

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Journalists' Perceptions of Social Media as Sources of Information in Cameroon

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Received: 22 April 2024 Accepted: 06 May 2024 Published: 09 May 2024

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Abstract

In journalism practice, sources make the news. With the world today facing numerous crises: pandemics, terrorism, wars, political instability, hate speech, xenophobia, fake news, and dis/misinformation; getting sources in journalism practice has become more challenging and this is negatively affecting the profession. Sources shy away from giving information to journalists; yet, information remains the stock-in-trade of journalism. Simply put, without information, there is no journalism. With individuals increasingly shying away from giving out information, journalists have resorted to social media sources with limited censorship, reduced cost, diverse platforms, rapid and convenient communication, amongst other merits. Thus, this study, guided by the medium and gatekeeping theories, focuses on uses journalists make of social media as sources of information in Cameroon. The quantitative approach is employed with survey as research method and a questionnaire as data collection instrument. Findings demonstrate that most journalists use social media for newsgathering (119, 93%). WhatsApp (107, 83.6%) is the most used, followed by Facebook (87, 68%), websites (77, 60.1%), Google Updates (76, 59.4%), Twitter/X (50, 39.1%), and Instagram (31, 24.2%) - the least understood and used platform by journalists. Also, 40.6% of respondents affirm social media as effective information sources, 50.8% are neutral, while 8.9% reject the point. Inferentially, journalists significantly consider social media as information sources. It is recommended that journalists approach social media information with caution to ensure they do not spread propaganda or fake news.

Keywords: Journalists' Perceptions, Social Media, Sources of Information, Cameroon.

1. Introduction

DataReportal's (2024) Global Digital Insights report indicates that Cameroon has 12.73 million internet users as of January 2024, and an internet penetration rate of 43.9%, indicating an increase of 325,000 (+2.6 percent) between January 2023 and January 2024. There were 5.05 million active social media users as of January 2024, equivalent to 17.4% of the total population. This reach of social media shows some opportunities that are available for institutions like governments, media houses, and other segments of society to leverage and reach more people.

The journalism profession gains its reputation and relevance in the world depending on the type of sources they attribute to the information they disseminate. A well-sourced news story is more believable because news consumers have been empowered by social media and can seek and find whatever information they need today on social media. Notwithstanding, the question of news professionalism remains controversial because of selection of news sources. Most of the people who share information on social media are not journalists, but journalists can use social media as springboards to research and investigate news reports.

Citation: Timothy M. Shing, Kingsley L. Ngange, Stephen N. Ndode. Journalists' Perceptions of Social Media as Sources of Information in Cameroon. *Annals of Journalism and Mass Communication*. 2024; 3(1): 38-51.

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Sigal (1986) affirms that sources make the news. "News is, then, a parasitic institution; its product is the deeds and words of others, and its quality depends at least partly on the quality of the information environment in which it is operating. News content, therefore, always needs to be understood not only in the context of what information is considered newsworthy, but of what information becomes available to the news media, and how" (Tiffen et al., 2014, pp.1-2).

From observations, mainstream journalists mostly focus on traditional sources of news like politicians, political parties, businesses, forces of law and order, and leaders of social, economic, cultural, and educational institutions. However, this study examines the role of social media as a source of news to journalists. This is important because social media removes the elite bias in news sourcing.

Gottfried and Shearer (2016) argue that social media has become an important source of information for most people, including journalists. This has been facilitated with the use of ICTs (Newman, Fletcher, & Levy, 2016). The Internet is a very useful tool for journalists and is widely included in daily journalistic practice (Hermans & Vergeer, 2009). A 2018 Forbes survey revealed that there was a 57% increase in traffic on news sites referred from social media. The survey also highlighted the fact that most internet users usually visit news sites to stay up-to-date on the news.

Information found on Twitter, Google, and other online media has become an integral part of the daily working routine of many journalists. This makes online news sources more visible in the news. They have enriched, rather than replaced, more traditional ways of journalistic sourcing (Hermida, 2013; Paulussen & Harder, 2014; Tylor, 2014; Vis, 2013). Broersma and Graham (2012) see social media as a tool for reaching out to audiences, using it in four ways: to disseminate news, to market stories, to establish relationships with news consumers, and as a tool for reporting.

On their part, Lecheler and Kruikemeier (2016) state that mixing both online and traditional news sources is very challenging. For instance, there are doubts about whether journalists always have sufficient technological skills to verify online sources such as quotes from Twitter (Schifferes, Neuman, Thurman, Corney, Göker, & Martin, 2014). Researchers have also observed that the anonymity that comes with internet journalism is liable to impede rather than enhance high-quality journalism and reduce

online information credibility (Bakker, Trilling, & Helfer, 2013; Schifferes et al., 2014 as cited in Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016). For example, the internet has made it possible to publish information unrestrictedly. It promotes the anonymity of sender location and makes it possible for senders to hide their identities. Most people in repressive societies turn off locations on their electronic devices to avoid being tracked by governments. Stassen (2010) supports that information credibility is still contended with online journalism as technology makes it difficult for the public to distinguish a trained journalist from an untrained one.

Traditional media journalists generally portray a negative attitude towards the internet in general and social media in particular. They are concerned with source credibility, information reliability, and the difficulties in verifying facts in the online world (Garrison, 2000; Weise, 1997; Chan et al., 2006). Such reactions can be seen as constituting a process of "news repair" that reaffirms the institutional authority of traditional news media, and the legitimacy of the traditional model of journalism (Bennett et al., 1985; McCoy, 2001).

Unlike most traditional media, that is, print publishing, information posted on the web may not be subject to filtering through professional gatekeepers, and it often lacks traditional authority indicators such as author identity or established reputation. Additionally, there are no universal standards for posting information online, and digital information may be easily altered, plagiarized, misrepresented, or created anonymously under false pretences (Fritch & Cromwell, 2001, 2002; Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003).

Based on the foregoing, it becomes imperative to ascertain the use of social media as a source of news for journalists, since they are the professionals in news gathering, treatment, and dissemination. This is important for journalists reporting in conflict areas where sources are scared to give information to journalists, as well as concerns over information hoarding.

The '*medium is the message*' was coined by Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan and introduced in his book, '*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*', published in 1964. McLuhan proposed that the communication medium itself, not the messages it carries, should be the primary focus of the study. His statement means that the form of

a medium (print, visual, musical, etc.) determines how that message will be perceived. This highlights the importance of sourcing the right information no matter which medium a journalist uses to disseminate information.

This study looks at the uses of social media as sources, from the perspectives of Cameroonian journalists, in information gathering and dissemination. Given that the study is a *mélange* of both print and broadcast journalists, a wider view of social media use as a source of information is surveyed. This is important because previous studies have focused exclusively on print or broadcast journalists.

What then is the problem of the study? Working as a journalist in Cameroon in general and the North West and South West Regions in particular has been increasingly very difficult, given the socio-political crisis, known as the Cameroon Anglophone Conflict, in these two regions.

As a result of the conflict in the North West and South West regions and COVID-19 crisis which also affected the country, people shy away from giving information to journalists for fear of reprisals. If there is a confrontation between separatist fighters and the forces of law and order, the local population who witnessed it will rarely talk to journalists. When journalists go to the scene of such incidents, most eyewitnesses play the ostrich, claiming ignorance of anything, immediately one introduces him/herself as a journalist.

However, since most of these eyewitnesses share such information on social media platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook, journalists have increasingly leveraged such information to build their reports. Nowadays, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Google News Updates, and websites are used mostly to share information. Journalists are faced with the challenge of having no sources, or eyewitness accounts of events. This complicates their task of collecting, treating, processing, and disseminating verifiable information to the public.

While the shying away of sources from giving information to journalists poses challenges, it also allows journalists to explore social media as sources, as many people share everyday experiences on different social media platforms.

The main objective of this study, thus, is to examine journalists' use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Google News Updates, and

websites) as sources of information. Specifically, the study seeks:

1. To investigate the extent to which journalists consider social media as sources of information in Cameroon.
2. To examine how social media use as sources of information affects journalists.
3. To assess the motivations for journalists' use of social media as sources of information in Cameroon.

Three questions are used to guide the researchers:

RQ1: To what extent do journalists consider social media as sources of information?

RQ2: To what extent do social media sources affect the professionalism of journalists in Cameroon?

RQ3: What are the motivations for journalists' use of social media as sources of information in Cameroon?

2. Literature Review

Conceptually, this study focused on journalists' use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Google news updates and websites) as sources of information in Cameroon. Concepts such as social media, journalists, journalism, and sources of information are reviewed.

2.1 Social Media as a Source of News

Social media sources are sources of information that journalists access via social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram or websites like Google News Updates and other credible news websites as well as wire services. Journalists are increasingly incorporating tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram photos, and YouTube videos from individuals and organizations into their mainstream news coverage.

Much of the journalism scholarship on social media has focused on the way journalists have adopted social media to enhance journalism. Studies show that reporters find it useful for conducting research; finding, monitoring, and breaking stories; developing sources; staying up to date with events; and promoting news stories among their audiences (Weaver & Willnat, 2016).

The internet, and particularly social media, enables citizens, civil society, and political and business elites to bypass traditional mass media and directly communicate with each other (Paulussen & Harder,

2014). The demand of the digital media environment, with requirements for constant updates and massive competition for clicks, has been a challenge to many long-established traditions in journalism and news production, leading also to the need for radically different business models (Picard, 2014). Journalists also work in an environment where there are blurring boundaries between citizen journalists, bloggers, and other communication roles (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Deuze, 2007).

Importantly, news has become more integrated into social media, which becomes a place where readers access news and where outlets can deliver content tailored to personal needs. So, social media has become a core part of sourcing news content (Hermida, 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). This could mean breaking stories by using citizen journalist reports on Twitter, or having journalists scouring local community networks on social media for locally trending story ideas. Twitter itself has become what some observers call a part of news production's "technological infrastructure", where news outlets find stories but also where they monitor and copy each other (Paulussen & Harder, 2014).

2.2 Benefits of Social Media to the Journalism Profession

Immediacy in information delivery is one of the benefits of social media to the journalism profession. Marshall, Lefringhausen and Ferenczi (2015) highlighted the increased use of social media in the news production process; as online information-seeking audiences expect to access news information immediately with constant updates of news.

With the availability of online websites and Social Networking Sites (SNSs), information gathering has simplified the practice of journalism, as media organizations now invest in online journalism. With this, journalists using social media can access news, not just as news consumers or information recipients, but also as information providers. Corroborating with this assertion on the benefit of social media to journalism practice, Stassen (2010) pointed out that internet journalists can now receive recent news updates, carry out live coverage (streaming) and disseminate information via online platforms such as blogs, websites, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Newman (2009) also mentions that the use of SNSs for journalists is also advantageous in that it can spread news and information across the world instantaneously.

In a 2005 study by EURO RSCG Magnet and Columbia University as cited in Cassidy (2007), nearly two-thirds (64%) of journalists sometimes or often use news from the web in their reporting. Furthermore, over 90% of journalists indicated that the Internet has had a substantial impact on how they perform their jobs. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) believe that the internet has prompted a shift in the role of journalists in the communication process. In the changing phase of technological advancement brought about by the internet and ICT tools, journalists must play critical roles in mitigating the negative effects of social media and social networking sites on their profession by; verifying information, especially breaking news information to be sure it is credible before disseminating.

A Hoot survey among 275 journalists and other related fields in India found that 28% of them use Facebook, whereas 11% use Twitter. Both Facebook and Twitter are used by 57% of journalists and only 4% of them use none of the social media platforms. 68% use Facebook as a news source and 61% use Twitter for that purpose, 62% use Facebook to follow others, for which 43% use Twitter. For sharing other links, 49% use Facebook whereas 55% use Twitter, and 48% of journalists use Facebook and Twitter for disseminating personal work.

Gearhart and Kang (2014) in their study on the influence of social networking comments on television found that SNS comments have become an important part of television news. Twitter comments are more acceptable as a news component than Facebook comments.

Kruikemeier and Lecheler (2018) in their study titled *News Consumers Perceptions of New Journalistic Sourcing Techniques* involved 422 participants. They discovered that online sourcing techniques, especially the use of social media as a source of news, were perceived as less credible than traditional sources. People perceived the use of social media platforms as sources in the news (that is, Twitter and Facebook) as less credible (mean = 2.56, SD = 1.33; mean = 2.55, SD = 1.64, respectively), compared to the use of traditional news sources and the use of other online sources, such as websites. In addition, the use of other online sources (such as Wikipedia, Google, and websites) was perceived as less credible (mean = 2.99, SD = 1.62; mean = 3.02, SD = 1.56; mean = 3.43, SD = 1.69, respectively), compared to the use of traditional (offline) news sources. Thus, people indeed

consider traditional journalistic sourcing techniques to be more credible than newer forms of sourcing. Opportunities now exist to co-use both online and offline sources.

3. Theoretical Perspective

This study is premised upon two theories: the medium and the gatekeeping theories.

The medium theory states that *the medium is the message* to highlight the importance of the different channels of communication in the communication process. It was developed by McLuhan (1964) to explain that the communication medium itself, not the messages it carries, should be the primary focus of the study. With the emergence of social media today, which is a convergence of text, pictures, audio, and video, audiences can decide which medium now to get information from, given all channels carry the same information in one way or another.

With the evolution of technology, different media will emerge to meet the needs of different communities to pass across the same messages. Thus, the medium keeps changing as well as the messages thanks to technology. Now, a mobile phone can act as a television, radio, or a platform to read newspapers, magazines, books, etc.

The medium theory has two basic assumptions: "The medium is the message" and "Messages influence perceptions apart from the medium". Going by the first underpinning of the medium theory, McLuhan believed that technology was an extension of man and through television, it was possible to have a universally shared culture; thus, suggesting the idea of a global village.

The second tenet argues that the content of the messages influences perceptions apart from the medium. The content or uses of such media are diverse so its consequences on human association cannot be the same. The argument here dwells on the power of the media (medium) in shaping perceptions that will differ from one person to the other based on what they use the media for. However, with the advent of the internet, there have been alternative means to a global village that is even faster than the traditional media (television) (McLuhan, 1964). This is visible in these three towns as journalists in Buea can report issues and incidents in Mamfe, Kumba, Ekondi Titi, Mundemba, and other parts of the South West Region, without stepping their feet in these places by leveraging social media.

Despite criticisms, the medium theory is relevant to this study as McLuhan's *medium is the message* highlights the fact that changes in the medium of communication will also change perceptions of different messages. The literature review demonstrated how journalists across the world have embraced social media, while this study demonstrates their use of such platforms as sources of information.

Meanwhile, the gatekeeping theory by Kurt Lewin explains how information disseminated through media passes via scrutiny and filtration in the hands of some persons who decide, out of the numerous pieces of information at their disposal, what to publish within a particular space and time context (Lewin, 1947).

Lewin argues that the gatekeeping process is led by editors in media houses who are responsible for ensuring that the content disseminated is newsworthy, keeping in mind; the ethics of the profession, laws governing the media landscape in that location, and the editorial policy of that media house (Bajracharya, 2018).

The gatekeeping process is also influenced by other levels of forces, such as the professional routines of journalists and the influence of the news organisation (Ettema & Whitney, 1987). Within the context of this research, gatekeeping is evaluated in terms of how journalists use social media as sources of information, in an era where fake news often competes with real news.

White (1950) classified the different levels of gatekeeping that exist in the media as follows:

3.1 Individuals

Individuals in the light of this study include everyday users of social media, who decide which information to type, which audio or video to record, and the media professional to share with.

3.2 Routine

Media have a pattern of behaviours on how they treat particular issues. In this study, different media organs prioritize different stories.

3.3 Other Media

Media houses are influenced by some high individuals, organizations, or institutions especially when it concerns their financing. Thus, even when journalists get news tipoffs on social media about such individuals, organizations, or institutions that portray such in a negative light, such media organs

will not publish such information to maintain a cordial relationship between them and their sponsors to ensure their continuity and not lose their financial advantages.

3.4 Organisation

All media houses have their agendas to set and issues to propagate. As such, while deciding what to cover, they would always consider these factors, thereby affecting the gatekeeping process and their perceptions of social media as sources.

3.5 Societies

Media must respect the norms and values of the societies in which they operate. As such, practitioners filter their news content and programmes to suit the psycho of the population they are serving to ensure they do not distribute contents that violate society's rights and cultures.

The role of gatekeepers in contemporary society is weakened because individuals have different means of accessing information. Grosheck and Tandoc (2017) aver that need exists to tighten up the media gatekeeping role in this internet era to combat fake news and information overload.

Kurt Lewin's study during the Second World War was also a period of great turbulence with food in limited supply, a picture that fits what is happening in Cameroon today. However, the problem in Cameroon is not a shortfall in food supply, but a shortfall in information sources to verify information. Using this theory, the researchers were able to investigate and understand journalists' use of social media as sources of information.

4. Methodology

This study used the quantitative approach and a survey method. Data were collected from 128 journalists (workers/volunteers) from print and broadcast media organs in the towns of Buea, Limbe, and Tiko, in the South West Region of Cameroon, to determine the uses journalists make of social media as sources of information. These towns are the richest media centres in the South West Region.

The study used the cross-sectional survey to collect data on social media use concerning news gathering, frequency of use, benefits and if they can recommend it, knowledge of the platforms, effectiveness as sources, their understanding and perceptions of social media, social media sites and the journalism profession, and the motivations for social media use as sources.

It was difficult to have a specific number of journalists so a head-to-head count of those working in different houses was conducted by the researchers with help from the Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists, CAMASEJ chapter presidents in Buea and Limbe, who gave the researchers contacts of station managers and publishers. Some offices were visited for the exercise while others were contacted by phone to find out the number of journalists. The researchers used this method because neither CAMASEJ chapter presidents, other journalism association leaders, nor the Ministry of Communication could give the exact number of practising journalists in these towns. After the head-to-head count, the total number of journalists was estimated at 188. The sample study population is represented as seen in the table below:

Table 1. List of media organs with journalists in Buea, Limbe, and Tiko

Media Organ	No. of Journalists
Christian Broadcasting Service (CBS) radio	10
Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) radio	8
Mediafrique radio	10
Dream radio	15
Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV)	13
Revival Gospel radio	5
Bonakanda Radio	4
Tiko Council Community radio	9
HI TV	10
PS TV	5
LD TV	8
CM TV	5
CAM 1 TV	6
EQUINOX TV	2

CANAL 2 TV	1
My Media Prime TV	2
VISION 4 TV	4
LTM TV	3
CRTV MT Cameroon radio	6
Ocean City Radio	10
Eden radio	6
Eternity gospel radio	6
Divine Mercy Gospel radio	5
The Guardian Post newspaper	2
The Post newspaper	8
The Voice newspaper	2
The Horizon newspaper	2
Municipal Updates newspaper	2
Eden newspaper	5
The Star newspaper	6
The Advocate newspaper	5
Cameroon Tribune newspaper	3
Total	188

From table 1, a total of 188 journalists work in the targeted towns. This figure was given and confirmed by station managers, publishers, presidents of journalism associations, editors, and senior staff of the media institutions mentioned above. The researchers used the *Taro Yamane formula* to calculate the sample size, which was 128 journalists.

Cronbach's alpha was conducted to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Hulin, Netemeyer, and Cudeck (2001) proffered that a reliability value ≥ 0.6 is acceptable. In this study, the reliability statistic is 0.67, showing that the instrument is acceptable and reliable.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample

128 journalists in Buea, Limbe, and Tiko took part in the study. Of this number, 63 (49.2%) were males, while 65 (50.8%) were females. Most respondents (47, 36.7%) worked for radio stations, followed by newspapers (33, 25.8%), and television (28, 21.9%). The age range of the respondents suggests that

majority of them (80, 62.6%) are aged between 21 and 30 years, 25 (19.5) respondents are between 31 and 40 years, 16 (12.5%) are between 15 and 20 years; 6 (4.7%) between 41 and 50, and 1 (.8%) above 51 years. Participants cut across different age groups, which is quite important in presenting a full picture, mixing the younger generation who started in the era of social media, and the older generation who were already practising before social media was introduced.

Data illustrate that 101 (78.9%) journalists were sampled in Buea (Buea actually has the greatest representation amongst the towns under study), 25 (19.5%) were sampled in Limbe, and 2 (1.6%) from Tiko. Buea is the regional headquarters of the South West and where the regional correspondents of most media organs in the region are based.

Research question one: To what extent do journalists consider social media as sources of information?

Journalists were asked to rate their use of social media as news sources weekly

Table 2. Journalists' use of social media as sources weekly

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rarely	10	7.8
Sometimes	33	25.8
Often	48	37.5
Always	37	28.9
Total	128	100

With regards to their frequency of social media use as a news gathering tool daily, Table 2 shows that most of the respondents, 85 (66.4%) drawn from always 37 (28.8%) and often 48 (37.5%), said they use social media on an almost daily basis to seek information.

In contrast, 10 (7.8%) of them indicated a rare frequency of use of social media weekly, meaning they make irregular use of it. Also, 33 (25.8%) indicated that they use it sometimes.

Table 3. Journalists' views on social media as effective sources of information

Response Category	Frequency	Per cent
Strongly disagree	3	2.3
Disagree	8	6.3
Neutral	65	50.8
Agree	48	37.5
Strongly agree	4	3.1
Total	128	100.0

Table 3 contains the views of journalists on whether social media are effective sources of information. Respondents were asked to give their opinions on the use of social media as sources of information, by rating their agreement or disagreement on its use as a source of information. 80 (62.5%), drawn from the strongly agree 22 (17.2%), and agree 58 (45.3%) categories attested that they use social media as a source of information in their practice. In contrast, 8 (6.2%) drawn from the strongly disagree 1(0.8%) and disagree categories refused to use social media as a source of information. Furthermore, another group,

40 (31.3%) said they neither agreed nor disagreed with social media being used as a source of information.

A good number of journalists view the different social media platforms as effective sources of information, with 52 respondents (40.6%) strongly agreeing to their effectiveness. Most of the respondents, 65(50.8%) gave a neutral score on social media as an effective source of information. Meanwhile, a small portion of the respondents 11(8.9%) rejected social media as effective sources of information in journalism.

H1: Journalists significantly consider social media as a source of information

Table 4. social media significantly assist journalists in newsgathering

One-Sample Statistics		One-Sample Test (CI: 95%)	
N	128	Df	127
Mean	3.7	T	16.5
Std. Deviation	0.8	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		Test Value	2.5
		Mean Difference	1.2

On Table 4, a One Sample T-test was conducted to determine whether journalists significantly consider social media as a source of information. The result of the test, $t(df = 127) = 16.5, p < 0.05 (p = 0.000)$, revealed that journalists significantly consider social media as a source of information. The result was statistically significant at a 0.05 level with a 95% confidence interval. The mean of the sample (3.7) was significantly higher than the probable test mean, of 2.5 (average agreement response). The result of

this test confirms hypothesis one. Thus, journalists significantly consider social media as a source of information.

Research Question Two: How do social media sources affect the professionalism of journalists in Cameroon?

The researcher also sought to know the benefits of social media to journalists

Table 5. Benefits of social media in journalism

Benefits	Strongly disagree	disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Diverse sources	1 (.8%)	4 (3.1%)	19 (14.8%)	75 (58.6%)	29 (22.7%)	128 (100%)
Breaking news	1 (.8%)	1 (.8%)	18 (14.1%)	61(47.7%)	47 (36.7%)	128 (100%)
News gathering	2 (1.6%)	5(3.9%)	29 (22.7%)	77 (60.2%)	15 (11.7%)	128 (100%)

Constant news updates	3 (2.3%)	3 (2.3%)	26 (20.3)	65 (50.8)	31 (24.2%)	128 (100%)
Feedback from audiences	4 (3.1%)	5 (3.9%)	23 (18%)	57 (44.5%)	39 (30.5%)	128 (100%)
Reporting live	2 (1.6%)	11 (8.6%)	31 (24.2%)	52 (40.6%)	32 (25%)	128 (100%)
Reduced costs	4 (3.1%)	11 (8.6%)	35 (27.3%)	41 (32%)	37 (28.9%)	128 (100%)

Table 5 examines the benefits of social media in journalism and the first benefit rated by respondents was diverse news sources, 104 (81.3%). A summation from the strongly agree 29 (22.7%) and agree 75 (58.6%) categories, affirmed that the possibility of having diverse sources was a benefit of social media in their profession. In contrast, 5 (3.9%) from the strongly disagree 1 (.8%) and disagree 4 (3.1%) categories refuted. 18 (14.1%) respondents were indifferent to diverse sources as a benefit of social media in their profession.

108 (84.4%) drawn from the strongly agree 47 (36.7%) and agree 61 (47.7%) categories, argued that breaking news was one of the benefits of using social media as journalists in their professional lives. However, 2 (1.6%) drawn from the strongly disagree 1 (.8%) and disagree 1 (.8%), categories rejected it. 18 (14.1%) remained indifferent to breaking news as a benefit of using social media.

For news gathering, 92 (71.9%) respondents from the strongly agree category (15, 11.7%) and agree (77, 60.2%) affirmed newsgathering as a key benefit of social media in their daily practice as journalists. However, 7 (5.5%) respondents drawn from strongly disagree (2, 1.6%) and disagree (5, 3.9%) categories refuted it as not being a benefit. 29 (22.7%) were neutral on newsgathering as a benefit of social media in their profession.

Regarding constant news updates by journalists, a summation of 96 (75%) from the strongly agree 31 (24.2%) and agree 65 (50.8) categories, argued that constantly updating audiences with news updates was a benefit for them using social media in their profession. On the other hand, 6 (4.6%) from the strongly disagree category 3 (2.3%) and disagree 3 (2.3%) categories,

opined that using social media for constant news updates was not a benefit for them. Meanwhile, 26 (20.3%) respondents were indifferent.

In line with getting feedback from audiences as a benefit of social media, 96 (75%) drawn from strongly agreed 39 (30.5%) and 57 (44.5%) attested that getting feedback from the audiences was a benefit of social media in their profession. The view was contrasted by 9 (7%) from strongly disagree, 4 (3.1%), and 5 (3.9%) for disagree categories who said it was not a benefit of social media in their profession. Finally, 23 (18%) of the respondents were neutral neither acknowledging it as a benefit or not.

Concerning reporting live as a benefit of social media, majority of respondents, 84 (65.6%) from strongly agree 32 (25%) and agree 52 (40.6%) accepted that using social media to report live events and news happenings was a benefit of social media in their profession. This view was contrasted by 13 (10.2%) respondents in the strongly disagree 2 (1.6%) and disagree 11 (8.6%) categories who rejected reporting live as a benefit of social media in their profession. Meanwhile, 31 (24.2%) were indifferent to the issue.

Most respondents 78 (60.9%) from strongly agree 37 (28.9%) and agree 41 (32%) categories were positive that reduced costs were a benefit of social media in their profession. Contrarily, 15 (11.7%) respondents strongly disagree 4 (3.1%) and 11 (8.6%), rejected reporting live as a benefit of social media. Also, 35 (27.3%) of the respondents remained indifferent on the issue.

H2: Social media sources have a significant positive implication on the professionalism of journalists in Cameroon.

Table 6. Positive implications of social media sources on professionalism

One-Sample Statistics		One-Sample Test (CI: 95%)	
N	128	Df	127
Mean	27.5	T	29.5
Std. Deviation	3.8	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		Test Value	17.5
		Mean Difference	10

A One Sample T-test was conducted, as presented on Table 6, to determine whether social media sources have a significant positive implication on the professionalism of journalists in Cameroon. The

result of the test, $t(df = 127) = 29.5, p < 0.05 (p = 0.000)$, affirmed this assertion. The result was statistically significant at 0.05 level with 95% confidence interval. In addition, the mean of the sample (27.5)

was significantly higher than the probable mean test of 17.5 (average agreement response), which confirms hypothesis two.

Research question three: What are the motivations for Cameroon journalists' use of social media as sources

Table 7. Journalists' motivations for social media use

Variables	Not important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Important	Very important	Total
Getting feedback	2 (1.6%)	13(10.2%)	20 (15.6%)	65 (50.8%)	28 (21.9%)	128 (100%)
Get news updates	2 (1.6%)	8 (6.3%)	16 (12.5%)	71(55.5%)	31 (24.2%)	128 (100%)
Verification of news	4 (3.1%)	14(10.9%)	50 (39.1%)	41 (32%)	19 (14.8%)	128 (100%)
News gathering	3(2.3%)	9 (7.0%)	26 (20.3)	69 (53.9)	21 (16.4%)	128 (100%)
Posting news updates	2 (1.6%)	3(2.3%)	28 (21.9%)	58 (45.3%)	37 (28.9%)	128 (100%)
Socialising with audiences	3(2.3%)	6 (4.7%)	22 (17.2%)	55 (43.0%)	42 (32.8%)	128 (100%)
Research	4 (3.1%)	11 (8.6%)	35 (27.3%)	41 (32%)	37 (28.9%)	128 (100%)
Personal security	4 (3.1%)	9 (7.0%)	34 (26.6%)	44 (34.4%)	37 (28.9%)	128 (100%)

Findings on Table 7, prove that majority of the respondents have different motivations for using social media; rating it from not important to very important. Most respondents 93 (72.7%), drawn from very important 28 (21.9%) and important 65 (50.8%) categories said getting feedback was a motivation for their use of social media as journalists. On the other hand, 14 (11.8%) refuted the fact that feedback was a motivation for using social media. 20 (15.6%) were neutral.

102 (79.7%) respondents representing the very important, 31 (24.2%) and important 71(55.5%) categories rated the platforms very highly in terms of their importance in giving news updates to journalists. In contrast, 10 (7.9%) from not important 2 (1.6%) and somewhat important 8 (6.3%) categories rated getting news updates as not important or slightly important motivation in using social media. Another fraction, 16 (12.5%) were neutral.

60 (46.8%) of the very important 19 (14.8%) and important 41 (32%) categories note that verification of news is a very important motivation for using social media. However, 18 (14.0%) of the not important 4 (3.1%) and somewhat important 14(10.9%) categories refuted it. 50 (39.1%) were neutral on the verification of news as a motivation for using social media.

90 (70.3%) from the very important 21 (16.4%) and important 69 (53.9) categories rated news gathering as a motivation for using social media as professional journalists. Then, 12 (9.3%) from the not important 3(2.3%) and somewhat important 9 (7.0%), categories

of information?

Respondents were asked to rate their motivations for using social media platforms as news sources in their daily lives as professional journalists.

refuted news gathering as a motivation for using social media. Meanwhile, 26 (20.3) expressed their neutrality.

95 (74.2%) in the very important 37 (28.9%) and important 58 (45.3%), said posting updates on social media was a motivation for them to use social media. In contrast, 5 (3.9%) respondents from the not important 2 (1.6%) and somewhat important 3(2.3%) said it was not a motivation for them to use social media, while 28 (21.9%) were neutral.

Most journalists 97 (75.8%) drawn from the very important 42 (32.8%) and important 55 (43.0%) categories agreed socializing with audiences was a motivation for using social media. 9 (7.0%) refuted it, while 22 (17.2%) were neutral.

Concerning the desire to research information on social media, 78 (60.9%) from the very important 37 (28.9%) and important 41 (32%) categories agreed. On the other hand, 15 (11.8%) in the not important 4 (3.1%) and somewhat important 11 (8.6%) categories refuted its role as a motivation, while 35 (27.3%) remained neutral on the issue. 81 (63.3%) respondents from the very important 37 (28.9%) and important 44 (34.4%) categories argued that personal security was a motivation for them to use social media as journalists. However, 13 (10.1%) from the not important 4 (3.1%) and somewhat important 9 (7.0%) categories refuted its importance, while 34 (26.6%) were neutral.

H3: Crises (Cameroon Anglophone crisis and COVID-19) significantly motivated journalists to depend on social media for information

Table 8. Crisis (Anglophone crisis and COVID-19) influenced journalists' reliance on social media as sources of information

One-Sample Statistics		One-Sample Test (CI: 95%)	
N	128	Df	127
Mean	3.3	T	9.2
Std. Deviation	0.9	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		Test Value	2.5
		Mean Difference	0.8

Table 8 shows a One Sample T-test which was conducted to determine whether crises significantly motivate journalists to depend on social media as sources of information. The result of the test, $t(df = 127) = 9.2, p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.000$), revealed that crises significantly influence journalists' use of social media as sources of information. The result was statistically significant at 0.05 level with 95% confidence interval. The mean of the sample (3.3) was significantly higher than the probable test means of 2.5 (average agreement response), which confirms hypothesis three.

6. Discussion, Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this work was limited to the use of social and online media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Google News updates, and websites) by journalists as sources of information in Cameroon. The study was confined to three towns (Buea, Limbe, and Tiko) in the Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. It is therefore the hope of the researchers that the results obtained will be used to establish external validity (generalisability) within the wider context of studying journalists' use of social media as sources of information and the relationship between social media and journalism.

This study, building on a valuable wealth of research in this area, surveyed journalists currently working in the print, broadcast, and online media sectors in the three towns of Buea, Limbe, and Tiko, to learn more about their use of social media platforms as sources of information in their day-to-day professional practice.

Findings suggest that journalists consider social media as significant sources of information. These results corroborate research by Powers and Zambrano (2017) who concluded that nearly every journalist described using social media as important, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to more easily follow sources, get news scoops, and also to get official information. This result confirms a similar study by Kaplan and Heinlein (2010) as cited by Gulyás (2016) that social media allow for a great variety of activities and indeed this flexibility is seen as a key feature of the tools and reasons for their popularity.

In addition to Messner et al (2011) who argued that journalists primarily use social media for publishing and promoting their content, information sharing, sourcing, networking, and conversation, this study adds reduced costs, diverse sources, and reporting live as other benefits of social media.

This research complements other studies which point to the necessity for journalists to standardize the use of social media as sources for their news reports, potentially causing a shift in the traditional gatekeeping and verification conventions (Canter, 2015). As reporters leverage their social networks for professional purposes and fulfil some of the most basic requirements of news construction as social media platforms continue to strengthen their hold on professional journalism.

Research Objective One: To investigate the extent to which journalists consider social media as sources of information in Cameroon

Findings indicate that most respondents 87 (68%) prefer Facebook, 50 (39.1%) Twitter, WhatsApp 107 (83.6%), Instagram 31 (24.2%), websites 77 (60.1%), and Google Updates with 76 (59.4%).

Respondents gave opinions on the use of social media as sources of information, by rating their agreement or disagreement on its use as a source of information. 80 (62.5%) attested that they use social media as a source of information in their practice.

Research Objective 2: To examine how social media use as sources of information affects journalists

To investigate this objective, respondents rated their level of agreement or disagreement with the importance of different social and online media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Websites of media houses, and Google news updates. Respondents largely agreed that these platforms were important in news gathering and dissemination. Furthermore, a significant majority of respondents 113 (88.3%) expressed their willingness to recommend social media as sources of information.

Research Objective 3: To assess the motivations for journalists' use of social media as sources of information in Cameroon.

Findings suggest that respondents were significantly motivated by crises (Anglophone crisis and COVID-19 pandemic) to rely on social media as sources of information. Also, respondents' motivations for using social media like getting feedback (72.7%); getting news updates (79.7%); verification of news (46.8%); news gathering (70.3%); posting news updates (74.2%); socializing with audiences (75.8%); research (60.9%); and personal security, (63.3%) rated them very highly in influencing their practice. Furthermore, other motivations include: sources drying (37.5%); information hoarding, (37.5%); fear of reprisals (45.3%); unwillingness of sources (35.2%); desire to protect sources (35.2%); lack of experts (32.8%). In all, the study provides answers to major research questions that prompted this study.

6.1 Recommendations

For journalists, it is recommended that they embrace social media in their daily practice to get a wider variety of public opinion on their reports. This will enable journalists to inform the public with information from different sources. It can also enable journalists to remain safe while doing their job in times of crises like the Anglophone crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic and many other instances. It also protects sources who are threatened and cannot meet with journalists or talk through insecure lines.

Media organs should harmonize a social media policy that will guide how content is extracted from social media and the extent to which it can be used. This will help media organs reach new audiences and get more content.

To researchers, this work will add to already existing literature in the field, thereby acquainting readers with the basis for knowledge of social media as sources of information for journalists in the targeted towns and the journalism landscape as a whole. This study can also spur further research on fake news in the era of social media and how journalists can learn to identify and debunk it to better inform audiences.

The government, through the National Communication Council (NCC), can outline social media guidelines for journalists to follow in their practice. The government can also encourage civil servants, institutions, and the public to provide needed information to journalists and regularly update their websites and social media platforms.

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