NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FACULTY OF COMPUTING AND INFORMATICS

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATICS, JOURNALISM AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

AN EXAMINATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES CONFRONTING OPERATIONS OF SELECTED HYBRID MEDIA ORGANISATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE IN NAMIBIA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MASTER OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

BY

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DECEMBER 2021

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

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For my love, Naison and sons, Atinzwa and Vunganai.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I thank God almighty for giving me the opportunity to study through this programme and for being my refuge during unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, where many lost their lives.

I am very grateful to my husband, Naison and sons, Atinzwa and Vunganai for their unwavering support, not only in doing this research study, but the entire Masters programme. They had to bear with me during my absence from them as I devoted lots of time in writing this project.

Tribute is particularly extended to Professor Admire Mare, my research supervisor who tirelessly availed himself and gave his guidance in making this study a success. To all the participants who contributed towards this study, many thanks, you were very co-operative. My whole-hearted thanks also goes to Dr. Hatikanganwi Mapudzi for believing in me when I doubted myself as we collaboratively worked together and co-authored a couple of research papers.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. It specifically used the cases of *Namibia Media Holdings* and *The Namibia*, which are the biggest hybrid media organisations in Namibia in terms of readership and circulation thus far. The overall research question was: what contextual factors have shaped ethical dilemmas experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) and *The Namibian*? It located itself with the interpretivism philosophical underpinning, in which a case study research design was used to as it provides room for observing multiple actors within specific contextual parameters. A total of sixteen (16) full-time employed journalists and five (5) news editors were selected using purposive sampling technique. Qualitative data were collected through the administration of focus group discussions and interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data, in which emerging themes were categorised, labelled and interpreted in response to each research question. Key findings indicate that a number of contextual factors responsible for shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by professional journalists working for selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. These include: the ever-changing technological landscape; the immediacy of internet; media sustainability; the integration of social media platforms in the news work; the absence of specific ethical framework for hybrid media organisations; conflicts of interest; and the notion of public interest. It came out clear that traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness and impartiality are still relevant to inform operations of hybrid newsrooms and are also cornerstones without, which there is no professional journalism. In order to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia, the following media accountability ethical frameworks and policies were cited: revision of the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online Media; strengthening of digital fact-checking mechanisms; and additional journalistic training.

Key words: hybrid media organisations, media ethics, ethical dilemmas, digital age, contextual factors, journalists, news editors.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	: Artificial Intelligence
CNN	: Cable News Network
FGD	: Focus Group Discussion
UGC	: User Generated Content
NBC	: Namibian Broadcasting Corporation
NMH	: Namibia Media Holdings
NUST	: Namibia University of Science and Technology
SRT	: Social Responsibility Theory
VOA	: Voice of America

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This qualitative study examines ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. Since digital and traditional media platforms have different social and technical affordances, scholars have highlighted that there is need to study how journalists working for hybrid media organisations negotiate the ethical dilemmas associated with the digital age (Ward, 2018; 2019; Ess, 2013). These include copyright infringements, how to handle online errors and corrections, manipulation of photography/videos, plagiarism of digital content and cyberbullying, which are no stranger to the operations of digitised newsrooms. In order to account for contextual specificities of such newsrooms, the study borrows analytical insights from the social responsibility theory (SRT) and the Bourdieusian field theory to make sense of how professional journalists working for selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia negotiate ethical dilemmas confronting their news making practices in the digital age. Therefore, this particular study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the ongoing ethical debate on the relevancy and irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of hybrid media organisations, not only in Namibia, but the global media at large.

1.2 Background of the study

The advent of digitisation has been accompanied by what some scholars call a 'revolution' in the media space in terms of news production, dissemination, consumption and the business model (Ess, 2013). As a result, the migration of traditional media platforms into the digital space and the massive growth of born-digital media platforms, which are characterised by interactivity, speed and immediate forms of journalism, ethical frameworks undergirding journalistic work have not been spared by these disruptive shifts (Couldry, Madianou and Pincheviski, 2013). Issues such as copyright infringements, how to handle online errors and corrections, manipulation of photography/videos and plagiarism of digital content and cyberbullying are oft-cited as some of the ethical dilemmas that have received significant attention in the digital age (Ward, 2019). Applied media ethics refers to accepted set of

principles and good conduct at the level of print, broadcast and digital media (see Arant, 2000; Chari, 2019; Ward, 2018). Media ethics can also be further sub-divided into traditionaland digital journalism ethics. Traditional media ethics as set of applied media ethics that were invented centuries ago to guide professional journalism and the operations of mainstream media before the advent of digitisation Chari (2017, p. 26). Examples of traditional media ethics include: impartiality, accuracy, truthfulness and pre-publication verification among others. Digital media ethics deals with distinct ethical problems, practices and norms of digital media such as cyberbullying, copyright infringements and plagiarism of digital content and manipulation of photography (Ess, 2013, p. 10-11).

Therefore, traditional and digital media ethics must be seen as one and not separate because the concept of hybrid media does not necessarily replace the mainstream media with the digital media, but there is interdependence. Although professional ethical codesare not panacea for unethical journalism, they are necessary because they act as cornerstones of a profession (Chari, 2019). Without codes of ethics, journalism would be likea ship without a radar. The incremental shift by advertisers towards digital adverts has been accompanied by a weighty drop of revenues from the mainstream media (Remmert, 2019). That said, today's media organisations are left with little choice but to adopting the hybrid media system in a bid to sustain their business models. Hybrid media organisation (also referred to as converged media organisation) is a combination of mainstream and digital media offerings to create media content for wide and heterogeneous audiences (Jenkins, 2006).

The concept of hybridity differs from media convergence in that the latter assumes different dimensions that shape communication, which include: technological; professional; operational and structural (García-Avilés, Meier & Kaltenbrunner, 2016). At the core of "what is meant by technological convergence: all forms of media being increasingly stored and transferred on the same format and therefore becoming completely interchangeable" (Miller, 2011, p. 73). In simple terms, it means coming of things together that were previously separated. The former is used to denote a type of media convergence, in which a new mode emerges containing elements of combined media. Hybrid media system is the co-existence of traditional and digital media platforms and offerings. It does not necessarily replace the former with the latter, but there is interdependence (Chadwick, 2017; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). Examples of hybridmedia organisations in Namibia include: Namibia Media

Holdings (NMH) which comprises 3 newspaper brands namely: *Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Namibian Sun, Erongo News* and *Republikein* with both print and digital offerings (online editions and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn) and *The Namibian* (with print editions, online editions and social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook). The fact that traditional and digital forms of media are now stored and disseminated on the same format and subsequently becoming completely interdependent, these organisations are also regarded as converged media organisations in the study.

Founded as Democratic Media Holdings in 1992, Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) is the largest media group in Namibia, which operates as a commercial entity. It publishes three major newspapers, the Afrikaans-language *Republikein*, the German *Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the *Namibian Sun* in English (NMH website, 2021). The *Republikein* was founded in1977 by Dirk Mudge and Jan Spies (as founding editor) and incorporated into NMH at its inception. The *Allgemeine Zeitung*, published since 1916 and was bought by the publishing house John Meinert in 1934, and later sold to NMH in 1991. The *Namibian Sun* was established in 2007 as a weekly newspaper and became a daily since 2010 (NMH website, 2021). It publishes in English with some sections in *Oshiwambo* and targets a readership aged between 18 and 40 (NMH website, 2021). NMH is owned by Stimulus Investments, a Namibian investment company. Statistical information on NMH website as of January (2021) indicates that on Twitter, *Namibian Sun* has 148,000 followers; *Republikein* has 17,600 followers and *Allgemeine Zeitung* has 1,494 followers. On YouTube, *Allgemeine Zeitung* has 5,490 subscribers and 3,700 videos. On Instagram, *Republikein* has 6,341 followers and1,244 posts; *Namibian Sun* has 105,000 followers and *Allgemeine Zeitung* has 27,500 followers.

The Namibian is the largest daily newspaper in Namibia that publishes in English and a section in *Oshiwambo* on Fridays (*The Namibian* website, 2021). It was founded in 1985 by veteran journalist, Gwen Lister as a weekly newspaper dependent on funding of donors, which aimed to promote Namibian independence from South Africa. Its first edition appeared on 30 August of that year with a print run of 10,000. *The Namibian* became a dailynewspaper on 1 April 1989. It is owned by Free Press of Namibia, a private trust managed by its founding editor. Its head office is in Namibia's capital city, Windhoek and has otheroffices in Oshakati, Rundu, Swakopmund and Keetmanshoop. Until March 2011, *The Namibian* was managed by its founding editor, Gwen Lister. Its current editor-in chief is Tangeni Amupadhi. A distribution

survey by *The Namibian* (2021), indicates that on average,one copy is read by 8 people and it reaches up to 313, 000 daily readers from Monday to Friday and a staggering of 624,000 on Fridays as of January 2021 (*The Namibian* website, 2021). It has 3,730 likes on Facebook; 234,000 followers and 3,996 posts on Instagram; 213, 000 followers on Twitter; 1, 100 videos and 28,400 subscribers on YouTube as of January 2021 (*The Namibian* website, 2021). As audiences continue to rely on digital news offerings, the circulation of *The Namibian* print editions went down from a peak of 78, 000 in 2016, to 17, 000 during COVID-19 lockdown between March and July 2020 to 28, 000 as of August 2020 (Ngutjinazo,2020).

The study examined how journalists and news editors working for hybrid media organisations such as the Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) and *The Namibian* negotiate ethical issues in their day-to day work routines. The choice of these two was motivated by the fact that they are the largest hybrid media organisations in Namibia in terms of circulation and readership, hence influential to the entire Namibia at large.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

There has been a clarion call for media ethics to be revised in the wake of uptake of digitised media ecosystems (Ward, 2018, 2019; Ess, 2013; Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015; Sa, 2016). This call has been necessitated by the assumed ethical tensions that exist between mainstream media and digital media, both at local and global levels. Traditional media ethics with their values of accuracy, pre-publication verification and gate- keeping, rubs up against the culture of digital media which emphasises immediate form of journalism and post-publication correction. The cut-throat competition to become first with the 'breaking news' is no stranger to online publications (Chari, 2013; 2019). The trend on how to handle online errors and corrections is disturbed by the immediacy of internet and the probability of spreading misinformation, disinformation and malinformation becomes very high. The uptake of algorithms and artificial intelligence used in professional news production have also spawned ethical challenges at the level of data search and origin, data usage and abuse and creations of filter bubbles. Hybrid media organisations by their very nature of having elements of traditional and digitalmedia platforms have been at the forefront to dealing with the mismatch between traditional and digital journalism ethics. This requires special attention since traditional journalism ethical frameworks are failing to provide sufficient guidelines for

journalists working for hybrid media organisations such as *The Namibian* and Namibia Media Holdings. In Namibia, the then Minister of Information Communication and Technology, Tjekero Tweya, once alluded to the deteriorating quality of media content in Namibia owing to the influx of ethical transgressions committed by professional journalists in the wake of digitisation of newsrooms (*The Namibian*, 2019). The Namibia code of conduct for print, broadcast and online media enforced by the Office of the media ombudsman regulates the operations of all media. Even though the current code of ethics acknowledges the existence of print, broadcast and online media, it does not provide explicit regulations on the operations of hybrid media organisations. This is despite the fact that these organisations are the new norm in the contemporary media scene. Although the Namibian code of ethics and conduct for media practitioners was revised in 2017, still, it does not explicitly address all ethical issues including the manipulation of photography, which is common in digital age. Moreover, it does not indicate the haste with which the proliferating ethical challenges should be handled. There are no empirical studies in Namibia even broadly in Africa on how professional journalists negotiate ethical issues confronting the operations of hybrid media organisations. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is one of the first studies to interrogate this academic lacuna in Namibia.

1.4 Research questions

Main research question

What contextual factors have shaped ethical issues experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) and *The Namibian*?

Sub-questions

- What are the perceptions of full-time journalists and news editors working at the NMH and *The Namibian* towards the relevance of traditional media ethics in the operations of selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia?
- What are some of the major ethical issues that full-time journalists and news editors working for hybrid media organisations such as the NMH and *The Namibian* encounter?
- What media accountability frameworks and policies can full-time journalists and news editors working at the NMH and *The Namibian* propose to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is likely to benefit the community indirectly through its findings that are likely to propose new ways of ethically governing the operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia. It will recommend ways that the current Code of Ethics for Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online Media can be revised in line with the changing media ecosystem. Most importantly, hybrid media organisations such as *The Namibian* and the NMH could indirectly benefit from these findings as they can develop a workable ethical framework to inform their everyday news making practices.

1.5 Delimitation of the study

The study confines itself to the examination of ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia, particularly *The Namibian* and the Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) using qualitative research approach. The respondents' views and experiences were drawn from full-time employed journalists and editors only.

1.6 Limitation of the study

Since the study employed qualitative approach, all samples were drawn using purposive sampling method, this means that the sample size was relatively smaller compared to that of quantitative approach, hence cannot be generalised to similar contexts.

1.7 Overview of literature review

The majority of literature shows that the operations of hybrid media organisations in this digital age are not immune to ethical dilemmas (Ess, 2013; Couldry, 2013; Mare & Brand; 2010; Chari, 2013, 2019; Ward, 2018). The perception on the irrelevancy and relevancy of traditional media ethics to inform operations of hybrid media organisations has been

documented by a relatively large body of literature in Europe, America, Asia and some parts of Africa (Arant and Anderson, 2000; Chari, 2009, 2013, 2019; Ward, 2014, 2018; Ess, 2013; Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj, 2015), yet nothing has been written about this scholarly issue in Namibia. Such literature advances a radical approach to media ethics arguing that, traditional codes of conduct that have guided the media for ages have ultimately lostrelevance in this digital age were many media organisations are operating as hybrid systems. It is argued that traditional media ethics with their values of accuracy and gate- keeping, rubs up against the culture of digital media which emphasize immediacy and post- publication correction (Chari, 2017). On the other hand, it is argued that mediaorganisations operating in different cultural context observe different principles (Kasoma, 1996). Therefore, there is need for a new regime of ethics called 'Afriethics' that are grounded in African philosophy in order to address localised realities of African experiences.

A relatively small body of literature that document the study of media ethics is informed by normative theoretical frameworks and acknowledge that truthfulness, fairness accuracy and balance of facts are ethical codes of conduct without which there is no professional journalism (Chari, 2009; 2013; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015). Such narratives assume a non-radical approach to traditional media ethics and argue that they must not be discarded, but upgraded to match the new changes that have occurred in the media space. For Couldry (2013), complementing traditional media ethics with digital media ethics and global media ethics, can be a constructive match for hybrid media systems. The conceptof media ethics today is not about making traditional, global and digital ethics overshadow each other, but to complement each other (Couldry, 2013).

The uptake of digitisation in journalism as a profession operates as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is perceived as an enabler of participatory journalism, where professional journalists are able to conduct their news-making practices at the greatest of ease. Earlier studies tend to idealise the role of the internet on journalism practice, accentuating it as an enabler of journalism in the digital age (see Lee, 2012; Moyo, 2007, 2009; Berger, 2005; 2009; Mudhai et al, 2009). Such narratives overlook ethical dilemmas associated with digital media technologies in the operation of hybrid media organisations. Kothari (2018) contextually asserts that media operating in different cultural contexts appeal to different ethical norms in order to arrive at the most acceptable moral standards. On the other hand, recent studies posit that the uptake of digitisation expose professional journalists to anarray of unethical

conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation. Such ethical dilemmas include, but are not limited to: dissemination of information disorder, creation of filter bubbles, handling of online errors and corrections, cyberbullying, hate speech, plagiarism of digital content and invasion of citizen's privacy (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021; *Namibia Fact Check*, 2021; Chari, 2019; Remmert, 2019; Chan-Olmsted, 2019; Wahutu, 2019; Mare, 2018; African Media Barometer; 2018; Mhiripiri & Chikakano, 2017; Dubberley, 2016; Feltoe, 2018; Dube, 2017). In order to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia, scholars such as (see Chari, 2019; Zlatev, 2011; Links, 2020; Bannikov & Sokolova; 2018; Posetti & Bonchiva, 2020) posit that it is a positive possibility that operations of hybridmedia organisations can be addressed by the following policies and frameworks: self- regulatory mechanisms; in-house journalistic training; research and a constant revision of media fair use policies.

1.8 Theoretical frameworks

The study borrowed analytical insights from the social responsibility theory (SRT) which was developed in 1947 by the Hutchins Commission in United States and the field theory propounded by Pierre Bourdieu in 1951. Given the complexity of the research topic and the ever-changing context of the proposed study, one theory could not suffice to understand the research problem at hand, hence the triangulation of the SRT and Bourdieusian field theory. The aim here is not to supplant each other but rather to complement. The SRT has its roots in Western philosophy. It was developed in 1947 by the Commission on the Freedom of Press (Hutchins Commission) in United States of America and latter upgraded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956 (Christians & Fackler, 2014). Its basic tenet is that hemedia is expected to cultivate self-regulatory procedures of responsibility by embracing journalism standards and codes of conduct in response to the demands from the public (McQuail, Golding & Bens, 2005). It informs the proposed study as it postulates that journalism as a profession and operations of the media, are governed by normative theoriesthat are found in media policies, law and ethics (McQuail, Golding & Bens, 2005).

In order to account for contextual specificities of digitised newsrooms, there is need to go beyond the basic tenets of the SRT. The field theory as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, was propounded in 1951 (Bourdieu, 1990). As a spatial metaphor, the Bourdieusian theorybuilds

on four concepts namely: field, habitus, doxa and capital, which share interconnectedness that is useful in appreciating the relations within the journalistic field (Mare, 2018). Field signify an arena of production, circulation, and appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, status, and the competitive positions held byactors in a bid to amass, exchange, and monopolise different kinds of power resources (Bourdieu, 1990). Newsroom thus can be viewed as fields that have dos and don'ts knownas doxa. This brings these discrete entities into a wider perception that emphasises their relational properties rather than their inherent features and ultimately the array of forces shaping the behaviour of each (Mare, 2018). Bourdieu (1990, p.55) posit that habitus refers to the socially instituted system of dispositions that position 'expressions, perceptions and thoughts'. Mare (2018) further notes that there is a dialectical relationship between field and habitus which enable the interface that yields practice such as news making practices and routines. These are commonly referred to as behaviours, actions of actors /journalists (Mare, 2018). In application to the study, (un) ethical journalistic behaviour is assumed as 'habitus' by journalists who work for hybrid media organisations (journalistic sub-field). Through job socialisation, journalists experience what is known as habitualisation in diverse newsroom habitus (see Mare, 2018; Ryfe, 2012). Bourdieu (1990) posit that habitualisation connotes the reproducibility of behaviour or human action effortlessly henceforth being repeated often. This exhibits that journalists internalise the ways of doing things, including insider deals with many actors in the journalistic field (Mare, 2018). In this theory, capital symbolises 'actually usable resources and powers' (Bourdieu 1984, p.114). Different actorsin the journalistic field tend to pursue several types of capital such as social, political,cultural, symbolic, economic capital. As Bourdieu (1990) cited in Mare (2018) puts it across, that these forms of capital are reciprocally transformable and however, it is amiss to perceive them as secluded from each other. This then directs our attention to scenarios where journalists working for hybrid media organisations tend to be ethically influenced by other actors outside their field (such as advertisers, public relations agencies, and politicians) in the wake of digitisation. These will be used in this study to make sense of how journalists from selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia are influenced by the wider habitus and capitals (see chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks).

1.9 Definition of key terms

Applied media/journalistic ethics refers to accepted set of principles and good conduct at the level of print, broadcast and digital media (see Arant, 2000; Chari, 2019).

Traditional media/journalistic ethics is a set of applied media ethics that were invented centuries ago to guide professional journalism and the operations of mainstream media before the advent of digitisation (Arant, 2000; Chari, 2019).

Digital media/journalistic ethics deals with distinct ethical problems, practices and norms of digital media such as cyber-bullying, plagiarism of digital content and manipulation of photography (Ess, 2013; Ward, 2018).

Professional journalist is a news correspondent for print, broadcast, digital or both whose professional activities are guided by journalistic codes of conduct.

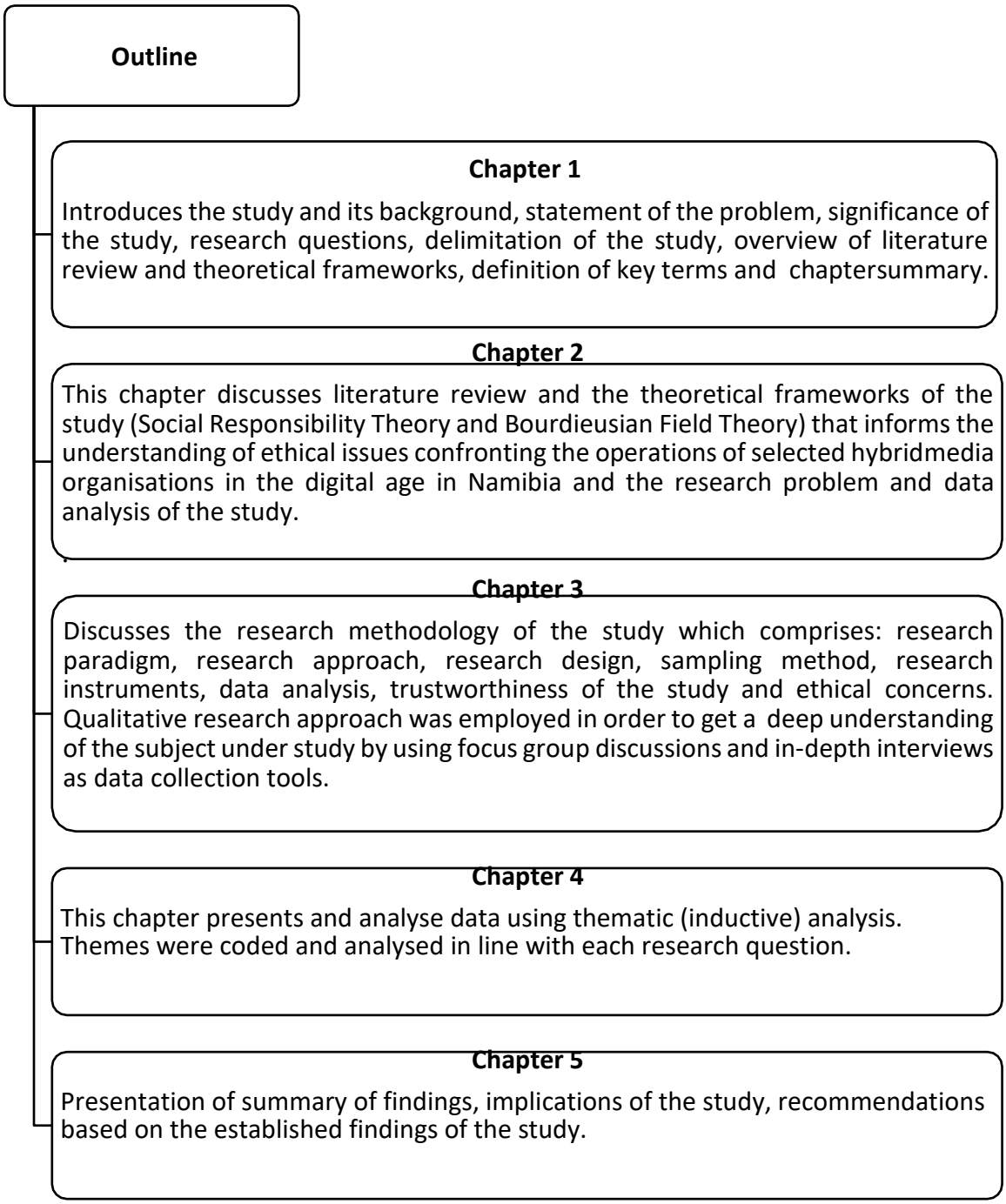
News editor is a news correspondent for either print, broadcast, digital or both who is in charge of gatekeeping of news production for publication or broadcast.

Hybrid media organisation is the co-existence of traditional media and digital media. It does not necessarily replace the former with the latter, but there is interdependence (Chadwick, 2017; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021; Jenkins, 2006). In this study, the phrase hybrid media organisations is used interchangeably with converged media organisations.

Digital age (also called information age), is the time in the 21st century characterised by large amounts of information widely available to users, largely due to computer/mobile devices technology and internet (Pavlik, 2008).

Contextual factors is used to denote technological; economic; social; epistemic and political determinants responsible of shaping ethical dilemmas experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the NMH and *The Namibia*

1.10 Organisation of the thesis



1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the purpose of the study and contextualised its background. It further expounded the research problem, followed by research questions. The significanceof the study, delimitation of the study, limitations of the study, an overview of the literature review and theoretical frameworks were also discussed in this chapter. Key terms used inthe study were defined and the organisation of thesis was outlined. The next chapterreviews literature related to the study and theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

After a thorough perusal of literature relevant to this study, it emerged that the operation of hybrid media systems is in this digital age is not immune to ethical dilemmas (Chari, 2019; Ess, 2013; Couldry, 2013; Kasoma, 1996; Kothari, 2018 & Ward, 2014; 2018). Research on media ethics dates back to the enlightenment period, where media ethics were invented as guiding principles to inform operations of the media. The advent of digitisation witnessed a revolution in the media space in terms of news production, dissemination, consumption and business model. This has created ethical tensions between mainstream media and digital media, both at local and global levels. The chapter is organised as follows: first, it outlines the main concepts, which are media ethics and the hybrid media system. Second, it providesa brief scholarly background of media ethics. Third, it highlights the ongoing debate on the relevancy and irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of hybrid media organisations. Fourth, it discusses ethical issues experienced by journalists working for hybrid media organisations in the digital age. Fifth, it signposts media accountability frameworks that can be used to inform operations of hybrid media organisations. In doing so, *contextual factors* such as technological, economic, social and political determinants are used to inform this discussion. Furthermore, the chapter discusses theoretical frameworks, which are social responsibility theory (SRT) and the Bourdieusian field theory. It ends with the summary of the chapter.

2.2 Defining Media Ethics

Media Ethics are type of applied ethics that signify accepted set of principles and good conduct in media practice be it print, broadcast and digital (Chari, 2019). Journalism is a Western construct or invention and so are media ethics. Examples of media ethics comprise: impartiality, balance of facts, accuracy, truthfulness, pre-publication verification and gate-keeping (Cheney, May & Munshi, 2011; Chari, 2019). These ethics are commonly referred to as traditional media ethics owing to the fact that they were invented centuries ago to guide

professional journalism and the operations of mainstream media before the advent of digitalization. Scholarly debates on media ethics is determined by questions like: If there is wrong or right way of media practice, then whose norms informs such ethical principles? (Chari, 2013, 2019; Ess, 2013; Kasoma, 2009; Kothari, 2018; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2020). In view of this, the concept of media ethics in the digital age becomes a highly contested terrain.

2.3 The concept of hybrid media system

The concept of hybrid media system (also referred to as converged media system) gathered momentum in the late 1990s due to the development of digital media technology (Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). It denotes the ongoing restructuring of media companies and latest developments that have occurred in news production, distribution, consumption and business model (Chadwick, 2017; Jenkins, 2006; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). The emergence of social media and the uptake of artificial intelligence (AI) brought about technological disruptions that are transforming old news-making practices in the media industry (Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). This is backed by Mabweazara and Mare (2021) who corroborate that the media space is undergoing structural changes where "old operational and business models have been disrupted" (p. 1).

In this study, it is important to differentiate the notion of hybridity from media convergence. The latter assumes different dimensions that shape communication, which include: technological; professional; operational and structural (García-Avilés et al, 2016). At the core of "what is meant by technological convergence: all forms of media being increasingly stored and transferred on the same format and therefore becoming completely interchangeable" (Maxwell & Miller, 2011, p. 73). In simple terms it means coming of things together that were previously separated. The former is used to denote a type of media convergence, in which a new mode emerges containing elements of combined media. Hybrid media system is the co-existence of traditional media and digital media. It does not necessarily replace the former with the latter, but there is interdependence (Chadwick, 2017; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). Chadwick (2013) elaborates that the hybrid media system is:

> *"A system built on interactions among older and newer media logics, where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors and organizational forms. Actors in this system are articulated by complex and ever-evolving relationships based on adaptation, interdependence, concentrations and diffusions ofpower. Actors create, tap or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable or disable others' agency, across and between a range ofolder and newer media settings"* (p.4).

The advent of digital media, which is characterised by interactivity, speed and immediate forms of journalism, witnessed a shift by mainstream media to combine traditional forms of journalism and digital journalism (Couldry, Madianou & Pincheviski, 2013; Parahita, 2021; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2021). In terms of business model, the preferential shift by advertisers towards digital adverts witnessed a weighty drop of revenues from the mainstream media (Remmert, 2019; Santos & Mare, 2021a; Mabewazara & Mare, 2021). That said, responses to these changes motivated many media organisations to adopt the hybrid system in a bid to sustain their business models. Examples of media organisations in Namibia that operate as hybrid system include: Namibia Media Holdings (NMH), which includes the following newspaper brands: *Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Namibian Sun* and the *Republikein* with both print and digital offerings (online editions and social media platforms on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedI*n*). *The Namibian*, with its online editions, digital offerings on social media and the print version. The *Namibian Broadcasting Corporation* (NBC) is another one, which comprises: 11 radio stations, 2 television channels, online editions on website and social media platforms such as YouTube*,* Twitter and Facebook*.* The fact that traditional and digital forms of media are now stored and disseminated on the same format and subsequently becoming completely interdependent, these organisations are also regarded as converged media organisations in the study.

2.4 De-Westernising media ethics

Research on media ethics demonstrates that media revolution has created ethical tension on two levels, first: there is tension between traditional media ethics and digital media ethics and secondly: the tension between local and global media (see Ess, 2013; Ward, 2018;

Shaw, 2018; Kasoma, 1996; Borgmann, 2012; Kothari, 2018 & Chari, 2017; 2019). It is argued that traditional media ethics with their values of accuracy and gate-keeping, rubs up against the culture of digital media which emphasise immediacy and post- publication correction (Chari, 2017; Ess, 2013). Since media organisations operating in different cultural context observe different principles, Kasoma (1996) advances the need for a new regime of ethics called '*Afriethics*' that are grounded in African philosophy in order to address localised realities of African experiences. Media organisations in the West may place more attention on individual freedom while those in Africa may feel duty bound to respect the interests of the community they dwell (Kasoma, 1996). This is backed by Kothari (2018) who reiterates that media operating in different cultural contexts appeal to different ethical norms in order to arrive at the most acceptable moral standards.

Shaw (2018) shares the same sentiments as he asserts that, "the de-Westernising thesis is needed for journalism education in the same way that it is necessary for journalism practice. Training programmes from the West are often out of tune with the realities on the ground in Africa" (p. 44). Kasoma (1996) further claims that although Western media principles offer useful guidelines in negotiating moral choices, they fall short of capturing other socio- cultural realities within African experiences. In view of this, Chari (2017) advances a multi- million-dollar question which point to the idea that: what criteria will inform the structure of a professional code of *Afriethics* that accommodates diverse cultural values given that the continent has 54 countries in total? Conversely, this will propagate another wave of ethical tension in pursuit of defining what constitutes a collective African culture.

a) **'Glocalisation' of media ethics**

There is a common view shared by some African media scholars (Kothari, 2018; Borgmann, 2012; Banda, 2009; Kasoma, 1996), which lament that African journalism lacks Africanvalues, and that "African journalists are merely mimicking the dominant neoliberal democracy model of journalism" (Shaw, 2018: 35). Examining globalisation's effects onmedia ethics in South Africa and India, Wasserman and Rao (2008) reveal that the impact of globalisation in post-independence African media ecosystems in terms of ethicalframeworks is two-fold. First, "it meant the acceptance of Western philosophical foundation for ethics codes" (p. 170). This has seen the establishment of the code of practice for South African journalists being

influenced by models from Europe and the USA. Consequently, this exert influence over South African journalism practice in the long haul (Wasserman & Rao, 2008). The uptake of neoliberal model of global media development has made it possible for global marketsystem and the notion of socio-cultural and economic sharing of ideas at the greatest of ease.

In this regard, media ethics can be observed as the synthesis of both global and local epistemologies, hence the term 'glocalisation' (Wasserman & Rao, 2008). It has been noted that journalism as a profession, cannot exist outside the influences of globalisation and the uptake of digitisation. This is supported by Borgmann (2012) who notes that, "a globalised media is rooted in finding and developing standards which can be applied to journalism worldwide" (p. 2). Because of the aforesaid, "the epistemology and practice of media ethics must be understood as an incendiary mix of technology and culture that accepts modern forms of communication and resist linear Western notions of ideology" (Wasserman & Rao, 2008, p. 168). 'Glocalisation' of media ethics assume different forms depending on national identities and the pace tends to also vary from one medium to another. Wasserman and Rao (2008) further propose the adoption of global to local theoretical background that is cognisant of the convolution of such ethics in particular cultural context.

Similar studies demonstrate that even though there is no consensus on universally agreed media codes of conduct, there exist a thin line of similarities in the way professional journalists around the world practice their journalistic duties such as the watchdog role among others (Dueze, 2005; Weaver, 1998). Dueze (2005) further asserts what he termed 'twin forces of globalisation and localisation' in which there is a dominant global philosophy of journalism that is inversely understood in indigenous settings and in different media (p. 445). Thus, the uptake of digital journalism has eroded the foregoing frontiers between nations and supplanted them with fragmented arrays of communication and identities (Wasserman & Rao, 2008).

The other side of coin implies that globalisation prompted resistance on the importation of Westernised media codes of ethics through African Renaissance philosophy as articulated by then South African president Thabo Mbeki. Rooted in African culture, the aforesaid philosophy assumed that the indigenous journalists must re-introduce African values in their professional codes of conduct. It is stressed that efforts to localise media ethics must be

perceived as a way of curbing cultural imperialism and also a criteria of safeguarding African indigenous identities. In other words, as Wasserman and Rao (2008) put it across that "it should be understood as the re-articulation of the global in the local context and as local responses intertwined with global influences" (p. 172).

2.5 The perception on the irrelevancy and relevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age

Chari (2019) asserts that there is no technological invention that has motivated a contestable terrain on journalism practice more than the uptake of digitisation thus far. Media scholars generally perceive that journalistic code of conducts are cornerstones without which there is no credibility and trust in the news media. The ongoing debate onthe irrelevancy and relevancy of media ethics in the operations of hybrid mediaorganisations is contested by a large body of literature, which advance a radical approach tomedia ethics arguing that traditional code of conduct that have guided the media for ages have ultimately lost relevance in this digital age were many media organisations are operating as hybrid systems (Ward, 2014, 2019; Ess, 2013; Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj, 2015). Such narratives advocate for a new regime of media ethics that match new realitiesof the digital space. On the other hand, a relatively small body of literature maintains a non- radical approach to media ethics arguing that, the current traditional media ethics are still relevant to guide the operations of hybrid media systems (Chari, 2013, 2017, 2019; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015).

a) The irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the digital age

The majority of literature that document the irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of hybrid media were conducted in Europe, America and other parts of Africa (Arant and Anderson, 2000; Ward, 2014, 2018; 2019; Ess, 2013; Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015). It is argued that traditional codes of conduct that have guided the media for ages have ultimately lost relevance in this digital age were many media organisations are operating as hybrid systems (ibid). Media revolution is taking the nature of its ethics through a course of irreversible and critical change (Cheney, May & Munshi, 2011). The hybrid media space is characterised by professional, potential and amateur journalists who share the means to gather, produce and disseminate news for heterogeneous audiences through User Generated Content Platforms (Sa, 2016; Ess, 2013). Subsequently, it is argued that ethical challenges

relating to various news categories like: political, business, healthand development reports arise (Arant & Anderson, 2000). Such ethical dilemmas include: copyright infringements, the invasion of citizens' privacy, cyber-bullying, anonymity of sources, plagiarism, how to handle online corrections, transparency and manipulation of photos/videos (Ess, 2013). The advent of algorithms and artificial intelligence being used in digital news production are said to have ethical challenges on different levels such as data search and origin, data usage and abuse (Chan-Olmsted, 2019; Danaher, 2020). Ward (2014)argues that there has not yet been an update of traditional media ethics to address such issues. That said, the relevance and applicability of traditional media ethics in the operations of hybrid media systems has been hotly contested (Ward, 2014; 2018. 2019; Ess, 2013; Cheney, May & Munshi, 2011). Such narratives advance a radical approach and call fora new regime of media ethics to replace the current traditional ethics. Ward (2018) adds that traditional media ethics like: impartiality, balance and accuracy are no longer relevant and applicable enough to cover the whole spectrum of ethical challenges confronting hybrid media systems in the digital age.

Scholars who call for a radical approach to media ethics base their argument on the fact that, traditional codes of conduct that have guided the media for ages are worn out and eventually lost relevance in the operations of hybrid media systems (Arant & Anderson, 2000; Ward, 2014, 2018; 2019; Ess, 2013; Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015). They use a metaphorical statement "new bottles for new wine", to denote the fact that there is need for new media ethical frameworks for emerging challenges. Ward (2014) claims that thepast is over and there is need to construct new ethical frameworks that speak to thecontemporary era which is characterised by a digital and global media. Ward (2019) further asserts that there is no going back to the basics, hence the need for radical responses to address radical changes that have occurred in the news media. The scholarly justification forradical media ethics stems from the historical and theoretical reasons. The history of media ethics demonstrates that the ethical revolutions follow revolutionary practice (Ward, 2014; 2019; Ess, 2013). On the other hand, Kasoma (1996) calls for another approach to ethical frameworks rooted in African philosophy and culture termed '*Afriethics*'. Kasoma'sargument is based on the fact that the current traditional ethics are Western constructs, for that reason, they do not match the actualities of African experiences.

Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015) argue that codes of media ethics in many African countries were last revised many years ago and as a result, they fall short in addressing ethical

issues of the 21st century. The Code of Ethics of the Malian Journalist was adopted and last revised in 1991. The National Institute of Journalist of Uganda Code of Ethics adopted and last revised in 1995 (Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, ibid). The Code of Ethics for Zimbabwean Media Practitioners was revised in 2015 (Dube, 2017). The Namibian Code of Ethics and Conduct for media practitioners was revised in 2017 (Namibia Media Trust, 2017). In her analysis of ethical codes of conduct for countries in the Southern Africa, Dube (2017), reveals that the newly revised Namibian Code of Ethics do not explicitly address manipulation of photography, an ethical dilemma that is common in digital media. The Namibian Code merely alludes to photography by describing when, how and under what circumstances photographs should be taken (Dube, 2017). Moreover, it does not indicate the haste with which the proliferating ethical challenges should be handled (Dube, 2017).

b) The relevancy of traditional media ethics in the digital age

A relatively small body of literature that has been conducted to document ethical issues in the media space is informed by normative theoretical frameworks and acknowledge that truthfulness, fairness accuracy and balance of facts are ethical codes of conduct without which there is no professional journalism (Chari, 2009; 2013; 2017, 2019; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015). Such narratives assume a non-radical approach to traditional media ethics and argue that they must not be discarded, but upgraded to match the new changes that have occurred in the media space. Couldry (2013) asserts that digitisation does not make traditional media ethics archaic, hence the need to update them in order to take cognisance of realities of the hybrid media organisations. Chari (2013) concurs that updating traditional ethical codes for hybrid media should not result in neglecting the ethical conducts that directed traditional media for ages. Literature that supports a non-radical approach to ethics for hybrid media use a metaphorical statement: “pouring new wine into old bottles”, which implies updating the current traditional media ethics based on the old frameworks that are rooted in virtue ethics in order speak to new realities of the digital age. Couldry (2013) notes that updating traditional media ethics entails embracing some values that are believed to be relevant and applicable in the operations of hybrid media organisations.

Indisputably, such media are not only producing and disseminating for local audiences, but

indeed the global village which comprises wide and heterogeneous audiences. For Couldry (2013) complementing traditional media ethics with digital media ethics and global media ethics, can be a constructive match for hybrid media organisations. Thus, the concept of media ethics today is not about making traditional, global and digital ethics overshadow each other. There should be non-radical co-existence, one informing the other and compensating limitations of the other (Couldry, 2013). Some scholars (Chari, 2009; Couldry, 2013) maintain that it is a positive possibility that the shortfall of traditional media ethics in terms of their applicability to operations of hybrid media organisations are likely to be addressed by pouring "new wine into old bottles". Thus considering both new and old ethical frameworks to come up with hybrid ethics for hybrid media systems.

Goran and Karamarko (2015) acknowledge that truthfulness, fairness, accuracy and pre-publication verification are core values of professional journalism. However, thesetraditional media ethics are no longer relevant and applicable enough to match the operations of hybrid media space owing to transformative changes that have taken place. This invites some scholarly views that call for the modernisation of traditional media ethics to match the new changes that have occurred within the media ecosystems in the digitalage and not to be downgraded to the back stage.

2.6 Ethical dilemmas encountered by professional journalists working for hybrid media organisations (world-wide, Africa and Namibia)

The uptake of digitisation in journalism as a profession operates as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is perceived as an enabler of participatory journalism, where professional journalists are able to conduct their news-making practices at the greatest of ease. Earlier studies tend to idealise the role of the internet on journalism practice, accentuating it as an enabler of journalism in the digital age (see Lee, 2012; Moyo, 2007, 2009; Berger, 2005; 2009; Mudhai et al, 2009). Such narratives overlook ethical dilemmas associated with digital media technologies in the operation of hybrid media organisations. Kothari (2018) contextually asserts that media operating in different cultural contexts appeal to different ethical norms in order to arrive at the most acceptable moral standards. On the other hand, recent studies posit that the uptake of digitisation in the media space expose professional journalists to an array of unethical conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation (see Mabweazara & Mare, 2021; Namibia Fact Check, 2021; Chari,

2019; Remmert, 2019; Chan-Olmsted, 2019; Wahutu, 2019; Mare, 2018; Mhiripiri & Chikakano, 2017; Dubberley, 2016; Feltoe, 2018; Dube, 2017). Such ethical dilemmas include, but are not limited to: dissemination of information disorder, creation of filter bubbles, handling of online errors and corrections, cyberbullying, hate speech, plagiarism of digital content and invasion of citizen's privacy.

a) **Information disorders**

Information disorders is a collective term, which refers to misinformation, disinformation and malinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). It is not a new phenomenon; the uptake of digitisation brought fundamental changes to the way information is produced, communicated and consumed. Some scholars resort to use the term 'fake news' in place of information disorder. Misinformation is false and misleading content that is shared without the intention to cause harm; disinformation is false, imposter and fabricated information that is shared deliberately to cause harm; malinformation is "when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere" (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 5).

i) Misinformation

In news media, when journalists share exaggerated or inaccurate news content but are not aware of that, it does not imply a bad intention in a sense. However, such information is misleading, thereby termed misinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019). The Namibian-German genocide settlement is a relevant issue that attracted much discussion on social media, in many cases aggravating mixed reactions with misinformation from the local and international hybrid media organisations. *The Namibia Fact Check* (2021) published a monitoring media reporting on the issue of a settlement said to be agreed on between the Namibian and German governments over the genocide perpetrated against the *Ovaherero* and *Nama* ethnic groups by German colonial-era forces during the period 1904-1908. The twist of media reports started off on 28 May 2021 when reference was made that the German foreign minister Heiko Maas, acknowledged that a monetary settlement had been agreed between the two governments. The Namibia Fact Check (2021) reports that since then, no official response had been issued by the Namibian government to the statement of the German foreign minister.

One of the aspects in all the media reports that has not been passably elucidated, is the extent of the involvement of the affected communities in the negotiations between the two governments. Some media reports have stated that affected communities were well represented by recognised traditional leaders and entities at the negotiation table, while other reporting has indicated that relevant traditional authorities and affected communities had consistently been side-lined. Both print and online editions of the *New Era* (2021)report at least seven (7) *Ovaherero* traditional leaders recognised by the Namibian government have been part of the negotiations. Correspondingly, *The Namibian* (2021)online edition reports that "traditional chiefs from the Maharero, Kambazembi, Gam and Zeraeua royal houses" – all of them recognised Ovaherero traditional authorities – had been"part of the negotiations delegation for Namibia" (Petersen, Ngatjiheue & Nakashole, 2021).

On the other hand, Germany's largest online news outlet, *Der Spiegel* (17 May 2021), reports that some *Ovaherero* and *Nama* traditional leaders were opposed to the deal being struck between the two governments. Conversely, the same news outlet on 28 May 2021 reports that the *Ovaherero* and *Nama* groups were on the whole in agreement with the settlement because they had been part of the decision-making processes. In contrast, *The Washington Post* reports that Alfredo Hengari, spokesman for Namibian President Hage Geingob, said

> *"The announcement out of Berlin was the result of a ninth round of negotiations that began in 2015 over how Germany would move forward in making amends to victims' descendants and repairing relations between the two countries. The process has drawn widespread criticism among victims' descendants, who say they have been left out."* (Beck, Bearak & Immanuel, 2021).

This statement clearly suggests that affected communities were not represented at the negotiation table, implying that the Namibian government negotiators did not consult the traditional authorities of affected communities.

The *Namibia Fact Check* (1 July 2021) argues that much of the reporting failed to make it clear who was at the table and why and who was not and why, in order to create a coherentpicture

of the relevant players for interested audiences. Furthermore, voices from these traditional authorities that allegedly agreed to the deal have not been provided prominent space by the media to state their sides. Such different reports that provide differing stance for the same story come across as untidy journalism which is misleading, thereby elicit lack of trust within hybrid media organisations (Namibia Fact Check, 2021). Chari (2019) rightly asserts that the "desire to serve it hot" becomes problematic when it gets into the way of verification because it leads to misinformation.

ii) Disinformation

In news media, when journalists disseminate news that they are aware of being exaggerated or fabricated reveals a willful attitude to misleading audiences. This is termed disinformation because such intentional behaviour is meant to purposely mislead and confuse audiences (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019). What is disturbing than the instances of misinforming is when hybrid media organisations actively engage in spreading disinformation and conspiracy theories especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the case between March and April 2021 with Windhoek-based radio station, *Eagle FM*. The Namibia Fact Check (2021) reported that on 16 March 2021, *Eagle FM* posted a message on its Twitter page with more than twenty-six thousand (26 000) followers which reads:

> *"COVID-19 is a 'plandemic', not a pandemic, the hidden truth is here. Join us tonight on COVID-19 Business Impact Show as we get you into the depth of it".*

The night of 16 March 2021, the show titled '*COVID-19 business impact with Frans'*, the long debunked COVID-19 related conspiracy theory of the "*plandemic*" was rehashed in great depth by the host, Frans, and his guest (*The Namibia Fact Check*, 2021). Again on 23 March 2021, the same programme aired COVID-19 vaccine falsehoods in a show titled "*the vaccine is an experiment, make a wise choice*". Namibia Fact Check sent questions related to the broadcast of these conspiracy theories and disinformation to *Eagle FM* station management. After repeated follow ups for a response from the station, the *Eagle FM* management acknowledged receipt of the questions indicating that a response would be provided. However, no response was received from *Eagle FM* by end of April 2021(*Namibia Fact Check*, 2021). Furthermore, what is disturbing to note is that *Eagle FM* did not take responsibility to

retract the Twitter post on COVID-19 '*plandemic*' as of July 2021. These examples serve to illustrate how some hybrid media organisations are disseminating and amplifying disinformation that first circulated on social media networks despite of it having been long debunked by professional fact-check organisations such as the *Namibia Factcheck*.

Furthermore, the Zimbabwe's *H-Metro* tabloid is another good example of hybrid media organisation that is no stranger in disseminating disinformation. This was the case of a renowned Zimbabwean professional model by the name Tafadzwa Mushunje who wasfalsely accused of serious child abuse (Feltoe, 2018). In February 2016, a social media site published a highly damaging article about Mushunje alleging that the she was HIV positive and had injected her HIV tainted blood into her boyfriend's son (Feltoe, 2018). She was also alleged to have made the child drink her urine and to have physically abused the child. *The Herald* and *H-Metro* (the subsidiaries of Zimpapers) covered this story both on their print and online editions of 26 February 2016, which resulted to the spilling over of the samestory to other international online sites. Mushunje filed a defamation lawsuit against Zimpapers based upon their reporting and misleading headlines, which were regarded as an acts of disinformation (*New Zimbabwe*, 2016). After thorough legal proceedings, it emerged that the media reports by *H-Metro* and *The Herald* were "unbalanced, inaccurate and failed to make it clear that there were merely allegations against the plaintiff instead of presentingthem as facts" (Feltoe, 2018, p. 1). These scenarios are just the tip of the iceberg, when it comes to hybrid media organisations amplifying disinformation owing to their interdependence on unverified information from social networks (U-G-C) as news sources (Newman & Fletcher, 2017).

iii) Malinformation

Malinformation is disseminating news that is based on reality but used to injure reputation and violets privacy (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). This was the case in February 2016 when National Petroleum Corporation of Namibia (NAMCOR) Managing Director, Immanuel Mulunga's leaked sex tape video scandal went viral on social media. On 17 February 2016, *The Villager* reported that NAMOR issued a press statement regarding the circulating news on social media involving its Managing Director Immanuel Mulunga's marital affairs. The press statement reads:

"NAMCOR has learned of the unfortunate publication of videos and photos surrounding the private life of the Managing Director Mr. Immanuel Mulunga on the social media. NAMCOR regards this as a private and sensitive matter, and trusts that the media will respect the privacy of Mr. Mulunga. The NAMCOR Board of Directors carries its fiduciary duties with the highest levels of transparency and integrity. Against this background, the Board will deliberate on the possible impact this could potentially have on the company brand". The Villager (17 February 2016).

On 19 February 2016, *The Namibian* picked the alleged scandal on social media and covered it with negative tone on its Facebook page heading *"NAMCOR board to discuss Mulunga's marital status….Do you think your personal problems affect your performance at work?"* as a bold fact rather than as an allegation. This attracted heavy criticism from the audiences' comment section. The alleged sex scandal is based on reality, however the media used it to violate Mulunga's privacy and injure his reputation as a public figure without public interest justification. This is supported by Mhiripiri and Chikakano (2017) who assert that it is unethical for the media to contradict ethical requirement such as reporting on sensitive nature leading to disclosure of a person's privacy in the name of public interest.

b) Data search and origin and creation of filter bubbles

The media industry is among creative sectors world-wide that has adopted artificial intelligence (AI) into its production process (Chan-Olmsted, 2019). Having this said, AI is changing the practice of journalism in terms of newsgathering; content processing; and content distribution. Mabweazara and Mare (2021) allude to the notion that the uptake of algorithms, robots and chatbots used in professional news production operate as double edged sword in that: Firstly, it enables professional journalists to practice participatory journalism at the greatest of ease through social media analytics such as YouTube analytics and Facebook Insights among others. On the other hand, it has spawned journalistic ethical challenges at the level of data search and origin, data usage and abuse and creations of filter bubbles (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021). If programmed, artificial intelligence is capable of

performing journalistic tasks and manipulate audiences' opinions. Algorithms are automated to track and source users' wants on digital media based on their location and past behaviours, thereby creating filter bubbles (Chan-Olmsted, 2019). International media organisations such as the*Associated Press* was able to expand the number of companies it reported on from only 300 to 3, 700 in 2016 using AI (Peiser, 2019). However, some scholars partially blame the nature of AI as responsible for the proliferation of information disorder in the digital age (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019; Wahutu, 2019; Mabweazara, 2011). The non-human nature of artificial intelligence is said to pose negative ethical implications in the field of journalism, which is regarded as the custodian of truth and verified facts. One such is that AI systems "have influenced user-participation practices in ways that demonstrate how the growing intersection between human and technological actors is complicating media audience interactions" (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021, p. 10).

To elaborate more on the aforesaid, is the example of social humanoid robot, Sophia invented and activated in February 2016 by Hanson Robotics Company based in Hong Kong. The robot becomes famous in the digital space when it was granted Saudi Arabian citizenshipin 2020, becoming the first robot to have a nationality (Danaher, 2020). As the uptake of AI continue to gain momentum in the global media industry, "numerous newspapers andTelevision (TV) channels around the world invited the robot to visit their studios and TV shows, such as Good Morning Britain, CBS 60 min and Jimmy Fallon's Tonight Show (Parviainen & Coeckelbergh, 2020, p. 1). This attracted controversy with regards to media ethical concerns by some scholars (see Parviainen & Coeckelbergh, 2020; Pagallo, 2018; Danaher, 2020). Parviainen and Coeckelbergh (2020) further argue that "the definition of AI in the context of robots has been considered problematic because there are many different interpretations of intelligence, and human intelligence itself is difficult to define" (p. 2). There has been a risen debate about ethical status of humanoid robots and questionsfrequently asked include: whether and how much AI should be taking independent decisionsabout moral equivalence involving ethical choices which have conventionally been the domain of humans? Should people allow robots to become partners with humans in the same way they allow fellow beings to become partners? Would they be able to bear responsibility of their actions in cases of ethical transgressions? (Pagallo, 2018; Danaher, 2020; Bossman, 2016). Narratives that document criticism against humanoid robots argue that robotic objects are different from

biological beings, therefore, perceiving them as "alive" when it comes to performance is misleading than informative (Pagallo, 2018; Danaher, 2020). They further argue that Sophia the robot and all other functional humanoid robots lack autonomy which is a distinctive of biological lifeform. Danaher (2020) corroborates that even though humanoids are "entities that look and act like human beings, they have none of the inner phenomenal conscious experiences of human beings" (p. 2029).

Bossman (2016) echoes the same sentiments as she asserts that algorithms and robots can be gullible in ways that humans would not be and this is what she terms 'artificial stupidity'. This is because AI comes from learning whereby it goes through training phase in which they "learn" to detect the right patterns and act according to their input (Bossman, 2016). Once a system is fully trained, it passes through test phase, where it is hit with more examples and we see how it performs. For instance, random dot patterns can enable a robot to "see" things that are not there because the training phase cannot cover all possible examples that a system may deal with in the real world (Bossman, 2016). Pagallo (2018) adds that since AI system cannot distinguish whether the input it receives is accurate or inaccurate, this can lead to issues around authenticity.

Though artificial intelligence is capable of speed and capacity of news production that is far beyond that of journalists and editors, it is not immune to inaccuracy and bias (Wahutu, 2019). World's social media company, Google and its parent company Alphabet are one of the leaders when it comes to AI, as seen in Google's Photos service, where AI is used to identify objects, people and scenes. However, AI can be biased or inaccurate, such as when a camera misses a mark on racial sensitivity (Angwin, Larson, Mattu & Kirchner, 2016). This explains why AI systems pose serious ethical dilemma in news production because they are programmed by humans who are judgmental and biased (Angwin et al, 2016). With this said, hybrid media organisations by their very nature of having elements of traditional and digital media platforms have not been immune from the mismatch between traditional and digital journalism ethics (Ward 2014, 2018). This implies that the cornerstones of journalism are in danger of losing their relevance in the digital age if unethical practices of information disorder are not nipped in the bud. This point to the notion why there has been a clarion call by some media scholars (Ward, 2018, 2019; Ess, 2013; Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015; Sa, 2016) in

terms of rethinking and reformulating media ethics to face the ethical dilemmas of the “greased information’s" production and dissemination in the digital space.

c) Manipulation of photography and videos

There are new ethical issues raised by the rise of image technology, which include both photographs and video (Dube, 2017). Professional journalists have new and easy ways to capture and transmit images, such as cell phones linked to the internet via wireless technology. They have new technologies for altering and manipulating images too. Muthoni (2017) corroborates that photojournalists often justify how it is permitted to change the ‘technical’ aspects of a picture such as slightly altering the tone or colour of a photo, hence they draw the line at any further changes. However, the line between a technical change and a change of meaning is not always clear. An image maker can enhance the colours of a photo until it is quite unlike the original picture of the object or the event (Dube, 2017). Changing the meaning or content of the image so as to mislead audiences is considered unethical.

The African Media Barometer (2018) suggests that ethical transgressions committed by professional journalists on minorities and other cultural groups are on the increase in Namibia. It reveals that both digital and print media are falling short in terms of depicting the minorities and other cultural groups more accurately. The report blames certain media organisations for portraying the San community in a primitive form through manipulated images and allude that this is archaeologically amiss. Furthermore, bias and outright racism tone in reportage the Chinese people and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) people have been observed with concern as indicated in the same report (ibid). The African Media Barometer (2018) reveals that, there have been is a lot of mis-gendering and de-gendering of LGBTI issues in the Namibian digital media space whereby photographs of transgender people are used before their transition to present them as the sex that they no longer identify as (ibid). It is argued that these ethical dilemmas go to the extent of using incorrect or sensitive terminologies such as "sodomy" when describing LGBT relationships (African Media Barometer, 2018). Thus, hybrid media organisations are blamed for not observing ethical conductstowards the marginalised people, instead they are inciting more marginalisation of marginalised groups (Dube, 2017).

A study by Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015) demonstrate that various Media Codes of

Ethics in Africa were last updated many years ago and for that reason, they do not comprehensively address the new realities of digitisation that have occurred in the media space. Such examples include and are not limited to: the Code of Ethics of the Malian Journalist, which was adopted and last revised in 1991; the National Institute of Journalist of Uganda Code of Ethics adopted and last revised in 1995; the Code of Ethics forZimbabwean Media Practitioners was revised in 2015 (Dube, 2017); and the Namibian Code of Ethics and Conduct was revised in 2017 (Namibia Media Trust, 2017). In her analysis of ethical codes of conduct for countries in the Southern Africa, Dube (2017) reveals that the newly revised Zimbabwean and Namibian codes do not explicitly address manipulation of photography, which is very common in the digital news. Both codes merely allude to photography by describing when, how and under what circumstances photographs should be taken (Dube, 2017). The Namibian code does not indicate the haste with which the proliferating ethical challenges should be handled. The Zimbabwean code defines the media practitioner,"as a reporter, editor, radio and television producer/presenter employed by a media organisation, a freelancer reporter or columnist who is a stringer" (Dube, 2017, p. 54). A photojournalist and a media videographer are not mentioned in the code's definition of a media practitioner. Dube (2017) further notes that including a photojournalist and a media videographer could have broadly defined a media practitioner and ensure that they are also included in the code's specifications.

d) Handling of online errors and corrections

A common ethical dilemma facing hybrid media is on how to handle online corrections owing to the speed of internet and the explosion of information disorder in the digital space(Chari, 2019). The anxiety of losing a story within the hybrid media operations tends to exertpressure that journalists find it challenging to verify facts in a systematic manner (African Media Barometer, 2018). Reports and images circulate the globe with amazing speed via Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, cell phones, and email. Such speed puts pressure on hybrid newsrooms to publish stories before they are adequately checked and verified as to the source of the story and the reliability of the alleged facts (Chari, 2019; African Media Barometer, 2018). This has contributed towards the rise of what Moyo, Mare and Mabweazara (2021) call "disinformation society where misleading and false information and narratives are deliberately weaponised for political, cultural and economic gain" (p. 1). Sometimes, the impact of publishing unverified reports could induce panic and prompt

military action. Increasingly, hybrid media organisations often stream 'live' about sports games, news events and breaking stories. Inevitably, when journalists work at the immediacy of internet, factual errors are made. The ethical challenge is to articulate guidelines for dealing with corrections in an online world that are consistent with theprinciples of accuracy and pre-publication verification.

On 14 October 2018, a bogus Twitter account in the name of the Nigerian opposition leader Atiku Abubakar, posted a message expressing gratitude to the Association of Nigerian Gay Men (ANGAM) for its support ahead of oncoming presidential elections (Lime, 2018). Subsequently, the story was published again by two Nigerian blogs. Then twelve days later, two prominent Nigerian newspapers, *The Nation* and the *Vanguard* both picked the user generated content (UGC) and published the same story on their digital platforms and print editions with a related tone (Lime, 2018). They reported that an LGBT organisation called Diverse was also supporting Mr Abubakar for president. After careful investigations by the *BBC Africa Reality Check* of 12 November 2018*,* it emerged that the reports were amiss because the Twitter account, which was the source of the original story is not an official account for Abubakar (Lime, 2018). His real account was verified with a blue tick by Twitter. There was no proof that the LGBT rights organisation cited in the early tweet, or the subsequent blogposts and newspaper articles exist (Lime, 2018). Furthermore, the *BBC* Africa Reality Check further claims that it is well documented under the current Nigerian laws that the operations of LGBT organisations are prohibited in that country (Lime, 2018). This spread of disinformation orchestrated by unethical journalism was blamed for sewing confusing among the Nigerian voters.

With public trust in the media in decline, the unprecedented information disorder by news media is said to excavate distrust in hybrid media organisations (Chari, 2019; *Namibia Fact Check*, 29 April 2021). On 27 April 2021, the online news portal *Windhoek Observer* reported that Namibian health minister Kalumbi Shangula was vaccinated against COVID-19 using the AstraZeneca vaccine (Namibia Fact Check, 2021). At the same time, the daily *Namibian Sun* (the subsidiary of NMH) reported on Twitter that Shangula had taken the Sinopharm vaccine. This contributed to confusing and complicating the communication around the COVID-19 vaccines. After thorough investigations by the *Namibia Fact Check*, it emerged

that Shangula took the AstraZeneca vaccine. This scenario resonates with what has been alluded to by the African Media Barometer (2018) that some journalists do not take the time to check facts in order to produce accurate news stories, hence compromise their integrity of accurate reporting. However, the *Namibian Sun* neither retracted its post on Twitter, nor apologised for misinforming the Namibian audiences and the global village at large (*Namibia Fact Check*, 29 April 2021). Such unethical journalism practice shows that some hybrid media organisations are reluctant to take responsibility for their errors of commission or omission. They tend to think, erroneously, that by apologising, they will erode their standing in the eyes of the public" (Media Council of Tanzania, 2019, p. 11). Conversely, an apology is perceived as a sign of showing remorse thereby, earns the media organisation enormous respect from the public. Media Council of Tanzania (Media Council of Tanzania, 2019) adds thatin sensitive cases, a prompt apology may even exempt a media organisation from legal action.

A report by the African Media Barometer (2018) reveals that in Namibia, the Office of the Media Ombudsman often receives complaints to do with inaccurate reporting such as name spelling errors, reporting on figures and terminologies (pp. 48-49). This is substantiated by a scenario that transpired on 16 March 2021, when Namibia received a donation of 100,000 Sinopharm vaccine doses from the Chinese government (*Namibia Fact Check*, 2021). Despite health authorities making it clear at the occasion of the arrival of the Sinopharm vaccine cargo in Namibia on 16 March, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) news on Twitter misinformed the audiences by reporting that Namibia was receiving the '*Sinovac*' vaccine (*Namibia Fact Check*, 2021). This spelling error had still not been corrected by end of April 2021 (*Namibia Fact Check*, 2021).

Similarly, *The Namibian* of 14 April 2018 published a story titled "Namibian scoop Harvard best student award". It was reported that, a 25-year-old woman Monique Krohne, received Harvard Medical School Award for being one of the best 1st year students for 2017/18. The same article reported that Krohne graduated with a Bachelor (Hon) and Masters in Logistics and Supply Management from Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). Many audiences raised their eyebrows on this articles and it attracted so many questions on *The Namibian* social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter). Thorough investigations were

conducted and on 30 April 2018, *The Namibian* published another online titled "Student accused of faking qualifications". It emerged that Krohne was neither at once admitted at Harvard University nor hold such qualifications she claims to have. It was also established that a 'well-placed' source from NUST confirmed that Krohne did not graduate from that institution, instead she was expelled in 2015 over allegations of academic dishonesty. This was a follow up story to clarify the 1st article of 14 April 2018. The ethical challenge of this hybrid media operation is that, *The Namibian* took a short-cut to publicise an unverified academic story. After finding out that all was incorrect, they resorted to clarify the beef with another news headline, they did not publicly withdraw the article and apologise for misinforming not only the Namibians, but the global audiences on the digital space. Undeniably, there is a possibility of spill over tendency where the article could have been used as reference by other publications to publicise their stories. *The Namibian* was heavily criticised on their social platforms by audiences on how it reported the fake qualification saga from the initial story to the follow-up (Links, 2019). Given such a scenario, it has been argued that the current traditional media ethics are no longer relevant and applicable enough to guide the immediate form of journalism, which is found in the operations of hybrid media systems (Ward, 2014, 2019).

e) Cyber-bullying and hate speech

Cheney, May and Munshi (2011) note that media revolution is taking the nature of its ethics through a course of irreversible and critical change. The operations of hybrid media system are characterised by professional, potential and amateur journalists who share the means to gather, produce and disseminate news for heterogeneous audiences through usergenerated content platforms (UGCP). In doing so, ethical challenges relating to various newscategories such as political, business, health and development reports arise. Cyber-bullying and hate speech are oft-cited as ethical dilemmas associated with the use of digital media platforms (Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021). The former occurs when the offender incite annoyance or any other adverse emotions, often by posting provocative messages online (Phillips, 2016). Similarly, the latter refers any kind of communication, be it verbal or written that uses derogatory language with reference to a person's or group's affiliation, gender, race, ethnicity, social class and so forth (Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021). Mabweazara and Mare (2021) observe that hybrid newsrooms are finding it difficult to gatekeeping thecontent and

adapt to “changes spawned by readers’ comments on their news websites and social media platforms, in which strangers contribute and respond directly to something journalists alone once controlled” (p. 18). Chari (2019) and Ess (2013) assert that cyberbullying and hate speech are unethical practices because they contravene core values of journalism as a profession. Mabweazara and Mare (2021) further note that “lack of clear gatekeeping strategies has opened floodgates of abuse, hate speech and extremist views that pose serious threats to the core values and normative ideals of journalism” (p. 18). This is backed by Chari (2019) who notes that the gate keeping role of news editors has been supplanted by the uptake of new digital media technologies, resulting in a new twist of ethical transgressions.

f) Copyright infringements and plagiarism of digital content

The uptake of digital journalism has seen journalists around the world relying on social media content in their news-making practices. With this said, they tend to operate at the “intersection of existing copyright practice and emergent communication practices” (Aufderheide, 2014, p. 74). Artificial intelligence systems involve machine learning from human-programmed work, which comprises articles, images, music and so forth that are protected by intellectual property rights. The same with content posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, it requires consent of the holder. A copyright holder is the person, organisation or group who owns the exclusive rights of copyright in a work. It is argued that “embedding content without permission is not a copyright infringement, however, embedding content that has been posted without the consent ofthe holder is a copyright infringement” (Dubberley, 2016, p. 22). Even though social media companies offer guidelines (through fair use policy) on how to use their services, not all journalists follow them (Aufderheide, 2014). This is supported by Ess (2013) who notes that journalists are increasingly accustomed to using unlicensed quotations from social media and defy copyright laws where copyrighted material is routinely used in news-making practices without owner’s permission or payment of royalties. Aufderheide (2014) further asserts that in the process of recording and disseminating a video or a song of a popular musician that has been copyrighted by citizens on social media platforms, journalists can commit ethical transgressions by capturing such content.

Some incidents of plagiarism of digital content were reported *by The Washington Post* (16 May 2014) where the then news editor at *Cable News Network* (*CNN*) who was fired in May

2014 for repeated plagiarism offenses (Wemple, 2014). This happened after an internal investigation at the *CNN* found that Marie-Louise Gumuchian (then news editor who covered international news) published approximately fifty (50) stories containing plagiarisedwork. It was established that most of the plagiarised content came from *Reuters* (Wemple, 2014).

Another report by *The Washington Post* (2021) reveals that in 2020, *Voice of America (VOA)* top editorial team observed something strange in the radio scripts that a Paris-based journalist was submitting to editors at the international broadcast service (Farhi, 2021). After thorough investigations, it emerged that some sentences, phrases and multiple paragraphs in reporter's stories matched those published by other news organisations word for word. The *VOA* latter removed majority of Pinault's archived reports dated since May 2019 from its website. These are just the tip of the iceberg, there are many incidents of such and what is disturbing to note is that a journalist who commit this transgression is risking not only his/her own reputation, but the reputation of the media organisation at large.

g) Invasion of citizens' privacy and defamation

Citizen's privacy is the individual's control over her/his own privacy spheres in the real world, social interaction and personal integrity and protection (Kenyon, 2016). In many cases, invasion of citizen's privacy leads to defamation, which is better understood as the action of injuring someone's reputation by oral or written means (Kenyon, 2016). *South Africa Broadcasting Corporation* (SABC), is another example of a hybrid media organisation that has not been spared by such ethical dilemma in the digital space. On 27-28 October 2018 the *SABC* extensively covered (on its all platforms) an alleged sexual scandal of then former South African finance minister, Malusi Gigaba who was accused of sending a sexual video showing his nudity to a 16-year-old learner who resides in Gauteng province of South Africa. Gigaba's lawyer responded on SABC and it emerged that the sexual video was intended for Gigaba's wife and not the former, as alleged (*SABC*, 28 October 2018). Some suspicious citizen journalists hacked the minister's sexual video on his phone sometime in 2016 with the intention to blackmail him (regarding his decisions as the finance minister that time) and discredit his political career. The leaked video went viral on social media and consequently, the *SABC* covered the story first on its digital platforms and latter, mainstream channel. The ethical dilemma of such a scenario is based on illegalities as a result of transgression

committed by the act of hacking into Gigaba's private communication with his wife (ibid). Although the *SABC* did not play the video on any one of its platform, their reports were based on anonymous citizen- supplied video which was obtained illegally from the then minister's phone. The reports from *SABC* digital platforms attracted negative reactions in the form of cyber-bullying and hate speech against Gigaba. The above scenario point towhat has been alluded to by Chari (2009) that hybrid media organisations, "are using the advantage of internet to operate outside the jurisdiction of the law to wage war against their adversaries" (p. 70).

An ethical question is, how did the *SABC* identify such anonymous citizen-supplied video and report on it before the scandal was cleared through legal processes, one may ask? It is based on reality, but used to injure reputation by violating a person's privacy without public interest justification (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). This is supported by Mhiripiri and Chikakano (2017) who note that it is unethical for the media to contradict ethical requirement such as reporting on sensitive nature leading to disclosure of a person's privacyin the name of public interest. In cases were political figures are involved, "information might interest the public, but do not carry convincing justification of public interest" (Mhiripiri & Chikakano, 2017, p. 8). Kasoma (1996) cited in Chari (2009) asserts that politicians deserve impartial and justice plays like any other citizen from the media. Thus,the media is not expected to embarrass politicians (based on rumours) on private issues of sensitive nature when they are not proven guilty by the court of law (Chari, 2009).

2.7 Media accountability frameworks and policies informing the operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia and Africa in general

Scholars such as (see Chari, 2019; Zlatev, 2011; Links, 2020; Bannikov & Sokolova; 2018; Posetti & Bonchiva, 2020) posit that it is a positive possibility that operations of hybrid media organisations can be addressed by the following policies and frameworks: self-regulatory mechanisms; in-house journalistic training; research and a constant revision of media fair use policies.

a) Revision of media codes of ethics

Media ethics, most of which are not new to professional journalists, must be open to amendments by relevant authorities in order to keep pace with digital transformation that has occurred in the journalism sector as a result of digitisation (Media Council of Tanzania, 2019). Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015) argue that codes of media ethics in many African countries were last revised many years ago and as a result, they fall short in addressing ethical dilemmas of the 21st century. The Namibian Code of Ethics and Conduct for media practitioners was revised in 2017 (Namibia Media Trust, 2017). However, the newly revised Namibian code does not explicitly address manipulation of photography, an ethical dilemma that is common in digital photojournalism. It merely alludes to photography by describing when, how and under what circumstances photographs should be taken (Namibia Media Trust, 2017). Moreover, it does not indicate the haste with which the proliferating ethical challenges should be handled (Namibia Media Trust, 2017). A report by Media Council of Tanzania (2019) suggest that "the media cannot assume the role of the society's watchdog if it does not have in place its own watchdog that will ensure journalists adhere to their professional ethics before they point an accusing finger at others" (p. 2). Therefore, the importance of constant revision of media code of ethics lies in the fact that it goes a long way to realise that unethical journalism is nipped in the bud.

In an effort to combat the spread of disinformation amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Namibian government criminalised the spread of COVID-19 disinformation under the amended state of emergency regulations, dated 17 April 2020 (Menges, 2020). Part of the COVID-19 regulation (15) states that:

> *"A person commits an offence, if that person publishes, through any form of media, including social media any statement that is intended to deceive any other person about or in connection with COVID-19"*

At the time of writing this thesis, there is no documented literature that gives reference to anyone being arrested or charged with contravening the above regulation despite ample evidence of some hybrid media organisations breaching this regulation. One thing that is confusing is whether this regulation is a toothless bulldog or not, as it remains difficult to assess its application since its promulgation in April 2020.

b) Constant revision of social media fair use policies

Posetti and Bontcheva (2020) suggest that social media companies (through their fair use policies) have a role to play too in as far as informing frameworks that specifically deal with media ethics for hybrid media operations. Fair use policy (also referred to acceptable use policy), is a set of rules applied by the owner of a network, website or internet service provider that restrict the ways in which the network, website or system may be used. Thus, fair use policies are the core of internet self-regulation, as they define the standards that areexpected of the users in their day-to-day internet browsing practices. Recently, WhatsApp Company revised its fair use policy on forwarding viral messages on its encrypted messagingapplication (Martin, 2020). It limits messages that have been forwarded many times in a bid to curtail the spread of information disorder. Although this is an attempt to delay the spreadof information disorder going viral on WhatsApp, it does not absolutely prevent the spread of such content. Posetti and Bontcheva (2020) further propose that social media companies can also plough back to the industry by offering financial support to independent fact- checking media organisations that are dedicated to investigate and debunk unethical reporting that contribute to the proliferation of information disorder. To this end, this is likely to motivate ethical journalism standards, thereby restore trust in hybrid news media.

c) Self-regulatory mechanisms

Professional journalists have a role to play in mitigating ethical dilemmas confronting operations of hybrid media organisations in digital age. They can do so by self- regulating themselves through internal media accountability systems rooted in normative theories of the media (Zlatev, 2011). Self –regulation is important for any media organisation because it implies the power to generate change of behaviour, attitude and policy (Zlavtev, 2011). In this digital age, a lot of changes have occurred in terms of news gathering, dissemination and consumption, the challenge of hybrid media organisations is to prove their credibility and reliability to the public in a bid to regain trust.

d) In- house journalistic training

Hybrid media organisations must offer educational programs designed to promote information digital verification and fact checking skills to journalists (Posetti and Bontcheva, 2020). This, they can achieve through focusing on content verification tools and web content indicators meant to empower journalists and news editors not to fall prey to information disorder since they tend to rely on citizen supplied content (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020). The use of internal memos can also serve as educational tools meant to constantly remind journaliststo observe their ethical standards coupled with regular training on journalistic standards (Chari, 2019). It is further noted that an update of traditional media ethics must not be the end, it must be complemented with regular training of journalists towards ethical considerations when operating within hybrid system. This could go a long way to remind them the significance of recognising media ethics, which in turn assist to navigate ethical dilemmas prompted by the evolution of digital space (Chari, 2019).

e) Research

Research plays a significant role in informing suitable frameworks to address operations of hybrid media organisations (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020). Media researchers and relevant stakeholders are encouraged to combine their efforts and re-position their research schemata to concentrate more on media ethics. They can do so by embarking on participatory action research projects that respond to critical incidents connected to ethical transgressions committed by journalists working for hybrid media organisations (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020). Thisis backed by Links (2020) who notes that there is need to conduct comprehensive (from the academia) studies as to come up with suitable frameworks that inform operations of digital journalism, which is no stranger to information disorder especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period. To this end, they can come up with informed recommendations aimed at motivating policy makers and other relevant authorities to formulate apposite frameworks that specifically address operations of hybrid media organisations. In the long haul, it is believed that this can serve as a panacea to remedy unprecedented information disorder exacerbated by over-reliance on social media platforms for news-making practices within hybrid media operations (Links, 2021; Posetti & Boncheva, 2020).

f) Fact-checking and debunking information disorder

In the context of information disorder, Mantzarlis (2018) defines fact checking as the process of determining the truthfulness and accuracy of officially published informationsuch as news reports and political statements. Mantzarlis further asserts that fact-checking comprises three (3) stages. The first one entails "finding fact-checkable claims by scouring through legislative records, media outlets and social media" (p. 84). It includes identifying major public claims that can be fact-checked and ought to be fact-checked. The second stage requires fact checking organisations to establish facts by observing tangible evidence with regards to the claim being investigated. The last stage involves correcting the record byassessing the claim in view of the evidence, on a scale of truthfulness. Debunking is a subsection of fact-checking that necessitates a specific set of skills that are in line with verification (Mantzarlis, 2018). Wardle (2017), suggests that since newsrooms are frequentlycounting on social media for content, scientific verification skills and the ability to detect networks of fictitious news websites are becoming more imperative than ever before. In thesame vein, Bannikov and Sokolova (2018) theorise fact checking as the verification process and efforts to ensure accuracy of contents, which is part of journalism news-making practices. Links (2020) corroborates that media organisations in Africa and Namibia in particular need to develop "in-house fact checking and debunking capacities, moving beyond reporting of events and statements, and abandoning a half-in approach to online and social media presence and engagement" (pp. 2-3). Theorising of fact-checking by Bannikov and Sokolova (2018) offers additional opportunity for journalists working for hybrid media organisations to keep track when they act as the vanguard of change inadvocating anti- information disorders in the digital age.

On a contrast note, Newman and Fletcher (2017) opine that fact checking and debunking of information disorder should be considered as an independent genre on its own, and not part of journalism. This argument stems from the fact that hybrid media organisations are partially blamed for amplifying information disorder owing to their interdependence on unverified information from social networks (U-G-C) as news sources (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). The following metaphorical sentiments by then former South African President, F. W. DeKlerk explain why an independent genre of fact-checking and debunking that is not part of journalism and hybrid media organisations is preferred.

"Society undoubtedly requires the media to play a dynamic watchdog role by sniffing

out corruption and other wrong doings by those in power. Nevertheless, anyone who has ever kept a large watchdog will be aware of the downside. Large dogs sometimes bay at the moon and disturb the neighborhood. They knock over dustbins and scatter garbage over the front lawn. They bound into the house with muddy paws and upset delicate and valuable crockery. They can be obsessed by the scent of sex. From time to time, they invade the privacy of the neighbour's garden and regrettably, they have been known to bite innocent passerby". F. W. DeKlerk (Feb, 1994)

Deklerk's sentiments point to the notion that even though the media is expected to perform its watchdog role against wrongdoings in society, they are not spared from ethical transgressions which see them diverting from journalistic standards. The consequences of such behaviours results in disseminating information disorder in the name of watchdog role.

On the other hand, Fader (2012) adds a twist to the notion of independent fact checking organisations. She argues that independent fact-checkers are not immune to bias and criticism. There seem to exist a concern about the business model of fact checking organisations, which implies a lot in terms of their funding or sponsorship. Those whoconcur with Fader's narratives corroborate that wherever sponsorship is involved, one cannot bite the hand that feeds (Akinfemisoye, 2018; Trifonova, 2018). This is likely tocreate more harm than good because there is a tendency that their investigations can be biased towards their sponsors. In view of this, Fader (2012) advances a multi-million dollar question, which seeks answers as to who checks the fact-checkers.

2.8 Research gap

Although a relatively large body of literature on ethical issues confronting operations of hybrid media organisations documented so far have been largely conducted in Europe, America, Asia and some parts of Africa (see Arant & Anderson, 2000; Chari, 2009, 2013, 2019; Ward, 2014, 2018; Ess, 2013; Mare, 2018; Mabweazara & Mare, 2021)), yet nothing has been written about this scholarly issue in Namibia. Earlier studies tend to idealise the role of the internet on journalism practice, accentuating it as an enabler of journalism in the digital age (see Lee, 2012; Moyo, 2007, 2009; Berger, 2005; 2009; Mudhai et al, 2009). Such narratives overlook ethical dilemmas associated with digital media technologies in the operation of

hybrid media organisations. However, recent studies posit that the uptake of digitisation in the media space expose professional journalists to an array of unethical conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation (seeMabweazara & Mare, 2021; *Namibia Fact Check*, 2021; Chari, 2019; Remmert, 2019; Chan-Olmsted, 2019; Wahutu, 2019; Mare, 2018; Mhiripiri & Chikakano, 2017; Dubberley, 2016; Feltoe, 2018; Dube, 2017).. In light of this observation, some scholars recommended that there is need to study how journalists working for hybrid media organisations negotiate the ethical dilemmas associated with the digital age (Ward, 2018; 2019; Ess, 2013).

There are no empirical studies in Namibia even broadly in Africa on how professional journalists negotiate ethical issues confronting the operations of hybrid media organisations. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is one of the firststudies to interrogate this academic lacuna in Namibia. In doing so, this particular study fills the research gap, thereby making a significant contribution to existing body of knowledge in many ways. First, it highlights that traditional and digital media ethics must be seen as one and not separate because the concept of hybrid media does not necessarily replace the mainstream media with the digital media, but there is interdependence. Second, it adds key dimensions to the ongoing ethical debate on the irrelevancy and relevancy of traditional media ethics to inform operations of hybrid media organisations, not only in Namibia, but the global media at large. Third, it unpacks contextual factors responsible for shaping major ethical dilemmas confronting journalists working for hybrid media organisations in the digital age. Furthermore, it signposts media accountability ethical frameworks and policies to informing operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia. All these aspects are important because scholars have recommended that there is need to study how journalists working for hybrid media organisations negotiate the ethical dilemmas associated with the digital age (Ward, 2018; 2019; Ess, 2013).

2.9 Theoretical frameworks

The study employed two frameworks: the social responsibility theory (SRT), which was developed in 1947 by the Commission on the Freedom of Press (Hutchins Commission) in United States of America and latter upgraded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956 (Christians & Fackler, 2014) and the Bourdieusian field theory as articulated by Pierre

Bourdieu in 1951 (Bourdieu, 1990). Given the complexity of the research topic and the ever-changing context of the study, one theory could not suffice to understand the research problem at hand, hence the triangulation of the SRT and Bourdieusian field theory. The aim here was not to supplant each other but rather to complement. The SRT has its roots in Western philosophy. Its basic tenet is that he media is expected to cultivate self-regulatory procedures of responsibility by embracing journalism standards and codes of conduct in response to the demands from the public (McQuail, Golding and Bens, 2005). It is considered one of the normative frameworks of the media after the Authoritarian Theory; Libertarian Theory and Soviet Theory (ibid). In both Hutchins Commission and Siebert et al (1956) version, the notion of public interest is at the core of what they call "social responsibility". Its purpose is to put emphasis on the media's responsibility to assume its powerful position in a bid to credibly deliver information to audiences. In the 1990s, the media got to be known as the Fourth Estate after the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary (McQuail, 2005). This implies that, the media is expected to play the watchdog rolethrough checks on excess of state power (Onyango, 2013). The basic principle of the SRT isto retain freedom so as to organise public communication. It assumes that this freedom comes with accountability to observe the provision of services as assured by the state. The media is expected to cultivate self-regulatory procedures of responsibility by embracing journalism standards and codes of conduct in response to demands from the public (Onyango, 2013). Moyo, Mare and Mabweazara (2019) concur that the SRT "accentuates an accountability framework that journalists are expected to adhere to with respect to their professional practice and ethical conduct" (p. 4). Siebert et al. (1956) add that, "to see the social systems in their true relationship to the press, one has to look at certain beliefs and assumptions which the society holds" (p. 2). This implies that to understand the role of journalists in society, it is important to know the social structures in which they operate.

The theory informs this study as it postulates that journalists have the responsibility to abide by certain codes of conduct (like accuracy; truthfulness, protection of privacy and impartiality) in as far as news production and dissemination is concerned. McQuail, Golding and Bens (2005) posit that journalism as a profession and operations of the media, are harnessed by normative theories that are found in media policies, law and ethics. Since SRT was developed in the 1950s to explain journalism practice in Western contexts, a lot has changed. Journalism is now being practiced in several non-Western contexts where the

notion of 'public interest' has been critiqued for failing to understand what happens in the global South. As part of the decolonisation project, Santos and Mare (2021b) argue that scholars in the global South have tried to incorporate *Ubuntu*, *Afriethics* and communitarianism as more relevant ethical frameworks. There is also an acknowledgement that social responsibilities for journalists in the global North cannot be un-problematically transplanted to the global South without adequate localisation and contextualisation (Santos & Mare, 2021b). Thus, social responsibilities are context-specific, and relative. Despite this call for an ethical revolution in the global South, scholars concur that newsrooms are now hybrid media systems. These are increasingly confronted by diverse ethical challenges.

The SRT provides insight in terms of shaping and restoring credibility/trust in the news media be it conventional media, digital media and hybrid media. It is argued that the quality of media content and what is being disseminated can be regarded as the starting point for considering the notion of credibility (Onyango, 2013). In other words, the absence of manipulation of photography/video; handling of online errors; offence to decency, reputational harm to citizens' privacy and copyrights infringements among others entail legitimate operations of hybrid media organisations.

Other scholars who borrowed theoretical analysis from the social responsibility theory (SRT) to understand research problems and inform their data analysis process include: Muthoni, 2017; Onyango, 2013; Couldrey, 2013; Sa, 2016; Khan & Limpot, 2020. Khan, Limpot and Villanueva (2020), used SRT in their study, which examined how Philippines media coverage has impact on the framing of children-related news on primetime viewing. Since UNICEF developed guidelines for media when covering children, SRT was used to inform the analysis of findings on how ethical transgressions (by journalists) can violet images of minors (Limpot & Villanueva, 2020). The study by Onyango (2013), focused on the impact of citizen journalism in the process of gatekeeping using a case study of *Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation* (*KBC*). She used SRT to how KBC (which is the subject of her study) is regarded as a national institution that is compelled to responsibly provide diverse information and opinion, which is the center upon which SRT became germane to the study (Onyango, 2013).

In order to account for contextual specificities of digitised newsrooms, there is need to go beyond the basic tenets of the SRT. As a spatial metaphor, the Bourdieusian theory builds on four concepts namely: field, habitus, *doxa* and capital, which share interconnectedness

that is useful in appreciating the relations within the journalistic field (Mare, 2018). These are used in this study to make sense of how journalists from selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia negotiate ethical issues confronting the operations of hybrid media organisations. Bourdieu projected the concept of field as a metaphor for studying objective relations within a confined social setting (Benson & Neveu, 2005). Bourdieu (2005) defines a field as, "the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experiences of these social fields" (p. 30). For Bourdieu, a field signifies an arena of production, circulation, appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, status, and the competitive positions held by actors in a bid to accumulate, exchange, and monopolise different kinds of power resources (capitals) (Bourdieu, 2005). Willig (2013) adds that the concept of field is perceived as an alternate diagnostic tool to organisations, markets, institutions, individuals, and groups although all of these can be key components of fields. This is supported by Mare (2018) who concurs that, field examination brings these discrete entities into a wider perception that emphasises their relational properties rather than their inherent features and ultimately the array of forces shaping the behaviour of each. Mare (2018) further explains that, it then directs our attention to scenarios where journalists working for hybrid media organisations tend to be ethically influenced by other actors outside their field (such as advertisers, public relations agencies, and politicians) in the wake of digitisation.

Moreover, such influence is bound to take place within the journalistic field between editors, shareholders and owners (ibid). This concurs with Benson and Neveu's (2005) remark that the notion of the journalistic field affords "a new way of understanding and explaining the constraints and processes involved in news media production" (p. 1). Thus, within the journalistic field journalists have specific social responsibilities. These include upholding the ethical practices and principles of the profession, which make SRT and Bourdieusian field theory relevant to inform this study. More importantly, social responsibilities in society are not cast in stone. They are always evolving and shaped as well as restructured by various socio-cultural, historical and technological factors. The practices of hybrid media organisations fall into the general field of cultural production. Journalism is also situated at the 'heteronomous pole' of the field (Bourdieu 1990). This points to the idea that, it is influenced by the external pressure of digitisation, which Bourdieu maintains has a 'powerful

determinative effect in the contemporary historical context' (Benson 1999, p. 488). With regards to this study, the concept of journalistic field enables the researcher to examine how the mainstream media and digital media (as sub-fields of the media fraternity)and other technical, social, economic and political fields in society interrelate and mutually influence each other (Bourdieu, 1990).

Bourdieu (1990) posit that habitus refers to the socially instituted system of dispositions that position 'expressions, perceptions and thoughts' (p. 55). As Mare (2018) puts it across, it cognitively shapes behaviour but not in a deterministic way, since there is room for actors (journalists) maintain some degree of agency. Mare (2018) further notes that there is a dialectical relationship between field and habitus, which enable the interface that yields practice such as news making practices and routines. These are commonly referred to as behaviours, actions or attitudes of actors /journalists (Mare, 2018). Bourdieu (1990) posits that such behaviours and actions are bound to be repeated over time until they become habitualised. The practices in the journalistic field are said to be shaped and controlled by both written rules (codified professional guidelines) and unwritten rules, comprising what is known as *doxa* (Mare, 2018). Doxa represents traits of social existence that are generally taken for granted.

In application to the study, (un) ethical journalistic behaviour is assumed as 'habitus' by journalists who work for hybrid media organisations (journalistic sub-field). Through job socialisation, journalists experience what is known as 'habitualisation' in diverse newsroom habitus (see Mare, 2018; Ryfe, 2012). Bourdieu (1990) posit that 'habitualisation' connotes the reproducibility of behaviour or human action effortlessly henceforth being repeated often. Similarly, changes in the journalistic habitus forces journalists to internalise new ethical ways. For instance, in a hybrid media organisation, new and old ethical dilemmas collide in complex ways. This necessitates a situation where journalists have to be self-reflexive agents in an ever-changing media ecology (Mare, 2018).

In this theory, capital symbolises 'actually usable resources and powers' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 114). Different actors in the journalistic field tend to pursue several types of capital such as social, political, cultural, symbolic, economic capital. As Bourdieu (1990) puts it across, that these forms of capital are reciprocally transformable and however, it is amiss to perceive

them as secluded from each other. For example, journalists bring cultural capital in the form of professional competence and qualification, while owners and shareholders bring economic capital in the form of digital equipment and funding (see Mare, 2018; Schultz, 2007). In turn, this they can convert to more economic or political capital; and news sourcesalso come to the journalistic field with cultural, economic, social, and political capital (Mare, 2018; Schultz, 2007). Stakeholders such as owners and advertisers who possess more capitalare bound to determine the rules of the game and control the rewards in a particular journalistic field (which in this study are hybrid media organisations).

Other scholars who used the Bourdieusian field theory to the study of journalism include: Mare, 2018; Willig, 2013; Ryfe, 2012; Schultz, 2007; Benson & Neveu, 2005. Mare (2018) used the Bourdieusian field theory to make sense of how business journalists from Kenya and South Africa negotiate ethical decision-making in their everyday news making practices. Willig (2013) employed the concepts of Bourdieusian 'journalistic field', 'news habitus' and 'newsroom capital' to understand the Danish newsroom ethnography. It also informed his concurrent study within the Danish journalistic practices and the structures that enable and constrain them. Ryfe (2012) used the same framework to inform his study on attempts by the United States of America daily newspapers to embrace digital technologies in their publications. Using ethnographic material from observations of editorial practices in a Danish television newsroom, Schultz (2007) employed the Bourdieusian framework to make sense of how "journalistic *doxa*", "news habitus" and "editorial capital" are used by professional journalists as "gut feeling" in news production. By merging the SRT and the Bourdieusian field theory, this study makes a case for understanding new social responsibilities for journalists in an ever-changing media ecology. It also allows us to reflect on what are the new social responsibilities that journalists are expected to uphold and live up to in a society where social conditions are in a state of flux.

2.10 Chapter summary

The chapter comprehensively discussed literature related to the study. What came out clearly is the assertion that there is no technological invention that has motivated a contestable terrain on journalism practice more than the uptake of digitisation thus far. On

one hand, the aforesaid is perceived as an enabler of participatory journalism, where professional journalists are able to conduct their news-making practices at the greatest of ease. On the other hand, it is said to expose professional journalists to an array of unethical conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation. Media accountability ethical frameworks and policies to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia and Africa in general were also discussed. The chapter concluded by discussing the theoretical frameworks (social responsibility theory and the Bourdieusian field theory) that furnish an understanding of the phenomenon under study and its relevance to the study. This literature review and analytical insights from the theoretical frameworks will be used as reference to inform the data analysis process. The next chapter discusses research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter discusses research methodology of the study titled, an examination of ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. Bryman, Hirschsohn, Santos and Toit (2015) describe research methodology as a systematic procedure of investigating and analysing a research problem under study. In this chapter, the following sections were discussed: research philosophy; research approach; research design/strategy; time horizon; data collection procedures and analysis articulated in the research onion framework. The chapter concludes by discussing ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm (also referred to as research philosophy) is a set of commonly held beliefs and assumptions shared by academic researchers on how to conduct research studies. It comprises ontology, epistemological and methodology used to guide the researchcycle (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). As illustrated in the research onion developed by Saunders et al (2016), there are different paradigms used in academic researches such as positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Each paradigm offers "differing assumptions of reality and knowledge which underpin their particular research approach which is reflected in their methodology" (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). The study locates itself within the interpretivism philosophy.

Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) state that ontology informs the phenomenon in terms of its nature of existence. The ontological assumption of the interpretivism philosophy is that of relativism which translates to the idea that reality is a human construct and that there is no pre-existing objective reality that can be observed (Scotland, 2012). For interpretivists, all truths can be relative and that objective observations of the social world are not absolutely attainable as the positivists assume. There are multiple realities out there that can beexplored and constructed through human interactions. Furthermore, Alharahsheh and Pius (2020)

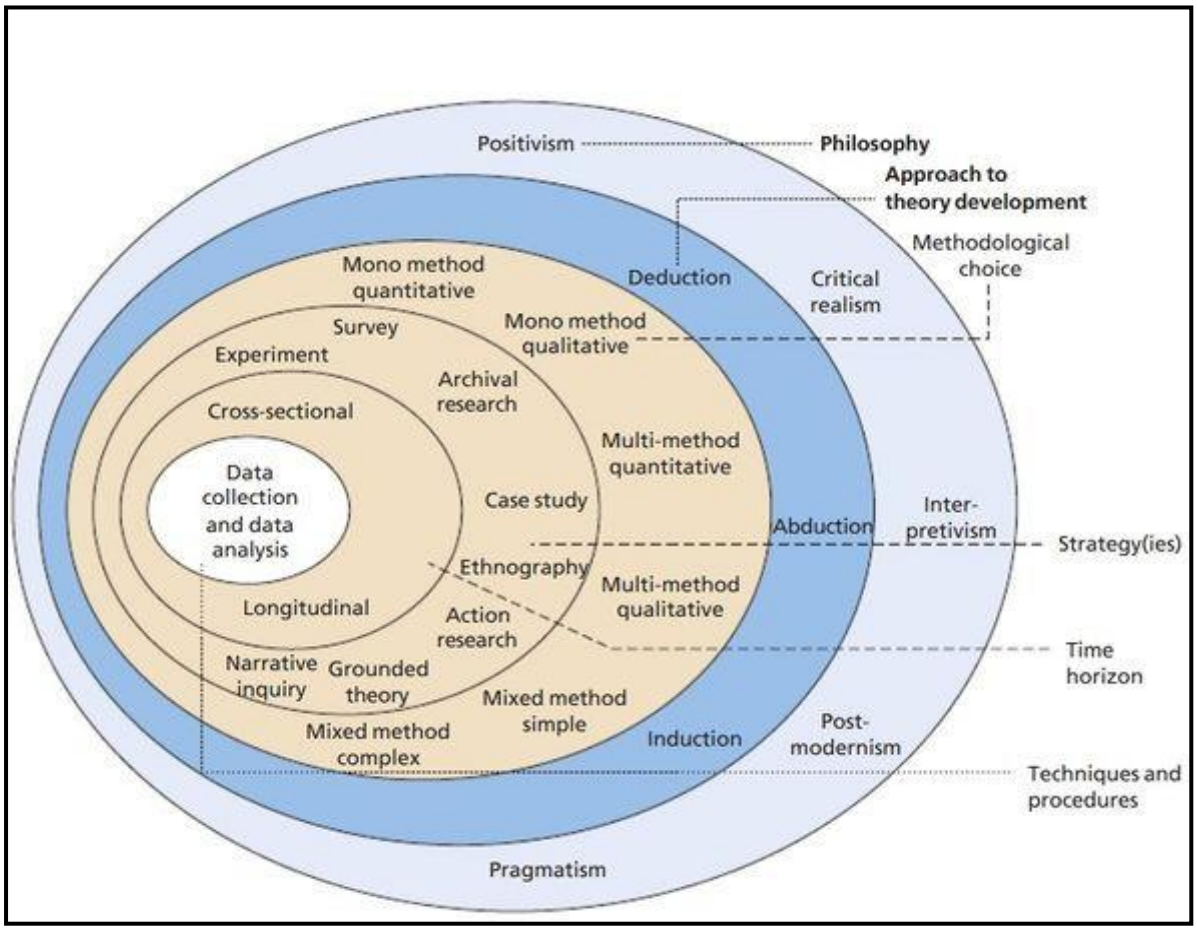
note that it seeks to discover how people make sense of their social worlds in the natural environment by means of daily routines, conversations and writings whileinteracting with others around them.

Epistemology refers to how knowledge is communicated. It is “considered as an internal factor within the researcher as it is also concerned with how a researcher can distinguish between wright and wrong, and it is about how a researcher is viewing the world around them” (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 40). Its epistemological assumption is that of subjectivism. It emphasises the importance of subjective meanings and subjective interpretations in that the relationship between the researcher and the subject must not be perceived in terms of “detachment, but rather of involvement and interaction” (Dammak, 2015, p. 5). This is because, the world does not exist independently of human knowledge. Scotland (2012) corroborates that “meaning is not discovered, it is constructed though the interaction between consciousness and the world” (p. 11). Collecting and analysing numerical data (used in positivism worldview) does not ideally furnish in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. There is need to explore why different participants have different views and experiences, and to appreciate how these differences effect the construction of meanings attached to a phenomenon (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). By doing so, the researcher would be able to make sense of how different participantinterpret their social environment. For the interpretivists, it is required that the researcher makes use of subjective interpretation, acknowledging the experiences, views andperceptions of the participants.

Its methodology is directed towards appreciating and interpreting the research problem from individual’s experiences and perceptions (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). It then assumes qualitative research approach, which uses research designs such as case study, phenomenology, ethnography and hermeneutics. For the interpretivists, the way to discover meaning is through language, not solely by numerical analysis (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Qualitative study presents and analyse data as descriptive narration, thereby interpret it in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Borrowing insights from the interpretivism philosophy was a befitting choice as it enabled the researcher to make sense of how journalists and news editors working for selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia negotiate ethical dilemmas in their news-making practices within their natural

environment. Furthermore, it furnished the researcher in terms of appreciatingindigenous nuances by observing reality and the contextual analysis of findings.

Figure. 3. 1: Research onion framework



Source: Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2016)

The above research onion as propounded by Saunders et al (2016) is a model used to organise and guide the research methodology as a cyclical process in the sense that itfollows a logical order.

3.3 Research approach

Creswell and Báez (2020) define research approach as a method that incorporates various techniques, instruments and procedures to collect and analyse data in the research cycle. There are various research approaches used in academia such quantitative approach,

qualitative approach and mixed methods (Saunders et al, 2016). The study employed qualitative approach which is "a systematic enquiry of concepts that enable one to understand social phenomenon in its natural settings, giving due emphasis to experiences, views, perceptions and meanings of the participants" (Teherani, Martimianakis & Stenfors-Haye, 2016, p. 669). Qualitative research is most suitable when the researcher seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding and familiarise with the phenomenon of interest. In other words, it lends itself to thick narrative description of behaviours within the natural environment.

Qualitative research approach uses data collections tools such as focus group discussions (FGDs); in-depth interviews; observation; archives; and documents to obtain a profound understanding of how people perceive certain phenomena and to describe in great detail the experiences of the research participants (Flick, 2018). It presents and analyse data as descriptive narrative of words that seeks to make sense of the phenomenon through construction of meaning attached to it (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Such analysis is informed by related literature or concepts of a particular theoretical orientation with the purpose of demonstrating how the present study contributes to expanding the body of knowledge (ibid). Qualitative approach was a befitting choice because it offers the researcher detailed insights (through in-depth interviews and FGDs) to make sense of how journalists working for selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia negotiate ethical dilemmas in their news-making practices, which quantitative approach cannot yield using numerical data.

3.4 Research design

Babbie and Mouton (2008) define research design as a "plan or blueprint for conducting research" (p. 74). Other literature refers to it as a research strategy as illustrated in the research onion developed by Saunders et al (2016). It provides the researcher with an outline that guides the research methods. Various research designs used in qualitative studyinclude: ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology and narrative studies. The study employed a case study research design which is an "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institutions, programme or system in a 'real life' context" (Simon, 2009, p. 21). In other words, this research strategy offers the researcher solid, contextual and comprehensive knowledge about a specific real-world phenomenon. Although some literature claims that qualitative

research findings cannot be generalised to similar context (owing to the use of smaller sample sizes), Creswell and Creswell (2017) argue that the use of a case study provides room for generalisability of findings by the very notion of observing multiple actorsin a setting (s). Correspondingly, Yin (2014) asserts that the value of adopting a case study design lies in its ability to offer 'analytical generalisations', where the researcher's aim is to generalise a particular set of findings to some broader theoretical propositions (p. 40). Given the interpretivism philosophical stance assumed in this study, and the researcher is under the impression that the case study is the most suitable research design for the study. This is because of its merits in divulging rich information within real-world setting, which would have been obscured in research designs, used in quantitative study. Yin (2014) adds that this particular research design is appropriate to circumstances where it may be problematic to discrete research variables from their environment.

3.5 Time horizon

Saunders et al (2016) describe time horizon as a plan within which the research study is expected for completion. As illustrated in the research onion, two (2) types of time horizons used in academic studies are: cross-sectional and longitudinal. The study employed the former horizon, which refers to collecting and analysing data within a specific time frame as opposed to the latter, which denotes the collection and analysis of data persistently over a lengthy period of time (Saunders et al, 2016). Even though the study was conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic with the experience of some academic disruptions due to lockdown measures and social distancing, data were collected remotely and the study was completed within a period of not more than twelve months.

3.6 Target population and sampling method

Table 3.1

Name of hybrid media organisation	**Target population**	
	Journalists	News editors
Namibia Media Holdings	33	12
The Namibian	7	3

Total	**40**	**15**
Sample size	16	5
Percentage %	40 %	34%

Target population is the total number of individuals that is of interest to the study, with varying characteristics from which the sample is to be drawn (Bryman et al, 2015). There are 33 full time employed journalists and 9 full time employed news editors at NMH. Likewise, at *The Namibian*, there are 7 full time employed journalists and 3 news editors. This means the target population is 40 journalists and 12 editors. Sampling is the procedure of selecting an appropriate representative part of the population in order to determine parameters of the target population (Sharma, 2017). Krejce and Morgan (1970), argue that, "in quantitative research, when the target population is 40, the appropriate sample must be 36 and when the target population is 12, the appropriate sample must be 10" (p. 608). However, Saunders et al (2016) clarify that qualitative research typically focuses on relatively small sample size compared to that of quantitative study. This is supported by Muthoni (2015) who corroborates that a minimum of 20-30% of the target population is adequate enough to draw sample size and generalise findings of a qualitative study. Saunders et al (2016) add that saturation redundancy level of data is another guidingprinciple of determining sample size in qualitative research. Therefore, a sample of 16 journalists (5 from *The Namibian* and 11 from NMH), which translate to 40% of the target population was drawn using homogeneous purposive sampling. Similarly, homogenous sampling was used to draw a sample of 5 news editors (4 from NMH and 1 from *The Namibian*) respectively. Although there are many types of non-probability sampling used in qualitative research such as snow ball sampling, convenience sampling, purposive sampling and quota sampling, homogeneous purposive sampling was deemed fit. This is because ofits ability to allow the researcher to choose a sample of journalists and news editors who have similar traits. In this case, I chose those who work for hybrid media organisations and occupy similar journalistic fields and habitus. Furthermore, homogenous purposive samplingwas the best choice because it offered room for generalisation of findings from the data, thereby enhancing the transferability of the study, which is established through trustworthiness. As a non-probability type of sampling, purposive sampling requires that the researcher rely on her/his own judgement when

choosing a sample as it is rationally assumed to be representative of the target population (Sharma, 2017).

3.7 Data collection methods

Qualitative study incorporates various data collection methods using research tools such as observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, archives, texts, audio and videos (Evans & Lewis, 2018). In this study, data were collected through the administration of focus group discussions (with journalists) and in-depth interviews (with news editors).

3.7.1 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs are well-known research tools used to collect qualitative data from participants of similar experiences or characteristics and is often lead by a moderator (Flick, 2018). The FGD checklist consists of unstructured or open- ended questions meant to dig deeper into participants' views and experiences on the phenomenon under study. In light of this, the researcher constructed fourteen (14) open-ended questions using simple vocabulary that is understandable and these were: probe questions; follow-up questions; and exit questions (see appendix I). In order to observe the COVID-19 regulatory measures put in place by the Namibian government to contain the spread of coronavirus, the researcher blended digital and traditional methods in the facilitation of FGDs, which are Zoom meetings and face-to-face sessions. The participants were diversely grouped into three (3) separate groups of 5; 5; and 6. Each session started off by introducing the research questions of the study and lasted a period of approximately one hour. Although it is generally recommended that participants of a FGD must be between 6- 10, (see Morgan, 1997; Johnson & Christensen, 2004) however, in practical terms, it is not easy to get 6- 10 journalists working for daily newspapers sitting in FGD given their busy schedules deadlines. The researcher encounters some in this regard as 2 participants withdrew within a very short notice. Therefore, FGDs as scheduled with other participants could not be cancelled on the basis of losing 1 participant from each group. It was deemed it fit to proceed with the other committed participants. Given that the selected newsrooms under study are male dominated, 6 female journalists and 10 male journalists partook in the FGDs.

The researcher herself facilitated the FGD through moderation, no research assistant/s were involved. Audio recorder, together with jotting down information in black and white were both used to record data so that the researcher keeps track of relevant information. This choice was motivated by the fact that FGDs are flexible and time saving, with the capacity to produce large amount of data within a short period of time (Flick, 2018). Moreover, they provided access to comparisons within journalistic experiences and views on the phenomenon under study. Notwithstanding the aforementioned merits of using FGDs, the researcher experienced some obstacles during data collection process. Initially, face-to-face discussions were not envisaged, but due to technological challenges associated with the use of Zoom meetings, the researcher was motivated to blend digital and traditional methods of doing FGDs. Given the work pressure from the journalists' side to meet deadlines together with academic and family related commitments from the researcher's side, it required a lot of patience to come up with dates and time slot for FGD sessions that were convenient to everyone.

3.7.2 In-depth interviews

These are described as research tools used to gather information of greater depth and more sensitive to contextual variations in meaning (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). They are used to gather intensive data in order to explore participants' views and experiences. Evans and Lewis (2018) elucidate that in-depth interviews as research tool requires the researcher to come up with an interview checklist which enables her/him to address a research phenomenon while allowing respondents to answer in their own terms. With this in mind, the researcher constructed an interview checklist of fourteen (14) open- ended questions that were proactive, interpretive, leading and multiple (see appendix I). Initially, face-to-face discussions were not envisaged, but given the work pressure from the news editors' side, the researcher blended digital and traditional methods in the facilitation of in-depth interviews with news editors, which are WhatsApp voice notes and face-to-face sessions. The researcher herself facilitated the interviews through moderation, no research assistant/s

were involved. All voice notes were recoded using a smart device to keep track of relevant information. Follow-ups were conducted to ensure clarity between the researcher and the respondent before final presentation and analysis of findings. Given that the newsrooms under study are male dominated, 1 female news editor and 4 males partook in the interviews.

Cohen et al (2011) argue that the disadvantage associated with FGDs respondents is that they may feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep. In order to compensate this scenario, in-depth interviews with news editors were necessary because the researcher was able to obtain rich information (from news editors who are also journalists) with additional opportunity to probe further underlying facts that were not possible with FGDs. However, it is important to acknowledge that in-depth interviews are not immune to disadvantages, one of which the researcher experienced is time consuming compared to FGDs (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Nevertheless, the researcher maintains that the use of two (2) data collection instruments was valuable in that it allowed her to triangulate findings, not only by cross-checking, but by capturing different dimensions (from respondents' experiences) of the same phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.8 Data analysis

There are many ways of analysing qualitative data such as: narrative analysis, contentanalysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory and discourse analysis. For this study, datawere analysed using thematic (inductive) analysis. It is one of the common method used in qualitative research to identify, report and analyse themes from respondents' views and experiences (Flick, 2018). Even though the use of electronic qualitative analysis such as NVivo and MAXqda softwares help to speed the analysis process, the researcher of thisstudy resorted to manual analysis. This choice was motivated by Zamawe's (2015) recommendation to other researchers after his experience of using NVivo. He notes that

> *"The main function of electronic qualitative data analysis is not necessarily to analyse data, but rather to aid the analysis process, which the researcher mustalways remain in control of. In other words, researchers must equally know that no software can analyse qualitative data. NVivo and all other CAQDAS are basically datamanagement packages, which are there to support the researcher during the data analysis process"*

(p. 13).

With the aforesaid recommendation in mind, the researcher started off by familiarising with the data, coding of themes, reviewing of themes, labelling themes and interpret them by linking with related literature as they respond to a specific research question respectively. Themes contain codes that have a common point of reference and have high degree of generality that merges ideas with regards to the subject of inquiry Vaismoradi, Jones and Turunen (2016) clarify that a theme "is used as attribute, descriptor, element, and concept. As an implicit subject that organises a group of repeating ideas, it enables researchers to answer the study question" (p. 101).

The researcher ensured all these stages by transcribing data into black and white, reading transcriptions and highlighting meaning units. This was followed by jotting down reflective notes and reading them several times in order to establish the trend of respondents' views that can be traced back using direct excerpts from the transcript. By so doing, it offered the researcher of this study an additional opportunity to remember and to maintain accuracy towards respondents' views, thereby enhancing the notion of trustworthiness of the study. Data was then coded using abstractions from the respondents' comments on how they negotiate ethical dilemmas in their news-making practices. Flick (2018) notes that coding "is a process of categorising data as a first step of the analysis process" (p. 423). In thematic analysis, coding helps to moderate the amount of raw data to that which is pertinent to research questions of the study and breaks it down to manageable categories. Vaismoradi et al (2016) corroborate that such grouping does not only help the researcher organise codes, "but also enables detailed comparison and classification prior to the subsequent analytical steps (p. 103).

The phase of reviewing themes requires the researcher to "reflect on the process of organising codes and compare them in terms of similarities and differences to assign a place to each cluster of codes in relation to the research question" (Vaismoradi et al, 2016, p. 105). With this in mind, the researcher used the basic principle of classifying and organising codes by giving a collective meaning to a group of codes with various features. This was followed by a revision of codes to allow comparison across data which offers potential for generating acceptable themes. In the same vein, Vaismoradi et al (2016) further assert that

"the more the same code occurs in a text, the more likely it can be considered to be a theme…, and should capture something important in relation to the overall research question" (p. 105). Given the interpretivism philosophical stance of this study, themes were reviewed and labelled using phrases in a bit to present excerpts for that theme. Sandelowski and Leeman (2012) concur that labelling of themes using a sentence or a phrase in thematic analysis is much preferred than a word as it captures ample ideas. At this stage, each theme was then engaged upon to construct meaning from the respondents' main views, experiences and the researcher's judgment.

In the last stage, data were interpreted and analysed by marrying findings to the related literature of the study. The research question/objective based technique was used to group labelled themes. This means, themes were grouped as they responded to each research question respectively. The Researcher deemed a qualitative description of participants' experiences and an inductive analysis of data as most befitting for the purpose of this study because it provided a clear link between the research questions and the findings derived from raw data.

3.9 Trustworthiness

Even though the applicability of research validity and reliability in qualitative study is generally contested (Noble & Smith, 2015; Porter, 2007), the quality of qualitative study is established through trustworthiness in its four elements namely: credibility, dependability confirmability and transferability (Berg, 2016; Hammarberg, Kirkman & Lacey, 2016).

a) Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility implies the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy (Berg, 2016). It is similar to internal validity in the sense that research findings are expected to match reality. Hammarberg, Kirkman and Lacey (2016) note that "qualitative study is credible when its results, presented with adequate descriptions of context, are recognisable to people who share the experience and those whocare for or treat them" (p. 500). In line with the interpretivism philosophy used in the study,reality is relative

to the meanings that people construct within social contexts. To ensure credibility of the study, all research methods were clearly described for value truth purpose.

b) Dependability

Dependability is similar to reliability which is observed through a clear connection of research tools used and the consistency of findings. It entails the extent to which research findings can be replicated with similar subjects in an analogous setting (Berg, 2016). In qualitative study, reliability cannot be absolutely practical because variables tend to be dynamic, contextual and fluctuate due to influencing factors or systems as illustrated by the Bourdieusian field theory. In view of this, Cope (2014) suggest that dependability of aqualitative study should be determined by whether the findings are consistence with the data collected. On the other hand, Hammarberg et al, (2016) argue that the notion of consistency of findings "does not mean that the same result would necessarily be found in other contexts but that, given the same data, other researchers would find similar patterns" (p. 500). To ensure dependability, the researcher explained in detail the theories that informthe research problem in order to establish a clear connection with data collection methods used. Furthermore, multiple research instruments were used in order to triangulate findings, hence reliability is pronounced.

c) Transferability

Transferability is similar to external validity which denotes the extent to which findings can be generalised to similar contexts. Qualitative study is considered to meet the criterion of transferability "when its findings can fit into contexts outside the study situation and when other researchers view the findings as meaningful and applicable in their own experiences" (Hammarberg et al, 2016, p. 500). Since the study adopted case study research design, the idea of generalisation that is relatively applicable is the inferential generalisation which brings about generalising from the context of the study itself to similar settings. Eventhough some scholars consider transferability a challenge in qualitative study (Noble & Smith, 2015; Porter, 2007) owing to smaller sample sizes used, the researcher ensured thisby

providing readers with rich contextual information (using case study research design) and evidence of data collection methods used to show that its findings can be applicable to similar settings. This is supported by Guenther and Falk (2019) who corroborate that "based on a review of modern and historical approaches to generalisation, it can be achieved in qualitative research through defensible research design and methods" (pp. 1012-1013).

d) Confirmability

Confirmability is similar to objectivity and denotes the extent to which research finding can be verified by others. Cope (2014) asserts to "the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints". In order to ensure confirmability, the researcher used direct excerpts derived from raw data to generate themes (using thematic analysis) and subsequently findings of the study. Furthermore, all data collected were archived in an orderly and retrievable form so that it can be made available should the research findings happen to be challenged.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Flick (2018) asserts that whenever one is conducting a research study, it is always imperative to abide by certain ethical conducts. Being mindful of the harm likely to be incurred by exposing the participants' health to COVID-19 disease, the researcher adhered to the COVID-19 regulatory protocols imposed by the Namibian government to ensure the safety of all participants in face-to-face interviews and FGDs proceedings. These include: wearing of face masks, sanitising hands and observing physical distancing protocols. Furthermore, ethical conducts were also observed through the following principles: autonomy; non-maleficence; justice and beneficence.

a) Autonomy

The principle of autonomy requires the researcher to value and respect all respondents' decisions to participate in the study (Flick, 2018). Consent letters from all relevant authorities such as the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), NamibiaMedia Holdings

and *The Namibian* were granted to the researcher of this study in black and white before proceeding with any research process (see appendices II, IV, VI). In order to obtain consent from the participants, they must first "understand exactly what is expected of them and the significance of their participation" (Berg, 2016, p. 4). Furthermore, the principle of autonomy entails that all participants must be self-determined to have the ability to ask the researcher any questions pertaining to the study (Flick, 2018). With this in mind, the researcher informed all participants about the objectives of the study and their invaluable participation to the study. All participants were asked to sign their written consent regarding their participation in study through an informed consent letter. This was to ensure that participation in this study is voluntary, based on willingness and the freedom of participants to withdraw from participating at any given time of data collection and analysis process should they wish to do so.

b) Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence entails to do no physical, social or emotional harm to the participants (Berg, 2016). Beyond this, Flick (2018) corroborates that this principle compels researchers to guarantee participants' confidentiality in every aspect of presenting and disseminating findings. With this in mind, all responses were treated confidentially and purely used for academic purpose. To achieve this, data from in-depth interviews and FGDs were all kept in a secure device with a password known to the researcher only. As a guiding principle for anonymity, the researcher did not make use of participants' identities such as their full names and names of organisations in presenting, analysing and disseminating researchfindings.

c) Justice

The principle of justice requires the researcher to treat all participants equally (Flick, 2018; Berg, 2016). Doing justice to participants entails that the researcher "should not include judgement on a personal level" (Flick, 2018, p. 144). To ensure this, all respondents were treated fairly and with respect irrespective of their professional backgrounds, affiliation and age.

d) Beneficence

Flick (2018) asserts that beneficence as an ethical principle entails that “research on human subjects should produce some positive and identifiable benefits rather than simply carried out for its own sake” (p. 136). Having this said, the researcher anticipates that the study might indirectly benefit all relevant stakeholders through its findings and informed recommendations that proposed new ways of ethically governing the operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed components of the research methodology of the study which comprises research philosophy; research approach, research design/strategy, pilot study, time horizon, data collection procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations. Recognising the appropriateness of qualitative approach to this study, the chapter demonstrated that research is a cyclical process that follows a systematic plan until it reaches its conclusion. The next chapter presents and analyse findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses data presentation and analysis of findings obtained from the administration of FGDs and in-depth interviews. The participants' response rate was very high given that the majority sample of participants turned up for FGDs and interviews as scheduled. This is attributed to the researcher's patience to wait for specific dates and time slots that were convenient to the majority of participants, without giving up. Focus group discussions were held on the 30th; 31st of August and the 7th of September 2021 on Zoom meetings and face-to-face respectively. For in-depth interviews, these were conducted on the 7th; 8th; and 10th of September 2021, via WhatsApp voice notes and face to face respectively. According to Cohen and Manion (2011), common methods of structuring the presentation and analysis of qualitative data include: research tool based method and research question/research objective based method. For this study, the researcher used the research question based method (as a heading) in which emerging themes were grouped as they respond to a specific research question respectively. The chapter is organised as follows: first, it outlines the meaning of *contextual factors* as labelled in the overall research question of the study. Second, it focuses on data presentation and interpretation. Third, it discusses and analyse findings. It ends with a summary of the chapter.

4.2 Contextual factors that shape ethical dilemmas experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the NMH and *The Namibian*

In this study, the phrase *contextual factors* is used to denote technological; economic; social; and political determinants responsible for shaping ethical dilemmas experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the NMH and *The Namibian*. The ever-changing technological landscape tends to disrupt the means of news production and dissemination, which is now characterised by interactivity, speed and immediate form of journalism than never before (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021; Remmert, 2019). Economically, the seismic shift by advertisers towards digital adverts witnessed a weighty drop of revenues from the mainstream media, and in response to these changes, many mediaorganisations had to re-structure their business models in order to sustain themselves

(Couldry, Madianou & Pincheviski, 2013). With the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, "the diminishing private advertising revenue has made media organisations to implement paywalls and subscriptions, monetise virtual events and in some cases become overly dependent on government advertising" (Santos & Mare, 2021, p. 2). Social contextual factors are determined by the integration of social media platforms in the hybrid newsrooms. Politically, the government of Namibia "allows the journalists to practice their profession with minimum interference" (Santos & Mare, 2021, p. 4). In light of this observation, hybrid newsrooms in Namibia are operating in the absence of apposite ethical frameworks to inform their accountability (African Media Barometer, 2018). In doing so, thisexplains its consistence with the top ranking in terms of press freedom in Africa and its 3rd position out of 180 countries in the world (Reporters without Boarders, 2021). It is important to take note of all these contextual determinants as they influence the operations of selected hybrid media organisations by shaping ethical dilemmas experienced by journalists and news editors.

a) **The ever-changing technological landscape**

From the majority of the respondents' experience on the phenomenon under study, it emerged that the ever-changing technological landscape is a contextual factor within the digital journalism branch that shapes ethical dilemmas encountered by journalists and editors working for hybrid media organisations in Namibia, such as the NMH and *The Namibian*. Below are some of the responses that emerged:

> *The way we used to gather and disseminate news in now different from back then. My cellphone is the center of it all because I can do everything with it from gathering information, taking videos, and chat on social platforms with audiences, unlike before. Everything happens so fast.* (Respondent, *the Namibian).*
>
> *Cognisant of importance of eye-witness accounting when reporting issues of sensitive nature is very important…..to always be there when it happens. However, nowadays it is true that we often rely on U-G-C from our reliable resources.* (Respondent, NMH).
>
> *I have realised that with the majority of our audience, they now prefer quick and easy ways to consume information and this has led us to increase video-based production and dissemination through all of our digital platforms.* (Respondent *the Namibian*).
>
> *With the online interactivity on our digital platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook), our comment sections are always flooded with inquiries from concerned audiences on different news stories…….And*

I must tell you that it's difficult to post feedback promptly and assist them directly…., that is why many end up judging us that we ignored their request for news information. (Respondent, the NMH).

The above findings indicate that the ever-changing technological landscape has disrupted the news-making practices of selected hybrid newsrooms in Namibia as well as the consumption patterns amongst audiences. Although it cannot be denied that technologyand the and the devices used to digest media are getting more convenient than never before, on the other hand they spawn ethical challenges at the level of online content,which is mostly accompanied by bad netiquette. Moreover, the idea that the means of newsproduction and dissemination is no longer in the hands of professional journalists andeditors alone like it used to be in the yesteryear, ethical dilemmas also arise at the level of news credibility when U-G-C is used.

b) The immediacy of internet

From the majority of respondents' experience as full-time journalists and editors at *The Namibian* and NMH, it emerged that the immediacy of internet in disseminating news is a technological contextual factor responsible of shaping ethical dilemmas they are confronted with. The following responses emerged:

Since the production and dissemination of news has become more fast-paced and interactive than ever before, with breaking news no longer waiting for the next day's paper otherwise we run the risk of being overtaken if we publish outdated news the following day. These days the print platform is normally reserved for less urgent but in-depth /investigative articles. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

The fear of being beaten on breaking stories online by citizen journalists and other media organisations puts us under pressure to write a story in a rush, which sometimes compromises the quality and credibility of such news. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

The pressure that comes with the speed of digital news has put us under pressure to urgently produce content in real time, which sometimes affects the quality and credibility of stories as there is sometimes little time to verify information, although we strive to ensure that whatever information wepublish is indeed factual and verified. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

Online media reporting provides little time to verify information, especially in the case of a breaking news story trending on social media. Sometimes operating within ethical boundaries costs us timeliness as sometimes we delay publishing an article while waiting for information to be fact- checked and verified (which often takes time). There are times we are tempted to put out unverified news because it is trending on social media and we fear that by the time information is verified, it would have been old news. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

The above responses clearly indicate that the uptake of digital journalism in the media fraternity tend to expose professional journalists to an array of unethical conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation. The immediacy of internet exerts pressure on journalists and editors to assume short-cuts in their news-making practices of proper verification and fact-checking mechanisms. In doing so, ethical issues such as misinforming the audiences arise, thereby questioning the credibility and trust of such newsrooms.

c) **The integration of social media platforms into the operations of hybrid newsrooms**

Responses from few participants indicate that the integration of social media platforms into the operations of hybrid newsrooms spawn ethical issues at the level of control of content and cyberbullying. Some of them responded as follows:

> *If I want to develop a story based on Facebook or Twitter posts of public figures, in some cases, the only problem that I have is whether I should still call that individual to give me a right of reply on something controversial they posted.* (Respondent, *the Namibian).*
>
> *The comment sections on our digital platforms are always packed… and honestly sometimes it's annoying to attend to that. In terms of gate-keeping, I must say we don't have a comprehensive policy on that one. We were caught off-guard by the entry of social platforms….* (Respondent, *the Namibian).*
>
> *Our standard operation procedure allows senior journalists to post digital content on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc….. especially teasers for a full report in the print version without going through a chain of sub-editors and chief editors…… There is a challenge yes…..where you find some reporters making silly jokes especially when commenting on certain posts…and the next thing they are bullied byaudience, they retaliate.* (Respondent, NMH).

The integration of platform companies such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter in the hybrid newsrooms entails that journalists now share means of news production and dissemination with audiences. Audiences, who hitherto were ordinarily recipients of media messages, now easily manifest themselves on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube participating directly on various stories in ways that ethically challenge journalists' traditional roles as sole mediators and disseminators of information. Audiences' participation through social media platforms gave birth to analytical tool and editorial metrics, which enable hybrid newsrooms to monitor and evaluate general details about audiences' news consumption patterns and engagement. This affects the overall ethical manner in which they engage with audiences and vice-versa. Moreover, news editors find it difficult to effect apposite gate-keeping strategies to control many voices of the audiencesin the comment

section.

d) Media sustainability

A lot of changes have occurred in the media landscape not only in terms of production and dissemination, but business models too, in which strategies of yesteryear have been disrupted. This has been alluded to by few of respondents who shared the following:

> *There is a time when I wanted to write a story about our ads client's personnel who reported cases of misconduct at their work place to us. It turned out to be a big issue with our sales department saying that company is one of our biggest client, and so you can't write news that they won't be happy with.* (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

> *Our organisation is a self-funding organisation, we are an independent media outlet and so the only problem comes when it concerns some of our big ads clients. Even though we are not owned by the ads clients, they have some influence in the sense that they inject money for our business survival.* (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

> *We are in the business of news and this means we had to commercialise all news platforms from print to digital publications in order to maximise what we want to achieve.* (Respondent, NMH).

> *There has been a seismic shift in terms of how we do our media work from news gathering, the entire production chain. Most of the changes of course affect our business model where we have to adopt new sales and marketing ways. Remember we are also into business and this is very key in generating funds to keep us going especially during COVID were many businesses collapsed due lockdown.* (Respondent, NMH).

These responses point to the idea that private owned hybrid media organisations in Namibia are struggling to sustain themselves during this period, which is characterised by economic recession. This has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw movement restrictions crippling many businesses entities including the media industry. In a bid to sustain themselves in a digital landscape, hybrid media organisations in Namibia responded by introducing new business model such as monetising live events and maintaining good relationship with sponsors (advertisers) on their digital platforms. In doing so, it creates a scenario whereby one cannot bite the hand that feeds, hence the emergence of ethical dilemmas. In other words, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

e) The absence of digital media ethical frameworks

The absence of digital media ethical frameworks contribute a lot in shaping ethical predicaments faced by professional journalists who work for hybrid media organisations in Namibia. This was indicated by the majority of respondents, who noted the following:

> *There isn't any specific guideline given when it comes to multimedia or digital content. A lot of it, we just follow the rules that have been set for traditional media and try to contextualise it for digital. I can't say to you here is the guideline for digital media, such template doesn't exist.* (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

> *The expectation is that you follow traditional media ethics without too much focus on how it changes on the digital side.* (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

> *In most cases I see that digital issues are solved under the traditional framework.* (Respondent, NMH).

> *The current ethical regulations are somewhat confined to traditional mainstream media, so there hasn't been amendments to some of these laws and regulations, we were caught off-guard by the advent of new technology because it happened so fast.* (Respondent, NMH).

> *Right now in Namibia for example, the cyber security law is not yet in place, therefore journalists can still take videos of citizen's intimacy and post. There is no law that stops them from doing that.* (Respondent, NMH).

The above responses indicate that relevant authorities such as the Ministry of Information Communication Technology; policy makers; The Code of Ethics for the Namibian Media; and The Office of the Media Ombudsman are too reluctant to enact apposite media laws and regulatory frameworks that inform operations of the media in the wake of digitisation. Thus, lack of media accountability ethical frameworks that explicitly address the operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia is creating room for ethical transgressions committed by professional news editors and journalists in the digital age.

f) Conflicts of interest

Responses from the few participants indicate that conflict of interest is a contextual circumstance that shapes ethical issues confronted with journalists and news editors in their news-making practices. The following responses emerged:

> *We may be compromised especially when reporting on same issues aired as opinion on a separate platform. It is true that our impartiality as journalists reporting on those particular issues becomes questionable to the readers.* (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

One of the best practices of ethical journalism is impartiality, but this becomes tricky as we try to strike the right balance between tweeting opinions on current affairs and causes we feel strongly about, while reporting on those same issues. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

There is a time when I wanted to write a story about our ads client's personnel who reported cases of misconduct at their work place to us. It turned out to be a big issue with our sales department saying that company is one of our biggest client, and so you can't write news that they won't be happy with. (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

Even though journalists may put out a disclaimer that the opinions shared on their private accounts are not that of their employer, the audience does not always see it that way. A journalist's personal online activity impacts the news organisation's image somehow, regardless of what disclaimer is put out there. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

From the above findings, it can be noted that conflicts of interest affect the ethical manner in which journalist gather and disseminate news. It arises when a journalist or news editor take positions on social or political issues, thereby tend to approach their stories in a biased manner. Failure to declare conflict of interests obviously yields poor quality media content, which contributes to lack of trust in such news media.

g) The notion of public interest

Responses from the majority of participants indicate that the notion of public interest is a contextual factor that shapes ethical dilemmas confronted with journalists and news editors in their news-making practices. The following responses emerged:

There are certain scandals (like the fishrot) that you just can't do away with no matter how sensitive because they carry public interest. We are striving by all means to tell it as it is and keep our readers informed about the latest development. (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

We have cases where public figures argue that anything posted on social media in their private capacity should not be published on a news platform and blown out of context. Our position is that they are public figures and whatever they post on their social media becomes public information as it is already posted on a public platform. If it is private and personal, they would not post it online in the first place. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

If a CEO of a big organisation get involved in a scandal of personal nature, where do you draw the line with ethics, do you think your personal affairs have no impact on your work? That issue of being a public figure obviously attracts public interest. (Respondent, NMH).

I don't see anything wrong about writing a sensitive story exposing those in power owing to their wrongdoings as long as the report is motivated by the desire to inform the public. (Respondent, NMH).

Regarding our tone of how we have been covering the 'fishrot' scandal ……., are you aware that most of the information that we use to cover such stories are from the court documents ….. We just cite court documents and I don't think there is an ethical dilemma there. The moment when journalists

start thinking of the tone when reporting such issues, if implicates the whole thing. It's up to the public to interpreting the story, ours is to just report. (Respondent, NMH).

These responses point to the idea that even though journalists and news editors working for hybrid media organisations use the notion of public interest to underline the watchdog role of journalism, the ethical dilemmas arise when journalists invade citizen's privacy or defame character in the name of public interest. This has been the case with the 'fishrot' scandal (with pending investigations) in Namibia, in which more than USD 650 million was flagged as suspicious proceeds, involved some state-owned organisations and Icelandic fish processing firm, Samherji. The notion of public interest is the most common justification that journalists and editors use in their news-making practices, hence test the limits of ethical conduct.

4.3 Perceptions of full-time journalists and news editors working at the NMH and *The Namibian* on the relevance and irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia

a) Traditional media ethics are the cornerstones of journalism

All the respondents unanimously perceive that traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness and fairness are core values of professional journalism, which are still relevant to inform operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age. Below are some of the responses that emerge:

These traditional ethics should remain in place as they are still relevant to the media holding itself accountable (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

Journalism ethics are still important and relevant whether it's traditional or digital media and this marks the difference between a professional journalist and citizen journalist. (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

Traditional media ethics have become more relevant now in this digital age than ever before. Verifying information, accuracy, truthfulness and giving people a right of reply, is what define us as credible sources of news and set us apart from citizen-generated content (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

Journalism remains the same whether you are using print or digital forms, the only difference is that of platforms but the ethics still remain the same and still relevant (Respondent, NMH).

Truthfulness, fairness, accuracy…..these traditional ethos are here to stay, they will never be diluted because of the new ways of news production and dissemination. We just can't do away without them. (Respondent, NMH).

> *Given the fact that news production is no longer confined to newsrooms only, we have citizen journalists everywhere who can post anything, anywhere. Speaking from a professional journalism perspective, traditional media ethics remain relevant for the accountability of journalistic practices.* (Respondent, NMH).

The above findings point to the notion that even though traditional media ethics were devised centuries ago to inform journalism as a profession before the advent of digitisation, they are still considered relevant in this contemporary era. Traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality and pre-publication verification are seen old wisdomthat guided not only media of yesteryear, but the contemporary media too.

b) Complementing the existing traditional media ethics

Few respondents perceive that complementing the existing traditional media ethics can be a positive possibility to ensure their relevance the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age. The following responses emerged:

> *We were caught off-guard by the advent of technology because it happens so fast….. I think there is nothing wrong with updating the current traditional ethics as long as they don't get diluted in the way.* (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

> *I know that the way we gather and disseminate news these days is now different from back then. When you write a story, it's an obvious thing that it must be factual, accurate and you need to cite sources where necessary. So, I think there must be ways in which we can complement media ethicsthat are already there.* (Respondent, NMH).

> *I have seen that many journalists struggle with conflicting interests in their reporting, so I think one aspect that should be taken note of when updating the current ethics is conflict management. We must come to a stage where journalists are supposed to declare their conflict of interest whenever necessary in their reports.* (Respondent, NMH).

These findings point to the notion that it is a positive possibility that the shortfall of traditional media ethics in terms of their relevance to operations of hybrid media organisations is likely to be addressed by considering both new and old ethical frameworks to come up with hybrid ethics for hybrid media systems. In other words, complementing traditional media ethics entails non-radical co-existence of two frameworks, one compensating the weakness of the other.

4.4 Major ethical issues that full-time journalists and news editors working for hybrid media organisations such as the NMH and *The Namibian* encounter

a) Online errors and post-verification

Among major ethical issues facing operations of hybrid media organising such as *The Namibian* and the NMH is on how to handle online errors and post-verification owing to the speed of internet. Responses from the majority of participants allude to the idea that the anxiety of lagging behind with online reports tend to exert pressure on journalists, thereby find it difficult to verify facts in a systematic manner before publishing. The following are so the responses that emerged:

> *Even if you are the best learned journalist, you make mistakes like spelling or typing errors and by the moment you realise it, it will be online already.* (Respondent, NMH).
>
> *The biggest challenge with me for online and the issue of speed, is the impact it has on grammar, spellings and language in general. You find a lot of errors…..because some stories do not go through the entire production chain like sub-editors or proof readers like we have the print edition. I can saythe gate-keeping process is still the same, but more refined for print publications.* (Respondent, *the Namibian*).
>
> *Relying on citizen journalists takes a lot trust that this information is hopefully correct and this has taught us lessons because a lot of times we had incidents were that information was not correct……, you put it out and next think you hear that it was not correct. So, the process of verification amid this swamp of information has become difficult a little bit.* (Respondent, NMH).
>
> *We have incidents where reporters do not attend to certain events and tend to rely on a third party as source of information without proper verification. The recent case with the Olympics on those who were running ……, one of our reporters on Twitter said the girl's time runner was 22.02 seconds, while in fact we later found out that it was 22.06 seconds. Those are some of the challenges we are facing*. (Respondent, NMH).
>
> *The online error on Twitter about health minister, Shangula, which initially said he received Sinopharm vaccine instead of AstraZeneca was latter corrected in the print version only because in terms of longevity and for record purpose, you find that most of the corrections and apologies carry more weight in the print version than the digital paper.* (Respondent, NMH).

From the above responses, one can conclude that, media reports circulating the globe with amazing speed via digital platforms such as *Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp* put pressure on journalists to publish online stories before they are adequately verified, resulting in misinforming audiences. Since the trend on how to handle online errors and corrections is disturbed by the immediacy of internet, the probability of spreading misinformation, disinformation and malinformation become very high. Such ethical dilemmas have global

impact in the sense that, the production and dissemination of misinformation does not only affect local audiences, but the entire global village.

b) Prying into citizen's privacy

The majority of the respondents admitted that they are sometimes caught on the wrong side of journalistic principles by prying into citizen's privacy especially public figures. The following are some of the responses that emerged:

> *We have come across such, but we try to apply good judgement in each of these cases by first distinguishing between public interest and privacy prior to reporting such material.* (Respondent, *the Namibian*).
>
> *We have also come across the dilemma of deciding whether we should publish a comment that someone, especially a public figure, has made on their personal social media account that qualifies as news because some of them view this as an invasion of their privacy.* (Respondent, *the Namibian*).
>
> *There is also the question of whether journalists should still call an individual to give them a right of reply on something controversial they posted online or if what they posted should be put on the news platform without allowing the author to put it into context or perspective.* (Respondents, *the Namibian).*
>
> *We have cases where public figures argue that anything posted on social media in their private capacity should not be published on a news platform and blown out of context. Our position is that they are public figures and whatever they post on their social media becomes public information as it is already posted on a public platform. If it is private and personal, they must not post it online in the first place.* (Respondents, *the Namibian*).

The above responses indicate that some journalists and news editors commit ethical transgressions (malinformation) in the name of public interests. The desire to scoop many likes and following on social media seems to motivate them into prying public figure's sensitive stories and habitually justify their actions using the banner of public interests, when in actual fact some stories do not qualify in that category. Even though such online reports are based on reality, however, they are used to injure reputation by violating citizen's privacy without the public interest justification.

c) Plagiarism of digital content

Plagiarism of digital content has been cited by few respondents as an ethical issue confronting journalists who are incompetent in their news-making practices. Below aresome of their experiences:

When it comes to plagiarism, that one is very tricky because online, they are these offshoots, blog, whatever…., and it's really hard to keep track of all of them, to be able to keep an eye on whether plagiarism has taken place, which I think might happen. (Respondent, *the Namibian).*

The only incident close to plagiarism that I still remember with us was an option piece that we published. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

We had someone working with us who lost a job because of online content that she plagiarised. (Respondent, NMH).

I remember that one trainee journalist was fired here late last year for plagiarism….. There was suspicion of plagiarism by one of the sub-editors because her reports were too perfect to be written by a trainee and so we wondered how she mastered this kind of writing. We did our internal research andlater found that all that articles that she wrote at NMH were plagiarised. Disciplinary proceedings were effected and she admitted that she plagiarised and was fired. (Respondent, the NMH).

These findings indicate that some journalists working for selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia commit this ethical transgression also known as 'patch writing' by lifting others' content and use it as their own. It is a violation of journalistic ethics that leads to penalties or expulsion from work. Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon, but it is important to note that with the uptake of digitisation in the newsrooms, it is becomingmore prevalent than ever before. The use of digital media technologies can be applaudedfor a number of reason, but on the other hand, they provide opportunities for journalists to easily copy and paste documents and pictures at the greatest of ease without acknowledging the original source.

d) Cyberbullying

With the use of social media platforms to produce and disseminate news, few respondents admitted that they sometimes fall prey to cyber-bullying, an ethical dilemma that arise when the one incite adverse emotions by posting provocative messages online. These responses are what they said:

With digital content, you get to see audiences' reaction and more engagement compared to reading a print newspaper. This influence the content we put out and the way we communicate as journalists. If you get bullied you won't keep quiet when you actively see that this is unacceptable? (Respondent, *the Namibia*).

I have been a victim of cyberbullying on most of my social media accounts for a long time now….. Even if I post something that is not work related, I am always attacked and I said to myself, I am not going to watch other people walking all over me ….. (Respondent, NMH).

Some people are always offended by what journalists write…… I have seen reporters going on Facebook and start retaliating when they are bullied. (Respondent, NMH).

The above findings indicate that cyberbullying spares no one. With the integration of social media in news work, platform companies such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter do not explicitly provide guidelines or fair use policies on the operations of podcasters, social media influencers and bloggers. Furthermore, there are no guidelines for journalists and editors on the use of Facebook live and Twitter spaces in their news-making practices. Having this said, professional journalists find themselves engaging in unethical practices of retaliating when they are bullied by audiences on social media platforms. In ethical terms, journalists are not expected to participate in cyberbullying whether they are bullied first or not. By them responding to audiences (bullies) through extremist views, it is deemed unethical to the normative values of journalism as a profession.

4.5 Media accountability ethical frameworks and policies full-time journalists and news editors working at the NMH and *The Namibian* proposed to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia

a) Revision of the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Media

The majority of respondents suggest for the revision of the Code of Ethics for Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online media. This, they say the code must specifically address the operations of hybrid media organisations. Below are some the responses that emerged:

Currently, the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Media is largely applicable to mainstream or traditional media, in which there are loopholes on the digital side. There must be special blue print meant to inform media organisations with both print versions and digital platforms. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

You see..., now that many reporters are into business to generate extra income through digital platforms, I think relevant authorities must amend the Namibian Code of Ethics for the media and include a section that makes reference to journalists declaring their conflict of interest whenever necessary. (Respondent, *the Namibian*).

Yes, I want to add on that the Code should be reviewed and revised at least every five years in order to effectively guide the operations of media houses with both print and online editions. (Respondent, NMH).

Since the current ethical regulations are mostly applicable to traditional mainstream media, I would suggest that there should be amendments to some of the media policies in order to account for the operations of both print and digital platforms as one. (Respondent, NMH).

> *I think the Namibian Code of Ethics must incorporate the cyber policy and regulations……Because right now journalists can still take photos or videos of citizen's intimacy and post. There is no specific section that stops them from doing that.* (Respondent, NMH).

These findings indicate that the even though the Namibian Code of Ethics acknowledges the existence of print, broadcast and online media, it does not provide explicit regulations to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations. A precise ethical framework for hybrid media organisations is necessary in order to account for a wide-range of realities that transpire in the digitised newsrooms.

b) Additional journalistic training

Few respondents propose for further journalistic training in addition to their initial or main qualifications in order to equip themselves abreast of what is expected in the operation of hybrid media organisations such as the NMH and *The Namibian*. The following responses emerged:

> *We have a Media Academy just behind there for additional refresher courses paid by the company. But we haven't received training for the past two years because of COVID-19 and other things. It could be wonderful if we happen to get the opportunity to resume again and I am sure, this will see us improving on our journalistic approach especially to do with ethical conduct.* (Respondent, NMH).

> *Crash courses are also very important just to add on this whole thing of moving into a different dimension with the media.* (Respondent, NMH).

> *With the Media Academy, there is always a list of short courses where one can choose what he/she wants to do in order to go an extra mile with news gathering. This is very important and must continue ….. Coming back to the issue of journalistic conduct, some ethical dilemmas arise as a result of being ignorant and I have seen this to be very common with most of our juniors.* (Respondent, NMH).

In light of these propositions, additional journalistic training with special focus on media ethics will serve to knock some sense into the minds of journalists and editors who graduated from their academic programmes many years ago before the uptake of digital journalism in Namibia and Africa. Most importantly, the ever-changing technological landscape requires journalists and editors to be well-versed with expectations of the century in order to realise ethical journalism and be the vanguards of information disorderin the digitised newsrooms.

c) Fact- checking mechanisms

In order to inform operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia such as the NMH and *The Namibian*, the majority of respondents suggest that there is need to maintain fact-checking and debunking of information disorder. The following responses emerged:

> *We have a relationship with Namibia Media Trust (NMT), which is a sister organisation to us. Their mandate is working on access to information and fact-checking. Every year they offer digital fact-checking short courses to journalists freely. I did one in 2019, then 2020, I did the social media fact- check course. So, I want to encourage all professional journalists around Namibia to take advantage ofthis to equip themselves with new skills of digital fact-checking. This will help them to easily spot bogus banners and websites when gathering news on desktop.* (Respondent*, the Namibian*).
>
> *Fact-checking mechanisms must be maintained and supported within each media house, with special focus on the digital side because that's where a lot ethical challenges occur.* (Respondent, NMH).
>
> *Fact-checking protocols must be taken seriously if we are to maintain the media industry as a credible source of information. I would also love to see our interns going through fact-check courses in order to fully prepare them for the labour market.* (Respondent*, the Namibian*).
>
> *What I am suggesting is that each media organisation must have a stand-alone desk responsible of fact-checking and debunking of misinformation and conspiracy theories.* (Respondent, NMH).

The above findings indicate the need for internal fact checking mechanisms in hybrid newsrooms, which in turn assist to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of officially published information such as news reports. This does not apply to news editors only, it is required that all journalists (including interns) must be acquainted with digital fact-checking skills. This goes hand- in hand with debunking mechanisms as they both necessitates the idea of verification and exposing fake news.

4.6 Discussion and Analysis of Findings

Findings of this study indicate that technological; economic; social and political determinants are contributing factors responsible of shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by journalists and news editors working for selected hybrid media organisations in thedigital age in Namibia. The uptake of digitisation in the media landscape has brought about technological disruptions that are transforming old news-making practices. Chari (2019) rightly asserts that there is no technological intervention that challenged operations ofmedia organisations more than the internet thus far. As news media, hybrid media organisations are identifiable by certain codes of conduct in their news-making practices (Cheney, May & Munshi, 2011). In the same vein, journalism is subject to same codes of conduct, without which there is

no professional journalism. The ever-changing technologicallandscape tends to disrupt the means of news production and dissemination, which is now characterised by interactivity, speed and immediate form of journalism than never before (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021; Parahita, 2021; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 202; Remmert, 2019; Chari, 2019). Traditional media ethics with their values of pre-publication verification and gate- keeping, rubs up against the culture of digital media which emphasises immediate form of journalism. The dog-eat-dog competition to become first with the breaking news is nostranger to online publications (Chari, 2013, 2019; Remmert, 2019). Study findings demonstrate that the trend on how to handle online errors and corrections is disturbed by the immediacy of internet and the probability of spreading misinformation becomes very high. When the desire to 'serve it hot' gets into the way of news verification, ethicaldilemmas arise (Chari, 2019). This has been once alluded to by then Namibia's Minister of Information Communication and Technology, Tjekero Tweya, who made reference to the deteriorating quality of media content in Namibia owing to the influx of ethicaltransgressions committed by professional journalists in the wake of digitisation of newsrooms (*The Namibian*, 13 November 2019). With the COVID-19 outbreak, the news- making practices within hybrid newsrooms were "severely affected in terms of newsgathering, processing and distribution. To remedy the situation, media organisations in Namibia responded by accelerating the adoption of digital media technologies and launching new content distribution channels" (Santos & Mare, 2021, p. 1).

Within the economic context, the media space is undergoing structural changes where "old operational and business models have been disrupted" (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021, p. 1). This has been more pronounced since the uptake of digitisation, which is accompanied by a 'revolution' in the media space not only in terms of news production and dissemination, but the business model too. The core values of journalism are eroded at the expense of business sustainability. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic also aggravated the sustainability of many hybrid newsrooms, which in turn prompted them to adopt new business models for survival (Santos & Mare, 2021; Parahita, 2021; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2021). Thus, "the diminishing private advertising revenue made media organisations to implement paywalls and subscriptions, monetise virtual events and in some cases become overly dependent on government advertising" (Santos & Mare, 2021, p. 2). In the same vein, "it is worthwhile to note that the issue of precarious advertising revenue was already compounding the problem

of media sustainability, where media companies have periodically restructured their operations owing to persistent economic challenges" (Santos & Mare, 2021, p, 4). This resonate with the capital dimension of the Bourdieusian field theory, which symbolises 'actually usable resources and powers', in which different actors in the journalistic field tend to pursue several types of capital such as social, political, cultural, symbolic, economiccapital (Bourdieu 1984, p. 114). As Bourdieu (1990) puts it across, that these forms of capitalare reciprocally transformable, for example, journalists bring cultural capital in the form of professional competence and qualification, while advertisers/funders bring economic capital. In turn, advertisers who inject more income to hybrid media organisations arebound to determine the 'rules of the game'.

In view of the above, it came out clear from study findings that the selected hybrid media organisations, which are the NMH and *The Namibian* tends to differ in terms in their media sustainability. On one hand, *The Namibian* as a self-funding and independent media outlet, it is heavily reliant on sponsorship and advertisers as their source of funding. In doing so, this has negative ethical implications as it affects the ethical manner in which journalists and news editors conduct their news-making practices. On the other hand, NMH is a highly commercial media organisation, which is into profit making. It is not overly dependent on sponsorship unlike the former. The NMH's business model differs from *The Namibian* in that it make use of paywalls, bypassing advertisers and monetising virtual events for sustainability. In doing so, this have lesser ethical implications compared to the former mainly because he who pays the piper calls the tune.

With the integration of social media platforms in hybrid newsrooms, they are "redefining the means by which journalists engage with their audiences as well as how audiences relate and respond to the news content" (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021, p. 110). In some scenarios, hybrid newsrooms recruit social media experts and content moderators to moderate, analyse and monetise the big data incipient from their followers. Moyo et al (2019) asserts that user engagement, which manifest through editorial metrics has also ominously transformed the production and dissemination of news. This is backed by Mabweazara and Mare (2021) who concur that the audiences' voices on social media platforms "are increasingly shaping and contributing to the dynamics of news-making in ways that point to an emerging ecological reconfiguration and recasting of dimensions of news production and consumption" (p. 111).

In doing so, the ethical challenge that stacks out clearly is the lack of clear gate-keeping strategies (from the news editors) to control content on their social media platforms. As a result, journalists participate in cyberbullying with the audiences in the comment section both knowingly and unknowingly. This has been well expressed by Mabweazara and Mare (2021) who assert that hybrid newsrooms are finding it difficult to gatekeeping the content and adapt to "changes spawned by readers' comments on their news websites and social media platforms, in which strangers contribute and respond directly to something journalists alone once controlled" (p. 18).

From the study findings, it came out clear that the absence of specific digital media ethical framework is a political/environmental contextual factor, which adds to the list in shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by hybrid media journalists and news editors. In a sense, it confirms what has been observed by Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015) that various Media Codes of Ethics in Africa were last updated many years ago and for that reason, they do not comprehensively address the new realities of digitisation that have occurred in the media space. This has been well expressed by the African Media Barometer (2018) report, which reveals that although the Namibia code of conduct for print, broadcast and online media enforced by the Office of the Media Ombudsman regulates the operations of all media, it does not provide explicit regulations on the operations of hybrid media organisations. This is despite the fact that these organisations are the new norm in the contemporary media scene. In her analysis of various Codes of Media Ethics in Southern African countries, Dube's (2017) findings concur with above as she reveals that even though the Namibian code was recently updated in 2017, still it merely alludes to photography by describing when, howand under what circumstances photographs should be taken. It does not indicate the haste with which the proliferating ethical challenge such as manipulation of photography should be handled (Dube, 2017).

On the other hand, there is the recent COVID-19 national regulatory framework endorsed by the Namibian government to criminalise the spread of disinformation amid the pandemic. Under this regulation, any person(s) who publishes through any form of media, misinformation and conspiracy theories associated with COVID-19 is committing an offense, which attracts a fine of up to N$2 000 or prison term of up to six months (Menges, 2020).

However, it is surprising to note that there is no record thus far of any journalist/editor being charged for contravening it regardless of ample evidence of some hybrid media organisations breaching this regulation. One may wonder, if this framework in question is a mere toothless bulldog or not. Does this mean policy makers and other relevant authorities are too reluctant to ensure that unethical journalism in the hybrid newsrooms is nipped in the bud, one may ask too?

In order to account for contextual factors that shape ethical issues experienced by full- time journalists and news editors working for the NMH and *The Namibian,* there is need to incorporate the projected concept of the field as postulated by Bourdieu (1990; 2005). For this study, hybrid media organisations are seen as the field that brings discrete entities into a wider perception that emphasises their relational properties and ultimately an array of contextual factors that shape ethical issues encountered by journalists and editors in their news-making practices. Benson (1999) notes that the practices of journalism are also seen as situated at the 'heteronomous pole' of the field in that they are influenced by the external pressure of digitisation, which has 'powerful determinative effect in the contemporary historical context' (Benson 1999, p. 488). This concurs with Benson and Neveu's (2005) remark that the notion of the journalistic field affords "a new way of understanding and explaining the constraints and processes involved in news media production" (p. 1).

Changes in the journalistic habitus forces journalists to internalise new ethical ways. For instance, in a hybrid media organisation, new and old ethical dilemmas collide in complex ways. This necessitates a situation where journalists have to be self-reflexive agents in an ever-changing media ecology (Mare, 2018). This include scenarios where journalists and news editors tend to be ethically influenced by other actors outside their field such as advertisers (who happen to be their source of funding), platform companies and politicians in the wake of digitisation. Thus, within the journalistic field journalists have specific social responsibilities. These include upholding the ethical practices and principles of the profession, which make SRT and Bourdieusian field theory applicable to inform the research phenomenon.

Although this study focuses on ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid

media organisations in the digital age in Namibia, its analysis of findings is done with a broad perception on the ongoing debate about the relevancy and irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of hybrid media organisations beyond Namibia. The majority of study findings from both NMH and *The Namibian* clearly demonstrate that although traditional media ethics were devised centuries ago to inform journalism as a profession before the advent of digitisation, they are still considered relevant in this contemporary era. Traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality and pre-publication verification are seen old wisdom that guided not only media of yesteryear, but the contemporary media too. This resonates with a body of literature (see Chari, 2013, 2017; 2019; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015), which assume a non-radical approach to traditional media ethics arguing that the contemporary media landscape is informed by normative frameworks such as pre-publication verification, accuracy, truthfulness and other ethical codes of conduct without which there is no professional journalism.

In line with the afore-mentioned perception, it has been further noted that, there is need to complement or revise traditional media ethics in order to speak to new realities that have occurred in the digitised media ecosystem. Study findings (from few respondents) correspond with narratives from a body of literature, which assumes a non-radical approachto traditional media ethics maintaining that they must not be discarded, but complemented to match the new changes that have occurred in the media space (see Chari, 2013, 2017, 2019; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015). Chari (2013) adds that updating traditional ethical codes for hybrid media should not result in neglecting the ethical conducts that directed traditional media for ages. What came out clear from these findings is that they do not support the body literature, which advances a radical approach to traditional media ethics arguing that such ethics have ultimately lost relevance in the digital age were many media organisations are operating as hybrid systems (see Ward, 2014; 2018, 2019; Cheney, May & Munshi, 2011; Sa, 2016; Ess, 2013; Arant & Anderson, 2000). The argument is thatthe uptake of digitisation within the hybrid media ecosystem spawn ethical dilemmas such as copyright infringements, the invasion of citizens' privacy, cyber-bullying, plagiarism and manipulation of photography among others and there has not yet been an update of traditional media ethics to address these ethical dilemmas. Ward (2014, 2018) suggests the need to discard traditional media ethics and replace them with a new regime of ethics that match the new changes that occurred in the digitised newsrooms.

Even though the aforementioned body of literature maintains that there is no going back to traditional media ethics, findings of this study concur with Couldry (2013) in that, complementing traditional media ethics entails embracing some values that are believed to be relevant and applicable in the operations of hybrid media organisations. Thus, the concept of media ethics today is not about replacing old frameworks with new ones. There should be non-radical co-existence, one informing the other and compensating limitationsof the other.

Findings of this study indicate that handling of online errors; post-verification of news;prying into citizen's privacy, plagiarism of digital content and cyberbullying are some of the major ethical dilemmas confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia. The immediacy of internet news dissemination exerts pressure on journalists and editors to quickly post information without proper gate-keeping protocols. This has been well expressed by Moyo, Mare and Mabweazara (2019); Chari (2017; 2019); and African Media Barometer (2018) whose observation concur with study findings in that when journalists work at the immediacy of internet, factual and online errors such as namespelling, reporting on figures and terminologies are made, which compromise their integrity of accurate reporting. Chari (2017) rightly asserts that traditional media ethics with their values of accuracy and gate-keeping, rubs up against the culture of digital media which emphasise immediacy and post-publication correction. However, Moyo et al (2019) addthat the challenge still stands in articulating guidelines for dealing with corrections in an online world that are consistent with the principles of accuracy and pre-publication verification.

Furthermore, journalists and news editors working for hybrid newsrooms are often caught on the wrong side of journalistic principles by prying into citizen's privacy especially public figures. They usually justify such new-making practices in the name of public interest. Findings of this study resonate with Mhiripiri and Chikakano's (2017) assertion that in cases were political figures are involved, "information might interest the public, but do not carry convincing justification of public interest" (p. 8). In light of this it can be concluded that, it is unethical for the media to contradict ethical requirement such as reporting on sensitive nature leading to disclosure of a person's privacy in the name of public interest. Kasoma (1996) cited in Chari (2009) also share the same sentiments by supporting that public figures also deserve justice play from the media like any other citizens. In view of this, Mhiripiri and Chikakano (2017) rightly asserts that, in such cases it is always imperative for news editors to separate what is in the public interest from those things members of the public are

interested in. For ethical reasons, the media is not supposed to embarrass public figures on private issues of sensitive nature when there is no justification of public interest.

Plagiarism of digital content adds to the list of major ethical issues confronting operations of hybrid newsrooms in the wake of digitisation. This dilemma is not unique to Namibia, professional journalists and news editors across the globe are not immune from such ethical offence. A similar incident published by *The Washington Post* (16 May 2014) of plagiarism committed by the then news editor at *CNN* who was fired in May 2014 for repeated plagiarism offenses (Wemple, 2014). This transpired after an internal investigation at the *CNN* found that Marie-Louise Gumuchian (then news editor who covered international news) published approximately fifty (50) stories containing plagiarised work. It was established that most of the plagiarised content came from *Reuters* (Wemple, 2014). Another report by *The Washington Post* (27 May 2021) reveals that in 2020, *VOA* top editorial team observed something strange in the radio scripts that a Paris-based journalist, Nicolas Pinault was submitting to editors at the international broadcast service (Farhi, 2021). After thorough investigations, it emerged that some sentences, phrases and multiple paragraphs in reporter's stories matched those published by other news organisations word for word (Farhi, 2021). The *VOA* latter removed majority of Pinault's archived reports dated since May 2019 from its website. It is disturbing to note that a journalist who commit this transgression is risking not only his/her own reputation, but reputation of the hybrid media organisation at large.

Cyberbullying is a major ethical dilemma experienced by journalists and editors in the hybrid newsrooms. This has been well pronounced since the integration of social media in the news work where platform companies such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter do not provide explicit guidelines or fair use policies for amateurs who operate as podcasters, social media influencers and bloggers (Moyo et al, 2019). Furthermore, there are no guidelines for journalists and editors on the use of Facebook live and Twitter spaces in their news-making practices (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021). Having this said, professional journalists find themselves engaging in unethical practices of retaliating when they arebullied by amateurs on social media platforms. In ethical terms, journalists are not expected to participate in cyberbullying whether they are bullied first or not. By them responding to audiences (bullies) through extremist views, it is deemed unethical to the normative values of journalism as a profession.

On the other hand, it is surprising to note that findings of this study do not confirm literature related to study with regards to copyright infringements as an ethical dilemma confronting operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. Despite this (copyright infringements) being oft-cited as a major ethical issue in the digital space, findings of this study do not resonate with Aufderheide's (2014) and Ess's (2013) findings in this regard. Furthermore, what also came out clear from findings of the study is that, even though the use of algorithms and AI in news production spawn ethical dilemmas at the level of data search and creations of filter bubbles as observed by Mabweazara and Mare (2021), this has not been confirmed to be the case with hybrid media organisations in Namibia.

In order to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia, some media accountability ethical frameworks and policies were suggested, and these include but not limited to: a constant revision of the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Media; additional journalistic training; and strengthening of fact-checking mechanisms. Revising the Namibian code of ethics to specifically have a section that addresses operationsof hybrid media organisations will go a long way to ensure that unethical journalism within such newsrooms is nipped in the bud. This is in line with the tenets of SRT, which postulates that journalism as a profession and operations of the media, are harnessed by normative theories that are found in media policies, law and ethical frameworks (McQuail, Golding and Bens (2005).

In addition to above, the proposition for a genuine need to encourage refresher courses on media ethics to all journalists and news editors working for hybrid newsrooms, on top of their journalistic qualifications cannot be ignored. This is backed by Chari (2019) who recommends that an update or revision of traditional media ethics must not be the end, it must be complemented with regular training of journalists towards ethical considerations when operating within the hybrid media system. This will serve to remind them the significance of recognising media ethics, which in turn assist to navigate ethical dilemmas prompted by the evolution of digital space.

What came out clear from study findings is that fact-checking mechanisms must be strengthened and incorporated in journalistic and editorial routines as a policy in order to address ethical dilemmas such as online errors and plagiarism of digital content. The significance of internal fact checking mechanisms in hybrid newsrooms assist to determine

the truthfulness and accuracy of officially published information such as news reports. This proposition was more pronounced in the findings from news editors at NMH. Unlike *The Namibian,* NMH is a media holdings organisation with a wide range of journalists andeditorial team. For NMH, fact-checking mechanisms must be strengthened and incorporated into journalistic routines. This resonate with other scholarly recommendations, which theorise fact checking as the verification process and efforts to ensure accuracy of contents, which is part of journalism news-making practices (Bannikov and Sokolova, 2018; Links, 2020). Links (2020) adds that media organisations in Africa and Namibia in particular needto develop "in-house fact checking and debunking capacities, moving beyond reporting of events and statements, and abandoning a half-in approach to online and social media presence and engagement" (pp. 2-3). This is backed by Wardle (2017) who suggests that since digitised newsrooms do frequently count on UGC as sources of information, scientific fact-checking skills are becoming more imperative than ever before. This, they can achieve through focusing on content verification tools and web content indicators meant to empower journalists and news editors not to fall prey to information disorder in their news- making practices. In doing so, it offers additional opportunity for journalists working for hybrid media organisations to act as vanguards of change in advocating anti- information disorder in the digital age.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the study findings do not support literature related to this study as noted by Newman and Fletcher (2017), which suggest that fact checking and debunking of information disorder should be considered as an independent genre on its own, and not part of journalism. This argument stems from the fact that hybrid media organisations are partially blamed for amplifying information disorder owing to their interdependence on unverified information from social networks (U-G-C) as news sources (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). Interestingly, Fader (2012) adds a twist to Newman and Fletcher's (2017) assertion, and argues that independent fact-checkers are not immune to bias and criticism owing to lack of transparency in their business model, which implies a lot in terms of their funding or sponsorship. Those who concur with Fader's narratives corroborate that whenever sponsorship is involved, one cannot bite the hand that feeds (Akinfemisoye, 2018; Trifonova, 2018). This is likely to create more harm than good because there is a tendency that their investigations can be biased towards their sponsors.

Since SRT was developed in the 1950s to explain journalism practice in Western contexts, a lot has changed. Journalism is now being practiced in several non-Western contexts where the notion of 'public interest' has been critiqued for failing to understand what happens in the global South. As part of the decolonisation project, Santos and Mare (2021b) argue that scholars in the global South have tried to incorporate *Ubuntu*, *Afriethics* and communitarianism as more relevant ethical frameworks. There is also an acknowledgement that social responsibilities for journalists in the global North cannot be un-problematically transplanted to the global South without adequate localisation and contextualisation (Santos & Mare, 2021b). Thus, social responsibilities are context-specific, and relative. Despite this call for an ethical revolution in the global South, scholars concur that newsrooms are now hybrid media systems. These are increasingly confronted by diverse ethical challenges that were non-existent before the uptake of digitisation (Chari 2017; 2019). These include, but not limited to cyberbullying, handling of online errors, post- publication verification and plagiarism of digital content. This then explains the reason why there is need to update the SRT framework because journalists and news editors workingfor hybrid media organisations should assume new social responsibilities upon their shoulders in addition to the ones already indicated back then by this framework.

Furthermore, incorporating the Bourdieusian field theory affords this study this study to perceive the journalistic field as "a new way of understanding and explaining the constraints and processes involved" in hybrid news-making practices (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 1). Study findings indicate that the journalistic field (which is in this case hybrid media organisations) tend to be ethically impacted by contextual factors such as technological, economic and social. It came out clear that when journalists work with speed and immediacy of the internet, ethical dilemmas arise, which include: short cuts in observing proper verification protocols of facts. Similarly, it was noted that the overly depended of hybrid media organisations (such as *The Namibian*) on sponsors for sustainability create scenarios whereby he who pays the piper calls the tune, hence affect the ethical manner in which they engage in their news-making practices. In light of these changes of rules of the game, there is need to develop new *doxa* (both written and unwritten rules of conduct) for hybrid media organisations to either to improve or replace the tenets of the Bourdieusian field theory.

4.7 Chapter summary

From the study findings it emerged that there are a number of contextual factors responsible for shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by professional journalists working forselected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. These include: the ever- changing technological landscape; the immediacy of internet; media sustainability; the integration of social media platforms in the news work; the absence of specific ethical framework for hybrid media organisations; conflicts of interest; and the notion of public interest. It came out clear that traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness and impartiality are still relevant to inform operations of hybrid newsrooms and are also cornerstones without, which there is no professional journalism. However, there is need to update or complement traditional media ethics in order to speak to the realities of digitised newsrooms. What came out clear in this chapter is that the majority of the study findings correspond with literature related to the study to a greater extent. It has been noted that the uptake of digitisation in the media space tend expose professional journalists to an array of unethical conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation. These include, but are not limited to: handling of online errors and corrections; cyberbullying; plagiarism of digital content; and invasion of citizen's privacy. In order to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia, thefollowing media accountability ethical frameworks and policies were cited: revision of the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online Media; strengthening of fact- checking mechanisms; and additional journalistic training. To a lesser extent, findings do not correspond to literature related to the study. The next chapter summarises the study, suggests recommendations based on the findings of the study and draw the conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The study examined ethical issues confronting operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. As articulated in chapter one, the overall research question was: what contextual factors have shaped ethical dilemmas experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) and *The Namibian*?Chapter two discussed literature review, which did not only identify emerging themes from related studies and research gaps that need to be filled, but also helped to locate the study within relevant theoretical frameworks in order to understand the research phenomenon. The choice of research methods employed in this qualitative study were discussed and rationalised in chapter three. Chapter four presented, discussed and analysed research findings using thematic analysis. This chapter is organised as follows: first, it discusses summary of findings by revisiting research questions of the study. Second, it provides recommendations based on the study findings. Third, it suggests areas for future studies. Last, it draws the conclusion, which briefly reflects on the entire study.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

5.2.1 Contextual factors that shape ethical issues experienced by full-time journalists and news editors working for the NMH and *The Namibian*

Findings of this study indicate that the ever-changing technological landscape is a contextual factor within the digital journalism branch, which shapes ethical dilemmas encountered by journalists and editors working for hybrid media organisations in Namibia, such as the NMH and *The Namibian*. This has been alluded to by the majority of respondents who learned from their experience as full-time journalists and news editors that technology has disrupted the news-making practices and dissemination patterns of selected hybrid newsrooms in Namibia. Although it cannot be denied that technology and the devices used to digest media are getting more convenient than never before, on the other hand they spawn ethical challenges

at the level of online content owing to the immediacy ofinternet. This resonate with literature related to the study, which demonstrate that there is no technological intervention that has challenged the operations of the media more thanthe internet thus far (Chari, 2019). Correspondingly, Mabweazara and Mare (2021); Parahita(2021); Ndlovu and Sibanda (2021) concur that the ever-changing technological landscape tends to disrupt the means of news production and dissemination, which is now characterised by interactivity, speed and immediate form of journalism than never before. Moreover, the idea that the means of news production and dissemination is no longer in thehands of professional journalists and editors alone like it used to be in the yesteryear,ethical dilemmas also arise at the level of news credibility when U-G-C is used.

The immediacy of internet in disseminating news is responsible of shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by hybrid newsrooms. The uptake of digital journalism expose professional journalists to an array of unethical conducts that were non-existent and hardly ever before the advent of digitisation. The immediacy of internet exerts pressure on journalists and news editors to assume short-cuts in their news-making practices of proper verification and fact-checking mechanisms. This has been well expressed by Chari (2019) whose observation concurs with findings of this study in that traditional media ethics with their values of pre-publication verification and gate-keeping, rubs up against the culture of digital journalism, which emphasise immediacy in disseminating news. The dog-eat-dog competition to become first with the breaking news is no stranger to online publications (Chari, 2013, 2019; Remmert, 2019). In doing so, ethical dilemmas such as misinforming the audiences arise, thereby questioning the credibility and trust of such newsrooms.

Furthermore, study findings from few respondents demonstrate that the integration of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter in the hybrid newsrooms spawn ethical issues at the level of control of content and cyberbullying. Journalists now share the means of news production and dissemination with audiences. This is coupled with conflicts of interest, which arise when a journalist or news editor take positions on certain issues they post on social platforms. In so doing, it affects the overall manner in which journalist gather and disseminate news. Study findings confirm the assertion made by Mabweazara and Mare (2021) that the integration of social media platforms in hybrid newsrooms, is “redefining the means by which journalists engage with their

audiences as well as how audiences relate and respond to the news content" (p. 110). This is backed by Moyo et al (2019) who notes that user engagement, which manifest through editorial metrics has also ominously transformed the production and dissemination of news. In some scenarios, hybrid newsrooms recruit social media experts and content moderators to moderate, analyse and monetise the big data incipient from their followers. This is exacerbated by lack of apposite gate-keeping strategies to control many voices of the audiences in the comment section.

A lot of changes have occurred in the media landscape not only in terms of production and dissemination, but business models too, in which strategies of yesteryear have been disrupted. This was revealed by the majority of participants who concurred with Remmert's (2019) observation that Namibia's economy is undergoing through a recession since 2016. Thus, private owned hybrid media organisations have since been struggling to sustain themselves and this has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw movement restrictions crippling many businesses entities including the media industry. This has been well expressed by (Santos & Mare, 2021; Parahita, 2021; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2021) whose research findings resonate with findings of this study in that the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic also aggravated the sustainability of many hybrid newsrooms, which in turn prompted them to adopt new business models for survival. Thus, "the diminishing private advertising revenue made media organisations to implement paywalls and subscriptions, monetise virtual events and in some cases become overly dependent on government advertising" (Santos & Mare, 2021, p. 2). In doing so, it creates a scenario whereby one cannot bite the hand that feeds, hence the emergence of ethical dilemmas. In other words, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

The majority of respondents cited the absence of specific digital media ethical framework as a political determinant that contributes a lot in shaping ethical predicaments they are faced with. It seems relevant authorities such as the Ministry of Information Communication Technology; policy makers; The Code of Ethics for the Namibian Media; and The Office of the Media Ombudsman are too reluctant to enact apposite media laws and regulatory frameworks that inform operations of the media in the wake of digitisation. Lack of media accountability ethical frameworks that explicitly address the operations of hybrid media

organisations in Namibia is creating room for ethical transgressions committed by professional news editors and journalists in the digital age. Correspondingly, it confirms what has been observed by Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj (2015) that various Media Codes of Ethics in Africa were last updated many years ago and for that reason, they do not comprehensively address the new realities of digitisation that have occurred in the media space. Furthermore, this is supported by the African Media Barometer (2018) report, which reveals that although the Namibia code of conduct for print, broadcast and online media enforced by the Office of the Media Ombudsman regulates the operations of all media, it does not provide explicit regulations on the operations of hybrid media organisations

Responses from the majority of participants point to the idea that even though journalists and news editors working for hybrid media organisations use the notion of public interest to underline the watchdog role of journalism, the ethical dilemmas arise when journalists invade citizen's privacy or defame character in the name of public interest. This has been the case with the 'fishrot' scandal (with pending investigations) in Namibia, in which more than USD 650 million was flagged as suspicious proceeds, involved some state-owned organisations and Icelandic fish processing firm, Samherji. The notion of public interest is the most common justification that journalists and editors use in their news-making practices, hence test the limits of ethical conduct (Mhiripiri & Chikakano, 2017).

5.2.2 Perceptions of full-time journalists and news editors working at the NMH and *The Namibian* on the relevance and irrelevancy of traditional media ethics in the operations of selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia

Traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness and fairness are core values of professional journalism, without which there is no professional journalism. This was indicated by the majority of respondents who unanimously agreed that even though traditional media ethics were devised centuries ago to inform journalism as a profession before the advent of digitisation, they are still considered relevant in this contemporary era.This resonates with a body of literature, which assume a non-radical approach to traditional media ethics arguing that the contemporary media landscape is informed by normative frameworks such as pre-publication verification, accuracy, truthfulness and other ethical codes of conduct without

which there is no professional journalism (Chari, 2009, 2013,2019; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015).

Few respondents perceive that complementing the existing traditional media ethics can be a positive possibility to ensure their relevance the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age. Study findings point to the notion that it is a positive possibility that the shortfall of traditional media ethics in terms of their relevance to operations of hybrid media organisations is likely to be addressed by considering both new and old ethical frameworks to come up with hybrid ethics for hybrid media systems. Study findings echo the same sentiments as those from a body of literature, which assumes a non-radical approach to traditional media ethics maintaining that they must not be discarded, but complemented to match the new changes that have occurred in the media space (see Chari, 2013, 2017, 2019; Couldry, 2013; Goran & Karamarko, 2015). Chari (2017; 2019) adds that updating traditional ethical codes for hybrid media should not result in neglecting the ethical conducts that directed traditional media for ages. What came out clear from these findings is that they do not support the body literature, which advances a radical approach to traditional media ethics arguing that such ethics have ultimately lost relevance in the digital age were many media organisations are operating as hybrid systems (see Ward, 2014; 2018, 2019; Cheney, May & Munshi, 2011; Sa, 2016; Ess, 2013; Arant & Anderson, 2000). It is assumed that complementing traditional media ethics entails non-radical co-existence of two frameworks, one compensating the weakness of the other.

5.2.3 Major ethical issues that full-time journalists and news editors working for hybrid media organisations such as the NMH and *The Namibian* encounter

Among major ethical dilemmas facing operations of hybrid media organising such as *The Namibian* and the NMH is on how to handle online errors and post-verification owing to the speed of internet. Responses from the majority of participants allude to the idea that the anxiety of lagging behind with online reports circulating the globe with amazing speed via digital platforms such as *Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp* exert pressure on journalists to publish online stories before they are adequately verified, resulting in misinforming audiences. This correspond with observations made by other scholars (see Mambweazara & Mare, 2021; Moyo et al, 2019; Chari 2017; 2019; African Media

Barometer, 2018) whose concur that when journalists work at the immediacy of internet, factual and online errors such as name spelling, reporting on figures and terminologies are made, which compromise their integrity of accurate reporting. Since the trend on how to handle online errors and corrections is disturbed by the immediacy of internet, the probability of spreading misinformation, disinformation and malinformation become very high. Such ethical dilemmas have global impact in the sense that, the production and dissemination of misinformation does not only affect local audiences, but the entire global village.

The majority of the respondents admitted that they are sometimes caught on the wrong side of journalistic principles by prying into citizen's privacy especially public figures. The desire to scoop many likes and following on social media motivate them into prying public figure's sensitive stories and habitually justify their actions using the banner of public interests, when in actual fact some stories do not qualify in that category. Study findings resonate with Mhiripiri and Chikakano's (2017) assertion that in cases were political figures are involved, "information might interest the public, but do not carry convincing justification of public interest" (p. 8). Even though such online reports are based on reality, however, they are used to injure reputation by violating citizen's privacy without the public interest justification.

Plagiarism of digital content has been cited by few respondents as an ethical issue confronting journalists who are incompetent in their news-making practices. Study findings indicate that some journalists working for selected hybrid media organisations in Namibia commit this ethical transgression also known as 'patch writing' by lifting others' content anduse it as their own. It is a violation of journalistic ethics that leads to penalties or expulsion from work. Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon, but it is important to note that with the uptake of digitisation in the newsrooms, it is becoming more prevalent than ever before. Similar incidents of journalists committing plagiarism is that of Marie-Louise Gumuchian, former news editor at *CNN* and *VOA* journalist who were all dismissed for repeated plagiarism offenses and (Wemple, 2014). The use of digital media technologies can be applauded for a number of reason, but on the other hand, they provide opportunities for journalists to easily copy and paste documents and pictures at the greatest of ease without acknowledging the original source.

Cyberbullying is a major ethical dilemma experienced by journalists and editors in the hybrid newsrooms. Few respondents admitted that they sometimes fall prey to cyber-bullying, an ethical dilemma that arise when the one incite adverse emotions by posting provocative messages online. This has been well pronounced since the integration of social media in the news work where platform companies such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter do not provide explicit guidelines or fair use policies for amateurs who operate as podcasters, social media influencers and bloggers (Moyo et al, 2019). Furthermore, thereare no guidelines for journalists and editors on the use of Facebook live and Twitter spacesin their news-making practices (Mabweazara & Mare, 2021). Having this said, professional journalists find themselves engaging in unethical practices of retaliating when they arebullied by amateurs on social media platforms. In ethical terms, journalists are not expected to participate in cyberbullying whether they are bullied first or not. By them responding to audiences (bullies) through extremist views, it is deemed unethical to the normative values of journalism as a profession.

5.2.4 Media accountability ethical frameworks and policies full-time journalists and news editors working at the NMH and *The Namibian* proposed to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia

The majority of respondents suggest for the revision of the Code of Ethics for Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online media. This, they say the code must specifically address the operations of hybrid media organisations. Findings of this study indicate that the eventhough the Namibian Code of Ethics acknowledges the existence of print, broadcast and online media, it does not provide explicit regulations to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations. A precise ethical framework for hybrid media organisations is necessary in order to account for a wide-range of realities that transpire in the digitised newsrooms.

Few respondents propose for further journalistic training in addition to their initial or main qualifications in order to equip themselves abreast of what is expected in the operation of hybrid media organisations such as the NMH and *The Namibian*. In light of these propositions, additional journalistic training with special focus on media ethics will serve to knock some sense into the minds of journalists and editors who graduated from their academic programmes many years ago before the uptake of digital journalism in Namibia and Africa.

Most importantly, the ever-changing technological landscape requires journalistsand editors to be well-versed with expectations of the century in order to realise ethical journalism and be the vanguards of information disorder in the digitised newsrooms, as supported by Chari (2019)

In order to inform operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia such as the NMH and *The Namibian*, the majority of respondents suggest that there is need to strengthen digital in- house fact-checking and debunking mechanisms within hybrid newsrooms. Study findings indicate that the importance of fact-checking mechanism in the hybrid newsrooms lies in its ability to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of officially published information such asnews reports. This has been well supported by Bannikov and Sokolova (2018) and Links (2020). On the other hand, this proposition is contested by Newman and Fletcher (2017) who argue that fact checking and debunking of information disorder should be consideredas an external structure on its own that is not part of journalism. The argument stems from the fact that hybrid media organisations are partially blamed for amplifying information disorder owing to their interdependence on unverified information from social networks (UGC) as news sources (Newman & Fletcher, 2017).

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations are made:

To hybrid media organisations

- Regular in-house training of journalists on ethical considerations within hybrid newsrooms must be seriously taken into consideration as a standard operation policy of all hybrid media organisations in Namibia. This will assist journalists and editors (especially those who graduated many years ago before the uptake of digitised newsrooms) to navigate ethical issues prompted by the evolution of social media in the digital space.
- Since hybrid newsrooms do frequently count on U-G-C as sources of information, scientific fact-checking mechanisms must be strengthened and incorporated in journalistic and editorial routines. This can be achieved through focusing on content

verification tools and web content indicators, which equip them with necessary fact-check skills. In doing so, it sensitise journalists and editors working for hybrid media organisations to act as vanguards of change in advocating anti- information disorder in the digital age.

To journalists and news editors working for hybrid newsrooms

- Contextual factors contribute a lot in shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by journalist and editors working for hybrid media organisations in Namibia. Accordingly, all journalists and editors, are encouraged to consider taking refresher courses on media ethics and fact-checking skills on top of their journalistic qualifications. This will equip them with new attributes to navigate ethical dilemmas prompted by the evolution of digital space.
- Since the challenge of hybrid media organisations is to prove their credibility and reliability in which they share the means of news production and dissemination with citizen journalist, journalists and editors are to strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms. They can achieve this through observing internal media accountability systems rooted in normative theories of the media. To this end, it motivates them to assume change of behaviour and attitude towards realisation of ethical journalism in the digitised media landscape.

To other relevant stakeholders and policy makers

- The Ministry of Information, Communication Technology in collaboration with the Editors Forum of Namibia must revise or amend the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online Media to specifically incorporate a section that addresses operations of hybrid media organisations. This will go a long way to ensure that the Namibian code fit for its purpose and that unethical journalism is nipped in the bud.
- Media researchers, the academia and other relevant stakeholders are encouraged to combine their efforts and re-position their research schemata to concentrate more on media ethics in order to come up with suitable frameworks that inform operations of hybrid newsrooms. They can do so by embarking on participatory action research

projects that respond to critical incidents connected to ethical transgressions committed by journalists working for hybrid media organisations. In doing so, they can come up with informed recommendations aimed at motivating policy makers and the Ministry of Information Communication Technology to indorse apposite national policy frameworks that specifically address operations of hybrid media organisations.

5.4 Suggested areas for further research

From the researcher's knowledge at the time of doing this study, there are no empirical studies particularly in Namibia on ethical issues confronting operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age thus far. With this in mind, more research studies of this nature could be conducted to contribute to the body of knowledge.

As is clear from the study findings that contextual factors contribute a lot in shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by journalists and editors working for selected hybrid media organisations, it would be significant and interesting to attempt. Media researchers, the academia and other relevant stakeholders are encouraged to combine their efforts and re-position their research schemata to concentrate more on media ethics in order to come up with suitable frameworks that inform operations of hybrid newsrooms

It came out clear from study findings that traditional media ethics such as accuracy, truthfulness and impartiality are still relevant to inform operations of hybrid newsrooms in the digital age and that there is need to complement them with new frameworks. Future researchers are challenged not only to continue with this ongoing debate, but to shed comprehensive insights on the criteria to be used in complimenting such ethics. This is very important in this regard taking into consideration implications likely to be incurred thereafter.

There are many directions in which to conduct further research on media ethics. It will be beneficial to assume both empirical and theoretical interventions to examine implications associated with the 'digital/platform first strategy' used in hybrid newsrooms, in which news is seen as multi-course meal where you don't serve the entire bulletin on print version before a teaser on the digital. This means online is about breaking news, while print is aboutin-depth meaning.

5.5 Conclusion

The researcher is highly convinced that the study was a success, albeit a few limitations. This, she concludes based on the fact that all research questions as indicated in the beginning of the study, in chapter one were adequately addressed. Nevertheless, withample time and adequate resources, the study could have been broadened to a wider scale of longitudinal time horizon, focusing on more hybrid newsrooms in Namibia and beyond. Interestingly, the positive responses and voluntary willingness the researcher received from all to share their experiences and perceptions of the research phenomenon cannot beunderestimated. Findings of the study highlight key dimensions to the ongoing ethical debate on the irrelevancy and relevancy of traditional media ethics to inform operations of hybrid media organisations, not only in Namibia, but the global media at large. They also provide a reflective background of contextual factors responsible for shaping ethical dilemmas encountered by journalists and editors working for selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. Media accountability ethical frameworks and policies to informing operations of hybrid media organisations in Namibia were recommended.

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APPENDIX I: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Cover letter

My name is Itai Zviyita, a Master of Journalism and Media Technology student at NUST. As part of the requirements for the completion of my studies for the award of the aforementioned degree programme, I am conducting a research study titled,

You are cordially invited to share your perceptions and experiences through voluntary participation in focus group discussions and interview sessions, which seeks information useful for this academic research.

I assure you that your responses will be treated with strict confidence and sorely used for academic purposes only.

Your participation is highly appreciated.

Thank you.

Itai Zviyita

(The researcher)

Focus group discussion guide for full-time professional journalists at *The Namibian* and NMH

1. How long have you been working as a full-time journalist?
2. How has journalism practice changed ever since the advent of new media technologies?
3. Are there any specific ethical dilemmas that you have experienced in this digital age?
4. In your view, do you think such ethical dilemmas are a result of contextual factors within the local setup and why?
5. What does your organisation's ethical frameworks and policies say about professional journalism conduct in the digital age?
6. In your view, do you think traditional media ethics such as accuracy, impartiality and truthfulness are still relevant to inform operations of hybrid media organisations like yours and why?
7. In your opinion, are there any specific ethical issues that have arisen in your organisation as a result of your digital publishing of news content?
8. In this digital age, a lot of changes have occurred in news production and dissemination. How often do you rely on eyewitness account and citizen-generated content for 'breaking news'?
9. What media accountability measures do you observe to ensure ethical journalism when dealing with eyewitness and citizen-generated content?
10. Ethical dilemmas such as manipulation of photography/video, copyright issues and plagiarism of digital content are very common in this digital age. How do you handle such ethical dilemmas in your organisation?
11. Fake news (misinformation and disinformation) has become an ethical nightmare for media organisations in the digital age, what are you doing as an organisation to deal with it?
12. If you are to recommend for the revision of the Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online Media, what ethical frameworks and policies can you propose to inform the operations of hybrid media organisations (that have both hard copies and digital media products) in Namibia?

In-depth interview guide for full-time professional news editors at *The Namibian* and NMH

1. How long have you been working as a full-time news editor?
2. How has journalism practice changed ever since the advent of new media technologies?
3. Are there any specific ethical dilemmas that you have experienced in this digital age?
4. Are you cognisant of the fact that the production and dissemination of news content by hybrid media organisations is not meant for local audiences only, but the global village? If so, what are you doing to ensure your ethical conduct respond to these realities?
5. As a news editor, how do you handle online errors and corrections?
6. According to the World Press Freedom Index, Namibia is ranked number one in Africa for press freedom and 23 out of 180 countries in the world. In light of this, what contextual factors do you think are responsible of shaping ethical dilemmas that you experience as editors of hybrid media organisations?
7. Digital media is characterised by speed and immediate form of journalism. What is your editorial policy on gate keeping and pre-publication?
8. Ethical dilemmas like manipulation of photography/video, copyright issues and prying into individuals privacy, are very common in this digital age. How do you handle such ethical dilemmas in your organisation?
9. Do you think traditional media ethics are still relevant and applicable to inform operations of hybrid media organisations in the digital age and why?
10. In your opinion, are there any specific ethical issues that have arisen in your organisation as a result of your digital publishing of news content?
11. In order to maintain trust in the news media, how do you deal with ethical transgressions committed by journalists at your organisation?
12. Fake news (misinformation and disinformation) has become an ethical nightmare for media organisations in the digital age, what are you doing as an organisation to deal with it?
13. If you are to recommend for the revision of the Code of Ethics for the Namibian Print, Broadcast and Online Media, what ethical frameworks and policies can you

propose to inform the operations of media organisations (that have both hard copies and digital media products) in Namibia?

14. In your view, what measures should be put in place to hold accountable operations of hybrid media organisations to ensure quality media content that is ethically sound?

APPENDIX II

NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (F-REC)

DECISION: ETHICS APPROVAL

Ref: S008/2021
Student / Staff no.: 218037627

Issue Date: 17 August 2021

RESEARCH TOPIC

Title: **An examination of ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia**

Researcher: Itai Zviyita
Tel: +264 81 669 5983
E-mail: itaizviyitaa@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof Admire Mare
E-mail: amare@nust.na

Dear Ms Zviyita,

The Faculty of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (F-REC) of the Namibia University of Science and Technology reviewed your application for the above-mentioned research. The research as set out in the application has been approved.

We would like to point out that you, as principal investigator, are obliged to:

- maintain the ethical integrity of your research,
- adhere to the Research policy and ethical guidelines of NUST, and
- remain within the scope of your research proposal and supporting evidence as submitted to the F-REC.

Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the F-REC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to F-REC as applicable in writing.

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at NUST.

Sincerely,

Dr Godfrey Tubaundule
Acting Associate Dean: Research and Innovation
Tel: +264 61 207-2932 / 2325
E-mail: gtubaundule@nust.na

Dr Pilisano Masake
Acting Dean: FoHS
Tel: +264 61 207-2063 / 2325
E-mail: pmasake@nust.na

APPENDIX III

Ms. Itai Zviyita

P.O BOX 35446 Kleine Kuppe

Windhoek, Namibia

Date: 24 August 2021

The News Editor

Namibia Media Holdings

Windhoek, Namibia

RE: APPLICATION FOR CONSENT TO CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH JOURNALIST AND INTERVIEWS WITH NEWS EDITORS

Dear Toivo Ndjebela

My name is Itai Zviyita, a student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology studying Master of Journalism and Media Technology. I am conducting a research study on ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. The objective of the study is to investigate how journalists and news editors working for selected hybrid media organisation in Namibia, negotiate ethical dilemmas they are confronted with in the digital age. Therefore, it is my humble request to ask for permission from your organisation to conduct focus group discussions with journalists and interviews with news editors sorely for the purpose of the study.

I sincerely hope my request will be granted in this regard and therefore, your favourable response is highly appreciated.

Yours truly,

Itai Zviyita.

APPENDIX IV

NAMIBIA MEDIA HOLDINGS

27 August 2021

To whom it may concern

RE: CONSENT TO CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH JOURNALIST AND INTERVIEWS WITH NEWS EDITORS

I hereby give consent to Itai Zvilyita, a Master of Journalism and Media Technology student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, to engage with journalists and news editors at NMH. This follows a request made by her in writing stating her intention to conduct interviews and focus group discussions with the aforementioned staff on ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia.

In this regard, she has my permission to engage with the selected news desk staff for the purpose of the study.

Yours sincerely,

Toivo Ndjebela
Editor

P.O. Box 3456 | Windhoek | Namibia 110 Gen. Murtala Muhammed Ave | Eros | Windhoek | Namibia Tel: +264 (0)61 297 2000 www.nmh.com.na

APPENDIX V

Ms. Itai Zviyita

P.O BOX 35446 Kleine Kuppe

Windhoek, Namibia

Date: 24 August 2021

The News Editor

The Namibian

Windhoek, Namibia

RE: APPLICATION FOR CONSENT TO CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH JOURNALIST AND INTERVIEWS WITH NEWS EDITORS

Dear Ashley Smith

My name is Itai Zviyita, a student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology studying Master of Journalism and Media Technology. I am conducting a research study on ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia. The overall objective of the study is to investigate how journalists and news editors working for selected hybrid media organisation in Namibia, negotiate ethical dilemmas they are confronted with in the digital age. Therefore, it is my humble request to ask for permission from your organisation to conduct focus group discussions with journalists and interviews with news editors sorely for the purpose of the study.

I sincerely hope my request will be granted in this regard and therefore, your favourable response is highly appreciated.

Yours truly,

Itai Zviyita.

APPENDIX VI

Still telling it like it is!

the namibian

42 John Meinert Street
Tel: +264 61 279 600
Fax: +264 61 279 602
P.O. Box 20783
Windhoek, Namibia

31 August 2021

Re: Consent to conduct focus group discussions with journalists and interviews with news editors

To whom it may concern

I herein give consent to Itai Zviyita, a Master of Journalism and Media Technology student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, to conduct focus group discussions with journalists and interviews with news editors.

She has informed me that she is conducting a research study on ethical issues confronting operations of selected hybrid media organisations in the digital age in Namibia.

In this regard, she has my permission to interview selected journalists and newsdesk staff.

Yours sincerely,
Ashley Smith
News Editor

.....

The Free Press of Namibia (Pty) Ltd
Reg. 85/058
www.namibian.com.na

Directors: Theo Frank (Chairperson), Alisa Amupolo, Ulla von Holtz, Graham Hopwood
Editor and Managing Director: Tangeni Amupadhi

APPENDIX VII

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This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

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APPENDIX VIII

Certificate of editing

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CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

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P.O. BOX 26388
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https://www.facebook.com/Xpresswriting

17-11-2021

To whom it may concern

This is to certify that a master's thesis titled **'AN EXAMINATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES CONFRONTING OPERATIONS OF SELECTED HYBRID MEDIA ORGANISATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE IN NAMIBIA',** commissioned to us by **Ms ITAI ZVIYITA** has been edited for English language, proofreading, technical, grammar, punctuation, and spelling by Express Language Editing.

Yours sincerely

L. Gawazah

Lazarus Gawazah

Professional English Language Editor

Master of English and Applied Linguistics
(NUST) Namibia

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