda, but they don't exploit it accordingly though they always have it with them wherever they are. At a same level, Rwandan citizen journalists seem not to take enough advantage from this gadget that human skills have availed for them to gather process and share to media or publish on their own. The lack of basic skills in this field that is still in its childhood, the mindset of editors and reporters as well as the poor quality of content generated using mobile phones are the major obstacles to the significant influence of the mobile phone on journalistic practices in Rwanda.

## 6. Recommendations

Mobile phones present significant technical innovations in almost all domains. However, mobile phone remains underutilized in several areas including journalism while it could streamline media professionals' tasks and responsibilities. The following recommendations would help to make this happen.

Media organizations could provide their reporters with adequate skills that they need to take advantage of mobile phone in their daily assignments. They could also train them in terms of mobile journalism and then encourage them to mobile reporting.

In addition, as far as possible, it would be better for media organization to provide them with more efficient phones as is done in some developed countries, since some of theirs are less efficient.

Having a good perception of the influence that the mobile phone can have on the practice of journalism in Rwanda, journalists operating in Rwanda should take a second step to exploit it in what they do as far as possible. Besides, they should train each other, as some of them have enough skills of manipulating the mobile phone for journalism practices until their respective media schedule related training.

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