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Assessing the Effectiveness of Smartphone Use in Electronic Media News Coverage: A Case Study of ZANIS TV

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Abstract

The integration of smartphones into journalism, commonly referred to as mobile journalism (MoJo), has transformed news production globally by enabling journalists to gather, edit, and disseminate news content using a single portable device. In Zambia, while private media organizations have adopted mobile journalism more rapidly, public broadcasters such as Zambia News and Information Services Television (ZANIS TV) continue to face structural, infrastructural, and policy-related challenges that constrain effective adoption. This study assessed the effectiveness of smartphone use in news coverage at ZANIS TV in Lusaka, focusing on patterns of use, perceived benefits, challenges, and organizational support mechanisms.

A qualitative case study design was employed, complemented by descriptive quantitative analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, document review, and non-participant newsroom observation. The study was guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory to examine both individual-level perceptions and organizational-level adoption dynamics. Findings reveal that although smartphone ownership among journalists was high, professional use varied by task, with greater uptake in photography, audio recording, scriptwriting, and story submission than in mobile editing and live streaming. Smartphones significantly improved reporting speed, flexibility, and remote reporting capacity; however, their effectiveness was constrained by unstable internet connectivity, limited data access, inconsistent training, inadequate accessories, and the absence of clear institutional policies. The study concludes that smartphones have enhanced news production efficiency at ZANIS TV, but sustainable integration requires deliberate investment in infrastructure, structured capacity building, and clear editorial and policy frameworks.

Keywords: Mobile Journalism, Smartphones, News Coverage, ZANIS TV, Public Broadcasting, Technology Adoption

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of smartphone technology has profoundly reshaped contemporary journalism by enabling reporters to perform multiple news production tasks using a single, portable device. This transformation has given rise to mobile journalism (MoJo), a practice that allows journalists to research stories, record audio and video, capture photographs, edit content, write scripts, and disseminate news directly from the field. Unlike traditional broadcast journalism, which depends on bulky equipment, specialized crews, and studio-based editing, mobile journalism integrates these functions into smartphones supported by mobile applications, cloud storage, and digital publishing platforms.

Globally, mobile journalism has emerged as both a technological innovation and a strategic response to structural challenges facing the media industry. Declining revenues, shrinking newsrooms, and increasing competition from digital platforms have compelled media organizations to adopt faster, more cost-effective production models.

Smartphones, with their increasing processing power and high-definition cameras, offer an efficient alternative to traditional broadcasting tools while maintaining acceptable professional standards. As a result, journalists are increasingly expected to operate as multi-skilled practitioners capable of producing complete news stories independently. In sub-Saharan Africa, mobile journalism has gained particular relevance due to infrastructural and economic constraints.

Many media organizations operate in environments where access to satellite trucks, professional cameras, and editing suites is limited. Smartphones, therefore, provide a practical Solution for real-time reporting, especially in remote or underserved areas. Studies across the region indicate that journalists rely heavily on mobile devices for covering breaking news, community

events, and political developments, where speed and mobility are essential.

In Zambia, mobile journalism is gradually becoming part of mainstream media practice. However, adoption has been uneven across the media landscape. Private media organizations have generally embraced smartphone-based reporting more rapidly, supported by flexible management structures and commercial incentives. In contrast, public broadcasters face distinct institutional challenges, including bureaucratic procedures, limited funding, and slower policy adaptation. Zambia News and Information Services Television (ZANIS TV), a state-owned broadcaster under the Ministry of Information and Media, operates within this context.

ZANIS TV plays a strategic role in disseminating public information and government programmes across the country. Its effectiveness in delivering timely, accurate, and accessible news is therefore closely linked to its capacity to adopt modern production technologies. Despite widespread smartphone ownership among journalists, there remains limited empirical research examining how smartphones are integrated into newsroom workflows at ZANIS TV, the extent to which they enhance news production efficiency, and the institutional factors that shape their adoption.

This study addresses this gap by assessing the effectiveness of smartphone use in news coverage at ZANIS TV in Lusaka. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory, the study examines patterns of smartphone usage, perceived benefits and challenges, and organizational support mechanisms influencing mobile journalism adoption within a state-owned media institution.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Patterns of Smartphone Usage in News Coverage

The literature on mobile journalism consistently demonstrates that smartphones have become central tools in modern news production. Journalists worldwide use smartphones to gather information, record interviews, capture video footage, take photographs, edit content, and publish stories across digital platforms. Mobile editing applications such as Kinemaster, Adobe Premiere Rush, and LumaFusion have further enabled reporters to complete entire production workflows without returning to the newsroom.

Studies indicate that smartphones are particularly useful in fast-paced reporting environments. Journalists frequently rely on mobile devices to cover breaking news, live events, and emergencies where traditional equipment may be unavailable or too slow to deploy. Smartphones also support background research, note-taking, scriptwriting, and communication with editors through messaging and cloud-based platforms, thereby streamlining newsroom workflows.

In African media contexts, smartphone usage is often shaped by infrastructural realities. Journalists rely on mobile devices to overcome logistical constraints, especially in rural or remote areas. Research shows that while private media organizations increasingly integrate smartphones into full-scale production, public broadcasters tend to use smartphones more selectively, often as supplementary tools rather than primary production devices.

In Zambia, existing studies suggest that smartphone journalism is more entrenched in private media than in public broadcasting. At ZANIS TV, smartphones are commonly used for photography, audio recording, and story submission, but less frequently for advanced tasks such as editing and live streaming. These patterns reflect both individual adoption and organizational readiness, underscoring the need for institutional support to enable comprehensive mobile journalism integration.

2.2 Challenges and Opportunities of Smartphone Journalism

While mobile journalism offers significant advantages, its adoption is accompanied by numerous challenges. Technical limitations such as poor battery life, limited storage capacity, low audio quality, and unstable internet connectivity frequently undermine effective reporting. In developing contexts, reliance on mobile data networks exposes journalists to delays, especially when uploading large video files or conducting live broadcasts.

Institutional challenges further constrain mobile journalism, particularly within public media organizations. Limited training opportunities, absence of clear editorial policies, inconsistent managerial support, and inadequate financial investment often result in uneven adoption. Journalists may own smartphones but lack guidance on professional standards, ethical considerations, and digital security practices.

Ethical concerns also feature prominently in the literature. The speed and immediacy associated with mobile journalism can compromise verification, accuracy, and privacy if not carefully managed. The pressure to publish quickly may increase the risk of misinformation, particularly when journalists rely on user-generated content or report from volatile environments.

Despite these challenges, smartphone journalism presents substantial opportunities. Smartphones enhance reporting speed, reduce production costs, and support multimedia storytelling. They enable journalists to report independently, expand coverage to underserved areas, and engage audiences through interactive platforms. For public broadcasters, mobile journalism offers a pathway to improving efficiency and relevance, provided that appropriate institutional frameworks are in place.

2.3 Organizational Infrastructure Supporting Mobile Journalism

Organizational infrastructure plays a critical role in determining the success of mobile journalism adoption. This includes access to suitable smartphones and accessories, reliable internet connectivity, skilled personnel, supportive management, and clear editorial policies. Without these elements, the potential benefits of smartphone journalism remain limited.

Studies show that private media organizations often invest more aggressively in digital infrastructure and training, enabling faster adoption of mobile journalism. In contrast, public broadcasters frequently face bureaucratic constraints and limited budgets, which slow innovation. Strengthening organizational infrastructure is therefore essential for ensuring that smartphone journalism becomes a sustainable and standardized practice within public media institutions.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design complemented by descriptive quantitative analysis to examine smartphone use in news coverage at ZANIS TV. A

case study approach was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of mobile journalism practices within their real-life institutional context, capturing the interaction between technology, individuals, and organizational structures.

The target population comprised 49 newsroom staff at ZANIS TV in Lusaka, including reporters, editors, producers, ICT personnel, and management staff. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with direct involvement in news production or oversight of digital tools. This ensured that data were collected from information-rich participants with practical experience of smartphone-based reporting.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, document analysis, and non-participant newsroom observation. Interviews provided detailed insights into journalists' experiences, perceptions, and challenges, while questionnaires generated quantitative data on usage patterns and perceived effectiveness. Document analysis offered a contextual understanding of institutional policies and practices.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics generated through STATA version 14, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Triangulation across data sources enhanced the validity and reliability of findings. Ethical principles were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

4. Results

This section presents the empirical findings on the effectiveness of smartphone use in news coverage at ZANIS TV. The results are organized thematically to reflect patterns of smartphone ownership and usage, the role of smartphones in multimedia production and remote reporting, perceived benefits, and challenges affecting effective adoption.

4.1 Smartphone Ownership and General Suitability

Findings show that smartphone ownership among ZANIS TV journalists is nearly universal. An overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) reported owning a smartphone, indicating that access to mobile technology is not a primary barrier to adoption. Furthermore, 88% of respondents indicated that their smartphones were suitable for professional journalism work, including tasks such as recording interviews, taking photographs, writing scripts, and submitting stories remotely.

In terms of software compatibility, 76% of respondents confirmed that their smartphones support professional news applications such as mobile editing and live-streaming tools. However, 16% reported incompatibility, while 8% were unsure of their device capabilities. These findings reveal disparities in device quality and user awareness, suggesting that smartphone ownership alone does not guarantee full participation in mobile journalism practices.

4.2 Use of Smartphones for Multimedia News Production

Smartphones were widely used for core multimedia tasks. Photography emerged as the most common use, with 69% of respondents regularly using smartphones to capture images for news coverage and a further 25% using them occasionally. Audio recording was even more prevalent, with 86% of respondents using smartphones to record interviews and soundbites, reflecting the convenience and accessibility of mobile audio tools in field reporting.

Video production showed more moderate adoption. While smartphones were used to record video footage, only 41% of respondents reported editing video or audio directly on their smartphones. A significant proportion (37%) edited content occasionally, while 22% did not use smartphones for editing at all. This suggests that while smartphones are accepted as capture devices, they are not yet fully embraced as complete production tools.

4.3 Live Reporting and Remote News Filing

Live reporting using smartphones remains an emerging practice at ZANIS TV. Only 42.9% of respondents reported conducting live reporting or live streaming using smartphones, while 40.8% did not use smartphones for this purpose. The remaining respondents reported occasional use. This indicates that although smartphones enable real-time reporting, their adoption for live broadcasting is constrained.

In contrast, remote story filing is highly integrated into newsroom workflows. A substantial 92% of respondents reported using smartphones to submit scripts or stories remotely. This demonstrates that smartphones have become essential tools for transmission and workflow efficiency, allowing journalists to file reports directly from the field without returning to the newsroom.

4.4 Institutional Integration and Management Support

Regarding institutional support, 61% of respondents confirmed that smartphones are officially integrated into newsroom workflows at ZANIS TV. However, 21% indicated that integration occurs inconsistently, while 18% reported no formal integration. This points to the uneven institutionalization of mobile journalism practices.

Management support was reported as relatively strong, with 82% of respondents indicating that management supports smartphone use in news coverage. Despite this, only 46.9% confirmed the existence of clear editorial guidelines governing smartphone-based reporting, while 40.8% reported no such guidelines. This gap suggests that informal acceptance of smartphone use has outpaced formal policy development.

4.5 Challenges Affecting Smartphone-Based Reporting

Respondents identified several challenges affecting the effective use of smartphones. The most prominent challenge (32%) related to compromised picture and audio quality, often due to environmental noise and limited camera performance in low-light conditions. Battery life and the cost of data bundles were cited by 30% of respondents as significant constraints, particularly during extended field assignments.

Network-related challenges were also prominent. Poor network coverage accounted for 50% of reported connectivity challenges, followed by inadequate data bundles (20%) and general network instability (20%). These infrastructural constraints directly affect the timeliness and reliability of mobile reporting, especially in rural or remote areas.

5. Discussion

The findings provide important insights into the effectiveness of smartphone journalism at ZANIS TV and its alignment with the Technology Acceptance Model

(TAM) and Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory.

5.1 Smartphone Adoption through the Lens of TAM

From a TAM perspective, the high levels of smartphone ownership and frequent use for core reporting tasks demonstrate strong perceived usefulness among journalists. Smartphones were widely viewed as enhancing reporting speed, flexibility, and efficiency, particularly for field-based reporting and remote story submission. This explains the widespread adoption of smartphones for photography, audio recording, scriptwriting, and transmission.

However, perceived ease of use varied across tasks. While basic functions were easily adopted, advanced tasks such as mobile editing and live streaming were less common. This suggests that technical complexity, device limitations, and lack of training reduce perceived ease of use, thereby constraining deeper adoption. These findings reinforce TAM's assertion that usefulness alone is insufficient for full adoption if ease of use is not adequately supported.

5.2 Diffusion of Innovations and Institutional Readiness

Applying the DOI theory, smartphone journalism at ZANIS TV appears to be in a transitional phase between early adoption and institutional diffusion. Individual journalists have embraced smartphones out of necessity and convenience, but organizational structures have not fully adapted to support systematic integration.

Key DOI factors such as communication channels, leadership support, and organizational readiness remain uneven. While management support exists in principle, the absence of standardized editorial policies and uneven access to resources slows diffusion across the organization. Early adopters rely on personal initiative, leading to fragmented practices rather than uniform institutional adoption.

5.3 Organizational Infrastructure and Public Broadcasting Constraints

The challenges identified—poor connectivity, limited data access, device disparities, and lack of formal policies—underscore the importance of organizational infrastructure in mobile journalism adoption. As a public broadcaster, ZANIS TV operates within financial and bureaucratic constraints that differ from those of private media organizations. These constraints limit the pace of technological innovation despite individual willingness to adopt smartphones.

The findings suggest that without deliberate institutional investment and policy alignment, mobile journalism risks remaining an informal practice rather than a standardized professional tool within public broadcasting.

6. Conclusion

This study assessed the effectiveness of smartphone use in news coverage at ZANIS TV and found that smartphones have significantly enhanced reporting speed, flexibility, and remote news production. Journalists widely perceive smartphones as useful tools for modern journalism, particularly for field reporting, multimedia capture, and story transmission.

However, the study also reveals that smartphone journalism at ZANIS TV is constrained by infrastructural, technical, and institutional limitations. Limited use of smartphones for editing and live reporting, coupled with weak policy frameworks and inconsistent training, indicates that mobile journalism adoption remains partial.

The study concludes that smartphones alone cannot transform public broadcasting without corresponding organizational support. Sustainable integration of mobile journalism at ZANIS TV requires investment in digital infrastructure, provision of data and accessories, structured training programmes, and clear editorial and policy guidelines. Addressing these gaps will enable smartphones to function not merely as supplementary tools, but as fully integrated components of professional public service broadcasting in Zambia.

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