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DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES

**DISSERTATION TOPIC: PROCESSES AND PRACTICES OF ONLINE
'ALTERNATIVE' TELEVISION PROGRAMS IN ZIMBABWE: THE CASE OF
RUVHENEKO LIVE AND #THISFLAG THURSDAY.**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN
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Declaration

I, Kennedy Khombo (R15399Z), do hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work that has not been previously submitted to any other university. In writing this dissertation, I duly complied with ethical issues and laws governing intellectual property.

Dissertation title: Processes and practices of online ‘alternative’ television programs in Zimbabwe: The case of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday*.

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Certificate of Supervision

I hereby certify that I personally supervised this dissertation in accordance with Department Regulations and the University General Regulations.

On that basis, I confirm that this dissertation is examinable.

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Dedication

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Abstract

The study explores the production and distribution processes and practices of online ‘alternative’ television programs in Zimbabwe using the case of two internet based television programs namely *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* owned by Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa and Fadzayi Mahere respectively. The study also sought to unearth how online television programs in Zimbabwe such as the ones mentioned above make money and the effect of that on their programming. The study employed four distinct data collection methods namely online archival search, netnography, non-participant observation and in-depth interviews to gather data while thematic and interview analyses were used in the presentation and discussion of the findings. In the main, this study acknowledges the significances of the internet in creating alternative spaces for communication. However, it sharply disagrees with Dean’s (2003) position that the advent of new platforms of communication such as the internet had revived the Habermasian concept of the public sphere characterized by free entry, free exit as well as freedom of opinion and expression as it unearthed various production and distribution processes and practices of the aforementioned online television programs that contradicts the key tenets of a true public sphere. In light of the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that online television programs in Zimbabwe should endeavor to be more inclusive of ordinary citizens in terms of their production and distribution processes and practices and avoid being driven by commercial, political or any exogenous interests thus keeping the true spirit and grain of the alternative nature of internet based communication spaces alive.

Acronyms

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AIPPA - | Access to Information and Protection to Privacy Act |
| ANZ - | Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe |
| BA - | Broadcasting Act |
| BAZ - | Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe |
| BBC - | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| BSA - | Broadcasting Services Act |
| CASEP - | Civil Alliance for Social and Economic Progress |
| CSPO - | Communication Service Providers Overview |
| EPA - | Emergency Powers Act |
| GNU - | Government of National Unity |
| GPA - | Global Political Agreement |
| GUMC - | Glasgow University Media Group |
| ICT - | Information and Communications Technology |
| ICTs - | Information and Communication Technologies |
| ISP - | Internet Service Provider |
| ITU - | International Telecommunications Union |
| JSC - | Judicial Service Commission |
| LOMA - | Law and Order Maintenance Act |
| MDC – T - | Movement for Democratic Change - Tsvangirai |
| MIC - | Media and Information Commission |
| MISA - | Media Institute of Southern Africa |
| NPP - | National People’s Party |
| OSA- | Official Secrets Act |
| POSA - | Public Order and Security Act |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| PTC - | Posts and Telecommunication Corporation |
| RBC - | Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation |
| RF - | Rhodesian Front |
| SADC - | Southern African Development Community |
| UCT - | University of Cape Town |
| UDI - | Universal Declaration of Independence |
| VMCZ - | Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe |
| WHOSWO - | Women's Heritage Society World Organization |
| ZANU (PF) - | Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front |
| ZBC - | Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation |
| ZEC - | Zimbabwe Electoral Commission |
| ZINARA - | Zimbabwe National Roads Authority |
| ZISPA - | Zimbabwe Internet Service Providers Association |
| ZMC - | Zimbabwe Media Commission |
| ZTV - | Zimbabwe Television |
| ZUJ - | Zimbabwe Union of Journalists |

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Broadcasting in Zimbabwe has been a contested terrain since its introduction in the then colonial Rhodesia in the 1930s (Moyo, 2005). Notwithstanding claims to political neutrality by broadcasters in Zimbabwe, the ruling elite in both pre- and post-independence governments have always used broadcasting as a tool for political control and manipulation of the masses. However, Zaffiro (2002) notes that this phenomenon is not unique to Zimbabwe but is an African problem. He advances that the broadcasting sector in post-independence Africa lies squarely under government control. Further, he states that no African government in its right mind would willingly sacrifice direct control over broadcasting if it does not have to. To lose or even to share broadcasting with other factions, from a Zaffiro (2002: 12) perspective, is “illogical and dangerous”. Moyo (2005) submits that in Africa, there has been an observable practical link between broadcasting and political power which has made the ruling elites to be particularly watchful about its ownership. Coup plotters on the continent, for instance, have always made broadcasting programs key targets (Zaffiro, 2002).

More fundamental to this study, television broadcasting in Zimbabwe has hugely remained under government control, thirty seven years after the country’s independence. Ronning (2003: 214) notes that in terms of government control of broadcasting in the country, “there exists a basic continuity ... before and after independence”. Just like in the pre-independence epoch, Zimbabwe has only one traditional media television station namely the Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) which is owned and controlled by the government. The Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) which establishes the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) whose function, among many others, is “to receive, evaluate and consider applications for the issue of any broadcasting license or signal carrier license for the purpose of advising the Minister on whether or not he should grant the license” (BSA, Section 3 (2) (c)) has, at the time of writing this research report, not recommended the licensing of a single television station thus effectually consolidating ZTV as a *de facto* television broadcasting monopoly and effectively shutting out any competition against it in the country. This seemingly lack of political will by the government to award television broadcasting licenses to new private players is arguably one of the fundamental

reasons that has immensely contributed to the sprouting of online television broadcasts as alternative platforms of communication in Zimbabwe.

Apart from the political and/or legal repression against new private players in television broadcasting in the country as made possible by the Broadcasting Services Act, the proliferation of the internet and digital technologies on a global scale has led to the emergence of a plethora of social media platforms which have significantly enhanced the creation of online alternative platforms of communication. In the Zimbabwean context, this digital boom comes at a time not only when the traditional electronic media industry is heavily controlled by the state but also when it essentially closed on potential new players. As a result, citizens in Zimbabwe have embraced the digital boom by, among other things, by creating alternative communicative spaces which are internet based thus contributing to the emergency of online television broadcasts.

Closely knit to the above and also central to this study is the concept of technological convergence. Jenkins (2002) defines technological convergence as the digitalization of all media content. This characterization implies that all forms of media namely print, audio and visual are unified in a manner which makes them all accessible on a single digital device such as a laptop, tablet or a cellphone. Technological advancements has made it possible for a cellphone, laptop or desktop computer and/or tablet to be used to record a voice or video, take photographs and access the internet among other digital functions. The accessibility of these devices which have the tripartite capability to record, post (or broadcast) and access an online television program with relative ease, at a cheaper cost compared to the huge financial resources, expertise and legal requirements of setting up a proper television station has also contributed to the proliferation of online alternative television broadcast in Zimbabwe.

As a way to circumvent all these legal requirements and the prohibitively high startup and operational costs associated with setting up television broadcasting in Zimbabwe, individuals and corporates alike have resorted to setting up ‘*alternative*’ television programs that made possible by the global digital boom and technological convergence as explained above. They broadcast programmes on online platforms such as *Facebook* and *YouTube*.

Against that background, this study explores the production and distribution processes and practices of online television broadcasting entities in Zimbabwe using online television platforms namely *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* as case studies.

1.2 Background of the Study

The media are central to modern democracy as primary sources of information (Moyo, 2005). This is because democracy as a political system requires an informed citizenry that is capable of participating effectively in public debate and in the overall political process where they have to make informed choices. As such, Moyo (2005) argues that the exchange and free flow of information as well as equal opportunities to participate in political debates have been considered key elements of democracy. Broadcasting, in particular, has come to be regarded as the most effective mass medium worldwide in shaping people's social and political perceptions. The accessibility, immediacy and intrusiveness associated with both radio and television have given rise to these assumptions about the power of broadcasting (Moyo, 2005)

In the name of 'national interest', 'national security' and 'national sovereignty', as noted by Moyo (2005), broadcasting in general and television in particular, from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, has been characterized by two salient features namely its 'legal' status as a state monopoly and secondly, its location under the Ministry of Information which renders it a political tool in the hands of the government of the day.

Private players in television broadcasting, since the country's independence in 1980 have been completely denied the right to freely set up programs in Zimbabwe, in spite of constitutional guarantees firstly under section 20 of the Lancaster House constitution which guarantees the protection of freedom of expression for every citizen (Zimbabwean Constitution Order, 1979). Probably, the ruling elite took advantage of the fact that this (old) constitution was silent on the rights of citizens to freely set up broadcasting media as a way to enhance ways of enjoying their freedoms to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas.

Interestingly, the new Zimbabwean constitution of 2013, hyped by media freedom advocates as one of the best and most liberal constitutions in the world, under section 61, subsection (3) states that broadcasting and other electronic media of communication have freedom of establishment which is, however, subject only to '*state licensing procedures*' (Constitution of Zimbabwe,

2013). Notwithstanding this new dispensation as ushered in by the new constitution, at the point of writing this academic research report, the broadcasting sector, particularly television broadcasting remains closed for new private players and control of the sole television station in Zimbabwe lies firmly with the state. The above-mentioned ‘state licensing procedures’, enshrined squarely in the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001, are ones which scholars say are being employed by the government to deny entry into television broadcasting by new private players.

For example, Moyo (2005) notes that at face value, the BSA is an excellent document that opens up the broadcasting sector to competition, more so given that it has been touted as a hybrid of some of the most democratic laws in the world. Further, he states that its provisions for the establishment of a broadcasting authority responsible for the regulation of frequencies and allocation of licenses to new broadcasters (the setting up of a three-tier broadcasting system comprising public service, community and commercial broadcasting; and its emphasis on the promotion of national culture, national languages, local ownership and local production industry) are a remarkable improvement from the previous colonial legislation.

However, Moyo (2005) notes that a closer look at the Act reveals that it, in many ways, impinges on the communicative rights of Zimbabwean citizens. He observes that BSA contains several clauses that make it difficult for new players to enter the broadcasting market, which to some extent, may explain why sixteen years after its enactment, no single company or individual has been awarded a license to operate. For instance, the Act places excessive powers in the hands of the Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services as the ultimate licensing authority. As stated under section 6 of the Act, “subject to this Act, the minister (of Information and Broadcasting Services) shall be the licensing authority for the purpose of licensing any person to provide a broadcasting service or operate as a signal carrier in Zimbabwe”. The minister thus determines at his discretion who gets a license, the terms and conditions attached to an issued license, whether an issued license should be amended, suspended or cancelled, when to take over a broadcasting station among many powers (Hondora, 2002). Also according to the Act, the minister of information, in consultation with the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, appoints members of the BAZ. Moyo (2005) argues that BAZ is therefore not independent as the minister has the discretion to appoint, terminate or alter the conditions of service of its members.

Further, he states that such boundless powers are open to abuse as the Minister can deny access to broadcasting to perceived ‘enemies of the state’.

Further, the BSA extremely limits investments in the broadcasting sector by insisting on unrealistic licensing conditions, particularly for commercial broadcasting (Hondora, 2002). According to section 11 of the BSA, foreign shareholding is prohibited while licensees are restricted from possessing both a broadcasting license and a signal career license. Under subsection 5 of the same section, also, licensees should make available a cumulative one hour per week to the government of the day, at its request, for the purpose of enabling it to explain its policies to the nation. The abovementioned clauses are some of the notable restrictive clauses that are not investment friendly and the Civil Alliance for Social and Economic Progress (CASEP) argues that the Act is “a recipe for continued state control of radio and television leading to the silencing not liberation and amplification of the many unheard voices” (*Daily News*, 7 April 2001).

On the other hand, the first ever Internet Service Provider (ISP) in Zimbabwe according to the Communication Service Providers Overview (CSPO) released in 2013 is a company called *Data Control & Systems* which was established in 1994. The national *Posts and Telecommunication Corporation* (PTC) in 1997 invested in a national internet backbone to sell to private ISPs and this led to affordable and improved internet access to many (CSPO, 2013). The International Telecommunications Union (2014) reports that internet in Zimbabwe has witnessed a phenomenal expansion with approximately 40 per cent (5.2 million) of the country’s population being users of internet in that year as compared to 15.7 per cent in 2011 and just 0.4 per cent in the year 2000. The Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 established the ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to focus on ICTs growth and development and that move led to improved access to internet for the people of Zimbabwe.

As a response to the aforementioned barriers to entry, thanks to technological convergence and the advent of the internet and digital platforms, private individuals and companies are setting up internet based television broadcasting as a way to sidestep the legal requirements or impossible state licensing procedures associated with the setting up of the traditional media television broadcasting station in Zimbabwe.

Against this background, this study unpacks the production and distribution processes and practices of the internet based television broadcasting in Zimbabwe. The study establishes the production and distribution modus operandi of online television programs as well as their ways of making money. At the time of conducting this study, the internet based platforms such as *YouTube*, *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* among others were awash with Zimbabwean ‘television broadcasts’ that seek to offer an alternative perspective to the one being offered by ZTV. Examples of such television broadcasts include *PO Box*, *Bus Stop TV*, *Zim DiTV*, *Ruvheneko Live*, *#ThisFlag Thursday* and *263 Chat* among several others. This study however, focuses only on the cases of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday*.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Existing literature related to broadcasting and new media in Zimbabwe focuses mainly on the history of broadcasting in Zimbabwe before and after independence, the laws that were enacted to stifle the setting up of privately owned television programs in the country (Zaffiro (1992, 2002); Feltoe (2002); Moyo (2005); Mano (1997, 2008); Ronning (2003) Hondora (2002); and Chiumbu, Minnie and Bussiek (2009)), and the emergence of the internet based communicative spaces in Zimbabwe that seek to liberalize the airwaves (Chibuwe and Ureke 2016; Dean 2003; Papacharissi 2009; Allan 2007; Wang and Bates 2008; Hindaman 2008; Castells 2007). However, academic or scholarly literature which specifically addresses the production and distribution practices and processes of internet based online television programs in Zimbabwe is scarce.

Against that background, the proposed study is worth pursuing because it fills the academic gap on the production and distribution processes and practices as well as the sustenance of online television broadcasting in Zimbabwe. Further, the study could serve as a comprehensive academic record for generations to come on the role played by online television programs in offering an alternative perspective of socio economic and political issues in Zimbabwe thus challenging the hegemonic discourses as advanced by the state through ZTV. Also, for future researchers, this study can provide a point of departure through the providence of baseline information on the history of online alternative television station in Zimbabwe.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Owing to the reluctance by the Zimbabwean government to award television licenses to private players, individuals and companies have resorted to setting up internet based television channels. These seek to offer a new and alternative perspective of the socio economic and political issues thus effectively challenging the manner in which news as well as socio economic and political views are presented on the sole television station in Zimbabwe. Following this rise of online television programs in Zimbabwe, this study seeks to explore their production and distribution processes and practices using the cases of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#This Flag Thursday*.

1.5 Broad Research Question

The main research question is: “What are the production and distribution processes and practices of online ‘alternative’ television in Zimbabwe?”

1.5.1 Related Questions

Research sub-questions are:

- How do online television programs gather, package and disseminate information?
- How do online television programs get credible sources of news and information?
- Who are the target audiences of online television programs in Zimbabwe and how do they measure their viewership?
- What are the ownership, control and funding patterns of online television programs in Zimbabwe?

1.5.2 Research Objectives

The ultimate goals of this study are to:

- Establish the production and distribution processes and practices of online television programs in Zimbabwe.
- Interrogate the ownership, funding and control patterns of online television programs in Zimbabwe.
- Establish the target audiences of online television programs in Zimbabwe and they ways to they use to measure these audiences
- Probe the ability of online television programs to in Zimbabwe to get credible sources of news.

1.6 Assumptions

In conducting the study, the key assumptions are that the owners of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* will be readily available to be interviewed and more fundamentally they will respond to all the questions from the researcher truthfully and objectively.

1.7 Delimitation

While there are so many emerging privately owned internet based television broadcasts in Zimbabwe, this study focuses only on two Harare based online programs namely *Ruvheneko Live* owned by radio and television personality Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa and *#ThisFlag Thursday* owned by Adv. Fadzai Mahere. Also, the study focuses only on the period between January 2017 and October 2017.

1.8 Limitation

The limitation of this study is largely related to the criticism(s) or weakness(es) of the case study research design which is being employed herein. One of the key disadvantages of the case study approach as noted by Stake (1995) is that the data collected cannot necessarily be generalized to the wider population. This means that the data collected and findings of the proposed study may not be relevant or particularly useful to other alternative online television programs in Zimbabwe. However, case studies allow a lot of detail to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs (Creswell, 2009).

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study, explored its significance and set out its objectives. The next chapter explores reviewed related literature and theoretical frame work. Chapter three presents the methods of data gathering and analysis and presentation while chapter four analyses the two online television structures. Chapter five presents the research findings and finally chapter six concludes the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the media theories and concepts upon which informs this study. Furthermore, related literature is reviewed in this section with the intention to indicate the academic gap where this study fills in the existing body of knowledge within the realm of media studies.

2.1 Literature Review

In an academic study, it is vital to explore the field in which you are going to do your research and gain a thorough awareness of current work and perspectives in the area so as to position one's own research clearly on the academic map of knowledge creation (Ridley, 2008). Bless and Higson Smith (2006) define literature review as a process of reading whatever has been published and appears relevant to the researcher's topic. Hart (1998: 13) advances the view that a literature review refers to:

the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular stand point to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.

Ridley (2008: 42) states that "...in literature review, it is where connections are made between the source texts that you draw on and where you position yourself and your research among these sources". It is, therefore, the researcher's opportunity to engage in a written dialogue with researchers in their area while at the same time showing that they have engaged with, understood and responded to the relevant body of knowledge underpinning their research. Simply put, deducing from the above-mentioned scholarly definitions, literature review serves as the driving force and fulcrum for your own research investigation. It is a coherent argument that leads to the description of a proposed study (Rudestam and Newton, 2001).

Making use of the thematic approach in terms of presentation, this study reviews both published and unpublished academic works by various scholars in the area of media studies.

2.1.1 Broadcasting in Pre and Post-Independence Zimbabwe

Broadcasting in Zimbabwe has always been tightly controlled since its inception under such laws as Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA), Emergency Powers Act (EPA), Broadcasting Act (BA) enacted before the country's independence and the Access to Information and

Protection to Privacy Act (AIPPA), Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting (Commercialization) Act passed after independence. Zaffiro (1992, 2002); Feltoe (2002); Moyo (2005); Mano (1997, 2008); Ronning (2003) Hondora (2002); and Chiumbu, Minnie and Bussiek (2009) are some of the key scholars who have published academic work in the area of broadcasting in Zimbabwe. In essence, the abovementioned scholars all agree at the idea that the space for truly independent or privately owned broadcasters in Zimbabwe is limited or closed. Furthermore, they agree that, generally, there is lack of political will on the part of government to loosen its grip on the broadcasting sector and allow ‘genuinely’ private broadcasters in both radio and television to operate in Zimbabwe. Some of the abovementioned scholars explore the ‘draconian’ media laws which were deliberately enacted or amended by the post-independence government to stifle the setting up of truly independent private broadcasters in Zimbabwe thus limiting the freedoms of expression of the media and their establishment.

Moyo (2005) traces the origins of broadcasting from the early days when it was introduced in Rhodesia until the year 2005, a post-independence era when he conducted his study. He states that the history of broadcasting in Zimbabwe dates back to the 1930s and its development is closely linked to that of Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia), from where the first broadcasting to Africans was done. Further, Moyo (2005: 13) states that broadcasting, as the Director of Information for Northern Rhodesia Harry Franklin, wrote began more as an experiment to “see whether broadcasting to Africans would be worthwhile from the point (of) view of war propaganda and of getting to the people quickly in the event of a serious war emergency”.

Ronning (2003) unpacks the colonial Broadcasting Act (BA) and argues that it was a racist piece of legislation which was designed to deny both the access to the existing broadcast media and the freedom to set up independent broadcasting spaces in Rhodesia. Moyo (2005) weighs in and states that the Broadcasting Act law was retained by the newly elected ZANU government and was used to deny entry into the broadcast sector by truly private and independent players until it was repealed in the year 2000 and replaced by the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) of 2001. Further, Moyo (2005) narrates how the laws restricting media freedom were enacted by the Rhodesian Front (RF) regime when they assumed power in 1960. He states that when the RF government came to power, there was growing domestic and international pressure for granting independence to the majority Africans. Because of this, for the RF regime, direct control of

broadcasting became imperative, as it perceived free flow of information as a threat to its survival. Pursuant to their agenda of rigid control of broadcasting as a way of countering resistance to the introduction of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), Moyo (2005) writes that in 1963 the RF regime staffed the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation with party loyalists, the majority of whom were neither qualified nor experienced in broadcasting. Further, he states that following the declaration of the UDI in 1965, the RF government went on to enact a plethora of restrictive laws that it enforced without hesitation until independence in 1980. These include LOMA of 1960 which provided for the prosecution of the media, journalists and individuals for making statements which might cause “fear, alarm or despondency”; the Emergency Powers Act enacted in 1964 which presented the RF regime with a wide range of powers not only to clamp down on the media as well as individuals opposed to its cause but also to craft and enact emergency laws as it deemed fit.

At Zimbabwe’s independence on April 18, 1980, Mano (1997/2008), Ronning (2003) and Moyo (2005) all agree that the new ZANU PF government took over a broadcasting system that had been created to serve minority interests. In light of this, the new government’s immediate task was, therefore, to transform RBC into an institution that served the needs of the black majority. Pursuant to that, Moyo (2005) and Mano (1997/2008) narrate that in April 1980, a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) taskforce led by John Kirk was set up and commissioned to establish the future necessities of broadcasting in a newly independent Zimbabwe. Further, they write that, among other things, the taskforce’s terms of reference included to evaluate the existing transmission, training, management editorial and financial aspects of ZBC and make recommendations on how public broadcasting services would be expanded to serve all parts of the country.

Most importantly, according to Ronning (2003), the BBC taskforce’s report noted that broadcasting has been undesirably affected by political interference both under the RF and the UANC governments. The report, therefore, stressed the need to win back broadcasting from partisan control, stating that, “the first requirement is for the broadcasting service to be independent of government, party, commercial or any other pressure” (cited in Mano, 1997: 45). Other recommendations were that there was need for technical upgrading, streamlining of management, improvement of programming so that ZBC’s service become responsive to the

interests of its audiences and that it acts as a unifying, educational and informational source (Mano, 1997). Zaffiro (1992), however, condemned the BBC team for its top-down tone and accused them of failing to conduct wide societal consultations on broadcast policy in Zimbabwe.

Moyo (2005) concurs with Mano (1997) and Ronning (2003)'s sentiments above and adds that most of the BBC taskforce recommendations were implemented and the content of broadcasting on both television and radio became more reflective of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity in Zimbabwe. Further, he writes that the management structure at ZBC changed in light of the BBC's team recommendations and a new approach for using the media for nation building, socialist transformation and rural development was adopted with Radio 2 and Radio 4 being deployed for this purpose. Also, a second television channel namely TV2 was introduced to serve as a strictly educational and informative channel (Moyo, 2005).

However, more fundamental to this study, Ronning (2003) and Moyo (2005) observe that these changes did not tamper or interfered with the monopoly status of ZBC. Further, they converge on the idea that government control of broadcasting through the Ministry of Information remained unchanged and the ZBC remained both politically and financially dependent on the government, hence, in Moyo's (2005) view, there was *change without change* as the title of his paper suggest.

This view is endorsed by Mano (1997) who argues that during the *Gukurahundi* era (early to mid-1980s), a pre-independence law namely the Broadcasting Act was employed by the ZANU government to deny ZAPU officials access to broadcast media in an independent Zimbabwe, in the same manner the pre-independence Smith Regime had used it to deny the African nationalist movements access to broadcast media.

The Broadcasting Services Act of 2001, which replaced the colonial Broadcasting Act, in principle, as not by Zaffiro (2002); Ronning (2003); Moyo (2005); Chiumbu *et al* (2009), opens up the airwaves but in practice, it closes them and protects ZBC against any competition. Zaffiro (2002) unpacks the specific laws that affect both the establishment and operations of broadcast media houses in post 2000 Zimbabwe. He explains how the BSA was used by the ZANU PF regime to limit the establishment of new private players in the broadcasting sector. In essence, he argues that the BSA, which was enacted hard on the heels on the formation of a meaningfully

strong opposition party namely the Movement for Democratic Change (formed in 1999), limits the right to freely set up new broadcast media through provisions such as the establishment of BAZ whose function among others is “to receive, evaluate and consider applications for the issue of any broadcasting license or signal carrier license for the purpose of advising the Minister on whether or not he should grant the license” (BSA, Section 3 (2) (c)). Zaffiro (2002) further contends that members of BAZ serve at the pleasure of the minister who appoints them and this makes them biased in favour of their appointing authority. Ronning (2003) weighs in and explores two other media laws namely the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002 and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting (Commercialization) Act which augment the BSA. He states that AIPPA provides for the licensing of all media and the registration of all journalists with government appointed Media and Information Commission (MIC). Moyo (2005) agrees with Ronning (2003) and writes that, according to AIPPA, one has to be a Zimbabwean citizen to be eligible to own a media service, a condition which he argues that it stifles the growth of the media by denying foreign nationals or Zimbabweans who ordinarily reside out of the Zimbabwe the right to own a media service.

In a booklet titled *A Guide to Media Law*, Feltoe (2002) explores all the laws that relates to both the print and electronic media in Zimbabwe. He unpacks the provisions of laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), Official Secrets Act (OSA), Public Order and Security Act (POSA), and the provisions of the (old) constitution among others. However, this booklet only unpacks the various provisions on these laws and the constitutional position on freedom of expression in Zimbabwe but does not critique them. In essence, it simply enlightens journalists and media houses in Zimbabwe on what is expected of them in terms of the law and the resultant ramifications should they fail to observe the law.

Chiumbu *et al* (2009) in their work titled *Public Broadcasting Series in Africa: Zimbabwe (A Survey by the African Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project)* go a step further and critique all the media laws in Zimbabwe. In essence, they argue that despite the general guarantees of freedom of expression and access to information on paper in the constitution, the vast majority of people in Zimbabwe do not feel free to express their views or set up private

alternative media services. They postulate that people voice their opinions freely only within their own group and often consider carefully where they are, who they are with and what they say under the circumstances.

To validate the abovementioned views, Chiumbu *et al* (2009) state that the space for freedom of expression in the media was severely restricted after the authorities closed down the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), publishers of the mass circulation *The Daily News* and *The Daily News on Sunday*, on 12 September 2003. Further, Chiumbu *et al* (2009) posit that the closure of *The Daily News* was followed in 2005 by the closure of the weekly *The Tribune*, another independent newspaper, and *The Weekly Times*, a paper based in Bulawayo.

Masunungure (2010) states that the March 29, 2008 harmonized elections were the closest to a normal poll the country had seen in a decade where, for the first time, opposition parties were granted access to television broadcast to articulate their manifestos and flight political advertisements on the national broadcaster, ZTV, in the run up to the elections. However, following Robert Mugabe's first round defeat at the hands of Morgan Tsvangirai in that election, Masunungure (2010) states that the ZANU PF regime quickly realized and corrected its mistake and never granted the MDC access to the state broadcast media in the run up to the 27 June 2008 presidential run-off. She notes that the run off was marred with accusations of vote buying, rigging, violence, intimidation and, more relevant to this study, biased coverage in state controlled media among other irregularities. This prompted the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai to pull out of the runoff, five days before the vote. The results therefrom were rejected by the MDC as well as some of the regional and international bodies which resulted in an impasse between the MDC and ZANU PF. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) through then South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki intervened and successfully brokered the Global Political Agreement (GPA) which, in turn, gave birth to the Government of National Unity (GNU).

The scholarly discussion above is quite useful to this study not only because it explores the historical context of broadcasting in Zimbabwe but also because it unpacks the legal environment within which broadcast players, including new or online 'alternative' broadcasting media houses, operate. Further, it explores and gives graphic examples of how the law has been

used for political expediency in both pre and post-independence Zimbabwe, at the expense of freedom of expression and other related civil liberties.

During the GNU, Zimbabwe witnessed the licensing of the first two ‘privately owned’ radio stations namely *ZiFM Stereo* and *Star FM* in 2011. However, the licensing of the two aforesaid radio stations was tainted with accusations of bias with the ZANU (PF) half of the GNU, which was responsible for the ministry of information, being accused of awarding the licenses in a manner that is skewed in favour of their blue eyed boys namely Supa Mandiwanzira and the Zimpapers group, a Zimbabwe Stock Exchange Limited company, in which the government owns a controlling stake. The year 2013 marked the end of the GNU and more fundamentally to this study, a new dispensation was ushered in with the adoption of a new constitution. Sections 61 and 62 of the constitution expressly guarantee freedoms of expression and the media as well as access to information. According to section 61, subsection (3) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) “broadcasting and other electronic media of communication have freedom of establishment which is, however, subject only to *state licensing procedures*”. In spite of this constitutional guarantee, no single genuinely privately owned television was licensed at the time of writing this research report.

However, in 2015, a ray of hope in the liberalization of airwaves was witnessed following the licensing of community/commercial radio programs such as *YA FM* in Zvishavane, *Skies FM* in Bulawayo, *98.4 FM Midlands* in Gweru, *Hevoi FM* in Masvingo, *Breeze FM* in Victoria Falls and *Diamond FM* in Mutare. However, in television, the space for private players is still closed and citizens have resorted to the use of internet based platforms as alternative spaces of communication. It is these those platforms that this study explores and fill the academic gap that exists, focusing on the production and distribution processes and practices of online television programs such as *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* in Zimbabwe.

2.1.2 The Internet as an Alternative Communicative Space

Quite a substantial body of knowledge points to the fact that Zimbabweans and the world at large have embraced the internet based platforms such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter* and *WhatsApp* among several others (Chibuwe and Ureke 2016; Dean 2003; Papacharissi 2009; Allan 2007; Wang and Bates 2008; Hindaman 2008; Castells 2007). The abovementioned scholars appear to coalesce on the notion that the advent of the internet has presented the world with a plethora of

platforms to send and receive information at super high speeds with minimum to no regulation at all or any form of interference from political or commercial forces.

An excellent point of departure is offered by Dean (2003) who acknowledges that the emergence of new communication technologies such as the internet has revived Habermasian concept of public sphere. In her work titled *Why the Net is not a Public Sphere* she defines the public sphere as the “site and subject of liberal democratic work” (p. 95) which is characterized by equality, transparency, inclusivity and rationality. Interestingly, however, Dean (2003: 98) denies that the internet is a true public sphere and argues that it is “an ideology of publicity in the service of communicative capitalism”.

Papacharissi (2009), on the other hand, disagrees with Dean (2003) and believes that the advent of the internet has enhanced people’s communication through the introduction of two or multiple ways of interaction not envisaged with traditional media. Allan (2007) agrees with Papacharissi (2009) view above and adds that the internet has opened up a space for citizen journalism. He mentions cases such as Hurrican Katrina and the July 7, 2005 London bombings when mainstream media relied on citizen journalists’ information as classic examples. Castells (2007: 246) weighs in and describes the rise of the internet, as an alternative communicative space, as “the rise of mass self-communication”. He argues that the diffusion of internet, mobile communication, digital media and a variety of tools of social software have prompted the development of social networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time.

Wang and Bates (2008) also agree with other scholars on the importance of the internet as an alternative space for communication and state that the internet gave ordinary citizens the power to become producers and consumers (pro-nsumers) or actors. Further, they argue that online alternative spaces of communication have to lead to a significant improvement in the public and private discourses thus providing a marketplace of ideas vital to a democracy.

Midlands State University based scholars, Chibuwe and Ureke (2016), in a paper titled *‘Political Gladiators’ on Facebook in Zimbabwe: A discursive analysis of intra Zimbabwe African National Union – PF (ZANU PF) cyber wars; Baba Jukwa vs Mai Jukwa*, describe social media, as ushered in by the advent of the internet, as ‘liberative’ as they explore its use in the context of

political discourse in Zimbabwe. The paper looks at how two warring camps within the ZANU (PF) party made use of the *Facebook* platform to unleash unrestrained attacks on one another in the run up to the country's general elections held in 2013. Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) agree with the notion that the internet's emergence has liberated and enhanced the public sphere due to the sometimes anonymous nature of its communication.

The academic works reviewed above are important for this study because they explore, albeit from different stand points, how the advent of the internet has not only enhanced but also liberalized communication and presented people with alternative spaces to freely express their views, a case which may not have prevailed at any stage in Zimbabwe, had it not been for the emergence of the internet. The discourses above are also vital to this study because they present graphic examples of how internet based platforms of communication have been successfully used as alternative spaces to enhance peoples freedom to hold opinions and freely express themselves. The internet has enabled citizens to challenge the veracity of news and information presented on traditional media radio and television. Hindman (2006) states that the internet (online communication) has made journalists and other elites more accountable, or at least more vulnerable while Wang and Bates (2008) note that it is more democratic and enables ordinary citizens to hold the media accountable for their actions, unlike before when communication used to be top-down.

However, all the scholars cited under this sub-topic agree that the internet, as an alternative communicative space or public sphere, brings with it a plethora of challenges. Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) state that the internet's liberative potentials are also its potential dangers. They argue that, for instance, internet based platforms of communication such as *Facebook* have led to the plummeting of long established journalistic ethics and principles since any user can send information to multitudes of people. Furthermore, they postulate that several governments have expressed concern over the unholy use of the internet by terrorist movements to recruit and train followers. Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) also contend that relative anonymity associated with the use online communication inevitably presents a chance for abuse, such as slander and defamation, usually with no room for recourse for the aggrieved.

Dean (2003); Hindman (2008) as well as Wang and Bates (2008) converge on the idea that the internet gives too much power to too many, sometimes, dangerous people. Wang and Bates

(2008: 3) state that "... the openness and freedom of the Internet is disruptive, lacking the moderating influence of more traditional channels of political discourse" and most of the information produced by ordinary citizens online is 'trivial, silly or wrong', deceptive and pornographic among other ills. Dean (2003: 100) argues that when ordinary people go online, they "tend to lose their common sense and believe all kinds of tales and crazy theories".

The review is vital to this study not only because it demonstrates the emergence of the internet as an alternative platform for communication, but also looks at immediate past graphic examples where specific platforms on the internet have been used successfully as alternative communicative spaces. In light of that, this study explores the production and distribution processes and practices of a different platform from the ones in the literature reviewed above thus making it worthwhile to pursue.

2.1.3 Alternative Media Discourses

This study will not be complete if I do not commit time and space to review literature in the area of alternative media, sometimes referred to as radical media. While there is no shortage of academic work in this area, what is interesting, however, is that there are a lot of divergent views in terms of what constitutes 'alternative media' and what are its key characteristics. However, several scholars agree that what led to the emergency of the alternative press is the unfair reportage of news in the main stream media which is usually skewed in favour of the a few elites at the expense of not only the minority in a society, but also the truth.

Abel (1997) notes that defining 'alternative' or 'radical' has led to some critics to argue that there can be no meaningful definition of the term 'alternative media'. Further, he says whilst the term 'radical' encourages a definition that is primarily concerned with (often revolutionary) social change, the term 'alternative' is more general in application. Atton (2002) weighs in and posit that as a blanket term, the name 'alternative', as used in 'alternative media', has the strength that it can encompass far more than radical or social change and can also include alternative lifestyle magazine, an extremely diverse range of zine and the small press of poetry and fiction publishers.

The Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1982, and 1985) has shown how trade unions, striking workers and the depiction of industrial relations are portrayed in the mainstream media

largely from the position of the powerful people such as the politicians, the company owners and their managers. They argue that, on the other hand, workers and their representatives are portrayed in the same at best as irritants and at worst as saboteurs operating outside the bounds of logic and common sense.

Miller's (1994) study of the mainland reporting in the Northern Ireland, Gitlin's (1980) examination of the American media characterizing the American New Left in the 1960s and Maritz's study of the American media's representation of gays and lesbians, in agreement with the Glasgow University Media Group (above), all point to extremely selective and prejudiced news reporting.

Atton (2002) also weighs in and states that there is no shortage of studies to show how mass media characterizes and represents specific social groups in ways suggesting that these groups are blameworthy for particular economic or social conditions or that they hold extreme political or cultural views. Furthermore, he notes that such groups rarely comprise the powerful and influential elites that routinely have access to such media. By contrast, other groups are marginalized and disempowered by their treatment in the mass media, treatment against which they generally have no redress.

From the academic work of scholars cited above, it is apparent that there is no conclusive definition for the term alternative media. What appears ostensible to all is the converging point on what led to the rise of alternative media the world over. The unfair coverage and reportage of news has led to the rise of alternative media and the same seems to be true for this study. The tightening of grip on broadcast media whose reportage is tilted in favour of a few ruling elites in Zimbabwe, has significantly contributed to the rise of internet based alternative media platforms in the country.

However, Fisk (1992) in his work titled *British Cultural Studies and Television* attempts to draw a line between mainstream media and the alternative media and states that the major difference between the two lie in their selection of news and in the way that selection is made particularly how the alternative media politicize the 'repression of events'. He argues that this remains a continuing, defining characteristic of how much alternative media view their approach to their content. Atton (2002) approves this distinction as noted by Fisk (1992: 17) and adds that "in a

media culture that appears less and less interested in in-depth investigative reporting, alternative media provide information about and interpretation of the world which we might not otherwise see and information about the world that we simply will not find anywhere else”.

Two American studies exhibit the significance of alternative media for radical or unconventional content. On the one hand, Schuman (1982: 3) states that “the alternative media, in whatever format is, is our pamphleteer”. Further, he argues that alternative media employ methods of production and distribution, associated with activist philosophy of creating ‘information for action’ timeously and rapidly. As such, they can deal with developing issues and it is the nature of alternative media to have these issues as they emerge. Schuman (1982) demonstrates how rape as a social issue was first presented as a ‘sex crime’ by alternative press, a full year before the *New York Times* identified it as such and four years before a major book publisher tackled the subject. Kettering (1982), on the other hand, examines the rape issue deeper, comparing its coverage in the US alternative media and in mainstream publications along with a similar study of the Iranian Revolution of 1970s. In both cases she presents a compelling evidence to confirm her thesis that “in both timeliness and content, the alternative press can be shown to be a more dependable information resource”

Sanndoval and Fuchs (2010) warn against being too optimistic about the actual democratic effects of notions like alternative media. They argue that in a contemporary society which is characterized by structural inequalities an understanding of alternative media is insufficient. Instead, they suggest the notion of alternative media being presented as ‘critical media’ which is grounded in social critical theory.

In a paper titled *Alternative Media Theory and Journalism Practice* Atton (2010) posits that the academic study of alternative media is dominated by a slant that emphasizes on the political worth and, specifically, on the ability of alternative media to empower citizens. He argues that central to empowerment is the chance for ordinary publics to tell their own stories without the formal education or professional expertise and status of mainstream journalist. This argument augurs well with the work of Couldry (2000) who had argued that alternative media theory offers opportunities for *ordinary* citizens to become media producers. Atton (2010), in agreement with the Couldry’s sentiments above, states that we can think of alternative media as more democratic because contributors do not necessarily require prior education or training. Couldry (2000)

further states that alternative media projects encourage ‘denaturalization’ as citizens who had previously considered themselves only as audiences of the media can become producers of the media. Atton (2010) however challenges the aspect of denaturalization as coined by Couldry and argues that it is only achievable when citizens understand that the natural state of mainstream media is not the only possible form. Further, he states that media power does not have always to lie with professionals and experts within institutions. He cites the example of contributors to *Wikipedia* who come from a far wider pool of “experts” than the traditional Encyclopedia, which typically draws only academics affiliated to universities and other research institutions. As such, it is not difficult to see why alternative media such as *Wikipedia* should be celebrated; they offer participation in media production, encourage amateurs as well as recognize their knowledge and expertise unlike main stream media which are elitist organizations that recognize only professional and institutionalized knowledge (Atton, 2010).

Another key aspect of alternative media, as noted by Atton (2010), apart from challenging the structures of the mass media and being more democratic and socially inclusive, is that they contest the concentration of institutional and professional media power and challenge the mass media’s monopoly on producing symbolic forms. Bourdieu (1991) defines symbolic forms as the power to construct reality. Atton (2010) argues that alternative media construct a reality that opposes the conventions and representations of the mass or mainstream media.

Downing (2001) states that alternative media also play an important role in shaping the political consciousness of dissent groups in society which he says are different from established political parties and/or institutions. Atton (2010) endorses Downing’s (2001) assertion and states that alternative media can also make important contributions to the social and political life of amateur media producers by developing communities and active citizenship. Further, Atton (2010) notes that whereas mainstream media make extensive use of members of elite groups as sources of news and information, alternative media offer access to a much wider range of voices. These often include members of local communities, protesters and activists; ordinary voices compared to privileged voices of elites. Also, where the stream media employ the view of experts, alternative media employ ordinary people to provide expert knowledge (Atton, 2010).

The literature discussed above is central to this study because it explores the historical background as well as the importance of the alternative media in challenging the existence of

mainstream media as a monopolistic source of news and information. It exposes how a few elites use and/or abuse the mainstream media to perpetuate hegemonic discourses. The literature also explores how alternative media have been successfully used in the past to address a social issue which was being expediently overlooked by the mainstream media and how the mainstream media uses professional training as a way to exclude citizens from telling their side of contentious issues in the society. Further, the literature and scholars therefrom appear to be coalescing on the idea that alternative media is more democratic and inclusive. However, what is missing in the literature reviewed in this sub topic is the central role played by the advent of the internet to expand alternative media as well as the various internet based platforms which are at the citizens' disposal to employ as platforms of alternative communication. Against that, this study hopes to fill that gap by exploring the production and distribution processes and practices of online television programs in Zimbabwe.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theories that informed and guided this study are discussed ostensibly showing their link and relevance to the study. The concepts which informed this study are the alternative media and power and counter-power theories

2.2.1 Alternative Media Theory

This study is grounded mainly in the alternative media theory as advocated by Chris Atton in 2001. Atton (2001) noted that *alternative* and radical media hardly appear in the dominant theoretical traditions of media research. In his view, this is surprising since some theoretical accounts seem to have space for them. Further, he argues that the Marxists analysis of the media contains within it the seeds of such a space, in that alternative media may be considered as offering radical, anti-capitalism relations of production often coupled to projects of ideological disturbance and rapture. Also, the Gramscian notion of counter-hegemony is discernible through a range of radical media projects and NOT only in the obvious places such as the working class newspapers (Allen, 1985; Sparks, 1985) and radical socialist publications (Downing, 1984).

The Frankfurt School appear to have supported an alternative press through Adorno's assertion that the culture industry was best combated by "a policy of retreatism in relation to the media which, it was argued, were so compromised that they could not be used by oppositional sources (Bennett, 1982: 4).

Enzensberger (1976) proposes a politically emancipatory use of the media that is characterized by interactivity between audiences and creators, collective production and a concern with everyday life and the ordinary needs of people.

Against this background, Atton (2001) proposes a theory of alternative and radical media that will not be limited to political and ‘resistance’ media. His intention was to develop a model that will also be applicable to artists and literally media (video, music, art, creative writing etc.) as well as to the newer cultural forms such as zines and hybrid forms of electronic communications (ICTs). Alternative media might then be considered to be “heteroglossic (multiple-voiced) text” drawing on the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin that gives full heterogeneous voices to all others (Atton, 2001).

Silverstone (1999: 103) affirms that alternative media “have created new spaces for alternative voices that provide the focus both for specific community interests as well as for the contrary and the subversive”. Further, he talks of the employment of mass media techniques “to pursue a critical or alternative agenda, from the margins, as it were, from the underbelly of social life”.

This theory is key in the proposed study because it offers a historical account on the basis upon which new alternative media were established as well as give a comprehensive explanation of they seek to achieve. It also offers an explanation on what alternative media are and what drives them among other key things.

The theory suggests that the dominant practices of mainstream media or mainstream journalism (such as what counts as newsworthy, how stories are framed and how subjects of those stories are represented) are taken for granted. It argues that in Gramscian terms, the mainstream media’s ways of covering and presenting news are nothing short of hegemonic practices that appear natural and it seems that there is no other way of doing journalism (Atton and Hamilton, 2008). However, as the theory suggests, through the practice of more inclusive and democratic forms of media production, it is possible for alternative or amateur media producers not only to challenge the dominant forms of journalism presented by the mainstream media but also demonstrate that the power of the media does not lies solely in the hands of the professionally trained journalists. Atton and Hamilton (2008: 124) argue that alternative media are able to “re-balance the power of

the media, however modestly”. Alternative journalists can construct realities that oppose the conventions and representations of the mainstream media (Atton and Hamilton, 2008).

Bourdieu (1991) states that symbolic power is the power to construct reality; as such, the alternative media theory suggests that participatory or amateur media production contests the concentration of institutional or professional (mainstream) media power and challenges its monopoly on producing symbolic forms. This theory is central and relevant in this academic work because the online television programs such under *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* under study perfectly characterize alternative media that seek to challenge mainstream media’s (ZTV) monopoly on producing symbolic forms in Zimbabwe.

2.2.2 The Power and Counter–power Concept

This concept was propounded by American scholar Manuel Castells in 2007 when he explored the interaction between communication and power relations in the context of technological convergence that characterizes internet based networks. Castells (2007) argues that the media is the social space where power is decided. His study articulates the relationship between politics, media politics, the politics of scandal and the crisis of political legitimacy in a global context. Castells (2007) also states that the advent of new technologies and internet based communication has led to the birth of a new form of communication which he coined mass self- communication. As a result of this, social movements, making use of the new alternative communicative platforms made possible by technological convergence and the advent of the internet such as online television programs under study herein, are able tell their side of the story in the new communication space.

Castells (2007) notes that throughout history, communication and information have been key sources of power and counter-power of domination and social change. He states that this is so because “the fundamental battle being fought in society is the battle of the minds of the people” (p. 1). Furthermore, the concept argues that the way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are built; thus torturing bodies is less effective than shaping minds.

According to the theory, power is the capacity of a social actor to impose its will over other social actors while, conversely, counter-power is the capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge power relations that are institutionalized. Castells (2007) notes that power relations are

by their nature conflictive as societies are diverse and incongruous. As a result, the theory suggests that, the relationship between technology, communication and power reflects opposing values and interests, and engages a plurality of social actors in conflict.

In the context of this study, the government through its hold on ZTV as a *de facto* television broadcast monopoly in Zimbabwe represents power while alternative communicative platforms such as internet based television programs represent counter-power. Online television programs such as *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* are repelling the institutionalized hegemonic discourses presented by the ruling elite on ZTV and challenge the manner in which news and view are presented on the country's sole television broadcaster through offering an alternative perspective on the socio economic and political issues in Zimbabwe.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and discussed relevant literature and theories that informed and guided this study. The two discussed theories and reviewed literature's objective was to assist in locating the academic gap which this study endeavors to fill. The next chapter explores the research methods and methodology employed by the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, methods of data gathering, analysis and presentation are explored. In essence, this study employed a qualitative research approach and a case study research design. Episodes of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television program constituted the total population from which a research sample was obtained while a thematic approach was used to present and analyze data.

3.1 Research Orientation

This research study employed purely the qualitative research paradigm. Mauch and Park (2003) state that a qualitative research approach represents the general name for a group of investigative procedures with common characteristics that use natural settings as primary data. It is pragmatic in the same sense as other known forms of scientific enquiry. In the context of this study, this approach has been chosen because the variable under study call for a lot of observation and qualitative research approach allows for exactly that with the researcher being the main instrument for collecting data. Bryman (2012) notes that the qualitative research approach relies on deduction and conclusions are reached by reasoning or inferring from general principles to particulars. This study sought to unpack the production and distribution processes and practices of online television stations in Zimbabwe and as such demand that the research engage in observation hence the choice of this approach.

I must declare here and now that I, the researcher, am a fan and avid follower of both the *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online shows. As one of main instrument of data collection, this may have affected the results of this study. However, efforts to be as free from bias as possible were made throughout the course of this study.

3.2 Research Design

For the desire to gain a thorough knowledge on the production and distribution processes and practices of online television programs in Zimbabwe a case study research design was chosen for this study. Hart (2005) posits that the term research design refers to structure that holds together the research and enables the investigator to address their research questions in ways that are appropriate, efficient and effective. A simpler definition of a design is offered by Nachmias (1992) who states that a research design is a plan that guides the investigator in the process of

collecting, analyzing and interpreting observations. On a practical level, Punch (2006) postulates that a research design means connecting the research questions to data. Further, he says a research design sits between the research questions and the data, showing how the research questions will be connected to the data, and what tools and procedures to use in answering them. Hart (2005) posits that the structure of a research design acts and can also be thought of, as the scaffolding that supports the purpose of the study.

3.2.1 Case Study

A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions (such as *causality* and *generalization*) of the research (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the case study approach was chosen because of the high quality of results that is associated with case studies. The term case study, as noted by Bryman (2012), refers to a research design that entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. Further, he states that the phrase is sometimes extended to include the study of just two or three cases for comparative purposes. Simply put, a case study allows a lot of detail to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs (Creswell, 2009).

Case study research design was also chosen in this study because it focuses on a single case which allows investigation of the details, including contextual matters, of the phenomenon under investigation (Hart, 2005). As the researcher, I am alive to the limitation that the findings or results of this study may not be generalized or taken to be true for all other online television programs in Zimbabwe. Yin (2014) warns that a fatal flaw in doing case studies is to consider statistical generalization to be the way of generalizing findings from one case. His argument in this context is that cases are not sampling units and also will be small in number to serve as an adequately sized sample to represent any larger population.

3.3 Population or Universe

For this study, my research population consists of episodes of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* broadcast between January 2017 and October 2017. Also known as unit of analysis, a research population refers to the universe of units from which a sample is to be selected (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the unit of analysis consists of episodes both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* broadcast online since January 2017. Owners of the said online

television programs namely *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa* and *Fadzai Mahere* who were subjects of my in-depth interviews also form part of the unit of analysis.

From the above-mentioned period, a total of 20 episodes of *Ruvheneko Live* were recorded and broadcast online while *#ThisFlag Thursday* had an aggregate of 14 episodes which were broadcast in the same manner as the former. This means that the total combined size of the population is 34 episodes. This is a fairly manageable population and as such, I made a decision to sample 50 percent of the episodes apiece meaning I sampled ten episodes from *Ruvheneko Live* and seven from *# ThisFlag Thursday* to arrive at a balanced total of seventeen samples. From these 17 samples, I sat in as a non-participant observer during the live recording and online broadcasting of one program at *Ruvheneko Live*.

3.4. Sampling

Sampling is an example of inductive logic by which conclusions are inferred on the basis of a limited number of instances (Foreman, 1991). A perfect sample, as noted by Lohr (2010: 3), “would be like Grandview: a *scaled down* version of the population mirroring every characteristic of the whole population”. Of course, no such sample can exist for complicated populations but a good sample will be *representative* in the sense that characteristics of interest in the population can be estimated from the sample with a known degree of accuracy (Lohr, 2010).

There are two broad techniques of sampling which can be employed in an empirical study namely *probability sampling* and *non-probability sampling*. Lohr (2010) says that in a probability sample, each unit in the population has a known and equal chance of being selected and a random number of tables or other randomization mechanism is used to choose the specific units to be included in the sample. On the other hand, non-probability sampling refers to a technique where the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected (Lohr, 2010).

In this study, only non-probability sampling, particularly purposive and convenient sampling techniques were employed. The purposive sampling technique was handy for me in terms of coming up with a sample which includes some of the episodes that answers directly one of my research questions namely ‘do online television programs have credible sources of news?’ As a

result, as part of my sample, I used my discretion to include episodes of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* which I discovered that they featured senior government and opposition party officials as credible sources of news.

3.4.1 Purposive Sampling

This study, made use of purposive sampling firstly in selecting *Ruvheneko Live* and *#This Flag Thursday* as my study cases not on because of the pre-dominantly political discourses they cover on their shows but also because of their popularity with the viewers deduced from the number of *YouTube* views compared to other online television programs. Secondly the study made use of purposive sampling in the selection some of the episodes from both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* to include in the sample. These were episodes I felt would useful and best meet the objectives of my study.

Also known as judgmental or deliberate sampling (Punch, 2006) purposive sampling is a non – probability sampling technic that allows the researcher to handpick samples which best suits his or her study. Hart (2005) notes that in purposive sampling, units are chosen on the basis of how they represent a population or category to which they belong. In essence, the sample is drawn from the population in a deliberate or targeted way, according to the logic of the research. Hart (2005) warns that purposive sampling is never any assurance that the subject selected will be representative of their category and the fact that it relies upon the subjective considerations of the researcher, makes it prone to uncontrollable results.

3.4.2 Convenience Sampling

This study also made use of convenient sampling. This is because an opportunity arose during the course of the study and it became cheaper while saving on time and money. When I attended the recording and live online broadcasts of one of the episodes at *Ruvheneko Live* as a non-participant observer, I had gone to Harare to attend to some other business. I then included that episode which was scheduled to be recorded and broadcast online at *Ruvheneko Live* in my sample because it was convenient for me.

As noted by Hart (2005) convenient sampling also falls under non – probability sampling and pertains to the selection of the nearest units for inclusion in the sampling frame and selection of sample (Hart, 2005). In other words, it is a sample that is selected because of its availability to the researcher. This method is quite expedient as noted by Hart (2005) but suffers the

shortcoming that it may be highly unrepresentative of any larger population and therefore not a basis for generalization. In spite of this weakness, convenience sampling is cost effective and saves time (Punch, 2006).

3.5 Methods of Data Collection

Data collection in a research study refers to gathering facts, figures or statistics from the sample so that the research questions can be answered (Bryman, 2012). This study made use of netnography, non-participant observation and in-depth interviews

3.5.1 Online Participant Observation/Netnography

During the course of this study, I became an online covert participant observer on both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* programs and took notes on how their programs were structured, who were advertising with them and observed their regular sources of news. As part of that online participant observation or netnography, I also became part of the online conversations on topical issues that were aired on the two programs.

Participant observation refers to a data gathering technic in which the researcher is immersed in a social setting for an extended period of time (Bryman, 2012). The researcher makes regular observations of the behaviour of members of that setting by listening to and engaging in conversations, interviewing informants on issues that are not directly open to observation or that the participant observer is unclear about and developing an understanding of the culture of the group and people's behaviour within the context of that culture. On the other hand, Kozinets (2010) point out that Netnography is a specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer mediated contingencies of today's social worlds. He argues that netnography is used by modern day social research to construct a *digital self*.

Bryman (2012) notes that the main advantage of being a covert participant observer is that it eliminates the problem of reactivity because participants do not know the person conducting the study is a researcher and, as a result, they are less likely to adjust their behaviour because of the researcher's presence. In the context of my study, it is less likely that the producers of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* changed the way they package and present news on their platforms because they were completely unaware of the presence of a researcher in their online audiences.

3.5.2 Non Participant Observation

This refers to a technique where the researcher observes but does not participate in what is going on in the social setting (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the non-participant observation data gathering technique was employed when I requested and was granted permission to sit in and observe the live recording and online broadcasting of one of the programs at *Ruvheneko Live*. I observed and took notes on what exactly transpire moments before, during and after the recording and live online broadcast of the program *Ruvheneko Live*.

3.5.3 Interview

In this study, for the purposes of pursuing information around the topic (McNamara, 1999), I engaged in face to face interviews with the owners of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* namely Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa and Fadzayi Mahere. In qualitative research, an interview involves asking questions and setting answers from participants in a study (Hart, 2005). Dooley (2003) posit that an interview can simply be understood as the process of using questions to get answers. In research, interviews are used when the respondents are basically not too many (Warhol and Malanga, 1969) and the researcher must always control the course of the conversation in order to extract meaningful and relevant data. Yin (2014) contends that throughout an interview, the researcher has two jobs which are to follow the line of inquiry as reflected by the research instrument and to ask the actual conversational questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of the inquiry.

This method, in my view, was the most essential element of the data gathering expedition as it led to the unearthing of detailed information vital to this study. Both Ruvheneko and Fadzayi, among other things, shared key insights regarding the production and distribution processes and practices as well as sources of revenue of their online television programs.

3.5.4 Online Archival Research

This study made use of previous episodes or programs of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* stored online on *YouTube*. These episodes were vital in providing a sense of how the two programs were structured, whom they featured and who advertised with them.

For many case studies, archival records often take the form of computer files, public files, service records, organizational records, maps and chats of the geographical characteristics of a place and survey data produced by others (Yin, 2014). While archival evidence is deemed

relevant in a case study, Yin (2014) advises that a researcher must be careful to ascertain the conditions under which it was produced as well as its accuracy.

3.6 Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis stage is fundamentally about data reduction (Bryman, 2012). This essentially means that it is concerned with reducing the large corpus of data of information that the researcher has gathered so that he or she can make sense of it. In the context of this study, in order to extract meaning from the data I had gathered, I employed two distinct statistical techniques namely thematic and interview analysis.

Bryman (2012: 13) warns that “unless the researcher reduces the amount of data collected, for example, in the case of quantitative data by producing tables and in the case of qualitative data by grouping contextual materials into categories like themes – it is more or less impossible to interpret the material (data)”.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

According to Bryman (2012) the term *thematic analysis* is used in connection with qualitative data to refer to the extraction of key themes in one’s data. This means that data is examined in a manner that enables the researcher to come up with core themes that could be distinguished both between and within transcripts. However, Bryman (2012) cautions that thematic analysis is a diffuse approach with just a few generally agreed principles for defining core themes in data.

3.7 Methods of Data Presentation

Findings are presented in purely qualitative form, that is, a thematic approach was employed in explain and clarifying findings.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the research methods and methodology of the study, discussing data gathering methods and analysis as well as presentation methods employed by the study. The next chapter that is Chapter 4 analyzes and explores the structures of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday*.

Chapter 4: Organizational Structure and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses organizational structures of the online television platforms under study herein namely *Ruvheneko Live* and *ThisFlag Thursday*. It explores the aforesaid online alternative television programs' ownership, funding and organizational structures.

4.2 Historical Background of Ruvheneko

The *Ruvheneko Live* internet based television program was founded by University of Cape Town (UCT) trained journalist and media personality Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa. Listed as the 23rd Most Influential Young Zimbabweans (under the age of 40) and a recipient of the Women's Top Business Leader of the year –Special Recognition in Media and Broadcasting Excellence and the Top Outstanding Woman in Broadcast Media and Radio in the Republic of Zimbabwe awards from the Women's Leadership Awards in 2017 and the Women's Heritage Society World Organization (WHOSWO) in 2015 respectively, Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa realized that there was a demand for quality online television programs that were relevant to Zimbabweans both locally and internationally. Following the end of her dance with a local commercial radio station namely *Zi FM Stereo* from which she resigned, ostensibly in protest of the imposition of a guest on her slot. She then sought to create a communicative platform which is not only free from the restraints she had experienced at the above mentioned radio station but also presents Zimbabweans with a chance to interact with public figures and voice their opinions in real time. That gave rise to the *Ruvheneko Live*; a *Facebook Live* based weekly talk show which is aired every Thursday at 1800hrs to a global audience and the first episode was aired on Thursday 09 January 2017. On her website, she writes that she takes inspiration from her name *Ruvheneko*, which is a *Shona* word for bringing light or simply enlightenment.

4.2.1 Organogram

Fig 1 below shows the organizational structure obtaining at *Ruvheneko Live* online television program.

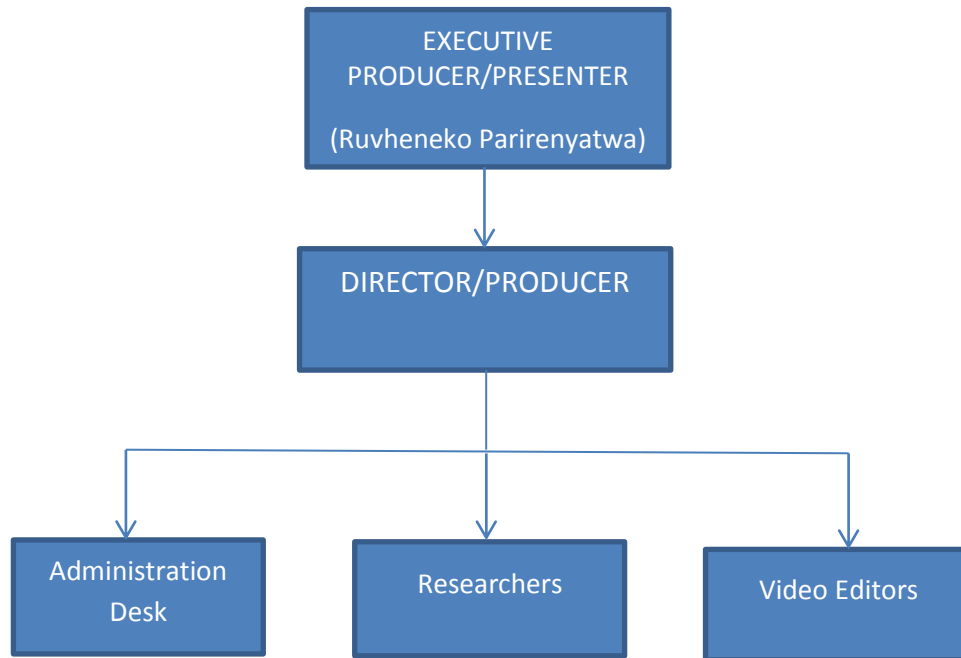


Fig 1 (above) shows the *Ruvheneko Live* organogram.

4.2.1.1 Executive Producer and Presenter

Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa is at the helm of the organization as the executive producer and also doubles as presenter of the show. Her responsibilities include making business decisions, providing general guidance on the direction of the program and interviewing guests in her capacity as the presenter.

4.2.1.2 Director and Producer

Celani Dube doubles as the director and producer of the show. He is the head of production and technical departments of the show and supervises the whole production crew. He ensures that the all the technical aspects that makes it possible for the show to be broadcast on the *Facebook Live* platform are in place before the show. The producer also supervises the administration desk, researchers and the editors.

4.2.1.3 Administration Desk

The administration desk at *Ruvheneko Live*, as the name suggest, is responsible for handling the logistical aspects of the show. These include contacting guests for the show on behalf the executive producer, making payments to service providers, communicating with and where necessary arranging meetings between the organization's external publics and the executive producer among other related duties.

4.2.1.4 Researchers

Researchers are part of the pre and post production meetings and their duty is to furnish both the producer and the executive producer of topical issues which are relevant to their target audience. They also research on both the guests and the topic to be discussed on the show and furnish the presenter with the details accordingly. During the show, researchers are responsible for monitoring comments and questions from the audiences and forward them to the presenter who in turn read them out or, in the case of questions, ask them to the guests on behalf of the audiences.

4.2.2 Ruvheneko Live Funding

Ruvheneko Live, according to the show's executive producer, is funded through advertisement and partnerships. The question of funding is part of the objectives of the study and will be fully explored in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

4.3 Historical Background of #ThisFlag Thursday

The *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television program was born as a result of the *#ThisFlag* citizens' campaign which was started by Pastor Evan Mawarire. On 19 April 2016, Evan Mawarire was in his office in Harare, wondering how he would pay for the school fees of his children. Following that, using the hash tag *#ThisFlag*, he decided to post an online video of himself voicing out his frustration with the Zimbabwean flag around his neck. In the video, he said that the flag, given the obtaining socio economic and political situation in Zimbabwe, was no longer his pride and inspiration. Furthermore, in his video, he claims that he was neither aligned to any political formation nor civil activist, but a mere citizen voicing his concerns against the decline of standards of living in Zimbabwe, attributable mainly to widespread corruption and poor governance and challenged government to be accountable. The video went viral, attracting tens of thousands of hits and likes online among Zimbabweans from all over the world.

The weeks that followed saw Evan Mawarire posting a series of online videos under the hash tag *#ThisFlag* banner and the internet based campaign was joined by many Zimbabweans both at home and abroad. Advocate Fadzayi Mahere who previously had worked together with Evan Mawarire at the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe also joined the campaign through offering legal advice needed for the movement. As an extension of the campaign, Fadzayi Mahere later decided to start an online program which will act as a discursive platform for citizens with a view to bring the government to account. The program was to be aired online every Thursday at 1900hrs and the first episode of the online program was aired on 27 January 2017. However, the show has since stopped as Fadzayi said she needed to focus on her newly launched political career, having public declared to stand for the 2018 general election as an independent candidate for Mt Pleasant. The last episode of the program was aired online on 4 May 2017.

4.3.1 *#ThisFlag Thursday* Funding and Organizational Structure

According to the Fadzayi Mahere, the *#ThisFlag Thursday* online had absolutely no funding and no organogram. In her own words, during an in-depth interview for the purposes of this study, she said the following regarding her show's organogram and funding structure:

...we had no money and our budget was zero dollars. And how we would pay for things is through our own pockets. I am not at liberty to tell you some of the people I worked with on this program. I can only tell you that there was Kuda Musasiwa who was helping us with visuals. As for others, I will have to clear with them first before I can tell you... (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere on 27/09/2017)

To a greater extent, Fadzayi Mahere's sentiments above are true as all the five episodes of her online program sampled for this study had no adverts, or any features that could suggest that they were receiving funding from somewhere. Lack of revenue could be one of the key reasons why the existence of the program was short lived. However, what remains dodgy is Fadzayi Mahere's unwillingness to name the people or organizations she worked with on the program. Regarding the organogram of *#ThisFlag Thursday*, she said the following:

...No, there was no organogram. It was really quite fluid and we would use whoever we had available to help us make the show happen or whoever was willing to lend us their equipment. There was a time I did a show in which it ended with me showing how we had set up the show. We used an ironing board as the table in someone's room. The show is there on *YouTube*, you can look up for it. It was really to show people that this wasn't professionally produced in the sense that we didn't have this budget where we can deploy multiple resources. Sometimes we'd have to hire cameras and pay of the crew and this we did from our own money from our own salaries from our day to day jobs. We had a lot of people volunteer, people who think this was a

good idea. We had well-wishers who opened up their homes to allow us to film in their homes so that we'd have a nicer background especially when we had guests. So that's really how it was funded, there was no organogram, there was no structure; it was just a lot of passion. (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere conducted on 27/09/2017)

While Fadzayi argued that the idea to launch an online television program was purely a community service project with no hidden agenda, a closer analysis suggests that she launched the online alternative communicative platform for political expediency, as a way to market herself ahead of the 2018 general elections in which she has already declared herself as an independent candidate for Mt Pleasant constituency parliamentary elections.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analyzed organizational and funding structures of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online programs. Historical backgrounds of the two aforementioned online programs as well as how they operate were also explored. The next chapter presents and analyzes the research findings.

Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis of Findings

5.0 Introduction

This academic work explores the production and distribution processes and practices of online ‘alternative’ television programs in Zimbabwe. *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television programs owned by Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa and Fadzayi Mahere respectively were used as case studies. Data was gathered through online archival search, netnography, non-participant and in-depth interviews.

With regards to online archival research, I made use of the *YouTube* and *Facebook* platforms to search for the immediate past television programs of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* and watched them to observe the way the programs were structured, who advertised with them and their durations among other production aspects. As part of netnography, I became part of the online audience of the two aforementioned internet based television programs to gather information on how inclusive online television programs are to input from viewers as part of their programming. Non participant observation was used when I sat in to witness first-hand the entire production process, from start to finish, of one of the programs at *Ruvheneko Live* while in-depth interviews were separately conducted with Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa and Fadzayi Mahere. Findings of this research are presented in qualitative form using a thematic approach.

5.1 Production Processes and Practices

A total number of ten episodes from *Ruvheneko Live* and five from *#ThisFlag Thursday* representing a combined 50 per cent of the population were sampled and subjected to a close examination so as to establish fundamental production processes and practices of online television programs in Zimbabwe. In the main, this study established that the productions of both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* thrive on the topical socio economic and political issues of the day. For both online television programs, the production process of an episode begins with a production team meeting, which discusses the previous episode while brainstorming on the ideas of the next episode. Once a topic that is relevant or speaks to the socio economic and or political issues obtaining in the country is agreed on, the next stage is to select and invite a guest or guests who are relevant to the topic. This is then followed by a thorough research on both the guests and the topic to be discussed. On the day of recording and online broadcast of the show, the production technical teams are responsible for setting up the

lighting, cameras, internet connectivity and the set in general, in pretty much a similar fashion that obtains with the production of a traditional media television production. A final meeting of all the people involved in the production is conducted ostensibly to articulate the duties and responsibilities of each team member and highlight what is expected of them a few moments before, during and after the recording and online broadcast of the show. When guests arrive, they are briefed and prepped for the show before the actual live streaming of either *Ruvheneko Live* or *#ThisFlag Thursday*. During the show, online audiences have the platform to send comments or questions to the guests in real time which may either be read out or forwarded to the guests for their response. After the show, the same video is archived on the *YouTube* platform where users can access it and further send comments which may also be taken into consideration for the next episode.

5.1.2 Credible Sources of Information

One of the fundamental objectives of this study set out in Chapter 1 of this research report is to establish whether or not online television stations in Zimbabwe are able to access credible sources of information in their bid to provide an alternative platform of communication. During the course of the study, I established that for *Ruvheneko Live*, owing mainly to their middle-of-the-road approach in the reportage of socio economic and political issues in Zimbabwe, to a large extent, they are able to attract the attention of credible sources of information from the government, opposition parties, socialites, celebrities and news makers in general to be guests on their show. During the in-depth interview, Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa said the fact that she is a member of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) as well as an accredited journalist with the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) presents her with an opportunity to interact with fellow journalists and exchange notes on topical issues of the day. *Table 1* (overleaf) shows some of the people who have been guest on *Ruvheneko Live* as well as the offices they occupy which makes them credible sources of information.

5.1.2.1 Sample of *Ruvheneko Live* Guests

| DATE AIRED | NAME OF GUEST | POSITION |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 23 February 2017 | Saviour Kasukuwere | - ZANU (PF) National Political Commissar - Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. -Member of Parliament for Mount Darwin South |
| 02 February 2017 | Walter Mzembi | - ZANU (PF) Central committee Member. - Minister of Tourism and Hospitality. - Member of Parliament for Masvingo South |
| 16 March 2017 | Joseph Chinotimba | - ZANU (PF) Central Committee Member - Member of Parliament for Buhera South |
| 08 June 2017 | Nelson Chamisa | - Vice President for the Movement for Democratic Change (led by Morgan Tsvangirai) - Member of Parliament for Kuwadzana |
| 06 July 2017 | Joyce Mujuru | - Former ZANU (PF) Second Secretary and Vice President of Zimbabwe - Leader of the National People's Party (NPP) |
| 09 March 2017 | Themba Mliswa | - Member of Parliament for Norton. - Former ZANU (PF) provincial chairperson for Mashonaland West. - Leader of Third Force political outfit |
| 01 June 2017 | Acie Lumumba aka William Mutumanje | - Leader of Viva Zimbabwe political party - Former Harare Youth Council Chairperson. |
| 06 July 2017 | Rita Makarau | - Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) chairperson. - Judicial Services Commission (JSC) secretary - Supreme court judge. |
| 09 January 2017 | Desmond Chideme aka Stunner | - Award winning Zimbabwean recording artist. |
| 14 February 2017 | Olinder Chapel | - Harare socialite |

*Table 1 (above) shows, in no particular order, a sample of the people who have been used as credible sources of information on the **Ruvheneko Live** online television program since January 2017.*

By all accounts, the information on the table above is evidence that the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program has been able to interview or get the attention of high profile individuals in politics, government and social circles to be credible sources of information on the show. The middle-of-the-road stance taken by the show's executive producer Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa in the reportage of socio economic and political issues on the show is also evident in the credentials of the guests from across the political divide being given a chance to be part of the show. Ruling party and/or senior government officials as well as opposition political parties' officials were all interviewed and allowed to give their side of the story in the Zimbabwean socio economic and political discourses.

On the other hand, for Fadzayi Mahere's *#ThisFlag Thursday*, this study noted that due to the fact that her online television program identified itself and was associated with a perceived opposition political movement namely *#ThisFlag* started by Evan Mawarire, securing credible sources of information from ZANU (PF) as the ruling party or people in government to be credible sources of information on the show was almost impossible. During the in depth interview for the purposes of this study, Fadzayi Mahere said that while efforts to contact ZANU (PF) or senior government officials to come and be part of her online program were made, the majority of them would turn her down while others would keep postponing until she gives up on them. She believes that it was not politically expedient for people in ZANU (PF) or the government to grant her an interview, an opportunity which the majority of them would not pass, if it were the ZBC's ZTV that had requested for the same. However, opposition political figures in Zimbabwe were willing to make use of the *#ThisFlag Thursday* platform as an alternative communicative space. *Table 2* (below) shows the guests who accepted and honored invitations to be part from the *#ThisFlag Thursday* and the positions they occupy.

5.1.2.2 Sample of #ThisFlag Thursday Guests

| DATE AIRED | NAME OF GUEST | POSITION(S) |
|------------------|--------------------|---|
| (a) | (b) | (c) |
| 06 April 2017 | Douglas Mwonzora | -Secretary General for the Movement for Democratic Change –Tsvangirai (MDC-T) |
| 23 March 2017 | Dr. Noah Manyika | - Leader of the Build Zimbabwe Alliance political party |
| 04 May 2017 | Obert Gutu | -Spokesperson for the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T). |
| 02 February 2017 | Joyce Mujuru | - Former Second Secretary of ZANU (PF) and Vice President of Zimbabwe. - Leader of National People’s Party |
| 16 February 2017 | Evan Mawarire | -Activist, founder and leader of the #ThisFlag campaign. |
| 27 January 2017 | Albert Mugabe | - Zimbabwe National Roads Authority (ZINARA) board chairperson |
| 27 January 2017 | Bernard Manyenyeni | - Mayor of the City of Harare -Councilor for War |

Table 2 (above) shows, in no particular order, a sample of the people who have been used as credible sources of information on the #ThisFlag Thursday online television show since January 2017.

Information on *Table 2* (above) shows that opposition parties officials were mostly the ones who were used as credible sources of information on the *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television program. Out of the six guests from five episodes sampled for this study, only one senior government official namely Albert Mugabe, the ZINARA board of directors' chairperson, appeared on the program as guest and the rest were either opposition political party figures or activists. During the in-depth interview for this study, Fadzayi Mahere explained her ill-fated efforts to give a chance to some of the senior government officials to be part of her online television program:

...from government side, however, the majority of officials we invited to the program were not willing to be associated with us, mainly for political reasons. As a result, the majority of our invitations to government officials to come to the show were turned down. The only government official who honored our invitation was the ZINARA board chairperson, Mr. Mugabe, who came for a debate against the Mayor of Harare, Cllr. Bernard Manyenyeni (MDC-T). So apart from the ZINARA board chairperson, Mr. Mugabe, there was no one else from government. For the record, when doctors went on strike (in March 2017), we tried with no success to get the minister of Health and Child Welfare, Dr. David Parirenyatwa, to come to the show. We also tried to engage minister Dokora to come to the show to explain the new curriculum with no success again. I think it wasn't politically expedient for them to come to the program. (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere conducted on 27/09/2017)

The challenge with both Fadzayi Mahere and Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa's shows guest list sampled in the tables above is that the subalterns or ordinary citizens are not given a voice at all. Castells (2007) states that power is the capacity of a social actor to impose its will over other social actors while, conversely, counter-power is the capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge power relations that are institutionalized. However, in the context of the aforementioned online television programs, this study notes the elites continue to dominate the discourses in spaces which are supposed to challenge them. This goes against the spirit and grain of alternative media theory as stated by Atton (2010) who posits that the academic study of alternative media is dominated by a slant that emphasizes on the political worth and, specifically, on the ability of alternative media to empower citizens. He argues that one of the key thing in terms of empowerment is empowerment is the platform for ordinary citizens to tell their own stories without the formal education or professional expertise and status of mainstream journalist. Judging from the list of gusts who were invited to be part of discussions at the aforementioned online television programs, this study therefore argues that the platform is meant for the 'alternative elite' and certainly not the ordinary citizens thereby agreeing with Sanndoval

and Fuchs (2010) who warns against being too optimistic about the actual democratic effects of notions like alternative media. They argue that in a modern society which is characterized by structural imbalances an understanding of alternative media is insufficient.

5.1.3 Target Audiences and Measurement

Another fundamental production aspect that this study set out to unearth was the target audiences of online television station in Zimbabwe. This study establishes that online television programs in Zimbabwe such as *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday*, in the main, targets audiences who fit in at least one of the following categories:

- Zimbabweans who ranges from ages 15 to 49 because of their appreciation of the use of ICTs which are a pre-requisite for one to be an audience of any online show
- Zimbabweans who ordinarily live in towns and cities where there is access to electricity and good internet connection (again a prerequisite for one to be part of an online audience)
- Zimbabweans who belong in a social class that enables them to afford data and gadgets such as smart phones and laptop/desktop computers which are useful when one wants to be part of an online audience of a show like *Ruvheneko Live* or *#ThisFlag Thursday*.

In terms of audiences measurement, this study found out that both programs make use of the measuring system of the number of views, followers, likes or hits per episode, a system which is inherent both on the *Facebook* and the *YouTube* digital platforms where these shows are aired. This means that online television programs are able to measure more accurately their audiences or even break down the statistics to see which one of their episodes had the highest number of audiences. They are also able to measure with relative ease whether their audiences are increasing or decreasing with each episode by simply analyzing figures readily available both on the *Facebook* and *YouTube* communicative spaces after posting a number of episodes. *Table 3* (overleaf) presents an example of viewership statistics for the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program whose figures were taken from the *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa YouTube* channel and the *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa Facebook* page on 17 October 2017 at 1000hrs:

| | |
|---|----------------|
| FACEBOOK | |
| Followers (as at 1000hrs on 17/10/2017) | 42218 |
| Views | Highest: 79000 |
| | Lowest: 4800 |
| YouTube | |
| Subscribers (as at 1000hrs on 17/10/2017) | 2200 |
| Views | Highest: 94000 |
| | Lowest: 1300 |

Table 3 (above) shows a fairly simple example of audiences' statistics for the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program. On *Facebook*, as at 1000hrs on October 17, 2017, the *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa Facebook* page on which the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program is aired had a followership of 42218 viewers while her *YouTube* channel had 2200 subscribers. The highest number of viewers on of the show on *Facebook* was 79000 while the lowest on the same platform stood at 4800. On *YouTube* the highest number of viewers per episode stood at 94000 against a lowest of 1300. These figures are readily available on both the *YouTube* and *Facebook* platforms and it is fairly easy for an online television program such as *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* to measure and analyze their audiences for each new episode of their program.

5.1.4 Inclusiveness

This study also sought to unearth the extent to which online television programs are open and or inclusive of the audiences as part of their programing. The study observed that both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* alternative communication platforms are, to a greater extent, inclusive of their audiences as part of the production process. *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa* said her online show is 'audience driven' and she has created a plethora of social media platforms where audiences have a chance to share their thoughts before, during and after the show. She said the following during the aforementioned interview:

My show is audience-driven and our topics come directly from our audience via social media. That immediately opens up the show to everyone with access to the Internet. Viewers contact me via my Website, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *Linked-In*, *Facebook* and my *WhatsApp* group. The beauty of an online show is that there are no restrictions on questions and on comments. The

audience can speak freely. I also have real time access to their thoughts as I am conducting the interview; this helps me to give the viewers what they want to hear from whoever I will be in studio with. Viewers also have the opportunity to be part of the studio audience. The studio audience is drawn from the social media platforms by my research team. The studio audience asks the guests questions during the Q&A (question and answer) portion of the show. (Interview with Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa conducted on 09/10/2017)

To a greater extent, Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa's sentiments above are accurate as, during the course of this study, I covertly become part of her online audience and got the opportunity to comment on some of the issues her show. To be given the platform to share your views on a show on its own is being inclusive. Further, after contacting her, I was allowed to be part of a live audience in the studio on Thursday 12 October 2017 when she interviewed, recorded and broadcast online youth leaders of three opposition political parties in Zimbabwe at a rented studio situated at the Borrowdale Race Course in Harare. The fact that the *Ruvheneko Live* show allows for a live audience which is present in the studio as the episode is recorded and broadcast online and has a question and answer segment which accommodates that live audience to make contributions during the show means that there is a fairly genuine willingness on the part of the owner of the show to include the audiences in their programming.

This study noted that Fadzayi Mahere's *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television show was also open to contributions by the audiences in the similar manner as *Ruvheneko Live*. While *#ThisFlag Thursday* had no provision for a live audience in the studio as they record, it equally allowed for comments and contributions before, during and after the show via social media platforms. Fadzayi Mahere had the following to say regarding her online show's inclusiveness:

When you have a conversation that can be heard and that allows multiple people to send in questions and for people to questions asked, I think that's inclusive in a way that traditional media is not really inclusive. The fact that you can ask questions as things are happening live and we would always ask people to send in questions before which were asked on their behalf during the show; to me that being inclusive (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere conducted on 27/09/2017).

In the context of this study, I also covertly became part of the online audience of the *#ThisFlag Thursday* and observed the extent to which contributions by the online audiences were taken into consideration during the show. To a greater extent, both shows are inclusive of their online audiences. However, the study noted that there exist certain levels of gatekeeping where not all the comments and questions sent by the audiences are read out or presented to the guest for their response. This aspect will be explored in detail in the *Discussion of Findings* section below.

5.1.5 The ‘Liveness’ of Online Television Programs

The name *Ruvheneko Live* gives one an impression that the online television program is always recorded and broadcast in real time. It gives one the idea that the program is always happening as the online audiences are watching. During the in-depth interview, Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa herself said she was inspired to establish an online television program because she had the desire to “...create a platform where Zimbabweans could interact with public figures and voice their opinions *in real time*...” (Interview with Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa conducted on 09/10/2017).

However, during the course of this study, I established that it is not all the time that online programs in Zimbabwe are aired ‘live’ in the strict meaning of the aforementioned word. More often than not, the programs are pre-recorded and then aired as if they are live. Both Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa and Fadzayi Mahere admitted that sometimes their respective online television programs are pre-recorded and presented as if they are happening live. They argue that while every effort to broadcast all episodes in real time is put, sometimes it is just impossible as they are compelled by their guests to pre-record because of the guests’ other commitments at the time a live recording and streaming is scheduled to take place. To add to that, Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa says sometimes they experience technological and communication problems which forces them to either delay or fail to have the program as scheduled. As a result, a prerecorded episode comes in handy as it eliminates those challenges way ahead of the program’s scheduled day and time of online broadcast.

5.1.6 Consistency in Episodes Duration and Broadcast Timings

Consistency in programs duration is one of the fundamental production aspects that this study observed which distinguishes programs that are screened on traditional media platforms to those that are broadcast online. According to their owners, both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online programs’ episodes are supposed to run for one hour. However, out of all the 15 episodes of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television programs included in a sample for this study, not even one episode is exactly hour long or at least plus or minus two minutes. All the episodes have varying durations ranging from a minimum of 30 min 44 sec to a maximum of 1 hr 43 min 44 sec long for *Ruvheneko Live* and a minimum of 38 min 55 sec long to a maximum of 1 hr 5 min 26 sec for long *#ThisFlag Thursday*. *Tables 1 and 2* (overleaf) illustrate the durations of episodes of the two aforesaid online television programs.

5.1.6.1 Table 1: #ThisFlag Thursday Episode Duration Table

| DATE AIRED | GUEST(S) HOSTED | EPISODE DURATION |
|------------------|---|----------------------|
| 06 April 2017 | Douglas Mwonzora | 1 hr. 05 min. 26 sec |
| 16 February 2017 | Evan Mawarire | 54 min. 51 sec |
| 02 February 2017 | Joyce Mujuru | 47 min. 03 sec |
| 23 March 2017 | Noah Manyika | 38 min. 55 sec |
| 27 January 2017 | Bernard Manyenyeni and Albert Mugabe | 33 min. 27 sec |

Table 1 (above) shows the #ThisFlag Thursday online television program episodes duration in descending order. (Source: YouTube and the ThisFlag-IfulegiLeyi-MurezaUyu Facebook page)

5.1.6.2 Table 2: Ruvheneko Live Episode Duration Table

| DATE AIRED | GUEST(S) HOSTED | EPISODE DURATION |
|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 23 February 2017 | Saviour Kasukuwere | 1 hr. 43 min. 44 sec |
| 08 June 2017 | Nelson Chamisa | 1 hr. 21 min. 10 sec |
| 01 June 2017 | Acie Lumumba | 1 hr. 19 min. 42 sec |
| 14 February 2017 | Olinder Chapel | 1 hr. 13 min. 54 sec |
| 16 July 2107 | Joyce Mujuru | 1 hr. 11 min. 13 sec |
| 16 March 2017 | Joseph Chinotimba | 1 hr. 07 min. 29 sec |
| 09 March 2017 | Themba Mliswa | 1 hr. 06 min. 26 sec |
| 02 February 2017 | Walter Mzembi | 1 hr. 05 min. 25 sec |
| 09 January 2017 | Desmond Chideme (Stunner) | 55 min. 40 sec |
| 21 September 2017 | Rita Makarau | 30 min. 44 sec |

Table 2 (above) shows the Ruvheneko Live online television program episodes duration in descending order. (Source: YouTube and Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa Facebook page)

Tables 1 and 2 (above) show the episodes durations for #ThisFlag Thursday and Ruvheneko Live online television shows respectively. It is clear from both tables that the online programs do not follow a strict time limit in terms of the duration of the show. This practice validates Atton and Hamilton (2008) view that the dominant practices of mainstream media or mainstream journalism (such as what counts as newsworthy, how stories are framed and how subjects of those stories are represented) are taken for granted. They argues that in Gramscian terms, the mainstream media's ways of covering and presenting news are nothing short of hegemonic practices that appear natural and it seems that there is no other way of doing journalism. The two

aforementioned online programs present their episodes in a manner that appears unnatural by not following a strict time limit in as far as the duration of an episode is concerned.

Another fundamental production aspect which this study observed was that while both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television programs prefer Thursday evenings as their broadcast date, they both, to some extent, lacked consistency in terms of sticking to the aforementioned day and timings. Both shows, since their inception, failed to broadcast consistently on their favoured day and timings (1800hrs for *Ruvheneko Live* and 1900hrs for *#ThisFlag Thursday*), skipping some Thursdays or delay starting. For Fadzayi Mahere, Thursday is a strategic day to do an online program on topical issues as it allows stories to build from Monday to part of Thursday. She argued that:

Watching online content, it was clear to my team and I that Thursday (as a weekday) seemed to be kind of a bit free; it is just before the weekend, so people are not busy doing other things. But also, at the same time, it (Thursday) was strategically useful because you are far enough into the week to have determined what the issues of the week were or what people were talking about. It made it easier to then schedule content that was relevant. (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere conducted on 27/09/2017)

Similarly, for *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa*, it is easier to discuss issues that have fully developed into real stories and she discovered that Thursdays and Sundays, the world over, give political and economic stories that allowance to fully develop. She argued that:

If you have noticed, the biggest news days are Thursdays and Sundays. This is because the news stories will have fully developed in the lines of business and politics by Thursday; so it is easier to discuss topics and the guests are also more forthcoming. The time we chose to air is purely based on our Facebook insights that revealed our peak engagement time with our followers (Interview with *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa* conducted on 09/10/2017).

However, they both admit that while they value consistency, in terms of delivering the program as scheduled, it is not easy to stick to the scheduled day and time for an online program in Zimbabwe. *Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa* contends that communication and technological challenges and sometimes failure by guests to turn up at the last minute are some of the encounters that hinder on their consistency. She said the following:

Consistency is important to me. I put a great deal of time and effort into planning and creating content for the show. I work with a team and sometimes we do experience technological and communication problems. I have learned to delegate and trust each team member's experience and talent in what they specialize in. There is only so much you can do to mitigate unforeseen problems. There are certain situations that are beyond human control. Often our guests

themselves can let us down by coming late or changing plans last minute; but we understand our guests have busy schedules, as they are mostly high profile people in society (Interview with Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa conducted on 09/10/2017).

For Fadzayi Mahere's *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television program, apart from guest challenges similar to the ones experienced at *Ruvheneko Live*, the production team, which worked on a voluntary basis also affected the consistency and continued existence of the program. She explained this when she said that:

...we also had challenges with personal schedules. As you may know, I am not a journalist by training; I'm a lawyer so sometimes schedule would require me to be somewhere else at a time production is supposed to take place. The whole team was not made up of a proper production crew; it was made up of individuals who volunteered their time and expertise to ensure that the program happens. This meant that sometimes production would not happen because someone in the team was unavailable for one reason or another. However, we did try our best to make it as consistent as possible (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere conducted on 27/09/2017).

This practice sits in well with one of the key characteristics of alternative media which Couldry (2000) states that it should offer opportunities for *ordinary* citizens to become media producers. Atton (2010), in agreement with the Couldry's sentiments above, adds that alternative media should be thought of as more democratic because contributors do not necessarily require prior education or training. Couldry (2000) further states that alternative media projects encourage 'denaturalization' as citizens, such as Fadzayi Mahere, who had previously considered themselves only as audiences of the media can become producers of the media.

Atton (2010) however challenges the aspect of denaturalization as coined by Couldry and argues that it is only achievable when citizens understand that the natural state of mainstream media is not the only possible form. Furthermore, he states that media power does not have always to lie with professionals and experts within institutions.

5.1.7 Online Television Programs Revenue Sources

Establishing the ways, if any, in which online television programs in Zimbabwe make money, was another fundamental objective of this study. The case studies I used, however, were not converging on whether they make money or not with Fadzayi Mahere claiming that she did not make any money out of her online television while Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa admitted making money through advertisements and partnerships on her show. Fadzayi Mahere insists that she did not make any money from the show and she relied on people who worked on a voluntary basis and she would fund some of the costs from her own pocket.

The show or online program didn't earn money. It was not designed to earn money; it was designed to have conversations, to be a place where citizens come and have conversations and get answers because what happens in our ecosystem is that we are not getting answers from the national leadership. We had no advertisers; you can watch every single show, there was never an advert of any kind (Interview with Fadzayi Mahere conducted on 27/09/2017).

From the five episodes of *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television program sampled for this study, there is no single advertisement that can suggest that the show made money through adverts or any commercial interests. In one of the episodes, Fadzayi Mahere ended the show by demonstrating how they had set up for the show, using an ironing board as the table for the show. She explained that they wanted to show their audiences that they show was not professionally produced and there were no other forces behind it other than herself trying to create an alternative discursive platform for fellow Zimbabweans.

Ruvheneko Live, on the other hand, according to the show's executive producer, makes all its money through adverts and partnerships. She explains that the value of her show is its content and it has managed to attract a significant size of loyal audiences. It is those audiences who attract advertisers who include *ProAir*, a Harare based company which specializes in air conditioning products and *Brandsforless Zimbabwe*, an exclusive clothing company which provides the presenter with designer clothes to put on during the show in exchange for publicity.

At the time of conducting this study, the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program was partnering with the Election Resource Centre Zimbabwe (ERCZ) to feature all political players in the country on the online program ahead of the 2018 general election in an exclusive series dubbed the Zimbabwe Election Debates. According to information on their website, the ERCZ is a think tank and advocacy organization on electoral and democracy issues in Zimbabwe. One of their key objectives, apart from wanting to create a conscious and responsible citizen who participates in democratic and electoral processes, is "to influence transparency, credibility and inclusiveness in democratic and electoral processes". The picture overleaf is an advert which was posted on the *Ruvheneko Facebook* page to advertise the show which was recorded and broadcast online on 12 October 2017. It is also this show that I was granted permission to sit in as a non-participant observer during its live recording and broadcast.

RUVHENEKO

THE YOUTH VOTE
THE VOTE THEY ALL NEED!

HAPPYMORE CHIDZIVA (MDC-T)
DARLINGTON NHEMACHENA (APA)

GIDEON MANDAZA (MDC)
FARAI GWENHURE (PDP)

THURSDAY 12 OCTOBER 2017
TUNE IN LIVE @ RUVHENEKO **18:00 CAT**

#LevelPlayingField
www.erczim.org **YouTube**

You can also tune in on our website www.ruvheneko.com Or watch via YouTube on Ruvheneko

It is clear from the advert that the agenda or topic for discussion of the *Ruvheneko* show on this particular day did not come from the audiences but certainly from the ‘partners’ namely Election Resource Centre who were also given the right for their logo and contact details to appear on the advert. While I was not given the details of the agreement between the two ‘partners’, it was apparent, at least on the face of it, that the ERCZ was meeting part or all the production costs of the show, which include the use of an up market studio in Borrowdale, Harare, in exchange for determining the kind of discourses to be advanced on the show. This confirms the old adage that “he who pays the piper calls the tune”. This then puts to doubt Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa’s claims that her show is audience driven and the discourses advanced on the show are a reflection of what the audience suggests to her. Is it a coincidence that what the audiences had requested to her to focus on, on her show on that particular day is also what her ERCZ ‘partners’ wanted the show to focus on? Obviously, the answer to that question is no, it is not a coincidence. What the

audiences might have requested her to dwell on, via the various online comment and feedback platforms, was probably ignored in favour of what the partners, who were meeting part if not all the production costs of the program, want her to focus on. However, she claims that as the executive producer of the show, she has the final say regarding what the content of the show. In her own words she said: “*Advertisers are partners where our shows are concerned so we work closely on content but I am the Executive Producer so it all comes down to me at the end of the day*”.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

There are quite a number of interesting talking points that emerged as a result of the findings above. Of fundamental importance, in the context of this study, are aspects of production and distribution processes and practices of online television stations in Zimbabwe which go against the spirit and grain of the alternativeness nature (which include funding), all-inclusiveness and freeness of the internet based spaces of communication. Dean (2003) posits that the advent of new platforms of communication such as the internet had revived the Habermasian concept of the public sphere characterized by free entry, free exit as well as freedom of opinion and expression. However, in contrast, this study observed that, in the Zimbabwean context, internet based online television programs, owing to their production and distribution processes and practices highlighted above, are as not as free and easily accessible. Firstly, they are to a greater extent ‘elitist’ as one needs to be computer literate or technologically savvy to be part of the audience of an online television program. Further, one needs to own a smart phone or a computer and have access to a good internet connectivity to be able to access and be part of an online audience for a show like *Ruvheneko Live* or *#ThisFlag Thursday*. These pre-requisites alone are against the Habermasian concept of a true public sphere where people are supposed to enjoy ‘free’ entry. The moment one needs money not only for the gadget that enables them access the online show but also for the internet data bundles as well as a certain level of knowledge on the use of the gadget before being part of the online audience; it means the entry is not free. This study, therefore, endorses Dean (2003: 98) assertion that the internet is not a true public sphere and she argues that it is “an ideology of publicity in the service of communicative capitalism”.

This study also observed that the freedom of audiences to comment and share opinions is also tampered with by the producers of the online television programs in Zimbabwe. While the

platform to freely comment is inherent on social media platforms where both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* are broadcast to thousands of audiences across the world, it is not every comment that is read out or passed on to the guest on the show to respond. During the course of this study, I engaged in netnography and became part of the online audience of both shows. I took time to send questions to guests on both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* during the online broadcast of some of the episodes, but none of my question was ever forwarded to the intended guests on the show. What boggle the mind then is the unexplained criteria used by the producers of the online television programs to read out some comments and questions for guests on the show to answer at the expense of others. This means that the concepts of gatekeeping and mediation are equally used by online television platforms who claim to be open and more accommodative to comments of any kind that their traditional media counterparts. This production practice defeats the spirit of ‘alternativeness’ of online television programs as explained by Fisk (1992) who drew a distinguishing line between mainstream media and the alternative media and states that the major difference between the two lie in their selection of news and in the way that selection is made particularly how the alternative media politicize the ‘repression of events’.

This study also unearthed that some of the episodes which appeared and presented as if they were live on both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* were actually prerecorded. While the reasons thereto are, to some extent, acceptable and understandable, the practice of prerecording and episode defeats the claim by the owners of the aforementioned shows that they allow audiences to participate and ask questions to the guests as the show is in real time. To me, this is tantamount to cheating the very audience whom they claim to offer an alternative discursive space and is highly unethical. This could be the reason why neither of my comments nor question to the guests were read out during the show. Also, a pre-recorded show gives the chance of editing out (gate keeping) any responses from the guests which the owners of the online program perceive to be against their interests thus defeating the freeness associated the internet as an alternative communicative space.

Golding and Murdock (1987) state that advertising is the later day licensing authority of all the media houses across the globe. For McQuail (2010), it is clear that the structure of the mass media industry in most capitalist countries reflects the interests of advertisers. He argues that it is

not by chance that media markets often match with consumer divisions. This study found out that 100 per cent of the revenue realized by the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program is from advertisers and ‘partners’. As discussed earlier, is it a coincidence that the agenda of the Election Resource Centre, as outlined on their website is also reflected on the *Ruvheneko Live*’s Zimbabwe Election Debates series which were running on the show at the time of writing this research report? Alternatively, is it a coincidence that the *#ThisFlag Thursday* online program which had no single advertiser hence no source of revenue only survived for just above 3 months? The answer to the two questions is definitely no; the Election Resource Centre was funding the show in exchange for advancing their agenda through the show while the importance of advertiser revenue in the sustenance of a media house is evidenced by *#ThisFlag Thursday*’s the failure to continue broadcasting because they had no single advertiser.

However, to some extent, the platform created by these online television station feeds perfectly in the discourse of alternative spaces of communication. This study found out that the *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* managed two things namely to give a voice to marginalized sections of the community such as opposition political party figures and to deeply interrogate ZANU (PF) and or senior government official on the socio economic and political issues obtaining in Zimbabwe in a manner we have never witnessed on the country’s sole television broadcaster ZTV. Downing (2001) states that alternative media play an important role in shaping the political consciousness of dissent groups in society which he says are different from established political parties and/or institutions. This view is, therefore, validated by this study which clearly shows how opposition parties in Zimbabwe, big and small, being given a chance to articulate their party policies and what they are offering the people.

However, what remains missing in the aforementioned online programs, as discussed earlier, are the voices of ordinary citizens as guests on the shows. What led to the emergency of the alternative press in the first places is the unfair reportage of news in the main stream media which is usually skewed in favour of the a few elites at the expense of not only the minority in a society, but also the truth. This study noted that this phenomenon, as evidenced by the calibre of guests by guests interviewed on the program, is also obtaining on the two aforementioned online television platforms

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented and analyzed findings of the study with data being presented in the form of themes. The study established the fundamental production and distribution processes and practices of online television programs as alternative spaces of communication in Zimbabwe which include prerecording of episodes, ways of measuring audiences as well as ways to include allow audience participation in the production of the shows. It also found out that advertising is the sole source of revenue of online television programs such as *Ruvheneko Live*. The next chapter shall give a summary of the findings, make recommendations to the online television programs, highlight areas for further research and give a conclusion of the study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.0 Introduction

With the research carried out and the findings therefrom presented and analyzed, this chapter serves to conclude the whole dissertation. In essence, this section juxtaposes the objectives of the research and the data gathered to measure the extent to which the set goals were achieved. Recommendations, which are informed by the findings of this study, are also made to *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television programs so that they may improve on their production processes and practices. Recommendations of areas of further research are also made to future researchers.

6.1 Summary of Findings

Since there is harmony amongst scholars who include Dean (2003) Papacharissi (2009), Allan (2007), Castells (2007), Wang and Bates (2008), Hindaman (2008) and Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) that the advent of the internet gave birth to a plethora of ‘alternative’ spaces of communication such as *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *WhatsApp* among many others, this study aimed at unearthing the production and distribution processes and practices of internet based alternative communication platforms, particularly focusing on online television programs in Zimbabwe, using *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* as case studies. The study also sought to establish target audience and the way to measure them, the ability to get credible sources of news as well as the sources of revenue (funding), ownership and control patters of the two aforementioned online television programs.

The study was limited to the period between January 2017 and October 2017 mainly because that is the period within which both *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* were established and gained popularity judging from the increasing number of views and likes for the programs on social media platforms. The study employed a purely qualitative approach in terms of data gathering, presentation and analysis. It was informed by an array of theories in the field of media and communications studies which include alternative media theory, the power and counter power concept and the social construction of technology theory.

In terms of data collection, this research relied on techniques which fall under the qualitative research paradigm namely online archival research, netnography, non-participant observation

and face to face in-depth interviews, which were conducted with the owners of the abovementioned online television programs. Online archival research was used to search for the immediate past programs of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* posted online while netnography was employed when I actively became part of the online audiences of the two aforementioned *Facebook Live* based television programs. The non-participant observation technic was handy when I sat in and witness first-hand the live recording and online broadcast of one of the programs at *Ruvheneko Live*.

In the main, the research found out that the production process of the aforementioned online television stations in Zimbabwe begins with a meeting a meeting to brainstorm ideas followed which culminates into an agreed topic and guests for the show. This is followed by thorough research on both the topic and the guest(s). A final meeting is conducted to brief everyone on their roles before, during and after the recording and online broadcast of the program. Before and during the show, online audiences are given a platform to send comments and question and are forwarded to the guests if ‘necessary’. While this sound gloomy in terms of inclusiveness of the audiences, this study found that, it was not all the comments and questions sent by the online audiences that are read out during the broadcast; there exists, a certain level of gatekeeping, where certain comments are not read out ostensibly to maintain a ‘rational debate’.

Closely related to the preceding point above, the study also found out that online television programs such as *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* are not as inclusive to audiences input they are touted to be. Apart from the fact that one needs to own a computer, smart phone or tablet and good internet connectivity just to be a part of the online audience, this study also noted that the two platforms are not very open to ordinary citizens to be interviewed on the show and have their voices heard in the socio economic and political figures in Zimbabwe. One can argue that they are elitist and the alternativeness nature of the programs is limited to the alternative elites in the society and not the subalterns or ordinary men. The Fadzayi Mahere’s *#ThisFlag Thursday* program featured mainly opposition political figures and activists as guests to be interviewed on the program and no ordinary citizen was ever invited to speak on their plight in the socio-economic and political context in Zimbabwe. In other words, only the alternative elites in the form of opposition political leaders and activists were afforded a voice and certainly not the ordinary man.

This study also found out that for the *Ruvheneko Live* online program's source of revenue were advertisements and 'partners' who enjoyed the prerogative of influencing the discourses on the program at the expense of the audiences as witnessed by the Zimbabwe Political Debates 2017 series which were being run on the show every Thursday at the time of writing this report at the behest of the Election Resource Centre who were meeting part of the production costs as 'partners'.

Ease of measuring the size of audiences and the ability to determine whether an increase or decline popularity per episode is also another fundamental production aspect which was established by this study. Both *Facebook* and *YouTube* digital platforms are able to give the number of views of each episode with relative accuracy and online television programs make use of these figures to measure the size of audiences and, therefore, their popularity.

All in all, the theories, methods and methodologies I employed for this study, to a larger extent, assisted me to accomplish the objectives of the study which, in the main, were aimed at establishing the production and distribution processes and practices of online 'alternative' television programs in Zimbabwe.

6.2 Recommendations to Online Television Programs

6.2.1 Mission, Vision and Core Values

A mission statement articulates the purpose of an organization and emphasizes its unending pledge to meet the needs of its publics. A well-constructed mission statement serves to remind the leaders of an organization on what is important and what is not. On the other hand, a vision statement speaks to what an organization would like to accomplish in future and serves as the inspiration and framework for strategic planning. Core values, essentially, are qualities or traits that an organization views as not just worthwhile but present an organization's deeply held beliefs, fundamental driving force and highest priorities. In it is in this light that I recommend that online television programs in Zimbabwe have well-articulated mission, vision and core values statements that will guide them in terms of their purpose, what they ought to achieve and the key values that will guide and therefore help them to achieve their dreams. If providing a free, all inclusive and alternative platforms for communication is one of the goals, then it should be stated clearly so that they are constantly reminded to put the interests of the audiences ahead of any commercial or political interest that may come along the way.

6.2.2 Funding

While I acknowledge the importance of revenue which comes from advertisers and ‘partners’ in the sustenance and continued survival of online programs in Zimbabwe, it should not come at the expense of the alternativeness nature associated with internet based platforms of communication. The arrangement that a ‘partner’ or advertiser at that, sponsors the program on condition that they determine the kind of discourses advanced on the show defeats the whole purpose of providing an alternative platform for the marginalized voices to be heard as the subject for discussion should be determined by the audiences. In this regard, I recommend that online television programs in Zimbabwe such as *Ruvheneko Live* ensure that their shows remain audience driven not partner driven by protecting the interests of the audiences from any commercial and /or political forces.

6.2.3 Inclusiveness of Online Television Programs

While there using internet based platforms of communication such as *Facebook Live* and *YouTube* has inherent limitations in terms of the number of audiences who can access them due to the high cost of internet access (data), smart phones and computers among other reason which the online television program owners have no control over, they should endeavor to be more inclusive in terms of their sources of information. What we have seen from this study is that only elites who occupy certain positions in government, industry and/or commerce, politics and the society in general are usually the only once being given a voice. The subalterns are still marginalized from the socio economic and political discourses that held on the aforementioned online television programs because they do not qualify to be credible sources of information. However, in the context of the socio economic and political dispensation obtaining in Zimbabwe, these are the people who are probably suffering the most and would constitute more credible sources of information. It is, therefore, in this light that I recommend that online television programs in Zimbabwe be more inclusive or more open to ordinary citizens and invite some of them to be guests on the show so that they too add their voice and tell their plight or side of the story in the context of Zimbabwe’s socio economic and political issues in Zimbabwe.

6.2.4 Pre-recorded Programs

The truth is said to be the cardinal principle of the craft of journalism. In the spirit of ethical journalism and honesty, I recommend that when a show is pre-recorded for one reason or the other, the presenter should declare that beforehand, and tell the audiences that they show they are

watching online is a pre-recorded one. When they know, they won't bother to send question to guests for a non-existent real time guest on the show to answer.

6.3 Recommendations to Future Researchers

This study has explored the production and distribution processes and practices in Zimbabwe using the case of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday*. It has unpack fundamental production practices as well as the funding, ownership and control patterns. That said, for future researchers, I recommend that attempt to audiences and or content of online television stations in Zimbabwe. This study has already established who is being targeted to be the audience by online television stations in Zimbabwe and the onus is now on future researchers to study these audiences and find out whether there is a connection between the target audiences and who they really are in terms of various demographic aspects. In the context of the content of online television programs in Zimbabwe, future researcher can attempt to answer the question what is the content of online television programs in Zimbabwe and what are the various forces at play that influence this content.

6.4 Conclusion

This study complements the existing body of literature on emerging communicative platforms brought about by the advent of the internet and the information and communication technologies. It has unpacked the production and distribution processes and practices of online television programs in the Zimbabwean context using the case of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday*. Based on the findings from this study, Dean's (2003) position that the advent of new platforms of communication such as the internet had revived the Habermasian concept of the public sphere characterized by free entry, free exit as well as freedom of opinion and expression is challenged as there are various production processes and practices the limits the citizens' ability to access online television programs in Zimbabwe thus defeating the fundamental free entry and free exit aspect of a true public sphere. However, this study acknowledges that role played by the internet and the ICTs in creating an alternative and more liberal spaces for communication compared to traditional media, a position which complements earlier works by scholars such as Chibwe and Ureke (2016) among many others. The production and distribution processes and practices of *Ruvheneko Live* and *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television programs were explored, findings of the study summarized and recommendations to the two abovementioned online programs and

future researchers made. All in all, to a greater extent, this research was a success since the research questions and objectives were answered convincingly.

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Appendices

Interview Guide for Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa of *Ruvheneko Live*

1. What inspired you to start the *Ruvheneko Live* online television program?
2. The program is aired online every Thursday at 1800 hrs; can you explain why you have settled for that specific day and time and not any other?
3. How consistent are you in sticking to the scheduled time and day, and what are the challenges associated with sticking to this schedule?
3. How open or inclusive is *Ruvheneko Live* to input from viewers or citizens who are not ordinarily employed by the Ruvheneko to be officially part of the program and what are the ways of making sure that alternative, multiple and diverse voices are given a chance to participate on the show?
4. As an alternative communicative platform, how do you get credible sources of information? Do you receive government officials' itinerary or invitations to official government programs like mainstream media do?
5. Who are the target audiences of *Ruvheneko Live* and how large was your viewership?
6. Who else do you work with on the program? Did you receive financial assistance or startup capital for the program from anyone?
7. What is the business model of your venture? How do you make money or alternatively what are the sources of revenue of *Ruvheneko Live*?
8. Advertising is said to be the life blood of media houses. Do you also get advertisers on the show and what fraction of revenue can you attribute to advertising?
9. Related to the above, assuming there advertisers on your show, in what ways do they influence programming of the show?
10. Can you explain the entire production process of the program *Ruvheneko Live* from start to finish?

Interview Guide for Fadzayi Mahere of *#ThisFlag Thursday*

1. What inspired you to start the *#ThisFlag Thursday* online television program?
2. The program is aired online every Thursday at 1900 hrs; can you explain why you have settled for that specific day and time and not any other?
3. How consistent are you in sticking to the scheduled time and day, and what are the challenges associated with sticking to this schedule?
3. How open or inclusive is *#ThisFlag Thursday* to input from viewers or citizens who are not ordinarily employed by the Ruvheneko to be officially part of the program and what are the ways of making sure that alternative, multiple and diverse voices are given a chance to participate on the show?
4. As an alternative communicative platform, how do you get credible sources of information? Do you receive government officials' itinerary or invitations to official government programs like mainstream media do?
5. Who are the target audiences of *#ThisFlag Thursday* and how large was your viewership?
6. Who else do you work with on the program? Did you receive financial assistance or startup capital for the program from anyone?
7. What is the business model of your venture? How do you make money or alternatively what are the sources of revenue of *#ThisFlag Thursday*?
8. Advertising is said to be the life blood of media houses. Do you also get advertisers on the show and what fraction of revenue can you attribute to advertising?
9. Related to the above, assuming there advertisers on your show, in what ways do they influence programming of the show?
10. Can you explain the entire production process of the program *#ThisFlag Thursday* from start to finish?