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SOCIAL MEDIA CAPITAL AND SKILLS ACQUISITION IN JOURNALISM

BY

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ABSTRACT

Journalists' participation on social media platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp), is predicted on the belief that there are some tangible and intangible new resources obtained by using these platforms. The argument is that any payoff from engagement in social media, is a special form of social capital, referred to as social media capital. This offers a conceptual framework for the source, development, and the use of social media capital by journalists in Cameroon. Skills acquisition is one of the benefits journalists obtained from social media capital. Though very scanty, this paper touches on the fact that creating friendship on social media is not conducive as social media use hinders excellence or quality journalism, and sustains mediocrity in journalism. The paper contributes to the extant literature by elaborating the value of social media capital on journalism, which can be translated to meaningful outcomes positively and negatively.

KEY WORDS: Social Media, Social Capital, Skills Acquisition, Journalism

INTRODUCTION

Information Communication Technologies in general, and social media in particular, have transformed communications, societies, and communities since the earliest developments of the World Wide Web, and the internet in the 1990s (Amin, 2000). The web has revolutionized and changed the world on how information is stored, published, searched and consumed, for almost two decades. The great wave of web innovation since Google in 1998 has been in social media. Social media is about networking and communicating through text, video, blogs, pictures, status updates on sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, MySpace, LinkedIn or microblogs such as Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr (Alejandro, 2010) Johnson, Tanner, Lalla, & Kawalski (2013) advanced that considering the pervasive use of social network sites like Facebook and WhatsApp, assessing the ways users incorporate these tools to their daily lives to obtain benefits is imperative. It has led to new forms of relationships. These relationships have developed to new forms of social networking impact, leading to the development and maintenance of social capital. Gittell and Vidal (2000:35) defined social capital as "the resources embedded in social relations among persons and organizations that facilitate cooperation and collaboration in communities". Social networking sites and online communities are separate and distinct category of internet use, and possibly, a means for building social capital (Fox, 2017). Most journalists are ignorant of the wealth of social media capital, while others have resisted its usage which has much impact to the profession (Fox, 2017). During the past century, audio, visual, and digital innovations have contributed in

changing journalists' attitude and professional engagements in their work, through social interactions on Facebook and WhatsApp (Cruz & Sanche, 2015). It raises questions about the extent to which existing media work, journalism and news work will change as a result of social media use (Lewis, Kaufhold, and Lasorsa, 2010). Social media capital is the key mediator between social media presence and journalism outcomes. As with other organisational assets, social media capital is a resource that can be acquired, and expended to gain skills and tangible outcomes in organisations. In social media context, the resources assume a privileged place in value chain (Saxton & Guo, 2020). The argument is that for journalists to effectively perform their duties through social media, they must first acquire social media capital. Simply put, social media capital is the central and proximate resource acquired through social media efforts. This mediatory role lies in the primacy of the formalised social network in social media platforms (Kane, Alavi & Labianca, 2014). Considering how connected people have become online and the evidence suggesting that users are consequently better off (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007), Facebook and WhatsApp offers a platform where pressmen can interact and build relationships which may lead to skills acquisition and better performance (Appelgren, 2016), a necessary asset for local development.

Journalists use social media as a tool to disseminate information to the public, interact with readers and sources, and increase readers' engagement through instant articles, live streaming, crowdsourcing, and conversationally-toned posts (Rodriguez, 2017). According to Rodriguez (2017), as readers read, comment, like, share newsfeed on Facebook, a huge community of social capital is built and maintained. Sometimes, criticisms from readers of news feed and listeners of video clips, may guide journalists and publishers for improved delivery in the next edition. This wealth of social capital from readers and audience, possibly will lead to skill acquisition and improved performance.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the effects of social media capital on journalism skills. This topic is of particular interest to the researcher because of the increasing importance and span of social media use, and their impact on society in general. The scope of the research is social media, operationalized as Facebook, and WhatsApp. Facebook – the biggest online social network at this time, and WhatsApp, the most globally used popular messaging app worldwide with 1.6 billion monthly active users (WhatsApp Statistics and Facts, 2020). The reason for the topic is the increase of social media use in our lives and the many disputations whether it has positive or negative impact on its users. It is on this premise that this study investigates how journalists build capital on social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) whose effects could lead to skills acquisition and better performance, or even mediocrity in journalism. Therefore adequate research regarding key concepts and connections between social media (Facebook, WhatsApp) and social capital would benefit anyone who is interested in online social networks and their influence over societies.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to assess the effects of social media capital on journalism skills and performance within the Cameroon context. The paper has the following specific objective:

To examine the relationship between social media capital by journalists, and the acquisition or loss of professional skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The Figure 1 below shows the research model based on the conceptual framework. The core concept behind this research model is that journalists use social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) in their professional and social activities. Their relationship with colleagues and the audience on social media leads to the development of social media capital. Facebook is one of the most used online social networks amongst Internet users. Facebook has multifunctional software features (wall, chat, direct messages, updates of statuses, groups and etc.), enabling users to access multitude channels and ways of communication (Malkhasyan, 2013). Facebook allows the building of social capital (bonding, and bridging). Its software makes visible potential relationships, which can easily be converted within personal networks. Facebook has strong policy requirements requesting its users to keep honest about their identity. Facebook effectively fulfils informational and recreational needs of users due to the easy converging of various media in its system (games, news reading, live streaming, and crowd sourcing, amongst others) (Wellman *et al.* 2001).

Facebook interaction provides a new means of communication between parties, as well as supplementing or replacing physical interactions, thereby building social capital. Measures for social capital are focused on the effects of social actions, but may also comprise the networks themselves (Williams, 2006). Journalists use Facebook to build and maintain relationships, which are proven assets for skills acquisition and professional development. Meanwhile, WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones which enable users to send and receive location information, images, videos, audios, and text messages in real-time to individuals and group of friends at no cost. At present, WhatsApp handles over 10 billion messages per-day and is one of the most popular apps across all mobile platform. WhatsApp Messenger is available for iPhone, Blackberry, Android, Windows Phone, and these phones can all message each other (Church & Oliveira 2013).

In addition to basic messaging it enables users to send and receive location information, images, video, audio and text messages in real-time to individuals and groups of friends at no cost. It has the following features; Multimedia messages (send video, Images and voice notes to Friends and contacts), Group chat (Group conversation with WhatsApp users in contacts), no International charges (there is no cost to send WhatsApp messages internationally), no pins and username (WhatsApp work with phone numbers). No Log out/in (no confusion about getting logged off from another computer or device with push notification). WhatsApp is always on and connected (Kamboj & Dayal, 2018).

The nature and intent of WhatsApp messages tend to be more social, informal and conversational in nature, while SMS is seen as more privacy preserving, more formal and generally more reliable (Church and Oliveira 2013). With the introduction of WhatsApp, communication has become easier and most of the individuals have become closer to their networks faster as compared to the other means of communications (Srilakshminarayana, 2016). Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship between Facebook and WhatsApp use by journalists, which leads to the building of social media capital, and the effect is skills acquisition by journalists.

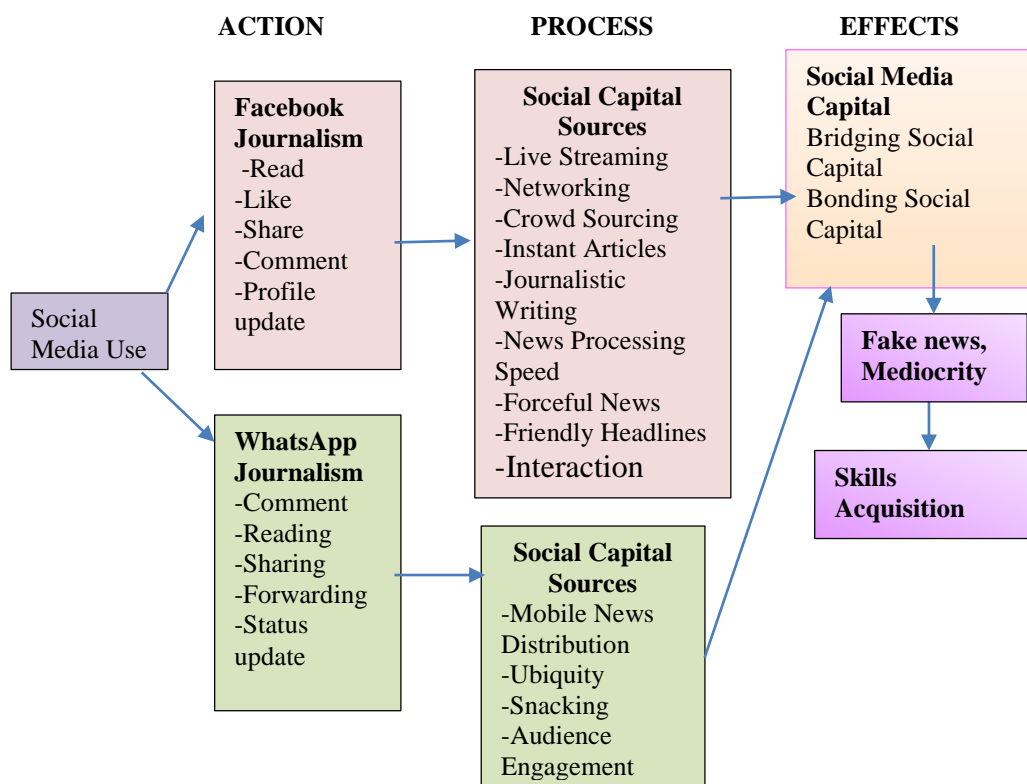


Figure 1: Social Media Capital, Skills, and Performance Model
Source: Ejang 2021

From Figure 1, Facebook enable journalists to shape their writing style, publish instant articles speedily with friendly headlines, forcing users to consume news indirectly. Besides, journalists are more interactive with their audience on Facebook through live streaming, networking, and crowd sourcing (Srilakshminarayana, 2016).

Likewise, WhatsApp offer journalists the opportunity to create friendship with up to 259 users per chat group. Journalists can belong to many groups as possible, expanding their sphere of virtual community. Members of WhatsApp group support each other financially, materially, emotionally, and even professionally. Professional chats take precedence in most WhatsApp groups which leads to concrete criticism, and the overall effect is the maintenance of ethics by journalists (Hara, Massimi, Harper, Rubens, & Morris 2014). WhatsApp characteristics like Mobile News Distribution enable journalists to share their content with their audiences, which indirectly builds friendship and increase their social capital. Also, the ubiquitous nature of WhatsApp builds large audience and develop social capital (Dimmick, Feaster, and Hoplamazian, 2011). In addition, WhatsApp’s nature of snacking, and audience engagement, brings the audience closer to journalists, thereby creating social capital.

The result of journalistic activities on Facebook and WhatsApp is the building of social capital. This is achieved when journalistic articles or news are read, liked, shared, or commented upon. This exposes the journalists to the world and raise the consciousness of

implementation of ethics in news publication. Through this interaction, bonding, bridging and maintained social capital is developed (Brandtzæ & Nov, 2011). The researcher conceptualized in this study that the wealth of social capital available for journalists leads to recommendation for seminars, webinars, and workshops, which contributes to the acquisition of skills and subsequent professional improvement. Besides, constructive criticism of the published news and other journalistic piece shapes news writing and publication as well. The wealth of social capital provides social support, helping the journalist to develop more skills in news writing, and dissemination. Social capital also builds confidence in the journalist as there is usually solidarity when press freedom is infringed. The press as the fourth estate is a necessity to the building of every democracy. No development can take place in any country without the press (Appelgren, & Nygren, 2014).

FACEBOOK USE AND SKILLS ACQUISITION

Different people view the impact of Facebook use differently based on the various areas of studies and particular goals to be achieved (Ainin *et al.*, 2015). Facebook has the ability to establish interpersonal connections and guide individuals entering an unfamiliar environment. Facebook use enables individuals to express themselves, establish a relationship, interact with others, and seek information. Several studies have disclosed the provision of advice, emotions and expanded social relations (Rains & Young, 2009). Ellison *et al.* (2007) hold that Facebook use serves as support providers whereby people can gain knowledge and obtain advice on interested topics. Facebook can be used to promote online connections amongst students, colleagues and community members, with a positive impact on engagement and interactions (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). Facebook has instant chat messaging where people can easily gain knowledge and obtain advice on any topic of interest, thus saving time of obtaining information via other sources (Ainin *et al.*, 2015).

Alejandro (2010) admits that Facebook helps journalists understand what issues people really care about, getting interviewees for a story, and is great for networking, and for trawling raw information. However, Alejandro (2010) cautions that one must guard against distortions and opinions disguised as fact. Facebook can be used as a tool to create and promote online connections between students and faculty within an academic community. This increase in communication has many impacts on the learning process. Teachers use it as a portal to share academic materials and lecture notes to students, enhancing the entire learning process and academic performance (Ross *et al.*, 2009). Very few studies have been done on the impact of Facebook use on journalism. Journalists use Facebook as a tool to distribute information to the public. Over recent years, Facebook with its updated features has changed the way journalists interact with readers and sources (Rodriguez, 2017). Journalists are using Facebook to make connections, verify information and gather sources due to the availability of the search feature. Crowd sourcing information has become a tool reporters use to collect information by asking readers for their opinions, what happened at an event they attended, or even submissions of multimedia elements (Rodriguez, 2017).

JOURNALISTS' ACTIVITIES ON WHATSAPP AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

WhatsApp is the most used messaging app for journalists, and its usage is much higher than other social networks such as Instagram and Twitter (Boczek & Koppers, 2019). Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Nielsen (2018) stated that there is a decline in Facebook use for news and a stagnation in general for Facebook use. Meanwhile WhatsApp use has

increased for both categories. WhatsApp use for news has almost tripled since 2014 and has overtaken Twitter's importance in many countries. With growing user bases, WhatsApp news channels have become relevant for journalism studies. Communication between journalists and sources on WhatsApp has gained scholarly attention over the years (Belair-Gagnon, Agur, and Frisch (2016), Baroni and Mayr (2018).

Apart from social networking services (SNS) like Facebook that leads to the development and maintenance of relationships, the commencement of Mobile Instant Messaging applications are strengthening the intensity of social relationships (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). According to Global Messaging Findings, WhatsApp is the most used smartphone messaging service in UK with 59% (Kamboj & Dayal, 2018). Individuals have observed that messages reach faster to their friends, family members and so on as compared to an SMS. Slowly a WhatsApp message has replaced an SMS (Srilakshminarayana, 2016). Since its release in August 2009, WhatsApp has played a major role in the rapid development and expansion of the contemporary poly-media environment within which humans interact with each other. Those in the media, and journalists in particular, have taken to this platform to use it as a way to share and receive information as well as to maintain regular, and sometimes more private contacts with their sources (Dodds, 2019).

Dodds (2019) examining the incentives that underline journalists' decisions to turn to WhatsApp and its consequences on news making practices of reporters found that WhatsApp usage by journalists has impacted their relationship with sources, both on a personal and professional level. New perceptions of intimacy and trust, camaraderie and obtainability, and temporality are observed among the journalists who use this application. These observations carry important professional and ethical implications for journalists navigating today's media ecology, and show how technological and socio-professional aspects are tightly interwoven (Dodds, 2019). A study on local news and their digital transition using interviews of European journalists and editors shows that news outlets have started to provide news via WhatsApp in addition to other platforms to compensate for the declining Facebook usage and especially to reach younger audiences (Jenkins and Nielsen, 2018). Another study on WhatsApp as a journalistic tool highlights two functions which are based on the characteristics of WhatsApp's genuine purpose: mobile and interpersonal communication. This shows that there is a potential technological change for journalism (Boczek & Koppers, 2019).

McIntyre & Sobel (2019) examined how Rwandan journalists believe the professional use of WhatsApp influences their daily news processes, news audiences. Using In-depth interviews with journalists, they discovered that journalists regularly use WhatsApp to generate story ideas, communicate with sources, disseminate news, receive audience feedback, and most notably, to collaborate with one another and promote professional practices for the good of their country. In practice, these activities empowered audiences, increased participation, and improved professionalism, ultimately contributing to the country's post-genocide reconstruction and development (McIntyre & Sobel 2019).

However, despite previous studies, there is still much to examine about the use of this application by journalists in more democratic contexts: Why and with what purpose do journalists in democracies use this WhatsApp? What are the advantages of using WhatsApp versus telephone calls or face to face conversations? An analysis of the existing literature

shows that only a limited number of publications explore the interactions between journalists and their sources using this platform (Dodds, 2019). Therefore, Dodds (2019) found out that the widespread use of mobile chat applications by Chilean journalists has impacted the news making process by transforming the temporality of the journalistic routine, under which new relationships with high degrees of intimacy between journalists and sources have been created, and new levels of mutuality and camaraderie in the communications between different journalists have been established.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Relationship between social media capital by journalists, and the acquisition or loss of professional skills

Facebook

Appelgren (2016) carried out a study entitled ‘Data Journalists Using Facebook on A Study of a Resource Group Created by Journalists, for Journalists’. The author found that on Facebook there are interest groups created by journalists, for journalists, that focus on the journalistic profession and work methods and quoted as example the Swedish group, “Datajournalistik” (in English, “Data Journalism”), which was created in 2012. The article was built on Granovetter’s theory on the strength of weak ties and focused on the skill development process taking place in the group. A content analysis was carried out of all posts that received comments in order to explore the social functions of the group. The results indicated that both a significant need for knowledge exchange and a need for self-affirmation were expressed in the group and that the group has played a major role in data journalism’s development process in the Nordic region. More specifically, as explained by the author, knowledge sharing and learning was taking place, thus suggesting that bridging social capital was created within the network.

Utz, (2015a) conducted a study on “Is LinkedIn making you more successful? The informational benefits derived from public social media.” The results revealed that LinkedIn and Twitter users reported higher informational benefits than non-users, whereas Facebook users reported lower informational benefits. Posting and strategic networking predicted informational benefits. The network composition mattered most on LinkedIn; strong and weak ties predicted informational benefits.

This other author instead pointed out social media as deskilling journalist. In a study entitled ‘Facebook Journalism: The Influences of Social Media on Journalistic Work in Taiwan’, Chang-de (2015), through a content analysis of the Apple Daily’s website, illustrated and examined Facebook fan page, and the line account, the differences in news topic, news sources, and media’s role. In order to attract higher viewing rates on the Internet, the Apple Daily was inclined to provide more sensational and entertaining contents with prejudiced and emotional comments on its Facebook fan page. At the same time, interactions of internet users on the fan page or website were further utilized in the Apple Daily’s news reports and thus the use of social media has facilitated the newspaper to incorporate the labour of “prosumers.”

Second, through in-depth interviews with the management and journalists, the way that social media have influenced news production and journalistic work was analysed. The author concluded that while the management of the Apple Daily enthusiastically introduced social media and digital technologies into news production process, journalists have suffered from

a rapid increase in workload and pressure. They added however that, some reporters have complained rather than resisting the change of labour process resulting from social media. From the perspective of political economy, the paper demonstrates how the management of news media manufacturing consent among journalists, reshaping the labour process of news production, and resulting in deskilling effects on journalists during the digital era. Sabatini and Sarracino (2014) argued that the rising practice of hate speech may play a crucial role in the destruction of trust.

WhatsApp

Andini (2013) in a study entitled ‘The Utilization of WhatsApp on Journalistic Practices of Harian Sumut Pos concluded that WhatsApp has been used by all the Journalists in Harian Sumut Pos to help and support their work. Both personal and WhatsApp groups were perceived important for giving, accepting term of reference, contacting news sources, interviewing sources, helping news gathering process, sharing newsworthy information, and discussion about new gatherings. The method used in this study was descriptive qualitative case study approach. This case study approach was focused on a case to be carefully observed and analyzed thoroughly. In other words, the researcher described, recorded, analyzed and interpreted the conditions that currently occur or exist in the Harian Sumut Pos. Researchers made observations and interviews as a technique of collecting data by using participant observation, where the researcher participated in the field to observe the object of research and actively interact in communication activities that occur within the Harian Sumut Pos. By interviewing researchers found out more in-depth things about participants in interpreting situations and phenomena that occur, where this could not be found through observation. Qualitative data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously until complete, so the data was saturated. The theoretical framework of the proposed research draws upon Social Media Analysis, Social Capital Theory, and Uses and Gratification Theory.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To achieve the research goals, the mixed method strategy was implemented. This strategy is characterized by collection and analysis of quantitative data, and qualitative data simultaneously. Journalists were sampled from 78 different institutions from five out of the ten regions of Cameroon with focus on major towns, that is, the South West Region (Limbe, Buea, Tiko, Kumba, Mamfe, Konye), the North West Region (Bamenda, Nkambe, Oku, Babungo), the Centre Region (Yaounde), the Littoral Region (Douala), and the West Region (Bafoussam, Baham). A total of 264 English and French speaking journalists were sampled for the quantitative study, and eight more experienced journalists for the qualitative study. This was to ensure diversity and a representativeness of the data.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and an interview guide. Quantitative data were processed using Epidata 3.1 and analysed with the support of SPSS 21.0, while qualitative data from interviews were analysed using the process of thematic analysis. The findings have been interpreted in the context of the research setting and generalized conclusions were drawn for wider applications of the research findings, in the sections that follow.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Quantitative Findings: All tables are given in appendix and analysis given as below

Professional Skills

Facebook

According to data in Table 1, journalists mostly agreed that Facebook has enabled them to build a great network of sources, colleagues, and audience 67.8% (118), while the same proportion perceived that they were able to interact with their audience and colleagues once they publish news on Facebook. A proportion of 55.7% (97) crowd source by getting information, pictures, and videos and this helps to build their report upon investigation. A proportion of 54.0% (94) agreed to be able to process and publish news speedily on Facebook. Those that perceived that their headlines on Facebook are always friendly to boost readership were 47.7% (83), 35.6% (62) agreed that they always publish instant articles on Facebook. Those that always live stream on Facebook to connect with their audience and bring them into events as to build trust and enlarge their contact list were 23.0% (40). Those that publish forceful news on Facebook all the times were 18.4% (32), being the least.

As seen in Figure 1, journalists to a weak extent agreed that they gain professional skills as a result of interacting with friends on Facebook with weight of 34.5%, followed by those that disagreed (44.5%) while those that somewhat agreed made up a weight of 20.9%. Journalists mostly agreed that from constructive criticism from colleagues and the audience, they perfect their skills 69.9% (165); 53.8% (127) were of the opinion that colleagues edit their work and this improves their skills; 44.1% (104) gain interview skills from colleagues; 32.6% (77) agreed that their language proficiency has improved by interacting with colleagues on Facebook.

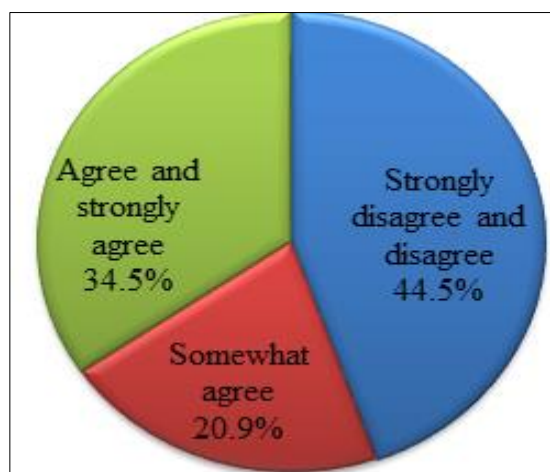


Figure 1: Gained professional skill as a result of interacting with friends on Facebook

Source: Ejang, 2021

10.6% (25) said they are usually mocked and ashamed to publish news and other professional feed on Facebook. In a negative perspective, 8.5% (20) publishing news and professional activities on Facebook that leads to depression, while 6.8% (16) perceived that publishing professional works on Facebook is a waste of time. There was a significant association between social capital and skills acquisition on Facebook ($P=0.000$). The proportion of high

Table 1: Professional skills gained as a result of interacting with friends on Facebook

Items	Stretched					Collapsed		
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree and disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree and strongly agree
I gain interview skills from colleagues	10.2% (24)	10.6% (25)	35.2% (83)	28.8% (68)	15.3% (36)	20.8% (49)	35.2% (83)	44.1% (104)
Colleagues edit my work and this improve my skills	9.7% (23)	11.4% (27)	25.0% (59)	33.1% (78)	20.8% (49)	21.2% (50)	25.0% (59)	53.8% (127)
From constructive criticism from colleagues and the audience, I perfect my skills	7.2% (17)	7.6% (18)	15.3% (36)	44.9% (106)	25.0% (59)	14.8% (35)	15.3% (36)	69.9% (165)
My language proficiency has improved by interacting with colleagues on FB	11.0% (26)	14.8% (35)	24.2% (57)	40.7% (96)	9.3% (22)	25.8% (61)	24.2% (57)	50.0% (118)
I have gained more photographic skills through FB use	14.0% (33)	22.9% (54)	30.5% (72)	24.2% (57)	8.5% (20)	36.9% (87)	30.5% (72)	32.6% (77)
I am usually mocked and ashamed to publish news and other professional feed on FB.*	39.8% (94)	38.6% (91)	11.0% (26)	9.7% (23)	0.8% (2)	78.4% (185)	11.0% (26)	10.6% (25)
Publishing news and professional activities on Facebook leads to depression*	40.3% (95)	35.6% (84)	15.7% (37)	6.8% (16)	1.7% (4)	75.8% (179)	15.7% (37)	8.5% (20)
Publishing professional works on FB is a waste of time*	42.4% (100)	40.3% (95)	10.6% (25)	4.2% (10)	2.5% (6)	82.6% (195)	10.6% (25)	6.8% (16)
MRS	21.8% (412)	22.7% (429)	20.9% (395)	24.0% (454)	10.5% (198)	44.5% (841)	20.9% (395)	34.5% (652)

*MRA: Reversed conceptual polarization; N_{cases}=236; N_{responses}=1888

Source: Ejang, 2021

skill acquisition was higher among those with high social capital, 82.0% (143), as against 35.2% (38) for those with low social capital

WhatsApp

Journalists that used WhatsApp generally agreed that they acquired professional skills. This accounted to a proportion of 81.8% (198), while 18.2% (44) did not. Figure 3 shows that the most acquired skill on WhatsApp was language perfection 58.1% (115), followed by news writing 56.1% (111), media ethics 48.0% (95), interview techniques 41.9% (83), news presentation 41.9% (77), broadcasting skills 35.9% (71), photography 35.9% (71), general knowledge 1.0% (2), networking technical skill (construction of J et R conductor) 1.0% (2), film making 0.5% (1) and notification 0.5% (1). Journalists mostly agreed that Facebook and WhatsApp are inevitable in the practice of journalism in our modern world. This accounted to a proportion of 63.9% (163).

Less than 47.1% (120) of the journalists perceived that they gain more skills by using WhatsApp Messenger for their professional activities, 36.5% (93) were of the opinion that they gain more skills by using Facebook for their professional activities, 17.3% (44) perceived that they are more confused by using Facebook for their professional activities, 8.2% (21) said to be more confused with the use of WhatsApp Messenger for their professional activities. There was a significant association between social capital and skills acquisition on WhatsApp (P=0.002). The proportion of those that agreed to acquire skill was higher among those with high social capital, 93.4% (114), as against 6.6% (8) for those that said not acquiring skills through WhatsApp.

The proportion of journalists that agreed that the use of social media has impacted on their skills was 87.2% for WhatsApp, significantly higher than the 63.8% for Facebook. There was a significant association between Facebook usage and improvement of professional performance (P=0.049), whereby those that used Facebook at least once a week had the highest proportion 94.2% (131) of those that agreed that activities on Facebook improve professional performance, as against 83.9% (26) for those that use it monthly.

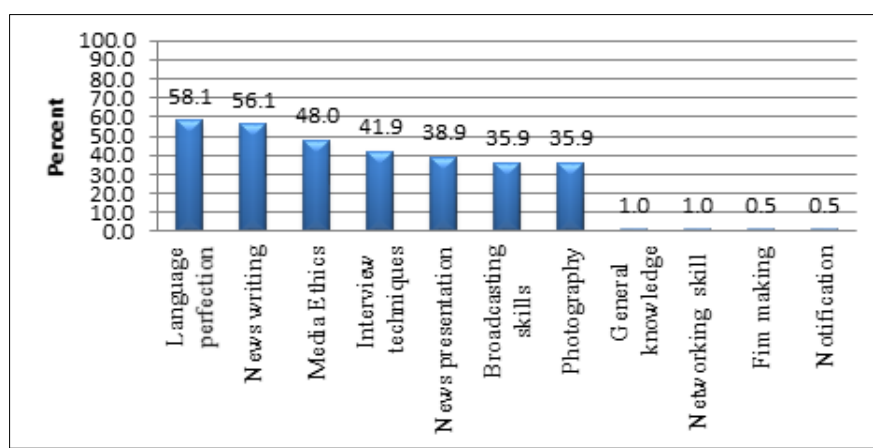


Figure 3: Skills acquired on WhatsApp
 Source: Ejang, 2021
 N=198

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Journalists stated that Facebook helps in professional development as they meet with other professionals, professional announcement, for instance seminar where they can gain skills. They perceived WhatsApp as more conducive for professional interaction; they try to be more duty conscious and rigorous when posting on WhatsApp as it is believed that people read more critically, and by so doing, they develop the sense of perfection. Others stated that from Facebook and WhatsApp, they receive feedbacks and criticism on social media which help improve their work, some emphasized that social media ease access to information, improve summarizing ability as one has to move from the traditional long stories writing for short and interesting stories, while others highlighted exposure of self and self-advertisement.

They further stated that social capital has served as encouragement to continue with the profession when one is demotivated, through moral support receive from friends on social media. They highlighted social liability given that they are morally liable to numerous friends they have made on social media; then financial support from colleagues which helps to cope with inadequate wage from private press. One journalist however argued that social media is time consuming, hinders excellence or quality journalism, and sustains mediocrity in journalism.

DISCUSSION

Relationship between social media's social capital by journalists, and the acquisition or loss of professional skills

The results revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp are inevitable in the practice of journalism in our modern world, as they enable journalists to gain professional skills. The research results show that journalists who have not undergone formal training, gain skills indirectly through recommendations by friends (social capital) on Facebook and WhatsApp to attend workshops, seminars, and webinars. This helps to build their skills. These findings are in line with Appelgren (2016) which indicated both a significant need for knowledge exchange and a need for self-affirmation were expressed in the group, and that the group has played a major role in data journalism's development process in the Nordic region. Also, the research findings indicated that journalists gain more skills on WhatsApp, which was more conducive to gain professional skills than Facebook.

According to the findings, from constructive criticism from colleagues and the audience, journalists perfect their skills. The most acquired skills on Facebook and WhatsApp was language improvement, news writing, media ethics, interview techniques, news presentation, broadcasting skills, photography, and general knowledge, networking, fact checking, ICT skills, and self-development of communication skills, broadcasting skills, news presentation photography, and the respect for ethics. The extant literature is supported by Stephanis (2017) findings on direct audience engagement, monetization, discovering innovative ways to tell stories and learning new product development strategies from newsrooms were additional assets of Facebook usage by journalists.

Furthermore, the findings revealed a significant association between social capital and skills acquisition on Facebook whereby the proportion of high skill acquisition was higher among those with high social capital, than those with low social capital. Based on the results, there

was equally a significant association between social media capital and skills acquisition on Facebook and WhatsApp. Journalists that use Facebook and WhatsApp most often, acquire high social capital, which enable them to gain more skills compared to journalists who do not use social media most often. This was supported by Boczek & Koppers (2019), answering the first objective of the study. Stephanis (2017) depicted positive impacts such as Facebook making a concerted push to build bridges with the news industry and promoting higher quality journalism. Zakaria & Razak (2018) in this perspective of social media assets added that the existence of Facebook has enabled the people to include media such pictures and videos to the news they are sharing with the virtual community to which it is better than the analogue print media.

The risk for unreliable information on social media was shyly brought up as it was believed that the propensity to have fake news or unreliable information on social media is high. The resurgence of fake news and citizen journalism on Facebook was emphasized upon by Stephanis (2017) who related fake news articles that contain false or exaggerated information intended to attract viewers for monetary gain. The issue of fake news was also raised by Zakaria and Razak (2018). These authors argued that Facebook is often being used by those who oppose a friend, politicians, entrepreneurs or even critics. As a result, it has become an unhealthy environment for both the government and the investigation team in searching for the right information and theorizing the situation as there is lack of befitting evidence or proof. Sarah Rodriguez (2017) equally highlighted the issue of fake news. She explained that news is disseminated almost instantaneously. Yet there is a rise in fake news challenges journalists to effectively use Facebook as a platform for news dissemination. On the other side, she emphasized that Facebook is using fact checkers and increased awareness to fight fake news as well as better equip journalists and readers.

CONCLUSION

This study assesses the effects of social media capital on journalism skills in Cameroon. Overall, this investigation advances the depth and breadth of our understanding of how social media capital enhances skills acquisition by journalists. Some of the skills obtained directly and indirectly include: an improvement in interview techniques, editing, news writing, news presentation, photography, fact checking, amongst others. Also the study points to the fact skills acquired through social media capital by journalists, have improved their performance. However, the study scantily revealed that creating friendship on social media is unreliable and uncondusive. The rising practice of hate speech was echoed in its crucial role in the destruction of trust. The risk for unreliable information on social media was shyly brought up as it was believed that the propensity to have fake news or unreliable information on social media is high.

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