

Media Credibility Index Zimbabwe

October – November 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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Acknowledgements

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 in the country and remains part of MMPZ's endeavors to promote and celebrate high standards of journalism in the country.

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

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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 voiceless¹.

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 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 the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist’s credibility.”²

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

² Society of Professional Journalists: SPJ Code of Ethics.
<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

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 has 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 outlets 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 organization by enhancing credibility.³

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.⁴

³ Blurt it.

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

⁴ Journalism ethics and standards – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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

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 depict 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.⁵

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 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.

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

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 to 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.”⁶

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 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

⁶ Roles of the media

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

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 (MCI) covers the two-month period from October 1st to November 30th. It involves monitoring and analyzing the content and credibility of stories published on the front pages of newspapers and those billed as the top three stories in the broadcasting media.

A total of 12 media outlets were monitored in the period under review, compared to the 10 that were under study in the September-October edition of the MCI. The two additions comprise the recently launched Star FM, a commercial radio station set up by the state-owned Zimbabwe Newspapers group (*Zimpapers*), publishers of the majority of newspapers in the country, and the state-owned radio station, Spot FM, which falls under the auspices of the national broadcaster, ZBC. See Fig 1.

However, due to some operational constraints, MMPZ was unable to survey the news output of Zimbabwe's first mainstream private radio station since independence, Zi FM, which started broadcasting in July last year in the current edition. The project plans to include it in its next issue of the MCI.

Fig.1 List of Media examined

Media	Regularity	Status
ZTV (ZBC)	Every day	Public/state media
<i>The Herald</i>	Every day	State media
<i>Chronicle</i>	Every day	State media
Spot FM	Every day	Public/state media
Star FM	Every day	State/Commercial media
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	Weekly	Privately owned
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	Weekly	State media
<i>News day</i>	Every day	Privately owned

<i>Daily news</i>	Daily	Privately owned
<i>The Standard</i>	Weekly	Privately owned
Short Wave Radio Africa (SWRA)	Every day	Privately owned
Studio 7	Every day	Privately owned

Methodology

THE research used both the quantitative and qualitative methods in measuring the credibility of the issues covered in the respective media. The quantitative aspect involved measuring all quantifiable issues 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, including the how credible the media is when covering stories.

The qualitative aspects were informed by ethical journalistic principles and good practice of accuracy, balance and fairness as described 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 Findings

BOTH the print and electronic media carried a total of 909 top stories in the period under examination. These were on various issues, such as politics and governance; social; and economic and business news.

Of the 909 reports, 772 were credible while the remaining 137 were not. This translated to a credibility-rating index of 85 percent, a 24 percent increase from the 61 percent credibility rating these media collectively scored in the August-September 2012 survey.

In other words, Zimbabwe’s mainstream media carried more useful and informative news reports in the two-month period under review than it did in the preceding period (August and September). Fig 2 gives a breakdown of the overall credibility of each media outlet. It should be stated however, that the news agenda in the periods covered by the two reports is also certain to have affected the quality of the reporting as much as reflecting an improvement in the quality of the reporting itself. For example, political reporting tends to succumb to reporting from the perspective of certain political agendas and to editorial intrusion, and therefore contributes to a lower overall average if there are more stories relating to political reports from one period to the next.

Fig: 2 Overall credibility assessment of each media outlet

Medium	Number of Stories	Credible	Not Credible	Credibility Media Index Rating %
ZTV	177	116	61	66
<i>The Herald</i>	128	105	23	82
<i>Chronicle</i>	120	107	13	89
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	22	17	5	77
<i>Newsday</i>	89	82	7	92
<i>Dailynews</i>	64	56	8	87
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	12	11	1	92
<i>The Standard</i>	18	17	1	94
Star FM	143	138	5	97

Spot FM	52	49	3	94
SW Radio Africa	46	40	6	87
Studio 7	38	34	4	87
Total	909	772	137	85

2.2 Key Findings

AS shown in Fig 2, the state media collectively carried the least credible top reports in the two-month study at 83 percent, although Star FM scored the highest aggregate credibility level of 97 percent among all the surveyed media. Spot FM was second with overall score of 94 percent

The aggregate 83 percent credibility score by the public media marks an improvement from the overall credibility level of 51 percent these media achieved in the August-September survey of their top stories.

The private media's aggregate credibility levels of their top stories in the period under review stood at 90 percent. This also showed a jump from the 73 percent they attained in the preceding study. *The Standard* was the best performer among the six private media news outlets under study with a credibility score of 94%, up from 83% in the previous survey. *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *Newsday* (both tied at 92%) closely followed by the *Daily News*, Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa, who were all tied in third place (87%).

2.3 Politics & Governance Issues dominate

LIKE in the August-September study, stories on politics and governance dominated the front pages of newspapers and top story slots in the electronic media. These constituted 491 of the 909 reports the surveyed media carried in the period under review. Stories on social matters (227) were the second most popular, while 191 reports on business and economic issues made it as leading stories.

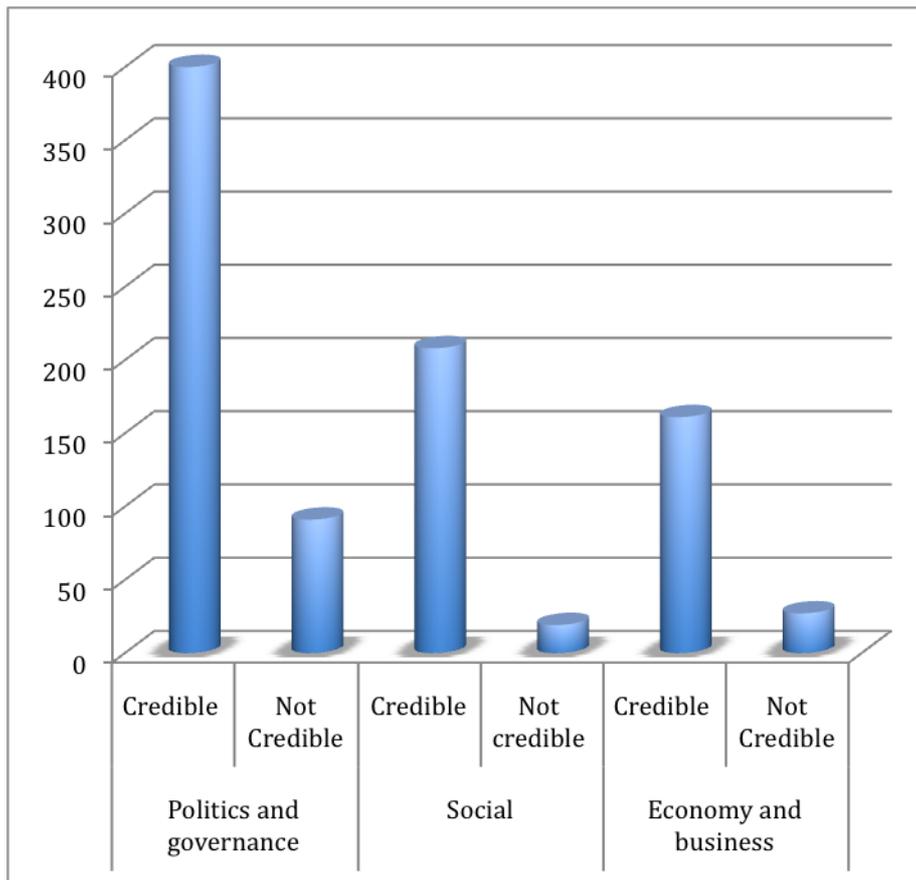
Despite their dominance as leading stories, the media's reports on politics and governance scored the least credible index ratings among the three categories. During the review period, reports on politics and governance achieved credibility levels of 81 percent as compared to social issues (92%) and the 84 percent credibility levels attained in the business and economy category.

Despite this however, the overall quality of these media's leading stories on political and governance issues showed great improvement from the August-September survey, recording a 24 percent increase in credibility rating from the 57 percent credibility score achieved in the August/September period. The 92 percent credibility score (social issues) and the 84 percent achieved

in the business and economic sphere was also in sharp contrast to the 71 percent credibility rates each scored in stories carried in these two categories in the August/September period.

Fig 3 illustrates this coverage by topic.

Fig 3 Breakdown by Topic



2.4 Media Coverage of political and governance issues

THE private media had the highest overall credibility rate of 89 percent in their coverage of governance and political matters in the two-month period while the credibility rating of the public media stood at a collective 77 percent.

The issues that dominated media coverage in the period under review ranged from one media outlet to another. However, squabbles within the coalition over the constitution-making process, ZANU PF's preparations for its annual congress and the political implications of internal struggles within the Anglican

Church over the control of church property in the country were prevalent across all the media surveyed.

The top scorer in the credibility index rating in this category was Star FM, with a 100 percent record, followed by *The Standard*, which achieved a 93 percent credibility rate. In third place were *Newsday*, *The Daily News* and Spot FM, all with a credibility rating of 91 percent each. Fig 4 illustrates this.

Fig 4: Credibility assessment of each media outlets' coverage of Politics and Governance.

Medium	Number of stories	Credible	Not Credible	Credibility media index rating %
ZTV	88	52	36	59
<i>The Herald</i>	76	56	20	73
<i>Chronicle</i>	52	44	8	85
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	14	11	3	78
<i>Spot FM</i>	35	32	3	91
<i>Newsday</i>	65	59	6	91
<i>Dailynews</i>	46	42	4	91
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	6	5	1	83
<i>The Standard</i>	14	13	1	93
<i>Star FM</i>	37	37	0	100
SW Radio Africa	27	22	5	81
Studio 7	31	27	4	87
Total	491	400	91	81

2.5 Social Issues

THE media displayed greater professional conscientiousness in their coverage of social issues than in their coverage of political and governance issues. The state/public media had an overall credibility index rating of 94% and the private media 89%.

The top performers in this category were Star FM, Spot FM, Studio 7, *The Herald* and *The Standard*, all with 100 percent records each, meaning all

stories they carried on the subject were credible. However, *The Standard* carried only two stories on the matter in the two-month period, while SW Radio Africa had eight (See Fig 5).

Reports on social issues were based on diverse social subjects, ranging from dysfunctional water supplies problems in urban centres, especially in Bulawayo, to the fall-out saga between Prime Minister Tsvangirai and his ex-lover, Locardia Karimatsenga-Tembo.

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

Medium	Number of stories	Credible	Not Credible	Credibility media index rating %
ZTV	57	48	9	84
<i>The Herald</i>	30	30	-	100
<i>Chronicle</i>	30	26	4	87
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	6	5	1	83
<i>Spot FM</i>	13	13	0	100
<i>Newsday</i>	21	20	1	95
<i>Dailynews</i>	13	10	3	77
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>The Standard</i>	2	2	0	100
<i>Star FM</i>	44	44	0	100
SW Radio Africa	8	7	1	87
Studio 7	3	3	0	100
Total	227	208	19	92

2.6 Business & Economy

AT least half of the 12 surveyed media excelled in their coverage of business and economic news in the two-month period by recording credibility ratings of 100 percent. These comprised Studio 7, Spot FM, SW Radio Africa, *The Standard*, *Newsday* and *Zimbabwe Independent*. ZTV and *The Sunday Mail* carried the least credible stories in this category, with each scoring a credibility rating of 50 percent.

Overall, the private media had the better credibility score (96%) in this category than the public/state media (83%). Issues that competed for pride of place in the media during the period under review included the presentation of the 2013 national budget and the Zimbabwe Diamond Conference that both took place in October 2012.

Figure 6 gives a breakdown of each media outlets performance.

Fig 6 Credibility assessment of each media outlet's coverage of Economy and Business Issues.

Medium	Number of stories	Credible	Not Credible	Credibility media index ratings %
ZTV	32	16	16	50
<i>The Herald</i>	22	19	3	86
<i>Chronicle</i>	38	37	1	97
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	2	1	1	50
<i>Spot FM</i>	4	4	0	100
<i>Newsday</i>	6	3	0	100
<i>Dailynews</i>	5	4	1	80
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	3	3	0	100
<i>The Standard</i>	2	2	0	100
<i>Star FM</i>	62	57	5	91
<i>SW Radio Africa</i>	11	11	0	100
<i>Studio 7</i>	4	4	0	100
Total	191	161	27	84

2.7 Common Weaknesses in the media's top reports

THE sourcing patterns of the 12 surveyed media continued to show bad habits. See Fig 7.

Less than half (40%) of the 909 top stories these media carried in the two-month period had multiple sources. The rest of the reports comprised 391 single-sourced reports and 77 based on unnamed sources.

Polluting the reliability of some of the media's top stories were editorial intrusions, which were noted in 14 stories in the period under review. However, the editorial intrusions recorded in the media in the current study were an improvement from the August-September survey, which had 44 reports with editorial intrusions.

Uses of misleading and sensational headlines and the failure to balance and corroborate facts also continued to be a problem in the examined media.

Fig 7: The Media's sourcing patterns

Medium	Stories with unnamed sources	Single sourced stories	Stories with two or more sources	Stories with editorial intrusions
<i>ZTV</i>	5	90	43	2
<i>The Herald</i>	13	33	93	5
<i>Chronicle</i>	18	9	83	2
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	3	9	14	2
<i>Spot FM</i>	1	25	16	0
<i>Newsday</i>	15	28	51	0
<i>Daily News</i>	8	29	9	3
<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	4	2	2	0
<i>The Standard</i>	7	5	12	0
<i>Star FM</i>	0	129	16	0
<i>SWRA</i>	1	24	13	0
<i>Studio 7</i>	2	8	29	0
Total	77	391	379	14

2.7.1 Single-sourced reports

WHERE the story 'comes from' and the sources quoted in news reports shape the story and the nature of the message conveyed. Bias by source control is a major issue, particularly in political reporting.

Apart from stories on official party positions, events, policy-making and official representation a story should generally have two or more sources to ensure balance and authenticity. Thus, to ensure balance, fairness and accuracy

reporters should abide by the “*two reliable source rule*”, especially in controversial issues.

Single-sourced reports dominated the 909 top stories carried by the media in the two-month investigation. There were 391 single-sourced top stories carried in these media compared to 371 that had multiple sources.

Although Star FM had the largest number of single-sourced stories (129), these reports were generally based on the pronouncements of the actual **policymakers/participants or official representatives/spokespersons involved in the action or negotiation with first-hand knowledge**. Examples include: *The executive director of Amnesty International calls for the abolition of the death penalty in new constitution* (1/10/12); *Police arrest two Chitungwiza men over the killing of six people in Chitungwiza* (1/10/12) and *President Mugabe calls for political tolerance and unity ahead of the general election next year* (8/10/12).

However, in this study some of the single-sourced top stories did not comply with professional journalistic reporting standards as they failed to test the accuracy of their information from all sources to minimize inadvertent errors. These included: *PM on unsanctioned trip* (ZTV 9/10, 8pm); *ZANU PF forcing resettled farmers to join party structures* (Spot FM 4/10, 8pm) and, *Youths castigate MDC-T for calling for the presence of international observers during elections* (Spot FM 26/11, 8pm).

2.7.2 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 in order 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 a story on Star FM (20/10) that quotes unnamed farmers accusing Finance Minister Tendai Biti for not doing enough to support the agricultural sector and *The Standard* report: *ZANU PF plans to retire senior, sick politicians*, which was based on the claims of unnamed ZANU PF “insiders”. Why these media failed to seek out the subjects of their news reports and give them the opportunity to respond to the allegations remained unsaid.

2.7.3 Editorial Intrusions

NEWS media often use labels and titles to describe people, places and

events. The nature of these labels and titles sets the tone of the story and can influence how readers view the news story and the individuals or organizations that are the focus of the news item. A journalist's decision to use labels such as "terrorist", "insurgent" or "freedom fighter" often reflect a deliberate choice and provides an indication of how the journalist attempts to frame the story².

Such editorial intrusions were prevalent in the state media. An example is the *Chronicle* (12/11) story "*MDC-T rejects Bhebhe, Mguni*", which opined: **"The Western-sponsored party is already in panic mode because ZANU-PF is making inroads into the MDC-T constituencies under a mobilization campaign led by Politburo member, Dr Obert Mpofu."**

2.7.4 Sensational / Misleading Headlines

THE importance of headlines cannot be underestimated. It is widely recognized that many readers 'scan' newspapers rather than read all of a news story. Often just the headline is read and perhaps an initial paragraph or two. In newspaper reports paragraphs frequently are just one or two sentences in length. Readers who adopt this strategy rely on limited and often sensationalised information.³

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.

VP Mujuru commends indigenous churches (ZTV 15/10, 8pm), for example, turned out to be a ZANU PF publicity campaign report rather than a religious news report, while *The Daily News' Mugabe senses election victory* (13/10) barely provided any evidence on President Mugabe suggesting an election triumph. It actually quotes him castigating the MDC for corruption and urging his party to brace for polls.

Spot FM (26/11, 8pm) report: *Youths castigate MDC-T for calling for the presence of international observers during elections* was equally misleading as nowhere in the story were youths quoted making those claims. Otherwise, the story merely featured "political analysts" Jonathan Moyo and MDC-T Nelson Chamisa deliberating on the constitution-making process.

2.8 Other miscellaneous offences

² Balsom, S. (1999). *Murder by media: Death of democracy in Australia*. Brisbane: Interactive Presentations.

³ Lee, M. & Solomon, N. (1990). *Unreliable sources: A guide to detecting bias in news media*. NY: Lyle Stuart.

THERE were also some miscellaneous professional offences that removed the gloss from some of the media's top stories in the period under review. These ranged from the media's fixation with officialdom and the peddling of mundane official pronouncements and functions as lead stories; propping up tired topics and failing to develop interesting story developments.

The public/state electronic media were the parties most guilty of this offence, especially Spot FM and ZTV. While Spot FM may have scored the second highest aggregate credibility levels, its news content was barely interesting, limiting itself to basic reportage of mainly straightforward official pronouncements and events.

Stories such as *First lady visits children's home* (5/10/12, 8pm); *Mugabe consoles Mudenge family* (6/10/12, 8pm); *Mudenge's body arrives in Harare* (7/10/12, 8pm); *Mugabe leaves for Uganda* (8/10/12, 8pm); *Mugabe back from Uganda* (9/10/12, 8pm); *Constitution Process accreditation to be completed tomorrow* (15/10/12, 8pm) and *Mugabe launches Matabeleland North Share Ownership Scheme* (18/10/12, 8pm) not only reflected the way it based its reports on events and their chronology without interpretation, it risked being exclusively perceived as a government notice board.

Chapter Three

Conclusion

THE examined media carried a total of 909 top stories in the October-November survey, 772 of which were credible and the remaining 137 were not.

This translated to an overall credibility rating index of 84 percent, 24 percent up from the 61 percent aggregate score achieved by these media outlets during the August/September survey.

The state/public media had a poorer aggregate credibility rating (83%) than the private media (90%) although on professional performance, Star FM had the highest single overall credibility score of 97 percent of all the surveyed media.

The Standard was the best performer among the six private media under investigation with a credibility score of 94 percent. *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *Newsday* (both tied at 92%) were second, while *The Daily News*, Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa were all tied in third place (87%).

The state/public media's aggregate credibility rating of 84 percent represented a great improvement from the overall credibility score of 51 percent they

achieved in the August/September study. Similarly, the private media's 90 percent aggregate credibility rating surpassed the 73 percent they achieved in the previous survey.

Political and governance issues remained the most poorly reported, although the overall quality of the surveyed media's top stories on the subject in the period under review showed great improvement from the August-September survey. The reports attained a 24 percent increase in credibility levels from the 57 percent aggregate credibility rating scored in the preceding study.

As in the August/September survey, a more professional approach was observed in the media's coverage of socio-economic issues in the period under review. On social issues, 92 percent of the 227 reports the surveyed media carried on the matter were credible. The state-owned media scored a higher credibility index rating of 94 percent in this category than the private media (89%).

In the business and economic sphere, the private media had a credibility rating of 96 percent, while the state media had 83 percent. At least half of the surveyed media excelled in their coverage of the topic by recording 100 percent credibility scores. These comprised Studio 7, Spot FM, SW Radio Africa, *The Standard*, *Newsday* and *Zimbabwe Independent*. But as mentioned earlier, the nature of the news stories reported on also affects the credibility rating. For example, simple official announcements (such as appeared on Spot FM) are more likely to earn full marks than an investigative news story on political developments. ZTV and *The Sunday Mail* carried the least credible stories in this category, with each scoring a credibility rating of 50 percent.