An Evaluation of the Impact of the Digital Platform on Hard News Storytelling at the BBC and SABC Online News Sites

by

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STUDENT DECLARATION

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution.

I declare further that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award and is solely my own work.

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Abstract

Digital technologies are impacting news cultures across the globe in various ways. In this thesis, I explore specifically how the digital platform is influencing hard news reporting practices at the online news websites of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). I investigate how the formats of the news reports, as well as the techniques and practices adopted for producing them are changing within these institutions. I also investigate the extents to which the role and identity of newsmakers are seen to be shifting in response to specific influences of digital technologies. These analyses are grounded on the theory that media convergence is a significant influencer in this changing space. This thesis finds that the context within which a news organisation operates is a strong influence on how it adapts digital techniques into the existing newsmaking practice. Consequently, the BBC as a PSB (Public Service Broadcaster) from a developed world is seen as having experiences that differ significantly from its counterpart, the SABC which is from the global South. Together, they are both being impacted in ways that are significantly different from private-sector mainstream or alternative news organisations across the two contexts.

It also finds that the norms that govern the production of hard online news are deeply rooted in the old media platforms of print, radio and television such that significant continuities can be seen with respect to specific techniques and practices. Further, it finds that some of the hypothesised affordances of the space with regards to the combined use of multimedia, hypertextuality and interactivity to engage the audience are not fully experienced. This thesis therefore concludes that though the digital platform is evolving and hard to predict, its impact on hard news reporting practices is not particularly revolutionary at this present time within these two contexts. However, it is acknowledged that the web does have the immense capacity to support highly innovative interactive forms of storytelling demonstrated through news platforms, formats, and genres such as mobile, live blogs, and multimedia magazine-style soft news projects. Hence, this thesis' deficiency is that it does not explore the significance of these newest and growing forms. However, in addition to drawing out specific nuances of the British and the South African digital media space, it contributes to providing a non-Western standard for measuring how the online news space is evolving, and fills the perceived gap about how under-researched contexts are appropriating specific digital techniques.

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Chapter 1: Introduction – Interrogating the Arena of Online News Storytelling

Discussions in the blogosphere over the past few years seem to indicate an acknowledgement from both practitioners and researchers that digital technologies have indeed transformed the practice of news journalism (see for example Bradshaw, 2008; Marshall, 2012; Kritsch, 2013). The exact conclusions that are reached about the extent of this transformation are however not very clear, in agreement with Jones and Salter (2012) that it is difficult determining the scale of this transformation or even the course that it will take going forward. As far back as 1998, Harper also noted these difficulties in making such predictions. As I will illustrate with the discussions in this thesis, making clear deductions about the state of digital transformations are difficult, especially when they are about the least-researched contexts such as the global South (which includes countries from Africa, of which one is a case study in this thesis).

Even from a layman's perspective, it is hard not to have observed that the arena of newsmaking has been changing over the past couple of years. It has also been particularly interesting to observe how digital technologies have influenced this shift. First and foremost, there is the unmissable information (news) overload from a myriad of sources, platforms and actors, and the implications (both positive and negative) that come with this phenomenon. The form in which this information comes is also an indicator of the changing space, and there is the perception that there are more choices of news formats available to audiences now than ever before. Live blogs – an emerging and growing form is a case in point. Additionally, the devices on which we access this information are constantly changing, and in many contexts, increasingly becoming ubiquitous, in particular the mobile. Beyond these, there are many other platforms (social media in particular) that have entered the arena, bringing along many different tools for information production and dissemination. An implication of these shifting norms is that there are now more people than ever involved in the 'business' of news. However, with respect to many of these actors, the exact roles that they play are heavily contested in some (mostly academic) circles and in some contexts. In fact a lot about this emerging space is contested as it is increasingly difficult to separate fact from hype. Hence, many of the practices of the changing digital media space have become buzzwords. It must however be acknowledged that some of these buzzwords have since evolved, even earning significant research attention and subsequently a place in accepted terminologies.

Among the array of changes, the area that is of greatest interest to me is the inevitable question of what exactly constitutes journalism in the digital age: who are journalists, what do they do, how do they do it, and what do news stories look like? Within this sphere is also the consideration that there are no uniform developments anywhere. The media contexts of certain countries in Africa which I am more familiar with including Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria paint various pictures. Hence, it is often difficult to advance a singular perspective (layman's or otherwise) on what specifically is characterising the online news space.

Research has certainly kept up with this space, as it must be noted that the academic literature available on this topic has increased over the past decade (see Siapera and Veglis, 2012), providing some clarity on a whole range of phenomena. For instance, leading researchers in the field are investigating the various facets of the changes in news journalism, which they observed to be due to the remote and or immediate influences of the advancements in digital technology (see Pavlik, 2000; Herbert, 2000; Deuze, 2003; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; Boczkowski, 2004; Bucy, 2004; Thurman, 2007; 2008; Quandt, 2008; Fenton, 2010). This thesis therefore draws from these different bodies of research but institutes a case-specific critical examination of how these influences of digital technologies impact online hard news storytelling.

It can be observed that online news on the whole evidences these transformations greatly, which makes it an appropriate case study choice when evaluating the impact of the digital platform on newsmaking. I must note here that online news is considered in this thesis as comprising news that is carried over the web, specifically on personal computers (PCs), drawing from the interpretation given in Picone (2007). Though digital platforms are defined as all computer and network-mediated platforms, the understanding in this thesis is limited to personal computers (desktops and laptops), as noted. Specifically, Kawamoto (2003, p.5) says "digital media encompasses other technologies such as digital television, personal digital assistants (PDAs), web-enabled phones, satellite-based technologies, portable computer 'tablets', and a host of other devices that might not be on the market yet". Hence, as I acknowledge in various sections of the thesis, the PC is not the singular digital device on which online news can be accessed, as for example the 'smart' TV has recently entered the arena, while the tablet and mobile news platforms have been around for some time and are certainly growing in many areas of the developed world, and hence is worthy of future examination.

Taking all these into consideration therefore, I think it is important to specify clearly the particular platform which I am investigating as the platform can have a direct impact on news

production, editorial processes and user experience. To illustrate, the BBC news website, viewed from a PC has a different level of functionality and significantly more information than the same page on a mobile device. This is known as responsive design where websites are designed to respond to factors such as screen size and users' movements in ways that provide optimum viewing experience by delivering the best possible volume of content. It is very much a technology-centered approach but also process-led as it can and does generate data back from the various users (be it PC, tablet, or mobile). This informs the editorial process subsequently, and hence is a vital consideration. The rationale for restricting the analytical sample to the PC platform however is that not all media organisations that offer online news have specific mobile and tablet app versions (these being considered as the relatively newer platforms comparatively). Hence, all things considered, online news reporting via PC can be regarded as the dominant format when cross-contexts (for example, developed world and emerging economies) are studied. Paying attention exclusively to this (PC) platform therefore enables a fundamental aspect of online news to be critically investigated (given the limited remit of this thesis). That said, this approach however misses the opportunity to explore the really significant and burgeoning platform of mobile newsmaking and all the innovative potentials that it offers, as indications from notable mobile news researchers and practitioners show (see Nel and Westlund, 2012).

Beyond the platform, this online news according to some of these digital news researchers, is subsumed under a 'global journalistic revolution' characterised by a change in the norms and practices of newsmaking and newsroom culture (Allan, 2006; Quandt, 2008). Hence, critical discussions in this thesis will also focus on the concept of what has now become known as 'online journalism', which is the practice of journalism on web platforms (Siapera and Veglis, 2012). Specifically, I evaluate the current standing of this predicted revolution (see Salter, 2012; Thurman and Schifferes, 2012) through an examination of how precisely newsmaking has been impacted and could be impacted in specific contexts through the development of specific news reporting formats, techniques and practices on the digital platform. It approaches the understanding of these changing norms from a storytelling point of view. The concept of online news storytelling is therefore interpreted in this thesis as the totality of how news stories are told online using a variety of modes and formats (including written text, graphics, and audiovisuals). The definition also embodies practices such as the techniques used in the presentation of the news (including but not limited to the use of multimedia, hypertext, and

interactive elements). The reference to these three is important as it has been established that they are indeed distinguishing elements of web newsmaking (Canavilhas, 2012).

To further confound how certain terminologies are used, Kawamoto (2003) finds that there is a tendency for the term digital journalism to be interchanged with others such as "online journalism, cyber-journalism, new media journalism, interactive journalism and multimedia journalism", (p. ix). Nonetheless, to reduce the ambiguity about what specifically is referred to, I will use 'digital' to refer solely to the device/platform, and 'online' to represent the type of news, newsmaking or journalism area (for example as distinct from print, radio or television).

It must be emphasised here that it has indeed been debated if (and how) the use of these various digital platforms and techniques constitute journalistic practice (see Jones and Salter, 2012). But towards the purpose of focusing on the salient objectives of this thesis, I will not go full-fledged into discussing the sociology of (online) journalism and how it is constituted. The key reasons are that, much has already been written about this topic and the debate is certainly still on-going. Further, a deep foray into these discussions might draw away from adequately focusing on the technicalities surrounding the news content production itself, which is central to this thesis' investigations. To emphasise, Kawamoto finds over a decade ago that the concept of what exactly is considered digital (online) journalism is still not absolutely defined, and is seen to still be evolving (2003, p. x). I think the discussions in this thesis will show that this is still the case at this present time.

Here, I present an outline of how this chapter is constituted. The immediate next section offers a justification for why there is the need to study the impacts of specific digital technologies, for example the use of certain nonlinear edit suites in online news storytelling. I also discuss why the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) are reasonable case studies for investigating these. Hence, I present both a theoretical and contextual background understanding of some of the norms associated with online newsmaking and online journalism, as pertains to the core ambitions of this study. I also explore briefly what are the impacts of specific technologies on online newsmaking at the BBC and the SABC as revealed by existing literature, and which is the body of knowledge that this thesis builds upon. The section after this discusses the research objectives of the study, followed by a presentation of how the study is executed empirically, and the justification for the use of the specific methodological processes. The thesis structure is then outlined with summaries of the contents of the various individual chapters, and thoughts and reflections on

how all the various elements fit together into a complete evaluation of the impact of the digital platform on hard news storytelling (within the BBC and the SABC). This introductory chapter closes with summary discussions on the identified deficiencies as well as strengths of the study, emphasising in particular, the key original elements of the research undertaking.

1.1 Justification: Why Online News (Storytelling)?

Online news seems to have found its place as both mainstream news organisations and the burgeoning alternative new(s) media platforms' actors clamour to offer news stories that respond to the dictates of timeliness and innovation that is expected in the rapidly-evolving digital age. Here, alternative media is defined in its relation to mainstream media, where it is seen simply as the 'other', but also more specifically as a supposed form of independent media that challenges established power structures, and also offers opportunities for self-representation and community participation (see Couldry and Curran, 2003; Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain, 2007; Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008). The nature of the digital platform (including the tools that it offers, the technical requirements of the platform itself, as well as the specific audience categories that it attracts and how they interact with the technology) invariably impacts how these news stories are produced and disseminated (see Clayton, 2003). Researchers such as Iosifidis, 2002; Deuze, 2003; Gordon, 2003; Singer, 2004; and Jenkins, 2004; 2006 rightly link the theory of (media) convergence to influences of digital technologies on online journalism. Media convergence is therefore the theoretical framework upon which this study's explorations are anchored. Not surprisingly, it has been explored in-depth by several researchers in the field, with various interpretations. However, in this thesis, the understanding of it is drawn first of all from Jenkins (2006, p. 3), who considers it as the "flow of content across multiple media platforms", such that there is some kind of interaction between old and new media. Burnett and Marshall (2003) also offer an interpretation which is useful to this thesis, as they observed that it is the unification of the different media platforms into a singular medium.

Further, it has been demonstrated in Quandt (2008) that the transformation in online journalism is not uniform across the different contexts, with specific news organisations across the globe presenting unique cases of how online newsmaking has evolved as a whole, and how specific digital techniques have been appropriated and used. Hence, this sub-section will therefore also highlight the phenomena of online newsmaking by drawing from specific cases which have been identified in previous research. For example, I will draw on the works of Thurman, and Hermida who discuss from various studies how online newsmaking is evolving at

the BBC; and here I will draw out how there is the relative lack of similar literature from the SABC context perspective to make a comparative assessment.

1.1.1 Foregrounding News Storytelling on the Digital Platform

News storytelling on the digital platform presents new challenges to newsmakers. Particularly for news organisations that are currently hybrid (offering news on a variety of new and old platforms concurrently), or have transitioned from print, radio or television to online, the norms, techniques and the particular affordances that relate to the new platform are not always so clear or consistent. This is well evident from the literature where seminal works on online journalism and digital news storytelling paint varied pictures of what is happening within the space (see for example edited collections by Kawamoto, 2003; Fenton, 2010; Siapera and Veglis, 2012). In Massey's 2004 study into web news, he observes that news on the online platform is expected to feature nonlinear storytelling formats which offer rich, interlinked multimedia content. Conboy and Steel (2009) also maintain that "current trends in newspaper digitization allow content to be tailored to the end-users that enable them to manage content in ways that best reflect their personal choices". Harper's 1998 prediction that there are in fact many possibilities for digital news seems to therefore be supported if indeed these contentions hold. There is a need therefore to see how they hold up at this present time within the different media determinisms studied in this thesis.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the web platform and for that matter media convergence has caused a decline in the creativity of news, as some researchers have identified that (news) content can be simply lumped from one platform to the other (see Cooke, 2005; Reich, 2011). However, other studies offer slightly less definitive perspectives. Czarnecki (2009) for instance argues that creativity is not tied to any one platform, and that creative norms exist independently of the medium, while Dupagne and Garrison (2006) stress the importance of communication skills that transcend any one platform, and Kolodzy (2013) maintains that the technology must not do away with the ability to tell a good story. These studies can be seen as downplaying the relevance of the role that technology plays in influencing newsmaking norms, whether creative or otherwise.

Understandably, online news stories are increasingly expected to be multiple-mode narratives, (involving a fusion of text, graphic and audiovisual), with accompanying techniques (such as interactivity, and the use of user-generated content) being core features of the story (see Harcup, 2009). This thesis therefore institutes a case study specific investigation into what

norms and techniques constitute creativity and or innovation exactly, as opposed to what is merely a functional dictate of the digital platform. It also critically evaluates the specific affordances and or potentials associated with the use of these techniques, if any. For instance, this thesis hypothesises that online news facilitates a better connection to the audience and also better engages their attention to the main details (of the story), so I investigate the extent to which these hold in the case of hard news reports.

Further, a central element to this evaluation is the issue of how news storytellers are seen to be adopting technological concepts on the whole, and how they adapt specific techniques into their newsmaking function; so this is also critically investigated. Additionally, the examination also considers the influences behind these specific processes as they occur within the contexts of the BBC and the SABC. These sorts of enquiries are necessary as they consider the sociological constructs of the online newsmaking phenomena within the two chosen case study contexts, thereby preventing the drawing of conclusions that are principally technologically-deterministic (as advocated in Domingo, 2008).

Consequently, critical attention is paid therefore to the seemingly shifting of the role and identity of the traditional 'news storyteller' generally, but also in relation to how they are seen to be evolving due to the combined effects of digital technologies and media convergence paradigms. This draws from the assertion by Paterson and Domingo (2008) that media convergence also considers the changing mindsets and practices of the actors involved in the mediasphere. For instance, convergence is requiring the digital news editor to have in totality the same functions as the news editors of both the broadcast and print platforms (see for example, Kolodzy, 2013). The 'place' of the mainstream journalist is also interrogated in this debate as they are no longer regarded as the sole authors and/or gatekeepers of the news. This is because editors are often forced to exercise their option to source for content (via comments and image/video submissions) from the audience according to the dictates of the 'new' media order (Deuze, 2003; Franklin, 2008; 2009b). This is due to the fact that increasingly, non-journalists are not only very likely to be at the scene of events, but also have access to useful, quality content (videos for example) to share. The associated effect of the adoption of such practices on the various aspects of the news organisation – from the supposed dilution of brand identity, to the perceived weakening of journalistic authority and subsequently news quality is an important line of enquiry in the research space, which this thesis will develop upon.

Converging digital practices also involve the use of specific nonlinear and interactive formats which according to Karlsson (2011), interfere with established backstage-frontstage cultures of news production. The argument here is that, as the traditional structure is opaque, where news stories are produced behind the scenes (the backstage) and published via the particular medium of print, radio or television (the frontstage), to have consumers interact with the content thereby changing it disrupts this traditional set-up. Consequently, this thesis investigates the specific editorial structures in place at the BBC and the SABC towards hard news content development in relation to these various claims. This is intended to contribute towards an understanding of how new technologies interact with news (room) cultures and processes within specific contexts. Further, it offers an investigation into the extent to which the theorised possibilities of the identified digital technologies as an impact on the newsmaking process as discussed above (as per for example, Harper, 1998; Quinn, 2005; Allan, 2006) are evidenced, or the extent to which new ones are shown.

However, it is acknowledged here, albeit prematurely, that it has been found that the production of certain news content, especially live blogs and other interactive soft news forms can and do elicit distinctive changes to the role and practices of the online newsmaker. Hence it is important to keep in mind that the impacts identified in these findings are exclusive to hard news reporting practices on the PC and should not be generalised across other domains and genres.

1.1.2 Contribution to Understanding Online News Across Contexts

It is important to have specific insights into particular news platforms in particular organisations within specific media environments in order to understand how the transformations of newsmaking cultures wrought by digital technologies have occurred, if indeed they have. This thesis therefore studies hard news reporting on the PC platform within the BBC and the SABC media set-ups. While it may appear that this criteria is restrictive and ignores some very important categories of web news (such as soft news), it may well be argued that producing news reports is the primary business of (most) news organisations as these reports can be seen as the 'staple product' (see Bell, 1991; Semino, 2009). Additionally, it can be argued that hard news reports (in comparison to the other forms) best satisfy the news values of objectivity, timeliness and factuality (which I choose to focus on in this study) and can therefore be regarded as a more important category (see Lehman- Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010). More importantly, it can also be observed that a significant majority of online news within the two case study institutions is disseminated in this manner, (soft news items fall behind at less

than a half of total output collectively, and live blogs are only randomly used and only at the BBC, not at the SABC). They can also be seen as generally more rooted, in comparison with newer and more innovative, but seeming one-off projects such as New York Times' Snow Fall and The Guardian's Firestorm. Hence, in an attempt to understand the time-tested and relevant everyday newsmaking practices (and also news consumption experiences) within these news institutions, the focus of the analyses is exclusively on such hard news reports. However, in as much as this thesis advances a sufficient enquiry into innovative digital storytelling norms, these findings by virtue of being derived from such a restrictive sample makes it impossible to arrive at conclusions that explore these innovations fully. This is a definite limitation as the need to have sufficient insights into these newer forms cannot be overemphasised, especially since the BBC is one notable public-sector mainstream news organisation that is leading in these areas.

Research has established that within the environment of burgeoning platforms and meta-sites that offer web news, mainstream news sites remain significant. The choice of mainstream online news sites (and organisations) as case studies is premised therefore on the fact that they offer in totality the most widespread online news production (Deuze, 2003). More recent research (see Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2014) has also established the dominance of mainstream sites in online news dissemination at this present time, despite the increasing popularity of new entrant aggregator sites. To suit the purposes of this thesis therefore, the mainstream news sites are studied to draw out the characteristics, practices and norms that show both differences and similarities – that is the continuities of the 'old' and the 'new'. This is because both case study news institutions have traditional mainstream platforms (of radio and television) as well as new (online) platforms. This therefore enables us to investigate in particular the convergence of content, as well as technological and professional convergence adequately.

Additionally, the contextual approach to this investigation using the combination of the BBC and the SABC is noteworthy as it presents a cross-cultural insight into how new technologies are appropriated towards newsmaking in both developed and intermediate economies. Some available research seem to suggest that the current BBC approach to online newsmaking and online journalism develops from its historical position towards technology in response to certain economic and political influences on its overall operations (see Ursell, 2003; Thumim and Chouliaraki, 2010). This is critically unpacked in chapter three. Thurman (2007; 2008), and Thurman and Lupton (2008) have also found that the BBC has since developed upon its online

news delivery, employing multimedia news production and reaching out to a diverse audience using various digital techniques and formats. Similarly, in the case of the SABC, the historical political landscape within which it operates is seen as a definite influence as most of the available literature on different aspects of the news organisation's operations draw upon this (see for example Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994; Teer-Tomaselli, 1995; 2008; Barnett, 1999). However, comparatively with the BBC, very little research is available that addresses its current online newsmaking position and structure. Studies by Berger (2001; 2011) and Wasserman (2005) are useful in considering the place of technology and convergence within South African media. However, they do not incorporate specific outlooks on SABC news from an online perspective as Thurman, and Hermida have done for the BBC. Hence, by choosing to juxtapose the BBC as a developed world case study against the SABC (an intermediate world case study), the findings in this study will present a distinctly-nuanced view that contributes to the development of the literature on (online) news culture.

Overall, it can be said that comparatively there is a great deficit in the literature on the scholarship of how new technologies intersect with journalism practices and news culture generally in Africa. This is being addressed through the pioneering works of Atton and Mabwearaza (2011), Mudhai (2011), and the more recent studies by Ogola and Rodny-Gumede (2014), Dugmore and Ligaga (2014), Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker (2014), Moyo (2014) and Jordaan (2014). However, most of these researchers have concentrated their investigations on newsroom cultures, and not so much on the development of news content, and the economic conditions of production that are in place towards this. That is why the direction chosen in this thesis in interrogating the techniques, formats and norms employed in online news content production within these news institutions as influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors is particularly relevant. Therefore, this study contributes to this under-researched niche through providing answers for why the BBC and the SABC experience different effects of digital influences, if at all, and how their particular online media environments and audience cultures might be a factor in these.

1.2 Research Objectives

News on the digital platform is perceived to be experiencing unprecedented changes in form and content, and leading scholars in the field have investigated at length just what is the extent of the impact of the platform on newsmaking practices and norms. However, the platform remains both highly evolving, and highly context-specific (see discussions in Fenton, 2010; Siapera and Veglis, 2012). There is a need therefore to have a study that situates these

phenomena within the present time, and which also considers to a large extent the relevant prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in place within each specific institution and country that impact news culture generally, and online newsmaking specifically. Consequently, this thesis aims to investigate the impact of the digital platform on hard news storytelling at the BBC and the SABC's online platforms, and to further examine its future potential from the viewpoint of the news producers.

Thus, the study questions whether the techniques that can be developed on the specified digital platform are enabling creative and innovative forms of newsmaking within these institutions, and whether they are equipping these newsmakers with the capabilities to orient hard news reporting techniques to a particular audience group, and to engage their attention to the main details in the news stories. Therefore, it also investigates the extent to which these attributes (or entirely different ones) are in place at the BBC and the SABC. Further, it explores the situational context of how the BBC and the SABC are seen to be adopting the identified digital techniques and how they adapt to emerging trends in this area. Finally, it interrogates the manner in which the practices, roles and identities of these newsmakers are being altered as a result. Therefore, the specific research questions which the thesis attempts to answer are:

1). How does the digital platform facilitate new forms of creative hard news writing?

2) How are online news providers matching their storytelling techniques with their perceptions of the wants and needs of the different segments of the audience?

3) What are some of the potentials that the new storytelling techniques offer in terms of engaging attention to the main details in the news report rather than just the headlines?

4) How successfully are news storytellers adapting their practices, roles and techniques to changes on the specified digital platforms?

1.3 Study Design

The study is essentially case study based and operationalised by a mixed methods approach. A case study strategy is useful for allowing for deep probes of the phenomena under consideration (Yin, 2009), which is what this thesis does. It must be noted that even though the use of mixed methods is highly recommended in media studies of this nature, only few studies (such as Thurman, 2007; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2011; Coddington, 2012; and Thurman and Walters, 2013) have employed it. Several related studies that have used either

quantitative or qualitative methodologies seem to suggest that future studies incorporate the other form (see Bucy, 2004; Massey, 2004; Quandt, 2008). In a quest to contribute further to addressing this perceived gap, this study employs the use of a combination of appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods in the investigations.

In the first phase of empirical work, Content Analysis (CA) was employed to establish the norms of news storytelling using sampled hard news reports sourced from the news websites of the BBC and the SABC. The CA as it was applied here sought to interrogate the forms, modes and techniques of digital news storytelling. This was a necessary process to undertake because it gave statistical legitimacy to the inferences that were made as far as establishing patterns were concerned. Further, it is from these patterns generated that extrapolations were made to develop the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MmDA) framework, as well as the questionnaire guide for the semi-structured interviews. This process also allowed for the affirmation of some of the findings from the literature discussed in different sections of this thesis, and enabled the author to ascertain if they hold for the BBC and SABC case studies as well, as far as hard news reports are concerned. Finally, it established if any of these conclusions have changed from the time when similar studies (for example Bucy, 2004; Massey, 2004; Thurman, 2008; Karlsson, 2011; Thurman and Schifferes, 2012) were carried out, and if so, to evaluate how these changes occurred.

The MmDA develops upon the CA and is premised on the understanding that online news storytelling is highly multimodal in nature. It therefore seeks to understand what role the digital platform plays in influencing the norms of online hard news reporting. It does this through an exploration of the contextual influences behind the presentation of particular news stories in distinct ways. A carefully-constructed sample of hard news reports from the two sites is used to test and illustrate a predetermined multimodal framework. Here, the importance of attributes such as colour, page layout and the overall document design is noted, and these attributes are therefore considered central to the analysis. At the same time, the analysis takes into consideration the contextual social processes surrounding the 'text' production and dissemination. This line of analysis emerges from the Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) interpretation of multimodality as how language and image are used together in a complex system and makes a particular meaning.

This study's empirical investigations are concluded with interviews with selected web news editors, producers and strategists from the two news organisations. This process sought to

understand how these news producers perceive the impact that the specified digital platform is having currently on their news storytelling norms. It also sought to find out what is their conception of the potential that it offers for matching different news storytelling techniques to different audiences, and for engaging the audience's attention to the main details in the news, if at all possible. Consequently, it was useful in identifying other capacities or affordances the platform offers outside of these hypothesised ones. Finally, it gives an insight into how they (and their respective organisations) are seen to be adopting and employing different techniques in online news storytelling. Overall, the interviews offer the opportunity to validate the main findings that arise from both the CA and the MmDA enquiries.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This sub-section presents how the thesis is structured. The introductory first chapter summarises the contents of the thesis and sets a roadmap for the journey through the document. The opening section briefly explains this thesis' interpretations of the main terminologies used in this research, with specific reference to 'digital', 'online' and 'storytelling' and the meanings that are ascribed to them within the boundaries of the study. The next section after this introduces the contextualisation of the concept of online news storytelling generally from the perspectives of some notable researchers in the field. Hence, it introduces the main findings from the various relevant research and shows how this thesis builds upon them. This section essentially offers the justification for the study and the identified gaps it will fill. The chapter then states the research objectives and the specific questions it attempts to answer. The next sub-section offers a justification of the choice of methodological approaches used in the study and how they are operationalised in each instance. The thesis structure is then presented, and the chapter concludes with summary reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the research and how the various bits all fit together.

Chapter two situates and problematises news storytelling norms within the framework of the digital platform. It outlines what defines and makes online news distinct from the news offered on the traditional 'old' media platforms. It argues therefore for both the distinguishing as well as the normalising characteristics of online newsmaking. Thus, the noted attributes of digital storytelling, including multimediality, hypertextuality and interactivity are critically discussed. The highly problematic concepts of creativity and innovation in digital newsmaking are explored, while the digital requirement of 'speed' is pitched against the age-old journalistic value of 'accuracy in reportage'. The discussions then attempt to outline what is required or expected of online news in relation to shifting audience expectations.

The discussions then proceed to theoretical reflections on media convergence upon which the study is anchored. The various aspects of convergence as it pertains to this study, including the convergence of content, institutional arrangements, 'newsroom' culture, as well as the convergence of production processes are discussed here. Consequently, I raise the question of how the roles, required skill sets, identities and practices of newsmakers are being altered under convergence paradigms. These salient reflections on how the shifting norms affect the 'place' of the news editor conclude the chapter.

Chapter three serves a dual purpose – it discusses both the selected case studies as well as the methodological choices employed in the thesis. The first part of the chapter offers a historical overview of the BBC and the SABC where the two institutions are reviewed and discussed as evolving and convergent public-sector media organisations. The critical review in this sub-section also considers how historically, newsmaking has been treated within the two institutions, and how the adaptation of technology into the newsmaking process has progressed. This section of the chapter also discusses how their public service remits in general and the specific socio-economic and political conditions in place within the two countries, have shaped these newsmaking processes. This is concluded with a discursive overview of how the BBC and the SABC have transitioned to their current digital news platforms.

In the second part of this chapter, the justification is given for the case study strategy and the mixed methods approach. Consequently, the CA, MmDA, and the semi-structured interview methods are introduced with explanations on how they are employed and operationalised in the study. The sub-section also advances a discussion around the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each method as far as its application to the study is concerned. The chapter closes with relevant reflections on the ethical considerations overall, but particularly in relation to analysing web-based corpora, and undertaking non-anonymised interviews.

Chapter four is the first of three chapters dedicated to outlining the findings and discussions emerging from the empirical application of the chosen research methods in answering the study's core questions. Hence, it outlines how the CA process helps to determine the nature of online news storytelling through the examination of the modes, formats, and techniques employed for the hard news stories published on the BBC and the SABC news sites. The chapter discusses how these findings support the arguments made that 'supposed' innovation coexists with the traditional in the BBC and the SABC's online newsmaking space. It further discusses

how the identified practices of interactivity, hypertextuality, the use of user-generated content (UGC), and the overall convergent media culture are evidenced by the patterns established through the analysis. The chapter concludes with an illustration of how these insights help to frame the questions that center on the sociological aspects of online newsmaking at the BBC and the SABC which are addressed in chapter five.

In chapter five, the analysis of online news storytelling at the BBC and the SABC news sites is approached from a social semiotics point of view. Employing the concept of multimodality of news 'texts', the analysis considers the complexity of these 'texts' as socially-situated sign processes, using Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) as a conceptual anchor. Foregrounded on the assumption that online news storytelling invariably involves a set of modes, the discussions explore the relevance and applicability of a pre-formulated theoretical frame to sampled hard news content from the online platforms of the two news sites. Consequently, the notions of socially-constructed digital practices, digital literacy, modal affordances, hybrid media, and the altered-storytelling sphere are used to explore, explain and test how the digital platform is influencing news storytelling in the contexts of the BBC and the SABC's online platforms.

Chapter six presents the findings and discussions that emerge from the semi-structured interviews conducted with key online news personnel from the BBC and the SABC. It opens with an overview of how respondents perceive the mediasphere within which their respective institutions operate. Discussions then proceed to the specifics of how online news production occurs within the two contexts. Thus, discussions centre on how various aspects of the newsmaking function including supposed innovative processes, and general operating and editing guidelines are in place in each context. Relational accounts from the respondents also provide an insight into their perceptions of the requirements of their audience and the tools and processes needed to effectively engage them. Here the concepts and practices of UGC use and cross-media production are particularly examined. The chapter concludes with discussions on the rate of incorporation of new technologies within these institutions, with a projectory outlook on what the future holds for online hard news reporting from the subjective perspectives of the respondents.

Chapter seven offers a holistic reflection on the findings and discussions of the previous three analytical chapters (chapters four, five and six). It does this by synthesising all the key evidence drawn from the discussions from both the empirical undertakings and the critical literature reviews. This enables us to make validations across the range of findings. It also helps in honing

down on some critical conclusions that are essential to effectively evaluating the impact of digital technologies on news storytelling within these institutions. Hence, the discussions identify for example, that hard news storytelling online employs digital nonlinear forms, though with very traditional underpinnings. The chapter also discusses the specific ways in which news culture within the case study organisations are changing due to the direct and indirect influences of the digital platform. The chapter concludes with clear highlights of the significant conclusions drawn, hence it makes a claim that mainstream newsmakers are still the custodians of the stories that are told on their news sites. It also makes a claim that the different news organisations have differing experiences of the affordances offered by the digital space, and that the platform of online news is in itself a non-static entity.

Chapter eight which concludes the thesis condenses key thoughts emerging from all the discussions and attempts to offer a fitting conclusion to the study that answers the stated research questions and satisfies the research aims. Consequently, it identifies how the key conclusions drawn support or refute the identified hypotheses about the impact of digital technologies on newsmaking. On the reflections on the key contributions of the study, the under-researched gap of the South African online news context that it fills is particularly highlighted. Further, it advocates that future studies employ the case study approach in order to draw out context-specific nuances on these phenomena which would be lost in a more general study, as this study has done. It also identifies what key themes future studies could focus on in order to build up on the findings from this study. Finally, in outlining some implications for the field for both news practitioners and researchers, it identifies that mainstream newsmakers will need to balance innovation with maintaining brand identity, while research will have to pay particular attention to considerations about the role time and context plays in this highly evolving and context- specific space.

1.5 Conclusions

This introduction sets the scene for the discussions that are done in the subsequent chapters. It shows why I argue that this thesis provides a significant insight into a relevant and constantly-evolving aspect of news culture. The research enquiries, chosen case studies, and combination of the methodological procedures used contribute towards a holistic evaluation of the problematic digital platform and how it is impacting on newsmaking culture from specific contexts' perspectives. However, a study of this nature and scope is not without problems. Overall, challenges lie in the fact that there are inherent deficiencies in each of the methodologies employed (which are discussed in each corresponding chapter). The choice of

the BBC and the SABC as primary case studies constitutes a limitation somewhat as they are media institutions that do not have print divisions, since this could have lent some critical perspectives. Additionally, sampling choices where only hard news reports on the PC platform are considered to the exclusion of for example, soft news, live blogs, mobile and tablet news apps, and unique multimedia projects mean that some other more innovative news storytelling norms are not analysed, which would have impacted the conclusions drawn. This is because an analysis of these domains would have undoubtedly revealed the immense capacity of newsmakers to use a combination of multimedia, and interactive and hypertextual links to create compelling news-consumption experiences in ways that differentiate them from the hard news forms analysed.

There were also challenges with executing the methodology, where for example, only very senior management respondents were obtained for the BBC interviews. Consequently, accounts on the practical day-to-day norms of newsmaking within the institution are not probed since the editors who undertake newsmaking directly were not interviewed. Once again, such an approach limits the research conclusions that can be drawn as first-hand accounts from the actors that undertake some aspects of online news reporting directly are not available to back claims. Nonetheless, I will show that the overall objectives of this thesis are satisfactorily achieved.

However, this research project has many strengths. Firstly, the way the thesis is structured is noteworthy as it contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon of online newsmaking and how it is shaped by the techniques that are developed on the identified digital platforms. The first three chapters focus on drawing out the gaps that the research enquiries will fill by discussing what has been identified in the literature, while the next three provide empirical evidence to support the conclusions that are advanced in the final two.

Secondly, the thesis indirectly makes a methodological contribution to the field through the way the MmDA method is applied here. Specifically, this process involved adapting some principles from the social semiotics field to news journalism, where relevant theories are developed and applied to news content. This is a typical case of what is advocated in applied semiotics, where principles and models are adapted to real life issues. This is an underexplored approach in online news research, as to the best of my knowledge, applied semiotics has not been used in this way before. Hence, by using this approach, I demonstrate a new way by which online news websites can be analysed.

Additionally, the thesis makes significant contributions through the key research focus. The study considers the possible impacts of digital technologies on newsmaking by considering all the important parameters including the hard news content, the specific digital platforms, and also news organisations, news producers, and news audiences. This enables various effects to be established as it provides a distinct insight into how each is affected. Further to these, the study considers the state of these parameters within two specific case study contexts that are in themselves quite significant. By virtue of the fact that the BBC and the SABC are notable mainstream news organisations, this choice allows us to effectively cover a significant portion of the media market from the two regions. They are also from two different geographical and economic contexts, which gives some insight into how two contexts across the globe experience these changing (online newsmaking) phenomena. Finally, the study enables us to contribute knowledge to an under-researched area (developing world context), and this helps to advance knowledge in this particular field.

Chapter 2: The Concept and Practice of Online News (Storytelling)

The need to study online news has become essential due to its increasing popularity in the developed world and some parts of emergent economies. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009, p. 562) affirm that online news has become an integral part of many societies, and this phenomenon can be rightly attributed to the growing use of the internet due to the improvements in bandwidth services in many areas. Consequently, researchers in the field have concluded that the number of people who receive their news digitally will increase (Nel and Westlund, 2012). However, it is also recognised in the research that not all societies from around the world will necessarily migrate towards the net as their primary source of news. These scholars, for example, believe that in the developing and even some intermediate societies, the traditional platforms of print will remain relevant for many more years to come (Franklin, 2008; 2009b). Hence, though various aspects of online journalism and online news are being variously studied due to this increasing popularity, there are still quite relevant studies that establish the dominant use of traditional news platforms. As Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) rightly observed, there is evidence that there is a lack of consolidation of many of the conclusions coming out of the research in this area, as further discussions in this chapter will show.

Consequently, the critical review done in this thesis considers a very specific set of literature. This is literature that is first of all limited to the conceptualisation of online journalism as a practice, and not necessarily as an ideology and what this achieves within the public sphere (as per Habermas). As a consequence, the foray into the on-going debate about the digital platform (and whether all news production and dissemination on it is considered journalism, and all its actors journalists) is only minimal, due to the reasons enumerated in the previous chapter. Hence I consider only how online journalism is practiced – the formats and techniques used and what the actors engaged in newsmaking processes are doing. However, as Jones and Salter (2012) acknowledge, the practice of journalism cannot be divorced from the socio-cultural, economic and political structures within which it exists (p.16), so I acknowledge that the reading of the relevant contextual literature also extends to these factors (and the inevitable discussions about the ideology behind them). To illustrate, one cannot look at the current state of BBC's online newsmaking norms without considering how these norms are being shaped by the presence and action of some external actors (such as emergent alternative media platforms), and hence the perceived power behind the influences exerted by these actors.

For the purposes of adequately clarifying the relevant issues surrounding online news storytelling (which is the primary focus of this study), this chapter situates and problematises online news storytelling and online journalism within the framework of the (identified) digital platform. This means I examine the digital platform and the norms and techniques of news storytelling that it fosters. As some seminal researchers have observed, the internet has had a definite impact on journalism as it is practiced online (Pavlik, 2000; Deuze, 2003; Franklin, 2008; Quandt, 2008). Hence, this chapter is commenced by drawing out what defines online news storytelling and online journalism and just what exactly makes them distinct from news and journalism on other platforms (notably the old mediums of print, radio and television). The argument interrogated here is that newsmaking and newsmakers can be seen to have assumed new identities and attributes on the digital platform (see Paterson and Domingo, 2008). From an observation of the digital news space, it is perhaps fair to advance the view that digital platforms are changing the identity of news but less emphatically clear whether newsmakers have indeed 'assumed new identities'. Nonetheless, practice and research have shown that some new roles and skill sets (for example coding and programming as part of news storytelling) have emerged. Hence, it is acknowledged that these changes are bringing a new skill base and levels of creativity to storytelling that haven't existed previously and couldn't exist without the digital platform. I therefore conceptualise and contextualise how this is (re)presented through various (case) studies, using media convergence as a conceptual anchor, where it is seen as shaping how journalists go about their business in newsrooms (i.e. the skills they work with and the tasks they perform).

This section further discusses news storytelling within the boundaries of its most common attributes. Consequently, the use of key techniques such as multimediality, hypertextuality and interactivity and how they are developed in digital-specific ways in online news storytelling is interrogated. Further, the discussions also consider the very important issue of what defines and constitutes 'creativity' and 'innovation' in the making of online news stories. The section after this explores some of the affordances (challenges and opportunities) associated with news production on the digital platform. Hence, the 'speed versus accuracy' debate is revisited as it has been found that this dichotomy is particularly enhanced in the digital space (Pavlik, 2000; Kautsky and Widholm, 2008). Kolodzy (2013, p. 24) also identified that "getting it first and getting it right are two journalistic values that are often in conflict in an age of instant communication". Consequently, industry demands and audience expectations are seen as

necessitating shifts in journalism and newsmaking culture that deepen this split. This sub-section will look at the extents to which this applies.

The theory and culture of media convergence is seen as integral to these shifting norms so a section is dedicated to exploring it in various aspects, in particular its effects on news content and newsmaking practices. The chapter is concluded with explorations around how the roles, identities and skill sets of news editors are shifting as well as interacting with the concepts of media convergence and other attributes such as the incorporation of UGCs into news stories.

2.1 Is Online News (Storytelling) Different?

As demonstrated, news in general has assumed new forms and identities on the digital platform. Researchers in the field (see Massey, 2004; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009) argue that online news has been found to be an embodiment of all the forms, elements, skills, practices and roles associated with the traditional platforms of print, radio and television, in a converged manner. This argument is supported in the discussions in the following section which highlight what exactly are the specific distinguishing and converging elements in online news (making).

2.1.1 Online Journalism as the 'Fourth' Journalism

Some scholarly writings in the field have categorised online journalism as a distinct form and labeled it a 'fourth' kind of journalism – next to print, radio and television (notably Deuze, 2003, pp.206). What though is this 'new' journalism? Early on, Harper in a study conducted in 1998 concluded that a new form of journalism called digital news (journalism) has emerged. It has been noted that it is shaped by the convergence of digital technology, computing and telecommunications (see Burnett and Marshall, 2003). This digital news, Harper rightly predicted, has the potential to innovate into even newer forms and dimensions, with resulting implications for the roles and practices of newsmakers (1998). Though the chief driver of this new form was found to be technology, other bodies of thought propose that technological innovations are shaped by a host of factors mostly internal to the institution, with technology not being independent (see Boczkowski, 2004).

The basic argument put forth here by these researchers is that the digital platform has revolutionised the concept of journalism. Specifically, Allan (2006) is cited as noting that online news is a 'global journalistic revolution' characterised by forms of participatory journalism such as blogging, and citizen media (in Kautsky and Widholm, 2008, p. 81). However, I find it

noteworthy here to highlight briefly the opinions from those who contend if indeed citizen journalism platforms (and especially those that use social media, including Facebook and Twitter) can be considered as news platforms for that matter. They maintain emphatically that blogging is not journalism due to the perceived absence of an editorial hierarchy where facts are checked and witness accounts corroborated, which are fundamental practices associated with traditional journalism. However, the ethical and legal concerns that have emerged from the recent scandals that have hit some UK mainstream news organisations show that the mere presence of hierarchies and structures as pertains to traditional journalism is not enough to indicate quality news production, and therefore is not a valid argument, in my opinion. This line of discussion is important as it establishes the basis for some of the discussions around quality in online news as I will critically unpack in later sections.

Deuze (2003) also maintains, "online journalism can be functionally differentiated from other kinds of journalism…" (p.206), However, some other researchers (for example Quandt, 2008), find that only some singular aspects of journalism as it is practiced have changed and so are reluctant to call it an outright revolution. Specifically, Quandt (2008) contends that while the editorial contents and formats used on the online have evolved somewhat and a shift has been experienced in how online journalists go about their newsgathering and dissemination business, this did not in fact cause a revolution in the industry as it had been speculated.

Citizen journalism is therefore one particular phenomenon that has been specifically highlighted as characterising the so-called revolution, as it can be seen as disrupting some of the established journalistic institutions. Goode defines it as "a range of web-based practices whereby 'ordinary' users engage in journalistic practices" (2009, p. 1288). Harcup also interprets it simply as the combination of UGC use and blogging, (2009, p.213). This phenomenon has been identified as being particular to the online domain and which exerts an influence (directly or indirectly) on the newsmaking culture of mainstream news organisations. For instance, the opinion has been advanced that the ubiquitous nature of the web makes everyone some sort of 'journalist'. These non-mainstream newsmaking actors are not constrained by some of the structural constraints peculiar to mainstream news organisations (for example editorial hierarchies). Hence, it can be argued that they are therefore comparatively, more agile at adopting some particular techniques into their (news) stories that are seen as more audience-driven, such as the use of extensive comments functions and more picture-led formats. It can be observed that with time, some of these practices creep into the

news production processes at some mainstream news organisations. Hence, the influence (directly or indirectly) of the alternative space is seen.

It goes without saying that there have indeed been global developments in the arena of journalism, with innovations in media technology and changing audience characteristics and requirements identified as being some of the key drivers of this change (Franklin, 2009b). However, an important dimension to the label of 'fourth' journalism is to scrutinise if indeed the concept, and for that matter the online platform will stand the test of time. Comparatively, the print, radio and television news platforms and the associated practices are still very much in existence in most contexts (Hurlburt and Voas, 2011), and (print in particular) can be regarded as having rooted (and time-tested) structures (Siapera and Veglis, 2012). Therefore, the question of if online journalism as it is practiced would indeed be a passing phase, as some scholars and studies seem to tentatively suggest (as discussed in Kawamoto, 2003) is a relevant one. The consensus is that innovation (within all the different attributes and interpretations given to the word within the discipline) would be the determinant of sustainability. Weiss and Domingo in particular point out that "innovation has become a crucial asset to the survival of the media industry" (2010, p.1158). I must note here that 'innovation' is in itself an important albeit secondary line of enquiry in this thesis. Hence, I explore its existence within the techniques and formats deployed, and also more importantly, the extent to which it can be seen as a consequence of the dimensions of the digital platform that is being investigated, or if it is due to other factors outside of these. Innovation in this space could be seen in how specific technologies are used to connect audiences and stories thereby fostering participation and inclusion. It could also be seen in terms of new collaborative structures that enable different platforms to share content, resources, and audiences and build up on each other. It is an extensive field that this thesis will only graze given its limited remit in this area.

To conceptualise this further, innovation in the online news industry has therefore become the subject of research enquiries, and scholars (in particular Boczkowski, 2004; Weiss and Domingo, 2010) have explored innovation from both theoretical and conceptual perspectives. Weiss and Domingo therefore define innovation in online newsrooms as "the development by the online staff of new production practices, new product features or new technological tools, which can include systems, programs or applications that help in the distribution, acquisition, processing, display and storage of the news and content the online journalists are working with" (2010, p.1158). Further, they observed that though technological developments shape online journalism practices, it is acknowledged that technological innovations in specific

locations such as newsrooms have been a factor of decisions made by certain actors, for example technical staff, journalists, and managers (Weiss and Domingo, 2010). Hence, the argument that these decisions are shaped by the economic conditions as well as the socio-political and cultural peculiarities of these localities is advanced here.

In this thesis, I draw even further from Weiss and Domingo's assertion that innovation is regarded as a process embedded in everyday practices (2010, p. 1158). Hence I advance the argument that, for online journalism to take firm roots and be established as the 'fourth' journalism, the whole fibre of the practices of both newsmakers and the audience, (which means the policies of journalistic institutions generally and specifically with regards to newsroom culture, and the attitudes of society at large) must be infused with new media ideologies. However the uptake of innovation within the sub-sector of online journalism has not been consistent. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) find that one reason for this is because news media hubs are unwilling to capitalise on the huge potentials of new technologies. Another reason could be attributed to what Franklin (2009b) observes to be the tendency of journalists to resist change, and Jones and Salter (2012) to be a "tradition of scepticism towards new technologies" (p.3). Consequently, this thesis explores to what extent these assertions hold for the case study institutions of the BBC and the SABC, by investigating just how far the actors are willing to go to embrace and innovate new techniques, if at all. This will aid in exploring the prediction that digital media will indeed make a considerable impact as much as the traditional platforms (Kawamoto, 2003, p. ix).

2.1.2 Online News (Storytelling): Forms and Attributes

Scholars in the field have identified certain attributes of online news which they (seem to) suggest are not merely characteristic but necessary for the full functioning of the platform (see Quinn, 2005; Allan, 2006). These attributes and characteristics comprise what I classify here as formats (for example, multimedia) or techniques (for example use of hyperlinks) employed in news storytelling and newsmaking. Nonlinearity on the digital platform has been particularly highlighted. Massey (2004) defines it succinctly as "..part of a larger news narrative made up of layers of related text and audiovisual content that are hyperlinked together" (p.96). He argues further that it offers "an interactive reading process in which readers actively choose their own paths through the narrative" with several layers and links and extra content such as archived stories, and audio and video reports (p.96). Kawamoto also interprets it less specifically as "a

flexible ordering system of information that does not necessarily adhere to traditional, chronological or conventionally logical patterns of storytelling" (2003, p. 4).

Consequently, multimedia of some form (involving text and graphics, or text and audiovisuals) has become usual of most online news. However there is more to it, involving the use of other complex interactive or hypertextual formats (which it can be argued, is what actually offers the digital-specific nonlinear element to online news). Massey (2004, p.96) maintained however that, studies have established that this concept is just textbook, as application-wise, news websites rarely practiced digital nonlinear storytelling and only did so in moderate forms completely divorced from the definition in the books. This suggests a possible disconnect between the potential of the web and its appropriation by journalists at that particular time. It is important though to note that this conclusion was drawn from a decade-old study conducted wholly on online newspapers and not online news sites specifically. Therefore this thesis offers an opportunity to investigate and advance conclusions on how this applies in the case of news websites at this present time. This is in response to the identified gaps in the literature, and where Massey suggests that further research could address this by exploring the extra factors – institutional and systemic, that hinder the full and extensive application of nonlinearity in the different contexts (2004).

As discussed above, online news involves the use of multimedia and some forms of complex add-on techniques, chiefly interactivity and hypertextuality. These techniques are not just defining for online news storytelling norms but also offer benefits which include the opportunity for consumers to check the reliability of news information from (hyperlinked) sources; the provision of more details and analysis; ability to contribute UGC (especially audiovisuals and graphics); and the ability to join chat groups to discuss various aspects of the news content (Harper, 1998; Clayton, 2003; Harcup, 2009). The other significant aspect of the use of these techniques in online journalism is the ability of the news producer to receive instant feedback on who is interacting with what content. This data is used to make procedural decisions on what news to publish and how to publish them. That said, these techniques are not without controversies. Comparatively, while multimediality is a fairly straightforward technique, hypertextuality and interactivity come with their own attendant problems, especially as hypertext pathways to external content and the use of high-level interactivity elements (such as UGCs) raise related and interconnected issues of 'who owns the news' and how transparent newsmakers are purporting to be. Therefore, the effects of the identified concepts of 'prosumers' (producers-consumers), and the resultant increasing blurring of the

frontstage-backstage divide (as highlighted in Pavlik, 2000; Deuze, 2003; Picone, 2007; Karlsson, 2011) are discussed in later sections of this chapter.

2.2 The Digital Platform and Creative News Storytelling

From the literature, the conclusion on whether the digital platform is affecting news writing (or storytelling) is rather inconsistent. Specifically, there are various schools of thoughts on whether it is enabling or rather hindering creative storytelling norms. While most researchers argue that the platform enhances creativity and exerts a (positive) influence on writing techniques, there are also others who identify with the opposite view. Harper is one of the early researchers that have delved into this subject in his 1998 book, where he outlines several personal accounts from named journalists and editors on their opinions on whether the platform is enhancing their creativity or not. One respondent was noted as saying that the platform indeed shapes the writing style (p.78), while another affirms that it offers opportunities for immediacy, interactivity and multimedia use (p. 70) – all of which enhance creativity. Much newer studies (comparatively) from Quinn (2005) and Allan (2006), all advance the conclusion that the internet and for that matter new media helps journalists to do better news storytelling, and better engage audiences. Deuze also maintains that technological advancements offer new possibilities for storytelling (2003).

However, those from the more traditionalist news storytelling camp maintain the view that new media does not exert any influence on the creativity in storytelling, as this quality is independent of the medium (Czarnecki, 2009), while Kolodzy (2013) reemphasises that the ability to tell a good story is still essential. The concept of storytelling itself as an art form is traced in the 2011 study by Hurlburt and Voas – from the prehistoric age to the present digital era, where they assert that the technique has indeed been shaped with time. They observed that we have returned to being visual storytellers where the new digital platforms are more tuned to visual forms, for instance YouTube and Flickr. This notwithstanding, they conclude much like Czarnecki (2009) that the incorporation of visuals and graphics into present news storytelling formats should not do away with the need to present a story in a coherent manner. Kolodzy (2013) also traced the trajectory of storytelling from ancient Greek norms to the present-day 3D (p. 24), noting the linkages between the eras. These studies indeed show that technology-mediated storytelling is not a new phenomenon since some level of technology (suited for that particular point in time) is always being used. Further, it can be noted that these technologies draw on the previous norms such that the 3D imaging can be connected to ancient Greek visualization, for example. However, Hurlburt and Voas (2011) did argue further

that technology is playing a crucial, albeit complex role in aiding the current storytelling process and hence, "new modalities of storytelling are becoming necessary to make sense of an increasingly digitised world flooded with nonstop data" (p.5).

These points raise relevant questions about what exactly is regarded as creative storytelling. On one hand, one can argue that it is seen in terms of the quality, quantity and the general consistency of the use of various innovative storytelling techniques (at the very least multimedia) in newsmaking. On the other, others may suggest that creativity lies in fact, in the use of specific techniques that best respond to the demands of speed and audience involvement (at the very least interactivity), as expected of the digital medium. These pertinent questions are explored further in the sections below.

2.2.1 Online Storytelling as the 'Other'

Overall, established researchers in the field still maintain that the internet and new technology have significantly influenced journalism and newsmaking, with Pavlik (2000) noting that the different facets of network news have been transformed. However, it has been rightly argued that storytelling (as well as journalism) have always utilised the height of technology historically (see Czarnecki, 2009; Hurlburt and Voas 2011; Jones and Salter, 2012). Hence, the idea advanced here that 'online' should be regarded in an 'other' category entirely is due to the totality of all its distinguishing elements, and not because it is influenced by technology, as further discussions in this sub-section show.

Some argue that online news storytelling is at best an upgrade of what traditionally constituted storytelling, as it is founded on the same frameworks and principles that characterised pre-modern forms such as oral, visual and electronic storytelling. Scholars who identify with this view maintain that the so-called inherent creativity within news stories should be judged on its own merits and not on how well add-on techniques are employed (Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Czarnecki, 2009). Hence, each online news story should be judged according to the narrative quality of the story, be it written text, graphic or audiovisual. Their argument is that the basic principles of what defines a good story have remained consistent over time, with Dupagne and Garrison affirming that the skills of "writing and reporting {are} fundamental elements for any platform" (2003, p.249). However, in this thesis I will be considering and presenting arguments for why the digital platform is distinct and needs its own set of standards for measuring creativity in online news storytelling. For example, one aspect is to consider that with online news stories, the particular (digital) platform can form part of the story (in the

interactive and hypertextual norms employed) – an attribute not experienced with the other news platforms (i.e. print and broadcast).

I argue that having such a standard in place is crucial for establishing a non-subjective insight into the changes that are being experienced across the industry as a whole. As it has been found, one of the resulting ills of the digital age is an overload of information which requires that editors embrace the use of some (technological) embellishments to retain the audiences who demand certain characteristics in their news stories (see Thurman and Lupton, 2008). It is further demonstrated in Thurman and Lupton (2008) that these characteristics are not necessarily the same for each audience group as text is demanded on occasion and audiovisuals in other circumstances. Drawing from this argument therefore, I make the case that the ability to effectively reach the right audience group with the right formats and techniques at the right time could be a relevant starting-point standard with which to measure 'good' and 'effective' online news stories. Related to this argument, I would suggest that any such standard considers how well news organisations incorporate consideration for specific audience capacities into their news production process. News organisations would therefore need to look at how, for example, certain technological or societal peculiarities of any section of their audience group would make full consumption of some news storytelling formats (and capabilities) challenging. Relatedly, Kolodzy sums this up by saying that "practicing convergence journalism requires being audience-centric, tool-neutral, story-driven and professionally-oriented" (2013, p.13).

Further to establishing the argument of online news as the 'other', I highlight here the assertions made by advocates for storytelling on the digital platform that it makes room for the inclusion of other voices, for example through citizen journalism/media and use of UGCs (see Chung, 2007). For others, for example Czarnecki (2009), digital storytelling goes further by helping to define culture by its propensity to draw on the Henry Jenkins idea of the shift from "individual expression to that of community involvement" (pp.6-7). Consequently, this draws on the idea that more voices collaborate in the formation of news stories as audiences are brought into the newsmaker/editor loop in the digital domain. However, as I will discuss from my investigation of the BBC and the SABC online space, (and as other researchers have established), this may not necessarily be so. For instance, Jones and Salter (2012) find that despite the fact that sourcing for content from audience has potential for including other voices, this content is still subject to the editorial standards of the media organisation, where

editors can (and do) edit out anything they want, mostly on ethical, moral and practical grounds.

Another area worth exploring is the type of narrative styles that are supported in the digital domain. For example, it has been argued that online news storytelling on its own merit makes other traditional narrative forms of news storytelling redundant, especially the narrative, as well as the inverted pyramid forms (for example Pavlik, 2000; Ytreberg, 2001). In particular Ytreberg (2001), is of the opinion that while the narrative form works for television, and the traditional inverted pyramid form (whereby writers capture the most salient elements within the story in the opening sentences) for the print platform, both are however not particularly suited for the digital medium. Additionally, Dunn in her 2003 study advanced the opinion that though the narrative form as a mode of storytelling is popular with broadcast news, it does not have the same standing with online news. Similarly, Pavlik (2000) maintains that the "once-basic inverted pyramid news-writing style is becoming obsolete in the online news world" (p.232). It is argued that this shift from the traditional forms of narrative was necessitated by a range of factors including – a change in journalistic practices as influenced by shifting audience expectations, coupled with the technical requirements of the platform (see Ytreberg, 2001).

Some scholars have gone further and attempted to distinguish between news genres, specific audiences, and the news-production cycle, and proposed the types of narratives that might be more suited to each case (for example Dunn, 2003; Thurman, 2007; Kautsky and Widholm, 2008; Zerba, 2008). It is worth reiterating that with the perception that there is a continuing increase in attention-deficit on the part of the audience due to information overload in the web space, the need for the online newsmakers to consider new forms of narratives remains imperative. Though it appears some are of the opinion that neither the inverted pyramid nor the narrative style might have a firm place on the online platform (Pavlik, 2000; Ytreberg, 2001), it can be argued here that most researchers and journalists would agree that factuality and objectivity are high value news qualities that should be evident in any narrative style that is adopted. This argument is carried forward in the next sub-section.

2.2.2 Quality in Online News

The debate about the need to have quality and accurate reportage as opposed to speedy reporting in online journalism has been raised by some notable researchers in the field (Pavlik, 2000; Kolodzy, 2013). And just like the previously discussed issue of creativity, the consensus on what constitutes 'quality' in the online news domain is unavailable. Gladney, Shapiro and

Costaldo (2007, p. 57) concur that the unique features of the web have affected how quality news is defined, and consequently, the academic treatment of quality standards for online news is haphazard. To Kautsky and Widholm (2008, p.81), in the current media environment, "speed and immediacy are increasingly prioritised characteristics of news production", and this presents both problems and opportunities. Earlier, Callahan (1999, p. ix) makes the point that the internet in as much as it provides opportunities for newsgathering, can also "exacerbate sloppy and inaccurate reporting".

Other influences of digital technologies that impact news quality are highlighted in the work of Harper (1998) where practitioners expressed the concern that performing multiple tasks across platforms (print and television platforms) and at breakneck speeds promote errors. However, in agreement with Callahan (1999), he maintains that in the same vein, the platform presents opportunities for better reporting. For example, there is more room for correcting such mistakes as compared to print (and even radio or television). Tan and Mei also wade into this debate in their 2011 study, and note that due to the fact that there are no deadlines for online news, coupled with the countless avenues for web blogging, there is in effect "too much information {which} imposes a threat on news credibility, accuracy and objectivity" (p.610). Pavlik (2000) also emphasise this cycle of destructive instant news production by drawing out from the literature how news production processes involving fast-paced narratives and edits, and shortened (video) shots are leading to the relegation of accuracy standards. And to Karlsson (2011), immediacy concerns coupled with the use of UGCs are a factor in the lowering of these accuracy standards.

In their 2007 study in which they sought to formulate new web-specific criteria for measuring news quality, Gladney, Shapiro and Costaldo found that content scored highest on the list of determinants of online news quality from the conducted survey. This 'content' is all encompassing – meaning substance is preferred over 'flash', and accuracy in news stories is highly regarded. A similar study was conducted by Trench and Quinn (2003) that looked at some case studies of online news, and centred on the premise of changing consumer demands and expectations of what constitutes the news. They concluded that the editors' comments showed that the traditional news reporting standards of accuracy and reliability are still very much valued. It appears therefore that researchers have overwhelmingly concluded that the need for accuracy in news reporting is more relevant than speed in digital newsmaking.

Studies such as these are however limiting and can only do so much by looking at a specific context, hence it is not entirely clear what any section of the audience would prefer under any given circumstance. Pavlik captures this sentiment by affirming that, no one has an answer to whether high-speed news is preferred over better-written news (2000). Additional thoughts on this emerge from the more recent work of Anderson and Egglestone (2012, p. 923-924) who maintain that a mix of influences: "technological change, tight budgets and perceived shifts in audience interest" are militating against the maintenance of the quality standards of news. Hence, in the section below, we look at what types of narratives are expected by the online news audience.

2.2.3 News Narratives and Audience Engagement

As noted, online journalists have a mandate as service providers to respond to consumer needs by better matching readers' consumption preferences. The issue then of what types of news narratives appeal to which particular sections of the audience, and which types and combination of tools and techniques are more effective in engaging them thus becomes worthy of further exploration. This is particularly relevant for the digital platform, which comes with its own inherent problems including, but not limited to accessibility issues to online news (for example due to limited bandwidth) on one hand, and the over-abundance of information on the other. First of all, I attempt to address the broad question of what is important (in terms of features and good practices) when it comes to web news. Some researchers have produced studies that address related issues on this (see Harper, 1998; Boczkowski, 2004; Bucy, 2004; Thurman, 2008; Zerba, 2008; Sturgill, Pierce and Wang, 2010; Anderson and Egglestone, 2012). However, it is acknowledged that it is a difficult task to effectively research this due to the high subjectivity involved and the myriad of all the different research methods that can be employed (Anderson and Egglestone, 2012).

The task here in this section is further compounded by the fact that the audience for online news tends to be more varied than those for the other platforms, according to established research. Thurman specifically notes that, a factor as to why this is so could be because online news can also find an audience internationally, especially when it is from global news brands such as BBC News and The Guardian (2007). It has been established that with news stories, the narrative style and the structural features within them are both essential to engaging audience attention (Bucy, 2004). Sturgill, Pierce and Wang (2010), discovered that in order for online news to have usability and promote user satisfaction, news providers should emphasise storytelling with easily navigable interfaces, since these factors influence site adoption and

retention. However, some researchers still maintain that the inherent detail in the content (content-richness) is essential (Bucy 2004; Massey, 2004) and can be preferred to the diversity of formats in which stories are presented. However, it is important to understand that regardless of the types of formats and techniques used – be it text or graphics, UGCs or above-the-line, quality considerations are still important and can be assessed (see Anderson and Egglestone, 2012).

There are other important considerations as far as usability and user experience are concerned. For example, Jakob Neilsen's extensive work in this area looks at a number of (often technological) attributes that create a compelling online information consumption experience. Specialists in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) also consider the role of User Interface (UI) design in enhancing the technical features that influence the experiences users get from particular platforms. Browsers that load too slowly or broken hyperlinks are examples of negative features that can affect the end users judgment of the news provider, the news platform and the content that has been offered.

With regard to the structure of the content itself, though studies have identified the growing need for multiple modalities (through the use of graphics and videos for example) to engage audience attention (Sunar, 2000), Bucy (2004) maintained that in the first generation of net news, text forms dominated, and in fact still do at the current moment (Anderson and Egglestone, 2012). Hence, the literature seems to support the idea that text forms are still appealing across the range of web news domains, at least from the viewpoint of the newsmakers. However, Bucy had observed that on the whole, news sites had evolved and progressively became more visual (2004). In the digital space, where it was discovered that comparatively reading tends to be slower (see Gould et al, 1987; Nielsen, 1995), practitioners and researchers advocate the use of multimedia, bullets, bold fonts and other such techniques that generally break stories into sizeable chunks (see Trends in Online Journalism, 2011). Research also showed that hard news is generally more difficult to read than soft news, especially in the case of younger audiences in particular (Zerba, 2008). She therefore proposed that the use of the narrative style as opposed to the traditional pyramid form could be an answer to this, as it was demonstrated that it allowed for greater retention in the surveyed group.

Further, through their research which examined the use of interactivity among young online audiences, Sturgill, Pierce and Wang (2010, p.4) established, that though interactive elements

are developed with this particular younger demographic in mind, they do not in fact necessarily take advantage of them. Ironically, the findings captured in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2014 indicate that this demographic represents the audience group that prefer to get their news via digital platforms such as smartphones and tablets (as opposed to mainstream traditional ones); and also represent the biggest group to use social media, and are more likely to share information across platforms. Hence, it is interesting to see that some digital attributes are not being utilised, and this thesis would advance the question on why this is so. Further, Sturgill, Pierce and Wang's survey on young audiences addresses the questions surrounding the length of (news) articles, options for news formats, and quantity of multimedia and interactive elements, amongst others, that are demanded by this particular group of the audience. These are all important considerations for online newsmakers who want to tailor their news stories with particular audience groups in mind. From their study, Sturgill, Pierce and Wang conclude that young audiences wanted greater control (through variety of content and multimedia, hence greater choice). They also wanted current and timely news through live and time-stamped updates; human-centred stories, (and also news that is more on the entertainment, rather than educative side); and shorter articles in general (Sturgill, Pierce and Wang 2010).

It can be concluded therefore that it is not an easy undertaking determining the particular narrative styles that appeal to a particular section of the online news audience at any point in time. However, practitioners and researchers generally advocate for new and innovative ways of telling the news story, involving multimedia use, audience-participation enhancing features, and other nonlinear structures, including the use of hypertext pathways that link to credible sources and archived materials (Harcup 2009; Trends in Online Journalism, 2011). There are however several identifiable gaps in the research including into how social media links influence online news accessibility by the various groups of the audience (in the specific contexts of the BBC and the SABC), and this thesis offers insights that aid further exploration of this phenomena.

2.4 Online Culture and Convergence Theory

The online space has a unique culture of its own that is significantly influenced by media convergence, which is defined as the merging of different media forms (Singer, 2004; Tan and Mei, 2011). In fact, Herbert (2000, p.14) declares that convergence has caused an upheaval in journalism, while Kawamoto (2003, p. xii) says convergence is fundamental to digital journalism. Therefore media convergence is seen here as a key influencer of the digital news

space as it has become mostly the framework by which the institutional arrangements, practices and principles, and products of the digital platform are currently examined. In effect, I argue that all the digital storytelling techniques of online journalism previously discussed, to some extents have roots in convergence culture. This convergence has been defined by Pavlik (1996, p.132) as the "coming together of all forms of mediated communication in an electronic, digital form". It has been analysed in-depth by notable researchers in the field (such as Negroponte, 1976; 1995; De Sola Pool, 1983; Pavlik, 1996; Jenkins, 2004; 2006; Iosifidis, 2002; Burnett and Marshall, 2003; Deuze, 2003; Gordon, 2003; Appelgren, 2004; Singer, 2004; Dennis, 2006; and Erdal, 2009; 2011) many of who find that it has implications for journalism as a field and its emergent mediascape. It must be emphasised that media convergence has many applications: technological, business, professional, as well as convergence of content (Infotendencias Group, 2012). This section, (and for that matter all the corresponding discussions in later parts of the thesis) will focus on any number of these different strands to the extents to which they are relevant.

2.4.1 Defining Digital Techniques: Multimediality, Hypertextuality and Interactivity

Undoubtedly, the digital platform is making demands on news production and distribution processes, with Nel and Westlund (2012, p.744) noting that mainstream news publishers are stepping up efforts to adapt to the requirements of new digital technologies. Past research on how news organisations are evolving their platforms over time looked at a variety of factors including content formats, accessibility of tools, and general (interpersonal) communication features available (Bucy, 2004). Not surprisingly, some techniques are increasingly being featured in digital storytelling which have been identified as key distinguishing elements of online news publishing such as multimediality, hypertextuality, and interactivity (Deuze, 2003). However, how they are operationalised differ from one institutional context to the other, with Deuze observing that the online journalist makes the decision on the formats and techniques to be used in crafting the news stories (2003, p. 206). The conclusions seem to suggest therefore that the degree to which (these) digital techniques (just like most forms of traditional media practice) are embraced still boils down to journalistic decision-making and institutional capacity (see Thurman, 2011). There are other nuances to consider in this conclusion. Firstly, the technological infrastructure in place, including the existing content management systems (CMS) and publishing platforms do force journalists to work in certain ways. Additionally, the institutional arrangements where this infrastructure is managed remotely by technologists (not

journalists) or vice versa, is a factor in these decisions on technology adoption, and its diffusion across any particular news organisation.

Bucy (2004, pp.102-103) offers a generic exposition on these three techniques by stating that, "online news sites are assumed to be evolving from a non-interactive passive model of information delivery into an environment of increased immediacy, content richness, and user control". This illustrates the need for multimediality and hypertextuality at the very least. Multimediality has been described by Deuze (2003, p. 212), as "the combination of information offered in different formats, produced in different sections of one or more media organisations". The concept of multimedia journalism was explored in significant detail in his 2004 study where he presents the practical understanding of the concept. It is said to be the presentation of a news story package on a website using two or more media formats, including spoken and written word, music, moving and still images, and including interactive and hypertextual elements (Deuze, 2004, p.140).

The application of multimedia in news publishing is not itself without several dichotomies. Firstly, text still appears to be the cornerstone of news sites – its modal contemporaries, graphics and audiovisuals fall far behind in terms of frequency and extent of use (see Anderson and Egglestone, 2012). This occurrence is further made more confounding by the fact that media houses appear to be spending more resources on developing video content (see Thurman and Lupton, 2008). In this study which was conducted on some of the UK's national news providers, they found that some news providers on the other hand attribute their partiality to text to the fact that they feel the usefulness of videos is rather limited (in certain instances), while others maintain that their audiences prefer text. The socio-dynamics of this decision-making process is probed in this thesis, especially from the angle of what role the 'public service remit outlook' of these news organisations plays in decision-making on how to incorporate such formats. This raises the question of if media organisations with public service remits need to, for example, make a greater effort to respond to the needs of the section of their audience-base that demand more text, as opposed to videos and vice versa, and how they manage these dynamics.

Beyond this, other identifiable factors to consider are the challenges associated with the existing journalistic skill sets when doing multimedia publishing. With journalists having to learn new skills in order to effectively undertake online news editing, opinions are split on whether they should acquire converged skills, or rather remain specialised and capitalise on

their strong points and core functions (Kawamoto, 2003; Thurman and Lupton, 2008; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009). No matter the route that is chosen, the particular effect on the newsmaking process and the news content is vital due to the requirements that come with the space.

Consequently, researchers have concluded that overall, news providers do not fully appropriate the full potential of online platforms when it comes to newsmaking. Specifically, Thurman and Myllylahti (2009, p. 703) state "online news media has often failed to utilise effectively the multimedia potential the medium offers". One of the reasons accounting for this could be due to some earlier assertions that some journalists are invariably "locked in their ways" and might not adapt wholeheartedly (Thurman and Lupton, 2008, p.443).

Multimedia's counterpart technique, interactivity is even more problematic than the former, stemming from its myriad definitions, as well as approaches to how it is operationalised (as discussed in Deuze, 2003; Nel and Westlund, 2012; Anderson and Egglestone 2012). Deuze (2003) had originally defined interactivity by introducing three sub-divisions of which there is navigational (through the content on the web page), functional (involving interaction with producers) and the more elusive adaptive (where due to constant use, the news site adapts to the consumer/user's behaviour). Bucy (2004) however classified interactivity into content interactivity (user-to-system), which involves audience navigating through the links and cues provided on the page, and interpersonal interactivity (user-to-user) which sees the user interacting with the producer or other users through the links provided. Thurman's (2011), interpretation is based on the degree of (user) control, along similar lines as Deuze but adds the classification of personalisation which is very much like Deuze's adaptive label. Thurman and Schifferes (2012, p. 376), further define personalisation as "a form of user-to-system interactivity that uses a set of technological features to adapt the content, delivery, and arrangement of a communication to individual users' explicitly registered and/or implicitly determined preferences". To Karlsson (2011), interactivity can be understood under the labels of dialogic or conversational interactivity (which involve participation in discussion forums) and consultative interactivity (through hyperlinks which the audiences explore).

Though these labels seem to vary, there seems to be a consensus from all these studies that navigational (user-to-system) interactivity is the prevalent form in use compared to the others. It is identified in particular, that despite the growing assumption that otherwise is in fact the case, mainstream news sites do actually offer very minimal participatory forms of interactivity

(Deuze, 2003, p. 206). The literature identifies that, though high interactivity gives users more involvement, with adaptive interactivity being the most sophisticated form, most sites however only offer navigational and some functional forms of interactivity (see Deuze, 2003; Imfeld and Scott, 2005; Oblak, 2005). There have been over-ambitious attempts to define interactivity as the situation where hitherto passive consumers have become active 'prosumers' just by disseminating content. It is argued here therefore that a mere 'sharing of pages' does not qualify audiences as prosumers. A more active form of interactivity involving for example, some moderation of the news story content by the consumer should suffice to earn the 'prosumer' label.

Consequently, UGC use is seen as closely relating to the concept being described here under the prosumer label (or prod-user, according to Picone, 2007). Hermida and Thurman's 2008 study for example, examined UGC and define it as a "process whereby ordinary people have an opportunity to participate with or contribute to professionally edited publications" (p. 344). It can therefore be determined that higher forms of interactivity are necessitated here. Overall, the use of UGC is highly regarded in the field. This is despite the fact that it has strong linkages to citizen journalism, which has been found to be interfering with journalistic institutions in certain contexts and instances (Greer and McLaughlin, 2010). And this interference can be attributed to the fact that it can disrupt established standards that come with the institution (such as hierarchical editorial structures). However, research does show that UGCs are seen as complementary to professional journalism newsmaking efforts, not replacing them (Singer, 2010, p. 132; Hermida and Thurman, 2008, p. 349) as they are merely used in support of some established processes.

Hypertextuality is the digital technique that is often taken for granted and can be seen as the least problematic in comparison with the other two. Consequently, it is a basic requirement of online journalists, and its easily distinguishable form can be seen in most of all new media publishing (Deuze, 2003). Hypertextuality simply defined, is the use of hypertext pathways. More specifically, Kawamoto says it is "the linking and 'layering' of digital information through a nonlinear hierarchical structure" (2003, p.4). It exists in two forms – internal and external, where the internal relates to hyperlinking a news producer's own resource, and the external covers those hypertexts that are from sites outside of the organisation's news sites. This could pose potential problems of copyright infringements should the hyperlinks bypass restrictions on the original site (for example paywalls). This could possibly be the reason why Deuze (2003) recommended that news providers be careful when doing it. However, internal hyperlinking is

largely ineffective (comparatively) in opening up the news story to fuller and more diverse content.

From the discussions, it appears therefore that some researchers have concluded that there is limited use of all the identified digital techniques, as the majority of the case study news sites/organisations mostly offered non-convergent multimedia, navigational interactivity, and internal hypertextuality. We can thus affirm (albeit prematurely) the broad view that the acquisition of news is still very much a 'passive affair' (see Deuze, 2003; Thurman, 2011). However, as this thesis aims to investigate the current form of online hard newsmaking, and also what future potentials exist in this area using specific digital formats and techniques, new insights could emerge on these.

2.4.2 Convergence Calls in 'New' Media News Production

The opinion advanced here is that media convergence as a paradigm underlines the practice of online journalism such that it can be seen in some aspect of the media organisation – for example the news content, the institutional arrangements or the business model. It is identified in Deuze (2004, p. 140) that some interpretations of it consider that all media organisations are moving on the convergence continuum towards an integration of different aspects of their newsmaking and distribution processes, though he identifies more with the idea that media convergence is allowing for the cooperation and collaboration between the various units. To most researchers however (see Jenkins, 2004; Erdal, 2009; Herkman, 2012), convergence goes beyond media and the technology, with a host of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional considerations shaping and being shaped by this phenomenon. Tan and Mei document the compelling benefits of having convergent content in news publishing in their 2011 study. These include having the crucial multimedia element which adds an entertaining/interactive angle to news items. Though multimedia use at most news institutions has become commonplace, there is not much evidence to support the existence of the convergence of (news) content. This has led some researchers to conclude that though some aspects of the news media institution, especially newsroom practices appears to be converging, the content can be seen as divergent as it often does not much incorporate the common (unifying) elements of the other platforms – visual and interactive elements for example (Appelgren, 2004; Tameling and Broersma, 2013).

These conclusions have also led some researchers to explore further why this is so. Consequently, it was found that resource availability is one of the key factors in convergence

considerations (see Dupagne and Garrison, 2006). The resources available enable the news organisation to make choices on the sorts of trainings to provide for which groups of journalists, which platforms to develop and at what expense, amongst others. Additionally, news organisations can also choose to produce niche content for specified audiences and platforms employing specific formats and techniques (Thurman and Lupton, 2008). Convergence culture also influences journalists' roles in the newsmaking supply chain with new skill sets acquired, and roles collapsed or expanded. This is discussed more in-depth in the section below.

2.5 The Reinvention of the News Editor?

The news producer/editor is an integral role in the news storytelling process especially at mainstream news media houses. With shifts to online journalism and the influence of media convergence culture however, other actors designated as for example web producer or digital producer, online editor, and social media editor have entered the picture. Further, their required skill sets and practices have also been altered. Nonetheless, can it be justified to argue that the role and identity of the news editor have therefore experienced a total reinvention?

2.5.1 Role and Identity of the Online News Editor

One of the most significant aspects of online journalism worthy of highlighting is the change it has wrought on the identity of the journalist, especially as they themselves perceive it. The literature seems to indicate that in a sense, they see themselves in a broader role, not just as a news reporter, writer or broadcaster. This can be attributed to their changed roles under the media convergence paradigm. For instance, Thurman and Myllylahti (2009, p.702) found that, in terms of identity, some say they see themselves as service providers now in addition to being journalists, and "so they have to better match readers media consumption preferences". This seems to agree with the assertion that the business of news organisations is no longer just news delivery. Further, the identity of newsmakers is no longer platform-specific. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) capture from previous surveys that reporters claim they do not work for a specific platform, but generally in the field of news. They thus see themselves beyond the platform which they report/write/broadcast for, hence having a much broader outlook to just what it is they do in the news production function.

Some others find that increasingly, this function is about trust, not just efficacy (Thurman, 2011), an argument complemented by the fact that online journalistic authority should be built on openness (Karlsson, 2011, p.280). On the digital platform, current consumer-involvement

initiatives such as the incorporation of UGCs, and the use of other highly interactive features are indicative of this transparency. Karlsson (2011) describes this as the blurring of the front and back stages in newsmaking which he also attributes to the immediacy requirements of web news. This has implications for the identity of mainstream news producers as the former gatekeepers and custodians of the news stories, with Deuze and Paulussen (2002, p.243) arguing that these gatekeeping and agenda-setting roles are increasingly becoming more irrelevant. It is worth noting that not all researchers are in agreement about the totality of this change, as Hermida and Thurman (2008) found the opposite to be the case where they noted that there are some gatekeeping practices still in place, while Hudson and Temple (2010) maintain that mainstream news actors still retain their gatekeeping role.

However, evidently, mainstream journalists are no longer sole providers of the news as using UGCs and relying on audience participation brings consumers into the storytelling loop. Consequently, Deuze's (2003) study introduces new roles for online journalists such as monitorial and dialogical, which requires journalists to do more than just tell the audience about what has happened. They need to engage with the audience and moderate the information coming in. Journalists have come to mean more than just telling people what they need to know (according to Deuze, 2003). This has led some researchers to predict that future outlooks indicate that the responsibility of news generation will increasingly rest on consumers instead of mainstream newsmakers (Trench and Quinn, 2003). However, as previously argued, the role being played currently by consumers in news production is not significant enough to guarantee this shift. Another important factor to be considered is that, it is not the quantity of community reporters that matter, but rather the quality and robustness of their journalism in relation to following established standards consistently.

2.5.2 Skills and Practices of the Online News Editor

Technological shifts and increasing convergence of the media has necessitated changes in journalistic practices as the sector sees more 'innovation'. As a consequence, the online journalist job designation is one of the biggest growth opportunities, having witnessed expansion in what journalists do and how. Additionally, it comes under several labels – web editor, copy editor, web producer, multimedia assignment editor or platform producer, web technologist amongst others. The skill set requirements of any number of these roles are also varied, including but not limited to writing, technical (programming/coding), and even social media skills. The literature captures a list of such requirements (see Trends in Online Journalism, 2011), where it is expected that in order to more effectively execute the roles in

online journalism, editors should aside from the traditional writing and (copy) editing, also undertake photo and audiovisual content editing, and be proficient in the use of alternative story forms and platforms (such as polls and quizzes). It appears therefore that regardless of the specific platform on which they were trained (be it radio or television), online editors must know how to perform all the other tasks associated with the other platforms. Harper (1998) affirms that the challenges of editing for the web includes the ability of the editor to know a whole lot of stuff going on compared with what was the case with the traditional platforms, and having to edit quickly (p.75). However, this tendency and ability to multi-skill is not viewed so favourably in certain quarters, even earning the derogatory name 'multimedia beast' to denote journalists who can do many things but none expertly (Thurman and Lupton, 2008, pp. 443, 451).

On the whole, this shift requires that journalists be able to learn and unlearn their techniques for storytelling, but it has been indicated in the literature that the uptake of new technologies within established journalistic corps have been low (see Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009), with Franklin (2009b) observing that journalists would generally resist (technological) change. Trench and Quinn (2003) maintain from their case studies on Irish online publishing that the commitments in adapting to new practices are not equal across the board, with some very low adaptation levels observed. Thurman and Lupton (2008, p.439) however found the opposite to be true and state "editors are keen to embrace new technologies, which are seen as being part of the future of news". Their study was conducted with online news providers in the UK (including the BBC), so it affirms our earlier assertion that adoption and adaption is indeed context-specific.

These changes are causing the workload of editors to witness dramatic increases (though a significant part of the work is now conducted indoors and not outdoors), according to Thurman and Myllylahti (2009). Another reason advanced for the increasing task obligations of online journalists is the merging (convergence) of departments and newsrooms, which has resulted in a reduction in the workforce. A reduced work force also necessitates the use of outsourced content, which comes with its own attendant problems (Thurman and Lupton, 2008; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009). These problems which can range from quality controls, to due diligence in following editorial protocols amongst others, has implications for the news stories that are produced on the online platform. Other practices that directly impact the news story content is the alteration of the frontstage-backstage space where newsgathering, processing and distribution all take place in the frontstage driven by interactivity and immediacy concerns (see

Karlsson, 2011). One can rightly conclude from the point made through the combination of factors enumerated above, that the possibility of news editors not being able to apply the rigour of ethical and quality standards with which they traditionally used to operate is quite high. Specifically, the immediacy concerns which impact the speed with which they churn out news stories, and the tendency for frequent updates as exists on the digital platform will undoubtedly impede their ability to follow through with extensive verification and background checks. That said, it is equally important to concede here in relation to this argument that some technologies ironically make verification much easier and more accurate. Using GPS coordinates from a mobile phone to place a (citizen) reporter or witness in a particular location, or through tracking IP addresses to do so, are just a few relevant examples.

According to Thurman and Myllylahti (2009, p.702), news editors are compelled during the course of the day to provide revised content for news stories, and include extras by way of analysis and comments, background details, amongst others. Admittedly, some of these tasks may fall outside of the scope of their (everyday) expertise or schedule of work. An additional consideration is that these extras all require time to put together – and time is considered a luxury for online news producers. There is a valid concern therefore that there is in effect a propensity for the dilution of journalism (as identified in Braun and Gillespie, 2011). This is due to the fact that these pressures lead to practices that set a departure from the established norms (for instance, more extensive verification of sources) that typify the (high) standards of 'traditional' journalism. It must be acknowledged here that this is in no way unique to online journalism. The pressures on all journalists to constantly update content have been prevalent for some time. For example radio news bulletins are frequently updated and freshened up on an hourly basis. The point here though is that this is worse in the online domain as there are no fixed 'transmission spots' or 'print deadlines'.

In a sense, these changes in newsroom culture and the institutional structure are affecting the climate within which online news publishers operate. Principally, the web platform has been identified as offering to journalists a greater freedom to practice their trade – to write new stories and to choose the particular medium through which to publish the news (see Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). From the Thurman and Myllylahti (2009) study, some journalists affirm that the online gives them freedom to be more creative, as they are not tied to any rigid formats. They also have the ability to develop and hone their craft by maintaining alternative (new) media platforms such as blogs. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) affirm further that blogs have been noted to be less formatted and rather non-conventional, which

could explain why they offer the chance to journalists to exercise their creative powers. At the same time however, a section of newsmakers still defer to the stability of the practices that characterise the traditional platforms (see Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009). Therefore in relation to what exactly are the affordances of the digital space, we see perspectives that place particular abilities as either opportunities or challenges, depending on who is considering them.

The news production process itself is being impacted by the new digital techniques, and Pavlik (2000) maintains that research must explore, for example how editors use these interactive platforms (such as the feedback function and chatrooms) in reporting stories. He however advocates (in keeping with the redefined roles of journalism), that newsmakers pursue this postmodern two-way symmetric model of communication that has been found to be especially appealing to the youth (Pavlik, 2000). Most researchers however downplay the role of audience participation in news story making. For instance, Hermida and Thurman (2008) found that though such opportunities exist, for example, for reader inclusion, news organisations still approached UGC use from a traditional gatekeeping framework. The scholarship on the place of audience-participation and UGC use is consequently split (as are many of the digital techniques discussed), though mostly the consensus among scholars is that the degree to which they can be (and are) used is limited.

Therefore, despite these myriad of changes, to some, the basic tenets of newsmaking as it is practiced on the web is not that varied from what was thought about the traditional ones (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). Hence I will advance the conclusion that using the term reinvention in connection with the role and identity of newsmakers generally is indeed arguable and should therefore be approached with caution.

2.6 Summary Conclusions

Significantly, the discussions carried out in this chapter show that the literature on different aspects of online news making phenomena is neither conclusive nor sufficient in many instances. However it offers many opportunities for deepening our awareness about this rapidly-evolving sector and provides the background upon which to build further research studies. In the previous chapter, I highlighted my research interests and what it will take to satisfy the objectives of these investigations. In this chapter therefore, I conceptualise and contextualise the thematic areas that are important to these investigations.

Firstly, I consider the issue of what exactly constitutes online newsmaking and online journalism by drawing out their characterising forms and attributes. Here I compare and contrast them to newsmaking and journalism on the traditional news platforms of print, radio and television. I show that online journalism seems to be an embodiment (a convergence) of all the forms, practices associated with the old and the new media, into a unique distinct form which has been classified as 'fourth' journalism. I also discuss how the sustainability of this platform (i.e. 'fourth' journalism) has been put in question and how innovation is crucial to its survival. This sub-section also considers some of the attributes associated with the online news storytelling, such as hypertextuality and citizen journalism and questions whether the treatment given to them by the different spheres of the media aligns to how they are interpreted in the textbook.

I also critically examine some of the perceived affordances of the online space by exploring various issues covering creativity, quality and audience-engagement. I show first of all that there is a lack of common standards for defining creativity, which has led to a lot of inconclusive viewpoints about just what the digital platform is able to offer as far as news storytelling is concerned. Here, I demonstrate that though arguments support the idea that age-old standards apply and are paramount, the online domain incorporates many new aspects of newsmaking that are definitely different and should be uniquely treated. I also revisit the accuracy vs. speed debate and the implications it has for conclusions that are raised about the quality levels of online news reporting. As valid concerns emerge that the web facilitates low quality levels of news story making, the arguments underscore the need for online newsmakers to prioritise their quality control procedures. Aside the quality of news stories, I also consider here the structure of the online news narratives delivered via the associated digital platform, and how that enhances audience engagement with the news. I identify several examples of what might be considered better news narratives, noting overall that these are formats that emphasise usability and content richness simultaneously.

Another area I critically discussed is what can best be described as online news 'culture'. Here I consider the characterising framework of media convergence that is impacting the ubiquitous use of techniques such as multimedia. I emphasise that several factors influence how each media institution undertakes media convergence and how these shape the news content, as well as the practices and actors involved with newsmaking. I also conceptualise other digital practices such as hypertextuality and interactivity and the use of UGCs, and how they are understood, applied and regarded within different contexts. As I highlighted in the discussions,

the roles, identity and skill set requirements of newsmakers have been impacted by digital technologies generally and media convergence specifically, to a large extent. I therefore identify how their roles are being expanded to include engagement with the audience (especially via social media platforms and through the use of UGCs), and the implications these have for the skill sets that are required to effectively handle these roles. On the other hand, I also consider how the converging newsroom is affecting the various tasks performed by newsmakers and how this affects the news process overall.

This chapter lays the foundation for what will be investigated in the empirical processes detailed in chapters four through to six. However, the immediate next chapter attempts to contextualise the key thematic issues through a consideration of what a critical historical look at the BBC and the SABC reveal. It also presents and discusses how the chosen methodological processes will aid in exploring them.

Chapter 3: Using the Case Study and the Mixed Methods Approaches to Interrogate Online News Storytelling

Both the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) are leading mainstream media institutions. The BBC is now a world-recognised news brand, seen by some as the world's largest (Hermida, 2010a), while the SABC has also assumed significance in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. They are both Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) that have over the years become points of reference for other (public service) broadcasting set-ups in different parts of the world (see Ursell, 2003; Teer- Tomaselli, 1995; Russell, 2011). These are also media institutions that have also evolved from providing news via solely the traditional news platforms of radio and television, to the more recent inclusion of web news. Additionally, their online news platforms have since become very popular with global online news audiences. It is for these key reasons that they are the chosen case studies for this study.

An examination of the relevant literature indicates that there is an appreciation that there is an increase in the news that is being offered on news websites (Nel and Westlund, 2012). Further research indicates that there is an increasing multiplicity (and relevance) of platforms outside of mainstream media that offer web news in various formats – including *weblogs,* (Campbell et al, 2010; Tunney and Monaghan, 2010). These findings notwithstanding, mainstream news institutions remain highly significant in the arena (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2012). Hence, this study is operationalised through a case study strategy involving the two aforementioned media institutions that are mainstream, and also because individually, they command a sizeable percentage of online news coverage (dissemination and consumption) in their respective regions. Given the aim of this thesis of presenting a cross-contextual insight into online newsmaking, studying these two regions of Europe (as developed world) and Africa (developing world) is appropriate. Therefore in this thesis, the study object is the news web sites of the two institutions. However, a critical review of the context allows us to explore the BBC and the SABC as media institutions in the post digital age.

In the first part of this chapter therefore, I explore their respective structural set-ups, especially in relation to news production over the years. Specifically, I detail how historically, newsmaking has been treated within them, and how adaptation of technology into the newsmaking process has evolved. I also discuss how their public service remits in general, and the particular existing economic conditions of production (within and outside of these institutions) have influenced

these processes. I round off this section by presenting how both institutions have transitioned to the current web news platforms.

In the second part of this chapter which is dedicated to methodological discussions, a presentation is made of how the chosen case study and the mixed methods approaches are relevant and sufficient for exploring the impact, role and potential of digital technologies on online newsmaking at the two news sites. Further, the section defines and justifies how the various method(ologies) of Content Analysis (CA), Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MmDA) and semi-structured interviews are operationalised in the thesis. This is concluded with an acknowledgement of the ethical (and practical) issues that may arise with the use of these particular approaches.

3.1 The BBC and the SABC as Evolving and Convergent News Organisations

Though they are both influential PSBs, the BBC and the SABC each presents very unique cases of their approaches to the adaption of media technologies into news production. This is as a result of the varied and context-specific internal and external political, economic and social influences that have shaped these processes. Hence, in the ensuing sections, I present and discuss these phenomena as they occur at the individual institutional (and also country) levels.

3.1.1 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

The BBC continues to remain a relevant national and international mainstream news organisation decades after it was established as a PSB, and this can be attributed to its strong brand power (Kung-Shackleman, 2000). It has carved a niche for itself as a leading provider of news and current affairs (Goodwin, 1993), through its combination of radio, television and web platforms. Its online platform is among the top most accessed by internet search engines, (Jones and Salter, 2012, p. 32). The institution itself has evolved from being wholly public-funded, to having a current mandate that requires that it attempts to earn income through specialised projects and initiatives. Consequently, there have been many calls from several quarters, both within and outside of the institution for an evolution and adaptation of some parts of its principles, practices and strategies (Peacock, 2004). Though these calls have economic bearings, they are also very much technology-driven. This is because primarily, the changes in media markets all across the globe are seen as a consequence (directly or indirectly) of these advances in technology. Hence in this context, the BBC is seen as responding to external pressures which relate to advances in technology itself, for example where users

adopt some technology and have the expectations that the BBC supply content on appropriate technological platforms using some particular formats and techniques.

A reading of the available literature on the BBC however indicates that this scrutiny and call for change is neither recent nor in fact exclusive to the BBC as the BBC has experienced such calls in the past, and so have other news institutions (for example News International that published *News of the World*). As far back as the early 1990s however, the BBC responded to such demands by changing the nature of its news production routines and presentation styles. In some regards, not all developments in newsmaking (whether primarily technology-driven or otherwise) have been seen as welcome. For instance, Stevens observed in his 1998 study that there appears to be elements of 'dumbing down' of news as there was a reduction in the educational elements of news programming at the BBC (with the aim of appealing more to the target audience). Consequently, some researchers (for example Goodwin, 1993; Stevens, 1998) criticise such earlier practices such as these, which were generally seen as a negative attempt by the BBC to change its strategic direction so as to be seen as more innovative through the adoption of certain newsmaking practices that better respond to audience needs.

More recent studies however suggest the opposite, noting that the BBC has in fact adapted innovatively, and produces content that satisfies perceived audience requirements (Thurman, 2008; Anderson and Egglestone, 2012). Within all these studies, the impact of technology and the issue of quality, and the cause-and-effect relationship between them is important as far as evaluating the respective online news platforms are concerned. However, it is noted that this examination should encompass the wider media environment as shaped by political and socio-economic factors. This is what I attempt to do with the sociological strategy deployed in the analyses.

3.1.1.1 New Technology and the Issue of 'Quality' at the BBC

Though the research specifically into technology and news at the BBC is not particularly ubiquitous, there are a number of studies – both dated and more recent, that explored newsmaking from a quality standards perspective, and serve as reference points for the arguments raised here about online news quality. These include Stevens (1998), Ursell (2001), Thurman (2008) and Anderson and Egglestone (2012). A (historical) review of the quality standards of news storytelling trends at the BBC and the SABC is important as it allows us to set the thesis' investigations (which also consider quality of current online news from a creativity perspective) within a relevant context. Not surprisingly, a number of the conclusions drawn

from a few of the earlier studies support the idea that the emerging new media technological practices are in fact responsible for the supposed degradation in news quality. However, beyond this conclusion, more recent works did not in fact explore the phenomenon to any sufficient degree.

According to Ursell (2001), convergence culture which is seeing emerging practices such as multi-skilling and multimedia news production is leading to a lowering of quality standards in news content. It is worth noting however that this same research (and a number of others) argued that the depreciation in news quality need not be technologically-deterministic as 'dumbing down' is as a result of an overall degradation of journalism standards that generally predates technology, (see also Goodman, 1998 who makes similar assertions). To emphasise this point, I argue then that the effects of technology on internal institutional structures (such as privatisation) and how these in turn affect journalism practices (for example editorial decision-making powers), and consequently standards in news programming is rather complex and not so straightforwardly determined. This point is buttressed by the general perception of researchers in the field that adoption of particular technologies is socially and culturally determined with specific nuances that need to be critically examined (Berker et al, 2005).

As Ursell observes, technological changes have been experienced across the BBC's large-scale operation through which it provides multiple news services across various regional, national and international platforms including television, radio and online – for example BBC News 24, BBC Online and BBC Worldwide (2001, pp. 189, 194). Further, it was established in Goodwin (1993, p. 499) that the availability of greater choice brought on by the increase in services offered at the BBC is as a result of these technological advancements. Consequently, it was found that a downside of this phenomenon could be a reduction in quality standards, as researchers (such as Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Ursell, 2001) maintain that it has led to a superficial treatment of news material and news content. In a disagreement with these claims, Starkey's 2007 book however offers a counter argument, maintaining that various technological standards in the news production process are put in place at the BBC to ensure that the high quality news standards it is held up to are maintained.

It is noted here that because online news at the BBC has developed substantially to include heightened use of full multimedia and some interactive elements, it is important to scrutinise how specific quality standards issues are treated and sustained in this domain. Anderson and

Eggleston's 2012 study that developed barometers for measuring quality standards in BBC's online news could set us off in this regard.

3.1.1.2 The BBC's PSB Remit

The BBC's PSB remit has undoubtedly indirectly influenced the evolution of its various online news platforms. Ursell (2001) maintains that directly or indirectly, PSB remit affects executive decision-making, which has been found to be central to adoption of technology at mainstream broadcasting institutions. Another strong factor is the prevailing economic condition within which the particular institution operates (in this instance the BBC), which is central to structural arrangements such as remaining wholly publicly-funded, or generating income from some private schemes. Closely linked to this is the influence exerted by the political climate where we see that the management in place at that point in time (when the Ursell study was undertaken) had been more responsive to taxpayers demands for reforms in public-sector institutions including the BBC, (2001). Thus, we see the BBC been made to evolve in a way that responds to the demands of the voting public.

Several researchers have delved into the issue of what this public service remit says about the evolution of internet news at the BBC overall (Goodman, 1998; Thumim and Chouliaraki, 2010). For instance, it was found that the BBC has been forced (obliged) to adopt private sector-like practices to remain competitive (Thumim and Chouliaraki, 2010, p.84; Lee-Wright, 2010). In particular, Thumim and Chouliaraki flag the *Capture Wales* internet-based project which is a good example of such adoption of new media practices which foster public participation and self-representation by ordinary people (2010, p.84). This approach was attributed to the need to stay relevant in an age where web blogs by alternative platforms are increasing in number and reach. This project also highlights the incorporation of UGCs into mainstream broadcasting at the BBC. These acts could be seen as pressures to commercialise, and Thorsen, Allan and Carter (2010) argued that they were effective as they did also result in some changes to how the news dissemination via the various web platforms were structured.

However, not all have welcomed these types of initiatives because they lay emphasis on user-involvement at the cost of quality informational content (Thumim and Chouliaraki, 2010, p.86). However, I can conclude from the findings obtained so far in this thesis' investigations that it appears that by bringing a traditional approach to UGC use, the BBC is not in fact relaxing its gatekeeper and quality control roles, in agreement with what Hermida and Thurman (2008) had found.

The evolution of news technology at the BBC therefore can be said to be reflective of its desire to respond to emerging media markets, and still continue to stay relevant. With growing fears that there is no place for public-sector, mainstream broadcasters in the age of burgeoning alternative news platforms , the BBC has in turn responded to several calls made on it to evolve in a particular way. Foremost among these were calls for it to commercialise and ditch its public service provider remit (Goodwin, 1993, Hargreaves, 1993; Goodman, 1998; Born, 2004, Lee-Wright, 2010). And we see from the illustrated case of the *Capture Wales* project how it initially responded to these. It must be reiterated that the PSB remit also has consequences for several aspects of news production – for content creation, marketing and coverage. For example, there is a constitutional remit to serve public interest by ensuring that there is impartiality in coverage (Johnson, 2009). Impartiality in coverage is an ethos that further complicates news delivery for the BBC as Johnson (2009) further argues that this mandate does not imply that just any free, state-sponsored content should be allocated space in the media market. Therefore it recognised that there must be a balance in coverage, even for PSBs.

Privatisation of media operations has also been identified to have the advantage of ensuring that quality assurance is kept at a level that offers value for money (Stevens, 1998); and as Jones and Salter (2012) observe, the BBC needed to prove its value for money. That said, privatisation can at the same time work against the ethos of impartial representation, which as a PSB should be the high selling points of the BBC – which is the fact that it offers something for each segment of the audience. In effect, a private-sector arrangement which does not fully support the principle of impartiality is not a desirable arrangement for the BBC given its public service mandate.

Public controls (through for example budgetary controls) are therefore identified as also important considerations for technology adoption at the BBC (Ursell, 2001; Anderson and Egglestone, 2012). Ursell (2001) for instance argues that because the BBC is primarily public-funded, economic pressures in the late 1980s and early 1990s made more of an impact to multi-skill journalists than digital technologies. It is observed from this argument that the move towards converged skills and practices was attributed to economic imperatives. However, in other instances and contexts, factors other than economic (in particular, technological and political ones) are seen as driving these multi-skilling strategies. This thesis therefore interrogates (through the interviews) what is the current perspective on this.

As a PSB operating within these changing technological and political climates, the BBC would want to evolve as a news brand that is technologically-savvy, yet still publicly-inclined through a concentrated effort to provide news in formats that meets the needs of all its constituents. Goodman had earlier made a call (1998, p.5) for the BBC to become concerned about how its evolution will affect newsmaking (given the uncertainties that surround how content and substance quality will be affected by a combination of technology and commercial pressures). This thesis therefore also examines the current state of BBC's online news production, in the light of this call.

3.1.2 The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)

The SABC, modelled on the BBC exemplar is arguably one of Sub-Saharan Africa's largest and most advanced public service broadcasters, (Harrison, 1981; Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994; 2008; Herbert, 2001; Horwitz, 2001), and which for a long time has dominated broadcasting in South Africa (Piombo and Nijzink, 2005). It has itself become the model for other PSBs of former colonies of Britain in the region – notably Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya (Bourgault, 1995). Not unlike any of these countries, the SABC has adapted and applied this PSB model according to the peculiarities of its own internal media context. Therefore, out of the growing body of literature available on the SABC, much of it touches on its stake as a PSB in the changing political landscape of South Africa (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994; 2008; Teer-Tomaselli, 1995; Barnett, 1999).

Evidently, media and democracy have taken centre stage in South African media research to the extent that, it is almost impossible to consider any aspect of SABC as a news institution without these factors foregrounding it. For the purposes of this thesis' evaluation however, it is essential to consider also those aspects of the operationalisation and ethos of the SABC's news production that are centred on how journalism practices intersect within new technologies, as advocated by Atton and Mabweazara (2011). Hence, it is acknowledged that these factors are central to how convergent practices occur and technological practices evolve within this relevant framework of the democratisation of the South African media. These I explore below.

3.1.2.1 News Quality from the Perspective of the SABC and the South African Media

The practice of news production at the SABC has not really featured much in the available research, hence quality issues have not been particularly considered. That said, it has been established that the SABC as an institution is committed to advancing news production at quality levels that reflect the overriding need for unbiased, public-centred reportage. This is

important given its reputation as the country's main PSB in the wake of the previously divisive apartheid political regime (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995). Hence 'quality' in news media production within the SABC context could be measured according to its ability to bridge (racial) divides and foster goodwill among its various constituents.

To further illustrate, it is identified that editorial independence and public accountability are necessary in public service broadcasting (Collins et al, 2001; Born and Prosser, 2001), and so therefore the SABC (and for that matter the BBC) should have the role of serving the interests of the public. Following from this argument therefore, the value of fairness has thus become a hallmark of quality as far as news at the SABC is concerned. However, it is worth noting that post-apartheid journalism was at the same time characterised by the dumbing-down of the power of newsrooms, due in part to bowing to commercial pressures in editorial decision-making which did not auger well for news quality overall. Quality of news in South African media is also marked by what has been called *service journalism*, where the journalist assumes a hero complex, acts as an advocate for the marginalised and the 'un-voiced', and provides a much needed service for the ordinary people, (Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p. 535). This is a tall order for newsmakers at the SABC as they would have to respond to multiple stimuli which include avoiding a commercially-centred approach to decision-making; balancing the need to adapt technologically in tune with global trends; and lastly, maintaining the 'something for everyone' ideal as a part of their public service ethos.

The SABC, being predominantly a broadcaster (using radio and TV platforms) has escaped the tabloid-style journalism with its associated negative connotations that has plagued South African print media for years. It must be highlighted here that tabloid-style journalism has been heavily criticised by researchers for not advancing quality news production in the South African context (Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010; Wasserman 2010). However, with the growing popularity of the online news space which shares some of the characteristics of print, the need to redefine editorial practices for news stories remains relevant in order for online news content not to be characterised as 'melodramatic tales', like the content in some popular South African tabloids such as *The Sun*, (Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010; Akinfemisoye and Deffor, 2014).

The infusion of new media techniques should therefore be seen as a way of boosting newsmaking qualities, potentials and practices. But as Berger found in his 2011 study into concepts of technology use in South African media, though specific projects "boost convergence between print, web and mobile platforms as part of a social convergence"

(p.716), more often than not, new techniques such as UGC use simply reinforce the status quo of journalists. For instance, as UGC still receives considerable editorial moderation, it merely emphasises the dominant role of the journalist as the 'gatekeeper' and 'agenda-setter'. Wassermann (2005) also concurs that technology does not necessarily reinvent the wheel but simply builds on the fundamentals that are already in place. The next sub-section discusses technology use within the SABC's remit of public service provider.

3.1.2.2 The SABC's PSB Remit and New Technology

There is increasing research on news in Africa dedicated to exploring broad aspects of technology (and news online). Overall, there is the consensus that there is a need to have disaggregated empirical research that looks at specific instances of the influences of technology on media practice in specified countries and not apply Western perspectives in totality (Atton and Mabweazara, 2011). In particular, these researchers decry the rather technologically-deterministic outlook to the scholarship on news media in South Africa where particular news production routines and practices are not sufficiently explored. Recent studies by Ogola and Rodny-Gumede (2014) and Dugmore and Ligaga (2014) are seen as an attempt to rectify this.

An earlier study however found that in the case of South Africa, the state has had a definite hand in the convergence of technologies (Barnett, 1999). This factor has implications for how the public service remit of the SABC is affected in making decisions concerning technology adoption and the overall technological direction of the SABC, and in particular towards news production. Consequently, the intricate way the transformative process of the SABC is linked to the wider society of South Africa is seen as relevant and has been well captured in the seminal works of Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, including Tomaselli (1994), Teer-Tomaselli (1995; 2008), and Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli (2008). Overall, it was discovered that the growth of technology and its associated influences of multi-channel society has brought a market value dimension which the SABC as a PSB had had to necessarily deal with (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995). In effect, aspects of programming that ensure that technology is used to increase reach to different parts of the audience (especially rural folks) was balanced with the need for processes of news production to stay at par with worldwide trends regarding digitisation. This is not always so easily-achieved, as discussions in later chapters of this thesis will further show.

Evidently, the tension between a public service duty and market at the SABC that existed as far back as 1994 according to Teer-Tomaselli (1995, p. 581) has remained. This was found to have affected various aspects of operationalisation and consequently, greater consideration was

given to more commercially-viable programming streams (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995). It could be said therefore that programming was skewed in favour of the latter (i.e. the market).

However, as noted in the SABC Editorial Policies (2004), the journalistic values which the SABC ascribes to include equality, diversity, and transparency. It is therefore necessary to investigate how and if technological developments enhance or hamper these attributes. Nonetheless, the SABC has a mandate to produce and deliver to its audience base, 'quality' news that meets the highest standards of journalism. One would argue that in the first place, utilising the highest form of available technology is required in order to do this, regardless of the specific digital needs and strengths of their constituents as a whole.

3.2 Online News at the BBC and the SABC

Surprisingly, not much has been written specifically about the online news platforms of the BBC, and even less so for the SABC, though Thurman (2007; 2008), Thurman and Lupton (2008), Hermida and Thurman (2008), Hermida (2010a), Thorsen, Allan and Carter (2010), and Anderson and Egglestone (2012), have all done some pioneering studies on various aspects of it in the case of the former. According to Tunney and Monaghan (2010, p.3), BBC news was brought online in December, 1997. Russell (2011) observes that it launched at a time when there were considerably fewer people online in the UK than there are today. Less than 8 million internet users were recorded at that time, compared to more recent estimates from the Office for National Statistics which peg it at over 45 million of the adult population (ONS, 2014). The BBC news website grew its audience base accordingly and has since expanded to become one of the highest suppliers of online news in the world.

The evolution of the BBC news site is an interesting one, where early attempts at developing content consisted of shaky starts and some 'trial-and-errors' (Butterworth, 2007); and an initial quite basic look by today's digital standards (Thorsen, Allan and Carter, 2010). The current era however is described as being characterised by sophisticated use of 'user-generated content' and multimedia storytelling, (Thorsen, 2010), despite the fact that it was regarded as a late-entrant into the online news arena (Thorsen, Allan and Carter, 2010). However, this is the extent of any formal analysis of the development of the news site.

Nonetheless, a scrutiny of the site using historical data from the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine paints some interesting pictures of how the site has developed over the years. It must however be acknowledged here that this data is only able to show graphically how the site

evolved and not any background information about who did what and the motivations behind it. Additionally, the dates provided in this analysis are approximate values since data on when the updates actually happened to the website are unavailable. First images captured in December 1996 show a very basic look with no coherent structure, and only two blocks of images on the homepage (in addition to the logo). The hyperlinked images direct to pages that were similarly unstructured, providing a myriad of information including the BBCs annual report, producers' guidelines, and a 'programmes' schedule. Colour schemes are similarly unstructured with lettering appearing in some seven different colours. From this point on and in the period leading up to the launch of the site in late 1997, a more coherent structure started to emerge on the homepage and content started to expand. By October that year, a sub-column was added to the services offered section for 'news on-line' (in addition to the already listed radio, television and world service).

By the beginning of 1998, a middle column and a third column appear on the homepage, holding substantially more content (mostly descriptions about the radio and television programmes). However a milestone is that, some actual news content (news reports precisely) was being published. The text of these reports is predominantly in black and white. Throughout 1998, the content also started to see some structuring as it was gradually partitioned into clear fields, with some introduction of colour and visual images. A search box is another milestone seen during this period. By December 1998, news reports form a significant majority of content on the homepage and a video item has been introduced. By September 1999, a link has been provided where 'one can email a friend' with the contents of the news story – one of the very first sightings of the now prevalent interactive sharing feature. The pages get increasingly more structured throughout the year, with sub-columns dedicated to world news, and for genres such as politics and entertainment, much like what we have today.

By 2000, more audio-visual material can be seen – not embedded but in an extended player format. This is also the year that we see personalisation making an appearance, where users can subscribe to be emailed news content based on their individual interests. This is also the year we see user-to-user interactive norms being implemented where users can email their views on certain issues to the producers. More content from the radio and television units are also being archived on the news site. However, news reports are put on the backbench yet again and we see all forms of soft news representations including features, and also advertisements, dominating the most prominent sections of the homepage.

Somewhere towards the end of the 2001 (approximately November), the *BBCi* was introduced which was marketed as *'The UKs no.1 digital destination'*. This featured a different style scheme and included an array of platforms such as a 'Kids' section, and BBC Sports. However, once again no news reports were directly published on the homepage (only accessible via links). This site stayed in place with very little distinct revisions made to its core structure till mid 2004 (when the *BBCi* designation was done away with). Around this period, another milestone was the introduction of links which made it possible to access a mobile edition (and later in 2005, an edition for PDAs). It must be noted that at this point, the site was not geo-tagged and one had to actively select the home or international versions according to preference (this feature introduced sometime in 2005).

The next noticeable milestone was by March 2008 when the option to customize your BBC homepage to your news items of choice (based on geography, genres etc.) was provided. By the end of 2008, the news site had begun to take on a shape that more closely resembles what it is today. At this point, much of the news content is traditional hard news reports. While written text forms still dominate the homepage, individual stories are starting to get more visual with some having as many as three photos including some maps and graphs. Soliciting for UGC in the form of comments on individual stories is also in place around this period. By early 2011, the homepage started getting more picture-led, and a photo-slide deck makes an appearance. It began to take on the shape of the exclusive news site (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk) introduced by July 2010 and which I analyse in this thesis. It must be noted that personalisation features such as emailed editions, RSS feeds, alerts and podcasts were already in place when this news (exclusive) site was outdoored in 2010. And between this period and early 2012 when I began my analysis, the only major changes were with improvements in the structural layout.

It has been recorded that visits to the news site have steadily increased over the years, with one notable peak period been the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, where the sports site alone received some 55 million visits (BBC News, 2012a). It is interesting that this time period coincides with the social media giant Facebook hitting the one billion users mark (BBC News, 2012b). As research (An et al, 2011; Hermida et al, 2011; Olmstead, Mitchell and Rosenstiel, 2011; Singer et al, 2011; Hermida, 2012) has established, social media sites are instrumental in helping consumers find online news stories. However, it must be acknowledged that these statistics are insufficient in themselves to determine what is the effect on BBC online news consumption as a result of a proliferation of the use of alternative platforms (and also gadgets).

The mere fact that some very obvious correlations can be seen, is interesting in itself as this thesis tries to determine if alternative platforms impact mainstream news production and audience news consumption patterns in obvious ways, and how. As Hermida (2010a; 2010b; 2012) found, social media has had a definite hand in the collaborative and networked phenomenon that has been termed ambient journalism, where news has been made ubiquitous in today's (highly technological and information-driven) society.

Research did show that the BBC online platform remains popular with news audiences surveyed in a Reuters Institute study of the US and some European countries (see BBC News, 2012c). This study also established that of all the countries surveyed, the UK had the strongest online audience base – which was attributed to the BBC's presence (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2012). For the UK, the BBC is cited as a unique case where a broadcaster's website appeared to be the main source of news, with the dominance of online news attributed to the BBC's strong brand showing. Interestingly, it was discovered that to find the online news stories which the BBC news site offer, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter continue to play a considerable part, (BBC News, 2012c). For example, 43% of the younger demographic (who are the biggest consumers of online news) say they are more likely to follow social media sources in search of news (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2012).

In the case of the SABC however, it was difficult to establish how any of the above factors play out in this context as the literature on any aspect of the SABC's online platform is practically nonexistent. It is known however that though the SABC has been in existence since the late 1930s when it was set up as a PSB, starting initially as radio, it wasn't until 1995 when a venture into digital satellite broadcasting began to revolutionise its journey towards the eventual adoption of its online news platform in 2000. However, the development of the platform has been quite slow. For instance, it was found that the use of multimedia stories and UGC is less than half of all its total content output, with an on-going digital strategy that is yet to be fully implemented (see Moodie, 2011).

An examination of data from the news site (also with the Wayback Machine) shows that the basic look at 2000 (when it was launched) does not much deviate from its current state in terms of structure, style and content. The same SABC logo, the three columns, hyperlinked content, a search window, photographic material and colour scheme used today were all in place by the end of the very first year. Additionally, the homepage was also predominantly populated by news reports – as many as 10 in most instances. Non-hard news content, adverts,

and weather reports were also published at that time. At the bottom of the homepage, links to audio and video content sourced from the radio and the TV units were also in place. Additionally, there was a link to a discussion forum where users can register and contribute comments to topics of interest. However, a personalisation feature where users get customized news feeds, though advertised as at the time of launch was not ready to be used until a few months later. The next milestone therefore was a link to email individual news story reports, which was implemented by approximately April 2002. This is fundamentally the shape the site takes until late 2003 when the basic layout changed (for example, it now had four columns instead of three). Content however remained mostly unchanged except that the site got less visual, (with most stories not featuring even a single image per story). Another milestone is the RSS link feature which makes an appearance by July 2005. However, by March 2006, a rebranded 'SABC News' logo appeared on the banner and brought with it increased use of visuals with almost all news reports having an accompanying image. There were no significant changes seen again, and throughout 2009, 2010, and most of 2011, data is unavailable to determine at what point exactly the news site was updated to the state that was analysed in the CA.

Drawing from the presentations on these two contexts, it is fairly obvious that the BBC and the SABC are at two very different levels as far as the development of the online news platform is concerned. I posit therefore that to analyse these two platforms comparatively using similar standards will indeed be challenging. This said, investigating two platforms which cover the spectrum of public-sector online media practice across both the developed and the developing world gives us insight into varying contexts, and is therefore a useful exercise. Hence, I attempt in this thesis to draw out the peculiarities of how the digital platform is impacting news storytelling using the same interpretations of the key phenomena, but paying close attention to the contextual nuances.

3.3 Methodological Approach

The objective of this thesis is to interrogate the phenomenon of online newsmaking through a critical examination of the norms and techniques employed at the BBC and the SABC for hard news reporting specifically. The overarching questions therefore centre on if and how the digital platform facilitates new forms of creative newsmaking and how effectively news storytellers adapt their technological practices and capacities to changes on the digital platform. Additionally, the study explores if and how news providers match these techniques

with their perceptions of the needs of the different segments of the audience. Finally, it investigates the potentials that the new storytelling techniques offer in terms of engaging audience attention with the main details in the news. To effectively do these, a case study approach was therefore adopted. It is noted that a case study strategy is useful in allowing for deep probes of the phenomena under consideration because, "*a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p. 18).*

Hence, this deep analysis of the BBC and the SABC allows us to identify and propose theories about the digital space of news storytelling, and provide sufficient evidence to support them. The study is generally abductive in nature, with the specific observations and analyses of patterns and phenomena leading to the developments of theories, which are then subsequently tested with sample news stories (from the news sites) and supported with personal explanatory accounts from the online news teams, until a plausible conclusion is arrived at. I adopt a constructivist philosophy to these analyses since I attempt to understand these phenomena using reasons and meanings in the social structure within which they exist/occur. This is in line with the nature of these sorts of scientific enquiries, where it is argued that because alternative and multiple channels of meanings exist within structures, a sociological procedure is required to unearth them. This argument closely relates to the ethos that subsumes the concept of media convergence which characterises the digital medium, and is the frame upon which this study is anchored.

Additionally, though not a core consideration, combinations of various other critical thinking on postmodernism and post-structuralism influence the discussion and analyses undertaken in this thesis. I note in particular the influences of theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Delueze and Judith Butler whose philosophies have been known for the synthesis of knowledge and experience from across different disciplines, and which move away from strict interpretations. Therefore, this thesis' examination of the multiplicity of the interconnectedness that exists in online news content and newsmaking practices, and the prevailing environment is premised on this approach.

Though it has been discussed here that a case study method is most appropriate for effectively examining the digital platform and the concept of online newsmaking, it still presents the

ultimate limitation of inability to generalise (see Yin, 2009), and this is hereby acknowledged. I discuss this limitation in-depth in later sub-sections.

3.4 Mixed Methods

It appears from the discussions from some methodologists (for example Tae Kim and Weaver, 2002; Mautner, 2005) that generally in the field of online communication, there exists a deficiency in the methodologies that exist for studying web-based corpora. Another point to consider in this area is inherent in the issues surrounding the rigour with which existing methodologies can be applied to web platforms. These issues include for example, either having to deal with too small or with too large datasets; having a multiplicity of modes to analyse at the same time (for example text and audio); and a greater challenge comparatively with capturing or storing some of these datasets for future analyses. A mixed methods approach (particularly one that also incorporates interviews) could therefore be proposed as a way of dealing with some of these issues, though only few studies have actually employed it, as noted earlier. A mixed methods approach in research has been defined as "as a design for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a study in order to understand a research problem" (Clark et al, 2008, p. 364). It is generally understood that by using methods that cut across the two fields, one is better able to overcome the inherent deficiencies in each particular one. This strengthens the findings obtained and the conclusions that are arrived at.

Furthermore, it has been identified that there still exists a gap for the study of online data, due to the fact that visual material (including graphics and audiovisuals) are not being considered much in comparison to text forms (Carpentier et al, 2010). In a quest to address these gaps, this study employs the use of a combination of appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods in the investigations, due essentially to the need to lay a focus on examining all the modal forms in use in news stories, as well as the different contexts in which they are used and how. Therefore, in the first phase of empirical investigations, Content Analysis (CA) was employed to study the modes and techniques of news storytelling using sample news content taken from the websites of the BBC and the SABC. The CA as it was applied here sought to identify, quantify and record the forms, modes and techniques of online hard news storytelling as they occur on these two news sites. The findings and discussions from this exercise help to identify and establish patterns of hard news storytelling at the two news sites which informed the subsequent development of some characteristic frameworks, used in a later phase of

investigations as part of the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MmDA) approach. The rationale behind the use of this particular method (ology) – that is, the MmDA, was to effectively explore in-depth the social construct behind the identified news storytelling norms at the BBC and the SABC. This process was followed by semi-structured interviews with select members of the web news team from the two institutions where they helped clarify findings arising from the analyses of the online data. They also shed light on how they perceive future potentials of the digital platform will be appropriated in online newsmaking at the two news institutions.

Established methodologist Norman Denzin has detailed the justification in combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches and notes that among other things, it allows for triangulation of data, and enables the strengths of one approach to correct the deficiencies in the other (1978; 1989; 2009). As it has been found that triangulation gives research findings greater credibility due to the employment of multiple approaches and theories (see Patton, 2002), it was beneficial that the method design of this study creates room for some form of triangulation. Also, the constructivist approach used in unpacking the headline findings from the interviews helps in putting the findings from the content and discourse analyses in a relevant context. Overall, the discussions are anchored on the founding framework of media convergence as an influence on newsmaking culture. I detail the specific method designs in the sections below.

3.4.1 The Content Analysis (CA)

CA has been defined by Holsti (1969, p.14) as the process of examining the specific elements of messages to make particular inferences. The rationale for using it in this thesis was because it enabled both a quantitative and a qualitative assessment to be done on the specific elements within the news stories, and this helped establish a pattern over the period the samples were analysed. This envisaged outcome is based on the Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005,pp. 25) interpretation of CA as being, "...particularly useful in analysing styles, identifying the features in texts, measuring readability and assessing the responses of audiences to communicative texts produced for them based on known characteristics". Consequently, this method was necessary as it helped determine how the forms of news storytelling occur on the case study news websites. Hence all the different modes and techniques of digital hard news storytelling were investigated. Additionally, this process helped identify the rate at which news storytellers adapt their hard news reporting (styles) to the changing nature of the platform by looking at

the trends over time (in this instance, the six month period during which the analysis was carried out).

Researchers in the field advocate for the use of Neuendorf's (2002) systematic CA, as well as Krippendorff's (2004) guide to CA methodology when analysing online phenomena (see for example, De Wever et al, 2006; Strijbos et al, 2006; Benoit, 2011) as they are better suited to dealing with some of the identified issues enumerated. When CA is applied to new media material, it is highly advantageous because it allows for a micro-oriented analysis (if that was the aim) of the forms and modes of news stories. However, a notable limitation is that most CA of the web are seen as not accommodating for the rigour that is often associated with conducting traditional CA (Herring, 2004). This is due to the fact that establishing strict categories and random samples, which are often necessary for traditional CA, are difficult for web-based corpora. Nonetheless, Herring (2004) argues that this laxity in rigour can allow for a broader perspective and approach to the method used. This means that the researcher is able to accommodate for the inclusion and analysis of emergent phenomena (from within the analytical material) that could not have been predetermined. This argument favours the thinking behind the underlining ethos of poststructuralist ideology which subsumes the analyses and discussions carried out in this thesis, because it allows for us to move away from strict interpretations.

The Sampling and Coding Procedure

Practically, the CA as it was employed in the thesis follows the basic guidelines laid out in Herring (2004). The outputs that were analysed were the hard news reports appearing on the homepages of the BBC and SABC news sites. These embody all the elements of each particular story (including images and other graphics; audio and videos; and add-on effects). As news is regarded (historically) as reports about timely, proximate and relevant events delivered in factual, unbiased ways, hard news reports were seen as best satisfying these criteria (see Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010). Hence, all soft news items including feature stories, magazine-style articles, opinions and analyses were excluded from the sample. This sort of strict interpretation of what constitutes 'news' was necessary to address the perceived problems with defining the unit of analysis of web pages as identified in Herring (2004). Though beneficial, this approach nonetheless limits the findings from being extendable beyond hard news reports to the innovative and fast-growing domain of soft news – an area of critical importance in online news research and which I would therefore recommend for future efforts.

The inputting of data (that is the coding process) was done once a week employing a random sampling approach to the day and time the coding was done, in accordance with the stipulations in McMillan (2000). Hence, all the news items (as per the coding criteria) were coded at a randomly selected day and time (within each week) over the six-month period. The entire code development and coding process comprising the inventory, audit, and the input of data was done by the author in the capacity of principal investigator. After the coding period, the inputted data was then quantitatively evaluated using simple statistical (frequency) counts. Qualitative deductions of the data however occurred at the point of the inputting of data. Notes on these qualitative observations were taken down, which were later grouped thematically and emerging patterns were established. This fed into the development of a framework for analysing the news stories more in-depth.

3.4.2 The Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MmDA)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MmDA) is the study of multimodal data where the analysis is not just of the static material but also of the socially-situated sign processes within which they are constructed (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; MODE, 2012). The use of MmDA in this thesis is aimed therefore at understanding the social contextual dynamics behind particular influences of the digital medium on newsmaking through an exploration of the multimodal hard news stories. Some researchers in the field are of the opinion that because new media content combines different modalities and possesses novel features, examining them requires the incorporation of methods from other disciplines (see Herring, 2004). MmDA is therefore considered appropriate in this instance. Application-wise, a set of (purposively) sampled news reports from the BBC and the SABC news sites are used to analyse and explain relevant multimodal, social semiotics theories that were developed prior. Purposive sampling is a carefully-constructed sampling procedure which is used to ensure that the sample is specific enough to satisfy the criterion in question, and which allows for deep inferential analysis (Dawson, 2007). The theoretical underpinning of the analysis undertaken here is contained in a 'framework' which has been detailed in chapter five.

Though appropriate for the study, MmDA still has its challenges. For example, it is known to have the identified challenge of data collection – where gathering and decoding multimodal corpora is cumbersome and difficult, as well as issues with what detail and scope to use in the analysis (see Baldry and Thibault, 2006). Hence by choosing the approach where a limited dataset is used to explain the 'theorised' phenomena, I avoid the issue of trying to generate theories from the examination of large datasets. An additional advantage of this approach is

that it enables us to generate different and integrated interpretations of the analytical material under consideration, in comparison to the alternative which can be likened to just a qualitative CA, as one is dependent on a mass of dataset to generate a theory. This approach also favors more in-depth exploration, and by choosing it I also benefit from a diversity of methods (as it differs from the CA which had already been used) in line with the advantages argued for by the mixed methods proponents. However, as O' Halloran (2008; 2011) argued, this approach still presents a challenge as I would have to contend with undertaking interpretations on complex resources that that go beyond language (including images and digital icons as you will find in use in the web space). To counter this problem and strengthen the overall findings therefore, the qualitative interviews probe further on these interpreted phenomena/findings in order to validate them.

Once again, the unit of analysis was the individual hard news report appearing on the homepage of the BBC and the SABC online news sites. All the different modal elements of each particular story (including image, audiovisual and add-ons) are considered in the analysis, and the samples used are captured in static (visual) form for representation in the analysis chapter. Likewise for the MmDA process, there was the need to have strict definitions of the values and parameters used in the analysis in order to conform to the rigour of analyses that employ media content from the traditional platforms.

3.4.3 The Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews are crucial to effectively interrogating the phenomena of online newsmaking especially when the case study approach is used. These interviews were therefore carried out with some (web) news editors as well as some senior online news strategists from both the BBC and the SABC. This is in order to get an insight into the production of online hard news reports at each of the two institutions. Specifically, the interviews gave an insight into if and how the respective web news platforms are offering particular potentials for matching different techniques to different audiences; and for engaging the audience's attention with the main details in the news. Additionally, the interviews helped clarify what news editors think about their evolving roles in the newsmaking process within these institutions, and how they anticipate and perceive the future potential of various technological innovations could impact news cultures in their individual contexts.

The interviews also presented the opportunity to validate the findings and discussions from the CA and the MmDA (as per Denzin, 1989; Patton, 2002). Additionally, they offered an

opportunity to obtain explanatory factors for some of the patterns and phenomena identified during the course of undertaking the two analytical processes of the CA and MmDA. A total of eight respondents were therefore involved from both institutions, and the sample was obtained using a purposive convenience sampling procedure. A purposive convenience sample is one in which respondents are selected by the researcher subjectively based on some predetermined criteria, and which are most-easily obtained due to the researcher's present circumstances (see Dawson, 2007). Practically, the interviews were carried out over the course of three months from December 2013 through to February 2014. Respondents were recruited through known associates from both academia and journalism practice from the two countries who recommended that these particular respondents be consulted. There were some respondents who the author got in touch with as a result of being named as an online news team member on the news sites. Generally, this sampling procedure has a high degree of bias which can among other things, limit the ability to generalise results. However, in the case of this study's objectives, specific insight trumps ability to generalise.

The type of semi-structured, in-depth qualitative enquiry, which follows a laid-down questioning track but also allows for the questions to be altered by the interviewer during the interviewing process, was deemed appropriate in this instance. This is because it makes allowances for the interviewees to provide responses to specific enquiries, while also allowing for the interviewer to elicit responses to emerging related issues. It also allowed for deep probing which was necessary to provide maximum clarity on the issues being discussed. Once again, the need for reflexivity was essential in order to objectively digest all the observed phenomena, triangulated with prior knowledge, in line with what has been advocated in social research.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations relating to all aspects of this study were taken seriously, and were treated with the general standards and guidelines stipulated for studies in this field. Because all of the datasets used (for the CA and the MmDA) were accessed from the BBC and the SABC news sites and therefore publicly available, I applied the standards set for analysing internet data, where considerations for anonymity and circumspection were duly observed. This is important as there are significant gray areas with using the often voluminous, freely-available and problematic web-based datasets (Herring, 2004; Hester and Dougall; 2007). Nonetheless, I treated the data from the entire study with objectivity regardless of whether they were from online or offline domains.

Further, I observed the University of Central Lancashire's research Code of Conduct, as well as applied general best-practice guidelines to the conduct of the interviews. Firstly, we sought for and obtained the formal ethical approval by satisfying certain conditions (especially with data handling and storage) prior to obtaining any of the respondent-based data used in the study. Before, during and after the conduct of the interviews, I applied the requisite due diligence in treating respondents, through conducting the interviews, and also in interpreting the responses. However, we opted for a non-anonymised reference to the respondents in the discussions because though none of them were personally named, a general description (for example, 'news editors of the BBC') was provided in reference to the various discussion points. This however, does not distract from getting the full point of our arguments, nor make them any less authoritative.

Due to the fact that the principal author and the supporting researchers had had some sort of prior engagements with one of these case study institutions in some capacity, there was the need to maintain the due ethical, objective, and relativist standards (see Neergard and Ulhoi, 2007) at all stages of the study where we maintained an objective distance and allowed the findings to speak for themselves.

3.6 Summary Conclusions

In order to effectively evaluate how specific digital platforms (and the techniques developed on them) are impacting online newsmaking in specific contexts, it is important to approach the analysis from a perspective that greatly advances the achievement of the stated research goals. To this end, I have demonstrated that the chosen case studies of the BBC and the SABC, and the mixed methods approach are best aligned towards this.

Mainstream news organisations were chosen as case studies primarily because they still command a sizeable chunk of the online news audience. The BBC and the SABC satisfy this criterion. Additionally, by virtue of the fact that they have both old and new media platforms, I was able to study the transitions of the platforms. And finally, they cover the range of contexts – developed and intermediate – which are important to me given the research aims of presenting nuanced insights into online newsmaking. The history of these news organisations cannot be overlooked. I therefore presented how historical arguments, for PSBs in general, impact their individual approaches to (online) news. For instance, I highlight that commercialisation imperatives in the case of both BBC and SABC have shaped these

approaches in notable ways. Beyond this, there are other considerations that emphasise the difference between these two organisations. For instance, there is the 'something for everyone' ethos in the case of the public service-inclined BBC, and the 'one thing for all of us' ethos of the unifying SABC in the wake of apartheid in South Africa. Both these contextual principles have implications for technology adoption on the one hand, and the quality of newsmaking on the other, which is important to understanding the current situation.

I have also demonstrated that the online news domain of the BBC and the SABC is another point of divergence for the two news organisations. This is seen first of all in the relative lack of literature about the state of online news at the SABC in comparison with the BBC of which much has been written comparatively. Additionally, research has established the dominance of the BBC as a force in the provision of online news worldwide, while its counterpart the SABC has been found to be making tentative progress in developing its online news platform. This diversity in standing thus shapes the approach adopted towards the investigations in later chapters, for example in the interview chapter (six) where a greater concentration is given to the SABC.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the methodological choices of this study. I have indicated that the mixed methods approach was useful overall as it helps counter the deficiencies in each individual method, while the quantitative and qualitative data serve as a validation of each other. The discussions also demonstrate that the combined use of CA, MmDA and interviews bring a robustness to the investigation that would have been lost if any one of these approaches is adopted solely. The use of the CA and the MmDA for analysing web-based corpora does pose some challenges, and I have clearly set out how each and every envisaged challenge is managed by showing how the two methods (including the interviews) were actually operationalised. Ethical considerations are important here and I have shown that industry and academic standards were indeed applied. Overall, the methodology section of this chapter was necessary in providing clarity on what the next three findings and discussions chapters will do and reveal.

Chapter 4: Examining the Nature of the BBC and the SABC's Online News

Research has established that it is now a lot more commonplace for news audiences (especially those from developed and intermediate contexts) to receive their news stories via online platforms – including tablet and mobile (see Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009; Nel and Westlund, 2012). Admittedly, this assertion is dependent on each specific country and the traditional media saturation within it. It has become necessary therefore for emerging research enquiries on news to pay particular attention to understanding the online news domain and what the situation is in each context. Examining the nature of online news is a necessary first step towards this understanding. This examination (as undertaken in this study) is premised on the assumption that generally, the institutional practices of journalism have been impacted by digital technologies, in addition to specific formats and norms of news stories which are perceived to have also experienced some alterations.

Research-wise, there are some viewpoints within the relevant literature that seem to suggest that newsmaking on digital platforms has taken dramatic new paths away from those via traditional news channels such as radio, television and print (see for instance Allan, 2006; Hasan and Hashim, 2009), and where several significant aspects of newsmaking have been revolutionised. Others maintain however that traditional norms still hold sway and online news is simply a combination of all these forms (for example, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). Thus, an important dimension to the investigation is to identify and establish the formats and techniques which are currently in use, in the midst of all the attributes being given to online news storytelling.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to ascertain what exactly are the physical forms and characteristics of hard news stories published on the BBC and the SABC news sites. Towards this, a quantitative and qualitative Content Analysis (CA) was done of the two news sites over a period of six months. This chapter captures what the findings are from this process, where I discuss the distribution of types and genres of the news reports published, as well as the scope of multimedia and interactivity used, and the rate of incorporation of (new) techniques at the two sites. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this study, I must emphasise here just what exactly is meant by the use of the term news 'genre'. Within journalistic circles, news genre represents the classification of the elements in the story and includes distinct groupings such as entertainment, sports and politics. This is solely the understanding used in this thesis except in certain dotted instances (especially in chapter five) where some definitions are used that

consider the sociolinguistic interpretation of genre as accepted classifications of 'text'/language styles that include conversation, lecture, or novel, for instance.

The chapter begins with an exploration of what previous case studies on the subject have observed and recorded. I subsequently outline how the choice methodology of CA is relevant and necessary in helping to establish the norms of online news storytelling, using the case studies in this particular study as empirical evidence. I also specify here the headline research questions which need to be answered and detail how the CA process was operationalised to do this.

In the ensuing discussion section, I discuss how tradition and change seem to be working side-by-side on the digital platform, though at different levels for the BBC and the SABC. The chapter concludes with discussions on how these insights help to establish specifically the nature of the BBC and the SABC's online news during the case study period. This fed into the development of the framework for the sociological MmDA. Finally, these findings help illustrate what subsequently changed with newsmaking norms at the two news sites, as discussed in later empirical chapters.

4.1 Assumptions About the Digital Nature of News

Case studies by researchers in the field (such as Deuze, 2003; Boczkowski, 2004; Bucy, 2004; Quandt, 2008; Thurman, 2008; and Anderson and Egglestone, 2012) can help to identify some suppositions about the characteristics of online news, which could serve as a benchmark for the examination undertaken in this chapter. On the whole, these studies identify and discuss various aspects of online news (not exclusive to hard news), such as the use of multimediality, hyperlink and hypertext pathway features, interactivity techniques, and UGCs. It is seen from the different cases presented that the particular appropriation, distribution, and usage of these various formats and techniques are dependent not only on the specific platform (be it online, tablet or mobile) but also on the context (developed world, emerging economy countries, or developing world) and the news type (hard news reports or soft news stories).

Some researchers conclude for instance that, digital news is characterised by standardised, traditional formats which might not necessarily be innovative (see Harper, 1998; Quandt, 2008). Others such as Quinn (2005), and Allan (2006) find that the online news space is characterised by enhanced potentials for storytelling and personalisation of news; and rich, interlinked multimedia content (Massey, 2004). Further, some find that it enables altered

(editorial) roles where consumers are brought into the storytelling loop through the use of sourced UGC and highly interactive news formats (see Deuze, 2003; Bucy, 2004; Weiss and Domingo, 2010; Karlsson, 2011). It was also concluded that there was a dominant focus on news of a domestic nature despite the widening of geographical boundaries on the digital platform (Quandt, 2008). Quandt also established in this same study that online news was characterised by very little author attribution, with no real documentation of the extent of UGC use (2008).

Is there any evidence from the CA of hard news reports from the BBC and the SABC to affirm or refute these assumptions – or indeed to suggest entirely new characteristics and phenomena?

4.2. The Content Analysis: A Necessary Undertaking

I undertook both a quantitative and qualitative CA of the hard news stories that appeared on the two case study news sites over a period of six months, from June to November 2012. Here, I analysed styles, identified the features of the news stories and made extrapolations about readability and audience responses to these contents. Practically, this involved identifying and quantifying, but I must also emphasise here that the qualitative side of this assessment also involved describing and recording the meanings associated with this data (according to the treatment given by Schreier, 2012; 2014).

Consequently, the CA process was useful in helping to among other things, determine how the BBC and the SABC tell their online hard news stories; what kind of news was being told; and which groups of audiences were being targeted with which particular formats and techniques. Additionally, I also determined the pace at which changes were made to these techniques and how in particular they had been incorporated across the two contexts. Most importantly, this process helped to establish who the online news storyteller is, i.e. how and to whom attribution is given.

It is worth reiterating that the findings from this process were discursively interpreted in their relation to the broader research enquiries via a combination of other methods, as discussed in the methodological chapter. This is in agreement with standards set in the field for its use, with for example, Krippendorff (2004) noting that this method should not be sufficient in itself but should be applied in a wider sense in relation to other measures and arguments. It is also emphasised here that the conclusions derive from the interrogation of hard news reports specifically and it is acknowledged that the exploration of other genres such as soft news which

is particularly prevalent at the BBC news site (comparatively) would likely engender other conclusions.

4.2.1 The Research Enquiry

There is definitely some literature available that establishes the existing characteristics of the nature of online news. However, it is still essential that I embark on this sort of examination as a precursor to further investigations as

1. It allows us to see if the general conclusions on the nature of online news hold for the news reports on the BBC and the SABC news sites at this present time.

2. The findings provide statistical and inferential legitimacy to embark on subsequent qualitative enquiries via the MmDA and the semi-structured interviews.

3. It allows us to establish how the nature of online news transforms in the later stages of the study.

The research enquiries were in 4 'strands'. Firstly, I explored the forms, modes and techniques of these news stories. Secondly, I investigated the frequency with which any sorts of changes were made to any of the identified formats and the techniques. I then analysed how the online news stories were told according to any distinctive classification of audience types and genres of news. Lastly, I investigated how news storytellers were identified on the online platform.

The specific Research Questions (RQs) for these 4 strands were

RQ1. What are the formats, modes and techniques employed for news storytelling on the online platform?

Answering this question involved analysing the various modal forms used in the news stories comprising written-text forms, images and audiovisuals. I also looked at the specific characteristics of these modal forms, including the length of text and audiovisuals, and the sizes of the images. The structure and narrative style in which the written text appears was also analysed. Techniques such as add-on elements used (including bullets, charts, and quotes), and the interactive features used such as comments, new media, RSS feed functions, and hyperlinks were also surveyed.

RQ2. What is the rate at which change is being made to the techniques and formats used on the online news platform?

Here, I sought to identify the rate at which new features and formats (outside of the forms and techniques found in **RQ1)** appear during the course of the investigation.

RQ3. How are hard news stories told differently according to distinct audience types, genres of news or geographical categorisation of the news?

In this instance, I examined if there was evidence that any particular type of narrative style or technique is used according to the different genres or categorisations of the news stories, or a distinct audience group (which could be young/old, or international/domestic). News is categorised into domestic as against international, based on the geographical location of the incidents in the story. The different genres are considered under the classifications of sports, entertainment, business, politics, weather and two other broad groupings (which comprise crime, security and foreign affairs news in one, and education, health, science and technology, and lifestyle news in the other).

RQ4. How are the news storytellers identified on the digital platform?

Here the identity of the creators behind the news story items (be it as an institution or an individual) was investigated to basically understand how attribution is given.

How the sampling and coding was done

The unit of analysis was the individual hard news story appearing on the homepages of the BBC and SABC news sites. This embodied all the elements of that particular story (including photos, videos, and add-ons). For the purposes of this study, and based upon preliminary examination of the data, any item appearing on the homepage is regarded as news. However, only news items with some content (two or more lines) appearing with the headlines on the homepage was coded. Those with just headlines that open up to the fuller content were excluded, since they are generally regarded as hyperlinks. Soft news items such as features, magazine-style articles, opinions and analyses on the homepage were also excluded.

Regardless of the variable, all the coding categories were designed to yield nominal (present-absent) level data. I sampled all the news items appearing on the homepages during one

randomly selected day and time of the week, over the six-months period. This means that, I picked a random day in each week over this period during which I coded and analysed all the hard news stories appearing that day. All the content audit and inventory, drawing-up of the coding schedule and the inputting of data were done by the author in the capacity of principal investigator. However, for the calculation of the Intercoder Reliability (IR), a second coder was involved to input that particular set of samples. The IR calculated for each of the 14 distinct variables was recorded for Percentage Agreement and Cohen's kappa. 90% agreement was accepted for the Percentage Agreement and Cohen's kappa was accepted at above 70%. Initial issues that were revealed during the IR calculations were subsequently resolved. The full coding schedule and the IR calculations are included in appendix one. Qualitative deductions from the coded sample are guided by findings from the quantitative analysis.

4.3 The Findings

The findings from the CA yielded many interesting insights especially when the BBC and the SABC are considered as distinct institutions. In most instances however, the findings are discussed collectively. Of the total number of 382 units of news items analysed from the two news sites, 170 were from the BBC representing 44.5%, and 212 were from the SABC representing 55.5%. This disparity in the number of units coded is simply as a result of the fact that the SABC published a greater number of hard news stories daily on its homepage compared to its counterpart, the BBC.

4.3.1 News Report Publishing Statistics

The analysis shows that the news stories cut across the different genres, and the table below highlights the distribution of news stories that were published over the period under consideration. In categorising the different news genres, it was important to take into consideration what is happening in the online newsmaking arena. It was observed that the noted news genre group classifications, such as for example, the predominant public affairs as against non-public affairs (as discussed in Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2010) are not entirely suitable in this instance. This is due to a number of factors. Firstly, the issue of if the nature of the digital platform is enabling the development of 'new' definitions of news representation has arisen (see for example, arguments put forth in Erdal, 2011). There are also a combination of other considerations including the existence of extremely disparate (online) news audiences; coupled with shifting producer motivations towards what news to publish in the online domain; and a greater tendency towards diversity in online news reporting (as found in

Tewksbury, 2003; Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2010; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013). The discussion in this chapter therefore stays away from the 'public affairs versus non-public affairs' distinctions, and any other such broadly accepted classifications for that matter, and simply looks at the different genres as individual categories. This 'classless' classification seems more appropriate to the particular characterisations of the news types that are observed to be published in the digital domain. Additionally, it helps dispel the confusion that comes with trying to employ a uniform group classification system when considering news publishing from different contexts (in this case the UK and South Africa) where interpretations of what genre is considered under what group can be somewhat different.

Nonetheless, in Table 1 (below), it is noted that the most dominant news genres published at both news sites remain the age-old notable ones (as delineated in Schultz, 2007), including political news (at 19.6%), which is by far the highest single genre representation, followed by news of economic/business/finance nature at 13.6%. The very high statistics (at 30.4%) emerging from the crime, security and foreign affairs news combination category is also not surprising given the relative historical importance of these genres (almost like political and financial news). The last row of Table 1 however shows one of two pools in which we subsume all news relating to education, health, science and technology and lifestyle news. Here, a sizeable total representation rate of 17.1% is observed from these genres that can be regarded as less dominant (or mainstream even). Considering that these units of analyses emerge from the main homepages of the two sites, this somehow supports our theory that the online platform indeed offers some diversity in news representation beyond those that we are used to from the traditional platforms. When this finding is looked at in isolation, it does not seem particularly remarkable given that the traditional platforms (in particular print) are increasingly exhibiting this trait where hard news stories of diverse genres are being published. However, I make the case in this thesis that the agenda-setting trait of mainstream newsmakers is being eroded due to a combination of factors which have been attributed to direct and indirect influences of digital technologies. This finding which sees news producers shifting from the standards that have them publishing only 'mainstream' public affairs centred news stories on the homepage could therefore serve as a valid base to carry our investigations into agenda-setting further.

There are other interesting findings in relation to the BBC and the SABC coverage statistics that are worth highlighting. The two organisations have very little distinction in the coverage statistics in all but two categories. These are in the areas of entertainment, as well as the

health, education, science and technology and lifestyle segments, where the SABC has a significantly higher representation rate in comparison to the BBC. With regards to entertainment news, it is interesting that a significant majority of news stories from this genre are international in nature (and sourced from Reuters). The other disparity is in the areas of health, education, science and technology, and lifestyle news. Drawing from the arguments already advanced above about these particular genres, it is therefore not surprising that the interview respondents that emphasised the loss of the agenda-setting by mainstream newsmakers were from the SABC in particular. This is unpacked in-depth in chapter six.

Genre	**BBC, No. (%) n=170**	**SABC, No. (%) n=212**	**Total, No. (%) n=382**
Politics	37(21.8)	38(17.9)	75(19.6)
Entertainment	2(1.2)	16(7.5)	18(4.7)
Business and Finance	24(14.1)	28(13.3)	52(13.6)
Weather	5(2.9)	2(0.9)	7(1.8)
Sports	25(14.7)	24(11.4)	49(12.8)
Crime, Security, Foreign Affairs	57(33.5)	59(27.8)	116(30.4)
Education, Health, Science and Technology, Lifestyle	20(11.8)	45(21.2)	65(17.1)

Table 1: Distribution of genres of news published on the BBC and the SABC news sites

4.3.2 The Forms and Techniques of Online News

All the three modal forms of text, image and audiovisual featured in the news stories to varying degrees. However, the text and graphic (image) combination was the most predominant – used in 72.5% of all cases (in Figure 1 below). Only a modest percentage of 17.1 employed a mix of all three formats (text, graphic and audiovisual) in each story, in the truest sense of multimedia. That said, it is worth noting that only two of the news stories coded were of the format text-only, with both the BBC and the SABC having just one story each which featured

only text and involved no image or audiovisual use. The text and audiovisual combination was used in only 9.9% of cases analysed indicating that it is still a rarity despite the apparent growing popularity of the use of audiovisuals in digital storytelling in both online and offline spaces worldwide. These statistics rather echo Anderson and Egglestone's discovery about the high level of text use in their 2012 study, and by Quandt who discovered and concluded in his 2008 paper that standardised article types or formats still existed for telling the news.

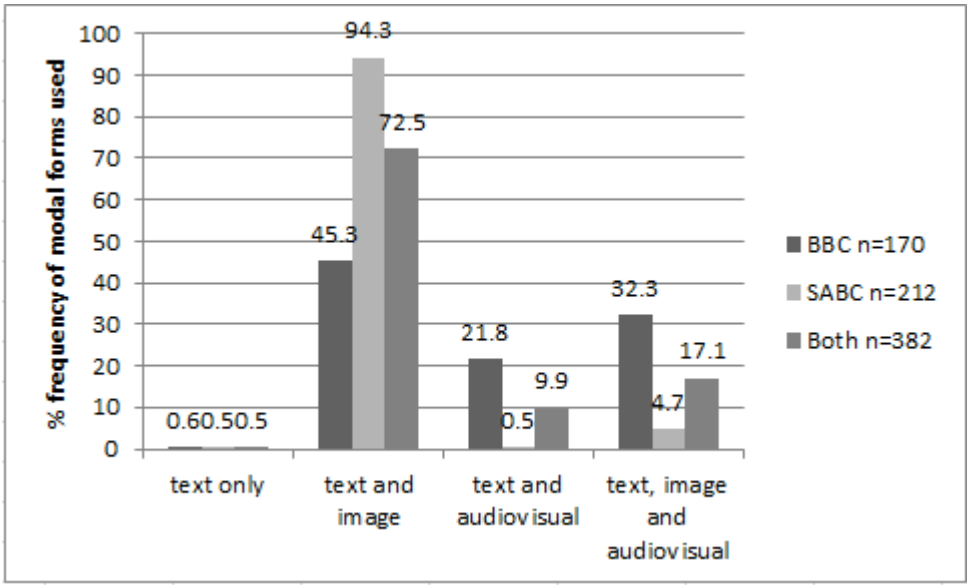


Figure 1: Distribution of the modal formats of news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

Beyond this, I examined the exact extent of the use of multimedia 'texts' in the news stories. Firstly, it is discovered that overall in terms of frequency, some type of image was used in 89.5% of cases. However, quantity of images per story was rather low with only 9.7% of news stories carrying more than one. Disaggregated, the SABC had a comparatively lower incidence rate – featuring only two single instances where more than one image was used per story (see Figure 2 below).

In terms of sizes, average sizes dominated, especially at the SABC where a constant size and shape was used in all appearances in a way that very much mimics some old newspaper templates. The BBC experimented a bit more in terms of image-use, modelling a substantial number of rather large ones (30.5%) especially with sports news stories (see Figure 3).

The use of audiovisuals followed a similar pattern. For example, for the SABC, only one hard news report had more than one video in the story. Out of the 12 videos published, all but two

were less than three minutes in length. For the BBC as well, 74.6% of audiovisuals were less than three minutes long. What is interesting about these numbers is that, by featuring more videos of the shorter variety, both institutions appear to be adhering to industry norms (see Figure 5). The standard of using (three) minutes as a measure though subjective and based on the author's discretion is grounded in some precedent. Firstly, an examination of the literature on news videos indicates that most researchers often go for minutes as a measure as it is expected for news stories to range in the minutes rather than seconds or hours, (see Nakamura and Kanade, 1997; De Santo et al, 2004; Zhai, Yilmaz and Shah, 2005). The choice of 3 minutes as the maximum was based on an examination of the literature and industry standards. For example, it was found that network TV news averaged 2 minutes and 23 seconds (Pew Research Center, 2012), while the media group Advertising Age features a three-minutes video news show. As the aims of the CA exercise (and indeed the overall research questions) did not necessitate a more in-depth second by second examination of the news videos, this measure was deemed sufficient overall.

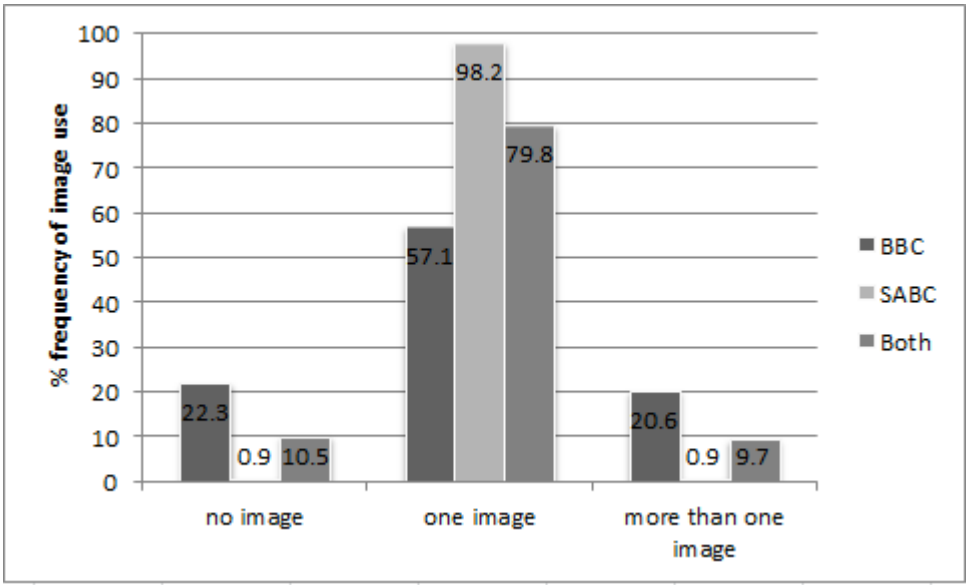


Figure 2: Frequency of image use in news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

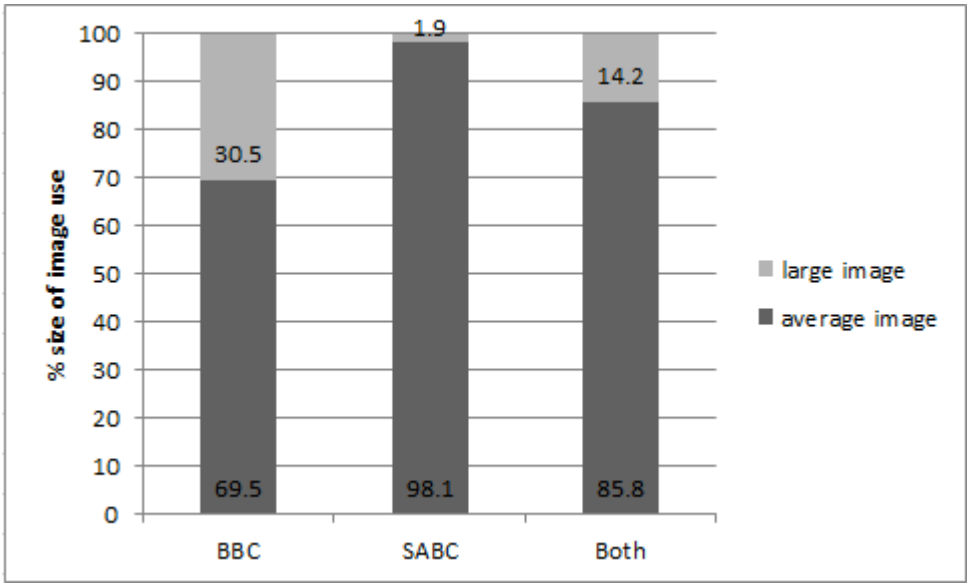


Figure 3: Sizes of the images used in news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

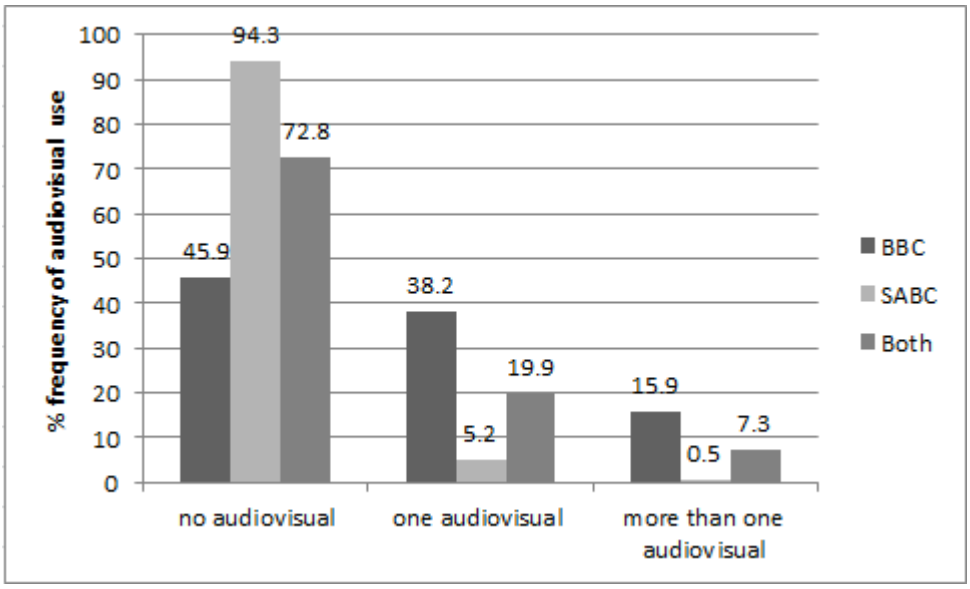


Figure 4: Frequency of the audiovisuals used in news stories on the BBC and SABC news sites

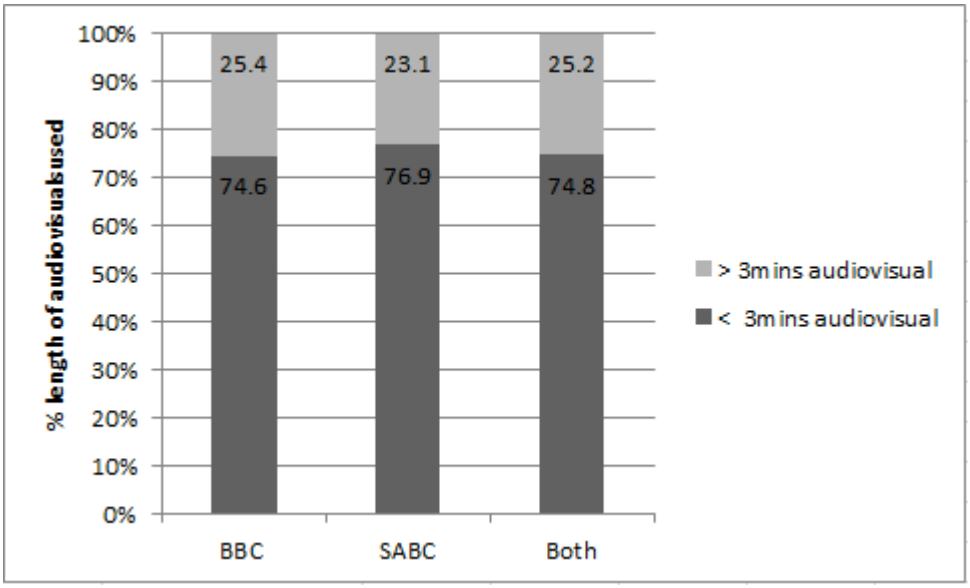


Figure 5: Lengths of the audiovisuals used in news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

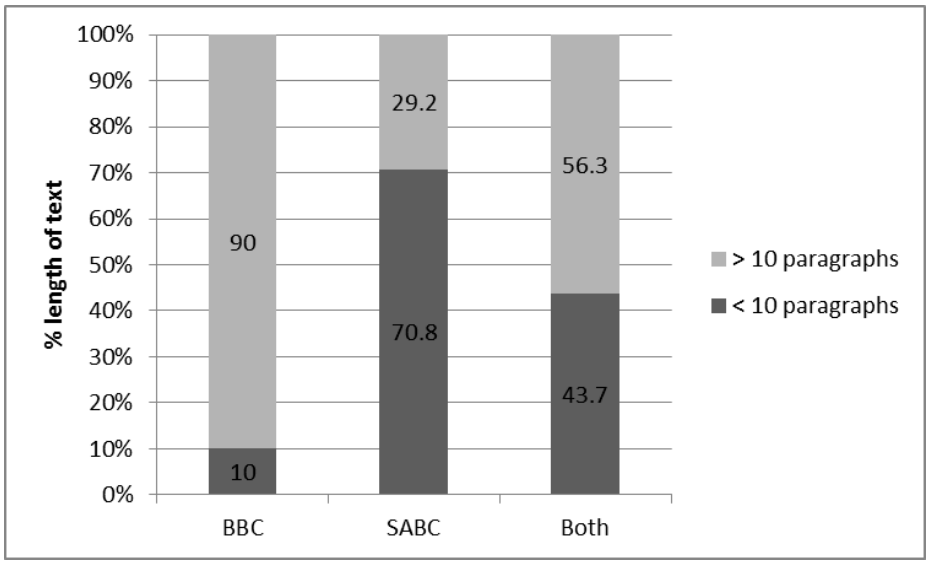


Figure 6: Lengths of the written text of news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

As seen from Figure 6, the majority of news texts (at 56.3%) were more than 10 paragraphs long, though a significant percentage of this figure is from the BBC, with the SABC in contrast featuring incredibly short stories, with an astounding 70.8% of texts being less than 10 paragraphs long. I must note however that the emphasis here is not so much on what is the total word count of the stories, but rather the amount of space in total that the 'text' occupies (hence text length being supported with a count of the types and numbers of call-outs used). Considering that most paragraphs range between 10 and 35 words at the BBC, and up to as

much as 58 words at the SABC, the extent to which newsmakers are utilizing space in the online domain is of primacy focus here given the research aims, hence the focus on paragraph count rather than words. As one of the hypotheses the thesis investigates is the affordance of space in the digital domain, it was more beneficial to use the paragraph as a measure rather than word count, though the latter would have been more accurate. A content audit and inventory of two news sites prior to the CA revealed that the BBC had considerably longer text and more paragraphs per story than the SABC. The choice of 10 paragraphs was therefore simply a compromise that meets both sites patterns since only a single standard was to be used for coding for both sites. As standards for news stories typically focus on word count rather than paragraph count, it was necessary to construct a measure that fits the situation, as there was no precedent to fall upon in this case. Based on this premise therefore, it can be qualitative deductions of the findings do reveal therefore that the BBC makes a greater use of space by breaking text into much shorter sentences more frequently, when compared with the SABC.

The technique of call-out

The technique involving the use of call-out elements was creatively engaged as part of the news storytelling process, especially at the BBC. Call-outs are defined here as quotes, figure boxes, bulleted-facts, opinion statements or texts highlighted with different fonts, font sizes or font colors, and any other closely-related feature used outside or within the main body of the written text. It was used 64.7% of the time at the BBC, considerably higher compared with the SABC's slightly more modest 47.6% usage rate (see Table 2 below).

	BBC, No. (%) n=170	**SABC, No. (%) n=212**	**Total, No. (%) n=382**
Used	110(64.7)	101(47.6)	211(55.2)
Not used	60(35.3)	111(52.4)	171(44.8)

Table 2: The use of call-outs in news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

Beyond this, the BBC also employed a diverse mix of the call-outs, featuring quotes, bullet points, analysis, and figure boxes in comparison with the SABC's use of only bold and coloured highlighted texts. This reinforces our conclusion that while the BBC seemed to be operating on a loose template – alternating with different forms and styles (perhaps to suit the story though

no particular trend was established), the SABC appeared to be less inventive and was sticking to a strict format in each and every instance.

Writing techniques, and the hypertextual and interactive elements used

In a quest to identify current writing norms and the narrative styles of textual news items, I sought to establish any trends consistent with each individual platform (i.e. the BBC and the SABC news websites) that may converge or diverge broadly from print. Therefore, the understanding of these writing norms were based on standards and structures traditionally used in print, especially with the inverted pyramid and the narrative styles. However, this required some comparism to specific newspapers since styles are not universal but adapted to each context depending on a number of factors, for example house style or news values (see Semino, 2009). But, this presented some considerable analytical challenge. To illustrate, a small sample of UK-based newspaper stories were analysed which consisted of 80 individual stories, from 12 copies published by 4 publishers: *Daily Express, Metro, The Telegraph* and *The Times.* Even without a larger sample being used, the results showed that each newspaper had a different approach to how it treated, for example bylines, lengths of articles, headlines and leads, etc., depending on the genres of the stories, the pages on which they were carried and the particular editors who edited them.

Consequently, it was a more useful exercise not to make a strict comparism, but rather to attempt to understand what they (these narrative structures) might mean in the context of the web, when cursorily compared to more specific newspaper norms. Hence, not much can be concluded about the state of the text narrative (style) in particular, in any way that makes online distinct from print broadly. That said, it can still be observed from the layout that the online news texts appeared very much well spaced-out, as the analyses of sampled newspaper texts revealed that space demarcations between paragraphs in some cases were not even visible (most likely due to the constraints of space). However, though some very short paragraphs (with fewer sentences) were experienced overall (more so in the case of the BBC than the SABC), this trend generally only differentiates from some broadsheets such as *The Times*, but not from most popular tabloids such as *Metro.* Additionally, longer stories featured section breaks with sub-headings, in the case of the BBC at least. The SABC however, hardly used these sub-sections as the text stories were never long enough in the first place to merit them. However, once again, it is acknowledged here that this might not necessarily be a digital-exclusive feature because while none of the sampled newspaper stories displayed this feature, some UK-based tabloid newspapers have been known to use it. Overall, though it can be

intimated that the web interface can enable news stories to be better structured, this is only achieved if the full range of (spatial) affordances are indeed taken advantage of by newsmakers, as further discussions in the next chapter will show.

Beyond the narrative technique, other 'new' and online platform-specific techniques were identified. These techniques involved the use of interactive features (both user-to-user and user-to-system) such as feedback and contact links, and social media links, as well as use of hyperlink and hypertext pathway features, and personalisation features such as the RSS feed function. The most common by far across both sites was the use of 'sharing' via alternative (new) media links such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as the use of hyperlinks/hypertexts, and the RSS. For example, from Table 3 below, it is evident that these features were used in each and every news item. However, user-to-user interactivity (at the level of conversational or dialogic) was only moderately appropriated. For example we see from the table that feedback and contact links (across both ways – for audience to contact the news organisation and vice versa) were rather underused, at a 25.3% and 6.5% usage rate respectively at the BBC. Both features were almost non-existent at the SABC (at a mere 0.5% and 0% respectively). I must emphasise here that these figures refer to the use of these features by the news producers, meaning opportunities presented for the audience to engage in the required manner (for example through 'shares') and not the actual execution by the audience.

	BBC, No. (%) n=170	**SABC, No. (%) n=212**	**Total, No. (%) n=382**
Feedback/comments	43(25.3)	1(0.5)	44 (11.5)
Contact link	11(6.5)	0(0)	11(2.9)
Hyperlinks to other online resources	170(100)	212(100)	382(100)
New (social) media links	170(100)	212(100)	382(100)
RSS link	170(100)	212(100)	382(100)

Table 3: Frequency of the types of hypertextual and interactive elements used in news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

'New' features used?

One of the main research goals was to identify adoption and adaption rates, interpreted widely as techniques, formats and styles that are 'new' to the news storytelling process at the two news sites. Our benchmark for what was deemed 'new' was anything of this nature that 1) Is not already listed on the coding scheme having previously been identified from the Content Inventory process, and 2) Is spotted for the first time since the coding commenced. It must be acknowledged here that simply spotting these techniques for the first time is not enough to indicate that they have just been adopted without a more-extended longitudinal study to determine at what point exactly they were incorporated for the first time. However, it can indicate the rate at which (long-standing) existing templates are altered, dependent of course on the exact point in time these changes are seen. The deductions in this sub-section however do not in anyway allude to a definite statement that they were in fact new occurrences. They merely premise a relevant line of enquiry that subsequent measures will attempt to probe further.

From the table below, we see that the BBC had 10 separate such appearances over the period compared with the SABC's two. For the BBC, these 'novelties' included an interactive picture slideshow which links to hypertext in diverse formats; an interactive drop down menu, also with extra content; as well as an interactive video; and links to live or recorded TV programmes. For the SABC, an interactive map and a non-interactive graph were the new features seen over the period under consideration.

	BBC, No. (%) n=170	**SABC, No. (%) n=212**	**Total, No. (%) n=382**
Evident	10(5.9)	2(0.9)	12(3.1)
Not evident	160(94.1)	210(99.1)	370(96.9)

Table 4: Evidence of different features appearing in news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites

Overall, one can conclude that most of the forms that were incorporated across the board were concentrated in the area of enhancing specific interactivity and hypertextuality elements within the news stories, and not much beyond that – indicating that templates were not particularly altered.

Who is the newsmaker?

Given this study's research objectives, it was important to establish who was producing what on the online platform. And by this, I mean how the news storytellers (i.e., the originators of any of the news items, be it text, photo, or audiovisual) were identified at any point in time. The BBC and the SABC had a different approach to how this was done. With the BBC, some sort of originator tag was used in 81.2% of cases compared with 100% usage rate for the SABC (from Table 5 below). Out of the 81.2% instances where sources were identified for BBC stories, only 8.6% had writers of the news texts personally named. In the rest of the instances, the images were only stamped with the AFP or the AP logo (photo databases the BBC subscribes to) or in the case of videos where the BBC watermark can be seen. Interestingly, in the instances when the BBC specifically named a writer of a news story, it was identified that a majority (over 50%) was in the genres of sports or political news. At the SABC, naming of writers was similarly rare (at 9.4%). However, this represented all the various news genres and there was no evident dominant genre (compared with the case of the BBC). The SABC also treated the labeling of all graphics and audiovisuals a bit differently from the BBC, always stamping them in each single instance with the 'SABC' logo to indicate perhaps that they are the default originators.

Overall, this pattern of (not) identifying originators of news stories on the web platform is a clear departure from what pertains to the more traditional mediums of TV, radio and print where writers, reporters or editors are inevitably easily identified. Overall, sources (interpreted to be institutional or individual) of news story items were identified in 91.6% of all total cases (see Table 6).

	BBC, No. (%) n=170	**SABC, No. (%) n=212**	**Total, No. (%) n=382**
Identified	138(81.2)	212(100)	350(91.6)
Not identified	32(18.8)	0(0)	32(8.4)

Table 5: How attribution for news stories is given on the BBC and the SABC news sites

It is noted that the SABC named a source in each and every case, and it was quite necessary for them to do so. In the case of the BBC, even when individual authors are not named, it is fair to ascribe authorship to the overall organisation because the institutional source is only ever the

BBC (from qualitative observations of the news site over the CA period). But with the SABC, which sometimes used news stories from other institutions (such as REUTERS and SAPA), it was essential that they name the (institutional) source in each and every instance.

4.4 Discussion

The findings presented only show the figures on the forms of hard news stories on the BBC and the SABC news sites, and the techniques used in making them. In the section below, I unpack these findings discursively in relation to the research objective of analysing the impact of the digital platform on online newsmaking. It is important to emphasise here that I also attempt in this sub-section to propose some explanatory factors for why the phenomena established through these findings may exist.

4.4.1 Mainstreaming Novelty into the Traditional

It has been identified by some researchers in the field that online news storytelling is characterised by the use of converged, multi-formatted, and non-traditional templates (see Kawamoto, 2003; Massey, 2004; Quinn, 2005; Allan, 2006). However, the analysis emerging from the findings indicate that storytelling norms on the digital platform are only moderately unconventional, where those supposed characteristics of the digital are often not very evident. One can submit therefore in agreement with Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) that there is indeed a meeting of tradition and change. I argue though, that the exact intersection of this change is not defined by hard and fast rules, and the traditional norms coexist with new online modes in an uneven manner.

This seems to be played out in several instances. For example, publication statistics show that in an age where news categories are seen to be more diverse with fluid definitions and a diversity in news reporting generally (Tewksbury, 2003; Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2010; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013), traditional genres (politics, finance, sports) seem to be receiving almost equal representation with a mix of the traditionally non-dominant genres such as lifestyle and science and technology news. Print versions are also seeing this trend as generally diverse content including arts, entertainment and lifestyle, are being featured (Franklin, 2009b).

However, in applying a constructivist approach to understanding how producers make choices on the news genres to cover, I consider here the specific conditions of the periods during which

the news sites were monitored and analysed. Considering that the data captured in this CA also covered a period of a big international sporting event (which is the 2012 London Olympic Games), this could be a partial factor in explaining some of the statistics that favour the sports genre, for example. Though there isn't sufficient evidence to support or refute such an assertion, it is still important to acknowledge the possibility of such external factors shaping the statistics emerging on how news websites feature the different genres of news stories at any point in time.

Multimedia use is also another indication of this intersection between tradition and change. As shown, the format being predominantly employed is the text and image combination. However, when we consider the novelty in the infusion of various types of call-out elements in the stories, we see an indication of the departure from the traditional ways of storytelling. It is important however not to generalise assumptions for both the BBC and the SABC altogether, and also with specific reference to the above point. Though the BBC's use of audiovisuals wasn't exactly on the very high side, the SABC in comparison almost never used them at all. Even in terms of the scope of multimedia use, the SABC followed a rigid formatting structure where the graphics were all of a medium size, and placed in the exact same spot on the page for each individual story. Additionally, the SABC also had a very conventional approach to how it used call-outs, with only a single template used (of highlighted text in blue-coloured, bold font) in every instance. This extreme adherence to templates is in sharp contrast to the 'freedom-to-express' ideology that is marketed by online news enthusiasts who note that freedom to play with varied templates is one of the defining advantages of online editing (in comparison to print and broadcast). I therefore make the case that, this 'freedom' which supposedly affords journalists the autonomy to be creative, and to choose formats and mediums through which to publish their stories (see Thurman and Myllylahti, 2008), does not apply in every case, and certainly not at the SABC. And according to Humprecht and Büchel (2013), when norms outside of these (print-like) templates are employed, it indicates innovation and creativity in online newsmaking.

This discussion on how 'convention' co-exists with 'innovation' underscores the need to discard strict interpretations, and rather apply a dynamic approach to analysing online newsmaking phenomena. For example, established newsmaking practices such as long-form journalism, and the use of the inverted pyramid style, as well as the agenda-setting and gatekeeping roles of news publishers are all being treated differently by both practitioners and researchers in the field. For example, it appears the long-form may not be entirely appropriate for the online

platform since hyperlinks and interactive call-out elements provide the deep context and probe which the long-form aims to provide. In fact, some practitioners in the field go a step further and claim that it is no longer important to even make the distinction between what constitutes long-form or not (see Forbes, 2012). Nonetheless, not enough evidence is presented to enable any valid conclusions to be drawn here.

4.4.2 Interrogating Interactivity, Hypertextuality, and UGC Use

An aspect of digital news storytelling that is rife in the literature is the use of interactive, hyperlink techniques – features quite peculiar to the digital platform and which set a departure from traditional print and broadcast news styles. Bucy in his 2004 study on the development of net news found that we have evolved into the third era of interactivity which is seeing heightened improvement in its application (2004). Such claims should not be generalised across the board however. From the CA enquiry into the use of interactive and hyperlinked features in news stories by the BBC and the SABC, it was found that dialogical interactive features which enable audience engagement with the news storytelling process, exemplified by the use of feedback/comments forum and contact links to the news site (for the audience to provide information and UGC) were almost non-existent at the SABC though the BBC did use them significantly more (almost one third of the time). However, hyperlinks and external links to share these news stories on social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) were used in each and every instance at both news sites. As Singer et al (2011) observe, these have become common features that help consumers share news stories. This illustration indicates a strong leaning towards navigational (or passive) interactivity in contrast to Bucy's claims (2004).

It can be concluded from these indicators that, during the case study period at least, provision was made for quite high levels of navigational interactivity and only very moderate amounts of conversational or functional interactivity on the BBC and the SABC news sites. Obviously, a longer case study would be needed to make a more certain claim. This notwithstanding, the conclusions arrived at in this chapter agree with the Thurman and Lupton (2008) assertion that though text is still the cornerstone of news websites, the use of features such as interactivity and multimedia will remain relevant, and I note that they may even develop into a dominant feature. This agreement stems from the fact that, though higher forms of interactivity appear to be only moderately appropriated (by producers), it still remains a defining hallmark of the online news storytelling space and news providers are likely to keep using them in a response

to the demands of the digital environment for up-to date news websites to have such features in place.

Almost as much has been written about the use of hypertextuality in news stories as interactivity. The use of hypertextuality is highly regarded by researchers, where for example, McAdams and Berger (2001) contend that it offers a better and more compelling reading experience for the online audience, and Harcup (2009, p.182) submits that these extras (by way of hypertext) offers consumers access to more in-depth information. However, like most digital techniques, it has its challenges. Oblak for instance, in her 2005 study maintains that this technique presents a complexity to online newsmakers as it challenges their desire to remain the authority when they are faced with having to link to external sources. From the findings presented, it is observed that at both the BBC and the SABC, hyperlinks were used consistently in every news story. However, most were used outside the main body of text and were mostly internal (links to that same news site or to another owned by the news organisation and not to material elsewhere on the web). This does confirm the consensus from researchers in this area that external hyperlinking is not fully harnessed by mainstream media organisations (see Reese et al, 2007; Himelboim, 2010; Redden and Witschge, 2010; Steensen, 2011; Coddington, 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2012). In effect we observe that it is still the case that mainstream news organisations are undertaking hypertextuality while retaining their traditional authority and structures. One can also conclude that the limited use of external links and hypertext within the main body of the news story somehow downgrades the 'multiple-paths through the text', and 'additional information' attributes that have been accorded the hypertext (see McAdams and Berger, 2001).

The discussion now moves to the use of citizen-generated contents. Outside of actual interaction with the newsmakers to understand if and how they use them, one other way this was established was through investigating how and to whom attribution in relation to the material used in news stories, especially when the stories are updated during the course of the day. As the findings show, I was unable to validate the assertions by Karlsson (2011) about an increasing and stronger role of consumers as co-creators of the news; and also by Quinn (2005) who contends that the audience can contribute to make more meaningful storytelling. At both news sites, only in few instances were the individual authors named. No additional information was also provided on the news site about possible collaborators on the story, as is the practice of some online news providers such as CNN and The Guardian. For graphics and audiovisual materials however, the sites differed in their respective strategies. With the BBC, some (not all)

graphics contained the seal of the photo database used; and all audiovisuals contained only the faint BBC News watermark. The SABC on the other hand always labeled all graphics and audiovisuals with the SABC name-tag.

It is this way of giving attribution which leads to the conclusion here that there is an under-use of UGC at the two sites. At the BBC, news stories were revised with updated content within the course of the day. However, new photos still bore either the seal of the photo databases that the BBC subscribes to (or the faint BBC logo in the case of audiovisuals), or no marks at all. We see this phenomenon at play even in instances when the BBC solicits for UGCs through the contact link at the bottom of the news stories. Because attribution is not fully given, one is left wondering which of the news items are in fact UGC, as research has established that the BBC does use UGC extensively (see Drakopoulou, 2011; Bennet, 2013; Harrison, 2014). There was also no evidence from this CA exercise to suggest that the SABC solicited for content from the audience at all. However, these conclusions can only be probed with additional information and this is done in the subsequent interview chapter. Discussions advanced in Garbett et al (2014) show that several factors account for this perceived attitude to UGC use, mostly philosophical but also practical which range from concerns that some contributions are not representative of the ordinary audience to the practical constraints of doing in-house verification given strict deadlines. The succeeding interview chapter therefore probes the extent to which these apply to the BBC and the SABC.

Considering that current discourses on online news and digital self-publishing place a high premium on UGC and seem to indicate that it is a growing phenomenon, these findings raise questions about what is the ethical consideration with regards to mainstream online news providers increasingly using UGC without giving the due attribution. Further, it raises questions about what are the minimum standards we expect them to keep with regards to declaring the origin of the UGC they use, and how they balance this with protecting the privacy of contributors. Over all, this phenomenon of UGC use without proper attribution, or no UGC use at all, is at variance with the new paradigm of (online) journalism which advances openness through the inclusion of other voices and the blurring of lines between news editors and consumers. Because journalistic authority is built upon openness (Deuze, 2003; Karlsson, 2011), and where use of UGC is one way of indicating this openness, there is a need to show evidence that not only do these opportunities exist, but are also taken up. Additionally, this level of transparency about who the source/writer is, is what most journalism code of ethics

recommend, and which also promotes the two-way communication between news producers and consumers (Carpenter, 2010, p. 193; see also O'Sullivan, 2012).

These pertinent questions are flagged and investigated in subsequent phases of the study. The thinking behind this phenomenon, as it occurs at the SABC and the BBC is explained in the discursive accounts from the news team at the two news institutions (as solicited through the interviews) in chapter six.

4.4.3 Supposed Differentiation in Online News Storytelling Techniques

Because today's news-consuming audience is increasingly fragmented and disparate (see Tewksbury and Rittenburg, 2009; Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2010; Napoli 2011) – there is a need for the online medium to more effectively engage with this diverse audience. As such, one mandate of the analysis in this chapter was to establish if and how the digital platform enables specific news reports to be tailored to particular news types and audiences. With respect to the individual stories, at the BBC, the only distinct instances of news stories being tailored were in the domain of sports news (though overall, tailoring homepages to geographical location of users exists). Outside of sports news however, online news storytelling norms at the BBC were fairly consistent across the different genres. The findings show that sports news was unique in the sense that it employed a high use of multimedia, both in terms of frequency of use and scope of use (for example above average use of audiovisuals, and above average use of two or more images of very large sizes per story). It also involved greater use of interactivity through the use of interactive links (including the *Interactive TV* feature), the use of comments/feedback functions, and UGCs in the form of tweets in almost all cases. Additionally, though the BBC on the whole modelled really long narratives of text, their sports news tended to be shorter, with haphazard or unstructured section headlines, fonts (colours, sizes) and call-out elements of varied sorts. Furthermore, attribution (of writer's name, designation and sometimes even geographical location) was given in more than 50% all news stories. In a surprising twist, the only other dominant genre of news stories that carried personal attribution at the BBC was political news, where editors of the stories were named in some instances.

A reading of the available literature on sports news audiences provides some justifiable hypotheses for this phenomenon. Rowe (2007) rehashes the debate that sports news is seen as the 'toy department' of news media production, where its textual content is seen as less rigorous and less serious in comparison with the other genres. Johansson (2009) also maintains

that sports news can be seen as trivial. Given that a sample analysis of sports coverage in some British newspapers finds this same distinctness (albeit at the level of print news storytelling formats), sports newsmaking at the BBC online site could simply be a reflection of this general tendency towards 'lightheartedness' in sports news reporting. This conclusion derives from the characterising features of BBC's sports online news previously described as generally haphazard with a rather informal formatting style. Rowe (2007) did acknowledge that the past decade has seen a positive shift in the favour accorded to sports (in broadsheet at least) in the British mediasphere. This factor could explain why sports writers are increasingly being named in online news reporting, much like their counterpart political news columnists who historically have enjoyed a fair amount of prestige.

At the SABC, the news stories received a fairly consistent treatment in terms of formats and modes of reportage, regardless of the particular genre. However, it was fairly obvious that in the case of international news stories with the external news agency REUTERS listed as the source, there was a slight variation in form. These news stories were often longer in comparison with the other classification of domestic news or rather, the news stories that had the SABC listed as the source. These (REUTERS) stories were more likely to feature the occasional section break and sub-section headline, and were more likely to have a greater use of multimedia material (an audiovisual content, or more than one image).

A rationale for why these stories appear different could simply be because they emanate from an external agency. The use of these newswire agencies is fairly commonplace in news media production (Paterson, 2005), driven largely by economic imperatives to keep costs low, given the extra costs in having correspondents on the ground in each (international) locality. No matter the rationale for its use, such stories would only endear the SABC to its audience-base in the long run as Delgado, Magalhaes and Correia (2010) found that multimedia systems that use enhanced visual illustrations do increase readers' attention and retention, and encourages repeat site visits.

Overall, the ability to tailor particular news stories differently is always a bonus in an age where news storytellers would want (and need) to connect better with their target audiences. However, it is evident from the illustrative discussions that this is not so easily achieved. Other strengths of the online platform, such as the use of web metrics, could however be used to track user experience and investigate in what ways the online news audience could be better served.

4.4.4 Evidencing the BBC and the SABC's Convergent Cross-media Culture

Increasingly, news media organisations are witnessing a convergence of practices, policies, and to an extent, content. To Burnett and Marshall (2003), this convergence is as a result of technological advancements on the web, where different media platforms have been unified into one digital form. Erdal (2009) however maintains that beyond technology, convergence is also impacted by cultural factors where the internal working cultures of the institution, and the subcultures associated with the platform (be it television or web) all impact the shapes these converging practices take for that particular context. Convergence appears under many labels such as multimedia journalism or cross-media journalism (Erdal, 2009). Given our overall interest in critically evaluating the specific elements in the news content, it was necessary to establish to what extent this pervasive convergent culture is exhibited in news stories as well. It is worth reiterating that, many of the notable works on convergence culture did not consider entirely the analysis of convergence in content (see Singer, 2004; Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Erdal, 2009; Herkman, 2012).

Evidence (or the lack of it) of instances of apparent media convergence in the online news stories, display the influence of the digital platform on news storytelling overall. News content from both news sites exhibit this convergence to varying degrees. At the BBC, the presence of its broadcast (television) platform is somewhat evident. As previously discussed, all audiovisual materials carried on the site featured a faint watermark of the BBC TV logo. This presupposes that the videos are extracted from the television site and were repurposed or transferred to the online site. Additionally, although not entirely related to the specific content of the news stories, I found instances of references been made to related footages of (BBC) television programmes, displayed as hyperlinks or call-outs. On occasion, outside of the actual news story, we find links to television or radio programmes being offered by the news organisation that connects with the contents of the online news story item, and appear in the form of adverts or commentary (and this occurrence is by way of cross-promotion).

Likewise at the SABC, similar instances of the cross-transfer of content were evident. Some images that were featured in the online news stories contained watermarks of SABC TV News, suggesting a still-capture of the television channel's news videos. Furthermore, some of the SABC's news videos contained a mark of the television site. As the BBC and the SABC are primarily broadcast news organisations (with radio and television channels), it is fairly evident why only audiovisual material (or on occasion graphics) on the news site would display this

evidence of cross-media coverage. Should the BBC and the SABC media institutions have had print platforms as well, it is accurate to hypothesise that the text content on the online platform would have displayed similarities to the print versions, and also some cross-transfer of content (as found in studies such as Chyi and Lasorsa 2002; d'Haenens, Jankowski and Heuvelman, 2004; Hoffman, 2006; Boczkowski and de Santos, 2007).

Erdal (2009) finds that, the reproduction or repurposing of content for the web is on the increase. The implications of this cross-media practice (and the overarching cross-media culture) are extensive with varying effects on quality standards, newsmaking cost-effectiveness, authorship and journalistic controls being documented in the literature (see Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Thurman and Lupton, 2008; Erdal 2009). With convergence journalism becoming almost mandatory for large media institutions, these evidences of a convergence culture at the BBC and the SABC are indicative of the level of adaption to (digital) technological influences. In later chapters, I discuss what the context-specific influences behind these convergence practices are and how they affect their respective newsmaking functions.

4.4.5 Strengths of 'Time' and 'Space' in the Digital Medium

Research seems to indicate that audience considerations are increasingly influencing web design, in terms of individual capacities, needs, and also consumption patterns (see Karper, 2005; Planken and Kreps, 2006). However, there are also some other inherent affordances of the web platform that influence the crafting of news stories, either positively or negatively. Affordance in the media space has been defined as the potentials and constraints of the different modes (Kress et al., 2001). Chief among such considerations is the idea that space and time are 'unlimited' in the digital space, in comparison to the print, radio and television platforms (see Fenton, 2010; Redden and Witschge, 2010). Because online news stories are not restricted to set broadcasting and publishing times (unlike the other platforms), there is a greater tendency towards updates which lends the much-needed immediacy elements to web news (see Nguyen, 2010). The BBC harnessed this potential to the extent possible by offering updates to their headline news stories. At the SABC comparatively, updates were rarely ever experienced. Once again, these findings echo our earlier assertion that the adoption of new digital techniques is context-specific. Indeed, what Matheson maintained in his 2004 study, that journalists are slow to adopt technology, and might not so enthusiastically embrace them despite the often-touted potentials, is certainly the case with the SABC, judging from these findings.

The conception of 'space' is another important consideration for web news development (see Nguyen, 2010). In that particular study, sampled audience members listed the ability to access depth and background content as part of the news story, as a major motivating factor for using internet news platforms. These attributes were seen as contributing to overall news creativity and quality. In the analysis carried out on the sampled online news from the BBC and the SABC, the ability to have 'extra' background information was seen significantly in the form of the use of hyperlinks and call-outs, more so at the BBC than at the SABC however. This availability of space on the digital platform also enables the access to archived news on-the-go, which is one great strength of the online (see Clayton, 2003; Ihlstrom and Henfridsson, 2005).

The news presentation style that was witnessed on the online platform involving the use of many and varied call-outs at the BBC, can also indicate this availability of space, perhaps more so than in print. However, Bateman, Delin and Henchel (2007) find that the idea that stories need to be non-sequential and broken down into small chunks with quotes did not in fact originate with the web, but rather in print. Ihlstrom and Henfridsson (2005) also argue that many of the forms (both linguistic and physical) of online news can also be found in print. I argue however that these instances described above are more pronounced in the online domain. For example, from the sample analysis of some UK newspapers (including *Daily Express, Metro, The Telegraph and The Times*), it appears that some newspapers incorporate call-out quotes and tweets on occasion but on a very minute scale, because they are included in only a limited number of stories per edition. It is fair to assume then that space could be one inhibiting factor to them being used extensively in print, while the special conditioning of the web interface makes it possible for these to be used extensively in online news. Nonetheless, Bateman, Delin and Henchel (2007) agree that simplified layout structure and presentation of news stories (of the kinds described above) are more consistent with web-based design. They concluded therefore that that some print editions are beginning to take on identities of online stories, rather than vice versa. This is certainly an ongoing debate that is much akin to the chicken and egg scenario between technology and journalism (as illustrated in Jones and Salter, 2012). The same arguments of space in print news can be applied to the broadcast media arena, where 'space' is constrained by the amount of time allotted to airing individual news story items. Outside of these allotted time slots, the background information which is provided through call-outs and hyperlinks on the web platform cannot be obtained.

There are certain drawbacks to this over-supply of time and space in web news dissemination however. The issue of the lack of the existence of a definite structure on the web, comparatively with the traditional media platforms was tackled by Ihlstrom and Lundberg (2003). They found that print news in particular has a definite structure which users can recognise and appreciate with time, (for example which pages contain what types of news, the space allocated to which news genres and how many pages in total). Likewise in broadcast news, the audience is able to pinpoint a precise structure in place, for example which news programme is carried at what particular time and for how long. These sorts of conventions create consistencies which can enhance audience experience. However in comparison with the online domain, while the homepages of the news websites have some structure to them because the BBC and the SABC online news audiences can generally locate, for example, where sports news or world news is on the page, the individual stories themselves paint a different picture in terms of consistency. Stories can occupy an indeterminable amount of space due to the variations in the length of any particular written text or audiovisuals, and the number and sizes of images used, or the types and number of other call-outs included. This is certainly the case for the BBC and the SABC (even more so in the case of the former than the latter as the SABC tended to make use of templates which can be said to be fairly structured). These inconsistencies make it difficult for the audience to anticipate any particular news consumption experience at any point in time.

Additionally, the overuse of constant updates, hyperlinks and other 'extra' content in the online space can create information glut (Redden and Witschge, 2010). With research establishing that attention span is dwindling on the web platform (see Zerba 2008), these sorts of online digital practices which promote the overflow of information are not going to be particularly useful if concentrating attention on the main details of the news was the goal.

4.5 The Online Newsmaking Practices of the BBC and the SABC at a Comparative Glance

It is increasingly evident that the specific impacts of the digital platform on newsmaking norms and techniques are not uniform across the board. As such, it would be erroneous to generalise these findings beyond the BBC and the SABC. As this was technically a comparative study, in order to drive home our earlier assertion that the appropriation of digital technologies is context-specific, I present from the findings some of these dissimilarities between the BBC and the SABC side-by-side. A comparative study is one where there is a systematic endeavor to compare two things, drawing out both points of convergence and divergence (see Smelser, 1976; Ragin, 1991; Collier, 1993). Through the CA, (as is also the case with the MmDA and the

interviews), I indeed investigate what is the situation at each of these two case study institutions with respect to each parameter (for example, the news report, the required skill sets, and the funding structure). And in the respective analyses sections, I identify how the findings on these individual parameters differ and also are similar in order to present the contextual nuances more forcefully.

Evidently, the two media institutions appear to be at two different levels with regard to the forms digital news storytelling are taking on their respective online news platforms. The constructivist approach applied in this study lends a greater understanding to these differing phenomena. Paterson and Domingo (2008) argue for this sort of approach to analysing new(s) media phenomena, which digs beneath the surface as it aids in avoiding technological determinism in the conclusions that are drawn. In subsequent chapters of this thesis (chapters five and six), I advance reasons (from the qualitative enquiry) that attempt to explain the dissimilarities identified below.

At the level of how the two institutions balance the traditional with shifting norms and innovations in the making of online news, it appears that the SABC approach has a greater level of convention, in comparison with the BBC where high levels of innovation were observed. This is exemplified in the SABC's use of rigid text and image templates and layout structures in a manner mimicking print platforms. The BBC's infusion of a combination of multimedia and interactive call-out elements in news stories sets a departure from this. It is also evident that the BBC exhibits a greater tendency to engage with the audience on the online platform. This is seen in their use of functional interactivity elements, for example the feedback and contact links. By soliciting for UGCs, (a phenomenon which was not experienced on the SABC online platform), the BBC demonstrated a greater tendency to adopt and adapt to new techniques according to the demands of the industry. This tendency to adapt to industry-wide trends is also seen in how regular updates are provided for daily online news stories – a phenomenon which was also almost non-existent at the counterpart case study media institution, the SABC.

The giving of certain types of attribution on the online platform is also one way in which the two institutions differed, though there were instances where their practices mirrored each other (for example, in how the watermarks of the respective institutions' logos were visible in the audiovisual contents). Beyond this however, it can be observed that the SABC named an institutional source in each and every instance, unlike the BBC. The SABC also provided actual citations of the institutional origin of the news story, even in instances when the watermark of

the SABC is evident from the graphics or videos. This was particularly important as the SABC on occasion used news stories from external wire agencies (namely REUTERS and SAPA), and hence by actually naming them, demonstrates a high degree of openness. Despite the fact that the BBC was very unlikely to be using an external agency news, it was nonetheless important that attribution is explicit rather than implied as authorship issues are magnified in the online domain (see Dupagne and Garrison, 2006). Given that the BBC was also highly likely to be using UGC due to their more regular (at least comparatively with the SABC) usage of conversational/dialogic interactivity elements, and the frequent updates made to news stories within the course of the day, this deficiency in giving attribution is noteworthy, and has been decried in certain quarters (see Phillips, Couldry and Freedman, 2010).

4.6 Concluding Discussions

The discussions have established that the exact impact of the digital platform on the nature of newsmaking is not exactly straightforward, but is subject to various (often contextual) interpretations. Therefore it is reiterated here that the claims made in this study (and for that matter this chapter) are limited to the contexts of the case study institutions of the SABC and the BBC, to their online platforms, and to hard news reporting. There is the inclination to conclude here that there is no strict approach to the forms and norms that 'work' with online news storytelling, based on the patterns that were established. It can be argued that editors (and for that matter news institutions) are operating on a loose template for what is more effective on the digital platform, by taking into consideration their respective institutional practices and mandate. Weiss and Domingo (2010, p.1158) concede, "multimedia online publishing is far from consolidated in terms of genres and production routines". That said, the basic approach of these two institutions does appear to derive fundamentally from traditional norms.

Though there is evidence of some innovative digital technology newsmaking practices, especially with the BBC, it appears journalists and news providers are still very much hinged on traditional styles, and their adoption of new techniques is at quite a cautious pace (as was shown by the modest use of multimedia and interactive elements), in agreement with Ursell's assertion that generic traditions are still very much followed, (2001). It is also important not to generalise assumptions about how the technological changes are revolutionising news storytelling across most platforms in the developed and intermediate world. As these findings indicate, within some intermediate contexts such as the case study area of South Africa in particular, the appropriation of new technologies is still low. Therefore, those benefits of the

digital platform which Harper predicted in his 1998 study are indeed there, and glimpses of them can be seen in the news stories but not at a particularly high level.

However, the argument remains that despite the low diffusion of enhanced digital techniques in online hard news storytelling within the case study institutions, the web news platform overall is seen as offering unique opportunities for storytelling that distinguish it from the traditional print and broadcast platforms. These attributes will continue to be its main selling point. Gladney, Shapiro and Costaldo, in their 2007 study that looked at quality in online news concluded that the traditional functions of providing news still hold sway over all the new add-ons. This may true only to an extent given that more and more people are going to be accessing their digital news via tablet and mobile, where the availability and usability of such add-ons are not only important, but are increasingly being demanded and provided. That said, there are often contextual challenges and complexities that hinder the audience from fully accessing the potential of online news via the various techniques and formats on offer, hence dictating the level of their use. In the SABC context, mention can be made of the challenges presented by access to fast internet connections, and this is discussed in-depth in chapter six.

Therefore, it is seen that the adoption of digital technologies is never even across the board, especially across different economic contexts. The BBC has been found to be generally an adaptive institution – even adopting private sector practices to stay competitive and relevant (Goodman, 1998; Herbert, 2001; Ursell, 2001; Johnson, 2009), and also in the use of new media to increase public participation and include audiences in the digital storytelling loop (Thumim and Chouliaraki, 2010). Likewise, the SABC has also reinvented itself as the media commercialisation process intensified (within South Africa), in order to have wider appeal and stay competitive (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995; Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2008). In the light of this, it seems reasonable to postulate here that this tendency towards adaptation within these two institutions will continue to be evident in online news production and dissemination. However the SABC position poses interesting questions as it tended not to stray too much outside the traditional ways of storytelling. The question therefore remains, would anything change in terms of its current news storytelling practices, and when? And what would be the chief drivers of this shift?

The insights shared in this chapter enable us to see how the digital platform is impacting on online hard news stories and the newsmaking process of the BBC and the SABC. They also show how important the social construct of each context is towards understanding the role played

by the platform in how news stories are made. Hence, there is a need to undertake a deeper sociological scrutiny, which is what the next chapter's multimodal discourse analysis does.

Chapter 5: The Multimodality in Online News Texts

From the discussions emanating so far, it is suggested that online hard news stories at the BBC and the SABC are multimodal in nature (that is, they involve a set of different modes). Most importantly, it appears that the application of multimodality on the online platform differs somewhat from that of the traditional platforms (of television, radio and print). Multimodality has been found to be the focus on the relationship among different semiotics within a text and how they affect (enable or constrain) interaction (see Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Iedema, 2003). It must be highlighted here that so far in the discussion, we have used 'text' in two senses – often referring specifically to 'written text' in news stories, but also on some occasions, it takes on the broader interpretation that considers 'text' as the whole analytical body (synonymous with news story) comprising all the different modal forms including graphics, videos, etc. However, in this particular chapter, I think it is very important that I highlight clearly how it is used in order to prevent a possible conflation. Unless otherwise denoted with the words 'written' text, one can assume that it (i.e. the word 'text') is being broadly interpreted. Multimodality looks beyond the materiality of language (as noted in the Glossary of Multimodal Terms – MODE, 2012). It provides a concept, method and framework by which a whole host of text items and environments are analysed and understood. It works with the assumption that all interactions draw on a set of modes (or modal elements) and are shaped by particular semiotic resources. Semiotic resources are seen as comprising the actions and tools that produce the meaning-making product, and as such include genres, modes and media (in MODE, 2012).

The objective of this chapter therefore is to investigate to what extent relevant theories on multimodality can explain and justify the existing 'new' news storytelling phenomena at the two news institutions. Hence, it explores the role of the digital platform in newsmaking from a multimodal point of view by investigating the aspects of multimodality that are unique to online news. The Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MmDA) approach which seeks to analyse newsmaking phenomena is used, where I analysed sampled BBC and SABC hard news stories that explain the theory behind the observed phenomena. This approach develops from an applied semiotics perspective where semiotic theories, methods and models are used to interrogate practical issues. Hence, it is acknowledged that this is an adapted technique towards the purposes of investigating the social dynamics behind online news, and as such is not applied in the purest sense of the understanding of these principles and models. It is theoretically underpinned by the social semiotics philosophy as interpreted in the works of

linguist Michael Halliday, where sign/language use is situated within a social construct and therefore contextually understood (1978). Hence, it emerges from the understanding that these signs are created with some particular purpose in mind, and are set historically and contextually, outside of the fixed norms and structures (van Leeuwen, 2005).

Mode, the central element of this chapter's analysis is fundamentally defined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and Jewitt (2004), respectively as a channel or a means of representation. It is noted in the Glossary of Multimodal Terms (MODE, 2012) that, "modes are not autonomous and fixed, but, created through social processes, {and} are fluid and subject to change". Both Goddard (2004) and Norris (2004) offer a reflective view on modeness where they interpret that modes are not defined in absolute terms, (where for example a phone call or a casual conversation is not treated strictly as oral text, and essays strictly as written text). This is the stance taken in this study. This view is fitting to the digital age (and most certainly to the online medium) where such variability in distinguishing modes exists. Good illustrations of this, outside of online news, are the medium of Skype (or the Internet Relay Chat), both of which are not absolutely confined to oral language. This broad interpretation of Goddard (2004) and Norris (2004) is therefore apt and advantageous in underpinning this analysis as it justifies the consideration of digital news elements such as hypertext and interactive links and icons, as is done here.

It must be reiterated that though multimodality on its own is not just a new media phenomenon, researchers are increasingly turning attention to investigating different aspects of the multimodality of online communication specifically (for example, Goddard, 2004; Flewitt, 2011). In this thesis, multimodality is considered in accordance with Jewitt's argument that "multimodality can be understood as a theory, a perspective or a field of enquiry, or a methodological application" (2009, p.12). While O'Halloran and Smith also note that, "multimodal studies apply existing generalisations (of theory, description, methodology) to the exploration of specific multimodal phenomena, sets of texts or contexts in order to cast new light on those domains" (2011, p.4). Towards the goal of achieving this therefore, in this thesis, various news techniques and formats are explored and explained by looking within and outside of the textual elements.

Consequently, a relevant multimodal theoretical framework was developed and then applied to illustrative case studies in the following sections. Here, the intersection and the interdependence of the various modalities of communication within the given contexts of the

BBC and the SABC's online news stories are considered in order to identify the influences behind and within the modes deployed. The investigation attempts to advance a step further beyond the previous chapter's quantitative and qualitative CA, to a more complex understanding of the deployment of these modes on the online platform.

In the section immediately following this, a justification for the applicability of multimodality (as a concept and methodology) to the study of online hard news texts at the BBC and the SABC is offered, as well as how it was operationalised in the study. This is followed by a presentation of the developed framework and how it was employed. In the analysis and discussion therefore, the identified notions of 'socially-constructed digital practices', 'digital literacy', 'modal affordances', 'hybrid media', and 'altered-storytelling sphere' are used to study how the digital platform is influencing (multimodal) news storytelling in the contexts of the BBC and the SABC. This chapter basically posits that current newsmaking norms and forms at the BBC and the SABC are explained by the notions identified and discussed in the framework.

5.1 The Application of Multimodality to Online News Texts

In order to draw out how the phenomena (of multimodality) is explained and validated, the MmDA methodology is applied. Application-wise, relevant predetermined theories on multimodality are tested and illustrated with sample online news texts from the BBC and the SABC, as well as contextual phenomena cases specific to the BBC or the SABC (and by inference the relevant aspects of the British and the South African media environment respectively). The analysis is therefore undertaken by matching the various theoretical notions (explained in the framework) to the illustrative case studies so that the latter can explain and validate the former.

Overall, attributes such as colour, page layout, and the overall document design are considered central to the analysis, while taking into account also the contextual socio-cultural, political and economic processes surrounding (and exacting an influence) on text production and dissemination.

The framework therefore serves a dual purpose of being a checklist and also a test of the hypotheses that have been made about the existing news storytelling techniques and formats. The process of doing this thus enables us to also generate explanatory factors for why the identified states of newsmaking formats and techniques are the way they are. To this end

therefore, the test case studies are merely intended to represent what the newsmaking norm is at a particular point in time when considered under that specific characterising notion (as contained in the framework). The hard news texts used in the analysis were therefore purposively sampled from the two news sites over a period of two months. The texts were subsequently captured in static form (through screen grabs) for inclusion in the chapter. A purposive sample is one in which the sample set is selected by the researcher subjectively based on a predetermined criteria (see Dawson, 2007). There are however trade-offs to its use because while it enables definite comparism to be made, it also has a high degree of bias, as well as the inability to generalise the conclusions to any degree beyond the applicable cases.

However, as this study aims to critically evaluate the space of online newsmaking using these exact case studies, insight into these contextual norms of how the BBC and the SABC's online newsmaking is impacted by specific technologies trumps the ability to generalise across a range of digital technologies, digital platforms and news organisations. This is because the goal of the thesis is to unearth the specific nuances of how the transformation of online newsmaking is happening specifically at the BBC and the SABC and not to offer an overall (likely technologically-deterministic) view. As the analysis in this chapter is considered within the larger corpus of findings from both the CA and the interviews, these are seen as offering sufficient validation of the arguments raised and helps strengthen them. Furthermore, as the design of the study does not make room for any form of direct enquiry of the audience, approaching the MmDA methodology through the use of pre-formulated hypothesis on how meaning is intended by producers and received by consumers therefore enables some sort of audience consideration to be done, albeit very limited and indirect. As Bezemer and Kress (2008, p.170) postulate, "one cannot analyse representations by focusing on design(ers) and ignoring those who use them". Hence, I must emphasise there that the study does not ignore the usefulness of investigating the audience. However, its focus is from a practitioner's perspective and concerned largely with the online news production practices, and this ties in well with the objective of understanding producer motivations. However, the robustness of the MmDA approach adopted here enables some form of unintended audience study to be done, and that is a definite plus.

5.2 The Theoretical Framework of Analysis

In this chapter, I hypothesise that online hard news reporting norms at the BBC and the SABC would exhibit, explain or be explained by some form of the phenomena (henceforth called

notions) discussed in the succeeding framework. The underpinning philosophy of all the notions is that of *social semiotics* who generally theorise that in order to understand media representations, one cannot rely on the readings of the media texts alone, but must also consider the social constructs within and outside of them (as evolved from Halliday, and subsequently Kress and Van Leeuwen). Contemporary multimodal and or new media researchers such as Cottle (2003), Constantinou (2005), Pauwels (2005; 2012), and O'Halloran and Smith, (2011) therefore approach their analyses of the digital domain from this philosophy in a quest to arrive at conclusions about the digital space that offer sufficient insight into this relevant interplay between technology and society. This is in conformity with the interpretation of media convergence as both a socio-culturally and technologically constructed phenomenon (see Jenkins, 2006).

The notions are premised on some assumptions which emanate from a reading of existing literature, backed by the findings resulting from the CA process undertaken in the preceding chapter. These assumptions are important as they give a legitimate platform upon which to develop the notions used in this analysis. I have captured them thus:

- Digital news involves a set of different modes, and the application of multimodality on the digital platform differs from its application on the television, radio and print platforms. This is seen in how modes are interpreted fluidly and differently for online so that techniques such as multimediality, interactivity and hypertextuality are catered for (see for example Goddard, 2004; Norris, 2004)

- These modes have distinct affordances (potentials and constraints) peculiar to the digital platform, and therefore to make sense of online newsmaking, one needs to attend to all the different modes and the relations between them (see Kress et al, 2001; Kress, 2010)

- The techniques of newsmaking employing these modes in new ways though influenced principally by shifting new media technologies are also to an extent impacted by socio-culturally shaped resources (see Cottle, 2003).

Consequently, what is analysed and explained by the illustrative news texts and context case stories incorporates the following theoretical notions. I must emphasise here that while these are not the only characterising frameworks with which to analyse online news, all the

discussions (from the literature and also from the findings emanating from the CA as discussed in chapter four) show that they are some of the more obvious and relevant ones due to the thematic patterns that were established. Additionally, these particular notions are more applicable in exploring the answers to the specific research questions which this thesis attempts to answer.

1. The notion of socially constructed digital practices surrounding the production of the meaning-making artifacts. This notion demonstrates that the semiotic choices of the BBC and the SABC's online newsmaking process (including how layout, colour, links and textual formats are used) are indicative of some larger socio-cultural processes at play. This follows arguments put forth by multimodal researchers Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2001), Iedema (2003) and Feng (2011) that fundamental choices in these text productions, and the contexts within which they are accessed by readers are influenced by socio-economic, legal and political structures behind the institutions and the societies in which these production and consumption processes take place.

   This notion therefore summarises the stance adopted towards the interpretation of all the other notions discussed below.

2. The notion of digital literacy. Digital literacy refers to the capacity to access and use information from digital (re)sources, by employing some basic competences (see Gilster, 1997; Bawden, 2008). It also considers the practices associated with the use of the digital space, which Papen (2009) calls the literacies of cyberspace. This notion therefore explores the idea that the competencies required of both producers and consumers with respect to the production and use of contemporary and multimodal media texts are changing (Lim, Nekmat and Nahar, 2011). Additionally, the idea that the changing technologies do not have embedded connotations but are constructed and operationalised differently across the contexts is advanced (Jewitt, 2011).

   It is argued here that the online news story productions emerging from the BBC and the SABC news sites reflect the understanding of the different digital capacities at play (with regards to both producers and consumers), which the illustrative cases attempt to show.

3. The notion of modal affordances. Modal affordance is noted in the Glossary of Multimodal Terms to have been created by Kress to mean the potentials and constraints of the different modes. It is indicated further that "the term 'affordance' is not a matter of perception, but rather refers to the materially, culturally, socially and historically developed ways in which meaning is made with particular semiotic resources" (MODE, 2012). The analysis involving this notion illustrates the idea that within (and outside of) each online news story, there are particular strengths (as well as challenges) associated with how the different modes are deployed and operationalised within each context of the BBC and the SABC (see for example Kress et al, 2001; Kress, 2010). Hence I consider strengths and weaknesses from both producer and consumer points of view.

   The analysis therefore tries to identify what exactly the various (technological) formats and norms offer to the online news story by way of strengths or weaknesses.

4. The notion of hybrid media. This notion allows news texts to be seen as a continuity between the old and new media platforms' norms and practices, as shown in the previous chapter's discussions. Eisenlauer (2011) for example, identifies and discusses both similarities and differences between new and old media multimodal techniques – the approach adopted in this sub-section's analysis. This concept builds on the theory of media convergence where new technologies are seen as supplementing rather than substituting for the existing mediums and platforms (see Jenkins, 2006).

5. The notion of an altered storytelling sphere. This concept develops upon the argument put forth in earlier critical review chapters that the arena of online storytelling and journalism has become altered such that the roles, identities and practices associated with being a mainstream news storyteller are being redefined. In its application to explaining multimodal newsmaking, it argues for and builds upon in particular the digital nonlinear formats being currently employed and their influences, and the implications of how they are used, as noted in the works of Iedema (2003) and Robinson (2009).

   The analysis therefore considers how these shifting practices are reflected in the BBC and the SABC's online hard news stories.

Purpose of the analysis and how it proceeded

The examination of the online news storytelling form through the lens of these notions is intended first of all to flag them as the most relevant multimodal influences in the (online) newsmaking space, as they are the most obvious ones from the examination of the literature and the previous chapter's empirical findings. Secondly, it is intended to draw out how these notions are specifically explained and supported differently in each context (of the BBC and the SABC). Towards this therefore, specific examples of news stories and context cases are drawn upon for the purpose of analysis. The idea is not to offer them as strict generalisations across the broad range of digital platforms and newsmaking environments. However, admittedly, these analyses may rightly be applicable to several other cases, and may engender similar arguments.

The discussions therefore stress that each case offers a distinct explanation of the phenomena based on the consideration of other sub-factors. This is in line with arguments put forth by social semiotics theorists (for example van Leeuwen, 2005) that social semiotics is seen as neither self-contained (to be considered on its own outside of the specific interrelated field), nor does it offer ready-made answers, but rather functions as a form of enquiry. Therefore, these explorations merely provide a valid lens through which any particular online newsmaking phenomena or process (within or outside of the BBC and the SABC) can be understood at any point in time.

5.3 Discussions – Exploring the Frames Behind the BBC and the SABC Online News Stories

It is worth reiterating that the explorations around the multimodality in news texts as undertaken in this chapter are subsumed under the concept of the sociology of technology (see Cottle, 2003; Pauwels, 2005; 2012) where the social constructions behind the textual production are equally important as the enquiries being made into the exact state of the technology being used. Drawing from this therefore, this section discusses how the digital practices surrounding online news production at the BBC and the SABC are shaped by the prevailing sociological contexts of the two media institutions. Consequently, all new media actions and techniques are seen as being explained by a set of phenomena specific to the context.

5.3.1 Socially-constructed Digital Practices

Iedema (2003) whose work particularly on resemiotisation best encapsulates this idea that digital practices are embedded within a social construct, notes that beyond the considerations

around the text, multimodality should be complemented with a dynamic view of how (texts) "transmogrify as part of a larger, dynamic process" (p.30). This line of argument emerges from Halliday's interpretation of text as a social action which has a socially-meaningful role, and also (the critical) linguists who maintain that text features are linked to social and institutional contexts (including politics and ideologies). Further, according to Cottle (2003) a mere reading of media texts alone is not enough to "understand why media representations assume the forms that they do" (p.3).

It is therefore necessary that the analysis of multimodal text on the BBC and the SABC news sites begins with a look at the central hypothesis – that these texts are the result of socially-constructed (digital) practices. Pauwels (2005) in supporting this view argues that:

> The current discourse about the web or the internet, and about computer-mediated communications (CMCs), is fortunately moving beyond determinist notions of technology, which tend to view technological innovation as an independent factor that subsequently produces social practices and uses. The complex interplay between society and technology has become the central strand of the 'sociology' of technology. (p.604)

This is the idea expanded upon in the next sub-section's look into the environment surrounding the BBC and the SABC's online news production.

5.3.1.1 The BBC's Production of Online News as a World-class Broadcaster

The online news website of the BBC (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/) has been cited as one of the world's most visited news websites (according to Reese et al., 2007; and also more recent statistics from the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2012). As a Public Service Broadcaster (PSB), the BBC has historically been found to have access to a vast amount of resources – including financial, technological, and human ones (see Steemers, 1999; Jakubowicz, 2006) – and its current sophisticated online news content production therefore reflects these factors. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have found that the current state of online media text is highly visual and this is due to standards set by global powerhouses that have access to the resources to make this format available. They note "the dominant visual language is now controlled by the global cultural/technological empires of the mass media, which disseminate the examples set by exemplary designers, and through the spread of image banks and computer imaging

technology, exert a 'normalising' rather than explicitly 'normative' influence on visual communication across the world" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p.4).

Cooke (2005) also contends that for global institutions that are increasingly becoming convergent, it is recognised that there is a convergence of (visual) presentation, where platforms have visual similarities that are shaped by dynamic media environments (including technological, cultural and social factors). Consequently, news text production at the BBC, and certainly within the UK media environment is expected to incorporate large amounts of high-resolution graphics (including images, charts and graphs) and audiovisual material. Heightened use of corporate brand colours is also expected to emphasise this visual identity and establish a resemblance to all the other platforms (radio, television), thus reinforcing the corporate culture and identity. A typical BBC online news story is therefore characterised by dominant use of images and the corporate brand colours (of red and white) in ways that reinforce Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) and Cooke's (2005) arguments. However, it must be emphasised that this phenomena is not necessarily peculiar to online as Franklin (2009b) also discusses the increase in the use of photographic storytelling in print.

Beyond this, other influences from the institution's socio-economic environment are identified in the literature. For example, the BBC's funding structure has been well-debated with each turn taken by the UK economy, and this has also been well-documented historically in the literature (see for example Goodwin, 1993; Stevens, 1998; Ursell, 2001; Born, 2004). These researchers also discussed the implications of this financial structure on news production overall (be it on the radio, television, or web platforms), and this has been discussed in-depth in the case study section in chapter three.

From an online-specific perspective however, the notable argument that the BBC needed to be more competitive in programming with the evolution of the internet in order to justify public-sector investment is once again raised. For example, as Thumim and Chouliaraki (2010) found, the BBC has been forced (obliged) to adopt practices that favor the alternative media space such as the use of user-generated content (UGC). This is because the use of UGC for example, at a philosophical and practical level does not align with the mainstream media ethos of editorial control and gatekeeping, and can also be seen as disrupting the general level of opaqueness that is maintained with regard to newsmaking processes. From the sampled news, this factor is cross-translated in current online news production, reflected specifically in how news stories are made to include some levels of conversational interactivity through the use of

the feedback/comments forums. Despite this occurrence however, one would find that conventional practices still prevail in how these citizen-generated material are not given a central role (for example through explicitly naming sources of UGC). Therefore, Gillespie's (2009, p.324) argument that "user-generated content is filtered, framed and situated within existing templates" seems in fact to be the case.

To reinforce this argument of the BBC adopting alternative media practices, I highlight here the approach adopted towards external hyperlinking where I had previously observed that the BBC does undertake them, albeit not extensively. This is intended to endear them to online audiences as open to and enabling of the 'share culture' that is promoted in the web domain. One can also contend that the BBC's use of highly visual material (mostly in sports news) as discussed is indicative of this move towards more private-sector, non-mainstream newsmaking practices, as it has been observed that they mirror the approach used by some alternative news platforms such as BuzzFeed. It can also be seen as a manifestation of what van Leeuwen (2006) observes to be an increasing importance and formality associated with the visual image in the typography of the screen. Newsmakers, such as the BBC are inclined to do so much more with the written word, harnessing colour, shape and other stylistic effects that can extend the meanings attached not just to news content but also to the organisational brand.

It is evident therefore that online newsmaking practices are not wholly determined by technology, but also by some internal and external factors – which play a crucial part in news format and technique choices, as well as in how digital tools are used generally.

5.3.1.2 The SABC's Online News Production from the Perspective of Africa's Premier PSB

The SABC, one of Africa's largest PSBs, has numerous radio and television divisions situated in most provinces of South Africa, with the online division (http://www.sabc.co.za/news) being a more recent addition (Abboo, 2009). From these numerous traditional media units spread across the country – which are organised along language and/or provincial lines – the SABC churns out a large amount of news stories daily in the form of written text, audio and videos (interview account, 2013). From this vast amount of news material, topical stories are reversioned and reformatted for the online platform. The decisions on what particular news items make the cut and in what formats they are to be published, are influenced by a whole host of factors, not just technological (interview account, 2013).

However, I highlight here how some of these factors influence the current online newsmaking practice. Firstly, the SABC has been noted to be the pioneer media broadcaster not only in South Africa but also in the rest of the African sub-region (Abboo, 2009). This factor coupled with its post-apartheid mission of adequately serving its constituency by providing news that appeals to a wide range of interests both within and outside of South Africa (see Teer-Tomaselli, 1995; Abboo, 2009) implies that it has a whole lot of disparate audiences to deal with. Secondly, being an African state-broadcaster (which from historical precedence tend to be more inclined towards established traditional structures), bureaucratic tendencies towards the greater use of traditional media – as opposed to new media – abound (Abboo, 2009). Further, as Ndangam (2008) and Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker (2014) find, African online journalists often have to work with inadequate infrastructure, especially since internet media penetration levels in South Africa are not too high (at 51.5% of the population as at 2014, according to the Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2014). There's a challenge with being partial and serving only a particular audience group (for example, those with access to technology, and who might be international in nature). There have been concerns raised by researchers in the field that exclusive focus can lead to exclusion in these societies. For example, when there is limited production of content in local languages, it can affect the extent to which certain citizens can engage with the democratization process (see Bwalya, Du Plessis, and Rensleigh, 2013).

In the case of the SABC, the combination of the aforementioned factors translate into the SABC's online news being characterised by 1) comparatively (with the BBC), a greater number of news story items per day on the homepage which comprise all the different genres, 2) a tendency towards having simpler use of multimedia and 3) a greater use of press agencies.

The SABC produces a vast amount of news material daily from all its various traditional units, many of which are potentially of interest to the different members of the very diverse online audience. Understandably, online editors therefore have a harder time deciding which material to include on the website. Considering that all the news material has to be repurposed for the web, and bearing in mind the limited resources available and the challenges posed by the South African media environment (from both producer and consumer perspectives), the average SABC online hard news story sampled from any given set is likely to be lighter on multimedia material. Evidently, multimedia material requires greater technological resources to produce and consume in comparison with plain written text.

Further, the constraints posed by inadequate financial capacity translate into the recourse towards a greater use of press agencies. This is because using the material from the newswires tends to be a cheaper option for the SABC compared to sending out reporters to cover individual stories. I must acknowledge at this point that by raising the above arguments, I am making some intelligent suppositions which would be validated with evidence from the interviews in the next chapter.

It appears from these discussions therefore that though the sociological contexts of the BBC and the SABC are not homogenous and therefore do not exact similar influences, collectively these impacts as showcased explain why particular news institutions would exhibit the specific online newsmaking traits that they do at any point in time.

5.3.2 Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has been noted to be a highly problematic concept to interpret (Das and Pavlíčková, 2013). Nonetheless, it serves as an important consideration for understanding why the online news stories of the BBC and the SABC assume the forms that they do, because as Barton (2009, p.484) observes, new technologies shift the materiality of what we think about literacy. Digital literacy refers to the capacity to access and use information from digital (re)sources, by employing some basic competences (see Gilster, 1997; Bawden, 2008). In the newsmaking domain, this capacity is assessed from both the viewpoints of the producers and the consumers. Because interactive digital technologies are accessed and utilised according to the prevailing conditions in each specific context, it is necessary to consider those of the BBC and the SABC (and for that matter the larger UK and South Africa media environment more broadly) in relation to particular producer and consumer capacities and practices.

Bezemer and Kress (2008, p.170) state that "in a social semiotic account of meaning and meaning making, producers as well as users {...} are regarded as meaning makers or *sign makers"*. Interpreted within the understanding of digital capacities, this therefore raises the following arguments. Firstly, that the collective practices of news producers that translate into the final news text are invariably influenced and impacted by the individual skill sets, as well as the organisational capacity with which they operate. Secondly, news consumers in making meaning from these news texts are influenced by their individual capacities, as well as the socially-situated capacities wrought by outside influences such as the technology in place for news access within that particular media environment.

Though print and broadcast media demand similar competencies, the online domain offers its own unique challenges because the consumption of news stories demands a greater 'participation' or 'performance' by the audience (assuming these opportunities to interact are actually taken up). Therefore digital literacies from both producer and consumer perspectives are essential considerations. Chan, Lee and Pan (2006) however maintain that the requirements of news on the online space call for proficiencies that go beyond technical capacity. Similarly, Das (2011) acknowledges that in the questions on literacies in media use, invariably how central is the notion of technology remains an argument. Nonetheless, digital literacy remains a vital consideration.

In the online domain, the use of the myriad of newsmaking techniques – including multimedia, interactivity and hypertextuality calls for definite technological capacities. Livingstone for instance, (having conducted countless audience studies on the subject), in her 2004 paper tries to understand specifically how hypertext pathways are followed by readers. She maintains that this is an important consideration for web news (development), and raises questions for how it (the hypertext) influences reading and the new media skill sets required of users – and therefore influences overall content delivery. Papen (2009) also observes that definite technological capacities are needed to engage with the language of the web, which is often multimodal and interactive in nature in line with the requirements of the medium.

However, the illustrative cases in the following sub-section show that, though digital capacities are necessary considerations in how the BBC and the SABC format online news stories, they are not the only ones and should not be looked at in isolation.

5.3.2.1 Digital Literacy Through the Online News Pages of the BBC and the SABC

Researchers in the field all seem to be in agreement that it is important to look at 'what lies behind the text' (see for example, Das, 2011; Das and Pavlíčková, 2013). Koltay (2011) therefore notes that, towards our understanding of (digital) literacies, the issues surrounding how text is composed and comprehended is paramount as a research enquiry, where there is a need to be critically evaluative of what is 'not-so obvious' in the text.

Overall, Flewitt (2011) offers a definition of literacy in the postmodern, networked society which is relevant to this evaluation. She maintains that "learning to be 'literate' involves acquiring a range of skills and practices in different media, where individuals need new kinds of expertise, technical skills and understanding" (p.297). Hence, Martin's interpretation of digital

literacy as the ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities (2006, p.19) is left open to our interpretation of what level is appropriate in each of the cases studied. Bawden (2008) however explicitly maintains that digital literacy should specifically include abilities such as knowledge assembly, information retrieval, and publishing and communicating. Papen (2009) also introduces a new term – literacies in cyberspace – which offers an interesting line of enquiry here. These literacies, which are said to exist in computer technologies, go beyond the forms available (for example, reading and writing), to the new practices of engaging in using them. These practices are socio-culturally constructed, and can be shaped by how a group of people work (in this case newsroom agents), which Barton (2009) classifies as workplace literacies. These different definitions taken together highlight the problematic nature of the concept. However, it is observed that on their own, each one makes up for the deficiencies in the other(s), which is why in this thesis, I choose to draw on all these different definitions to explain the applicability of digital literacy. Thus in summary, from all these different understandings of the term, it can be interpreted that the digitally literate person has to be comfortable, creative and critical with the daily use of any of these news texts, and be knowledgeable about what are their specific implications within the broader media context. Most importantly, it goes beyond the mastery of computers or technology to knowing how to access tools and information and what to do with them (Papen, 2009; Jones and Hafner, 2012; Dunn, 2013). Hence, I examine to what extent any of these 'literacies' are required for the news stories that are produced (and also consumed) at the BBC and the SABC.

It is worth reiterating that as PSBs, the BBC and the SABC are mandated to ensure that their online news (resources) can be accessed and utilised by a cross-section of the public (audience) in conformity with what they assume their individual or collective digital literacy capacities to be. As Kawamoto (2003, p.5) notes, (computer) literacy does help in exploiting the resources used within the digital journalism platform. This consideration should therefore also take cognisance of the so-called digital *haves* and *have-nots*, which Murthy discussed in his 2008 study as those with access to and knowledge of digital platforms, and those who do not. Papen (2009) and McClure (2013) delineate them into digital natives and digital immigrants, where the former see current literacy practices as inborn and therefore not new, and which is the opposite case with the latter group that have to have a new appreciation of these changing fields. Both these understandings are particularly relevant for the South African context where the constraints of internet access and technological infrastructure have been identified on one

hand, and a revolution in social media platforms is being experienced on the other, ironically (see Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker, 2014).

Indeed, these various analytical perspectives on digital literacy can be applied specifically to online news stories, and here I will use them in a slightly more extended analysis of the text under consideration. In the first illustrated sample hard news text below (see Figure 7 below), the story is a typical topical public interest news story published on the BBC online news homepage. It is observed that the story is composed of the three distinct modes (of written text, graphics and audiovisuals). Additionally, three different call-outs are included in the story – an analysis, a graph, and a map (all arrowed). The obligatory hyperlinked 'related stories' feature is in place at the right side of the page, and the share buttons are at the top and bottom of the page respectively. The interactive comments section is also in place (in this instance), at the bottom of the page. It appears from the use of these varied digital formats and techniques, that at the BBC there is an appreciation and anticipation of a sufficiently high degree of digital ability not only in the producers but also in the audience. Firstly, this involves having access to the technology (for example, the internet), and being able to access the BBC news page from whichever source. Thereafter, the ability to know what to do with each segment of the content on offer is vital. In the online domain, this can be particularly challenging for persons of various limited digital literacy backgrounds and practices. Hence, ability to access and navigate through the page is simply not enough. For example, from the section in yellow highlights, it is observed that the audience who wish to interact at the higher level through the comments section need to be able to sign-in/register. The old, the uneducated, and the so-called digital immigrants might generally find this harder to do, comparatively. Lankshear and Knobel (2008) provided a long list of the digital literacy requirements that include an understanding and use of discussion forums, FAQs and search navigation tools, internet memes, etc. Sometimes this translates into simply knowing what is authentic in the news story, for example, what has been 'photo-shopped'. Papen (2009) notes that in the internet space, a new pressure on literacy is simply knowing what to do with the gamut of information provided – essentially what to trust within the news story as accurate information. Even the use of hypertext pathways can present complications. For example, the audience will need to appreciate what is an original post by the media organisation or what has been deep-linked, though this is not an issue with the BBC news platform specifically.

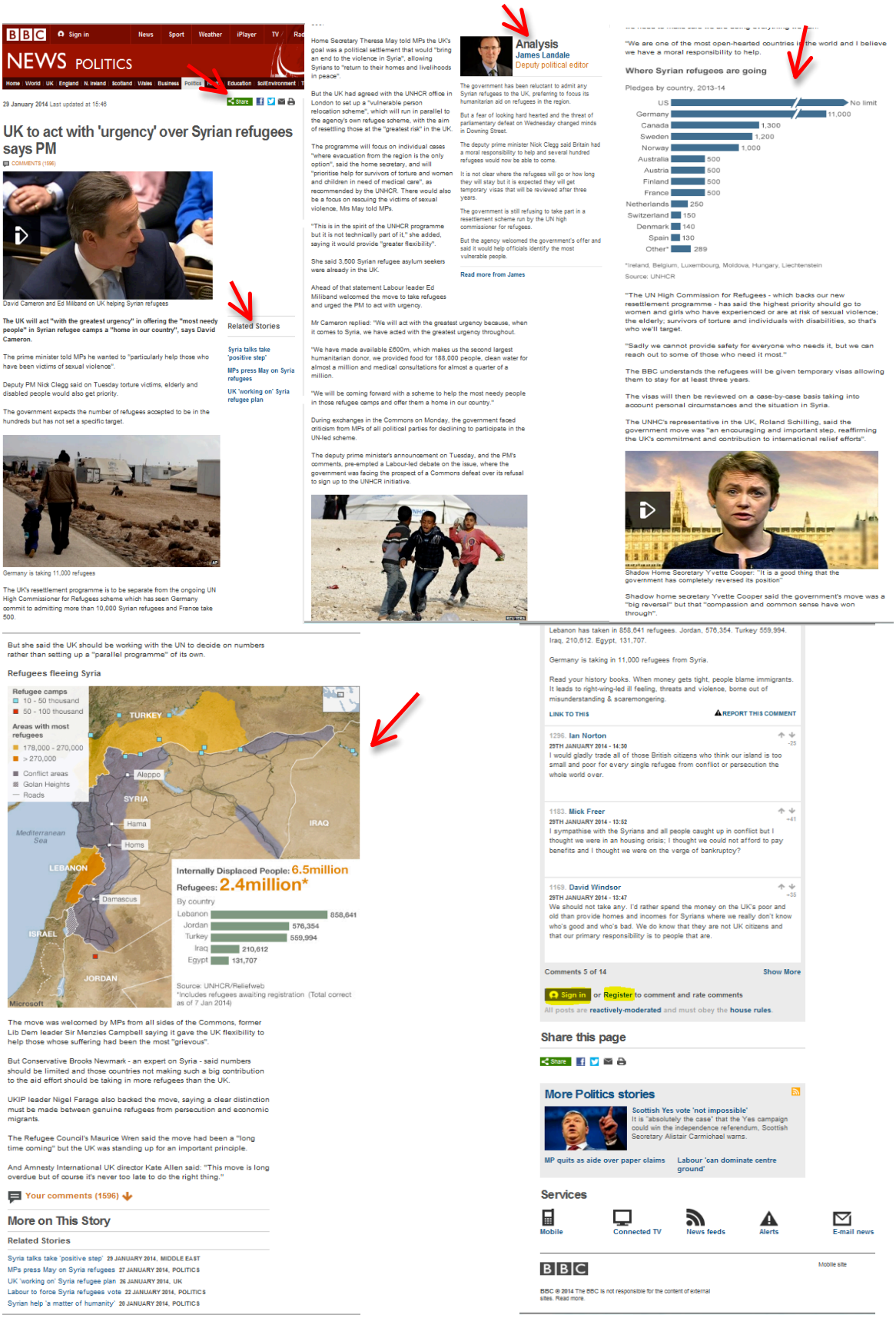


Figure 7: A BBC news story which highlights enhanced use of some digital techniques

In terms of audience involvement in the news discourse, though similarities have been drawn between phone-ins (in radio and television broadcast) and 'letters to the editor' (in print), to

the web news interactive section, it is evident that there is a different level of literacy at play here quite above the requirements for radio, television and print due to the level of involvement that is expected of the consumer. For example, Papen (2009) argues that most of the new ways of writing on the net is interactive, whiles Jones and Hafner (2012) observe that there's the breakdown of barriers between media producers and consumers, which is what facilitates this engagement. However, past research has shown that a greater portion of the audience who are digitally literate do not in fact necessarily make much use of the extra interactivity opportunities offered by online news sites (Himelboim and McCreery, 2012). Hence, Papen argues that though digital technologies offer more possibilities for engagement, they need to be actively applied. In the case of the SABC, it needs to be facilitated by the newsmakers in ways that suit that particular context, such as the use of the more ubiquitous social media platform to solicit for comments instead of the online news portal.

Here, it is important for newsmakers to understand what McClure (2013) observes to be the informational needs of users. In this context, this principally involves knowing what the audience requirements are of each news content, and could be anything from in-depth analyses, to access to the opinions of members of the public on a topical issue (available through the comments section). The next chapter's explorations try to understand the views that news producers from the case study organisations have about this requirement.

However, a look at a similar hard news story, albeit of the news genre health, but published on the same day presents a different picture. From the sample news text (in Figure 8 below), a simple, basic news-story format written mainly in plain, short text with, a single audiovisual and image, with no call-outs used at all, is observed. Outside of the one embedded hypertext, and a 'related stories' hyperlink feature which is in place at the right side of the written text (both arrowed), the story is devoid of any of the other embellishments typically used by the BBC. The obligatory share buttons, and other services buttons are however in place at the bottom of the page. The characteristics presented by this sample case in comparison with the previous case, indicate that at any point in time, there are other considerations in place for how online news stories are formatted. Evidently, these go beyond the question of the existence of certain (digital) capacities or not, which is why any of these theoretical arguments should not be considered in isolation.

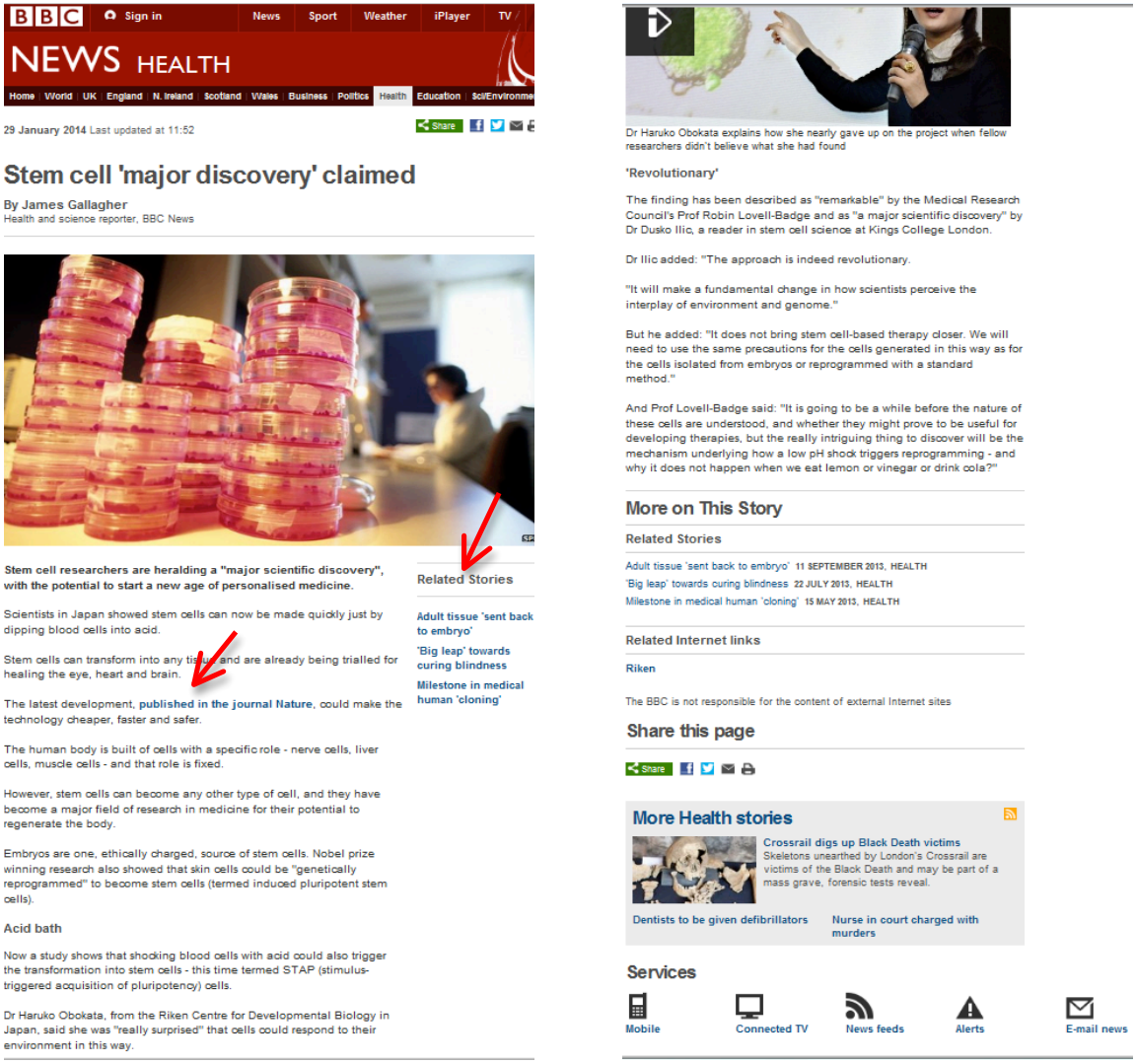


Figure 8: A BBC news story which highlights limited use of some digital techniques

At the SABC, a typical hard news story – however of the business genre and published on the same day as the two BBC stories, appears as Figure 9 below. Here, it is identified that the story is a fairly simple one composed entirely of written text and graphics. However, by way of an 'extra' call-out element, a *Storify* component has been included. The routine hyperlinks appear as tags under the story's only image, which is placed in the customary top left corner of the page. The share buttons are also in place at the bottom of the page.

The idea of simplicity is carried throughout the text – in the lack of audiovisual materials, more and bigger graphics, interactive icons, and more (and embedded) hypertext. This format reflects first of all, the limitations imposed on producers and the consumers by the limited internet infrastructure, which is why less bandwidth-heavy formats are seen. Additionally, considering that access of online news via social media platforms on a mobile device is what is prevalent in the South African context, a format which does not require the opening up of

additional pages, and zooming in and out (as would be required of interactive links and hypertext pathways) is therefore preferred, as seen. Therefore, though it is believed that these new literacies come with more opportunities for enhancing democracy, participation and greater creativity (Papen, 2009, pp. 496-497), it is seen that these possibilities are often contextually appropriated.

An important observation has been put forward by researchers (see Dunn, 2013), that there isn't a universal standard of literacy, but rather multiple literacies that are constructed internally by nuanced cultural, political and historical contexts of the different societies. The analyses so far show that both the BBC and the SABC have differing approaches to how each handles specific news formats and digital techniques. To illustrate, the latter uses social media platform extensively to gather UGC while the former uses the comments section on its news site. It is thought therefore that societies leverage their own contextual understandings to utilize the full extent of technological platforms. This aligns to the idea advanced by Barton (2009) on literary practices, where people apply their literacies in ways that embody belief systems, values and common norms. For example, he talks of workplace literacies where a group of people codify their everyday usage of language, noting that these practices are situated such that they "exist within a cultural context and are built up from existing practices" (p.483). An examination of the text alone however, does not reveal much about these behaviours, which is why the findings from the interviews are particularly insightful.

It must be noted that that though this sample news text is reflective of a significant majority of the hard news texts that are published on the SABC site, there are however also a number of sampled hard news stories that display more sophisticated use of digital techniques and tools. Therefore, much like the conclusion drawn from the BBC case, news production processes at any point in time incorporate considerations that go beyond the perceived level of digital literacy on either part (of the producer or the audience). The intent (of the newsmaker) is of course paramount in understanding why the news is presented this way. The next chapter's discussions emanating from the interviews with some SABC online news editors shed more light on this.

Figure 9: An SABC news story highlighting limited use of some digital techniques

5.3.3 Modal Affordances

A lot of researchers have delved into the issue of what exactly 'mode' is, especially in making allowances for how definitions are transformed in the online domain. Jewitt (2004) defines mode broadly as a means of representation. In the online news domain, this representation could be in any form ranging from the easily-distinguishable written text or image, to the more complex link or an interactive icon. This fluid interpretation conforms to Goddard's (2004) astute digital-age reflection on the lack of absoluteness in defining a mode when taking the web into consideration. However, Constantinou (2005) maintains that this does present the problem of what exactly is to be considered to be the form of the communicative mode as an object to be analysed, and this is a relevant consideration for this thesis as well. Nevertheless, I will argue that this broad outlook does enrich the analysis and does not present a problem as I am fairly consistent with my treatment of what I consider as analytic objects. Norris (2006) for example maintains that "the definition has to be useful to the analysis" (2006, p. 402).

The social semiotics approach to multimodality which also considers the affordances (i.e. the potentials and constraints) of these different modes (see Kress et al., 2001) is particularly important when analysing the role of the digital space in online news story making. At the BBC and the SABC news sites, we see a mix of different modes being deployed depending on the intentions behind the particular story. It is relevant to discuss the contexts of these modes, because as Flewitt (2011, p. 295) explained, "the temporal and material qualities of modes, {..} are determined partly by the materiality of the medium, and partly by how that medium is used within a particular culture". In this chapter, the interpretation of affordances also embraces the inherent qualities that the semiotic resources possess overall which enable some action to be performed on them (be it by the newsmaker or the consumer). This understanding goes beyond their physical capacity to the motivations and capacities of the people using them – which is perceivable in the ways the object is interacted with (see Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988). For example, to illustrate how the analysis considers modal resources as the analytic object, I consider that the layout of the story and the various ways the other modal forms are used (if at all), and situated within the news page either presents some challenges or opportunities (see treatment by van Leeuwen, 2006).

Therefore in order to evaluate what exactly each mode is 'affording' to the news story as a whole, this analysis considers among other things the complexity of the 'language', the layout, and the visual design – attributes identified and endorsed by both Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001, 2006) and Iedema (2003). To Iedema, this identification is premised on the idea that each mode (on its own) or within the larger body of corpus, transcribes the world differently. Hence, he sees each object as performing a specific function such that there is some kind of division of labour present between all the modal elements at the point of representation within the larger body (2003). Van Leeuwen (2006) also considers that there are inherent (ideational, interpersonal and textual) meanings which can be drawn out. I therefore discuss in the following sub-sections, modal choices (particularly within the SABC and the BBC) and what they mean.

5.3.3.1 Modal Elements in the Online News Space

In the online domain, how modes are deployed is particularly important. This is due to the fact that, the consumer has the right to choose the particular text to consume and how to do so. Iedema (2003) argues that modes have been made particularly prevalent by television, computer and web platforms, and as such, elements such as page designs and layouts have

become very essential overall. Unfortunately, there are notable complexities with understanding how (particular) multimodal text work. Kress (2010) maintains that the particular affordances could be either straightforward or less-determinable, and goes beyond the materiality of the text. From a basic understanding, speech (audio) is listened to, and delineated by time sequences, while graphics (images) are observed and measured by the space they occupy. In online news, the audience is primarily responsible for how they navigate through the modes and how they use these modal resources. For example, with the written text, they should simply read, however, via links and icons, they can be made to 'observe' instead or in addition – that is when these pathways connect to a graphic/image.

Consequently, Alexander, Powell and Green (2011/2012) build up from the argument by Kress that modes present different possibilities of expression, engagement and thus development, by highlighting the nonlinear, non-sequential interactive and hypertextual 'reading pattern' of the online domain. Hence, they maintain that "in addition to potentials and limitations, modal affordances also impact the level of success the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos have on readers" (Alexander, Powell and Green (2011/2012, p.2). Jones and Hafner (2012), observe that as the digital space offers further affordances of time and space to creators, they are able to utilize the platform for different modal presentations and for acting in real time – ensuring greater efficacy overall. This is particularly relevant to mainstream newsmakers who need to show that in the age of alternative journalism, they are still able to actually break news stories, and also provide in-depth background information creatively. Further affordances are to do with what has been observed as the breakdown of barriers about what constitutes written language (see Culpeper et al). And to Jones and Hafner (2012), the modes being employed in the medium of the web are increasingly interactive and creative – described as 'just like having a conversation' (Jones and Hafner, 2012, p.13).

In the online domain, the combination of written texts, graphics, audiovisuals and links used by news producers is intended to ensure a greater success at representation of the specific elements in the news story. This is the idea put forth by van Leeuwen (2006) about the typography of the screen medium where modal elements do assume particular importance, but also pose a challenge. By bombarding consumers with this mix of modal choices, there is a higher propensity for the disparate audiences to be effectively reached with their mode of choice. On the other hand however, putting various bits of information in the different modes on offer (for example main news in video, context analysis in a separate call-out, background information in a hyperlink) offers a diffusion of ability to focus on the main details in the story.

However, Alexander, Powell and Green (2011/2012) maintain that by offering 'multiple layers', and 'many voices', there is in effect a greater effectiveness of delivery, comparatively with non-online based platforms (for example, print and broadcast) which do not offer these.

Jones and Hafner (2012) maintain that the particular affordances that digital tools offer make the platform different from analogue. Thus, nonlinearity as it is showcased in the online domain presents the affordance of choice including where to navigate to on the (news) page (via links and icons) or even more simply, where to 'read' first or ignore altogether. This kind of news storytelling format also accords news producers the perception of being more in tune with and responsive to the specific needs of their diverse groups of audiences. For example, by offering a news story in written text, accompanied by an image and an audiovisual text, they are saying in effect that they acknowledge members of the audience who may be constrained by time, have different technological capacities (for example limited bandwidth to watch videos), or may even be physically challenged (for instance deaf or blind consumers). It must be stressed that such nonlinear formats have been found to be appealing to the youth, an audience group which organisations such as the BBC need to attract and retain in order to survive, (Jones, 2010, p. 154).

Additionally, there are affordances associated with the use of the different modes that are even more personal. For example, readers who are more prone to being emotional can choose to ignore more graphic images or scenes (for example in crime news) and stick to reading the written texts. By choosing to include both internal and external links that provide among other things, background/additional information which could range from validating statistics, to sources and author bios, they are acknowledging that various segments of the audience might have a need to pursue particular lines of 'extras' on offer. Harcup maintains that this 'extra' is the whole point of online (2009). A positive way of perceiving this particular nonlinearity is in the fact that it might ultimately endear the news website to its audience base due to the fact that it offers choice.

In as far as interactive links and icons (such as comment/feedback and share functions) are being considered as 'mode', there is the opportunity to explore the perceived affordances of these types of digital techniques. As the literature indicates, it is becoming increasingly important for newsmakers to offer opportunities for audience inclusion and engagement – in line with the redefined ethos of journalism in the new age. This has been attributed to the breakdown of the barriers between media producers and consumers (Jones and Hafner, 2012,

p.13). Thus, by including the share buttons which the audience use to disseminate stories of interest on a wide range of alternative media platforms, they are enabling and fostering this inclusion. Further, the incorporation of some highly interactive features such as feedback and comments links, and calls for the upload of photos and videos are examples of how they intend to include audiences in the storytelling loop. It is worth mentioning that this merely evidences their intention, as some researchers have questioned whether this inclusion of 'other voices' actually takes place (for example Himelboim and McCreery, 2012; Jones and Salter, 2012; Nielsen, 2014). However, I have demonstrated that digital literacies play a crucial role in the uptake of these interactive opportunities.

Additionally, these sorts of user-to-user and user-to-system interactive icons have the added benefit of aiding in audience research. This is as a result of the fact that newsmakers are able to track the sorts of modal elements the consumer is accessing, and the degree to which they are being consumed (for example the amount of time spent on each item). This enables them to evaluate their processes to refine the design and stories in a way that is supposed to be more audience-centred. This is a key factor in giving the audience due consideration when crafting communicative texts, in line with arguments put forth by Livingstone (2004). Another advantage of these digital tools is that they have the capacity to be modified and reused and adapted to unique circumstances (Jones and Hafner, 2012). For example, the BBC and the SABC cases shown illustrate that they appropriate social media platforms in different ways. This is vitally important given that producer and audience capacities are not similar across the different contexts.

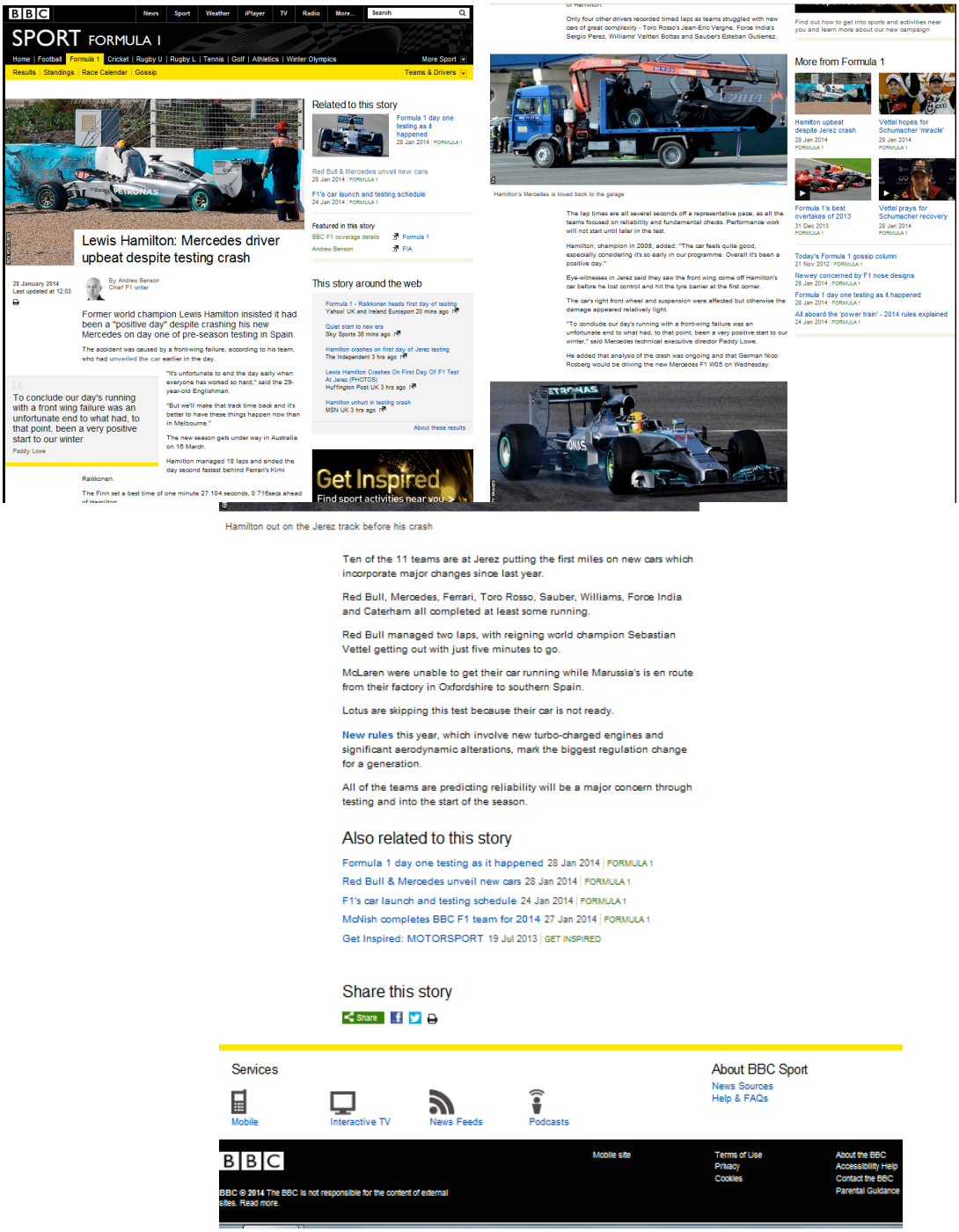
However, beyond the positives, there are also the constraints to consider as far as modal affordances are concerned. Cooke (2005), for example, highlights the constraints posed by the supposed potential of unlimited (vertical) space, which compels news producers to fill it up with news items dotted with large spaces between them, which present problems for vertical scrolling, especially for consumers visiting the site via mobile devices. Additionally, the study argues that the highly-populated and highly-visual format (which the web is noted for) allows for quick scans instead of a focus on the specific elements of the story. De Waal and Schoenbach (2010) also discuss how the online news space allows audiences freedom to blank out information they don't want, and this can lead to lowering their participation in the democratisation process. And Siapera and Veglis (2012, p. 9) also maintain that the online news audience tend to graze the news (especially the headlines) sporadically and not commit themselves to a wholesome, in-depth consumption of the contents of the story. And finally,

Conboy and Steel (2009, p. 28) also argue that the platform allows for the audience to blank out content they don't need. However, one may argue that it is the ability to quickly scan and decide what to 'read' at a more in-depth level that gives the affordance of choice that online news is touted for. This argument concurs with Clayton (2003, p.109) who also maintains that "a free and democratic society is better off risking information overload than risking information scarcity".

5.3.3.2 The BBC and the SABC's Use of Colour, Layout and Other Modal Elements

Predictably, the extent to which the full modal elements (including written text, images, audiovisuals, and icons) are used in online news stories can indicate the level of creativity of the newsmakers in staying up-to-date with current trends of multimedia news publishing. Hence, various conclusions can be drawn from how the BBC and the SABC each incorporates modal elements. Overall, news storytelling at the BBC and the SABC are characterised by a mix of formatting styles – mostly traditional template models at the SABC, and more unconventional styles at the BBC (and even more so with their sports news stories).

In the sample illustrations below, the news story captured in Figure 10 typify a BBC sports hard news report. Attention is drawn to the typography and the general layout, and in particular the use of colour and mode. Firstly, the story is laid on a yellow and black masthead, setting a departure from the typical red and white (noted brand colours of the BBC) which are used in news stories of all the other genres. The text story is interspaced with very large graphics, which are almost sequential accounts of the actual (video) story. Evidently, the newsmakers intend to give as much visual expression to the accounts of the story as possible. The placement of the images (within the text, and not at the margins) indicates that the consumer is more likely to 'consume' them, in comparison with the scenario where they are placed in the wings, (see for example, arguments in Lim, 2000). Additionally, this type of representation where the visual either creates it's own identity or reinforces the same information in the written text (see van Leeuwen, 2006), is a device used by newsmakers to create particular meanings for consumers depending on the news value systems that they want to project. In this example, it is seen that the newsmakers utilize the space to reinforce the dominant message – that it was a good day of testing (driving), and then there was a crash but the team is feeling positive nonetheless – with the personal quotes in the wings and the choice of the scenes captured in the images at the top and bottom of the text, prominently displayed to emphasize this.



Hamilton out on the Jerez track before his crash

Ten of the 11 teams are at Jerez putting the first miles on new cars which incorporate major changes since last year.

Red Bull, Mercedes, Ferrari, Toro Rosso, Sauber, Williams, Force India and Caterham all completed at least some running.

Red Bull managed two laps, with reigning world champion Sebastian Vettel getting out with just five minutes to go.

McLaren were unable to get their car running while Marussia's is en route from their factory in Oxfordshire to southern Spain.

Lotus are skipping this test because their car is not ready.

New rules this year, which involve new turbo-charged engines and significant aerodynamic alterations, mark the biggest regulation change for a generation.

All of the teams are predicting reliability will be a major concern through testing and into the start of the season.

Figure 10: A BBC sports news story showing how colours and images are used

Incidentally, the SABC news item of the same genre as the BBC story (see Figure 11 below), follows the same structure as the BBC's. So far, it is the first sampled case that features a departure from the predominant SABC style of using less multimedia-heavy material. This exclusivity for sports news representation mirrors the BBC case where only sports stories feature the use of a different colour scheme. Additionally, taking a look at this story, one can see that the way in which the graphics are placed between the various sections of the text is very much similar to that of the BBC. Though they are tweeted material from the audience, the news editor still made the choice to include in the compilation only tweets with large graphics. It must also be mentioned, (as shown in the previous chapter's discussions), that sports stories from the BBC were also the only genre to feature tweets as parts of the news content. The particular choice of tweets to use in this particular story – a mix of those that seem to be in support of the sportsman and those that seem to criticize him – is perhaps an attempt to convey the value system of impartiality on the part of the newsmaker, for example.

Despite this shift in the newsmaking technique of the SABC, it is observed that the habitual image at the top left-hand corner of the page is still in place. This emphasizes the observation that though the SABC occasionally incorporates new techniques into the process, these are still within the confines of more conventional practices.

Figure 11: An SABC sports news story showing the use of user-generated material in the form of tweeted images

These sample stories illustrate that through the different ways (using formats, modes) that the BBC and the SABC choose to depict news stories, their audience are 'afforded' specific news-consuming experiences. This means that the audience's experience of each online news story is premised on the particular way the story is presented and so this sub-section lends an understanding to what each news-consumption instance could possibly be using these sample cases.

5.3.4 Hybrid Media

It is worth reiterating that the digital medium is characterised by a convergence of contents and norms, where this convergence has been wrought principally by technological changes. Beyond the platform however, this convergence culture also permeates the skill sets requirements of journalists, as well as the newsroom practices and other institutional arrangements of these media set-ups. Fundamentally, this convergence is producing a hybridity of sorts in terms of the news content and the practices associated with it, which are seen to be maintaining both old and new media norms. Several researchers have dealt into what this looks like, and in this analysis I will highlight three perspectives in particular. These are hybridity in terms of content (i.e. of news story form, as well as the newsmaking process); hybridity through the demands being made on news production and consumption; and hybridity in terms of the skill sets required to undertake news production. These three are all interlinked somewhat, and I will first discuss them from the literature, and then illustrate them with sample news stories.

5.3.4.1 Hybridity Through the Literature

Firstly, Tan (2011) maintains that the internet is responsible for what was termed new hybrid forms of news discourse which are characterised by a blend of multimedia use (including graphics and audiovisuals). This blend of the old and new platforms, which some researchers have termed specifically as hybridity has also been explored in the works of Pauwels (2005) and Eisenlauer (2011). Eisenlauer in particular approaches hybridity from a diachronic perspective looking at both continuities and differences (2011). In Pauwels chapter, the idea of how new technologies do not substitute but rather supplement existing media norms and practices, is highlighted (2005). This same idea was carried forth in the more-recent edited book on online journalism in Africa by Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker (2014). Further, this web news is also noted by Couchot (2002) and Cooke (2005) as still maintaining the form of print and

broadcast news, thereby presenting a seeming continuity between the old and new media platforms, in agreement with Eisenlauer. Specifically, to Couchot, some aspects of traditional media have changed while others have remained the same (2002); while Cooke finds that in terms of layout and structure, new media designs are drawn from old media norms (2005). Drawing from all these perceptions therefore, hybridity can be interpreted as the norms that challenge the conventional, and still make room for those 'extra' elements on the digital platform that support practices such as the use of interactive elements and also content sharing (see Das, 2011).

Secondly, in tune with these shifts therefore, the way the audiences engage with and consume news has been altered by technological (re)mediations, where Lim, Nekmat and Nahar (2011) note that there are demands being made on both production and consumption in contemporary multimodal media settings. From Jenkins' perspective, there is "both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed" (2006, p.16). Bateman, Delin and Henschel (2007) using electronic and print newspapers as contrasting and complementing cases studies also illustrate the news production and consumption peculiarities that come with using the web interface. Further, Chan, Lee and Pan (2006, p.926) note that the online medium challenges the traditional in the sense that it presents itself as a platform which accommodates "alternative practices of news production and dissemination".

Finally, arguments have also been presented that support the idea that producing this hybrid online news material involves a new set of skills (and also routines and literacies) beyond those required of the old traditional platforms (see Chan, Lee and Pan, 2006; Papen, 2009). However, as the discussions in the next chapter show, though new skills are being demanded in the arena, there are still some basic, age-old newsmaking skill sets that are required in news production. For example, Papen discusses the possibility of some new media literacy practices being hinged on old practices in certain cases (2009). Hence, the idea is advanced that journalists need to be trained to perform multiple tasks associated with all the traditional platforms such as writing and editing skills as is required in the multimedia cyber environment (see, Trends in Online Journalism, 2011; Infotendencias Group, 2012).

Consequently, in summary, one would find that the notion of hybridity has been used to argue for processes where the whole fabric of the news content (formats, norms) and the newsmaking infrastructure (journalists, skills, sources and audiences) of the new media platform is redefined such that elements of both the old and the new are seen. Hence, in the

succeeding sub-sections, I would explore how the form of hybridity is experienced in different ways in the online news text production undertaken at the BBC and the SABC through the use of specific cases to show the three (interlinked instances).

5.3.4.2 Hybridity Through News Text

In arguing for why the explorations on 'texts' are important as analytic processes towards understanding the hybridity in news texts, Das (2011, p. 346) maintains that "a focus on 'text' thus helps to draw our attention to questions of syntax and semantics, content and shape, where audiences expect, anticipate and interpret differently for different {..} genres". Overall, this has been done with all the illustrative cases in previous sections of this chapter. However, in drawing out how hybridity specifically is evidenced, I show a couple of illustrative news texts below.

For example, a typical online news story at the BBC appears like this (see Figure 12 below). From this single story, it can be observed (in highlighted text) that there are instances where new media practices/techniques (specifically share links and hypertext material) are used. However, the news story is not wholly composed of these elements. Written text still constitutes the bulk of the content. Additionally, video elements have been included (with one which appears to have been extracted from the BBC TV live broadcast – which is an old media-type content). This simple illustration shows the blend between the old and the new norms and formats.

A second illustration that I make here emphasises that new media designs are drawn from old media norms. It is seen in the figure, that a call-out quotation has been included in the story (highlighted with an arrow). This is a technique that is not wholly new media as this practice is often seen in some UK print newspapers. In the same figure, the 'submit comments/contents' section is highlighted (also with an arrow). This feature has been flagged as one of the defining practices of UGC use and citizen journalism. At the front end of it therefore, it appears to be very much a new media (digital) practice. However, some researchers and practitioners have rightly likened this to the 'letters to the editor' feature that is undertaken in print news, as well as to the radio and television call-in programs. However, though the concept may be old, the operationalisation of it on the web is certainly new. For instance, in comparison to radio/television call-ins where these interactions happen during live broadcasts when the production and support teams are all expecting callers, online interaction is not fundamentally designed to receive instant moderation, and in this regard is more like the 'letters to the editor'

feature. However, the online is also designed to enable the audience to submit more varied material (including graphics and videos) and can support 24/7 submissions while call-ins are limited to oral submissions, and the broadcast period only. Hence, we see that the application of interactivity on the web develops upon that of the old media platforms.

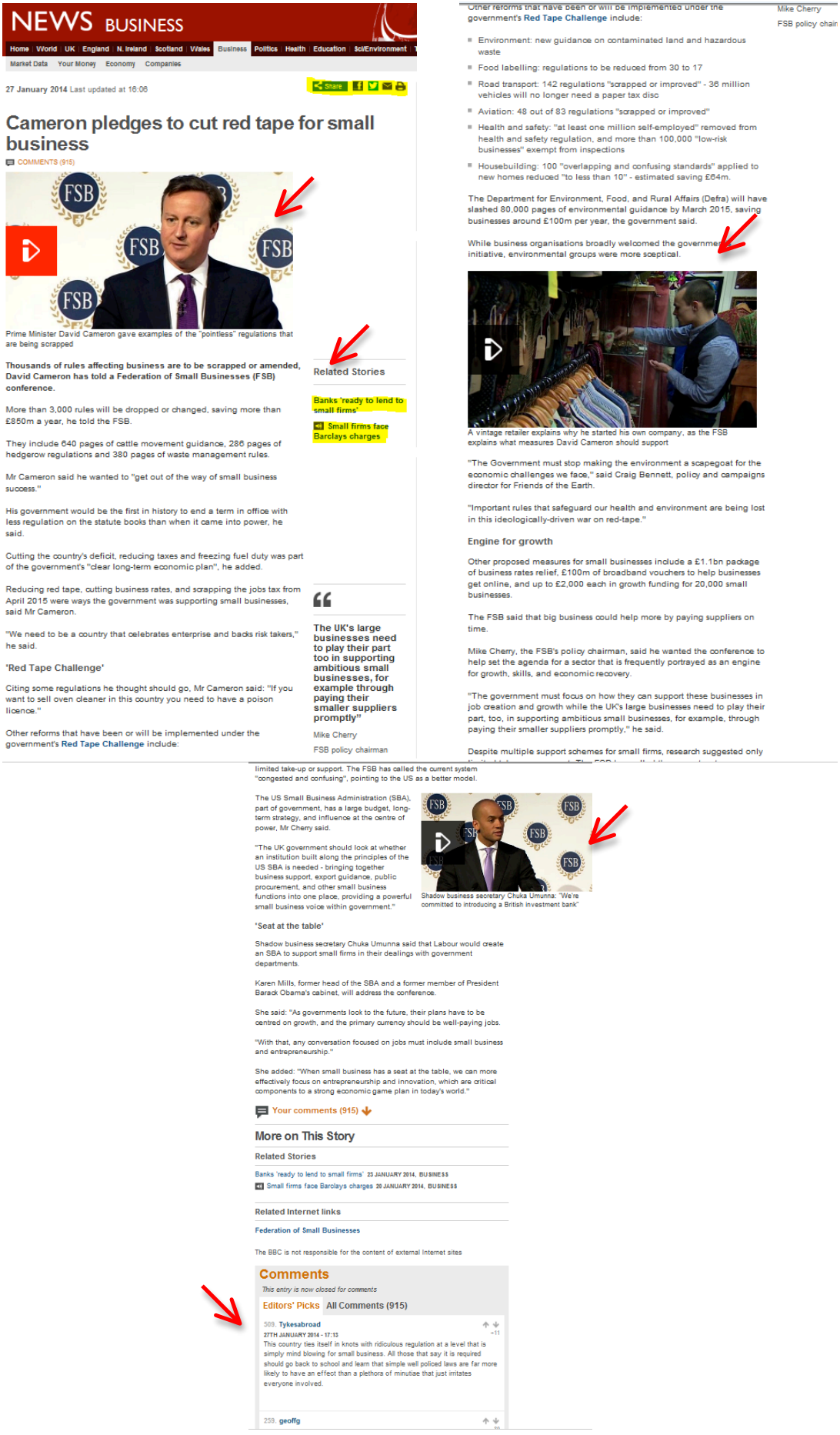


Figure 12: A BBC news story showing the use of both old and new media

The same news story can be used to illustrate how the web is making new demands on news production and consumption. For example, though the design of the news page interface mirrors that of print, it is observed that the news producer now has to contend with providing all the noted digital requirements such as hyperlinks, comments functions, share buttons, etc. These facilities ensure that the audience is presented with more opportunities than ever before to engage. They can now share stories on alternative platforms such as social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter in particular), and can use the RSS feed feature to tailor the news they receive to personalised tastes. However, at the same time, they are required to consume some other texts very much the same way they would with print or television. However, the difference is that, they have control and choice on consumption. For instance, the user actually chooses to play the audiovisual or not; or to pause reading the text content in order to access the hyperlinks, etc.

In considering the skill sets required to undertake these sorts of news storytelling, it is evident from the formats and techniques used that the skills of audiovisual editing, data journalism, writing, and (technical) programming or coding are all necessary. This reemphasises the convergent ethos that characterises online news media, but it also illustrates that hybrid old and new media techniques coexist in the online newsmaking space. This reinforces Kawamoto's (2003, p.x) conclusion that research seems to indicate that online media supplements and not substitutes old media.

From the SABC's online news reports, hybridity is similarly illustrated (in Figure 13 below). From the yellow highlights, it is observed that the author of the news story has been named. This is a practice that appears to be adopted from some print news platforms. At the same time, there is evidence of the use of new media techniques, for example, the hyperlinked tags (arrowed). It can also be argued that the general news presentation style showing a basic layout and simple use of colour is reminiscent of the convention in print forms, reinforcing earlier points that new media designs are based on old media norms. Further, some digital techniques (all arrowed) can be observed. These include the share function, and a YouTube video (embedded in a Facebook widget). Once again, the former is definitely new media, while the latter is in an old media-type format, disseminated via a new-media channel.

From both the BBC and the SABC illustrations therefore, this blend of new and old media, discussed in the literature is therefore seen.

Figure 13: An SABC news story showing the use of both old and new media

5.3.5 The Altered Storytelling Sphere

The notion that the storytelling sphere has been altered due to technology was corroborated by top news editors from around the world in a blog post. One editor for instance noted that the concept of news storytelling has changed such that journalists are now managers of over-abundant information (as opposed to scarce information) which they had to dish out to a passive audience, (Marshall, 2013). Outside of the practitioners, researchers have also emphasised this transformation in news storytelling processes and norms. For example, the online news storytelling space has to make way for the inclusion of different (alternative) practices including live blogging, news blogging, UGC use, and citizen journalism (see Bennett, 2013). Livingstone maintains also that the online news story increasingly features audience input (2004). To an extent, the creation of this alternative space has impacted the approach news storytellers take towards telling news stories.

Iedema (2003) argues that the increasing use of particular digital nonlinear formats can be said to be reflective of the changing times and the new ways of representation. These nonlinear

forms are seen as creating 'narrative contradictions' where author-reader roles are reversed (see Robinson, 2009). Such formats include the user-to-user interactive forms, and the use of sourced UGC. The illustrative discussion in the following sub-section is intended to draw out the supposed altered storytelling space from an examination of the text.

5.3.5.1 The 'New' Online News Story

Livingstone (2004) summarises the shifting context in which the BBC sees itself as operating by noting that the BBC hopes to reconceptualise its relationship with its audience (according to the dictates of the digital domain) by 'connecting communities', 'facilitating communities of interest online', and undertaking some form of UGC mediation. Picone (2007) also notes this changing BBC culture which seeks to involve the community more. This can essentially be seen as a contrast to the hallmark omniscient broadcaster role it historically plays through the creation and dissemination of elitist knowledge to the masses (using the radio and television platforms) – (see Hermida, 2010a).

With regard to the online news text itself, some have argued that the form that it takes in the digital domain where written text no longer takes the textuality of the pre-online days but is constructed of interactive dialogues, aided by visual and audio material, and interspaced with cues for the user to act upon, can be said to be conversational in form (see Jones and Hafner, 2012; Marchionni, 2013). This is perhaps in conformity with the breakdown of (literacy) borders in the online domain, and where there is the need to accommodate all voices in an 'open' manner. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that these researchers conclude this from the analyses of other non-hard news report platforms (such as blogs, Instant Messaging, Wikis, and Twitter). Previous findings in this thesis do show however that the level of scrutiny undertaken here is not sufficient to conclude emphatically for hard news forms. Nonetheless, the ability to share stories to friends (using social media), to comment on content and to expect a response from the audience or even the newsmaker, are all ways of creating a conversation, and it has been shown that these are facilitated in the online news stories studied so far. At any rate, it has been found that the conversational nature of news stories has historically been attributed to commercial pressures and competition imperatives (Fairclough, 1995), and is therefore not exclusive to the online domain.

Firstly, from the observation of the online news space of the BBC and the SABC, it can be argued that this 'altered' storytelling format to some extent involves the use of non-conventional formats and techniques that are certain to have a wider appeal given the

disparate nature of online audiences. For example, the news items at the BBC are characterised by a narrative style which sees long written text narratives broken into small chunks separated by wider paragraph spaces, some sub-section headlines, and shorter sentence/paragraph structures overall. At both news sites, it also features the inclusion of call-out elements in the form of personal quotes, tables, graphs and bulleted facts (often hyperlinked). Once again, I must reiterate that with the exception of hyperlinks, all these elements can also characterise print news stories (though they appear to be more pronounced in the online domain), thus once again emphasising the continuities between platforms.

A second point can be made about the shifting role of the mainstream newsmaker. From the illustrated BBC business news story in Figure 14, the features seen include share links (for Facebook and Twitter in particular), a comments section, a couple of graphs, and an analysis section (undertaken by an expert business news correspondent).

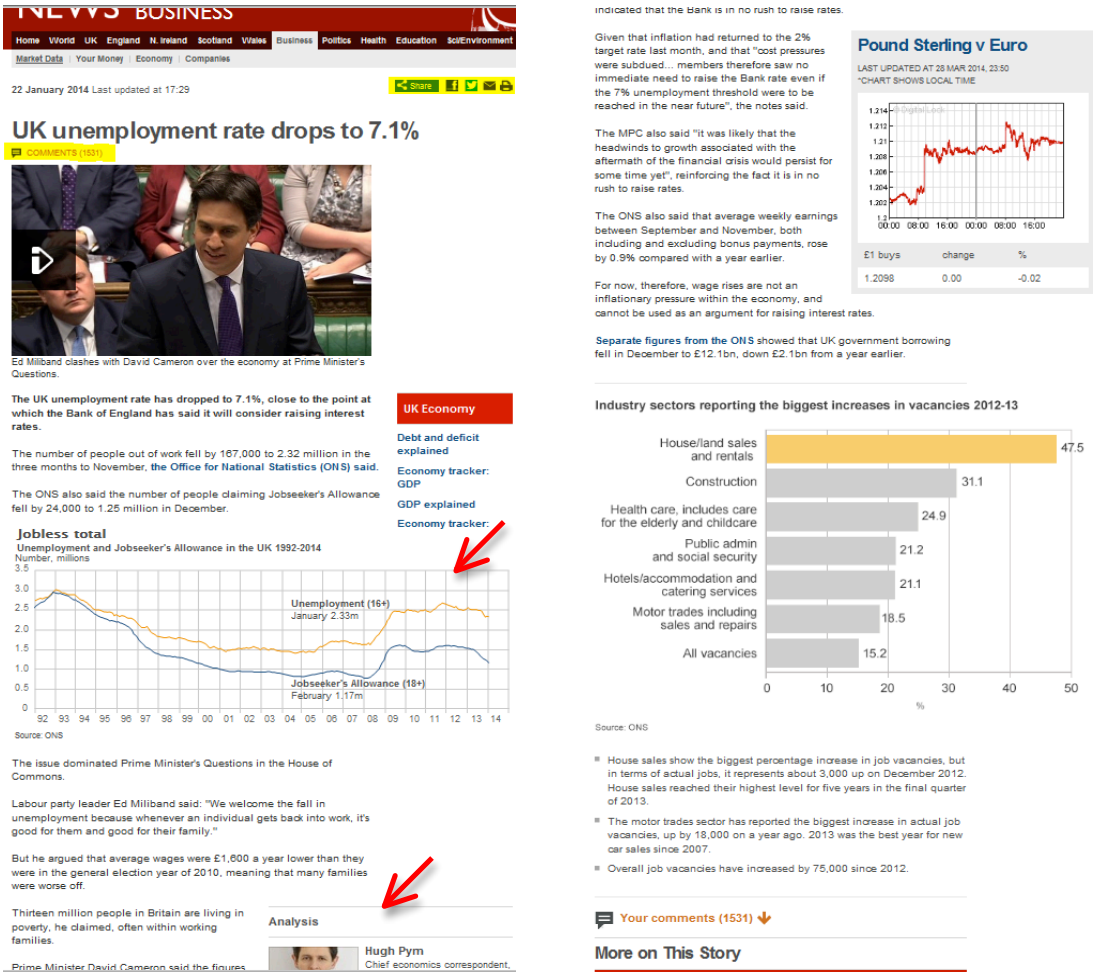


Figure 14: A BBC news story showing how news storytelling norms have changed

The changing role of the online newsmaker is illustrated in the way this news story content has been developed. In a report about the drop in unemployment rates, the BBC in addition to providing three videos that relate to the story, also provides an interactive map of what has historically been the unemployment rate in the UK. This combined with an analysis from an economics correspondent, a time-specific exchange rate chart, and industry statistics of job vacancies helps to put the news item in a relevant context for readers. The story also features data (statistical) analyses that indicate the level of data journalism that is being undertaken in the UK media, and certainly at the BBC. All these add-ons have the advantage of contextualising the news story which helps in expanding the role of online journalism beyond merely saying 'what is happening'. Jones and Salter (2012, p. 173) for example, go even further by raising the question of what journalists add to reporting, analysis and commentary in this age.

Finally, in this particular news story is included a link to provide comments on the story. This could perhaps be used to shape future developments that are done on this particular story, but it also indicates that by the topical nature of this particular story, producers expect that it would interest readers to offer some sort of opinion on its contents.

From the SABC illustration, which is depicted with two (also of the business genre) news stories from the same period as the BBC news stories (see Figure 15 below), it is observed that there is a gamut of 'altered' news storytelling norms. The text news narratives feature the short sentence/paragraphs structure and the section breaks described above. In addition, the contextual background analysis is observed in the form of stock exchange prices carried in the news (see arrowed item). A similar story published a day earlier features a *Storify* element, where there is a deliberate attempt to incorporate tweets as part of the news narrative. For example, statements such as *"not all agree with the industrial action"* and *"some are asking controversial questions"* are used to introduce the tweets (see items in yellow highlights).

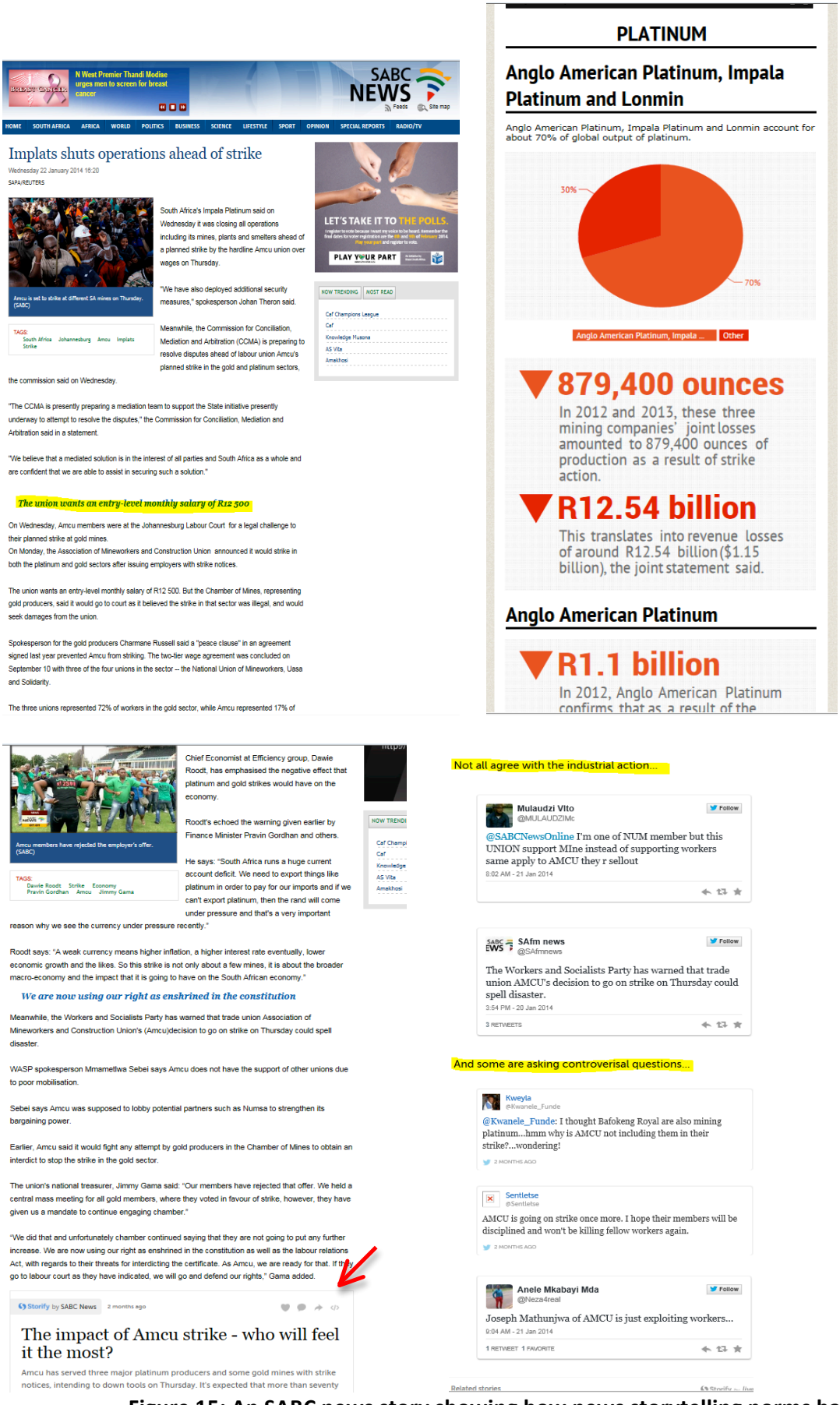


Figure 15: An SABC news story showing how news storytelling norms have changed

It must be noted that researchers view these discursive models positively. For news genres such as business and finance which often tend to be complex and not so easily represented or understood (Tan, 2011), these narrative forms can make reading and comprehension much easier. For other news genres, such as sports news, the use of larger images, colourful text, and the infusion of tweets, bring a lighthearted element to the narrative, reinforcing the general casualness associated with this genre (see Rowe, 2007). Further, the use of tweets, and attributing the news story to named editors in sports stories can all bring an inclusive element to a genre that is often associated with inclusion and self-identification and hence thrives on audience participation and engagement. Also, in typical public-interest news stories that are likely to elicit some form of response from the audience, the inclusion of comments functions is an important consideration.

5.4 Summary Conclusions

Multimodality is an integral element of all online news stories, and this chapter fundamentally argues that the particular ways in which multimodal resources are used in each online news narrative is as a result of particular socio-cultural influences. Hence, from the analysis undertaken in this chapter, it can be seen that there is a connection to be made between each newsmaking technique and the influences from the BBC and the SABC (and by inference, the UK and the South Africa media environment). This sort of approach allows a necessary link to be established between the observed news text and the larger motivations and influences behind it. It enables the identified digital practices to be set within a larger (both theoretical and practical) frame, which aids the goal of avoiding conclusions that are technologically deterministic. What it does rather is that, it allows for that relevant interplay between technology and society to be investigated and discussed from the perspectives of the two case study news cultures. This thinking develops from the social semiotics field where all sign systems are seen as socio-culturally situated processes.

I have demonstrated that five basic notions (explanatory factors) characterise the multimodality of online hard news reporting at the BBC and the SABC. In the first instance, I showed that the BBC and the SABC's PSB remits are fundamental influences on why the news stories on their respective online platforms are the way they are. Additionally, some contextual political and economic nuances of the British and South African media scene influence the newsmaking approach, where for instance, the BBC heavily moderates UGC and where

hyperlinking is mostly internal. At the SABC, there is characteristically more news of an international nature, mostly from press agencies and very moderate usage of multimedia. I also showed that the perceived digital literacies within these media environments could be observed through the news texts. Hence, overall, it appears from the way various digital formats and techniques are used that, at the BBC there is an appreciation that a higher degree of digital ability (both in the producers and also the consumers) is at play in comparison to the SABC. The discussions on modal affordances illustrate that particular uses of multimodal techniques by news producers can produce certain perceptions about their inherent opportunities and constraints, as they elicit particular responses from the news-consuming public. The discussions on hybrid media argue that hybridity (involving both old and new media norms) is pervasive in online newsmaking within these institutions as it permeates the content, norms and the skill sets associated with online newsmaking (and also consumption). Finally, the preceding sub-section on altered storytelling sphere shows that technology has redefined what mainstream journalists are supposed to be doing as part of newsmaking, where online news in particular evidences these shifting norms greatly. Hence, at the basic level, the journalist is no longer solely expected to merely break the news but must support it by providing contextual, analytical content.

This chapter has therefore shown that the impact that digital techniques have on the newsmaking norms of particular news organisations can be explained and understood from a socio-cultural point of view. This reinforces the earlier assertions that adoption of digital technologies is predicated on contextual phenomena. However, as researchers have demonstrated, universal truths about any aspects of online journalism are hard to attain (Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker, 2014). Moreover, it is acknowledged that in applying a developed hypothetical framework to purposively-sampled news text, there is the possibility of making inferences which might not be entirely supported in other circumstances. To counter this, the next chapter allows for more corroboration and validation of the phenomena discussed in this chapter through discussions emanating from in-depth interviews undertaken with the online news teams of these two institutions.

Chapter 6: Understanding the Role of the Digital Platform in Online Newsmaking: Context Perspectives from the BBC and the SABC

Even in these times of burgeoning alternative (as well as aggregator) media platforms, the place of the mainstream newsmaker remains relevant (Himelboim, Chang and McCreery, 2010). With the countless issues from editing controls, to convergence in skill sets that come with the web news territory, the 'new' platform's newsmaking actors are having to negotiate a somewhat challenging and forever-evolving work environment (see Newman, 2009). Hence, these journalists, web technologists and digital strategists lend perspectives that are crucial to our understanding of how the digital platform impacts their collective news output, from a relational perspective. Both the SABC and the BBC have both historically been known to be adaptive institutions. However, the ways in which each have adapted differ somewhat and it is necessary to probe further on these contextual norms and processes.

So far in the thesis, some patterns of newsmaking norms were established from the review of existing literature (on online news generally, and specifically within these institutions), and also from the CA and the MmDA findings. This chapter's interrogations were therefore intended to shed more light on these discussions, but from the viewpoints of this group (i.e. mainstream news producers) that is so pertinent to our understanding of how online newsmaking is impacted in the different contexts.

Consequently, this chapter's discussions emanate from semi-structured interviews with key personnel from the SABC and the BBC who are responsible for digital technology adoption and online newsmaking. It sought to explore what are the context-specific perspectives on the current impact of the digital platform on their respective newsmaking functions. The section immediately following this therefore outlines how the interviews were conducted. In the subsequent discussions, the discourse on the enquiries is extended first and foremost through an exploratory understanding of the British and the South African mediasphere/mediascape. This leads to discussions about how online news storytelling is being impacted; and this is complemented with relational accounts on how new techniques are being employed. The changing role and identity of the newsmaker is also evaluated within the boundaries of what is being changed with regards to institutional policies, guidelines and house styles. Arguably, the online news audience within these two contexts impacts and is being impacted by technological advancements. Therefore, a sub-section is dedicated to discussing who these 'new' online audiences are and what they require of newsmakers and news stories. The

chapter concludes with discussions on the rate of incorporation of new technologies within these institutions, with a projectory outlook on what the future holds for online newsmaking.

6.1 Method Design

Over the period of three months, from December 2013 through to February 2014, semi-structured, in-depth telephone interviews were carried out with a total of eight team members from the SABC and the BBC to understand the issues raised above. These comprised members of the online news production or editorial teams, and or persons responsible for digital technology strategy development and implementation within these institutions. This sample was attained through a purposive convenience sampling process where their individual roles in the respective organisations in relation to online news production were taken into consideration. Hence, I basically took into account what their job designations are and what is required of them in these roles within the two organisations. This selection criterion was necessary in order to gain specific insight into the phenomena investigated. But it was equally important to gain access to those who were available and willing to speak with me. However, it is acknowledged that there is a degree of bias with this approach as it is generally neither statistically representative nor relevant, and only considers the ease with which the sample can be obtained from the whole set. Nevertheless, it is a suitable method because it enables the recruitment of respondents who are most suited to attaining the objectives of the investigation.

Operationally, I first identified the type of roles for which it is crucial that I interview the responsible person from the two institutions, for example Head of (Online) News, Online News Producer, amongst others. I then identified who the individuals were that hold these positions, either from colleagues who have some knowledge about the institutions, or from web searches. I then pursued multiple channels of establishing contacts with these individuals, all with variable degrees of success. These ranged from 'mentions' and then direct messages on Twitter, and subsequently to emailed messages and telephone calls. In the end I managed to secure and undertake high value interviews (in terms of depth and scope covered) with three top level management of BBC News, and five (one senior management and four editorial team) members of the SABC's online news department. The interviews each lasted between 40 to 75 minutes and were conducted via Skype or telephone. In terms of comparing the two sets of interviews, the fact that only top level respondents were interviewed at the BBC presented a difficulty as I was not able to probe actual day-to-day newsmaking practices at the individual

and institutional level to a deeper level, (as I have done with the SABC). I reflect fully on the implications of this in later sections.

Overall, the role classifications of the individuals interviewed are reflected in the specific responses (findings) obtained. This is because the enquiries were tailored to the specific respondents from each organisation (that is the BBC or the SABC), taking their respective roles into account. The full list of questions appears in appendix three. Findings were organised in the discussions according to the same blocks of thematic classifications that were explored through the interview questions.

6.2 The BBC and the SABC Mediasphere

The media institutional context within which the BBC and the SABC operate remains relevant towards an appreciation of how online news is being produced and disseminated. For this thesis, taking into consideration the fact there is a paucity of available literature on the online newsmaking phenomenon in intermediate economies (of which South Africa belongs), attention is therefore more focused on the SABC, as opposed to the BBC (and the British media) of which much has been written comparatively. To highlight a few, Hermida and Thurman's 2008 paper on the use of UGC at UK web newspapers draws on some examples of how the BBC approaches citizen-generated content and how it manages the comments function. However, Thurman (2008) uses the BBC specifically as one of the case studies to probe how journalists (their roles, identity and newsroom norms) are changing with the making of online news. Hermida (2010a) also explores how emerging alternative practices such as blogging are shaping the BBC's newsmaking culture. Other works including that of Redden and Witschge (2010), Drakopoulou (2011), Bennet (2013), Harrison (2014) and the annual Reuters Institute Digital News reports all draw heavily on the British media and the BBC perspectives. Together they serve as useful and relevant literature from the Western perspective. Comparatively, there isn't much written about the SABC's online news. Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker (2014) maintain that online journalism in Africa is significantly understudied in comparison with the economies of the North; a gap which this study attempts to resolve. This identifiable and highly significant gap in the literature makes the findings discussed here particularly revealing.

6.2.1 The SABC's Online News Operation

All the SABC respondents were of the opinion that the particular peculiar characteristics of the South African media play a crucial role in the approach adopted towards their online

newsmaking function; as much as does their internal technology up-take situation. This confirms earlier assertions that technology is adopted and adapted within a sociological structure (see Jenkins, 2006). Accordingly, respondents asserted that there is an overriding influence in the fact that the SABC is South Africa's main PSB which has a huge task of reaching the country's 50 million plus audiences via a variety of platforms (including radio, television, and the comparatively newer online platform). This task includes broadcasting in 13 languages, from the radio and television stations that are located in numerous localities around the country. The traditional nature of the SABC's media set-up is currently 3 television and 18 radio stations, which together makes it one of the largest broadcasting units on the continent. In their opinion therefore, this is translated into an onerous undertaking for their online platform's production arrangement. This is specifically due to the fact that huge numbers of news materials are generated daily and made available to the online news team (majority of which are in various local languages and which must be subsequently translated into English) before being repurposed. It was noted by SABC respondents that at the present time, the online department is seen as a repurposing production unit only and not a gathering unit, and so they principally aim to translate the broadcast (radio and television) content on to the web.

A senior strategist at the news institution however maintained that because the radio and television broadcast platforms are so integral to the SABC structure and identity, a multi-platform agency ethos is being rigorously applied to their current online set-up where they are striving to work across platforms. Thus, they are endeavoring to ensure that the radio and television content and feel can be experienced online and vice versa. This ethos however has the propensity of being construed as simply lumping content from one platform to the other, examples of which have been discussed in Cooke (2005) and Reich (2011). Relatively, another area of influence is in the existing SABC structure which remains predominantly radio and television and this is also seen in the online team make-up as most of them have transitioned to the online platform after starting out working within the traditional platforms. Hence the main skill sets remain the traditional journalism skills of (field) reporting (writing/broadcasting), and editing. These prevailing skill sets also exact an influence on their individual approaches to online newsmaking norms and techniques.

Overall, online newsmaking represents a novel playing field for the SABC despite the existence of a news website as far back as 2000 (see Berger, 2001). This is because it was not a core area of their news dissemination function (and still remains so). It was previously known as www.sabcnews.com until its domain name changed to www.sabc.co.za/news approximately

three years ago when the website was re-launched for various reasons. However, some respondents acknowledged that the name change and re-launch was driven as much by shifting audience expectations as technical imperatives. It must be noted that, it was identified by Mavhungu and Mabweazara (2014) that, online technologies have forced a shift in the outlook and practices of many South African mainstream journalists.

SABC's online audience (who are targeted with major developing stories repurposed specially for them) include local South African audiences, and an international audience-base composed of people accessing the site from elsewhere in the Sub-Saharan Africa region; and from other parts of the world (who are mainly South Africans in the diaspora). This growing body of its audience (who can also be very disparate) makes choosing and scripting news stories from the vast pool of (mostly local) news stories quite difficult. At the overall strategy level, one respondent noted that in making this choice, consideration is given to whether the story item could potentially enlarge their existing local South African or diasporan audience, or if it could attract a whole new set of international audiences. At the operational level however, a salient factor that is also considered is if the story has 'multimedia potential'. This is translated into how the story could potentially be repurposed using a variety and combination of features, formats and tools (including audio, video, links, *Storify*). Additionally, it considers the ability of the story to be shared via a combination of cross-digital platforms including YouTube and Facebook.

Another aspect of the SABC's function that exerts an influence is in its identity/position as the 'African broadcaster'. The SABC therefore tries to offer a good overview of developments in Africa, by providing an African perspective on all major international developments. Relatively, in the light of its apartheid and post-apartheid mandate of representing all groups of people, it is keen to project an impartial outlook that is not one-sided (in favour of the ruling government). Both these factors invariably influence the choice of news genres and classifications that are repurposed for the web platform.

Within the current South African mediasphere however, the feeling is that the place of the SABC's online department is far from assured. At the institutional level, the SABC as a national broadcaster is facing stiff competition from other (private) broadcasters (for example the privately-funded and relatively newer ANN7 (Africa News Network 7) TV; while the online platform is seeing stiff competition from news24.com. Though the competition hinges on who provides better quality in broadcasting or who provides a more-balanced reportage, (and

generally it is perceived that the private broadcasters provide more balanced reporting in comparison to the SABC that is seen as a mouthpiece of the government – Teer-Tomaselli, 2008), this translates however into the level of legitimacy and significance that is accorded the online platform also.

With regards to the practicality of providing online news by relying on a convergent arrangement with the radio and television units, opinions are mostly negative. For example, one respondent feels that the requirements of radio/television are completely different from the web platform. She cited in particular the dictates of timeliness when publishing news, and argues that as news content from the traditional platforms becomes dated as at the time of transitioning it to the web platform, there is a need to rethink the dependency of the online team on these units. Hence, the view is that increasingly, the cross-media strategies being adopted, though seen as innovative will be counter-characteristic to web ideologies. Therefore, respondents proposed for SABC Online to be managed as a separate functioning unit as a possible solution. Interestingly, this contradicts the BBC case where the online division was fully integrated to function at optimal level.

Relative to this, there exists within the team a healthy appreciation of the fact that the SABC's online platform is functionally different from that of other broadcasters (such as Aljazeera, the BBC, and CNN). For example, with all of the aforementioned news organisations, a concurrent link can be established between the delivery of specific news stories on traditional media with that of the respective web platforms. This however is missing at the SABC and has been attributed in part to the need to depend on the content coming in from the radio and television units. However, overall, this was attributed to the fact that the online team is only recently experiencing growth and a revamp of their systems and work processes.

Consequently, the argument raised here is that the way in which the SABC is organised institutionally, and the overall characteristics of South Africa's news environment exert a significant influence on the online news (making) experience of the SABC which should not be overlooked.

6.2.2 The BBC: Changing in the Face of Tradition

Russell (2011), writing about news in transition in some notable mainstream institutions notes that the BBC is both highly innovative and at the same time quite traditional. She maintains that this is seen in how it has aggressively adopted new technologies (and is a model for the

news industry) but still remains paternalistic in its approach to its audience (Russell, 2011, p.47). This point is reflected in the introspective responses from the BBC respondents where they detail their views that generally support the idea that the public service remit of the BBC has impacted its overall strategic approach to technology adoption.

Arguably the largest news-gatherer and broadcaster in the world today (Russell, 2011), the scale at which it incorporates technology is above that of many counterparts in the news industry. Some responses obtained from the interviews revealed that the current strategy is geared therefore towards more tech-savvy inclusions (that develop upon IP-based technology) in the development of news formats. Consequently, a senior digital news strategist remarks that, they regard as their competitors not actors in the news industry *per se*, but the rapidly developing group of technologically-inclined platforms/aggregators that offer alternative digital news experiences (such as Twitter and Google News). Shifting norms within the BBC where the newsmaking team adopts certain digital practices (such as maintaining an active social media presence) are seen as a response to this perceived competition.

Some respondents were of the view that the BBC's current approach to innovative newsmaking develops from its historical stance on technology adoption overall. In reflecting upon why this is so, a respondent recounts how the BBC's online news platform, which was principally started in the mid-1990s (under director John Birt) has developed to its present standing as one of the world's most visited mainstream news websites, because John Birt saw great opportunity and potential in the internet. *"He therefore invested very heavily in its development, to build on the very basic web platform that was then available"*, noted this respondent. He continued, "*by the late 1990s however, it was realised that the BBC will need to operate on a multi-platform level, as the current system at that time was inadequate. Therefore, the best individuals were hired to develop it, and by the early 2000s, BBC online news has established itself as one of the best web news platforms*". Jones and Salter (2012) maintained that Birt's vision for developing digital media paid off, in how it enabled engagement with the online audience. They declared further that on his departure in 2000, Birt had developed Europe's most popular internet news site and the BBC had an excellent reputation in the area of online journalism.

This multi-platform ethos still drives its news platform-development techniques. This is evidenced in the converged content seen on the news website, and the use of the *iPlayer* feature, which enables viewers to access previously streamed radio and television programmes (archived on the site).

However, it must be noted that the development of the platform has not always been consistent. For example, one respondent is of the opinion that developments stalled from the mid-2000s until Tony Hall and James Harding took over directorship in the early parts of 2013. This respondent considers the flagship *iPlayer* as one of the direct results of the revamped news technology development at the BBC currently, and envisages that it has the potential to be developed and applied to online news.

One other crucial factor that impacts the BBC's approach to how it incorporates new technology is what can be interpreted as the struggle of weighing the shifting norms of public participation against professional (conventional) norms (see Russell, 2011). This is seen in how it carefully manages the incorporation of UGC by situating it as if it were a traditional 'newsgathering' process, as the UGC Hub is in fact considered as such.

Relatively, the PSB remit is seen as both a blessing and a curse in the quest to evolve technologically in line with context-specific industry expectations. One respondent is of the view that the benefits exist in BBC's public-sector status which enables funding streams to be obtained relatively smoothly. This creates a stable culture that allows for little disruption to its institutional (work) processes. The Research and Development (R&D) unit in particular thrives on this arrangement. However, at the other end of the spectrum, as a PSB, it is prone to a high regulatory oversight. One respondent noted that this regulatory oversight often hampers the speed with which they develop and roll out new products as they tend to be more cautious, and often have several hoops to jump through to obtain approval. He contrasts this with some of their privately-funded competitors from the private sector (either mainstream or alternative/aggregator media platforms) who can be seen as having more financial leeway comparatively. These combinations of factors in their opinion influence the approach adopted towards digital technology appropriation in significant ways.

6.3 The Technicalities of Online News Storytelling

It is evidenced that the norms of online storytelling appear to be different at the two news sites. This is reflected in a number of ways, including in the respective genre choices, multimedia formats used, and the levels at which interactivity and hypertextuality elements are incorporated, as well as how UGCs are used (or not). How the news storytelling actors at the BBC and the SABC reflect on the motivations behind these choices is examined in the following sub- section.

6.3.1 'New' Formats and Techniques at the SABC and the BBC

At the heart of the SABC's online newsmaking strategy is a multi-platform, cross-media production and dissemination agenda. According to all the respondents interacted with, this determines how they approach the formatting of online news stories (as seen on the news site). What does a multi-platform, cross-media approach at the SABC look like however? It features first and foremost, news content that is sourced from the radio and television platforms, and is repurposed for the web. This constitutes turning the radio and television extracts into (written) text form, and the inclusion of multimedia, interactive and hypertextual elements (where applicable). Beyond this however, is the quest to integrate the final news items across platforms (for example, audio news stories from radio archived on the web site). This is not unique to the SABC, and as Cooke finds, technology or production convergence at mainstream news institutions typically involve either the merging of two or more media technologies or the sharing of information through digitisation (2005). Moyo (2014) finds that digital technologies have made, for example, the radio platform more accessible via multiple channels – such as webcasting, social media, podcasting and mobile streaming. This is what the SABC's online news production is intended to offer consequently, through the cross-platform approach adopted towards the dissemination of news content.

Further, there is the approach of 'cross-digital' integration at the SABC, which some respondents explained to be the incorporation of a number of social media platforms and tools into the overall newsmaking structure, with the intention that it helps the audience to engage with online news, in line with Moyo's findings (2014). One respondent maintained that social media is in fact the 'inheritance' of online news as it can be seen as an asset that comes with the digital platform and which can be appropriated to develop online news further. As Jordaan (2014) finds, Facebook and Twitter seem to have been accepted in the South African media context. The quest of the online news team at the SABC therefore is to capitalise on the fast-growing domain of social media (in particular Facebook and Twitter) to expand the focus on topical radio, television or online news stories. Xu (2013) agrees that social media recommendation is a strong factor in getting people to access the news.

The respondents acknowledged that while online news has certainly not taken off among large numbers of their audience base, social media certainly has, with these tools now accessible on the ubiquitous mobile phone. Thus, by challenging the audience to provide insights, comments and analysis on current affairs news stories on the official social media sites rather than the

online news platform, the SABC is being insightful in its choice of the relevant tools to be applied here. This is due to the fact that they admit that the comments and feedback functions which are used in many contexts in the West, do not work in the South African media setting and is therefore not worth the effort. Jordaan finds that Facebook and Twitter have exacted an influence on news routines and cultures, and seems to suggest that it makes audiences 'prosumers' to an extent (2014). She identified instances where despite journalists maintaining in interviews that they hardly use social media in news sourcing and production, she found the opposite to be the case from observing their newsroom behaviour and output, (Jordaan, 2014). In the case of the SABC, opinions are split – while some respondents alluded to the significance of social media input in their news content development, others noted that it merely points them to potential sources.

Beyond social media techniques, multimedia is very important to the SABC's online newsmaking team, and most of the respondents maintain that there is value in videos, where highly-visual multimedia digital attributes greatly enhance the news stories that they produce. Therefore, the multimedia specialist insists that the online news format is intended to feature embedded video material from the television units, as well as live streaming of TV content on the YouTube channel. He therefore laments the fact that at the present time, they are only able to do this for major news stories or during special events. Consequently, though strides were made in the past year towards enhancing the use of multimedia elements in the newsmaking process overall, news stories on the whole at the SABC are still largely text-based articles, with very little (embedded) hyperlink and interactive elements incorporated. A digital media lead also agrees that there is definite value in the inclusion of images and videos, but acknowledges that over 85% of news items on the news site remain in written text form. This is attributed to the constraints placed on them as digital newsmakers by the limited development of internet connectivity in South Africa. Due to this, the digital media producers noted that the add-ons have to be simpler and less data-heavy. The challenge therefore for them in crafting the stories, is to balance rich media with easy accessibility. This limiting factor challenges their ability to harness all the creativity tools that the digital platform is capable of. One respondent is quoted as saying *"there is so much propensity for creativity, and that in itself is limiting".* To explain further, he presents the scenario where he dreams up a creative angle to a developing story, however, if the tools are not available to him to execute this dream, or for the audience to fully appropriate the finished product, then he is unable to do much with this creative idea. Another SABC respondent however stressed her personal stance on the incorporation of visual

elements, noting that *"these are all just different ways to tell a story, but the story remains at the heart of it all!"*

At the SABC, the newsmaking process also involved the application of new techniques and creative elements. For example, the *Storify* tool and the various Facebook widget functions are used to synthesise all these social media interactions, which are then subsequently transmitted via the television or online platforms, in conformity with their multi-platform news dissemination agenda. One digital media strategist maintained that this practice served dual purposes – it gives voice to the so-called 'voiceless' and also increases the reach of audience feedback and input. This is done by taking opinions from people who may not otherwise have access to the often-limited 'audience slots' on radio and television (but use social media), and spreading this information by making it accessible to the large numbers of South African audiences that can access television but not social media platforms. Therefore, in line with the vision to increase the reach of their digital presence, the SABC online team seeks to put in place an integrated ecosystem of services and contents across their digital platforms (including YouTube, Podcast, Twitter, Facebook, and Online). Further, their goal is to have a common look and feel across the range of platforms which is intended to drive traffic across their digital ecosystem with a singular effort.

The discussions from the SABC on all these digital strategies would somehow suggest that UGC use features greatly in the newsmaking process, but on the contrary, respondents perceive that it is rarely used here. A senior editor called it 'crowd-sourcing' noting that the term best represents their approach to its use. However, this process of 'crowd-sourcing' for content is only used on rare occasions (such as on the occasion of the death of the country's first black president, Nelson Mandela) where the Mandela Memories page was set up. Though, digital technology adoption within the South African mediasphere is not up to the level where these crowd-sourced content (or UGCs) are of the highest quality, one respondent admits that some are good enough to be transmitted on the television platform, with extracts from the broadcast repurposed for YouTube and *Storify.* One other major way in which these crowd-sourced elements feature in news storytelling is when tweeted responses from the audience on topical issues are used to build online stories. Despite these dotted instances of UGC use, from the opinion of most of the respondents, citizen journalism is far from being a realisation in the South African newsmaking arena. What is trending at the moment though, is for

reporters and journalists to follow 'leads' provided by the 'alternative' news platforms to get to the main sources to obtain content themselves for producing news stories.

Despite all the identified challenges, the SABC online news team is hoping to continue developing upon how it employs new techniques and formats including social media, multimedia, podcasting, data visualisation, and live streaming. The discussions highlight the disparity between the South African and the British context, as a senior digital technology strategist at the BBC notes that the agenda for them is to look at developing 'new' story formats using more IP-based technology. Evidently, the internet penetration and the level of digital technology adoption in the UK context makes the harnessing of such digital potentials more achievable.

The BBC online news team, though not experiencing many of the challenges identified for the SABC, is having unique experiences that are influencing their digital strategies and practices differently. In the first instance, their goal is to harness the potentials of digital technologies beyond the examples typically seen in mainstream newsmaking, and discussed earlier in this thesis. For example, according to this digital strategist at the BBC, their online newsmaking agenda going forward, is to develop different digital attributes of the *iPlayer* including a 'your BBC' concept where one can curate his or her own news and tailor it to individual styles and tastes. Thus, the hope is to build upon various elements of the existing *iPlayer* platform, adapt it to online news and develop its current capabilities further.

Additionally, the current BBC news-formatting schedule is characterised by genre choices and use of interactive techniques that are intended to drive traffic back to the BBC. One senior BBC respondent explains that there is fundamentally a cultural element to this choice, because as a PSB there are policy considerations to reach out to the diverse sections of their audience base. He notes that further to this, there is a current focus on undertaking external hyperlinking more extensively in order to help develop 'other' news sites, and this is also driven by their PSB ethos. To them, this is a foremost consideration to the extent that they are able to employ newsmaking techniques that incorporate and link to external news sites. As Quandt and Singer (2009) maintain, there are definite potentials for newsmakers to be more open (to externals) in this digital age. However with regards to this particular strategy, one challenge highlighted was the fact that it does not enable the BBC to effectively measure impact and reach, as it becomes difficult to measure these when external sites are involved. However, having a clear picture of how the platform is performing is important as it impacts their (public) funding streams.

Interestingly, elements of this extensive external linking are not seen from an examination of the hypertext pathways on the site, as discussed further in the next chapter.

6.4 The Changing Era of Newsmaking

Technology adoption and the resulting impacts of the increasing convergence of platforms, cross-media production and/or dissemination, are all opening up new frontiers in newsmaking at mainstream news institutions (Quandt and Singer, 2009). As such, various aspects of the BBC and the SABC's news culture (including the roles and identities of the editors and journalists) appear to be evolving in line with these perceived shifts across the industry. Relational accounts on the extents of these changes from the perspectives of the journalists whose working environments have been altered are presented in the following section.

6.4.1 The 'New' Newsmaker

The role and identity of newsmakers is perhaps the area in which the respondents appear most unemphatic about just what is the change that is being experienced as a result of the influences of digital technologies. In some aspects, they feel there is a definite change, but in others, opinions are mixed. Some SABC editors maintain that the practices of online journalists are governed by the same age-old basic journalism tenets as the mainstream journalists – with the existing codes of conduct being the guiding principles no matter the platform. So drawing from this argument, one respondent maintains that the basic identity of the online journalist remains unchanged. On the other hand however, others argued that consideration must be given to the fact that the role of journalists has indeed been altered in the digital age. This is as a result of the fact that, news storytelling (the foundation of journalism) is perceived to have been completely revolutionised in the digital age. One editor advises, "*it is best to consider that the newsmaking box is no longer square – it has many new aspects"*. Another notes, *"there are now more ways of telling a story, for example in data journalism, the numbers alone can tell a story"*. Another is of the opinion that one cannot be one-dimensional as an online journalist, and hence merely attending a press briefing will not suffice. One can argue therefore that Andrew Marr's advice to the journalist to "get out more often" (2005, p.116), will simply not hold in this day. Consequently, they are required now not to (simply) break the story but go beyond to give the context of the story; add value in terms of insights; and back it up with figures and analyses, amongst others. In this regard therefore, respondents concur that the role and practices of the online editor or journalist have indeed changed. Though some

respondents however were emphatic that journalists can and should shape the role they play in society, even in the face of changing audience demands and societal expectations.

The perceived shifts in the role and place of the 'new' news storyteller can also be seen in the current designations of the various newsmaking actors. Hither to the online producer at the SABC being named as such, the working title was online news writer, and the change reemphasises the focus on multimedia production where there is the need to do more than repurposing content for the web. Currently, titles such as Digital Channel Manager, Digital News Executive Producer, Online Production Editor, Digital Media Specialist/Producer, and Social Media Boffin are pandered around instead of the conventional correspondent, broadcaster, reporter and writer which apply to the traditional media units. Though some of these new roles could appear to have points of convergence with the ones from the traditional platforms, most are tailored to the web industry specifically. For example, the Digital Channel Manager specifically manages the SABC News' YouTube channel. Additionally, a data specialist (yet to be engaged) will be responsible for researching the relevant data behind news stories and synthesising information from this data to be used for better data analysis and visualisation. This, according to a senior team member, is in line with the on-going SABC digital strategy that aims to try to tell stories using text-plus tools that make the online experience more visual and interactive.

Consequently, the role of digital media specialists includes driving content development and optimisation of the SABC news website; as well as guiding the development of current and new online features and services. Other priorities for this position are popularising and improving SABC's online news services in line with emerging digital and social media trends; devising strategies and workflows to improve multimedia production and data visualisation outputs (including better use of in-house content and resources); as well as expanding and integrating the current suite of online tools. Digital media specialists therefore also train other team members in implementing these tasks. In addition, a producer who works from an editorial and liaison position (as opposed to tech development) however, still has the daily task of integrating across platforms and optimising content for the web, which basically means to provide more value-add for the online. This translates into critically understanding and appreciating the online space and how it functions, despite being mainly in an editorial position. It is evident therefore that roles are tailored for the online medium, and reflect a significant change for online newsmakers.

Beyond the identity and role of news production staff, the shifting norms also have implications for the skill sets required to produce these news stories, and respondents noted that they are having to constantly evolve accordingly. Especially at the SABC, where there is a focus on implementing a cross-platform strategy, the senior editors and producers are of the opinion that all online journalists (and indeed those from radio and television) should be comfortable performing all manner of newsmaking duties. As such, current staff capacity-building programmes are centred on training and development for improved online skills, especially the ability to produce multimedia (audio/video material), as well as some focus on data journalism skills, tech-based editing and mobile production (of tweets and images). This is particularly required for editors, journalists and producers who have transitioned from doing radio, magazine and television. The opinion of one senior editor at the SABC is that going forward, mere on-the-job, and or in-house training and capacity development would not cover the vastly-evolving nature of the current newsmaking industry skills demands. She suggested therefore for journalism education and training to reflect this change, where journalism students are taught skills that are diverse (as Gordon recommended in 2003), including web publishing, use of Excel and other spreadsheets, datasets/database analysis, and coding.

In addition to all these skills, a BBC respondent added that overall internet usage capabilities, data mining and web search skills are needed as the news institution's UGC function (which requires constant verification) is highly dependent on these skills. It appears that social media skills are perhaps even more required in this environment as BBC editors and correspondents have to maintain a steady social media presence.

6.4.2 The Changing House Style

Enquiries about the daily news story production cycle at the SABC revealed that the newsmaking pattern has indeed changed, or somehow deviates from that of the broadcast units (i.e. radio and television). This conclusion derives from a majority of the responses; and as most of the staff interviewed have transitioned from the traditional platforms themselves, it was particularly revealing. To one respondent who has followed this pattern (he started out in radio, then television before currently operating in new media), the biggest change to him is that they no longer really plan for the so-called 'big stories'. He maintains that, *"every story is potentially big!"* This statement is reinforced by earlier discussions that they follow leads in social media to obtain possible topical news stories. He asserts further that, one needs to be flexible about the news story (in terms of who, what and even when to publish) as several factors come into play when making such decisions (beyond what the editorial team has

determined beforehand). To illustrate, the news team can meet in the morning for their usual briefing and plan on repurposing particular stories for the web in particular ways. However based on audience reactions towards the radio or television broadcasts of particular stories, on social media platforms, this plan could change. This lends credence to the fact that agenda-setting is no longer an absolute attribute of mainstream journalism work.

Some basic procedures however remain unchanged. First and foremost, all stories still need to be verified (i.e. checked) by a sub-editor or an executive producer before being published. Hence, the story still needs to go through the normal editorial process/structure. Therefore, in terms of perceived freedom in online newsmaking, respondents feel it only exists in the form of liberty to pursue the story they want, and not liberty to publish the story they want. One respondent maintained therefore that though the tools may change (with online journalism), the overall business of journalism does not.

But how does the overall SABC house style factor into all these? The daily workflows include the maintenance of daily radio and television diaries, and more recently an online diary in addition. These workflows are structured to work effectively in order to facilitate movement between platforms. Basically, it requires all SABC reporters, broadcasters, and correspondents to put whatever news item they have in a centralised system. Once this is done, the online department then looks through the archived content and chooses some topical news items to be repurposed for the web. They then try to adapt the chosen news stories to the web platform (mostly by adding multimedia elements). Though this repurposed content is disseminated on the news site, it is not exclusive to the online platform however, and is sometimes moved cross-platform. It must be noted however that, sometimes the centralised system does not have in stock what the online team require (in terms of the news story) so they look to the international newswire agency feeds which the SABC subscribes to including the AP (Associated Press), AFP (Agence France Presse) and Reuters, as well as the local press wire SAPA. As the SABC has agreements with these agencies (as do some other mainstream broadcasters both on and outside of the African continent), their internal software system receives a constant stream of (news) wires daily which makes up for the deficit in news stories to be published on the web site. It must be noted that, the centralised system archives an average of 55 stories daily from the radio and television diaries, and the decision on what to include in the online/web diary is made based on two criteria – news value and its multimedia potential.

How the chosen story is repurposed is also significant. One producer relates the challenges that they encounter in trying to add value to the text-centred or audio/video-heavy content coming in from the wire agencies or traditional platforms, due to the traditional copy-content system that is in place. Time constraints also hamper this process as a huge amount of content is generated overnight (due to the existence of a 24-hour channel), which have to be used to build the top stories to be uploaded to the site in an hour or two. Updates from the morning and afternoon shows, and evening news (both radio and television) are factored into developing the web stories. Speed imperatives are therefore important as generally, online editors are expected to provide the relevant updates in a timely manner (see Paulussen, 2012). This is necessitated even more by the fact that there is a high possibility of the audience getting those updates or a taster of them from a myriad of sources including social media platforms. As Nguyen (2011) has found, the audience expect immediacy, timeliness and continuous updates in news content delivery. However, because the SABC online team by default already have access to so many video stories (and as such do not have to go out to get them), they are obliged to concentrate on value-add, and this adds pressure to their work.

As all the producers and editors are in agreement that multimedia adds value, it is particularly important that these stories are repurposed accordingly. However, generating still images from archived videos is not always easy, coupled with the fact that the SABC has no rights to SAPA pictures (only to REUTERS ones). Though the SABC, does request for UGC material on the radio and television news programmes (on some rare occasions), the quality of these materials is not always assured. Therefore to adapt and make up for this deficit, the digital producer on some occasions undertakes automated synchronising for YouTube and Facebook and then embeds that widget into *Storify* to be uploaded on the news website as news content. Respondents feel therefore that, though over the past year there has been a stronger online editorial team in place, the practice of not having an online reporter directly in the field and having to rely on the radio, television, and also the wire units hampers their story development efforts significantly. Additionally, this deficiency is a factor in why they are unable to 'break' stories online, as they very rarely ever publish a story before the radio and television units have done so.

The guiding (editorial) principles governing these daily practices are also worth reflecting upon. Respondents noted that general editorial rules covering privacy and ethics applies to the use of sources in news reporting, regardless of the platform. A senior editor indicated further that the current guidelines in place are sufficient for web news development as they are fairly high-

level and are all-encompassing. That said, he is of the view that there is still a need to have these guidelines documented as specific to the web. Hence, at the moment there is a review of these guidelines ongoing, where specific inputs (in relation to online and social media) are being made. He however is of the opinion that these changes are likely to be more of common-sense type input which is reflective of the wider South African media (represented by the South African National Editors' Forum – SANEF) changes which are also being undertaken currently. Some other respondents feel strongly that the overriding journalism principles apply sufficiently to their daily operations, despite the digital nature of their work, and must be left intact. These respondents admitted that, at the same time however, there must of course be extrapolations for some new media phenomena, such as UGC use. It seems therefore that opinions are split on if there is the need to have changes made to the existing codes of conduct to reflect the changing times, or to leave them as they are.

In the case of the BBC, a senior technologist at the PSB noted that the institution thrives on a stable work culture, and hence, historically has had very little change or disruption occurring to its agendas and strategies despite the shifting work standards being experienced generally. However, he at the same time acknowledged that the daily workflow is invariably impacted by the changing (digital) times. For example, UGC use, and its associated 'web searching' and verification is now a central part of the institution's newsgathering process. Hence, operationally, the UGC Hub has been placed at the heart of the BBC newsgathering function – no longer an addendum but a core part of the newsroom, and the newsgathering procedure, as declared by then Head of News Peter Horrocks in 2007 (see Jones, 2010).

Other changes to the BBC's newsmaking operations are influenced by firstly, the goal of utilising the digital platform to reach a younger demographic; and secondly, by the need to give a greater degree of choice to consumers. To that extent, the online news team capitalises on the internet to better incorporate the use of audience material. One editor was however quick to note that this strategy is certainly not new or unique to online. It must be noted however that, the BBC is unique in the approach it adopts to UGC use. A respondent recounts how this evolved, noting that after the 7th July London bombing incident when there was a massive influx of UGC to the extent that some news broadcasts consisted entirely of UGC material, the strategy was adopted to have the UGC Hub in place. As at today, UGC use has become one of the BBC's core newsmaking processes.

6.5 The Online News Audience

As noted in earlier discussions, the online news audience impacts and is being impacted upon by the 'new' news storytelling norms. The context-specific characteristics of the online news environment and the audience within it are important considerations and offer an insightful line of enquiry. One SABC respondent summarises his perception about their news audience, saying *"our online audience are those that are given multiple-platform news wherever they are, at whatever time, often through web interfaces (including the complementary platforms of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter*)". According to another, these audiences are not just passive, but are also given the 'voice' to engage with others on the topics that interest them, often using social media platforms. As these 'interactions' are repurposed for other platforms (via *Storify* for example) their 'voices' are also given greater 'reach' through the cross-movement of these repurposed contents across platforms. As the SABC is keen not to be seen as politically one-sided, in order to maintain the necessary transparency, it maintains that it opens up the space through the inclusion of 'alternative' voices.

However, though the reach of the online platform in principle is regarded as wider because of the internet domain which is not constrained by geography or time and therefore can be accessed on-demand, in the case of the SABC, this is not entirely accurate as internet penetration is still quite low and the majority of the audience still rely on the traditional platforms (i.e. the radio and television channels). As Mavhungu and Mabweazara (2014) have found, access to online news is neither assumed nor standard in this context. Considering the fact that the primary focus of the SABC (in principle) is on South African news, there is a need for the online team to better respond to the local audience group, whose access to this news is constrained.

Thurman (2008) found that in the case of the BBC in particular, its online news domain tends to find an audience internationally. However, for the SABC in comparison, the interviews revealed that the opportunities presented for reaching the so-called international (or diasporan) audience tend to be opportunistic rather than consistent. For example respondents intimated that during major events such as the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the Mandela funeral, the site received unprecedented traffic and the SABC online platform was able to provide more content for the international media through live streams. Himelboim, Chang and McCreery (2010) emphasise that though in principle the internet facilitates easy access to foreign news, and hence foreign audiences, sometimes this is not the case in practice;

and Ogunyemi (2006) concurs that it is never straightforward how diasporan audiences consume these news content.

Further, the perception of the SABC newsmakers about their audience is that they vary in their approach to accessing the news. One editor observes that some segments of the audience only access their news via the SABC's official Facebook and Twitter platforms, while others use the web site directly. Further, it was observed that this audience differ in how they consume these news stories – while some are time-constrained and prefer to read only these social media updates, others would download and listen to the audio files from the radio broadcasts that are archived on the news site. The majority that are constrained by bandwidth issues would stick to reading the (written) text story section. Therefore, according to respondents, giving choice to the audience through various news storytelling norms and formats is very important. Consequently, a strategy going forward for the online team is to continue to ensure that the online site is packaged well enough so that radio and television stories can be accessed from it, and where synergy is created between the traditional platforms and the web.

Though much has been made about the potential of the 'voice' given to the audience to participate, respondents from the SABC acknowledged that two-way communication between editors and audience hasn't been fully developed in the South African media context. As such, the current audience comments/feedback platform has not been very effective, especially on the main news website. However, there are increasing instances where audience feedback on social media platforms on key topical stories has influenced the way that a particular story has developed on radio and television.

On the other hand however, on the occasions when the news items generate the required response, there is an identified problem with the moderation of the feedback forum by the limited SABC online personnel, due to the sheer volume of content obtained. As Holmes, Hadwin and Mottershead found, feedback moderation is indeed a problem for most media organisations, regardless of the geographical context (2013). As such, one respondent observed that other media houses in South Africa are doing a better job at UGC use and citizen journalism. For example, it is noted that comparatively, Media24 (a newspaper) and its online news platform, channel24.co.za, do eye-witness reporting more consistently. Therefore the assertions in the literature that news storytellers increasingly incorporate reader feedback into the story (see Trench and Quinn, 2003); that there is an increasing and stronger role for users

as co-creators of the news (according to Karlsson, 2011); and that the audience can contribute to make more meaningful storytelling (Quinn, 2005) are not entirely supported in this case.

However, respondents still maintained that online news consumers can engage with content in more interactive ways that are different from what pertains to the other platforms. Additionally, consumers can have access to news that is immediate, as they do not have to wait for a bulletin to air or a publication to go to print in order to be informed. And finally, the audience also want the ability to share interesting news content on other platforms (according to Nguyen, 2011), and these are certainly features that are offered by the online news platforms investigated.

6.6 Adoption and Adaptation

Like most web-based phenomena, and certainly with online newsmaking at the SABC and the BBC as the discussions show, the issues and or findings are never straightforward. Hence, the enquiries about the rate of adoption of digital techniques, and the adaption of existing norms and formats did not generate clear answers. This is due to the fact that the rate of adoption does not have an even measure – it is merely subjective especially when the cross-context of the BBC and the SABC is considered, as overall, technology diffusion within the two countries is at varied levels.

As Garrison rightly noted, the adoption of new technologies no matter on which scale or in which industry, requires time (2001). However, the general opinion from the BBC respondents supports the conclusions from the latest research studies that place them high above the pack in terms of technology adoption. According to a senior member of the BBC technology team, overall the BBC has reacted quite fast towards technology adoption. However, he duly noted that this is not always the case, as the institutional status (as a PSB) exerts influences where sometimes decision-making (and hence processes) are accelerated and there are times when they are stalled. It must be emphasised that it has been found that the adoption of technologies is to a large extent a decision-making process (see Garrison, 2001). Russell (2011) writes that the BBC is ahead of its competitors that are traditional mainstream news operators. This is an interesting take which was corroborated by our findings. However, a respondent is of the opinion that despite this market-leader status, the BBC does consider the more tech-oriented, new-entrant, alternative news platforms that are primarily online operations (for example Twitter) as real competitors. And hence, his opinion is that these platforms do challenge them technologically. That said, the BBC's current standing and structure (as a PSB

and market-leader) has been instrumental in their quick reaction to technology-adoption, echoing Russell's assertions (2011).

At the SABC however, moderation is the guiding principle of their adoption and adaption strategies. This means that on the whole, there is a cautious approach adopted towards technology overall. One respondent offers a rationale for this, stating that intense planning takes place prior to decisions being made on the route to take with each technology. In recognition of the fact that there are a vast number of digital story making tools currently available, the strategy in place here is to consider the benefits of a particular technique (for example *Storify*) in the grand scheme of how it would be operationalised (and received) within the SABC/South African context. Hence, several trials are carried out prior to a decision being taken on whether to roll it out, or subsequently to discontinue the technique altogether. This accounts therefore for why adoption rates are slow. The opinion is that, this level of cautiousness has merits as it ensures that tools are well tested before they are launched. It also ensures sustainability as they are then least likely to withdraw a tool after it has only been online for a short while, (and when some members of the audience may have gotten attached to them).

Another respondent is of the opinion that the 'trial and error' method presents a good opportunity to be innovative, noting that the techniques employed so far (over the past year) have been successful, due in part to this procedure. A digital media specialist however cautions that these notwithstanding, techniques could work at present but may not in the future, due to the fact that the audience do change and one needs to constantly improve and grow with the audience, and adapt well to a rapidly changing digital landscape in order to continue to cater to their needs. The continuous process of tracking, monitoring and evaluating user experience (for example using social media statistics, web traffic, amongst others) therefore helps the online team to see what works best.

Skill sets considerations are also important as they impact the rate at which techniques are adapted in online newsrooms. Undoubtedly, the staff members that have started out in digital journalism generally find technological adoption easier. Hence, they bring particularly-needed dedication and robustness to the cross-platform, multimedia strategy of the SABC. However, those that transitioned from either radio or television may be more set in their ways, and hence will adapt at a much slower rate. Relatively, other considerations are the number of professionals in the South African media context that can readily provide the skills required of a

successful online news team. The opinion is that, at the moment there is a scarcity of people with the right skills. Even within the existing team of online news staff, a noted problem that militates against adoption is the fact that, though they are good journalists, some are individuals with very low digital life (for example in using social media outside of work). To illustrate this point, one editor revealed that though he loves technology and works primarily with it, it personally took him some eight weeks after setting up a Twitter account before fully engaging with its use.

Another challenge is the under-resourced technical support to the news site (human resource-wise). A solution was proposed to develop the capacities of all team members so changes are made to the (news) site immediately, and not delayed until the responsible persons can fit it into their busy schedules. Currently, the opinion is that the SABC online team is adequately equipped tech-wise to deliver as they have all the necessary equipment, but one respondent admits that *"journalists will never be fully satisfied".* Another maintains*, "the technology is there but we need to challenge ourselves to use it to full capacity in order to deliver".* With tools in use such as the Facebook's widget feature, he is of the opinion that the SABC is set to challenge itself in the online newsmaking arena.

The opinion of some of the respondents is that individual learning is integral to how the team adopts and adapts. In particular, they consider these opportunities for learning to exist within counterpart media institutions in the West, and how their newsmaking teams develop their own processes and tools. One respondent cited the example of how he personally capitalises on this. For instance, in planning how to tailor news stories to mark the anniversary of 20 years of South African democracy, and the general election campaigns in the course of the year, he looked to how the US mainstream media covered the Obama Administration's State of the Union (SOTU) address. He thought it was a good opportunity to learn and was hoping to adopt some of the strategies to the South African context.

Another factor that is important to consider towards understanding the rate at which adoption occurs is the institutional (decision-making) dynamics at play. A senior respondent at the SABC noted that mindsets are gradually changing within the senior management team about the place of online news, as it currently lags behind the other platforms. A respondent feels that the digital platform (and hence online news) at the SABC has not evolved as quickly, due also to the fact that the SABC is a public institution which has bureaucratic challenges, but acknowledges that senior management is slowly coming around to recognise its potential, and

therefore open to the vision of upgrading the platform. Additionally, it is important to consider the SABC's funding and management structure in the scheme of things relative to adoption (which is noted to be slow). With funding streams being generally inconsistent, coupled with management changing all the time, this translates into a delay in the realisation of the online news department's vision for improvements.

There are other constraints which could at best be described as 'political' (as used in the vernacular). One media strategist at the SABC noted, *"people are generally very critical of the SABC and say it is not as good as it used to be. It was the main news organisation during apartheid, so it was quite relevant to the people and the times. A lot has changed since then (with regard to media and democracy in South Africa) and the audience base does not feel quite the same connection to the institution as before".* The team hails new strategies such as the 24-hour channel, and think it might improve their standing in the local media environment. Another respondent feels the disparate nature of the SABC audience (more are less technologically-inclined, while only a few are more tech-savvy) is a factor in the decisions they make on how to adopt and incorporate news elements into the newsmaking process. They are addressing this problem however by going mobile and using social media platforms which are more widespread than online news sites.

In the case of the BBC's approach to adoption and adaption, I highlight here Russell's view that the BBC was historically noted for being conventional (2011), and how this impacts this process at the current time. Though it has over the years embraced new paradigms, allowing staff to use citizen blogging in the early to mid-2000s (as a result of a change in internal policy) – (see Bennett, 2013), respondents maintained that there was earlier scepticism and conservative tendencies towards allowing new media 'gimmicks' to influence their house style and thus brand value. That said, the BBC has overall embraced new technology quite well, and is now focusing on developing techniques quite above their peers in the mainstream online news arena – developing specialised platforms such as the *iPlayer* for the online domain. However, just like their counterpart SABC online news team, they believe in the need for constant experimentation with new techniques until the right fit is achieved.

6.7 What the Future Holds for Online News

As a follow-up of the thematic enquiries on adoption and adaption, investigations are made in this section into future predictions about the online news arena from context perspectives. The findings here are also acknowledged as being principally subjective, as studies have proven that

with digital media, no one can really predict what transformations could happen (see Franklin, 2009a), and there are high uncertainties about its future (Freedman, 2010). At the SABC, predictions are certainly optimistic with respondents noting that the level of digital media use in news production, as well as news dissemination via online platforms are only going to increase. One respondent observed that the tools that are only occasionally accessible now (certainly in the context of South Africa) are going to be vastly available in the future, hence this prediction. He notes, *"UGC is going to get big due to the influence of the increased diffusion of technology as a result of easier access to smartphones...online media/news is definitely going to be the biggest thing*". With Jordaan (2014) finding that social media use in Africa is not exclusive to urban dwellers anymore, this assertion carries some weight.

At the same time, the SABC respondents highlight the undeniable fact that the SABC structure and identity is predominantly rooted in broadcast. A digital producer predicted that despite this broadcast identity, the strength of the SABC (in the future) however lies in how well it embraces the online, tablet and mobile platforms. Therefore, a senior strategist noted that the challenge going forward is in integrating these platforms, in line with the current SABC Digital News' vision. She says, *"we have so much reach, and we need to capitalise on that"*. Another predicts that data journalism is going to assume increasing significance for online news production. She says as the expertise in this crucial area is becoming vital, journalism education and training should reflect this change. She says "*students should be made to acquire these skills (that include web publishing, database and spreadsheet use, and coding) as part of their training to be journalists".*

Going forward, an editor noted that there is a big opportunity for the convergence of content, especially across platforms. This reinforces earlier points raised about the aspiration for the development of a common look and feel across the SABC's multiple media platforms. Cooke (2005) observes that platforms that are same-owned tend to share the same converged content across them, and this seems to be the aim of the SABC online team going forward. Overall, there is awareness among the team that there is a great potential for the future with the SABC's online news platform overall.

At the BBC however, predictions about the future state of online news are more understated. From the responses received, these predictions seem to emanate from a position of increasing awareness and recognition of competitors in the online newsmaking arena. Thus, they predict that within the BBC, there would be greater innovation to counter the growing competition

(technologically) from the rapidly-growing body of new entrants who offer various (alternative) experiences for digital news.

Further, the BBC's position as a PSB is an influence on its outlook on the future of the online platform. Hence, as due consideration is given to the disparate audience who consume its news content, finding the right balance between developing new digital tools while ensuring that the needs of all cross-sections of the audience are met is vital. A senior strategist at the institution therefore notes, *"the BBC despite these huge potentials and vision for developing digitally also ascribes to the Universality principle".* Hence, going forward, there is a specific focus on developing a more customised experience for the *iPlayer* (and also other related newsmaking and dissemination tools) that serves individual needs more with specific application to the online news domain.

Additionally, there is going to be more investment into visual and data journalism, as well as some new and innovative platforms, for example *insta-facts/insta-news*, especially with the increasing use of mobile and tablet which favour such techniques.

6.8 Concluding Summary

The discussions established that the impact of digital tools and techniques on newsmaking is influenced by several context-specific factors which produce different experiences depending on the context. Consequently, each institution and country is seen as presenting unique insights into online newsmaking. Even though it appears that unifying factors such as a PSB remit might exert similar influences, it is evident that this is sometimes not the case. This argument draws from the discussions that are advanced in this chapter which demonstrate that the capacity (technological and financial) of the environment within which both the BBC and the SABC operate influence their respective outlooks and approaches in different ways. For example, the SABC had had to adopt an approach to managing and maintaining a cross-platform ethos that capitalises on its network of radio and television stations within the SABC media set-up. This approach takes into consideration the fact that the online division is run as an addendum to the traditional platforms (see Berger, 2002). The BBC in comparison, in addition to having a fully integrated online unit, also enjoys a stability of funding (and thus process) which makes it easier to develop and scale up on innovative newsmaking processes.

The respective institutional standings of these two organisations are also seen as important factors to consider. Here, I advanced the argument (through the discussions) in this chapter

that these have implications for brand identity and who the institutions consider as competitors, with both these factors indirectly affecting the approach to online newsmaking. The SABC for instance, considers itself as the African broadcaster, and therefore has a more diverse audience to serve with its online news platform. The BBC on the other hand gives due consideration to the fact that it must protect the brand that historically symbolises specific things to the British public and therefore aims to ensure that the adoption of new practices such as UGC still support this quest.

There are several other disparities about the effect of digital technologies on newsmaking within these two institutions that the findings highlight. For the SABC, priorities for online news development include the use of the social media platform in newsmaking while at the BBC, the emphasis is on the development of advanced personalisation tools such as the *iPlayer* for web news. Also, the implications of the current positions of the respective online news teams were emphasised. For example, it was demonstrated that the online division of the BBC is seen as more equipped technologically and financially in comparison to that of the SABC, and as a result the former generally adopts and integrates the use of diverse innovative techniques into the news process more quickly than the latter.

However, there are points of convergence for these two organisations as well. For example it was demonstrated that at both the BBC and the SABC, newsmakers are being required to undertake new roles as validators and 'context-setters'. This phenomenon has implications for new skill sets that are required for these roles including data journalism, internet search and social media skills.

I emphasise here that the perspectives of the key actors (the newsmakers) bring a much-needed insight into what is actually done on the news platform by way of news production and dissemination. However, because there was access to only the views from top-level management at the BBC as opposed to the online news editors, most of the insights obtained were those pertaining to the strategic direction of newsmaking within the institution. A notable implication of this is that there was the inability to call them out on obvious contradictions with the findings from the analyses of the site, or at the very least to obtain explanations for them. Additionally, this deficiency makes the accounts from their SABC counterparts assume a stronger voice since they were more able to explain their editorial procedures, while they (the BBC respondents) were only able to advance limited insights. This is notwithstanding the fact

that I was careful not to generalise the findings across the board since the two institutions are from noticeably different contexts.

Overall, these deficiencies show that we need to look at these perspectives in the light of what the findings reveal from the examination of the state of the respective online platforms, as well as what has been theoretically discussed in the literature. The next chapter therefore reflects and integrates from these different discursive and analytical perspectives.

Chapter 7: Reflections on the Current Nature and Future Potential of Online Newsmaking – Synthesis of Online and Offline Analyses

According to what has been documented in the literature and from the perspectives of news producers interacted with in this study, the online news space is growing significantly due to a whole host of factors, which are mostly related to the innovation imperatives of the news industry as a whole. However, getting a clear picture of what exactly is the overall state of new media and online journalism either globally, or in relation to a specific context is neither straightforward nor easy. In this study, it is made particularly complex by a number of factors. This includes the use of the two case studies from differing contexts; the range of research methods employed in the study; the time span of study – from 2012 through to 2014; and the limited sample considered – only hard news reports on the online platform. In order to ensure that a deeper interpretation of the findings is made therefore, there is an attempt here to synthesize what the evidence seems to be so far about the impact of digital technologies on news storytelling, taking into consideration both theoretical findings and the empirical evidence, and also the disparities in the findings within these two case studies. As such, this chapter considers discussions emanating from both online (the Content and Multimodal Discourse Analyses) and offline (interviews) findings, as well as the discussions from the literature review which preceded the empirical investigations. This is a necessary process in establishing exactly how these collective findings support or refute the stated research hypotheses, or whether they suggest some entirely new phenomena.

In the succeeding sub-section, I reflect on what forms and norms of online news storytelling are evident from the collective discussions undertaken in the thesis so far. Hence, I discuss among other things, how online hard news formats at the SABC were initially (at the start of the investigations in 2012) predominantly text-based and very traditional (with regards to multimedia and UGC use), but have since evolved into a more creative use of these techniques. I also make a case here that comparatively with the SABC, the BBC on the other hand right from the onset of the study, made a significant use of most identified digital techniques. As such, no drastic changes were seen over the course of the investigations.

The section after this discusses how the newsmaking culture at the BBC and the SABC is changing as a result of the influences from the digital platform. It critically reflects on a number of these changes from the perspectives of the institution (the news producers), as well as the media environment as constituted by the audience. Further, it is argued here that the adoption

of technologies is influenced first and foremost by the PSB remit of these two institutions. Additionally, the respective British and South African media environments are seen as exerting influences on what particular digital techniques are adapted into the newsmaking processes within the BBC and the SABC, and how.

The chapter concludes with a section that is intended to clearly highlight the significant conclusions drawn in this thesis. For example, it makes a claim that mainstream newsmakers are still the custodians of the 'story' they produce; and that the dominant form of online news storytelling is nonlinearity which can be seen in the use of various techniques. It argues further that the affordances of the digital techniques (and space) are not consistent across the board (that is within these two organisations). Finally, it is identified here that the concept and practice of online journalism is forever evolving.

7.1 Establishing the Forms of Online News Storytelling

What do we know about the current state of online newsmaking processes from the different (case) studies presented so far? It was argued by some notable researchers that the digital platform is impacting news production cultures under a global journalistic revolution (see Kautsky and Widholm, 2008; Franklin, 2008). Under this so-called revolution, some notable shifting norms in relation to news storytelling were highlighted. At the same time however, other studies support the claim that in fact nothing significant has changed (see Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). This thesis argues that it is not effective to make a general statement based on either claim as it has been sufficiently demonstrated that both stances can be supported when contextual cases are investigated. Hence, what would be a more useful exercise is to examine what is the state of each particular parameter (for example the audience, the news story, or the news producer) within each context.

Additionally, it is more expedient to consider that the influences of digital technologies as concluded from the findings in this thesis would be limited in any particular instance to the contexts studied (in this case, that of the BBC and the SABC) drawing from the non-generalisability arguments advanced above. In this sub-section therefore, discussions centre on the news story. For example, they highlight the fact that traditional elements are seen in the dominant use of textual narratives within both institutions. At the same time however, the use of call-outs, hyperlinks and interactive links consistently is seen as a distinct influence of digital technologies.

7.1.1 Merging Traditional and New Norms in Online News

It is well evident that news stories in the online spaces studied are characterised by nonlinear formats which see the inclusion of call-outs, hyperlinks and interactive links to some degree. It must be recalled that it has been demonstrated that these features can be seen as digital manifestations of nonlinearity as they create non-sequential reading patterns. Even when text forms dominate in news storytelling, hyperlinks, and some interactive call-outs (and the latter, in the case of the BBC at least) are used, where users can be engaged in exercising the option to follow through with other news-consumption cues at any point in time. Some researchers have gone a step further and demonstrated that these formats indeed also feature rich content and interlinked multimedia (Bucy, 2004; Massey, 2004). In this study's investigations however, it was found that while there are indeed some high elements of multimedia use in totality, level of use vary according to the particular news site, the genre of news, and the geographical classification of the news story, amongst others. For example, most BBC news stories feature some form of audiovisual material and the use of images (mostly above average in size), while the opposite occurs with the SABC. This shows that beyond the fact that the digital platform can accommodate such techniques, the media context and the institution also play a crucial role.

At the SABC, considerations are given to the time and expertise required to repurpose troves of audiovisual material for the web, even if they are freely available due to the convergence of content from the television, radio and web platforms in this context. Additionally, internet bandwidth challenges have been seen to be a limiting factor on the extent to which rich multimedia content can be incorporated into online news stories. The BBC in comparison, aside from having online news reporters in the field who can capture video stories directly without the need for repurposing, also have the added advantage of having producers and audiences who are not (to a large extent) challenged by internet accessibility issues and are therefore much more able to easily produce videos or access them. As Redden and Witschge had earlier established (2010), the BBC does range above its contemporaries in terms of multimedia use.

The genre of news stories can also be a determining factor, where sports news at the BBC for example is more likely to feature audiovisuals and large graphics with the written text stories. Some other news stories from this same news site (more likely from other genres), appear with very little multimedia (for example a single graphic, no call-out links, and no audiovisuals). And here, it is essential to look within the context of the story to see what other considerations account for this. For example, the type of audiences who access a particular news story, or the

characteristics anticipated of a particular genre can all exact an influence. To illustrate, topical news stories at both institutions covering a range of issues from trade union activities, national budgets, or immigration (depending on the context) are more likely to be set in a context with analysis, graphs and expert opinion features.

It must be noted that, while from the onset of the investigations the BBC's use of multimedia was fairly consistent, the SABC's news formats have evolved somewhat. In particular, in the first year of our investigations (which is 2012), a significant majority of SABC online news stories were principally written text. The deviation however was with news stories that were sourced internationally (from the REUTERS newswire) which featured the occasional multimedia element. However, within a year of the initial analysis of the site, I can say that a jump was experienced in how the SABC used multimedia, and this is principally because the use of the *Storify* tool was introduced. Hence, the use of more digital tools is seen at this present time in the SABC's online news, judging from what is presented in the findings from the CA in comparison to that of the MmDA.

Interestingly, SABC respondents validated the finding that text forms dominated the news site though they still maintained that video is of extreme importance. This confirms yet again that while newsmakers in this context may be desirous of publishing more innovative material, factors such as technological incapacity can and do inhibit them. Relatedly, previous studies carried out on the use of multimedia at the BBC cite some cases where news videos (specifically those that opened in an external player) were seen as having limited uptake (Thurman and Lupton, 2008). However, since indications show that news videos are still featured in present times but in a different format, it seems therefore that newsmakers in this context have indeed adapted news content to suit the desired requirements.

Further, some research works have indicated that there is the possibility of the potentials of personalisation to be used in enhancing digital news storytelling (Quinn, 2005; Allan, 2006; Massey, 2006). It can be recalled that personalisation refers to the use of a high form of interactivity (beyond navigational and conversational) that enables content to be adapted to a user's preferences. It must however be acknowledged that personalisation is in itself one of the digital techniques that is not so straightforwardly defined or operationalised, both within the literature and practice (see Thurman and Schifferes, 2012). This makes it difficult to attempt to ground findings obtained so far in this particular study on any one foundation that satisfies all the varied perspectives. However, the study by Thurman and Schifferes (2012) builds up on

several others, and provides useful and all-encompassing perspectives by which I will analyse the findings obtained here. For example, they developed several categories of what can be classified as a personalisation feature in online news (including both explicit and implicit forms). These include the provision of RSS feed functions, SMS alerts, Twitter feed functions, emailed newsletters, and geo-targeted editions, just to name a few. The findings from the CA reveal that for both the BBC and the SABC, the dominant form in use was the RSS feed function. This concurs with Veglis who finds that they have indeed become standard features for most media organisations (2007; 2012). However, I found that the BBC also made provisions for geo-targetted editions, Twitter feed functions, SMS alerts and emailed newsletters. But all of these (with the exception of geo-targetted editions), fall within the category of what researchers have determined are the least disireable and likely the most ineffective of personalisation forms. Thurman and Schifferes, (2012) calls them the 'explicit personalisation functionality' forms. This is due to the fact that they require a greater exertion by the user (as opposed to the technology, for example an algorithm) and this has implications for the time required to do so; the interest of users; and the digital literacy levels of users (Thurman, 2011). It is obvious therefore that despite the evolving nature of personalisation norms in online newsmaking, current usage is still not at particularly enhanced levels.

The conclusions here notwithstanding, it can still be argued that some forms of enhanced storytelling were evident from the news stories. For example, I have discussed how call-out elements were used at the BBC (and much later at the SABC) in creative ways that build upon the news story beyond the obvious modal formats (of text, images and audiovisuals). In particular, I can highlight the use of interactive graphs and infographics (at the BBC) and the use of the *Storify* element (at the SABC). All these practices are increasingly becoming ubiquitous in the world of digital storytelling and visualisation in different contexts of the world, and offer nonlinear patterns of information consumption (beyond what is experienced in print and television for example). It must however be noted that not all of these call-outs exemplify technology-impacted new media norms in the strictest sense, as some have some very obvious traditional (old media) underpinnings. For example, the more simple highlighted text (in bold font) as used at the SABC can be spotted in use in some newspapers. Although it has been maintained that this practice was adapted from the web platform to newspapers and not the other way round, these obvious continuities between the traditional and new media platforms as far as the use of this feature is concerned is noteworthy. Further, the use of the call-out quotation from a correspondent in that thematic field (for instance, from a political

news correspondent) can be likened to the 'expert analysis' segments in news broadcast on television.

These similarities are not surprising as researchers in the field (see Massey, 2004; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009) argue that online news journalism has been found to be an embodiment of all the forms, elements and practices associated with the traditional platforms of print, radio and television, in a converged manner. Clayton (2003; p.153) argues that "online journalism has the potential to take the best things about newspapers, magazines, radio and television and wrap them up in a single product". This is what I have discussed in this study as the hybridity of practice and content on the online platform. Consequently, it was found that especially at the SABC, this is because most of the online news team have transitioned from working on traditional platforms and carried some of the storytelling practices over to the new platform.

Beyond call-outs, the use of interactivity elements is another strong feature of news sites as these are seen in each and every news story analysed to date. However, the type of interactivity feature used, the degree of use, and the ways in which they are used vary according to the context. The user-to-system type of interactivity (also called navigational or content interactivity) involving the use of the share and hyperlinking functions was identified in all instances at both news sites. However, the BBC employs in addition some limited amounts of the higher levels of interactivity, in the form of user-to-user (also functional or interpersonal interactivity) by providing the feedback and comments functions on some occasion – a feature which we have indicated is practically nonexistent at the SABC. However, the availability of functions for comments and feedback can be seen on complementary SABC sites such as the official SABC Online Facebook and Twitter pages, as these platforms are more widely used in the South African context comparatively. However at present, most of the higher level interactivity features used fall into the category of what Örnebring (2009, p.150) calls 'low involvement' UGC, which allows users to comment on existing content but not create their own. Therefore, though the highly adaptive forms of interactivity seem to be the end goal and the most desired form of audience engagement, it can be observed that, for the moment, newsmakers at the BBC and the SABC are only mostly harnessing the potential of the limited navigational interactivity such as page shares.

The approach to the use of UGC itself within these two institutions deserves special mention. With regard to the BBC, though it is apparent that it is in fact being used because of the

provision of the feedback feature where content is solicited on occasion, however, within the content itself very little evidence of this exists. For example, attribution is not given to citizen-generated materials that are subsequently incorporated into news stories. However, respondents from the news team corroborated research findings which identify that the BBC employs a high use of UGC, to the extent that its UGC Hub is now a unit situated within the news division. Hence, it is operated as a central part of the newsgathering process, which explains why attribution of such content to the originators is not standard protocol, given that the editors can now assume ownership. Consequently, this finding supports the conclusions from some researchers that the BBC adopts quite a traditional approach to using these UGCs, especially in how the same age-old editorial guidelines are being applied, and where the content is heavily moderated.

On the whole, though on the face of it, UGC use appears to be very much a digitally-impacted technique, it definitely has traditional elements to it. For example, UGC in online news has been linked to similar practices in traditional media where calls are made for audience input. Therefore the continuities between platforms are continually emphasised. As Bivens (2008, pp.116-117) maintains, UGC may be new but the phenomenon isn't. Interestingly, while the SABC respondents maintained that UGC (called crowd-sourced content) use is not particularly a component of SABC online newsmaking, there are several instances where tweets from the audience are built into the story. Therefore, overall, multimediality, hypertextuality and interactivity remain rather contextualised, so it is difficult to arrive at conclusions that fully capture a collective understanding of these phenomena.

However, as C.P. Scott, editor of (then) The Manchester Guardian said as far back as 1921 (and is cited in Harcup, 2009, p.90), "comment is free, but facts are sacred". So for mainstream, public-sector news organisations (such as the BBC and the SABC) that want to protect their well-established brand value, it may well be that it is better for them to focus on adapting the new practices in ways that still support quality news delivery.

7.1.2 Creativity and Innovation in Online Newsmaking Processes

The notions of creativity and innovation on the web are rather problematic concepts to fully grasp. Both concepts (within the understanding of this thesis) can very simply be construed as the use of new and evolving formats that increasingly incorporate different aspects of technology. Hence, any aspect of the online newsmaking process at the BBC and the SABC can be perceived as such if they satisfy this loosely-defined criterion. The challenge here is that,

research and practice-wise, it is a very wide field whose interpretation is also highly subjective. At the very basic level, who determines what is creative and or innovative? And who decides where this creativity and innovation is taking place? In effect, to effectively grasp this, consideration needs to be given to the perspectives of the different actors (producers or audiences) and also the contexts (whether mainstream vs. alternative, or developed world as against developing world, etc.)

Both have become assumed features of online output however, though past research indicates that evidence supports only a limited use (Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Quandt, 2008). The audience expects it, and the producers conceive that it is required of them and they therefore aim to deliver. However, it is found that the features that denote creativity and innovation are not always guaranteed in every instance. For instance, timeliness of online news publishing that ensures that news stories are released more quickly and updates are given more regularly may exist in the BBC (UK) context but no so much at the SABC. In the case of the latter, creativity in ideas is hampered by the lack of the existence of the actual tools to execute them. Nonetheless, at both institutions there is the attempt to provide news consumption experiences that differ somewhat from that of the respective radio and television platforms through the incorporation of a myriad of digital nonlinear formats. This is therefore one way creativity is seen though admittedly, this process sees significant incorporation of old media norms.

Drawing from this example therefore, this study makes a strong case that technological changes are indeed shaped by institutional factors, with both technical and financial capacities imposing a significant influence on what particular techniques are adapted into newsmaking processes, and at what rate. At the BBC, I observed from my qualitative assessment of the news content during the CA period that there was the inclusion of some form of novel feature on the average of one each month, though these are just simple additions to an existing technique or format (for example use of interactive maps, graphs or photo slide decks), and are not in fact significant changes to style and form. The SABC in comparison rarely incorporated any and was observed to be making any noticeable inclusion approximately a year after investigations were initiated into the state of news content on the platform.

However, in the interactions with respondents from the SABC, it emerged that it is actively encouraged that staff of the online news team be as innovative in ideas and processes as much as possible. However, with a number of factors enumerated such as slow managerial buy-in,

coupled with systemic challenges (including technological and financial shortcomings), this innovation drive is not translated into actual output to any significant degree.

Other arguments which can be used to further situate the discussion in this sub-section regard how nonlinearity is actually operationalised within the case study institutions. A decade-old research highlights the view that newsmakers are not practicing textbook definitions of this feature (Massey, 2004). This was certainly still the case with the SABC as findings show that though the *Storify* component which was subsequently introduced, enabled the use of more diverse content formats, it was still lacking overall as it did not incorporate any of the complex innovative, and interactive formatting styles and techniques that Massey (2004) had highlighted in his paper and which the counterpart BBC does feature.

Consequently, taking into consideration the totality of findings from the investigations, our conclusions support the view (of Massey, 2004) that there is an indication that the full potential of the web is not being harnessed in certain contexts. In answering why this is so, the conclusion drawn in this study is that, there are several factors at play in each context with influences from the immediate media and institutional environment being chief drivers. For example, at both the BBC and the SABC, the consensus from the respondents was that they see the PSB remit as something of a constraint on innovation and creativity as it slows the rate at which they are able to incorporate new techniques into the existing processes (due to the already mentioned issues with regulatory oversights for example). At the same time however, responses indicate that the BBC enjoys a constant flow of finances to undertake Research and Development (R&D) due to this same PSB remit. Evidently, this R&D is what enables them to build up on many innovative newsmaking strategies. Hence, it is obvious that it's not easy to obtain a clear picture of overall impacts since an attribute can have both negative and positive consequences.

There are other related conclusions to be drawn here which I should flag. For example, I found that while speed (in news publishing and or updating stories) is anticipated on the digital platform and seems to be the practice, it does not seem to be in competition with quality as alluded to in the literature. Because the online news space is so saturated currently, the news institutions are being forced to take quality considerations seriously as brand recognition is a strong factor in consumer attraction and retention. Further, this same new media space allows for easy verification of the facts presented in the stories, hence there is a greater pressure on news producers not to sacrifice credibility for speed.

Finally, another creative element is seen in social media use. At the SABC, due to the challenges presented by the inability to harness the full ability of the news site's feedback and comments function effectively, they have found value in using the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms, which are more ubiquitous in this context. The BBC also makes use of social media in news story development, as it sometimes incorporates tweets into sports news stories. Therefore, social media platforms can be made to serve as 'feedback' channels, with the citizen-generated content used to develop news stories in creative ways.

7.2 How News Culture is Changing

In the literature, conclusions on the norms, techniques and the perceived affordances of the digital platform (like most researched media phenomena), are fairly inconsistent. However, one conclusion that is quite definite is that mainstream news organisations are still very relevant media institutions even in these changing times. What is important as a research agenda therefore is to evaluate which aspects of their work culture are changing and how, especially since it has been established that changes are context-specific and not consistent across the board.

In unpacking the reflections from the interview discussions, I argue here about the possible existence of two schools of practice working side-by-side in both the BBC and the SABC contexts. One is still very traditional, clinging to some of the old norms of news production and dissemination. The other however is capitalising on how the digital domain (which tends to be fairly unstructured and open) is spurring a change in the techniques and norms being used. These two are discussed in the following sub-sections.

7.2.1 The Institutional Perspective

It must be noted that some scholars in the field (for example Deuze, 2003) have categorised online journalism as a distinct form, labelling it as the 'fourth' journalism (following from print, radio and television). This conclusion seems to concur with Harper's, which finds that a new form of journalism called digital news has emerged (1998). However, within each of the case study institutions, the effects of this 'new' journalism differ based on a set of attributes seen and experienced during the course of our investigations. This conclusion agrees with assertions that though the chief driver of this 'new' form is technology, technological innovations are shaped by a host of factors mostly internal to the institution, where technology is thus not wholly independent (Boczkowski, 2004).

For instance, the BBC relishes the stability provided by its PSB remit, which allows it to function and innovate in a relatively stable work culture, unlike some counterpart news institutions that are wholly private-owned. From the previous chapters' discussions, this means that in parts due to this remit, some practices analogous to traditional platforms however remain unchanged despite the fact that a digital platform would otherwise have engendered some contrasting effects.

For example, we see a culture of limited external hyperlinking though the web is seen to be more conducive and open to featuring materials from other news organisations/sources. A top BBC personnel interviewed, in expressing his opinions on this matter however maintained that the institution is committing itself to more extensive external hyperlinking. He said that the rationale for this is because of a new mandate for the BBC to act more robustly in a supporting role to other alternative news platforms, in contrast to the previous nature which was generally closed. It must be observed here that while indeed the CA which preceded the interviews, confirmed that external hyperlinking was only done sporadically, the MmDA, which coincided with the interviews did not pick up on any more extensive instances. This contradiction can potentially be explained as an obvious limitation of the interview sampling method since only senior management were interviewed and they gave responses that were perhaps more aligned to (future) strategies which may not as yet have translated into actual everyday practices. Another reason could be that the respondent was merely overstating the current incidence levels, whereas the author was understating them (as a result of using measures in general online publishing, specifically alternative news sites and blogging platforms which do quite extensive hyperlinking). The ways in which news editors are being encouraged to maintain individual blogging platforms outside of the BBC is however evidence of a 'new' BBC culture that is being increasingly open (Bennett, 2013). Thus, Harper's prediction that digital news has the potential to innovate into new roles and dimensions (1998) is supported through these demonstrated shifts.

Hence, an argument is advanced here that online journalism is certainly getting an identity of its own which should be uniquely treated. However, as Weiss and Domingo (2010) noted, innovation imperatives are essential towards the sustainability of this 'new' industry. At the SABC, potentials for innovation are perceived to exist in social media platforms, hence they are being harnessed in this area. For the BBC, innovation potentials exist in specific tools, for example the development of the *iPlayer* specifically for web news. Consequently, I can

conclude that the ability of the platform to survive and thrive in these two separate contexts would depend on how well they build on these identified potentials.

On the other hand, it is equally important to isolate the instances where the BBC and the SABC's online news production processes remain unchanged. A distinct case is the editorial channel at the SABC through which all stories must pass before being published, which is still in place. Additionally, the editorial guidelines governing how news stories are reported and published remain the same, as those that applied to newsmaking on the radio and television platforms. At the BBC, a stringent verification process within its UGC Hub is maintained in conformity with these (editorial) standards (see Giannakoulopoulos, Varlamis and Kouloglou, 2012). In fact, a previous study established the BBC as one institution that is above its contemporaries in verifying news content received via these alternative routes (see Bruno, 2011). This reinforces the assertion by Jones and Salter (2012) that the BBC values accuracy over speed. These examples demonstrate that while some processes of news production are changing at the two news institutions, others remain in place to support the new norms.

7.2.2 The Newsmaker

The changing nature of the digital platform, in particular the convergence ethos that characterises it is causing a shift in the role of news producers. Collectively, there is a perceived shift in the mindsets of online journalists; the skills required to undertake online news production; and the role that these actors play in the newsmaking chain and the media environment generally. For example, in the current environment, online journalists are increasingly being perceived, not as gatekeepers but as professionals who among other things, bring much-needed clarification and or endorsement in these times when alternative and aggregating news sites flood the web with a glut of news stories.

These online journalists are also breaking existing norms with regards to their collective role and identity in a number of ways. They are developing and projecting individual brands beyond that of the news organisation. For example, news editors are encouraged to maintain personal blogs and social media channels through which they can extend the discourse of the news stories and engage with audiences. This concept was hitherto not common at the BBC. For example, Matheson (2004) argues that it is now expected that senior correspondents at the BBC maintain blogs and Twitter accounts to tell the news further, aside from what is actually published on the main website. This is one way for the news agency to undertake some of the

services provided by alternative news sites who offer additional insights and further opportunities to engage through the comments section.

Additionally, these online newsmakers are allowing other actors (the audience) to a limited extent into the 'newsroom' through the use of sourced UGC (in the case of the BBC) and audience tweets (in the case of both the BBC and the SABC). Furthermore, these audiences are allowed to partake in news dissemination through sharing of the published news on social media sites, and through cross-posting on alternative news sites. So therefore, through popularising particular new stories in this manner, the audiences are thus helping to set the agenda for mainstream newsmakers.

The infusion of some of the techniques and practices highlighted above invariably raise the often debated question of who 'owns' the news, as the concepts of 'prosumers' (producers-consumers) and the increasing blurring of the frontstage-backstage divide are coming to the fore in the research in the field. The evidence from this study seems to suggest that though some specific elements of newsmaking are witnessing a collaboration of sorts between (mainstream) news producers and consumers, the former still has a firm footing as makers of the news. Therefore, the grand idea that the audience is brought into the storytelling loop of mainstream news establishments is not supported at this present time in its entirety. This is the only conclusion reached as there isn't much evidence to support the otherwise scenario, for example, as attribution to UGC use is still very much non-existent at both news organisations.

The skill set requirement of newsmakers is perhaps the area in which the most shift has been experienced. In conformity with media convergence culture, the online news producer no longer has the luxury of being an expert in only one area – for instance in news writing, news reporting or in broadcasting. Rather, the online news editor has to be proficient in reporting (writing) a story; capturing the said story in still or video form; and editing and publishing the final product on the web. In certain instances, the basic role of reporting (writing) is made redundant. For example, in the case of the SABC, already archived (text) stories are merely repurposed with multimedia, interactive and hypertext content for the web. Additionally, new techniques require that news producers not only be conversant with ancillary skills (of social media and blogging) but should also engage with them even outside of the normal newsmaking channel in order to maintain their individual brands. Further to this, online newsmaking is requiring extra skills in totality. For example, internet navigation and deep verification (as

undertaken at the BBC UGC Hub) require different skill sets from what was the case with pre-online newsmaking.

Additionally, through the alteration of the role of the newsmaker, the online journalist is expected to provide much more information than required when merely 'breaking the news'. Gatekeeping and agenda-setting are attributes of the past for the online journalist, and so they are now seeking new ways to be relevant beyond these seeming outmoded ones. This is done through new roles of being the 'context provider' and 'validator'. Here, they seek to verify, validate and contextualise news stories through the provision of deep analysis, visualisation and background information. This essentially means that newsmakers must now provide some kind of expert context, beyond simply putting the story out there. Specifically, they should provide additional background information and expert analysis to support the news stories where necessary. Further, they are required to validate stories through their existing brand power. Hudson and Temple (2010) maintain that in an age where there is openness of access to the internet, the trustworthiness of noted brands such as the BBC is essential and will serve them well (p.70), as Harcup (2009, p.183) maintains that "quality of reporting remains the most important thing".

With these emerging new roles, it seems that effectively, the journalist should be able to code, undertake visual analysis and data journalism, and generally present stories convincingly and creatively. It seems therefore that skill sets that relate to multimedia production are being seen as basic and given in practicing online journalism just like writing was for print. For instance, Jones and Salter (2012) declare:

> As a result of these changes, a new set of essential craft skills is emerging for all those working in journalism – 'professional' or otherwise. It's not sufficient simply to be able to write, the next-generation journalist will need to be able to find and download data, use statistical software, be comfortable with advanced web-scraping strategies to analyse social news flows, and have the basic technical skills to facilitate their work. (p.172)

Though it might appear that online journalists from converged mainstream news institutions have less to do as they have all the content at their disposal and as such do not have to go looking for it, the opposite is in fact the case. To illustrate, UGC at the BBC has to undergo an intensive verification process; then the content must be put in a context with deep analyses

and background information. Editors from this platform often are expected to maintain a steady blog to drive topical conversations further. In the case of the SABC, content from the multi-platform pool (as well as from local and or international newswires) has to be reversioned after a decision has been made about the particular news stories to be published online. This online story must then be disseminated and discussed on various social media platforms of the SABC before being incorporated back to the web in the form of a *Storify* story in certain instances. It seems therefore that the workload is expanding rather than contracting. This has a definite implication for the quality and accuracy levels expected of a group of people that are already being burdened and challenged in this bourgeoning environment.

7.2.3 The Media Environment and the Audience-sphere

The general media environment (in particular the news audience) has also been impacted by the advancements in the use of digital media in newsmaking. The online audience is increasingly being perceived as empowered due to the choice and engagement offered by a whole host of digital techniques and practices such as multimediality and interactivity. The media environment is also seeing more 'collaboration' in how news content is cross-distributed and shared. For example, through external hyperlinking (on some rare occasions), and also through the use of the 'share' functions which is relatively more common.

In terms of the opportunities for engagement, in both contexts, social media platforms are used extensively, and at the SABC in particular, this platform is the main avenue for news producers to interact with consumers (sometimes even via personal Facebook and Twitter accounts of the news editors). It must be highlighted that the potentials for innovation in the South African media arena have been hinged in particular on the so-called development of the social media platform, where one respondent from the SABC was quoted as saying, *"social media is going to get big!"*

Further to this potential-to-engage argument, a recurring theme of the 'inclusion of other voices' is therefore noted as a defining characteristic of the digital news space, despite not being unique to the web. And here, I highlight once again the adaption of crowd-sourced content (by way of either UGC or tweets/Facebook posts) into news stories at the two institutions. One can argue however that, as this content is heavily moderated (in-house), the final product does not much embody 'other voices'.

Consequently, the type of news narrative that is required of this online environment is certainly changing though there are marked similarities to conventional norms (as seen on the traditional news platforms). For example, though some are of the opinion that the long-form can be seen as struggling, it is still being used on some occasions, at some news organisations and with some news genres, (for example, some of The Guardian's news articles, and most of the BBC's magazine-style articles). Additionally, some stories are infused with multimedia elements, interactive material and hyperlinked features, while others are very much simple and basic stories which are much like those of an online newspaper (this being the case with the SABC at the initial stages of the investigations in particular). Therefore, it appears that no single style is uniquely efficient or appropriate to the web as we see all manner of narratives at play.

This disparity in newsmaking norms can be said to reflect the choice that must be given to the consumer based on their individual capacities and wants. Hence, it can be concluded then that the environment is increasingly being characterised by news consumers who want a greater degree of choice. They want to be able to choose what to consume, how and when. This tie in then with what was found about other characteristics of the online audience, and the conclusion advanced here is that when the online news audiences from the two news environments are considered in totality, they are indeed very disparate. They comprise among other classifications, international audiences as well as local audiences (including some nationals, for example, South Africans living in the diaspora). Additionally, these audiences can include those who are considered heavy users of social media, or not. The types of news formats, contents and other news features that attract these audiences are therefore not so straightforwardly-determined.

However, newsmakers insist that they try to get a sense of what each particular audience group will require at each point in time. For example, some of the respondents advanced the idea that the different types of 'extra' elements they (aim to) provide by way of, for example the *iPlayer* in the case of the BBC, and the *Storify* feature at the SABC is in fact in response to their perception of the wants of certain members of the audience. The objective of this, from the point of view of these news producers, is to retain consumers as such techniques make such target audiences repeat users of the platform (as their needs are met). However, only a deeper form of audience study (beyond the scope of this one) would determine if that is in fact the case.

It must be noted that it has been identified that brand quality is integral to this process of capturing and retaining online audiences (or any form of news audience for that matter). Most news audiences may simply access the online news of these two organisations based on the awareness of the BBC and the SABC brand and not necessarily because they get a unique news-consuming experience. For instance, as pointed out in Sturgill, Pierce and Wang (2011), the touted higher level interactivity elements are not necessarily being taken advantage of by the audience, and this is may well be the case for both news sites judging from how little of them are in fact featured. This is therefore just one of the many examples of how a supposed pull factor in audience attraction and retention might just not be the case after all.

And finally, another way in which the media environment is being influenced is in how all news types (genres and classifications) seem to have a space in the digital domain. Newsmakers maintain that in responding to the changing media environment, variety in news selection is key. Consequently, space is provided daily for news stories that are not limited to the typical public-interest stories. As one respondent from the SABC noted, each news story has the potential to be topical (or 'big') due to the interest and (sharing/commenting) activities of the audience, and this cannot be predetermined as used to be the case in the pre-digital era. Thus, news audiences are increasingly shaping the news environment, and the agenda-setting roles of mainstream news producers seem to no longer apply in the digital context.

7.3 The Diffusion of Technological Techniques in Newsmaking

An important aspect of evaluating the impact of digital technologies on the newsmaking arena is assessing the rate at which technology adoption, and the adaption of different techniques occur within each institutional context. As repeatedly noted in this thesis, technological changes are indeed shaped by a whole host of contextual factors. A foremost consideration for SABC and the BBC is the assertion that the PSB remit plays a significant role in how these technological changes occur, with producer decision-making exacting significant influences which should not be overlooked.

From respondent accounts from the SABC online team, it appears that it is actively encouraged for staff to be innovative. Likewise at the BBC, editors are encouraged to 'stay on top' of the social media and the alternative media space through a well-established Twitter and personal blogging presence, which McNair (2009) finds as exerting an influence on their work culture. Though it had been argued that the development of the sector is hampered by what Franklin (2009b) and Herbert (2000) observe to be an unwillingness to innovate, quite the contrary

seems to be the case. From the interviews carried out, I encountered a keenness on the part of both BBC and SABC respondents to embrace new techniques if the environment (both internal and external) is supportive of it. However, in the case of the BBC, respondents advanced the idea that the factors that may hamper the innovation of the production team are tied around the already existing institutional structures and practices in place (as a PSB) which sometimes poses a challenge (for example, because of a comparatively higher regulatory oversight). At the SABC, the general limitations in the media environment surrounding the ability and capacity of the audience to access online news are additional considerations.

Additionally, the opinion at the SABC is that the necessary skill sets and tools to undertake innovative news practices are not always in place (in comparison to well-established global news organisations such as Al Jazeera and the BBC). That said, analyses of the news websites of the two news institutions over the course of the two years showed that they both have experienced some marked transformations. As already mentioned, the BBC from the onset (of the first analysis in mid to late 2012) has not undertaken any major overhauls to the form and style of the news stories, but have introduced some new features. The SABC on the other hand adopted a different approach to multimedia use between the time the CA and the MmDA were done. To illustrate, while all stories were text-heavy in the era of the former, later analysis on the site showed a significant inclusion of multimedia by way of the use of the *Storify* element. This is validated by the accounts of some online news team members who identified that it is as result of an internal revamp of the tools being used for building online news. A noticeable result of this new feature is that, while there was no use of UGC in the past (as seen from the qualitative analysis of the site during the CA exercise, and corroborated through the interviews), the *Storify* element almost always incorporated UGC by way of audience tweets.

Relatedly, convergence is as much a function of the institutional strategy and ethos, as it is a technologically-driven one. We see from the SABC structure, that the multi-platform strategy which is in operation is the main agenda driving all the convergence imperatives (at least in the area of content). Content definitely seems to be converging, but the individuals not so much. The online division remains quite a separate unit but dependent on the radio and television units for news content (which is then subsequently repurposed). The opposite is the case at the BBC where the online unit is fully integrated with the traditional ones.

Hence, it is seen here that the institutional arrangement of the respective news sites exacts an influence on the evolution of technology within it.

7.4 Potentials of the Digital Platform: Tools, Techniques and the Growing Space

It appears that the potentials for the development of the online platform lie both within the technology, and also the media environment (in particular the audience). For example, with the BBC, the potentials of the technology are perceived to exist (at this point in time) in the development of the *iPlayer* and the *Insta-facts*/*Insta-news* formats. Both of these have the probability of developing the personalisation aspect of digital news consumption, an element which is only experienced to limited extents on both platforms. At the SABC, as the online unit makes increasing use of the social media platform, there is the aspiration of the digital media strategy team to find more avenues/tools that can build upon social media to enhance or complement the online news production and consumption experience.

I will argue here that these particular strategies from the BBC and the SABC are driven overall by competition. The media environment is seen as certainly getting competitive with respondents from both institutions noting that the best way to counter this competition is through the use of techniques and tools that compete with existing and emerging ones. The potentials for innovation therefore exist in the market-driven environment in which the two news institutions currently operate. The BBC and the SABC though regional broadcast media market leaders in their own rights still recognise the competition posed by other news organisations (both mainstream and alternative). In the online domain, public-sector mainstream media organisations have relevance, but going forward, it is unsure whether the brand recognition and loyalty that they enjoy will endure, especially since in the case of the SABC, brand loyalty was tied to the pre-apartheid age (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995); and as public trust in the BBC brand seems to be in question at this present time (Aitken, 2013). These institutions will therefore need to respond adequately to competition in the arena, particularly in the case of the BBC where alternative news platforms with more innovative techniques are a significant threat.

It is equally important here to recognise that calls for both news institutions to develop and innovate (specifically with regards to news quality at the BBC, and ethical, non-biased programming at the SABC) all predate the internet. Hence it can be argued that, not all developments with regards to online news can be tied to the dictates of digital technology. The PSB remit therefore remains a key consideration and it offers both plusses and negatives for the development of the respective online news platforms of the BBC and the SABC. To illustrate, the BBC plans to strategically develop specifically to meet the requirements of

market competition, which is mostly those relatively newer, news aggregating platforms. The concerns identified in the literature about possible fears of quality standards perhaps being reduced as a result of the combination of technological changes and commercial thrust therefore appear to be somewhat grounded.

From the South African perspective, the SABC still sees itself as the voice of the 'unvoiced' and even more so on the digital platform. It therefore appears to be capitalising on how it can harness the potentials existing in digital technologies to more effectively do this. Hence, they are seen here as trying to balance reaching their non-digitised audiences with the need to stay at par with worldwide trends.

However, it must be noted that developments in online technology at the two institutions are marked by context-specific developments in the field (by way of major events) where they innovated as a response to these events. For example, UGC use was commenced at the BBC after the July 7th London bombings, while the Mandela funeral also brought dimensions of UGC use (as well a live streaming to the news site) in the case of the SABC. Therefore, it is difficult to predict if such an unforeseen occurrence might spur a similar development in some other type of newsmaking technique in the future.

To further situate this unforeseen ability of the platform, I revert to the definition offered by Kawamoto (2003, p.5) that "digital media encompasses other technologies {..} and a host of other devices that might not be on the market yet". Harcup (2009, p. 182) also notes, "there can be a rich mix of storytelling techniques with more ingredients, wikis, live interactive chats, animated graphics, {and} things we haven't thought of yet being added to the mix all the time". Herbert (2000, p. 9) also predicted over a decade ago that "future journalists will have to be comfortable using database software like Foxpro, and the variants of cBase, and with spreadsheets like Quattro Pro and Excel". As at the moment, other tools (beyond these) are in use. Hence, it is not an easy undertaking making a prediction about any aspect of the platform, especially where the use of tools and techniques are concerned.

7.5 Key Findings About the Influence of the Digital Platform on News Reports

This sub-section attempts to highlight the significant conclusions drawn from specific findings made in this study by aligning them to what has been argued in the literature, as discussed in all the preceding chapters and the first part of this chapter. The rationale behind this is to present a clearer picture of how the conclusions drawn from a study of the BBC and SABC at

this present time agree or disagree with what we know from established literature. This is intended to present more precisely and forcefully just what is significant and original about these findings. Overall, our conclusions confirm the assertion that digital technology has influenced and is influencing news production and news consumption culture, and that in itself is significant. However, the degree of influence across the range of products and actors (content, practice, journalists, etc.) and across the geographical contexts (UK – BBC, and South Africa – SABC) is what is emphasised here. I therefore unpack the headline findings in the following sub-sections.

7.5.1 Mainstream Newsmakers Are Still Relevant Custodians of Their Stories

It is worth noting once again that news storytelling is defined here as incorporating both the formats and techniques employed in producing the news stories. And as far as mainstream news organisations and news storytelling are concerned, I argue that these actors, their existing practices, and overall identity remain relevant in the digital age. This is despite the fact that it has been identified in the literature that the media space has experienced a so-called journalistic revolution which is seeing the (possible) proliferation of participatory journalism, which is done through blogging and other forms of citizen media, (according to Allan, 2006). I argue that mainstream newsmakers remain the principal storytellers, because while they allow stories from other 'non-mainstream' storytellers to filter through, they are in no way helping others to tell a story. What is rather the case is that, they are telling stories in different ways, employing techniques that give consideration to other voices, (as exemplified by the BBC's use of citizen-generated content from the UGC Hub, and the SABC's use of tweets from the audience). Overall, the choice of what to say, i.e. what content to publish, remains firmly theirs especially since the facility for the audience to actually engage with the content directly (for example, as is the case with Wikis) is not provided. This argument draws on the assertion by Campbell et al (2010) that major news organisation still hold the reins on the extent to which alternative practices are able to influence their space.

Consequently, I identify that the role played by (mainstream) news storytellers in society has indeed been redefined such that some previous roles no longer hold, while new ones have been assumed. And I particularly reference gatekeeping and agenda-setting roles which seem to have been displaced in the online domain. As shown in the discussions, the mainstream news producer no longer has the preserve role of disclosing information, as it can now be done by other actors, as Allan (2006) has identified. Further, due to various actions of citizens in engaging with the news, the audience now has the opportunity to set the agenda for

mainstream news producers. This notwithstanding, I argue that these new roles are equally important. For instance, I have highlighted the 'validator' and 'context-provider' duties in earlier sub-sections noting that mainstream newsmakers need to confirm and contextualise the information (news stories) coming in from these myriad of alternative news platforms.

In fact, I found that the case of the proliferation of such (alternative) platforms and actors as identified in the literature (see Allan, 2006) is not applicable across contexts, as interestingly, the SABC and for that matter the South African media is not seeing much of this. The perception of the SABC interview respondents is that, the news stories that they offer online do not in fact compete with any other alternative news (even if they do exist). They identify that the competition rather comes from emerging privately-owned mainstream news organisations which have online platforms, thus reinforcing the dominance of the mainstream in South African media. Comparatively, the perspective of the BBC news producers is that the activities of alternative/aggregator news platforms nonetheless pose some strong competitive challenges to their operations.

To further situate the relative lack of 'other' voices from the SABC context, UGC (under the precise definition of the term) has very limited usage within this context as solicitation for content specifically via the online news platform is hardly done. However, the infiltration of some other 'voices' is seen in the instances when content (not necessarily solicited) from the social media sites of Twitter and Facebook are used in *Storify* forms as part of the news story. However, this also receives moderation because the publishing editor makes the ultimate decision on the particular tweets or posts to include in the story and how. Relatedly, within the context of the BBC, solicitation of UGC is done, but the content is still heavily-moderated. Practically, editors within the UGC Hub make the choice on what sorts of sourced content to pursue by way of verification; and they also make the ultimate decision on how to incorporate them into a particular story (be it an image, audiovisual, or written text). This buttresses the argument that they have and do exercise their fundamental power over what is published on their news sites by way of actual content (this excluding comments of course). It agrees with Hudson and Temple (2010) that control rests with the mainstream, professional actors (p. 71). However, Thurman and Hermida argued that there is in fact a complexity in how media organisations are seen to be moderating such content from the different cases (2010, p.56). This is an important line of enquiry but the remit of this thesis does not allow us to pursue it further.

Nonetheless, to the extents that these points have been well established, it is argued emphatically here therefore that while other 'voices' are indeed featured, the story ultimately remains under the 'tone' of the mainstream news storyteller. It must be recalled that the perspectives of the online news team interviewed from the two institutions are that their newsmaking processes are governed by tenets and responsibilities that predate the digital. Hence the same due consideration is given to the story to be factual, and ethical, amongst others; and the best way of ensuring these ideals are maintained is for the responsibility to rest on the editor from within the institution.

7.5.2 The Affordances of the Digital Platform are Varied and Not Consistent Across the Board

In the discussions undertaken so far into what are the specific capacities (and also incapacities) of the platform as far as creative and effective newsmaking is concerned, it emerged that these affordances are different than what was hypothesised, and also quite varied and largely inconsistent. In this sub-section, I identify some examples that have emerged from the analyses. Firstly, in the area of UGC use, while the BBC places a great premium on content solicited from the audience, this is seen as a burden by the SABC team due to the moderation that is required to do it. This highlights the divergence in the perspectives of actors from the two news institutions with regards to the same technique – as one sees it as an opportunity, while the other considers it to be a constraint.

Another example is the case of the speed imperatives that are perceived to be enlarged in the web domain. Within the literature, this particular affordance is inconsistently treated as some hold that it affects news quality while others dispute this. Its impact across the contexts of the BBC and the SABC mirrors this inconsistent treatment. For instance, some seminal works (such as Callahan, 1999; Kautsky and Widholm, 2008) have questioned if the nature of the digital platform drives speed imperatives that interfere with the accuracy of online news stories. They observed therefore that the online space exacerbates sloppy and inaccurate reportage/newsmaking in certain instances. However, from the perspectives of established mainstream newsmakers (in this case from both the BBC and the SABC), this conclusion does not hold, as there are still stringent guidelines in place to ensure that news stories are, fact-checked, verified and accurate before publishing. Hence, I have established from the investigations that while the speed versus accuracy debate is indeed enhanced in the online domain in conformity with past arguments, the BBC and the SABC's existing systems of news production do not allow for the two elements to be competing entities. However, in the case of the SABC, when there are speed imperatives due to the need to make updates (within the

relatively short period when stories become available either through newswires or the TV/radio units), what suffers is not accuracy levels but rather the level of digital techniques that are included in that particular story.

Furthermore, how the concepts of quality and creativity in (online) news storytelling are treated produces many interesting conclusions. While most researchers believe that the quality of news stories is enhanced by digital techniques, a few others maintain that writing skills are still crucial and remain independent of the medium (see for example Dougherty, 2014). It is noted here that in the digital space, news storytelling is not just about writing as other forms, including sound and image production and publishing, as well as data visualisation are seen. Hence, this issue is not so easily settled as there are several parameters to consider.

With regards to the ability of the digital platform to allow for news stories to be tailored (according to a particular audience group, or a classification of news genre), it is maintained here that this capacity is not assured either. For example, while sports news (at the BBC) and reports from newswires (at the SABC) appear to be treated somewhat differently, this practice was not consistent throughout the period under consideration, as this different treatment also appeared with other news genres and classifications at some other point in time. Hence, it is fair to say that this attribute is not an assumed potential therefore of the digital platform.

Another example is the case of how the affordance of the digital medium with regards to time and space is treated, and here I maintain that the idea that the digital space offers unlimited time and space is well-evidenced most of the time. For example, the BBC updates some headline stories during the course of the day, and both news organisations undertake hyperlinking consistently which indicates extra space on the web. Additionally, there is extensive use of quotations, graphs and other call-outs at the BBC. Further, there are well-spaced out texts overall, and relatively longer text narratives at the BBC.

However, as we see, news institutions can choose to take advantage of this affordance or not. For example, the SABC very rarely made updates to stories during the course of the day at the time the investigations were carried out (though responses from the team indicate this is a strategy for the future). Additionally, all its call-outs are restricted to very simple highlighted text, and not the elaborate space-consuming types identified in the case of the BBC.

It is worth noting here that this opportunity for extra time and space implies that no particular structure for individual web news stories is seen in terms of exactly what is included, and also

with regards to the lengths of some news material (text and audiovisual) and the sizes of others (in terms of images or graphics). This, from some other perspectives can be seen as a constraint as the audience is not able to anticipate any particular news-consuming experience at any point in time. Additionally, as discussed, when news producers respond to this unlimited time and space by providing extra news, there is in the first instance the tendency towards the oversupply of information, and hence information glut (overload) on the part of the audience. As attention span has been identified to be particularly limited in the web space, this over-flow of information is likely to exacerbate non-retention of the salient elements in the stories. Secondly, when news producers are driven to continually update news stories, quality can be compromised (should the already mentioned editorial guidelines not be in place).

The multimodal nature of the digital space also offers the potential of choice to both producers and consumers. For the audience, choice is important in the online domain, as it gives them control over the aspect of news content (image, audiovisual, hyperlink, etc.) to consume and how. This choice afforded them by news producers indicates a consideration for individual consumer wants and capacities. From the perspective of the producer, this choice accords them a greater degree of representation of the facts of the story, as they are able to deploy stories via different modes at once. However, once again, this potential/opportunity is not always assumed. For example, as (Dougherty 2014) finds, consumers do not always appreciate or take advantage of this choice. And in the case of the producer, we have demonstrated that this affordance is not always used. For example, though there have been marked improvements, the SABC's news stories are still relatively light on multimedia, whereas the BBC on occasion features stories without any of these extensive multimodal elements. On its own, this affordance of choice has its negatives as it can lead to a diffusion of attention as the consumer is forced to respond to the different modal elements when all are offered within a single story.

To further establish this point, I found that though navigational interactive links are used extensively by news producers, whether they are able to achieve audience participation is not always clear (for example, I couldn't determine how many people actually use the 'share' functions in each news story). Nonetheless, it has been argued that because of way the web is structured, it is easier for the media organisation to undertake audience research to understand how the different news items are consumed and how the news sites are generally navigated (see Dougherty 2014). This is because what is consumed and how can be traced quite easily (unlike the radio, print and television platforms). But yet again, it is not

immediately evident the extent to which these capacities are being used within the industry, especially by mainstream newsmakers.

Finally, past research alludes to the supposed 'affordance of freedom' of the digital space because it allows journalists to be creative as they are able to undertake news publishing that is not boxed by set templates. However, findings reveal that this is not in fact the case as strict publishing procedures are still in place in mainstream news institutions, as online newsmakers at both the BBC and the SABC still adhere to the age-old, stringent editorial processes. Additionally, rigid templates are still in use at the SABC, and only recently relaxed to make way for the *Storify* element to be incorporated.

With these examples therefore, one can establish that the affordances of the online space, especially the positive ones are not always realised, particularly in the case of mainstream news publishers.

7.5.3 The 'Fourth' Journalism is a Forever-evolving Platform

Another key objective of the investigations carried out in this thesis was to examine the thinking of Deuze (2003) that online journalism can be categorised as the 'fourth' journalism. I therefore demonstrated through various arguments that this in fact seems to be so given that the online newsmaking sector has its own rules and norms that are functionally different from those of the traditional platforms. However, I note here that the bold claim that the mediasphere has been revolutionised is not in fact the case, as the norms though different, are not exactly revolutionary. To illustrate, most of the digital techniques that characterise these new norms have been found to have roots in old media (for example the use of UGC). Additionally, some techniques are no longer the preserve of the digital medium and are increasingly being appropriated into news production on the other platforms (for example, the use of certain call-outs in print, and the use of tweets as news content in both print and TV news). So we see in effect an adaptation of the new forms into the old and vice versa, demonstrating that the techniques that denote the 'fourth' journalism concept are not static. As not much has been written about the 'fourth journalism' concept yet, I consider this a significant finding.

Further, our investigations reveal that online news texts at the BBC and the SABC display continuities between the old and new mediums, creating in effect a hybridity of norms on the online platform. This hybrid nature is diachronic with both similarities and differences.

Consequently, hybridity is seen as challenging the existing practices by accommodating alternative practices, and this has definite implications for the skill sets that news producers are now required to have in order to work effectively. Therefore the perception of some news producers interviewed is that, skills such as visualisation, data journalism and coding are required in the space. However, these skills were not expected in 2003 when Deuze made this 'fourth' journalism claim. Hence, we see in effect that the requirements in the space are changing, and it is not possible to predict at the present moment what the characteristics of the space will be a couple of years from now.

This evolution of the platform (and hence the concept) is as a result of the fact that innovation imperatives are considerably greater in this space due to a number of reasons, but mostly because the web is such an open, collaborative space which is constantly seeing new entrants with new ideas. Therefore the perspective of some of the news producers interviewed is that the techniques and tools used in story making would have to innovate accordingly. Hence, most of the fundamentals of the platform would not be as static as is the case with the radio, television and print platforms because some specific online techniques would disappear altogether; others would be developed further; while others might even stand the test of time in their current states. This constant evolution is not necessarily a bad thing as Weiss and Domingo (2010) conclude that innovation is crucial to the survival of the industry.

Nevertheless, some researchers and practitioners in the space are beginning to question some of the practices associated with online journalism, critiquing if these practices stand up to journalism standards, and concluding that it does not. One reason given in support of this stance is the idea that it has the tendency to support anti-journalistic tendencies (such as non-verification of facts, valuing visualisation over well-written text stories, hasty publishing of stories, etc.). They therefore question the extent to which online journalism is going to stay relevant in the mediasphere (see Dougherty, 2014). Consequently, it remains to be seen whether innovation would indeed save this industry or be its death.

7.5.4 Nonlinearity is the Mainstay of Online News Publishing

The issue of what form online news stories are taking was paramount in the evaluation carried out in this study. Right from the onset of the investigations, it was apparent that in conformity with conclusions highlighted in the literature review chapter, online news has its own form because it embodies all the characteristics of radio, print and television (and this basically means stories featured written text, images and audiovisuals). Beyond this however, it also

embodied other interactive forms consistently, including hyperlinks and interactive 'share' links. Interactive infographics (graphs, maps, charts) were also used at the BBC. Overall, the digital manifestations of nonlinearity through these forms are always seen in news stories. Taking the totality of these findings into account therefore, I advance the argument here that the form of online news publishing at the BBC and the SABC though characterised by an inconsistent mix of formats and digital techniques, is nonetheless nonlinear in nature. As Gary Hudson and Sarah Rowlands note in Harcup (2009, p.174), "the nonlinear online package is the closest thing to a new form of journalism since the advent of broadcasting". That said, the conclusion here is that Massey's 2004 assertion that the textbook definition of nonlinearity is not being practiced is still the case with regards to these particular news institutions. For example, most stories only featured text and graphics (especially at the SABC), and interactivity elements were limited to the lower level navigational kind. It is observed that (digital) nonlinear formats should have the elements of multimedia, hypertextuality and interactivity (as well as digital archives), and it is acknowledged here that though these elements are present in one form or the other at the two news platforms, it is not all at once, and not consistently.

Hence, one main objective of the investigations undertaken through the interviews was to understand why newsmakers from these two institutions were not harnessing the full potentials offered by the platform (including the opportunity for more enhanced storytelling) as predicted by Harper (1998). And as the findings revealed, there are a whole set of factors at play, including the limited capacities with which news producers are working; the resources at the disposal of the online news division (particularly in the case of the SABC); and the perception of newsmakers about the needs and wants of the consumers.

7.5.5 Definite Changes to News Storytelling as it is Practiced Online

Through the evaluations carried out into the forms and practices of news production, I sought to determine how storytelling is being done in the online domain so as to establish if anything has changed, and how. Firstly, in terms of style, some earlier conclusions from the literature had indicated that the types of narrative styles that characterise the other platforms (for example the long-form used in print, and the narrative style which is ubiquitous in radio and television) are not particularly suitable for the online genre. The analyses done here however concentrated on the structural layout of the news narrative, as well as what has been incorporated into the content. The findings show that the formatting style is generally expected to support easily-navigable interfaces in conformity with audience demands and

expectations. News stories are also supported with contextual and or expert analysis mostly in the form of call-outs. Additionally, some stories incorporate audience-generated content, for example in the form of tweets. These formats make it easier to consume the news stories, especially when they are of the genre, business.

One further challenge to online news storytelling is the role of individual audience capacities which must be accommodated more so than on any of the other (traditional) platforms. This has undoubtedly affected the news storytelling practices adopted by these institutions as a response. Hence, our findings indicate that these online stories are made to display some particular easy-accessibility attribute at each point in time. For example, stories feature shorter audiovisuals for both the BBC and the SABC, and less bandwidth-heavy material at the SABC overall. Additionally, shorter written text forms are used at the SABC, perhaps in consideration of the significant numbers of their audience base who access the site from mobile devices. At the BBC, a mix of highly interactive elements by way of graphs, maps, and photo slideshows indicate an appreciation of the high digital literacy capacity of the audience accessing these stories.

Further, a culture of media convergence is shaping online news storytelling as seen within these two news institutions, where there is an attempt to align the stories, content and styles carried in the online domain to that of the other platforms (within the organisational set-up). For example, there is a strong use of brand colour in news stories overall at the two news sites. Moreover, there are notable cross-platform linkages of content where the SABC uses images captured from the television units, while the BBC uses audiovisual material from its TV platform as well. This cross-promotion of platforms is important as it has both commercial and philosophical impacts. On one hand, it can drive audience traffic across various platforms within the BBC or the SABC set-ups, and on the other, it can reinforce the organisational brand such that the old attributes associated with the traditional platforms are transferred to the new medium.

Finally, I can say that the perceived shifting role of the news producer emphasises this altering of the storytelling sphere. This change can be summed up as news producers no longer seen solely as news 'producers' but also news 'managers' as they have to create room to manage the information coming in from outside of their realm (by way of UGC). Additionally, various alternative practices have entered the mainstream newsmaking space, and these include the incorporation of content from the audience and the use of more visual material. There is also

now the attempt by these news institutions to connect communities, instead of the previously omniscient role of disseminating scarce news/information to the masses.

7.5.6 The Role of Digital Technology in Mainstream Online Newsmaking is Subsumed Under a Theory of Convergence

As discussed briefly in the closing lines of the preceding sub-section, convergence culture characterises the digital platform's storytelling form, and influences the institutional practices surrounding newsmaking, and the roles of newsmakers. Within the BBC and the SABC contexts, this convergence is seeing a merger of the strategies adopted towards newsmaking on the different platforms within the respective institutions. For example, the everyday newsmaking practices at the SABC in particular are characterised by a multi-platform ethos. Under this ethos, news stories are produced and shared across the radio, television and digital platforms; and the newsgathering, production and dissemination is guided by the same existing SABC code of conduct. Within the BBC's set-up, it is identified that the strategy going forward is to develop the *iPlayer* and other techniques that drive traffic back to the BBC radio and television platforms in conformity with this ethos.

Beyond the strategy, the findings indicate that the role and identity of the news team is also seeing this convergence. For example, most of the team at the SABC had transitioned from the radio and television units. However, they are now expected to supplement their individual skills base with the necessary skills required to undertake any number of news production tasks proficiently (and this includes writing, photo and video editing, and coding skills). The need for them to expand their skills beyond writing or reporting is because of the evolving roles of journalists in this converged space where singular skills are no longer adequate due to the diversity of news storytelling forms that must be undertaken. Consequently, new roles that have entered the arena include online editor, digital producer and multimedia specialist. In the case of the BBC, all the senior team respondents have had experiences from the pre-digital BBC news divisions. However, they are now expected to lead the development of strategies that support the expansion in the skills and techniques of online newsmakers within the online division as well, as a result of the integration of the different units into one.

I have demonstrated that the overall shift in focus and practice at the BBC and the SABC is as a result of the general broadening of the role and identity of the present-day journalist (or newsmaker). Beyond the background analysis that these online journalists provide for some news stories, they are also expected to help extend any particular topical story by expanding

public discourse on the issues through interactions in the social media space. For the SABC, these outputs are then cross-posted to the radio and television platforms. In effect, they are undertaking what Deuze (2003) finds to be monitorial and dialogical roles, and even more, thus indicating that convergence is necessitating an expansion in the undertakings of journalists and editors. Further, Jones and Salter (2012, p. 173) maintain "the question that must now be asked is, what do journalists add to reporting, analysis and commentary as journalists? Noting further that it may be suggested "that professional journalists can and should uphold the standards associated with excellence" (Jones and Salter (2012, p. 173). It seems therefore that news producers are increasingly being expected to add additional roles to their existing schedule, while still maintaining the high standards of the old era.

Beyond the strategy, and the roles and skill sets of news producers, it is equally important to highlight the fact that convergence culture is also seen as impacting the story. From the SABC perspective, content can only be sourced from the pool provided by the radio or television reporters, or it has to be obtained from newswires. In effect, the content they are working with is already limited in scope. Moreover, this content has to be repurposed within a relatively short period of time for the web by a small group of skilled online journalists who are responsible for performing multiple tasks. By their own accounts, this affects the creativity that is incorporated into any particular story (either by way of multimedia, call-outs, or other interactive elements). It must be recalled that, researchers (Kawamoto, 2003; Thurman, 2008) have found that journalists are having to undertake a whole range of tasks which can result in more workload, and hence a dilution of quality standards. This is only true to a limited extent at the SABC and not so much at the BBC. As stated above, the SABC's online news team is expected to undertake a number of converged tasks associated with news production, and as they are constrained by time and skilled persons, the final output in effect does not have all the ingredients of a true multimedia digital news story. That said, all the strict procedures are still in place for news publishing, so quality and ethical standards are not compromised.

It is important however to note here that there is some distinguishing to be made about the peculiarities presented by the BBC situation with regards to the above discussion. The findings indicate that while there is certainly an expansion of the tasks associated with online news publishing, the online team at the BBC can accommodate them as the team is considerably larger due to the growth of the division in recent years. The probability that the issues highlighted would occur is higher in organisations where the online division is small, and where it is operated as an addendum to the traditional media units. Hence, some have advocated that

online divisions diverge in order to function better, or to converge but be fully integrated (as is the case with the BBC for example).

7.5.7 Internally and Externally-driven Influences on News Practices and Strategies

As has been highlighted in different sections of this thesis, the BBC and the SABC are both leading public-sector broadcasters albeit from different contexts. They are both relevant players in the mainstream news arena in their respective regions and share a common trait of having transitioned into news institutions that now have both old media (radio and television) and new media (online) platforms. However, they both embody individual characteristics that shape their existing approaches towards the practices and strategies adopted in online newsmaking. Hence, in this sub-section I argue that the internal and external factors within the environment in which the news organisation operates shapes its strategies towards online newsmaking overall.

In the case of the BBC, it is a wholly publicly-funded entity that has over the years faced calls to justify this funding structure, and consider adopting some private-sector practices towards its earnings. These calls subsequently shaped the changes that were made to the pre-digital newsmaking practices (for example multi-skilling and dumbing down content – see Goodman, 1998). These calls also heralded the inclusion of some techniques that enhance audience participation, for example through the Capture Wales project, in order to stay competitive. And as we see now, the BBC's UGC Hub has become a standard newsgathering feature for the news institution. It is not surprising to see such a development as the BBC still faces competition from the expanding alternative and aggregator news media platforms.

At the SABC, this remit is customised according to the dictates of media and democracy in South Africa (about which much has been written, and discussed). Consequently, there is supposed to be the mandate of editorial independence, public accountability, and impartial reportage. Coupled with this is the complex role of 'service journalism' which SABC newsmakers have had to assume as state broadcasters. With this comes the need for them to be a 'voice' for the ordinary people. In the online domain, practices should not be seen as alienating the public hence the attempt to capitalise on the growing Facebook and Twitter platform for audience input as opposed to the use of the SABC's main online news platform (which fewer people could access). Another aspect of this public service remit that exert an influence is the (historical) existence of the tension between the market and public service ethos. In this regards, all news production within the SABC's online news practice must satisfy

the criteria of being both commercially viable and yet satisfying the greater public good; and being tech-savvy and competitive in the digital age but also accessible to a much wider audience.

Further, the SABC (in comparison to the BBC) has a relatively inconsistent funding stream. This hampers the extent to which it is able to innovate. Moderation is therefore the approach towards technology adoption, where the team undertakes countless trial and errors and intense planning prior to rolling out a particular technique. One other factor accounting for this could be the acknowledged low digital culture among journalists within the organisation. However, as findings reveal that mindsets are reportedly changing in senior management and the board of directors about the potentials that exist in developing the online platform at par with the traditional ones, there is a hope in the online team that funding streams will subsequently improve thereby creating the opportunity to boost technological capacity all round.

Another point worthy of consideration for the SABC as far as online news practices are concerned is the size of its operation. Specifically, I consider here the amount of content generated and how the convergence culture requires that this content be repurposed as opposed to new ones being generate (and this is due to the fact that the online division does not have its own news reporters in the field). This results in the inability of the online team to incorporate a great many multimedia elements into the story given the time constraints in getting the content online. On the other hand however, the South African (online) media environment is at the present time quite competitive as a result of new entrants from mainstream private sector media organisations. As these institutions have more resources to work with and more room to operate, they have the ability to include all sorts of techniques into the news story and the SABC is therefore driven to respond to this competition accordingly, despite these countless constraints.

I have highlighted in this thesis the very many instances where the BBC is showcased as being more innovative and thereby reacting faster towards technology adoption comparatively. By the same argument of the public service remit, we see the BBC attempting to engage with the audience through the comments and feedback function on the website. It must be noted here that the BBC is able to do this due to the technological capacities of its producers, as well as the consumers. Moreover, its financial standing by virtue of having access to substantial and consistent financial resources implies that it is able to adopt certain digital techniques at a

faster rate. We see this exemplified in how a diversity of multimedia and interactive formats is incorporated into the news stories. However, some opinions were advanced that equally support the idea that the BBC's inability to innovate some digital techniques as fast as the private sector and or alternative news institutions is as a result of the high regulatory oversight it must deal with as a public sector institution.

Further to this, its status as public-sector news provider requires that it responds to all its audience base in an impartial and inclusive manner, which can also hinder the extent to which they are able to experiment with some daring newsmaking practices, for example as seen with the counterpart online news platform, BuzzFeed. Finally, as a result of this same public remit, UGC use is managed from a traditional premise and is situated as part of the newsgathering process. In this way, the BBC is still able to protect its brand as a credible news source.

7.6 Summary Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to situate the specific findings from the empirical undertakings, within the body of conclusions that have emerged from past research. It is interesting to see unsurprisingly, that some existing assertions have been supported, while others are largely contested. And here, I attribute this significant insight to the fact that the investigations are constituted by a critical look into two important case study institutions that represent the divergent public-sector mainstream news contexts across the globe.

In the first part of this chapter, I highlight the emerging conclusions that can be drawn in some thematic areas of online newsmaking based on the objectives of the investigations that were established from the outset (in chapter one). However, the research has also revealed some significant phenomena (outside of these objectives). Hence, I demonstrated first of all that the form of online hard news reporting is hybrid, by establishing how traditional elements are still seen within both institutions, and where new digital techniques are underpinned by old media principles. I also show that it is indeed revealing the extent to which norms have changed over the course of a year within the SABC's newsmaking process in comparison with the BBC that already has so many techniques in place, and so experienced very little change overall. This sub-section also attempts to conclude about how I perceive the state of creativity and innovation to be within the newsmaking norms exhibited by the two institutions. I emphasise in particular the problematic nature of these two standards as their interpretations vary from sector to sector, and from context to context. On the whole however, it is reasonable to argue

from the conclusions drawn that the full potential of the web is not being harnessed for hard news making across the board.

The second thematic area addresses the issue of news culture and the changing norms in response to digital technologies. I approach the discussions from three different but interlinked perspectives – the institution, the news producers (journalists), as well as the audience. The overriding influence demonstrated across these parameters is the role of the PSB remit at both institutions. Hence, it is demonstrated that the peculiar states of the BBC and the SABC have affected most practices, from how it uses hyperlinks, multimedia, UGC, and social media, to the skills with which the online journalists work and the roles that they play as a whole. I emphasise that while there are definite changes, there are also some practices that remain unchanged.

And in the final thematic area that addresses the issue of technology adoption and the future potentials of the platform, I demonstrate once again that specific-context considerations are important. As such, I found that though there was a keenness from both institutions to embrace new techniques, efforts by the SABC are particularly hampered by the inadequate capacity in place in comparison with the case at the BBC, where there are more financial resources and technological infrastructure available. The arguments here show the disparity in what each context considers as potentials to be developed upon for online newsmaking. For example, this potential is in social media platforms at the SABC, and specific personalisation tools at the BBC. It was concluded that this outlook basically derives from what each context considers as the expectations of its audience, as well as competitors in the space.

The second part of this chapter basically shows clearly and precisely, the seven most distinct key findings that can be condensed from the key thematic areas discussed. Hence, I demonstrate that mainstream newsmakers are still the custodians of the news stories in their domain though some alternative practices and actors filter through. I also argued that the opportunities and constraints associated with the online news space are not consistent as they vary depending on several factors; and that the concept of 'fourth' journalism is not static as it can be observed to be continually evolving. I also argued in this chapter that despite the various differing, and sometimes inconsistent forms that can be observed from online newsmaking, the dominant form is still definitely nonlinear. This supports the conclusion about how the news storytelling sphere as a whole has been altered. And finally, the discussions demonstrate that the adoption of digital technologies is influenced by a convergent ethos, and

is impacted by several context-specific factors internal and external to each media organisation.

Overall, the conclusions in this chapter indicate that though the tendency is to think of technology as having an omnipotent role, what is in fact the case is that there is a whole host of internal and external non-technological factors that guide the process of technology adoption (or non-adoption). Hence, the specific context of any news institution is crucial to an understanding of how it is impacted by the digital platform. This essentially validates our quest to stay away from drawing generalised conclusions that apply to any of the industry's actors beyond the BBC and the SABC. The next chapter (the conclusion) therefore builds up on these arguments.

Chapter 8: Pulling it all Together: Online News Storytelling at the BBC and the SABC

One of the significant conclusions drawn in this thesis is that an in-depth enquiry into any online news/journalism phenomena from a specific context reveals many interesting insights which are lost when a general (non-case study) approach is adopted. Hence, an early key recommendation which I will put forward here is that in as much as research in this area will benefit from a holistic look at the industry, a necessary step towards achieving this would be by having a lot of useful snapshots into different phenomena in different contexts. As demonstrated, what this thesis has done is to take snapshots of different news phenomena – for instance hard news content, newsmaking practices, digital techniques – but from only two, yet note-worthy case studies in order to understand the issues to a greater depth. These case studies are sufficient in themselves as they are both institutions that offer some important insight into the trajectory of online newsmaking based on their historical and geographical prominence. This sort of in-depth analysis is really useful in contesting those widely encompassing, technologically deterministic assumptions identified in various sections of the thesis from the literature.

Consequently, in this conclusion to the thesis, I outline how the arguments raised from the various findings support or contest the hypothetical questions posed at the onset of the study. The next four sections therefore essentially address the four research questions established in the introductory chapter of the thesis. By synthesising from what has been found, discussed and reflected upon in all of the previous chapters, this chapter attempts to offer a befitting conclusion towards answering these questions of how the digital platform is facilitating creative news writing; how it is enabling news providers to match the news story forms with various audiences; how the platform offers the potential to engage with the main details in the news; and how successfully news producers are adapting to technological changes in the space.

The chapter (and for that matter the thesis) concludes with a sub-section that attempts to make some broad recommendations towards research and newsmaking practice particularly within the spheres of the BBC and the SABC.

8.1 How Does this Digital Platform Facilitate New Forms of Creative Hard News Writing?

This research question sought to examine the extent to which digital techniques are currently influencing creative news writing norms. It also attempts to investigate the ways in which this could be done with consideration for identified future potentials of the platform. First and foremost, I establish here that the concept of 'writing' is no longer an adequate description of what newsmaking is composed of in the online space. I also make the case that the notion of 'creativity' is fluidly determined, and should also give due consideration to evolving tools and techniques.

8.1.1 Newsmaking is not Limited to the Act of Writing Text Narratives

In the online domain, newsmaking incorporates a storytelling mix with various different techniques and formats being employed. Hence, it is best classified under the generic label of news 'making' and not news 'writing' or news 'broadcasting'. As demonstrated, the online news story is no longer limited to text content as it also incorporates other modal forms, including images and audiovisuals. Due to this, the creativity behind the writing style is not easily determined, if at all. Further to this, the text forms follow nonlinear formatting techniques that see the inclusion of interactive links and call-outs of various forms. At this present time, these call-outs are in the form of graphs, charts or maps (interactive or otherwise), quotes, picture slide-decks, amongst others. It can be said therefore that, each news story is composed of the combination of the stories within each of these individual component parts, and therefore the newsmaker must be able to do each of them well and creatively in the online space.

Drawing from these arguments therefore, I make the case that to consider creativity of online news in the light of the writing technique is not only inadequate but also very difficult, especially if one is applying the same writing standards that used to apply to print news. Hence, the only way to consider the creativity behind the making of any news story item is to consider the totality of the story as a whole – looking at the different modal elements and not just the writing aspects. Having a common objective standard with which to do this however is not an easy task, as I discuss below.

8.1.2 Creativity is a Multi-dimensional Phenomenon With Fluid Interpretations

I have made the case that determining a non-subjective parameter with which to effectively measure the level of creativity in online news stories is a difficult undertaking. Several factors

account for this. In the first instance, creativity in online newsmaking could mean different things to different classes of people, or it could be measured with differing standards. For example, mainstream news producers within the developed world are likely to be using different yardsticks from their counterparts in the developing world. Additionally, mainstream newsmakers (especially public-sector ones) could interpret creativity in the light of the impact that their various newsmaking techniques are perceived to be making. Or they could in fact be measuring it according to the degree to which they perceive that they meet or exceed industry standards. However, it is worth noting here that their counterparts from the alternative or aggregator news sites are likely to be using other standards to measure the same variables due to the picture-led and video-led digital storytelling techniques that are standards of practice in this sub-sector, (see Dougherty, 2014). To further illustrate, it can be observed that there's a greater element of innovation when other platforms are being considered. For example, the innovative and critically acclaimed Snow Fall and Firestorm (by New York Times and The Guardian respectfully) both used less traditional modes and formats of delivery and incorporated audio-visual material to a greater degree. Live blogging is also another news technique which sees non-traditional writing formats for news reporting, where there is a tendency to have time-stamped and rapidly-updated bulletins with new and proritised information (see Thurman and Walters, 2013). Other forms of soft news stories, such as magazine-style features tend to be longer and are most likely to incorporate all sorts of call-outs, audio and visual elements in a single story to a greater degree. On the whole, these online news forms do indeed signify the immense capacity of the digital platform to facilitate innovative and creative forms of newsmaking.

In the same vein, the audience will undoubtedly have different insights based on whether their needs are being met or not. Once again, the geographical context is important and will impact these outcomes. This is due to the fact that it is perceived that the level of the development of the digital media space in each locality is not equal across the different contexts. As we have established in this thesis, this level is lower within South African media in comparison to the media environment of the UK. Hence, some techniques regarded by the SABC team as creative are seen as par for the course at the BBC.

Further to the question of standards of creativity, there is a limitation in attempting to answer this question considering that there are inequalities in the perceptions of creativity across the digital storytelling domains in the different industries. For example, personal storytelling tools used in the arts and entertainment (especially film) as well as in certain higher education

contexts are different and sometimes ahead of what is employed in the news industry. For instance, news producers (especially from mainstream news sites) still place a premium on text writing skills and still undertake that quite considerably, whereas we see all forms of storytelling norms (that use modes beyond text) being recommended in the aforementioned industries. That said, news producers are also not underestimating the value in using powerful visual presentations and well-thought out analysis to support these written text stories. However as we have demonstrated, even within the same news institutions, be it the BBC or the SABC, different techniques are employed for different stories depending on what they perceive to be the requirements of that particular story. So in effect, we see some stories being predominantly text and image-based, while others also feature some highly-interactive elements, or heavy picture-led formats.

One can argue therefore that in order to avoid these issues confounding the assessment of creativity, then the creativity within each modal element (be it written text, image, video or interactive graph) must be considered on its own merit. However, in order to do that, one will have to apply the same values of creativity within which radio, print and television news stories are considered, and I have argued that the peculiarities of the digital medium means that such an approach will not be without issues either.

One can also argue that if creativity is interpreted to be a departure from the norm, then in the case of newsmaking practices, this is not necessarily a good thing. For example, both news institutions still apply pre-digital newsmaking principles which include verification of facts and following stringent ethical considerations in order to protect their respective brands. This practice ensures that new stories maintain the highest form of accuracy and credibility, and this overrides anything that creative elements offer to the story.

8.1.3 Digital Techniques and Tools are Still Evolving

An essential component of interpreting and measuring creativity lies in an appreciation of the level of techniques applied to news story making using particular tools. However, as seen from the findings highlighted from the CA to the interview process, some of these techniques are fast-evolving, and many of the tools are still in transition. Hence, to make an assessment on any particular tool at a point in time will be insufficient. Therefore the concept of time is important here. For example, some newsmaking tools have been developed and used already within the developed world context (in this case the BBC), before being adopted into the developing world (i.e. the SABC) context. If we interpret creativity and innovation to be tools

that are ahead of their time in any particular context, then that would be problematic. For instance, we are likely to consider the BBC to be un-creative should some specific tools which have been present on the Western media scene for some time still feature in their news stories. However, should those same tools be pioneered by the SABC into the South African mainstream media context, then the technique would have to be rightly classified as creative. Hence, there is the conflation of whether to consider the historical development of the tools in themselves, or to consider how and when they are applied within a particular context.

Further to this argument, even within the same institution, newsmakers are treating various techniques and tools on an uneven basis depending on the context of the news story, specifically the period within which they are used. For example, from some of the responses received during the SABC interviews, it appears some tools or techniques are left dormant for a while, and then later reintroduced due to several factors. Hence, a case is made here that, there is a strong possibility that the instances when the author first sights a technique at the SABC (or even the BBC) for the first time may not be 'new' after all, but rather old tools and techniques simply making a reappearance on the scene. Once again, this reinforces the importance of time considerations when making any assessment on the creativity of newsmaking norms by looking at tools and techniques as the only parameters.

8.2 How are News Providers Matching Their Storytelling Techniques With Their Perceptions of the Wants and Needs of the Different Segments of the Audience?

With this question, I attempted to investigate how newsmakers are undertaking the matching of their storytelling techniques with what they perceive to be the wants and needs of any cross section of their audience. This audience could be any discernible group such as younger demographics, or foreign audiences, amongst others. The conclusions in this thesis support the idea that while the online media audience may indeed be easily recognized, this does not make it any easier to target them more specifically when it comes to individual news stories. The conclusions also support the argument that the affordances of tailoring stories in fact transcend audience considerations.

8.2.1 Targeting a Particular Group of the Online Audience is not so Easily-achieved

There are certainly numerous positive affordances of online newsmaking, however the idea that it enables specific news stories to be tailored so as to best respond to individual needs (i.e. of a distinct audience group), is not entirely supported. As established, the online news audience is very disparate and transcends geographical borders. Mainstream newsmakers may

therefore have a harder task responding to more specifics sections of the audience base. However, this is with respect to the individual story item itself because they are able to and do tailor homepages (and the distribution of content on them) to the geographical locations of users through their geo-tagged editions. Because the online domain is tailored to offer so many different things (formats, content, techniques) all at once, what they are able to offer instead is choice.

They give the consumer choice from a whole number of options about what to consume as a news story item (be it in written text, image, or audiovisual form). The news provider also provides avenues for the consumer to act further on this choice, for instance, to download the audiovisual or image and to archive it for future consumption. Therefore, though it may not be very direct, the news producer is still able to respond to the perceived specific needs and wants of the different segments of their audience, but by responding to the entire consumer-base as a whole, and all at the same time.

8.2.2 Matching Storytelling Techniques Does not Only Apply to Audience Groups

This study has undertaken an in-depth enquiry into how news producers are matching their techniques to any audience group. It became quite apparent fairly early into the investigations that it is quite difficult to determine what is the particular intended target audience of any individual news item or technique. Our investigations (through the CA) revealed consequently that it was more evident if techniques have been matched to genre types or the classifications (i.e. local or international) of the news stories. However, inevitably some particular stories, based on their genres or classifications may be of interest to a particular demographic though this isn't often easy to determine with the level of investigations carried out in this study.

As a result, the conclusions on these sorts of tailoring are not definite as our findings have revealed that they are not intended in each and every instance. For example, the SABC's technique of presenting foreign news differently is as a result of the formats it receives from the newswires. We have also demonstrated in the analyses that there are increasingly blurred lines between the techniques applied to different genres as several of these techniques are being adapted across the broad range of news story genres. To illustrate, some of the heavy picture-led formats that we can associate with sports news at the BBC have also featured in some other news genres on the same platform over the period of the investigations.

8.3 What are Some of the Potentials That the 'New' Storytelling Techniques Offer for Engaging Attention to the Main Details in the News Report?

This question attempts to explore what the inherent capacities of the various digital techniques are for engaging audience attention to the important elements of the news story beyond what the formats on the traditional platforms are able to achieve. However, I argue that the techniques may not necessarily be classified as new as most of them have roots in traditional practices. Additionally, I make the case that it is difficult to determine what in particular engages each reader from within the story especially on the online platform where there are various modal forms of representation at play in each news story.

8.3.1 News Storytelling Techniques May not Necessarily be 'New'

The online news space certainly offers different avenues for the consumer to engage with the news story. Different techniques have been so far employed, which can largely be described as nonlinear and multimodal in nature. Each story is comprised of any combination of text narratives and audiovisuals (of varied lengths), images (of varied sizes), interactive elements of all sorts including charts, graphs, hyperlinks, and call-outs of quotes, amongst others. Both the BBC and the SABC have utilised these forms in a number of ways. As previously argued, while most of these forms are certainly new media based on the fact that the predominant tool used is a digital technique, the practices are rooted in old media concepts and therefore not wholly 'new'. Hence, I advance the argument that the totality and consistency of the use of these forms is what makes them distinct from the 'old' forms. The reason is that, it is difficult to conclude that there is a distinct nature of digital media use in news if it is only in isolated instances and is lacking a distinct pattern. Establishing a definite pattern allows us to make a more certain claim. Once again, there is a need here to give contextual considerations to where these techniques are in the innovation time map as some are still evolving.

8.3.2 Affordances of Techniques go Beyond Engaging Attention to the Main Details of the News

In the first instance, our findings did reveal that while it is certainly an important enquiry to try to ascertain what are the potentials of any particular technique to help engage audience attention to the main details of the news, this is not particularly easy without any obvious form of audience research. Trying to ascertain this from the newsmaker's viewpoint only is certainly inadequate. What the findings did reveal however is that the scope of what newsmakers want to achieve with the consumer through the story is no longer limited to just the 'main details in the news'.

As far as standards go for engaging the audience, the 'main details in the news' principle was indeed useful if it was print or broadcast platforms we are considering. In the online space however, the expectations of the newsmaker are very varied and go beyond just the 'main details'. For example, with the affordance of choice given through the various modal forms, the news consumer is more likely to engage with specific parts of the story. And unless the newsmaker tries to contain the main details of the story within each modal element, which is however not the case, it is hard to make the audience access the main parts of the news since there are various choices. That said, the use of the call-out is quite rampant within both institutions, and its increasing use indicates that there is however the potential for newsmakers to highlight certain elements within the story for the consumer to engage with.

There isn't therefore a unique technique for engaging audience attention, but one thing that is worth highlighting is the affordance of space in the online domain and how it impacts the layout and structure of news stories, and consequently the ability to engage. The newsmaker is more able to have lots of clearly-demarcated section breaks, with possibilities for fewer sentences per paragraph (if they so choose). This certainly makes the text better-structured (and perhaps more easily-read), especially in instances where the text is really long. Hence, the audience is motivated to keep engaged till the end. Further to this, the written text is interspaced with different call-outs, and some content is provided in other text-plus modal formats including images and audiovisuals. In effect, what is lost by way of the diffusion of attention is regained through the tactics of structure and variety.

It must be noted that one of the touted potentials of the online platform is the ability for newsmakers to know what the audience is consuming and how, and this facilitates easier audience research in comparison to the print and broadcast platforms. By virtue of this factor therefore, it is assumed that the newsmaker by employing particular newsmaking techniques is in fact responding to their understanding of the needs of the consumer, based on knowledge got from this research (i.e. if this research is actually carried out and results factored in). I explore this in greater detail in the next sub-sections.

8.4 How Successfully are News Storytellers Adapting Their Practices, Roles and Techniques to Changes on the Digital Platform?

This question attempts to investigate how effective are the processes that mainstream news institutions have towards how they adapt to the changing techniques of news storytelling in the digital sphere. It must be noted that this enquiry is principally from the viewpoints of the

newsmakers. The thesis makes a case here that the success of any adoption process is subjective, and to test the rate of adoption according to how fast or slow the process is will be inadequate. This is because there are other salient factors to consider beyond the speed with which new techniques are incorporated. For instance, it is equally important to ascertain how consistently and robustly each adopted tool is used, and how sustainable this usage is within that particular media environment. It also argues in chapter six that the particular cultural context of the institution is a very important consideration towards understanding how mainstream news organisations (especially public-sector ones) adopt technologies. Towards this therefore, it argues further that the factors that drive these changes can sometimes be outside of the remit of the news producing organisations.

8.4.1 There are Other Determinants of the Success of Digital Tools and Techniques Beyond the Rate of Adaptation

One crucial component the thesis sought to establish was how fast or slow news organisations adopt particular technologies, and how they adapt their existing tools and processes. This objective was necessary as it is constantly hypothesised that the digital space is constantly and rapidly evolving. However, I argue here that merely adopting a tool or a technique at a fast rate is not enough to indicate how innovative an institution is or how versatile. As our discussions show, the considerations around when to adopt a particular tool are driven by various factors. For example, what competing platforms are offering; whether it aligns with the larger organisational strategy; and finally, whether it is driven by the audience in that particular context, are all factored in. To illustrate, the SABC respondents revealed that they have had to discontinue the use of some tools they had adapted into their news production because the environment did not support them. However, when the infrastructure (specifically bandwidth) improved subsequently, these tools were reintroduced. Hence, it can be observed that applying such a simple test to ascertain the rate of adaptation misses out on some very important nuances of the context under consideration.

Due to this, it would be expedient to also consider the retention levels after adoption. Hence, to call an adaption process successful will be to try to ascertain how long tools stay in use, and also if and how they are developed upon with time. To do this will however require a more extended longitudinal research, as our findings show that the space might be rapidly evolving but the parameters worth looking at certainly evolve at a slower pace than hypothesised. To effectively evaluate this would therefore require a longer timeframe of investigation than what was expended in this study.

Finally, as I have demonstrated through various lines of questioning and the subsequent discussions, success considerations should also require that these news producers critically reflect on how well they perceive the organisation is doing towards responding to the demands in the sector, beyond merely adopting tools. Once again, these sorts of reflections are also likely to be highly subjective, and this needs to be taken into consideration.

8.4.2 Context is Important Towards Understanding How News Organisations Adapt

As I have argued, the geographical (or economic) context within which each particular news organisation operates is a key consideration towards how it adapts different aspects of work culture to technological changes and advancements. For example, we see that the BBC has innovated at a relatively faster rate than the SABC which is due largely to the economic and technological advancements of the UK as a developed world country, in contrast to South Africa which is an intermediate economy. Within each geographical/economic context however, there are other additional considerations. I particularly highlight here that the characteristics of the news organisation (whether it is privately owned or is a public entity) has a great impact on adoption and adaptation levels. For instance, within the BBC and the SABC, there is the recognition that a high regulatory oversight in the case of the former, and inconsistent funding streams in the case of the latter hamper the speed with which either online news strategy teams will ideally like to evolve.

Further to this, the role the news organisation plays within the mediasphere, for example as a mainstream newsmaker, or as an alternative/aggregator site is equally important. Mainstream news organisations especially high-standing public ones such as the BBC and the SABC have a higher standard to live up to in news storytelling. Hence, due consideration is given before incorporating new techniques especially those that disrupt the convention (such as extensive use of UGCs and comments functions). However, alternative news sites such as BuzzFeed also have a standard to live up to in terms of satisfying high demands of innovation in digital storytelling and this spurs their own adoption levels.

8.4.3 Change is Both Internally and Externally Driven

I have argued that context considerations are important towards understanding how news organisations adopt technology. A key thing to note therefore is that changes are both internally and externally driven. Sometimes, news producers are forced to respond to the changes within the media environment. This however paints them as belonging in the camp of

adopters (be it early or late), and not as innovators especially since most of the digital storytelling tools originate from outside of the news industry. However, some of these techniques and practices were rightly developed by news producing actors (be it mainstream or alternative sites). Hence, it is important to not to categorise newsmakers solely as adopters.

Further to these, I have highlighted instances when the traditional news platforms (print and broadcast especially) are seen as adopting certain techniques from the online space. This demonstrates that within the same sector (or even within the same media organisation), the online platform does shape the approach traditional platforms take towards newsmaking. These are therefore essential elements towards understanding and appreciating the role that news media institutions play in the digital technologies sphere on one hand, and within evolving news cultures on the other.

8.5 Looking Forward: Implications for the Field

This study has shown with the specific illustrations that it makes from the BBC and the SABC perspectives that the impact of digital technologies on news cultures is indeed context-specific. The discoveries around creativity and innovation are noteworthy, and I argue here that the big push for innovation in newsmaking (regardless of the context) is going to come from competition imperatives offered by the actors in the space. For the BBC, this exists in the alternative/aggregator digital news platforms that are increasingly offering many different news-consuming experiences for the increasingly diverse online audience. For the SABC, it is going to come from both existing and new-entrant mainstream news providers that are able to offer the online experience that the audience desire. However, it is apparent that mainstream news providers, and more importantly public-sector broadcasters with established brands will need to carefully consider how they incorporate new practices into their news. They would need to finely balance adoption and adaptation in response to the demands of the increasingly digital environment with the need to maintain the quality of their existing brands.

The argument raised that online news (and journalism) is a distinct concept that at the same time has deep, undeniable roots in traditional mediums and practices is significant. It strongly situates the key contention that current norms are hybrid in nature (with both old and new media norms that exist in complementary, rather than substituting roles). This demonstrates that the touted revolution of the newsmaking space only partially happened, and that in itself is a meaningful discovery. I must emphasise here that the findings also deeply illustrate the very important fact that whatever phenomenon it is that anyone is looking at a particular point

in time is going to be merely a snapshot of a larger, dynamic media environment. In effect, we see various continuities, as is often the case with the business of storytelling itself, as discussed in the opening chapter of the thesis.

The various other findings outside of those supporting or contesting the previously-discussed hypotheses are also significant as they help establish the value for further research into these phenomena. For example, the study only began to graze the domain of the ethical considerations revolving around how mainstream newsmakers adapt their practices with time, and in response to both internal and external stimuli, such as the need to engage more with the audience as a PSB, or to respond to the competition posed by alternative news platforms in the space. For example, some have questioned the justification for the BBC's perceived ownership of crowd-sourced content (or UGC) and whether it is ethical to do so. Further, it has been debated whether the trend towards the use of more picture and video-led content in hard-news stories at the expense of quality, in-depth text treatment is indeed supportive of the BBC brand quality. This is certainly an agenda for further research. Future research could also focus exclusively on non-hard news formats such as live blogs, feature articles, as well as on mobile-specific platforms in order to interrogate at a deeper level the supposed heightened creativity and accelerated innovation in these domains. Indeed some researchers have started to do this (for example Thurman and Walters, 2013).

Further, potential future research could also investigate the motivation of newsmakers to maintain the status quo in certain instances. For example, as established, only the user-to-system forms of navigation are being predominately used across the board. Relative to this, a focused audience study should also investigate audience motivations, specifically to find out what makes them repeat users especially in the light of such unenhanced storytelling practices by some mainstream online newsmakers in certain instances. A study like this would enable us to get a clearer picture of the extent to which newsmakers' perceptions of the needs of the audience align with what is in fact the case.

8.6 Conclusions

I consider that the various discussions undertaken so far in the conclusions to this thesis do three things. Firstly, some reveal new insights into certain newsmaking phenomena. Secondly, some existing ideas (from the literature) with respect to these phenomena are tested and confirmed, or contested. And lastly, they set some parameters for further research. These are clearly highlighted in chapter seven, and in the preceding sub-section. Therefore instead of

rehashing them in entirety, I will merely recap a few here. I can say that overall, all the findings from the SABC perspective are new revelations since this is the first such study to be conducted with a focus on online newsmaking from this context. Also the affordances that I identified collectively with regard to how time and space are used in the web news domain; as well as how some tailoring of news is done according to news genres and classifications; and finally, how the web platform enables attention to be concentrated on the salient elements of the news story through the use of call-outs, are significant.

Further, I have tested Massey's idea with regard to the practice of nonlinearity in online news, and found that the operationalisation of it within the two organisations is not strictly textbook, though the norms do evolve somewhat with time (for example, as was the case with the SABC). I also explored Deuze's idea of the 'fourth' journalism and discovered that it is not a static concept due principally to the fact that the hybridity (convergence) of sorts which characterises it is seen to be continually changing. And finally, I investigated various related ideas from some researchers (for instance Livingstone, Couchot and Thurman) and identified that news storytelling practice and the news storytelling sphere have indeed changed, especially with respect to the narrative styles that are supported, and also in terms of how the collective roles and identity of newsmakers have been transformed in the digital space.

What are the implications of all these discoveries therefore, and how are they relevant? For example, it has been emphasised in this thesis that digital technology has not revolutionised the news mediasphere to the extent that it was predicted, hence confirming Franklin's (2009a, p.6) arguments. However, at the same time, the unpredictable nature of the platform, coupled with the fast rate at which some news organisations are adapting some of their techniques and practices indicate that anything is possible. For the BBC, the increasingly competitive media environment in which it operates, as well as the fact that adequate financial and technological capacities seem to be in place may influence some rapid innovative developments. At the SABC also, an increase in the availability of tools in that context, could lead to increased technological capacity of the audience and this could push news producers in this context to innovate accordingly. Once again, these are merely intelligent suppositions and only a much-needed future study will indeed establish these predictions.

Hence, it is recommended that research into each particular phenomenon should be frequent and consistent, in order to keep up with the evolution of the platform, and to pick up any instances that may deviate from these conclusions. For instance, in studying this platform over

a three-year period, changes were seen in news production techniques in later stages that dramatically altered the conclusions drawn from the earlier ones. Time therefore needs to be an important consideration for future research.

It was apparent in the design of the study that it was extremely important to approach the evaluations from a case-by-case basis, as the experiences of web news development are unlikely to be uniform, especially in contexts as diverse as the BBC and the SABC (and by inference UK and South Africa). Some seminal works (see for example, Thurman and Myllylahti, 2008; and the various edited collections in Fenton, 2010; Siapera and Veglis, 2012 and Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker, 2014) have taken this route in studying the digital news space, and the same call is made here for studies to focus on specific sections of the space in order to draw out unique insights which might be lost in a more general study. At the same time however, a holistic look at the space, regardless of the context is also possible.

However, case study approaches also pose a limitation as the conclusions drawn here cannot be generalised to any degree beyond these specific phenomena and the contexts. Additionally, the PSB and hard-news exclusive criteria used in the selection leaves out some very important players and aspects of the digital newsmaking arena that would have undoubtedly impacted the conclusions drawn should they have been analysed. That said, the greatest contribution of this research lies in how it has used specific case study insights to contest certain assumptions about the role of digital technologies in shifting newsmaking practices generally. Additionally, a majority of the literature about these phenomena is set in the West. In effect, all the standards we applied in this thesis were Eurocentric in nature. However, studies such as this one are helpful in showing, as it did, how those standards can be adapted and applied in a way that allows for the different contexts of non-Western societies to be catered for. Hence, future studies can apply these adapted standards to ascertain how key online newsmaking interpretations translate within other media determinisms. This contributes in growing the knowledge base of what is known about the digital platform from a multi-contextual perspective. Hence, this study attempts to fill one of the notable gaps in the field, as discussed in Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) and Siapera and Veglis (2012), about the need for a cross-cultural insight into these pertinent issues.

Finally, as Tunney and Monaghan (2010, p. x) maintain, “in some quarters, there is a tendency to approach Internet journalism as a global phenomenon in a manner that obscures the local differences of practice, economy and political culture”. This study is therefore an attempt to

deviate from that path. Furthermore, it has been found that some notable research has proceeded from the premise of how technology has impacted newsmaking and journalism (see Siapera and Veglis, 2012). However, what I have done in this thesis takes the opposite path – attempting to understand how newsmaking and journalism (as it is practiced in specific contexts) have impacted on the technology and how it is adopted/adapted. In effect, some new approaches are modelled here. I do believe that these approaches have indeed revealed many interesting facets about these digital techniques even as they continually evolve, gradually proliferate, and eventually really revolutionise journalism.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Content Analysis Codebook

The codebook was drawn up after a content audit and inventory of the news websites of the two case study media institutions (i.e. the BBC and the SABC). Emergent coding principle was used, where the categories were established upon preliminary examination of the data. To the extent possible, the categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The rules of coding were also as explicit as possible. The full coding was then carried out (after pilot testing). Coding was done on a random day and time once a week for six consecutive months.

This qualitative and quantitative analysis process seeks to answer the following research questions:

R1. What are the forms, modes and techniques employed for hard news storytelling on the aforementioned digital platform?

R2. What is the rate at which change is being made to the techniques and formats used on this platform?

R3. How are digital news stories told differently according to audience types, type (genre) of news or categorisation of the news (local vs. international news) where possible?

R4. How are the news storytellers identified on the digital platform?

The unit of analysis is the individual hard news story appearing on the homepage of the BBC and SABC news site. This embodies all the elements of that particular story (including photos, videos, add-ons etc.). For the purposes of this research, and based upon preliminary examination of the data, any item appearing on the homepage is regarded as news. However only news items with some content (2 lines or more) appearing with the headlines on the homepage are coded. Those with just headlines are excluded, since they are regarded as links. Features, magazine articles, opinions and analysis on the homepage are all excluded.

Coding Schedule

The coding schedule encompasses rows and columns. The rows contain the specified individual data (news) item for which the coding is done, starting from the number 001 to the last coded

item of 382. The columns (of which there were 20) contain the 18 different variables of themes for which the individual content items were coded, plus an extra two columns for recording additional comments and for providing the corresponding url links. The 18 variables consisted of the standardised codes: Researcher ID, Post number, Date, and News site ID. The rest of the variables are the specific themes, with full details included in the coding manual below.

Coding Manual

V1- Researcher ID

The number that identifies each researcher in the coding team: Primary researcher (Deffor) is 1, any other coder is 2.

V2- Post number

Each news item that is coded gets a post number, starting from 001 until the very last news story at the end of the coding period.

V3- Date

The date on which the coding was done, not the date on which the news item was published on the news website. It is a 6-digit number in the format DDMMYY.

V4- News site ID

The news site that is being coded: the BBC is 1 and the SABC is 2.

V5-Type of news

This is defined as the main topic that the headline and the body of the news story is covering: politics is 1, entertainment is 2, business/finance is 3, weather is 4, sports is 5. 'other' (outside of the aforementioned five categories) is to be captured as 6 and the specific genre is to be recorded in the comments section, as well as an indication of whether it belongs to category A – security, foreign affairs or crime news; or category B – education, health, science and technology, or lifestyle news.

V6- Categorisation of news

This is defined as the geographical situation of the main content of the news story (i.e. within or outside the country where the media institution is located). Local news is 1, International news is 2.

V7- Format of post

Defined as the modal form employed in telling/reporting the news story. Written text only is 1; written text and graphics is 2; written text and audiovisual is 3; graphics only is 4; graphics and audiovisual is 5; Audiovisual only is 6; written text, graphics and audiovisual is 7; any other format outside these is 8 (specify in the comments section).

V8-Characteristics of written text content: Length

This is defined as the identifiable length of the written text component of the news item. Specifically the total length of the main body of text is to be counted and recorded according to the number of paragraphs. Less than 10 paragraphs is 1, more than 10 paragraphs is 2; where not applicable i.e. there is no text, code 0.

V9- Characteristics of written text content: Call-out elements

This is defined as a quote, figure box, bulleted facts, opinion statements or texts highlighted with different fonts, font sizes or colours, used outside or within the main body of the written text. When it is used, code as 1, not used is 2.

V10- Characteristics of written text content- style of writing

This is defined as the style of writing conforming to any obvious/distinct pattern of journalistic news writing. The distinct types could be the traditional pyramid style of journalistic writing, the narrative form of tabloid reporting or any other. If it is easily identifiable as been used code 1, if not code 2 (specify the exact type identified in the comments section).

V11- Characteristics of graphic content: number

When one graphic/image is used code as 1, when more than one used, code 2. Where not applicable i.e. there is no graphic used, code 0.

V12- Characteristics of graphic content (photo): size

An average size of photograph is defined here as approximately two passport-size photographs put together. Anything significantly bigger than the standard defined above is regarded as large. This standard is in proportion to a news story that is accessed on an average 21" computer monitor screen size. An average size graphic is coded as 1, and a large graphic is coded as 2, and explicitly specified in the comments section. To code the sizes when 2 or more graphics appear in a single story, code as (example) 1, 2 or 1, 2, 2.

V13- Characteristics of audiovisual content: number

When one audiovisual material is used, code as 1, and code 2 when more than one is used. Where not applicable, i.e. there is no audio-visual, code 0.

V14- Characteristics of audiovisual content: length

Length of audiovisual that is less than 3 minutes is to be coded as 1, and more than 3 minutes is to be coded as 2. Where more than one audiovisual item is used, code as e.g. 1, 2 or 2, 2, 2.

V15- Source identified

This is defined as the name of the originator of the news story being stated on the news website (this could be either the written text, graphic or audiovisual item). The source can be identified by an individual's or an institution's name and should be specified in the comments section. Source mentioned is 1, not mentioned is 2.

V16- Interactive/hyperlink techniques being employed

These are defined as any add-ons or special facilities included in the news or outside the main body of news item that can be classified as interactive or hyperlink elements. Feedback/comment function is coded as 1. Contact link with details of how the audience can get in touch with the news organisation, or for the audience to leave their contact details to be contacted is to be coded as 2; hyperlink to related content is 3, link to social media and other alternative media platforms is 4; link to an RSS function is to be coded as 5; and any other item outside these is 6 (specify in the comments section). Where none is used, code 0. When one or more apply, code as 1, 3 or 1, 3, 5 etc.

V17- New features in news reports

This is defined as any novel feature (format or technique) outside those outlined in this coding scheme appearing within or outside the news story. This includes features that haven't been seen before since the commencement of the coding process. Existence of a new feature is 1, none is 2, (specify in the comments section).

V18- Type of news audience targeted

This is defined as the distinct type of audience the news item appears to be specifically targeting. These distinct groupings could be local audience, international audience, youth, adults, etc. If it is easily identifiable code 1, if not code 2. Specify the specific grouping in the comments section.

V19- Comments

Any comments you wish to capture on the item coded for future reference (content, process etc.); and as per the instructions attached to some of the variables above.

V20- Url link

Copy and paste the url to the page of the particular news story being coded.

Appendix 2: The Intercoder Reliability Calculation

No.	Variable	Percent Agreement	Cohen's kappa
1	Type of news	96.3%	0.952
2	Categorisation of news	98.1%	0.953
3	Format of post	96.3%	0.943
4	Characteristics of text content: length	98.1%	0.962
5	Characteristics of text content: Call-out elements	100%	1
6	Characteristics of text content: Style of writing	92.6%	-0.038
7	Characteristics of graphic content: number	96.3%	0.926
8	Characteristics of graphic content: Size	90.7%	0.741
9	Characteristics of audiovisual content: number	100%	1
10	Characteristics of audiovisual content: length	96.3%	0.926
11	Source identified	98.1%	0.899
12	Interactive/hyperlink techniques being employed	94.4%	0.838
13	New features in news reports	96.3%	-0.019
14	Type of news audiences targeted	98.1%	0

The results of the reliability test for the Content Analysis of news stories published on the BBC and the SABC news website, n=54

Appendix 3: The Interview Guide

This is an outline of the questions that are to be asked during the interview exercise with key respondents drawn from the online news teams of the BBC and the SABC. The questions are merely a guide and are to be adapted for the specific organisation and the respondents accordingly.

1. In what ways are you using (new) techniques and formats in online stories, in particular hard news reports?
2. How central is multimediality (and also interactivity and hypertextuality) to your online news function?
3. What are some of your predictions for the future of news story making (in reference to the above)?
4. How are particular digital attributes enhancing how you produce and present your news online now? How might this change in the future?
5. In your opinion, do you think you are now being more successful in responding to and matching audience needs with different techniques?
6. Do you think, based on how you currently present your online news, that audiences are now much better able to engage with the main details in the stories, compared to the other platforms (TV, radio, print)?
7. How do you think internal influences such as editorial powers and financial capacity, as well as external forces such as political climate and digital literacy influence how you package your online news?
8. With reference to your existing house style and editorial codes of conduct for newsmaking, what has changed with regards to you publish news online, and how does this compare with the situation with the traditional platforms?
9. In what ways has the role and place of the news editor been altered (in this digital era), in your opinion?
10. Generally, how have you responded to adoption of new technologically-impacted techniques within your institution in relation to newsmaking; and what is your opinion about the position of your competitors?