

# Media Credibility Index Zimbabwe

August – September 2012

***“Every news organization has only its credibility and reputation to rely on”*** — Tony

Burman, ex-editor-in-chief of CBC News, *The Globe and Mail*, October 2001



*Defending free expression and your right to know*

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# Acknowledgments

*THE Media Credibility Index Zimbabwe* is an exploratory study into the principles that govern journalistic practice to establish whether the mainstream media in Zimbabwe are playing their central role in contributing to a just, functional free society.

The report is the first of its kind that the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) has undertaken and remains part of the Project's endeavours to promote and celebrate high standards of journalism in the country. Subsequent reports will be published bi-monthly.

We believe findings of this report – as with previous MMPZ publications – will help to strengthen the media's contribution to Zimbabwe's socio-political and cultural development.

MMPZ's research team conducted the research. It comprises media researchers Sibusisiwe Dube (who compiled the report), Pauline Ihani Phuthi, James Bvumira and Precious Zhou (Print media monitors); Christina Mundodzi, Hlengiwe Dube, Elijah Daka, and Pretty Moyo (Electronic media monitors). The report was coordinated by Eric Matingo and Edson Madondo and edited by Andrew Moyse.

MMPZ is also greatly indebted to ... which funded the research

# Chapter one

## 1. Introduction

MORE than ever before, the media today play a critical role in any society.

The media, from the shows we watch on TV, the music we listen to on the radio, our newspapers and magazines, and now the news services and social network pages of the Internet, serve as our main sources of information and communication. They keep societies connected to the world and to each other and informed about trends, events and opinions at every level. They are, in fact, the cohesive glue that reinforces our sense of identity; to our culture and the communities in which we live, and to the nations to which we belong.

A statement of Shared Purpose released by the Committee of Concerned Journalists (CCJ) following years of research into the **“principles that underlie journalism”** presents the function of the media as encompassing myriad roles in society. These include helping define community; creating common language and common knowledge; identifying a community’s goals, heroes and villains; pushing people beyond complacency; entertaining; serving as watchdog and offering a voice to the voiceless<sup>1</sup>.

The world over, the media is considered as an industry, as a public service and as a political institution. And because they are the engineers of public opinion and forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy, it is imperative that a significant proportion of the public must trust them.

In this context, information in journalism is therefore considered as a social good and not a commodity. This means media organisations share the responsibility for the disseminated information, not only to their proprietors but also to the public at large, a situation which entails journalists to assume their social responsibility always in conformity with a personal ethical consciousness.

The Society of Journalists (SJ) – one of the leading voices in the US on the subject of Journalistic Standards and Ethics – notes the indispensability of professionalism and credibility in the way the media conducts its work:

***“The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve***

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<sup>1</sup> Principles of Journalism: Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ).  
<http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles>

***the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility.***<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 What is media credibility?

MEDIA credibility is in fact trust and value given to a media product by its audience. If the audience have a high value of the media organization and trusts and respects the information provided, then that media organisation is said to have high credibility.

Thus, media vehicles having high levels of credibility enjoy good business status and social respect among the public. Otherwise, some bad names exist in the media only due to the low level of credibility. Modern media and their workers all take care of credibility efforts. They contribute to their company by enhancing credibility.<sup>3</sup>

How is media credibility achieved?

The Committee of Concerned Journalists (CCJ), a US non-profit consortium of journalists, publishers, media owners, academics and citizens, worried about the future of the journalism profession gives some helpful advice:

***“...commitment to citizens first is the basis of a news organisation's credibility, the implied covenant that tells the audience the coverage is not slanted for friends or advertisers. Commitment to citizens also means journalism should present a representative picture of all constituent groups in society. Ignoring certain citizens has the effect of disenfranchising them. The theory underlying the modern news industry has been the belief that credibility builds a broad and loyal audience, and that economic success follows in turn...”***

## 1.2 Codes of journalism – their purpose

MEDIA credibility is a complex concept.

There are several journalistic principles that are the building blocks to the credibility of any media and underline journalistic practice. These principles of ethics and of good practice – known among journalists as professional “code of ethics” or “canons of journalism” – are designed to address the specific challenges faced by journalists in the course of their duties. These also provide journalists with a framework for self-monitoring and self-correction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Society of Professional Journalists: SPJ Code of Ethics.

<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Blurt it.

<http://www.blurtit.com/q247830.html>

<sup>4</sup> Journalism ethics and standards – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

To ensure credibility in the dissemination of information media practitioners should therefore religiously adhere to these professional journalistic standards, which are centred on accuracy, fairness and balance.

## 1.3 Accuracy

JOURNALISM'S first obligation is to the truth. It should claim pre-eminence over all considerations. According to the CCJ, ***“journalist truth”*** is a process that begins with the professional discipline of verifying facts. This means journalists should take reasonable steps to ensure that they disseminate accurate information and depicts events fairly. Special care must be taken to check accuracy of stories that may cause harm to individuals or organisations.

Says the CCJ: ***“Even in a world of expanding voices, accuracy is the foundation upon which everything else is built – context, interpretation, comment, criticism, analysis and debate. The truth, over time, emerges from this forum.”***

Adds the body: ***“Independence is an underlying requirement of journalism, a cornerstone of its reliability. Independence of spirit and mind, rather than neutrality, is the principle journalists must keep in focus. While editorialists and commentators are not neutral, the source of their credibility is still their accuracy, intellectual fairness and ability to inform, not their devotion to a certain group or outcome...”***

Therefore, the most important task of the journalist is to serve the people's right to true and authentic information so that the public is provided with adequate material to facilitate the formation of an accurate and comprehensive picture of the world in which the origin, nature and essence of events, processes and state of affairs are understood as objectively as possible.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.4 Balance and Fairness

News reports should always be fair, full and balanced and must not suppress essential information pertaining to those events. The media should not distort information by exaggeration or omission, or give one side of the story and

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/journalistic-standards>

<sup>5</sup> International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism/ethic net  
<http://ethicnet.uta.fi/international/international-principles-of-professional-ethics-in-journalism>

report the facts out of the context in which they occurred. This entails the news reports to have balance and context. Words, facts and quotes must not be deliberately downplayed or emphasized so as to distort a story. Prominence of the story should be related to its importance. The use of misleading headlines must be avoided.

In fact, according to the CCJ when the concept of objectivity originally evolved, it did not mean that journalists were free of bias: objectivity did not denote the substance of the journalists themselves, but to a **“consistent method”** of testing information, **“a transparent approach to evidence, precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work”**.

The seeking out of multiple sources, disclosing as much as possible about sources and asking various sides for comment so that balance and fairness in presenting facts is achieved embodies this approach. **“This discipline of verification is what separates journalism from other modes of communication, such as propaganda, fiction or entertainment,”** says the CCJ.

Crucial too is for journalists to promote access by the public to information and participation of the public in the media, including the right of correction or rectification, and the right of reply.

## 1.5 Justification

THE concept of media credibility provides a platform to explore the relevance and responsibility of the news media in Zimbabwe. This is especially so as public trust in the media is often undermined when these media deliver erroneous or distorted information.

Walter Lippmann, an American public intellectual, writer, reporter and political commentator (September 23, 1889 – December 14, 1974) may have been talking about the role of newspapers in particular, but it evidently sums up the importance of the role of the media in today’s societies:

***“For the newspaper is in all literalness the bible of democracy, the book out of which a people determines its conduct. It is the only serious book most people read. It is the only book they read every day. Now the power to determine each day what shall seem important and what shall be neglected is a power unlike any that has been exercised since the Pope lost hold on the secular mind.”***<sup>6</sup>

This study therefore investigates the believability, reliability, ethical lapses, newsgathering techniques and news presentation of Zimbabwe’s mainstream media, both print and electronic, in relation to each other. This was done in

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<sup>6</sup> Roles of the media

<http://hums3001.unsw.wikispaces.net/Roles+of+the+Media>

the context of assessing all the front-page news stories published in the newspapers and top stories aired both on TV and radio stations.

Placement of stories in the media is one crucial manner in which the media mediate the world to us. The media ‘tell’ their audiences what is significant and meaningful through their placement of stories, sorting them in order of their perceived importance. Within a newspaper’s sections, for example, readers almost invariably read pages in order, from the front page to the back.

The front-page stories of a newspaper and those billed as top stories in the broadcasting media are thus seen as the marketing points of these media. They are the sales points, which attract the potential reader to buy the paper and read further, and in the case of radio and TV, the allure for listeners and viewers to remain tuned to that particular radio or TV station.

## 1.6 Scope of the research

THE Media Credibility Index report covers a two-month period from August 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, for all monitored media except for private radio stations broadcasting outside Zimbabwe (Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa). The two stations were only assessed for a month (September 1<sup>st</sup> – September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012) due to technical limitations.

The study involved monitoring and analyzing the content and credibility of all stories published on the front pages of the newspapers monitored and those billed as top stories in the broadcasting media. MMPZ took the top three stories in the main news bulletins of each of the radio stations monitored and the top four stories broadcast on ZTV’s main evening news bulletins. A total of 10 print and electronic mainstream media outlets were considered. These comprised both public and private media organisations (Fig 1.)

**Fig.1: List of media under inspection**

<b>Media</b>	<b>Regularity</b>	<b>Status</b>
ZTV (ZBC)	Everyday	Public media
<i>The Herald</i>	Everyday	Public media
<i>Chronicle</i>	Everyday	Public media
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	Weekly	Privately owned
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	Weekly	Public media
<i>Newsday</i>	Everyday	Privately owned
<i>Dailynews</i>	Daily	Privately owned
<i>The Standard</i>	Weekly	Privately owned
SW Radio Africa	Everyday	Privately owned

Voice of America (Studio 7)	Everyday	Privately owned
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## 1.7 Methodology

THE research used both quantitative and qualitative methods in measuring the credibility of the various issues covered in the respective media. The quantitative aspect involved measuring all quantifiable matters such as the number of stories and sources used in the media's coverage of the subject. The qualitative aspect was used to fine-tune the quantitative findings on how credible the media were in covering the issues they chose to report on.

The qualitative aspects were informed by ethical journalistic principles and good practice of accuracy, balance and fairness as ascribed in earlier sections of this report. Anything that failed these standards was therefore deemed unprofessional. In this context, various indicators were used to interrogate the credibility of the leading reports appearing in the country's mainstream media.

These mainly involved assessing completeness in news coverage; editorial intrusions; newsworthy events overwhelmed by trivia; representation of individual/party/corporate interests; lack of distinction between fact and opinion; manipulation of public/party opinion etc; obfuscation of facts with prejudice or supposition; and lack of discipline in verification.

From this process, reports were then classified as either fair or unfair; accurate/inaccurate; trustworthy/untrustworthy; balanced/unbalanced; biased/unbiased; reliable/unreliable; thorough/not thorough and; informative or not informative, benchmarks we used to categorise stories as credible or not.

# Chapter two

## 2. Summary of Findings

BOTH the print and electronic media carried a total of 681 leading stories in the period under review. The stories were on various topics such as politics and governance; social; economic and business issues.

Of the 681 reports carried in these media, 413 were credible and the rest [268] were not. In other words, 61 percent of the 681 top stories in the media during this period were useful and informative while the rest (39%) were not.

A breakdown of these findings by each media outlet is given in Fig 2.

**Fig: 2 Overall credibility assessment of each media outlet**

<b>Medium</b>	<b>Number of stories</b>	<b>Credible</b>	<b>Not Credible</b>	<b>Credibility media index rating (%)</b>
ZTV	169	95	74	56
<i>The Herald</i>	109	59	50	54
<i>Chronicle</i>	154	86	68	56
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	26	10	16	38
<i>Newsday</i>	86	75	11	87
<i>Dailynews</i>	72	37	35	51
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	10	8	2	80
<i>The Standard</i>	18	15	3	83
SW Radio Africa (September)	20	16	4	80
Studio 7 (September)	17	12	5	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>61</b>

## 2.1 Key Findings

THE state media carried the least credible top stories (see fig 2), with an overall credibility rate of 51 percent in the period under study.

Of these state media, *The Sunday Mail* scored the lowest credibility rating of 38 percent out of the 26 stories it carried on its front pages in the two-month period. Notably, the weekly paper was the only news outlet of the 10 surveyed media that got a credibility percentage tally of less than 50. Zimbabwe's sole national television station, ZTV, and the Bulawayo-based *Chronicle* were the joint top scorers in the Credibility Media Index ratings with 56 percent.

The private media's aggregate credibility levels of its top stories in the period under review stood at 73 percent. *Newsday* was the best performer among the six private media news outlets under study with a credibility score of 87% followed by *The Standard* (83%).

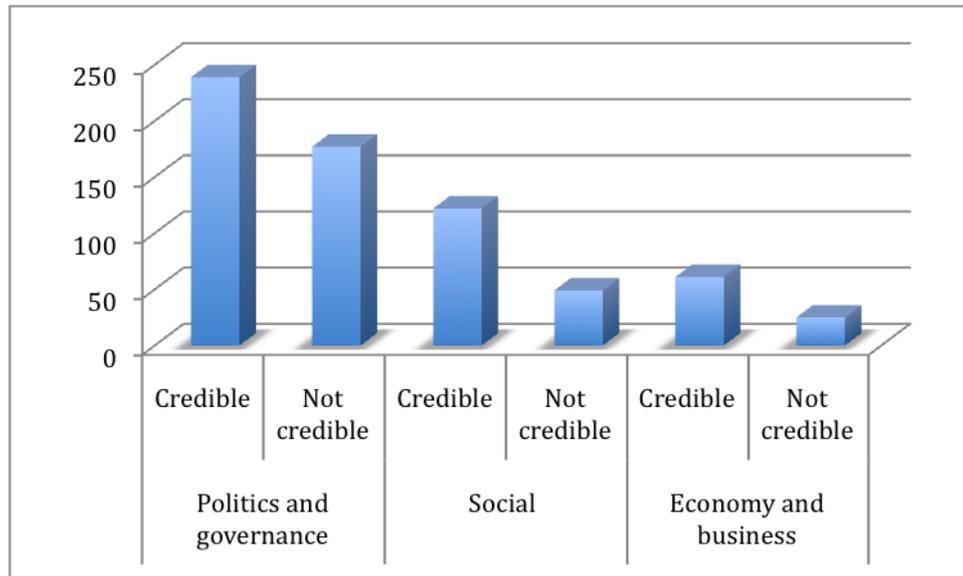
## 2.2 Social-economic issues versus political and government issues

THE research categorised the top stories under study into three categories: social; governance and politics; and business and economics.

Stories on governance and politics dominated the front pages of newspapers and the top story slots in the electronic media. These constituted 416 of the 681 lead stories carried in these media in the period under examination. Social issues were second with 171 stories while stories on business and economic issues accounted for the remaining 86 lead stories.

Although stories on governance and politics dominated the front pages of newspapers and top story slots of the broadcasting media, these did not always prove to be of great value to the public. Of the 416 top stories carried on the subject in the period under review, slightly more than half of these (57% or 239 stories) could be classified as credible while the remaining 43 percent were unhelpful. This was in sharp contrast to the 71 percent credibility rates each scored in stories on social, business and economic issues. Fig 3 illustrates this coverage by topic

**Fig 3: Breakdown by Topic**



## 2.3 Media coverage of political and governance issues

THE private media had the highest overall credibility rate of 76 percent in their coverage of pertinent governance and political matters in the two-month period while that of the public media stood at a collective 45 percent.

The issues that dominated coverage during the review period included haggling among coalition parties over proposed provisions in the constitution draft on executive powers, devolution and homosexuality, among others; activities of the political parties; the political implications of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's romantic affairs, the country's population census and the visit by the SADC facilitation team and the SADC summit, where Zimbabwe was on the agenda.

The top scorer in the credibility index rating in this category was *Newsday* (87%). *The Sunday Mail* displayed the worst journalistic practice with a credibility rating of 27 percent. Among the public and state-owned media, only the *Chronicle* achieved a credibility rating above 50 percent, while none of the surveyed private media outlets scored a credibility rating of below 50 percent.

Fig 4 gives a breakdown of how each media fared in their coverage of developments in the political and governance spheres.

**Fig: 4 Credibility assessment of each media outlet's coverage of politics and governance**

Medium	Number of stories	Credible	Not credible	Credibility media index rating (%)
ZTV	98	42	56	43
<i>The Herald</i>	65	27	38	42
<i>Chronicle</i>	72	38	34	53
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	11	3	8	27
<i>Newsday</i>	62	54	8	87
<i>Daily News</i>	56	36	20	64
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	9	7	2	78
<i>The Standard</i>	17	14	3	82
SW Radio Africa (September)	14	10	4	71
Studio 7 (September)	12	8	4	67

## 2.4 Media coverage of social issues

NONE of the surveyed media recorded a credibility level below 50 percent in their coverage of social issues. The public and state-owned media devoted 140 top stories to the topic, 94 of which were credible. This translated to an aggregate credibility mark of 67 percent.

*The Sunday Mail* had the highest integrity score in the reportage of social issues among the public media. Eight-nine percent of the nine front-page stories it carried on social issues were trustworthy.

The private media carried 31 top reports on the subject, 28 of which were credible. They scored an overall credibility mark of 90 percent. The private media's top performers in this category were *The Standard* and SW Radio Africa whose top stories on social issues were all credible. However, *The Standard* only published one front-page report on the subject in the two-month study, while SW Radio Africa had four reports. See fig 5.

Reports on social issues were mainly based on court cases about various social subjects, especially on court applications by Prime Minister Tsvangirai's ex-lover, Locardia Karimatsenga-Tembo, to bar the Prime Minister from marrying his fiancée, Elizabeth Macheke.

**Fig: 5 Credibility assessment of each media outlet's coverage of social issues**

<b>Medium</b>	<b>Number of stories</b>	<b>Credible</b>	<b>Not Credible</b>	<b>Credibility media index rating (%)</b>
<b>ZTV</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>58</b>
<b><i>The Herald</i></b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>67</b>
<b><i>Chronicle</i></b>	<b>59</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>71</b>
<b><i>The Sunday Mail</i></b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>89</b>
<b><i>Newsday</i></b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>85</b>
<b><i>Daily News</i></b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>
<b><i>Zimbabwe Independent</i></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>
<b><i>The Standard</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>SW Radio Africa (September)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Studio 7 (September)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>75</b>

## **2.5 Business and the economy**

THE public and state-owned media carried a total of 65 top reports on business news and the economy in the period under review, 21 of which were credible, while 18 of the 21 top reports the private media carried on the subject were reliable.

These included news coverage of Finance Minister Tendai Biti on the state of the economy; doubts over payment of a bonus to civil servants; deliberations of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Budget, Finance and Promotion, especially their recommendation that the State Procurement Board be overhauled to stamp out corruption; policy differences between ZANU PF and the MDC-T over the implementation of the indigenisation exercise, and the holding of the Harare Agricultural Show.

The overall integrity levels of stories on business and the economy the private media carried as top stories between August and September was rated at 86 percent, while those from the public media was 65 percent.

As in the social subject category, *The Sunday Mail* again turned out to be the most reliable news outlet in the coverage of business and economic issues among the public media group with its stories on the subject earning a credibility rating of 83 percent. The *Chronicle* was second at 73 percent.

Among the private media outlets, the *Zimbabwe Independent* and Studio 7 – both of which carried just one story on the subject, and SW Radio Africa (two stories) – ensured 100 percent credibility standing. Fig 6 gives a breakdown of each media outlet's performance.

**Fig: 6 Credibility assessment of each media outlet's coverage of business and economy**

Medium	Number of stories	Credible	Not Credible	Credibility media index rating (%)
ZTV	27	15	12	56
<i>The Herald</i>	17	12	5	71
<i>Chronicle</i>	15	11	4	73
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	6	5	1	83
<i>Newsday</i>	11	10	1	91
<i>Dailynews</i>	6	4	2	67
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	1	1	0	100
<i>The Standard</i>	0	0	0	-
SW Radio Africa (September)	2	2	0	100
Studio 7 (September)	1	1	0	100

## 2.6 Common weaknesses in the media's top stories

PROFESSIONAL journalistic flaws the study found in the media's treatment of their top stories in the period under review mainly consisted of the use of sensational and misleading headlines, failure to balance and corroborate facts, inaccuracies, editorial intrusions into the news reports, and reliance on both single and unidentified sources.

The sourcing patterns of these media also reflected bad habits: 348 of the top stories they carried in the period under review were multi-sourced as compared to 292 reports that were either based on single sources (201) or unnamed sources (91). Forty-four other stories contained editorial intrusions. See Fig 6.

**Fig 7: The media's sourcing patterns**

Medium	Stories with unnamed sources	Single sourced stories	Stories with two or more	Stories with editorial intrusions
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			<b>sources</b>	
ZTV	<b>5</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>The Herald</i>	<b>17</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Chronicle</i>	<b>27</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Newsday</i>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>Dailynews</i>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>The Standard</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>
SW Radio Africa	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>
Studio 7	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>44</b>

## 2.6.1 Editorial intrusions

Most of the editorial intrusions (38) were carried in the public and state-owned media group with the exception of the *Chronicle*. The remaining six cases of editorial intrusions appeared in the *Dailynews*. These editorial intrusions were mainly used to divert attention from the facts of the story and manipulate public opinion on the issues.

This was generally illustrated by the manner in which the public media, especially ZTV, latched onto and contrived as fact ZANU PF's rejection of the draft constitution on the basis of the party's allegations that the document excluded the "**people's views**" whenever they reported on the differences among the three coalition parties over the constitution-making exercise.

ZTV alone carried 27 top stories with editorial intrusions mostly stemming from its depiction as fact the ZANU PF claims that the proposed constitution excluded the "**people's views**".

*The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail* were equally guilty of this professional transgression as exemplified by *The Herald* report (20/9) *Government rejects referendum amendment Bill*. Apart from the report's one-sidedness – stemming from its overdependence on opinion from presidential spokesperson George Charamba almost to the exclusion of the other sources – it was polluted by the paper's own editorialising: "**The party (ZANU PF) audited the (constitution) draft and came up with a number of**

***amendments after realising that Copac deviated from the people's views as captured in the national report."***

And in its report, *MDC demand polls*, the *Dailynews* (26/8) depicts as fact what are but its own allegations: ***"Vice President Mujuru and Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa have been fighting for control of ZANU PF for the past two decades."***

## **2.6.2 Sensational/misleading headlines**

This was a weakness prevalent across the entire media divide. While it is human to have a natural propensity for curiosity, professional journalistic principles advise against misrepresenting or highlighting incidents out of context.

Some of the headlines used by the media in their top stories in the period under review appeared to reduce fidelity to the truth and contributed to a lack of needed context for public understanding of issues being reported on.

These included *Dailynews* (7/9) report, *No bonus for civil servants*, which presented as fact that civil servants were not getting bonuses for 2012. However, nowhere in the report are there such indications, apart from Finance Minister Tendai Biti's caution that government workers could have a gloomy festive season unless his department mobilized \$400 million by year-end.

Another headline *'Mugabe must go'* (*Dailynews* 5/8) is in quotes suggesting that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai had directly made those remarks yet nowhere in the story is he quoted saying these words.

Similarly, *ZANU PF paralysed* (*Newsday* 30/12), is a poorly informed headline, whose only excuse for legitimacy is based on the allegations of MDC-T spokesperson Douglas Mwonzora.

## **2.6.3 Failure to balance and corroborate facts**

One of the most important tasks of journalists is to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty, elements that were missing in some of the top stories carried in the media in this period. This was reflected in stories such as *Analysts defend ZANU PF constitution analysis* (ZTV 10/8, 8pm); *West's bid to rebrand Tsvangirai* and *D-Day for Copac Draft*, *The Herald* 7&8/8.

The ZTV report, for example, is basically a biased report based on the use of ZANU PF officials masquerading as analysts to endorse their party's amendments in the draft constitution. The *Herald's West's bid to rebrand Tsvangirai exposed* blurs the distinction between fact and opinion. The paper passively presents claims made by analysts in the story as fact.

## **2.6.4 Inaccuracies**

There were also basic inaccuracies noted in the top stories carried in the media in the August-September period. These included a basic typographical error in the *Chronicle* headline: *Man attempts to stab ZANU PF youth charman* (25/8) and a case of a mix-up in the acknowledgment of news sources by *Newsday* (18/8) in its story, '*Zim has capacity for 93 radio stations*'. The paper inaccurately attributed statements made at a broadcasting conference organised by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) on Zimbabwe's broadcasting capacity to TransMedia Corporation operations officer Rufaro Zaranyika instead of MISA country director Nhlanhla Ngwenya. Notably, the paper subsequently carried a retraction on page five of its August 21 edition.

### 2.6.5 Single sourced stories

As Fig 6 shows, stories with multiple sources were in the majority (348), showing that the respective print and electronic media mostly followed the, "*two reliable sources rule*". This is essential in journalists' work in pursuing the truth and ensuring balance and fairness to issues, especially when the subjects they are reporting on are controversial.

However, quite a large chunk of the media's top stories were also based on either single sources (201 stories) or unnamed sources (91), compromising the credibility of these reports.

For a single source story to be credible, the informant must be an actual policymaker or participant, official representative or spokesperson involved in the action or negotiation with first-hand knowledge. Such information should still be subject to particular scrutiny to ensure the media is not being manipulated.

An illustration of a credible single-sourced story included the *Newsday* (10/8) report: *ZANU PF rejects draft constitution*. It only gave space to ZANU PF spokesperson Rugare Gumbo giving the party's official position on the draft constitution.

However, in this study many of the single-sourced top stories did not comply with professional journalistic reporting standards. These included ZTV's *MDC wants to split AG's office: ZANU PF* (4/9, 8pm), where ZANU PF spokesperson Rugare Gumbo is given a platform to blame the MDC-T for the constitution draft's position on the Attorney-General's office without according the MDC-T the right of reply.

*MDC blamed for smuggling devolution into Copac draft; War veterans criticise MDC formations for not scrutinising the draft and, ZDP dismiss Copac draft* (ZTV 5&9/9, 8pm) further exemplified the undesirable consequences of single-sources stories: not only did the reports fail to give equal opportunity to the competing political interests in the matter, they also appeared designed to manipulate public opinion in favour of one political interest.

*Council tender scandal and, Angry Zambian chief stops visit to Nampundwe Zipra camp* (*Chronicle* 11 & 31/8) also lacked credibility as these reports failed to balance the competing views so that the paper's readers could judge for themselves.

## 2.6.6 Use of unnamed sources

A named source is always preferable to an unnamed source. Anonymous sources are the weakest sources in any report; they compromise the credibility of the story.

This is because an anonymous source is less reliable for the reader. It is hard for a reader, sometimes, to believe what an anonymous source says. Therefore it is imperative that journalists should only allow sources to remain anonymous in certain critical situations: Accusations and low profile stories should almost never have anonymous sources attached to them so as to curb the tendency by some journalists and media outlets to smuggle their own opinions into the news pages under the guise of anonymous sources.

Examples of stories whose credibility were dented by their exclusive reliance on anonymous sources in the two-month study included that from the *Zimbabwe Independent* (14/9), which was based on unnamed claims by “**high level sources and politburo members**” that President Mugabe had blasted army generals for “**grabbing money-spinning safari landholdings in the treasured Save Valley Conservancy, the largest private wildlife sanctuary in the world**”.

Another was a faceless story, *Police launch crackdown on Chipangano linked group* (SW Radio Africa 13/9), which accused ‘*mandimbandimba*’, an alleged offshoot of an Mbare terror gang *Chipangano*, of intimidating and harassing minibus drivers to pay them “protection fees”. Notably, no effort was made to seek comment from the gang, whose leader is reportedly, ZANU PF Harare chairman Jim Kunaka.

# Chapter three

## 3. Conclusion

The surveyed media carried a total of 681 leading stories in the two-month period under review, 413 of which were credible while the remaining 268 were not. This represented a 61 percent credibility rate.

The public and state-owned media had the poorest credibility rating, an aggregate of 51 percent of the 458 top stories they carried in the period under review against the 73 percent of the 163 leading reports published in the private media in the same period.

Political and governance issues were the mostly poorly reported, with the public and state-owned media recording an aggregate 45 percent credibility of the 246 lead stories they carried on the subject in the period under review. Seventy-six percent of the 170 top stories the private media carried on the topic were credible.

The public media’s coverage of the topic was mostly characterised by editorial intrusions and unbalanced sourcing patterns. ZTV had the highest number of reports with editorial intrusion in this category, especially on the constitution-making exercise in which its reporters repeatedly endorsed ZANU PF’s position that the draft “***excluded the views of the people***”.

In contrast, a more professional approach was observed in the media’s coverage of socio-economic issues. On social issues, 67 percent of the 140 top reports the public and state-owned media carried in the period under examination were credible, while these media had a 66 percent credibility rate in their coverage of business and the economy. The private media had a 90 percent credibility rating in the 31 top reports they published on social issues in the period under review. On business and the economy, 86 percent of the 21 stories they carried on the subject were reliable.

On aggregate, professional performance, the most credible media outlet during the two-month period, as reflected in its treatment of top reports, was *Newsday* with a credibility percentage of 87. Second-placed was *The Standard*, at 83 percent, followed by the *Zimbabwe Independent* and SW Radio Africa with an 80 percent credibility rating each, while Studio 7 (71%) came fifth.

In sixth place were ZTV and the *Chronicle*, each with 56 percent credibility ratings. *The Herald* scored a 54 percent credibility mark and was positioned eighth; the *Dailynews* (51%) was number nine; and last was *The Sunday Mail* with a credibility percentage of 38.

A breakdown of the credibility levels of the surveyed media by topic is shown in Fig 8.

**Fig 8: Media credibility rankings by topic**

Medium	Topic and credibility percentage rating	Pos	Topic and credibility percentage rating	Pos	Topic and credibility percentage rating	Pos
	Politics and governance		Social Issues		Business and Economy	
ZTV	43	8	58	9	56	9
<i>The Herald</i>	42	9	67	8	71	7
<i>Chronicle</i>	53	7	71	7	73	6
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	27	10	89	4	83	5
<i>NewsDay</i>	87	1	85	5	91	4
<i>Dailynews</i>	64	6	100	1	67	8
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	78	3	-	-	100	1

<i>The Standard</i>	82	<b>2</b>	100	<b>1</b>	-	-
SW Radio Africa	71	<b>4</b>	100	<b>1</b>	100	<b>1</b>
Studio 7	12	<b>8</b>	75	<b>6</b>	100	<b>1</b>

ends