

# Social Media Influence on Journalism during the Covid-19 Lockdown in Uganda

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## Abstract

This study, “*Social Media Influence on Journalism during the Covid-19 Lockdown in Uganda*” was conducted among journalists from Uganda Sports Press Association (USPA). The purpose of the study was to establish how social media has influenced on journalism during the Covid-19 lockdown in Uganda. The researcher sought to identify the challenges that journalists faced during the Covid-19 lockdown in Uganda, the Specific challenges of social media to journalism, determine the Opportunities of social media to journalism and establish the impact of social media on journalism in Uganda. I adopted a cross-sectional design using both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted and 169 journalists out of 243 journalists under Uganda Sports Press Association (USPA) were selected. I collected data using both primary and secondary sources where primary data collection involved interviews and semi-structured questionnaires while secondary data by documentary reviews. The study found that social media has given a new dimension to journalism in Uganda. It has made it easy for journalists to get news faster than before. Journalists rely on social media websites to collect news stories as well it has provided opportunity for enhanced access to information and a diversification of sources and opinions. Journalists and their respective media houses in Uganda have Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and other social networking sites to not only source news content, but also connect with their audiences. They provide channels for journalists to reach out to the public, to share information and to express opinions without formal requirements and with a minimum interference in form of regulation and censorship. Social media has further provided a forum for discussion and debate between USPA journalists and sports enthusiastic through their social media platform pages. Though social media has opened enormous opportunities, journalists still faces challenges. These included the dissemination of fraudulent, harassing, threatening, bullying, embarrassing, sexually explicit, profane, obscene, racist, intimidating, defamatory or otherwise inappropriate content. The researcher noted with concern that excessive reliance on social media may decrease the quality of journalism since there is no content monitoring and editorial control over the materials retrieved online. This has threatened the basics of journalism, credibility and reliability with many instances of false and fabricated information

generated on social media sites. Some of the posts on social media have been found to lack of objectivity as most of the people who float the information there, are either unaware of the idea of objectivity or they themselves are activists within the communities they write about. In conclusion despite these challenges, one can't deny the extent to which social media has positively influenced journalism under the Covid-19 lockdown in Uganda which restricted the movement of journalists thus making it hard for them to go to the field to collect relevant stories. It is therefore imperative upon media practitioners to improve the infusion of social media and journalism. To achieve this, I recommend that journalists should be given adequate training to enable them process information for distribution online as well as ensuring that materials to be posted on a Social Media site is not fraudulent, harassing, threatening, bullying, embarrassing, sexually explicit, profane, obscene, racist, intimidating, defamatory or otherwise inappropriate. Whereas law acts like Regulation of Interception of Communications Act (2010) and the Uganda Communications Act of 2000 (Cap 106) are already in place to regulate dissemination of information on social media, they have been abused to target political opposition and dissent. I therefore recommend that the government revises them to serve their intended purpose.

**Keywords:** Media, journal, lockdown