FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES

MY BODY MY BUSINESS: DIGITAL MEDIA ADVOCACY FOR LGBT+ SOCIETY IN ZIMBABWE

BY

R153310H

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES

NOVEMBER 2018

STATEMENT OF SUPERVISION

I hereby certify that I personally supervised this dissertation in accordance with Departmental Regulations and the University's General Academic Regulations for Undergraduate Degrees. On that basis I declare that the dissertation is examinable,

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: MY BODY MY BUSINESS: DIGITAL MEDIA ADVOCACY
FOR LGBT+ SOCIETY IN ZIMBABWE

CANDIDATE NAME   EPPNOGGIA MUTETWA

SUPERVISOR: DR. L.NCUBE

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR: ……………………………………………

DATE: ……………………………………………

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I R153310H, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and that it has not been previously submitted to any other University. I also declare that proper citations and acknowledgements in accordance with copyright law and ethical requirements have been strictly adhered to in writing this dissertation.

Name of student:

....

Signature of student:

....

Date

....

DEDICATION

For all the claustrophobic individual who are shoved into closets by a society that refuses to acknowledge, accept and appreciate the beauty in different individual identities. And my late father Lovemore Hlekani Mutetwa for instilling in me values that allow me to love unconditionally and defy all odds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The Zimbabwean society as always been homophobic and homohysteric in nature since the late nineties with the largely publicised homophobic utterances by the former president Mugabe influencing media discourse in the post-independence era. However, studies examining queer sexual identities and digital media platforms in contemporary times are scarce. Guided by the queer theory, this study qualitatively examines how Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe Facebook page and Unheard voices blog are utilised for advocacy. The study also examines the play of sexual identities and power contestations at these platforms. Findings of the study show that alternative media platforms are key when it comes to advocacy for queer sexual minorities in a largely conservative Zimbabwe society.

Acronyms

GALZ   Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe

LGBT+   Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender and all queer identities

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has always been predominantly a homophobic and heteronormative society. The society is hostile to queer sexuality or gender identity and only recognises heterosexuals as the acceptable norm. This is reflected in the legal framework in section 73 of the penal code which prohibits homosexual conduct between men although it only speaks directly to gay people and not all members of the queer community, the media representation through section 11 of the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act ,which prevents the printing, publishing and distribution of undesirable material, as well as the dominant societal perception.

In Zimbabwe ever since the Canaan Banana incident[1] and the continuous vilification of members of the Lesbian,Gays,Bisexual,Transgender and other member of the queer (LGBT+) community by the former president Robert Mugabe, queer identities have remained a taboo and something only discussed in dark alleys.. Mabvurira et al (2012)argue that "despite disapproval that homosexuality in unAfrican, it is as African as the baobab tree and as Zimbabwean as the Great Zimbabwe Ruins" .They also go on to state "that it is the responsibility of social workers in Zimbabwe to assume advocacy roles around the absence of adequate services for LGBTI communities".

The red tape and gross homophobia reflected by all main stream media outlets, however leaves digital media platforms as the only safe space and alternative for advocacy and framing of positive conversations. The research focuses on digital media as an effective tool for advocacy, social change, education as well safe space for the queer community of Zimbabwe, with the main

---

[1]In 1996, former President Canaan Banana was arrested based on accusations made during the murder trial of his former bodyguard, Jefta Dube, and found guilty of eleven charges of sodomy, attempted sodomy and indecent assault in 1998

reference point being Facebook pages and blog sites. With recent uprisings of social movements such as #feesmustfall[2], as well as #slutwalk[3] on various social media sites and the positive feedback as well as affirmative action achieved as a result is it of paramount importance for civic groups such as GALZ and SRC that advocate for LGBT+ rights to look into digital media as a channel for advocacy and empowerment.

The study explores how digital media advocacy is the way to counter the negative perception presented in main stream media, educate the Zimbabwean society on queerness and acceptance as well as create safe spaces for queer folk and their allies on Facebook and blog sites.

1.1 Background of study

"Zimbabwe's history, colonial and postcolonial, has been violent and fraught with human rights infractions, including economic crises that have left the country and its people stripped of resources. In this fraught context, the violation of the human rights of sexual minorities who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) is unsurprising" (Shoko and Phiri 2007) with the ostracisation of Canaan Banana in 1997 setting the tone on how main stream media was destined to represent the LGBT+ community in the negative light making it impossible for various advocacy groups to control public discourse through the media. Main stream media has always been used by the ruling party and several conservative groups to perpetuate the further oppression of the group as well as cultivate homophobia. This was largely evident in 1995 when the government engaged state institutions to exclude Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) from participating and exhibiting their material at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair.

---

[2] A student led protest movement that began in mid-October 2015 in South Africa, with the goal of stopping government from raising student fees and push them to increase government funding for universities.

[3] A transnational movement of protest marches calling for an end to rape culture, including victim blaming and slut shaming of sexual assault victims, participants protest against explaining or excusing rape by referring to any aspect of a woman's appearance

In Zimbabwe homosexuality remains a taboo topic with any form of public discourses being controlled and lead by various conservative groups such as the Christian community and traditionalists with Chief Charumbira, Leader of the Traditional Chiefs Council of Zimbabwe publicly declaring that "Homosexuality is a social wrong that progressive minds should resist […] It is alien to Zimbabwe and is a taboo […] even the platform to discuss such issues should not be accorded.". According to Shoko and Phiri (2007) the state uses homophobic media coverage, the legal system as well as religion to create the impression that same sex practices are alien to Zimbabwe despite documented   archival evidence to the contrary which is rarely publicised. The state has always used chapter 10.40 of the censorship and entertainment control act which prohibits the importing ,production and distribution of undesirable publications ,pictures, records, films and pornography to confiscate any GALZ pamphlet's, publications or productions within mainstream media.

The advent of digital media platforms that are free from the chains of state control and censorship has however allowed the creation of a safe space were members of the LGBT+ community as well as advocacy groups such as GALZ and Sexual Rights Centre [SRC] can freely air out their views and opinions as well as advocate for their rights at the same time educate and sensitise the community. According to a Pakasipti key member, "LGBTI Zimbabweans blog and use social media like Facebook and WhatsApp to connect". The digital sphere has also enabled the community to access regional and global media products that are sensitive to their cause and represent them in the positive light thereby normalising their lives and preventing the advent of self-hate and internalised homophobia.

Most of the research done in the area focuses on the representation of queer sexualities in mainstream media, the legal framework that is oppressive to queer folk, as well as societal perception with regards to queer identities however not much has been done in showing the role of digital media as a counter for all the dominating ideologies and narratives.Mhiripiri 2014 looks at how the Zimbabwean media is homophobic in their representation of queer sexualities as well journalist's perspectives on homosexuality. While Shoko and Phiri analyse the

Zimbabwean opinion on LGBT+ society, political ideology, the legal framework, media representation and how it has led to the formulation of the dominant narrative. Other scholars such as Mabvurira look at how the opinion that queer sexualities are abnormal was formulated, the history of the LGBT+ society in Zimbabwe and the sectors that are best blessed in advocating for a change in the dominant narrative.

The study looks at how various advocacy groups as well as queer folk and allies in Zimbabwe can effectively utilise the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog site to educate society, call for legal reforms as well as empower the community. It focuses on the role of media as a public sphere where queer friendly conversations can occur.

1.2 Significance of the study

The study focuses on the use of digital media platforms such as blogs and Facebook as tools to advocate for social change exploring the difference between main stream media and new media in advancing the cause for queer identities in Zimbabwe. In their analysis of queer theory Calafell and Nakayama (2016) note how identities are a social construct and how the theory seeks to explore the different means and reasons in which identities are constructed. With this in mind the study looks at the link between the media and the construction of identities in society and how new media can be used to reconstruct the societal perception with regards to queer identities in the Zimbabwean landscape.

Most research on the queer community in relation to the media is focused on how different media outlets in different countries represent the various identities; Mabokela (2015) dwells on the unfair portrayal of queer sexualities by the South African TV industry. In her dissertation she notes the role of television in formulating attitudes behaviors and trends .This goes to show how influential media is when it comes to influencing public perception with regards to queer sexualities. In their 2014 research HIVOS focused on the legal, social and health structures with regards to LGBT+ people in Southern Africa and how that in turn affects the rights of members of the community. Most available research dwells on history of queer sexualities, various legal frameworks and their implications as well as how media portrays queer sexualities and the power

of the media in formulating public perception, very little has been done to establish the importance of new media in reconstructing the reality of queer sexualities and their portrayal in society as well as push for legal and ideological reforms.

Very little research has been done to show how new media such as blogs and social media sites can be used as advocacy channels as well safe public spheres by the LGBT+ community. "Social media's open structure yields space for people to insert their traditionally silenced performances into the virtual realm resulting in new narrative forms that move beyond the individual story" (Murray, 1997) and for Zimbabwe a society where any conversation on sexuality and gender are centered around conservative views the study seeks to explore how the queer community and advocacy groups make use of blog sites and Facebook to educate, advocate as well engage in uncensored discourse on pertinent issues regarding their identities.

The study investigates the manner in which the GALZ Facebook page has enabled the creation of a critical digital public sphere for the queer community as well as analyses text from Unheard voices and how it is essential in reframing identity constructs. Mhiripiri (2014) notes how Tsvangirai was once on record stating the need to respect the rights of queer citizens and later changed to a more homophobic stance after state owned mainstream media castigated him. This proves both the ability of media to frame ideologies and perceptions as well as the limitations that come with the highly censored main stream media in terms of creating a positive opinion on queer issues. The researcher is exploring the political economy of digital media and how it therefore enables advocacy organizations such as GALZ to push their agenda and reframe the discourse in a manner that counters mainstream media.

The study seeks to cover the gap between identity construction and advocacy for social change through use of digital media platforms such as blogs and Facebook focusing on the Zimbabwean queer community and how they use these platforms to push their agendas. The researcher seeks to add on to already existing material by scholars such as (Calafell and Nakayama 2016, Shoko and Phiri 2007, Mhiripiri 2014 as well Mabokela 2015). In the era of movements for social change it is important to explore the role of new media as a tool for advocacy especially in terms of its accessibility to previously disenfranchised groups .The research will act as information source for future studies on digital media advocacy as well as queer studies.

The researcher analyses the GALZ Facebook page as well as Unheard Voices blog, as GALZ is the leading organization in terms of activism for LGBT+ society of Zimbabwe while the Unheard voices blog is the most active when it comes to posting articles and stories that seek to explain queer identities and struggles to an otherwise conservative society. These two platforms are the most easily accessible for queer people in Zimbabwe and are highly publicized on other platforms. This will therefore allow the researcher to come up with conclusive analyses of the topic. The outlets are reliable sources and will allow for an informed and less biased access to data.

1.3 Problem statement

The study explores the link between digital media and advocacy for otherwise oppressed groups in a highly conservative society where mainstream media is heavily censored with specific focus on the LGBT+ society of Zimbabwe. The researcher analyses discourses on Facebook and blog sites as educational tools and public sphere where uncensored discourse can take place.

1.4Objectives

Examine the use of Facebook by organisations such as GALZ as a public sphere and advocacy platform

Explore the use of blogs such as Unheard Voices as educational tools

Explore forces behind the use of digital media for advocacy by GALZ

1.5 Research questions
MAIN QUESTION

How can GALZ utilise their Facebook pages as public spheres and advocacy platforms?

SUB QUESTIONS

How can articles on Unheard voices blog be used to educate and sensitise the community?

What is the link between human rights advocacy and digital media?

1.6 Delimitations

The research focuses on the GALZ Facebook page and how they are used as ideal public spheres for the queer community and their allies as well as advocate for the rights of the LGBT+ society. The study also looks at the use of the Unheard Voices blog and their role as free media to educate and sensitise the public on issues of gender and sexuality. It analyses digital media as a public sphere and free media platform and how it can effectively be used to promote liberal ideologies in an otherwise conservative society with specific focus on the LGBT+ society of Zimbabwe.

1.7 Limitations

The major challenge the researcher might face is access to members of queer community as the legal framework of Zimbabwe is not queer friendly most tend to not be open about their sexual orientation therefore it will be difficult to separate allies from actual members of the community during the interview process. There is also no guarantee that whatever information the researcher gathers will be objective and accurate as individual tend to give responses based on their personal experience and opinions.

1.8 Structure of the study

The study focuses on the use of the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog by the queer community of Zimbabwe and how these platforms can be used to counter the negative publicity of mainstream media and push for reform. The study is organized into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the area of study and gives a background of the positionality of queer individuals and their representation in the media and how digital media can enable them to change the narrative.

Chapter two reviews available literature and discusses the theoretical framework in relation to the study. While chapter three focuses on research methods and methodology as well as data collection and analysis techniques that are employed by the study. Chapter four comments on the political economy of digital media in relation to social movements and advocacy. Chapter five presents the findings of the study and lastly chapter six gives recommendations and a conclusion.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Facebook and blog sites have become an integral part of our society and play a vital role in social movements and advocacy campaigns for several oppressed groups.it is therefore imperative that we study the digital media platforms in relation to the LGBT+ community of Zimbabwe and how these platforms can be used to reconstruct their identity and influence legal reform.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The chapter presents and discusses literature related to the study. The theoretical framework is also discussed.

2.2 Digital media as an alternative public sphere in africa

The idea of a public sphere was propounded by Habermas in the early eighteenth century and has since been modified by various scholars to suit the change in time. The traditional and modern public sphere is centered around the ability of individuals especially those from oppressed groups to engage in conversations and come up with solutions to their problems with the major addition to the initial theory being the idea of multi publics (Calhoun, 1992;Fraser, 1992;Asen and Brouwer, 2001; Low and Smith, 2006).The idea allowed for the integration of the internet as a public sphere, where smaller groups that share similar interests for example those who self-identify as queer can engage in dialogue online through platforms such as Facebook.

The idea of counter publics has been discussed by various scholars. These are usually identity based and work as counters to the main public sphere which is usually filled with exclusive hegemonic perceptions (Garnham,1992;Dalgren,2001;Squires,2002 and Anderson,2003).In the Zimbabwean context one can argue that traditional media is the main public sphere while digital media presents the opportunity for the creation of counter\issue publics. The main public sphere is usually governed by the hegemonic ideologies of the elite and excludes several oppressed groups from the conversation while issue publics allow for these groups to also participate in dialogue and lead change.

Several scholars have explored the idea of online issue publics and all agree that the internet can be a public sphere or be utilized to assist a public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002McDorman, 2001;Mater, 2001; Poster, 1999).While (Dalberg,2001;Sunstein,2001 and Papacharissi 2002) argue on the shortcomings of the internet in terms of being an ideal public sphere. These include unequal access and literacy, audience fragmentation as well as commercialization of the internet.Dahlberg (2001) suggests that the internet must meet a six tiered criteria to be considered a public sphere.These are,inclusion,autonomy from state and economy,sincerity as well as platform for criticism.

The internet is also a great platform to challenge state institutions and ideologies through generating public debates and redefining power (Stewart,2001 and Sassen,2006).Thus one can argue that the internet can be utilised as a platform for advocacy for legal and societal reform on issues affecting minority groups that are not cartered for in mainstream media.The nature and political economy of the internet contributes to its ability to act as advocacy platform.

In January 2001 the Philippines used social media to organise a protest that forced the court to pass a fair ruling leading to the downfall of the then president Estrada, since then social media has been utilised by several civic groups to initiate social reform and overthrow bad governments (Shirky 2011).The rise of the internet and the manner in which it has been used clearly shows how it can be an effective tool in the advocacy for social reform. If rightly used the GALZ and SRC Facebook pages can be used to push for policy reform with regards to the rights of queer people in Zimbabwe. When used to augment advocacy efforts, social media can bolster outreach efforts by spreading information about a cause, reinforcing relationships among supporters, promoting participatory dialogue between group leaders and supporters, and strengthening collective action through increased speed of collaborative communication (Brunson & Valentine, 2010).Thus the queer community of Zimbabwe can shape discourse and allow for positive conversations about sexuality to take place as well as garner support from the masses.

Facebook constituted a micro public sphere – but as more users invest time and efforts within this particular media environment, it has for some time now reached up to macro

structures of society thereby affecting general behavioural patterns of citizens (Valtysson, 2012) . The ability of Facebook to reach a large audience and allow for conversations the lead to behavioural change makes it an ideal public sphere as well as advocacy platform and can serve a similar function in addressing the issue of queer sexualities and gender identities in Zimbabwe.

While several scholars have explored the idea of the internet as an ideal public sphere as well as tool for deconstructing hegemonic ideals and principles thus freeing the opressed from the chains of state imposed exclusion.Very little has been done in exploring the idea of facebook as an ideal public sphere and advocacy platform in the Zimbabwean context focusing on issue publics for queer identities. The study therefore explores the idea of Facebook as an issue public sphere for queer individuals in Zimbabwe with specific focus on the GALZ facebook page.

2.2.1 Social media and construction of identity

Social media plays a big role in the construction of identity (Dobrowsky, 2012; Nyambura, 2015; Miller, 2015 as well as Gunduz, 2017) point out the importance of social media as a tool for socialisation and how it therefore contributes in the construction of identity both individual and societal. The study resonates with their findings that social media has replaced the traditional institutions of socialisation such as the church, family and school and how the audiences interact with texts on social media influences their identity as well as understanding of different identities.

The question of identity has been a bone of contention amongst several scholars ,with the general agreement being that identity is not definite but rather constructed with the influence of both internal and external forces (Eisend and Jana Möller,2007;Singh, 2010;Aronson, Wilson and Akert,2010 and Hall,1997).Singh (2010) notes the role of the internet as a tool for cultural change and its influence in the construction of identity, while Nyambura (2015) argues that identity is acquired through social institutions. This therefore means one can suggest that our identities and ability to understand other identities is based on the material we are fed by the cultural industry mainly the media. That is to say what we see, communicate and experience plays a role in the construction of identity.

Scholars also note the role of new media in influencing identity constructs and argue that the dominant narrative in the media affects the way in which society will perceive minority identities (Rutherford, 2000;Howarth, 2002;Brooks & Hebert, 2006 and Jaspal & Cinnirela, 2010).One can therefore argue that the people's opinions of certain identities are shaped by the media products they consume for example the media representation of Muslims as terrorists has created a general perception that all Muslims are violent while in Zimbabwe queer sexualities are seen as unnatural because of the way the media frames discourse on sexuality. Jaspal & Cinnirela (2010) also argue that the frequency and consistency of media representations will determine their eventual transformation into social representation, since the more these representations are reproduced in the media, the more firmly they become ingrained in the social and psychological context.

Stuart Hall (1999) points out that representation builds identity, that is to say all identities are dependent on the manner in which the media frames and represents them. When the media sends issues as messages to a mass audience via representations, they inevitably also send identity as a message (Bachofer, 2014). Therefore, one can argue that the media has the power to construct and deconstruct identities based on how they represent certain groups and the types of messages they generate

The study seeks to establish the link between the media and identity politics therefore it is of great importance to note the role of the media with particular emphasis on social media in the construction and deconstruction of identity. Halkoaho (2012) argues that media plays a role in shaping identity through what it exposes its audience to, while Miller (2015) refers to identity as the way individuals view themselves as well as the way different groups in society views them. With reference to these scholars the study analysis the use of GALZ face book page and Unheard voices in influencing the way queer people view themselves as well the way the Zimbabwean society in turn views them.

The research makes use of Hall's constructionist approach in terms of media representation of queer identities. That is to say the main concern is how audiences interpret text on the GALZ

Facebook page as well as the stories on the Unheard voices and in turn use it to formulate personal opinions on sexual and gender identity.

Existing literature and studies focus on the power of the media in constructing and deconstructing identities as well as defining identities and how it is influenced by framing and representation. However not much has been done in exploring the use of digital media to counter hegemonic identities and reframe the discourse on minority identities. The study establishes the link between new media and construction of identity in the Zimbabwean context focusing on queer identities.

2.2.2 Inclusive masculinity and deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity and homohysteria

The concept of masculinity as always been at the centre of all studies on gender and sexual identity with Connell (1995) focusing on hegemonic masculinity and Anderson (2011) countering it with the theory of inclusive masculinity. While hegemonic masculinity is somewhat oppressive and limits an individual's identity to societal constructs, inclusive masculinity is more liberal and allows for individuals to self-actualise and create their own identities. Hegemonic masculinity comes with several social problems the main one being the exclusion and oppression of queer men (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmitt, 2005). This shows that there is a link between the dominant type of masculinity in society and acceptance of queer identities.

It is impossible to discuss sexuality without talking about gender as the two concepts are inherently linked. The stigma associated with men's homosexuality reflects more than just the dislike of sex between men: male homosexuality is also disparaged because it is culturally conflated with femininity (Barrett and Pollack 2005; Kimmel 1994; Nardi 1995; Pronger 1990). Predominantly homophobic society are characterized by their desire to vilify femininity that is to say hegemonic masculinity breeds homohysteria in a society. Epstein et al. (2001, 135) note, "Even little boys are required to prove that they are 'real boys' in ways that mark them as masculine, even macho, and therefore (by definition) heterosexual". Homophobia not only oppresses queer men but also limits the identities of straight men.

13

The desire to be perceived as heteromasculine is understandable in a culture that distributes privilege unequally according to gender and sexuality (Connell 1987; Lorber 1994).Thus a heteronomative society will always promote hegemonic masculinity and most man will subscribe in order to avoid stigma and oppression.Inclusive masculinity rejects practices against homosexuality or femininity and they are, therefore, resisted by many contemporary males (Anderson and McGuire 2010).Reframing society and promoting inclusive masculinity is therefore important in the deconstruction of homohysteria.

Anderson (2009) notes that "Inclusive masculinity theory supersedes hegemonic masculinity by explaining the stratification of men alongside their social dynamics in times of lower homophobia". Thus society's migration to inclusive masculinity and abandonment of hegemonic masculinity would lead to a queer friendly environment.

Past studies dwell more on the different types of masculinity with scholars emphasising the link between hegemonic masculinity and homohysteria. Very little research has been done to establish the link between the media and construction of inclusive masculinity and deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity and homohysteria. The study explores the link between Facebook and blog sites in eliminating homohysteria and hegemonic masculinity in favour of inclusive masculinity in the Zimbabwean context.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The research is guided by two main theories that is queer theory and digital public sphere theory. These theories will help us establish the link between advocacy for social change, digital media as a public sphere and education on the diversity of sexual identity.

2.3.1 Queer theory

The study utilises the queer theory in its exploration of the role of digital media in advocacy as well as a public sphere. Queer theory branched out of feminist studies and feminist theory in the early 90's and Foucault is seen as a catalyst in the establishment of queer theory as most of his work is used as a foundation for early research on gender and sexual identities. "Queer theory is not a theory in the traditional sense of the word. It is rather a perspective that scholars take in order to better understand both how we conceptualise sexualities and how to change them" (Calafell and Nakayama 2017), the theory focuses on how identity is constructed and how this therefore entails that society cannot limit individuals to specific identities as people have the ability to construct their own identities.

Calafell and Nakayama (2017) note that the theory does not focus on identity but rather interrogates the legal, political, religious and any institutional discourse that creates these identities and the assumptions behind these gender and sexual constructs. This research seeks to analyse the role of the media as an institution with specific focus on digital media in the construction of sexual and gender identities and how the media can be utilised in the formulation of positive discourse on the topic thus leading to a change in the manner in which traditional and conservative societies perceive queer identities.

Queer theory focuses on three aspects of the media, how media discourse and narratives construct certain identities as well the implications of these constructs, how the media can deconstruct the ideologies of a heteronormative society by being inclusive and lastly challenging the manner in which sexuality is written about in academia. All these aspects are essential in fulfilling the objectives of the study and create a better understanding of the problem and solutions regarding the media and its representation of the queer community. The study will examine how these aspects can be utilised by the Zimbabwean queer community to advance their cause and deconstruct traditional ideologies through digital media.

"Since the media have such an immense impact on how homosexuals are viewed, it is extremely important that we look at these stereotypes and understand the various messages they send"

(Allen & Hill, 2004:40) in the Zimbabwean context the study will look at how queer representation in main stream media ranges from extremely negative to non –existent and this in turn cultivates a culture of massive homophobia and lack of informed opinions with regards to how gender and sexual identity are constructed.

Most of the media attention awarded to the LGBT+ community centred around the arrests of prominent members of the community such at Banana and Nathanson as well as homophobic statements that were uttered by the former President R.G.Mugabe at various rallies the initial attack having been made in August 1995 at the opening of the international book fair where he was on record comparing homosexuals with dogs and pigs and referring to them as an unnatural western phenomenon which had no place in Zimbabwe and ironically the theme for that year was Human Rights and Justice.

The continuous reporting of such stories lead to a general consensus where people of Zimbabwe believe homosexuality is an evil and unnatural western construct that must be shunned from society and failure of the media to construct positive opinions on queer sexual identities makes it difficult for any positive discourse to occur. The advent of digital media platforms such as Facebook has however created an environment where it is possible to challenge traditional gender constructs and change the media narrative on queer identities. Through the GALZ and SRC Facebook pages individuals are able to access articles from foreign newspapers as well as engage in sexual and gender identity conversations that are not stereotypical or homophobic in nature.

Blog writing also creates a platform were articles on queer identity are not subject to the existing barriers and censorship that hinder the main stream media. When newspapers or writers in general write articles on gender and sexual issues they tend to limit them to the traditional hetero normative identities and issues affecting this group of people however blogs such as Unheard Voices tell the story of the queer individual and have articles that help educate people on queerness as well as deconstruct homophobia and limited gender and sexual constructs.

Queer theory thereby creates a foundation on how digital media can be used to advocate for LGBT+ rights as it examines the co relation between the media and the construction of gender and sexual identity.

2.3.2 Digital public sphere

The research seeks to establish how digital media is an ideal public sphere and therefore allows for advocacy to take place. The public sphere theory which was propounded by Habermas as well as the analysis of new media as a public sphere will be utilised to meet this goal. Habermas (1996)defined the public sphere as "a virtual space or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space" while Hauser (1999) defines it as " a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and were possible to reach a common judgement about them", one can therefore argue that new media platforms such as facebook,whatsapp,twitter can fall under the definitions of what a public sphere is, and in the context of the Zimbabwe queer community the GALZ and SRC Facebook pages are the ideal platforms where interested parties can engage in discourse on the struggles met by members of the queer community as well come up with possible solutions to these.

Habermas (2001) argues that the public sphere is premised upon participatory democracy and the influence of public opinion on political action, while Benhabib (2002) makes reference to how government laws and policies in a democratic society should be shaped by the public sphere, with Hauser stating that "democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate". Several movements on social change such as #menaretrash, #metoo, and #blacklivesmatter have ran discourses and campaigns on social media and blog sites which have initiated policy reform and legal action to protect the affected individuals, the same can also be utilised by the LGBT+ society in Zimbabwe to advocate for Government policy legal reform, as well as change societal perception on queer identities.

According to Habermas(2001) the public sphere is characterised by four main elements that is, it is formed through mediated discussion, represents a space for participation of previously excluded groups, issues discussed are often political in nature and lastly ideas are considered

based on merit and not the social standing of the speaker all of the characteristics are evident on the various social media and blogging sites that the research focuses on and can be used to carry out an analysis of new media as an ideal public sphere especially for the queer individuals in Zimbabwe. The GALZ and SRC Facebook pages as well the Unheard voices blog fall under what Dahlgren described as "issue publics" as their main focus is gender and sexual identity and participating members share similar interests be it to create legal reform or advocate for social change and education with regards to queer identity related issues.

The discussions on the Facebook pages seek to reconcile the differences between the homophobic representation of queer community by old media and the informed reality of what it means to be queer, as such these sites including the blogs tell the story from an affected individuals position as well as educational thereby meeting the first criteria of a public sphere. On the second element the Facebook pages and blog sites allow for the participation of queer folk and their allies to actively participate in discourse that main stream media has always excluded them from preferring to crucify and vilify them from an uninformed if not misinformed position.

In the Zimbabwean sphere sexual and identity issues have always been highly politicised with various politicians using them as part of their campaign material wit Robert Mugabe always focusing on the negatives and swaying public opinion at various rallies, although at some point Tsvangirai seemed to be accepting of the queer identities e quickly changed his opinion to avoid losing support from the largely conservative society. Discussing sexual and gender identity issues means these Facebook pages and blogs meet the third criteria. Lastly unlike main stream media which prioritises ideas and contribution from religious, traditional, political and opinion leaders on the Facebook page everyone is allowed to participate and their contribution is regarded as important as that of the next person and no CV's are required.

"The counterhegemonic vigour of DPS stems from its ability to facilitate connections and create new habits that result in higher impact collectives" (Beasley-Murray, 2010). The digital public sphere is structured in a way that protects it from censorship as well as dominant narratives that flood old media and limits its ability to operate as a public sphere. This therefore means it's easier for the queer community of Zimbabwe to fight against oppression through digital media platforms as opposed to main stream media.

2.4 Conclusion

The media plays a significant role in the advancement of specific identities as well as suppression of others. Digital media can be utilised in reconstructing identities through representing inclusive masculinity as the preferred identity thus deconstructing hegemonic masculinity and homohysteria in the Zimbabwean context. Thus it is important to study blog articles as well as Facebook posts that reframe the dominant narrative. The following chapter will present the research methods and methodology that the study employs.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the methods used in collecting, analysing and presenting data as well justification for these methods.

3.2 Research approach

The study used the qualitative research approach to analyse how the images, text and videos on new media platforms can be used to advocate for and initiate uncensored discourse by the LGBT+ society of Zimbabwe. Qualitative research works with non-numerical data and interprets meaning from this information and helps us understand social life of targeted populations or places (Crossman, 2018). Overall one can say qualitative research focuses on the literal value and analyses of issues and not their numerical value and analysis. The approach allowed the study to explore the use of new media platforms such as blogs and Facebook to push forward agendas for the Zimbabwean queer community.

Qualitative research method assists researchers to have better knowledge and understanding of the social context of the world they live in through in-depth analysis of how language, imagery and sound are used (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The method therefore enabled the study to have a better understanding of the texts, videos and images on the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog in relation to advocacy and generation of conversation for the LGBT+ society in Zimbabwe. Crossman (2018) notes that qualitative research allows the researcher to analyse people's behaviour and actions. In the study the method allowed the researcher to analyse the people's comments as well as reactions to the Facebook and blog posts as well as their opinions towards queer sexualities and gender.

The main advantages of this method in relation to the study are it was fluid and based on available data as such the research was directed and interpreted based on available data. It is

human centred in that it focuses lived experiences and observations and therefore meant all data collected was based on the lived experiences of queer individuals in Zimbabwe. The research approach makes use of smaller sample sizes which made it easier as the LGBT+ community constitute a minority in the community, creativity oriented and lastly it allows the research to explain certain attitudes and behaviours such as people different reactions to the post as we as the articles themselves.

3.3 Research design

The study made use of a case study design. Shuttleworth (2008) defines a case study as a detailed study of a specific situation rather than an extensive statistical survey. The researcher based the study on the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog site. A case study narrows down a broad field of study into one researchable topic (Shuttleworth, 2018). The case study design allowed the researcher to focus on a specific Facebook page and blog site and their roles as alternative public spheres and advocacy platforms for queer individuals.

Case studies allow researchers to answer questions such as how and why (Spring,1997). The design allowed the study explores how the queer community make use of Facebook and blog sites to advocate for change and create dialogue as well as why new media is the preferred channel to push their agenda. Spring (1997) notes that a case study is relevant to real life scenarios and findings relate directly to everyday life of individuals. The study looked at stories on the Unheard voices blog which are based on lived experiences of LGBT+ individuals as well as comments on how these articles helped other individuals both heterosexual and queer.

3.4 Population

Population refers to the totally quantity of things or cases which are the subject of a research (Kothari 2014, Etikan et al, 2016). This study focuses on the queer community of Zimbabwe and their interaction with society on digital media. The target population allows the research to gain a better understanding of the problem as well as the impact of digital media in addressing it. The

researcher selected posts from the GALZ Facebook page as well as articles and videos from the Unheard voices blog site.

3.5 Sampling approach

The research frames the population using non probability sampling as selection is based on a person's gender and sexual identity meaning a certain portion of the population that is the cis-heterosexuals do not have the probability of being selected. The study used purposive sampling method. The researcher also purposively selected articles, posts and videos that resonate with the goal of the study and will allow for a conclusive analysis of the topic.

3.5.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs when elements for the sample are chosen by the judgement of the researcher Black (2010). The method can also be referred to as selective or judgement sampling as the researcher selected a sample based on certain characteristics and their ability to meet the goals of the study.

The researcher purposively selected articles, posts and videos that resonate with the goal of the study and will allow for a conclusive analysis of the topic. The study explores digital media as a platform to educate society on queer identities as well as advocate for change. The articles were selected based on their educational qualities as well as engagement received in the comments section. Five posts were purposively selected from the GALZ Facebook page and five articles and videos from the Unheard voices blog. The researcher also selected a few comments from these pages.

The method is cost and time effective and allows the researcher to cover more ground within a limited time period and save costs. As a result of the legal framework of Zimbabwe there are a limited number of primary sources of data and purposive sampling is more effective in such a study.

3.6 Methods of data gathering

The study being a qualitative research made use of online archival research to gather the relevant data.

3.6.1 Online archival research

The study relied on material collected from Facebook and blogs. These posts served as educational, informative as well discussions on queer sexualities and queer community specific events and information. The study analysed two pictures, three videos, two posts and three articles, all which contained information that enabled the researcher to answer the research questions.

The method enables the researcher to collect and analyse media text in relation to the research objectives and answer research questions. This method is effective in generating data that will enable the researcher to establish the GALZ Facebook page as an ideal public sphere as well as Unheard voices blog as a tool for educating and sensitising the public. The method allows the researcher to obtain first and data.

3.7 Methods of data analysis

Methods of data analysis are ways used to analyse the data that would have been collected by the researcher. This study employs semiotic analysis and critical discourse analysis as the methods of data analysis.

3.7.1 Critical discourse analysis

This study employed critical discourse analysis, which focuses on how social power abuse, dominance and inequality are negotiated and contested through verbal and non-verbal texts in social or political context (Van Dijk 1998). Critical discourse analysis aided the researcher to critically explore and analyse the hidden meanings embedded in the texts, images and videos on the Unheard voices blog and GALZ Facebook page. This method of data analysis helped the

researcher to also critically look at the role of digital media as an alternative public sphere and advocacy platform, through analysing the nature of the posts as well as how individuals reacted to these posts.

Fairclough (2000) notes that discourse is established on estimate observations. However, Fourie (2007) argues that, discourse means dialogue, talk, discussion or communication. He postulates that critical discourse analysis starts with the analyses of communication statements on a case pursued by an analysis of the laws that set down the methods of debating, delineating, representing a case and leaving other methods of representation. Fourie (2007) also argues that critical discourse analysis involves an analysis of the subject as it is embodied by the mass media and how the media's representation of the case acquires power and is embodied as the truth concerning the case as dealt with by the mass media.

The question that CDA asks is: what is the relationship between texts, their producers and consumers, and the social environment in which text production and consumption occurs? (Haig 2001). In other words, critical discourse analysis is more concerned with analysing how power is contested and negotiated in the production of media text. In the case of this research, critical discourse analysis assisted the researcher to explore the nature of new media in relation to the ability of queer individuals to post their stories as well as engage in discourse that sheds a positive light onto their sexuality as opposed to mainstream media.

Critical discourse analysis will help the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of how power is contested and negotiated in the process of production of media text that attempt to reconstruct identity and deconstruct heteronomative ideologies and advance the cause for the Zimbabwean LGBT+ society.

3.7.2 Semiotic analysis

This study employed semiotic analysis to analyse data. Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols, signification and it is also a study of how meaning is created. Deely (1990) states that semiotics is the study of sign action (semiosis). Semiotics is associated with the work of the American philosopher, C S Peirce, although its roots are in the works of a Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. American philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce (18391914) is responsible

for coining the term semiotics. Semiotics can be referred to as the study of signs. It examines how signs and symbols are manipulated to create meaning. (Chandler, 2001). Semiotic analysis can help the researcher to explore how identity is constructed and deconstructed through unpacking the signs and symbols that are employed in the posts the researcher is analysing.

Semiotic analysis seeks to explore the underlying meanings found in media texts. The media carefully selects what to put forth as a message be it in objects, images, words, sounds or colour. The media are engaged in signifying practices "a kind of symbolic work" that gives meaning to things and communicates that meaning to something else. (Hall, 1997: 14, Chandler, 2002). This means that the messages in the posts on the GALZ Facebook pages are meant to serve a specific purpose. It is the role of semiotic analysis to unpack these hidden meanings in text. Therefore, this study uses semiotic analysis to explore how identity is constructed and deconstructed as well as how queer identities are reframed in these posts.

The study also utilised semiotic analysis to explore whether political economy of digital media has an influence on the nature of texts produced and distributed on the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog. According to Du Plooy (2011), everything can be a sign that stands for something. A semiotic analysis of the imagery, text, sound and videos on these platforms allowed the researcher to explore the power of new media in the construction of identity and reframing of hegemonic ideologies.

3.8 Methods of data presentation

The study being a qualitative research employs a thematic method of presenting data. Data presentation helps in sowing the outcome of the study.

3.8.1 Thematic presentation

The study makes use of thematic method to present data because as it analyses digital media posts and their ability to reframe society's perception with regards queer sexualities and gender. Thematic content analysis is an illustrative presentation of qualitative data Anderson (2007).

Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) note that "thematic analysis is a method for recognizing, analysing, and describing outlines (themes) inside data.

By recognizing common themes in the texts obtainable for analysis, a precise level of clarification is presented but merely negligible so as to circumvent emotion of the researcher. The research made use of qualitative and methods in collecting, presenting and analysis of data. This method is also triangulation which refers to the strategy of using several different kinds of data collection instruments such as texts, interviews and content analysis to explore a single issue Gall (1989). Themes obtained as findings are related to the theory selected for the study that is the queer theory and digital public sphere theory in relation to their ability to answer the research questions. These explanations are crafted in line with research questions and objectives.

3.9 Ethical issues

Meyer et al (2015) states that ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. The researcher ensured they upheld ethical conduct throughout their research and avoided things such as plagiarism, data misinterpretation and misrepresentation, as well as presenting fake data.

3.10 Conclusion

This Chapter brought forth the research paradigm and design utilized by the researcher in this study. It also discussed the sampling techniques, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis and presentation that the research will use. The methods and methodology discussed in this chapter will be of great significance in assisting to obtain findings which are going to be analysed and presented in Chapter 5. The following chapter seeks to explore the organisational structures of GALZ as it is the leading organisation in terms of gay rights activism in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GALZ

4.1 Introduction

The chapter discusses the political economy of GALZ, which is the leading organisation in terms of protecting queer bodies in Zimbabwe. It explores background, organisational structure and core business of the organisation in relation to study.

4.2 Historical background

Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) is a non-profit organisation that deals with issues affecting the LGBT+ community of Zimbabwe. They provide HIV/AIDS related services, support services, vocational training as well as advocacy for inclusion of queer bodies in various programs.

GALZ was founded in September 1990, and it is one of the earliest and highly regarded LGBT+ advocacy organisations in Southern Africa. After Zimbabwean independence on April 18th 1980, a vibrant gay and lesbian social scene started to flourish in the major cities. However, in the late 1980s, many believed that the time had come to start an organization with more serious aims and objectives. The founding members were drawn from a men's party list and members of The Women's Cultural Club.

In the early 1990s, most of the membership was white or mixed race. The face of GALZ changed dramatically around 1995 as the association became more open about its existence. This meant that many LGBTI people from the black community, and more specifically from urban townships, started to join the association. Initially membership was dominated by men, particularly by the black queens, but since 2002, with the formation of the Gender Department, women's membership has increased significantly.

GALZ had around 70 members in its early days. Over the years this grew and membership reached around 500 in 2000. In recent years, however, numbers have dropped to around 300, many members having left the country to seek asylum either in Europe, Canada, the United States or elsewhere.

4.3 Ownership patterns

The Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) is a voluntary association. A voluntary association is a universitas if, it has the power to acquire property or other rights and to incur liabilities distinct from those of its members; and It has perpetual succession in that it remains in existence despite changing membership. It is recognized under the law as an association or a universitas. In terms of Zimbabwean law, a universitas is a juristic person or legal persona. Since it is a legal person, a universitas can acquire, hold and alienate property, can enter into contracts, becomes a creditor or debtor, may generally acquire rights and incur obligations and can sue or be sued.

The Constitution of GALZ provides in clause 2.1 that it has the power to acquire rights and obligations distinct from its members and that it has perpetual succession. Accordingly, in terms of the law of Zimbabwe, GALZ is a universitas. As such it has no need to register in terms of any legislation or under any statute in order to acquire legal personality or for it to constitute a juristic person for the purposes of Zimbabwean law.

4.4 Core business

At the center of GALZ core business is the serving the needs of LGBT+ persons in Zimbabwe, advance social tolerance of sexual minorities as well as fight against homophobic laws in the country. The organization organizes social gatherings where members can interact; provide access to health care services specifically for SRH issues, as well as training members and equipping them with life skills. GALZ also as an information center were members can access literature on LGBT+ issues as well as be educated more on different sexual identities.

4.5 Organisational structure

The organisation comprises of seven key offices, these are the director, programmes manager, finance and admin manager, services and policy advocacy officer, communication and advocacy officer, projects officer as well as the regional coordinator. Occupants for these posts are selected based on their history in advocacy work as well ability to accept and understand queer identities. Although some identify as queer, not all of them belong to the LGBT+ society some are cis-heterosexuals but are allies of the community.

The director is involved in advocacy and ensuring GALZ visibility in a number of sectors. He is responsible for analysing political developments and their implications on citizens with particular interest in LGBTI communities. He is the GALZ face and voice in the media and ensures continued visibility of GALZ nationally and internationally as a legitimate player in the human rights arena. The programmes manager oversees all the programmes that are run by the organisation. These include counselling services, training workshops as well as any events.

Finance and admin officer is Responsible for finance, accounting, administration, grant management and human resources in GALZ. While the services and policy advocacy officer provides counselling, para-legal support, documenting human rights violations, working with friends and families of LGBTI, sensitizing Health workers, lawyers and journalist on how to meaningfully and sensibly work with the LGBTI community.

The communications and advocacy officer is GALZ's Communications and Media Advocacy; managing and supporting GALZ's work to conceptualise, build and strengthen the organisation's brand and visibility and fulfilling GALZ's communications and media advocacy strategy with particular focus on promoting GALZ's strategy and national priorities to its stakeholders.

Projects officer is in charge of Member-focused programming, Peer Educators coordination, membership services and coordinating HIV programmes. Lastly the regional coordinator is mainly responsible for running the organisations Bulawayo division and acting as a liaison between the office and head office which is located in Harare.

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter outlined the organisational structure of GALZ.It explored the different structures and officers and their relation as well as role in terms of advancing the cause for queer bodies in Zimbabwe. The following chapter presents and analyses data obtained for the purposes of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study. The texts from the Facebook page and Blog site used as case studies are analysed to show how new media operates as an alternative public sphere for sexual minorities in Zimbabwe.

5.2 Digital media as an alternative public sphere and advocacy platform for queer sexualities in Zimbabwe

The study found out that Facebook and blog sites play critical roles as public spheres and advocacy platforms for queer sexual minorities in Zimbabwe. Data collected indicated that digital media is critical in terms of deconstructing the homophobic narrative portrayed in mainstream media. The sites are used to communicate and update queer individuals on any events or activities. The spaces also enabled individuals to share their personal story with risk of exposure, educate the public on queer sexualities and gender as well as carry out surveys. This is reflected in the Unheard voices blog bio which reads:

> For too long we have heard only one side of the story about how Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender people or Sex Workers are treated by others. Now it's time to tell a different side of the story. For every act of intolerance, hate, and violence, there's an act of understanding, compassion, and care. We know that tens of thousands of these stories of hope exist, from big gestures to smaller moments of support. We want to collect and share them with the world. So read our stories or share your own. Raise your voice and together we can make these stories of hope, heard.

Scholars such as Low and Smith (2006) contend that the main purpose of a public sphere is for individuals especially those from oppressed groups to engage in conversations and come up with solutions to their problems. It is clear from the findings of the study that the main objective of

the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog is to create a safe space for the queer community, an oppressed group in the Zimbabwean sphere to engage in conversations that benefit them as opposed to the perpetual vilification that is evident in mainstream media.

> In Zimbabwe where freedom of expression is seriously restricted through repressive legislation and other means and where an unofficial ban exists on lesbian and gay people speaking for themselves using the government-controlled media, the GALZ Information and Communications Department plays an important role in countering state-instigated propaganda. In this regard, it produces accurate and balanced information for dissemination to the GALZ membership and the broader public. (Statement from the GALZ Information and communication department)

The study also resonates with the findings of scholars such as Anderson (2003) with regards to the idea of counter public spheres that these are usually identity based and focused on countering the exclusive hegemonic perceptions evident in the mainstream media. The sites that were employed as case studies are focused on countering the homophobic ideologies perpetrated by the mainstream media and reconstruct queer identities in a positive light. Post-independence the Lancaster house constitution was silent on same sex marriages ,however Mugabe ensured the 2013 constitution outlawed any queer relations and went on to implement the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001 which prohibits the broadcasting of any gay footage in mainstream media. His actions ensured the continued exclusion of queer individuals by mainstream media. The ability of GALZ to publish their press statement with regards to the resignation of Mugabe on Facebook is evident of how digital, media platforms are more inclusive.
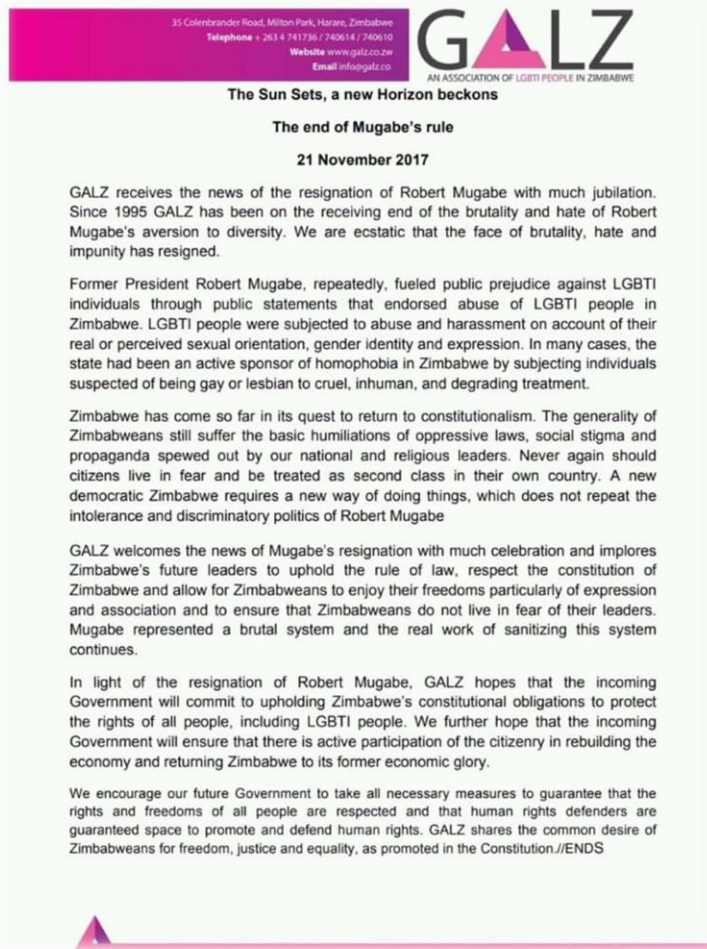
FIG 5.1 GALZ STATEMENT ON MUGABE RESIGNITION (GALZ Facebook page)

An ideal public sphere is characterised by the ability to shape government laws and policies (Benhabib, 2002), this can be achieved through initiating conversations that allow individuals to air out their concerns. The GALZ Facebook page as several post on updates for meetings, workshops as well as feedback from some of these events. Most of the events they broadcast focus on issues to do with legal reform, for example the munhu munhu Facebook live story they shared where key stakeholders where discussing the position of the queer community with regards to the 2018 elections.

FIG 5.2 LIVE VIDEO SHARED ON THE GALZ PAGE

The ability of individuals to air out their views without fear of censorship is one of the key components of a public sphere. Habermas (2001) notes that the public sphere is premised upon participatory democracy, that is the ability to comment and actively participate in conversation is not restricted as there is no gate keeping. Findings of the study show that both queer friendly and queer intolerant individuals are free to actively participate in conversations on both the Unheard voices blog and GALZ Facebook page. While mainstream media is intolerant of queer issues and restricts their ability to participate in the main public sphere, there is no censorship on digital media platforms as even though the purpose of these sites is to push queer agendas, conservatives are allowed to also contribute and air out their opinions.

"Let's see you in the streets and we kill you... Evil bastards ncaa" (comment on the GALZ page)

"They can never be a man of Gods heart, if they don't repent of their sick, twisted mind-set" (comment on an Unheard Voices story)

> "Do not hate gay's they are also humans and God said we are all equally but let's not justify sin still homosexuality is a Big Sin" (comment on an Unheard Voices story)

Several studies support the notion that identity is a construct influenced by both internal and external forces. Calafell and Nakayama (2017) argue that queer theory focuses on exploring how identity specifically gender and sexual identity are a social construct and how institutions such as the media play a role in either constructing or deconstructing these identities. Mainstream media actively cultivate homophobia in the Zimbabwean society, with past studies by scholars such as Mhiripiri (2014) exploring how the media breeds homophobia in society and queer sexualities are always castigated on the platforms. The study was able to establish that digital media is a sanctuary for queer individuals and allies and that through platforms such as Unheard voices individuals are able to tell the other side of the story thereby reframing queer identities and their positionality in society. Most of the stories on the blog focus on the road to acceptance as well as generate a better understanding amongst society.

> "This man changed my perceptions about gay people." (Except from Changed Forever)

> "This post is actually exposing the extent of ignorance still out there. Bigotry. It's a sexual orientation for crying out loud. A genetic predisposition of the chromosomes. It's not about endorsing anything here but accepting each other as humans for who we are and how we were all born. Thank you for sharing this Welile Masuku" (comment on an Unheard Voices story)

Scholars such as Papacharissi (2002) argue on the shortcomings of the internet in terms of being an ideal public sphere. With their major concern being audience fragmentation and commercialisation of the internet. Finding of the study showed how these sites had less traffic and therefore reached fewer individuals in comparison to mainstream media due to the prices of data and the fact that a large portion of the Zimbabwean population cannot afford the cost of data. Literacy was also an issue when it comes to these sites, as the information is only limited to educated and tech savvy individuals neglecting the rural population which mainstream media has a stronghold on. The major issue being audience fragmentation as homophobic people tend

to not have an interest in following these sites therefore the majority of participants end up being queer individuals.

While the ownership patterns of mainstream media as well as laws governing the media hinder these institutions from being inclusive and divorced of both political and government control, digital media platforms are not affected by these thereby making them ideal public spheres and information centres. With Habermas (2001) noting that an ideal public sphere must be free from government control and conversations must not be censored. Both the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog are controlled by independent non-governmental organisations whose main objectives are promoting human rights and empowering minority groups in society. Therefore, the study was able to establish new media as an alternative public sphere and advocacy platform.

5.3 Construction and deconstruction of sexual identities on virtual spaces

The study shows that bogs under study are also critical spaces where queer sexual identities are constructed and deconstructed. Importantly, the study shows the link between media text and societies perception on queer identities. Findings on the Unheard voices blog showed stories where people's perception of queer identities changed upon interacting with them and making and effort to understand them. The theme of the stories on the site is one of hope and the goal of these stories is to educate the public on queer identities as seen is stories such as Love While You Can, where a brother regrets rejecting his sister because of her sexuality and explains how a person's sexuality does not define them.

> "When my sister told me she was lesbian, I thought she had changed. What I didn't realise was that she was still the same wonderful. Kind, amazing woman that she'd always been." (Except from Love While You Can)

One of the key elements of queer theory is exploring how media can deconstruct heteronormative ideologies by being more inclusive; the goal of the Unheard Voices blog is to tell the stories that are rejected by mainstream media and tell the other side of the story. While mainstream media preaches hate, exclusion and homophobia, the stories on the blog reframe discourse and focus on tolerance, acceptance and unconditional love. Through the blog queer

individuals and allies are also able to have a voice which is consistently muffled by the mainstream media.

> "At first, my father tried to change me. He said that you can't just decide you're a man, if you're born woman. He'd force my mother to make me beautiful dresses, he forced me to grow my hair long and wear make-up. But eventually, my mother convinced him that it just wasn't going to work. And slowly, very slowly, he realised that I wasn't the daughter he expected, but I could be the son he never had." (Except from There's Nothing Like A True Friend)

Gender and sexuality have always been key components in identity politics and it is impossible to speak of one without mentioning the other. Inclusive masculinity rejects practices against homosexuality or femininity and they are, therefore, resisted by many contemporary males (Anderson and McGuire 2010). It therefore becomes imperative to deconstruct the concept of masculinity and abandon hegemonic masculinity if we are to eradicate homophobia within our societies. Being gay is always linked to femininity and weakness and queer men are always seen as lesser men or not worthy of being called men specifically in mainstream media. The story Protect Your Loved Ones No Matter What tells the story of a father who understood that being gay did not mean he was not worthy to be his son.

> "It took me a long time to realise that being gay did not make my son less of a man."(Except from Protect Your Loved Ones No matter What)

The media being a cultural industry plays a big role in socialising people and influencing their general perception and opinion with regards to certain issues especially when it comes to minority identities. As an issue public the Unheard voices blog focuses on reframing the discourse on queer sexualities and revealing the positive side that mainstream media excludes. The stories on the blog seek to present queer individuals as decent humans' worthy of society's respect and acceptance. Findings showed stories of individuals whose understanding of sexuality

changed when people in their lives came out and they realised that most of the dominant narratives where just myths and misconceptions.

> "This man changed my perceptions about gay people. He was a well-accomplished lawyer. It was not only what he achieved, but the way in which he narrated his life. He used words with the understanding of one who is well educated and established. This is not who I imagined when I thought of gay people. And the way I see them has been changed forever." (Except from Changed for life)

Queer theory explores religious and any institutional discourse that creates identities and the assumptions behind these genders and sexual constructs (Calafell and Nakayama, 2017). The study focused on how digital media can be used to reframe the discourse. In Zimbabwe mainstream media as well as several conservative groups have always used religion to castigate and vilify queer individual's. The blog however counters this through publishing stories of LGBT+ individuals who are Christians but had been rejected by the church, forcing them to question the role of the church when it comes to queer issues. Through these conversations, the church was able to better understand as well as accept queer individuals.

> He said that he believed that church should be welcoming to all. Sipho's testimony started a long discussion amongst the church leaders. It was decided that the role of the church is to show love to all God's people without judgment. (Except from Love. Not Judgement)

The findings of the study showed how stories on the blog site rebranded the queer identities countering the dominant homophobic narrative perpetrated by mainstream media. The stories also focused on bringing out the struggles of queer individuals living in conservative societies as well as the importance of having uncensored genuine conversations on sexualities. Overall the stories challenge societal prejudices and push people to revaluate their opinions and advocate for a tolerant and queer friendly society.

5.4 Link between digital media and advocacy for minority rights

The study showed that indeed there is a link between digital media and advocacy for minority through analysing various posts on legal reform. The nature of Facebook allowed GALZ to post information on surveys that would allow them to gather data on problems facing queer individuals. Digital media platforms allowed them to collect information that would aid them to draft a policy reform document with regards to the safety of LGBT + individuals enrolled at state universities.

> Ordaas in Zimbabwe
>
> A reminder of the ongoing Campus Climate Study. GALZ is conducting a survey that seeks to generate empirical evidence on the 'campus climate'/ institutional climate, exploring incidences of harassment of sexual minority students, stressors and behaviors that are distinctive to LGBTIQ learners and the resultant impact on academic learning. The proposed documentation of the 'campus climate' is meant to contribute to the development of an Inclusive Education Policy which will provide guidance and a support framework that enables the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the intention is to create an inclusive educational system that ensures that every learner achieves their potential and lives a productive and fulfilled life including LGBTIQ learners. To take part in the survey, click the link below https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MlN6LSZHzEYo5CliDhkzCerhjxK9opfAfhbY0ct13uk/edit?usp=sharing
>
> NB* Please distribute the link as widely as you can to your networks. (Post on GALZ Facebook page)

When it comes to laws and policies Benhabib (2002) contends that these should be shaped by the public sphere in a democratic society. Through their Facebook page GALZ is able to publicise their workshops and events where members of the queer community come together and discuss laws and policies that affect them as well as suggest possible reforms. The page also enables the organisation to publicise updates and reports on these meetings and inform the general public

and members who could not attend of any resolutions as well as allow them to also make contributions.

> **Project Update: Mutare Drop-In-Centre, 10 November 2018; a community dialogue on Human Rights Literacy was conducted with 45 members. The meeting aimed at creating an understanding of what Human Rights are and having conversations on how these rights are being violated in Zimbabwe. Community members shared their personal experiences of such violations. Members agreed that the LGBTI community is not claiming any special or additional rights but the adherence to the same rights as those of other human beings. #IzwiRedu #IzwiLethu #OurVoice (Post on GALZ Facebook page)**

Research finding also showed that the platforms as served as spaces where homophobic individuals were called out and pushed to change their perceptions. As opposed to mainstream media which focused cultivating hate and fear, digital media provided a space where tolerance and acceptance are promoted and a lot of misconceptions about queer identities are demystified and information offered is based on lived experiences and not personal prejudices of individuals. With stories such as Without Fear and Show Your Support calling for support and understanding amongst individuals.

5.5 Conclusion

The study showed the linkage between both the public sphere and theory and queer theory to digital media. Findings show the effectiveness of digital media as a public sphere as well as its role in the construction of identity. The research shows the linkage between deconstructing hegemonic masculinity and acceptance of queer individuals and how digital media plays a vital role in reframing masculinity. Findings also show how digital media is the ideal public sphere and source of unbiased information for the LGBT+ community of Zimbabwe. The following chapter summarises the research as well as provides recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This chapter serves as a conclusion to the study. The study examined the posts on the GALZ Facebook pages and Unheard voices blog site. The intention of the study was to explore role of new media as an advocacy platform and public sphere for the LGBT+ society of Zimbabwe. Focus was on the media and the construction and deconstruction of identities specifically gender and sexual identities and digital media. The study was also interested in exploring the differences between media representation and framing of queer identities on new media platforms and mainstream media.

The study utilised two main theories that is Queer theory and digital public sphere theory. Queer theory enabled the researcher to establish the link between media and identity enabling the researcher to explore how posts on the sites under study influenced society's perception on queer identities countering the dominant homophobic narrative portrayed by new media. While digital public sphere theory enabled the researcher to explore the use of digital media platforms as an alternative public sphere for LGBT+ individuals in Zimbabwe in cases where heavy censorship in mainstream media prevented any discourse that favours them to occur.

The study was qualitative and utilised the case study research design. Focus was on the GALZ Facebook page and Unheard voices blog site. The researcher purposively selected posts about queer issues, events and comments as the main focus of the study was the LGBT+ community. Archival research was employed as a method of data gathering.

Findings showed that Facebook and blog sites are ideal alternative public spheres in the Zimbabwean society. The spaces allowed for individuals to air out their views and opinions without fear of being silenced. Blogsites presented an ideal platform for queer individuals and their allies to publish material that portrayed queer identities in the positive light. Facebook also proved to be a critical space as a public sphere where individual could engage in an uncontrolled

discourse especially for LGBT+ individuals who are excluded from participating in the main public sphere. The political economy of these spaces enables the queer community to frame conversations as well as actively advocate for their rights as they are divorced from government control therefore conversations are not hegemonic and exclusionary in nature.

When it comes to identity politics and advocacy for minority rights it is essential to deconstruct dominant conservative ideologies and reframe the manner in which these identities are presented, by the media. Posts on the Unheard voices blog site deviated from the norm and the stories all focused on countering homophobia and homohysteria in society. The blog site gave a voice to queer individuals and allies to tell the other side of the story and reframe the portrayal of LGBT+ identities. The stories on the blog reconstructed the portrayal of queer gender and sexual identities and focused on educating and encouraging society to be more accepting and tolerant.

The study showed that there is a link between digital media and advocacy for minority rights specifically in conservative societies such as Zimbabwe. The study juxtaposed mainstream media with new media showing the weakness of mainstream media in terms of presenting an unbiased portrayal of queer sexualities and genders and how digital media does not have the same hindrances. The study showed how while mainstream media excludes queer individuals from participating digital media is an ideal platform for them to also tell their story. Findings also showed how digital media is more inclusive in terms of allowing individuals with different opinions to participate. The study also shows how digital media allows minority groups to bypass the system, share information and carry out surveys as well as pus for legal reform and more inclusive policies.

The findings of the study closely relate to past studies by Hall and Foucault in their research on identity and the media. Findings show that the media plays a vital role in influencing people's perceptions when it comes to different ideas. The research shows how media framing can construct and deconstruct identities. The study also resonates with studies on digital public sphere as findings showed that participation on these platforms was inclusive and discourse was not influenced or controlled by elite members of society.

6.2 Recommendations

The study focused on establishing the link between advocacy for queer individuals and digital media as well as its role as an alternative public sphere for oppressed groups in society. There are a few studies that focus on queer sexualities and the media. The study made use of posts that reframed queer sexualities as well as push for legal reform. While this study focused on queer identities as a whole it is also important to focus on specific members of the queer community that is to say it is also essential to explore the media and Trans genders or lesbians. Future studies can also explore the link between media regulation and its portrayal of queer identities.

REFFERENCE LIST

Anderson, Eric and *R. McGuire. 2010. "Inclusive Masculinity Theory and the Gendered Politics of Men's Rugby", Journal of Gender Studies 19 (3): 249-261.

Anderson, Eric. 2009. Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities. New York: Routledge.

Anderson, J. (2003). New media, new publics: Reconfiguring the public sphere of Islam. Social Research, 70 (3), 887–906.

Anderson, Jon. (2003). New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere. ISIM Newsletter. 5.

Anderson, R. (2007) Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) Descriptive Presentation of Qualitative Data. Unpublished.

Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D., & Akert, R. M. (2010). Social Psychology (7th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bachofer, R. (2014). Identity is the Message: How the Media Construct European and National identity.A Comparative Analysis of Political and Cultural Identity Building via Meida Coverage of the European Parliament Elections and the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. Unpublished Masters thesis. Avenue des Fleurs, Centre International de Formation European

Beasley-Murray, J. (2010). Poshegemonía. Teoría política y América Latina [Post-hegemony. Political theory and Latin America]. Barcelona, Spain: Paidós.

Benhabib, S. (2002) The Claims of Culture, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Black, K. (2010). Business statistics: contemporary decision making. Minneapolis, West Pub.

Brooks, D. (2006). „Gender, Race and Media Representation‟ inDow, B. J. and Wood, J. T. (2006). The Sage Handbook of Gender and Communication. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.297-319.

Brunson, l. and Valentine, D. (2010). Using online tools to connect, collaborate and practice. Global. Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 1, pp.1-8.

Calafell, B. and Nakayama, T. (2016). Queer Theory. In: *International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Calhoun, Craig. 1992. "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere". Pp. 1-48 in Craig Calhoun (ed.). Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chandler, D. (2001). Semiotics: The Basics. London: Routledge.Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence & Wishart. 222-237.

Connell, M. 1987. Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics. Stanford: Stanford University Press

Connell, R. W. 1995. Masculinities. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin

Connell, R. W., and James Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." Gender & Society 19 (6): 829-59.

Crossman, A (2018) An Overview of Qualitative Research Methods, Direct Observations, Interviews, Participation, Immersion and Focus groups

Dahlberg L (2004) Net-public sphere research. Javnost: The Public 11(1): 27–44.

Dahlgren, Peter. 2005. The Internet, public spheres, and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation. Political Communication 22:147-62.

Dobrowsky, D. (2009). Constructing Identity on Social Networks.An analysis of conpetence of communications constituted on Facebook.com. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 1.

Doi: 10.1007/S11002-006-9004-8

DuPlooy, G. M. (2007). Communication Research: Techniques Methods and Application, Lansdoure: Juta& CO.

E. Anderson (2011) Updating the Outcome: Gay Athletes, Straight Teams, and Coming Out in Educationally Based Sport Teams, 250-268. In Gender & Society 25 (2)

Eisend, M., & Jana Möller. (2007). The Influence Of TV Viewing On Consumers' Body

Epstein, D., M. Kehily, M.G. Mairtin and P. Redman. 2001. "Boys and girls come out to play: Making masculinities and femininities in school playgrounds."Men and Masculinities 4 (2): 158-172

Etikan, I, Musa S.A, Alkassim R.S. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics., pp. 1-4. doi: 10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

Fairclough, N. (2000). New Labour, new language? London: Routledge.

Fourie, P. (2007). Media Studies. Media Content and Media Audiences.Capetown: Juta and Co.

Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy". Pp. 109-142 in Craig Calhoun (ed.) Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

GALZ Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/galzlgbtizim/

Garnham, Nicholas. 1992. "The Media and the Public Sphere". Pp. 359-376 in Craig Calhoun (ed.), Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge, MA: MIT

Gündüz, Uğur. (2017). The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences. 8. 10.1515/mjss-2017-0026.

Habermas, Jurgen. 1996. Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Haig, E. (2001). "A study of the application of critical discourse analysis to Eco linguistics and the teaching of eco-literacy." Studies in Language and Culture (Nagoya University, Faculty of Language and Culture) 22 (2): 205-226.

Halkoaho, J. (2012). Identity-Related Media Consumption: A Focus on Consumers'

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In J. Rutherford (eds.)(1990), Identity:

Hall, S. (1997). Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. London: Sage Publications

Hall, S. (1997). Works of Representation. London. Sage.

Hauser, G. A. (1999). Vernacular voices : the rhetoric of publics and public spheres. Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, p.32.

Howarth, C. (2002). Identity in Whose Eyes? The Role of Representations in Identity Construction. Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour, 32:2.

Images and Related Consumption Behavior. Marketing Letters, 18(1-2), 101-116.

International Federation of Journalist (2014). *Reporting on Homophobia in the Zimbabwean Media*. Darkar: International Federation of Journalists.

Jaspal, R. &. (2010). Media Representations of British Muslims and Hybridised Threats to Identity. Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life, 4(3):289-310.

Keohane, Robert O. 2002. Power and governance in a partially globalized world. London: Rotledge

Kimmel, Michael. 1994. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." In Theorizing Masculinities, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, 223-42. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Kothari, C. R. (2004). Research Methodology. Methods and Techniques. New Delhi: New International (P) Limited Publishers

Lorber, Judith. 1994. Paradoxes of Gender. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Mabokela, E. (2015). The viewer's perception on the portrayal of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes. Undergrad. University of Limpopo

Mabvurira, V., Motsi, P., Masuka, T. and Chigondo, E. (2012). The "politics" of sexual identities in Zimbabwe: A Social Work perspective? International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2(13).

Mater, M. (2001). A structural transformation for a global public sphere? The use of new communication technologies by nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations. In R. Asen & D. Brouwer (Eds.), Counterpublics and the State (pp. 211–234). New York : State University of New York.

McDorman, T. (2001). Crafting a virtual counterpublic: Right-to-die advocates on the Internet. In R. Asen & D. Brouwer (Eds.), Counterpublics and the State (pp. 187–210). New York : State University of New York

Nardi, Peter. 1995. Gay Men's Friendships. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Nyambura, J. (2015). *MEDIA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN KENYA*. masters degree. University of Nairobi.

Paparcharissi Z (2002) The virtual sphere. New Media & Society 4(1): 9–27.

Poster, M. (1999). The net as a public sphere. In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society. London : Longman.

Pronger, Brian. 1990. The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex. New York: St. Martin's Press.

R. Asen & D. Brouwer,2001 (Eds.), Counterpublics and the state (pp. 161–186). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

R. Squires, Catherine. (2002). Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres. Communication Theory. 12. 446 - 468. 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00278.x.

Relationships with Their Favorite TV Programs . Vaasa: University of Vaasa.

Rutherford, Paul. *Endless Propaganda: The Advertising of Public Goods.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000

Shirky, Clay. "The political power of social media: technology, the public sphere, and political change." Foreign Affairs 90.1 (2011): 28. Academic OneFile. Web. 21 Sep. 2012.

Shuttleworth, M. (2008) A Case Study Research Design https://explorable.com/case-study-research-design

Singh, C. (2010). New Media and Cultural Identity:China Media Research, 6(1), 86-90.

Spring (1997) The Case Study as a Research Method: Uses and Users of Information

Stewart, Angus. 2001. Theories of power and domination: The politics of empowerment in late modernity. London: Sage.

Sunstein, C. (2001). Republic.com. Princeton , NJ : Princeton University Press.

Susen, S. (2011). Critical Notes on Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere. Sociological Analysis, 5(1), pp. 37-62.

The Other Foundation (2017). *Canaries in the coal mines: An Analysis of Spaces for LGBTI activism in Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg: The Other Foundation.

The Zimbabwean Constitution

Unheard Voices Blog http://unheardvoices.africa/stories-of-hope/love-not-judgement/##page-top

  Valtysson, B. (2014). Democracy in disguise: the use of social media in reviewing the Icelandic Constitution. Media, Culture & Society, 36(1), 52–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713507814

Van Djik, T. A. (1998). „Discourse, Power and Access" in Critical Discourse Analysis (eds) M. Coulthard and C.R Caldas-Coulthard. London: Routledge