

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Rethinking the role of the Internet in sustaining democratic
participation in Zimbabwe**

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Abstract

Political parties have increasingly turned to computer technology since the 1980s both for internal organisational purposes as well as for direct communication with members and voters.¹ In today's globalised world, the growth of digital media is bringing about fundamental changes in the way people think and act. Similarly, the development of global information and communication infrastructures has briskly transformed the ways in which knowledge and content are created, produced and distributed. This study aims to critically examine the overall role played by the Internet in railroading democratic changes in Zimbabwe. The March 2008 national elections will be used as the primary case study for this research, essentially scrutinising the extent to which Zimbabwean exiles made use of foreign-based news sites run independently by Zimbabwean journalists to channel pro-opposition information into the country, effectively leading to President Robert Mugabe's unprecedented election loss.

A critical analysis of news articles published by the so-called dissident websites will help this research investigate the overall influence of the Internet in shaping the 2008 voting outcome in Zimbabwe. The research is based on an already-developed hypothesis, which claims that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora, facing a gloomy future because of a battered economy back home and equally perturbed by President Mugabe's decision to deny them what they considered their democratic right to vote, played a fundamental role in the election outcome by relaying anti-Mugabe, equally biased publicity to families and friends back home. This consequently and indirectly played a crucial role in determining the outcome of the elections, effectively enhancing democratic participation. In this context, the research is dedicated to proving or disproving the affirmation that Zimbabwe's Britain-based community, whether deliberately or not, used its exposure to the Internet to discredit President Mugabe's government by encouraging relatives back home to vote for the then-opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), consequently leading to President Mugabe's first ever election defeat in the March 2008 elections.

(309 words)

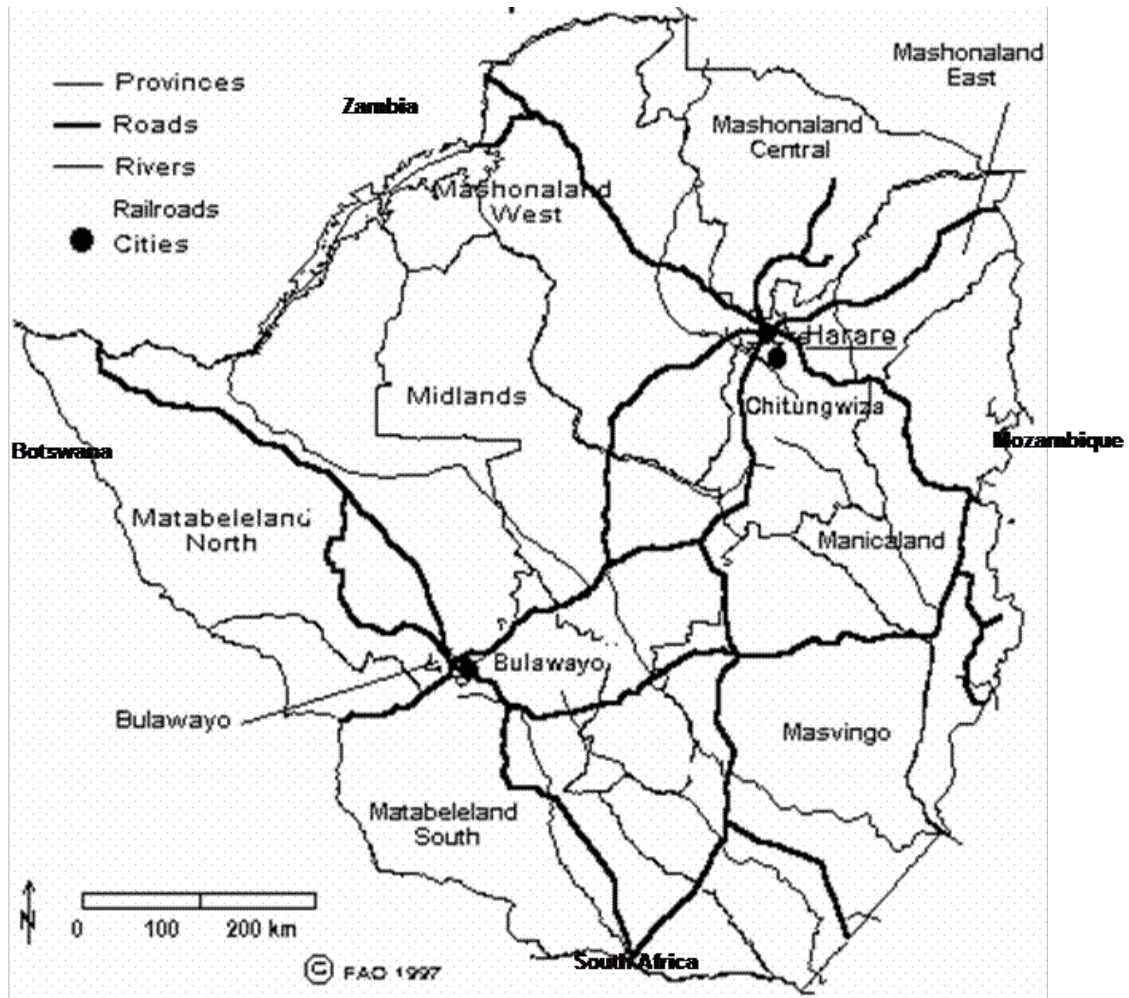
¹ Wainer Lusoli, Stephen Ward and Rachel Gibson, "Political organizations and online mobilization: different media - same outcomes?" *New Review of Information Networking*, Vol. 8. No. 1 (2002) pp. 89-107.

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Without the genuine moral and practical assistance from a number of individuals, it would have been impossible to complete this research. As my primary supervisor, Prof. Raphael Cohen-Almagor remained determinedly helpful in sharing critical ideas and captivating insights on many issues connected with my research. It was through his assistance and interest in my research that I was offered a University of Hull Research zero-fees fellowship that enabled me to financially support my studies. I am also indebted to everyone, including Samuel Mungadze and Dumisani Sigogo, who helped me secure the interviews I needed with resourceful people in Zimbabwe. Tammie Nolte read this research and shared her views, as did Birgitta Vai-Vai Soderberg.

To Vennah, Philda, Precious and Shylet

Administrative map of Zimbabwe



Source: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum

Acronyms

ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA)
CC	Constitutional Commission
CFU	Commercial Farmers Union
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IJAZ	Independent Journalists Association of Zimbabwe
LOMA	Law and Order (Maintenance) Act
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MIC	Media and Information Commission
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
MMPZ	Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe
PPOSA	Public Order and Security Act
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front before 1987 ZANU
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trades Unions
ZIANA	Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency
ZimRights	Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
ZINASU	Zimbabwe National Students Union
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army
ZNLWVA	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police
ZUJ	Zimbabwe Union of Journalists
ZWLA	Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Politics in the digital age

Political decisions, observes Dana Ott, tend to be reached through small-group, face-to-face communication, and that fact is set to remain despite the advent of the Internet. Ott believes the Internet allows the citizenry to challenge the status quo: “(T)he Net can affect the process preceding decision making by establishing a new channel transporting the citizens’ wants to the elite.”² That summation best describes current trends and developments in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular.

Internet usage has indeed been on the rise since the Dakar Declaration on the Internet and the African Media of 1997. According to Alfred Kagan, the declaration specifically advocated the establishment of “a culture of online communications and ensuring African content on the Internet.”³ Tendai Chari calculates that Africa has enjoyed unparalleled Internet growth of 1,030.2 percent between 2000 and 2008 compared with the average world growth of 280.6 percent.⁴ Despite these promising figures, the Internet is still very much controlled and accessed by members of an elite club, most of who live in the main cities, thereby excluding the rural folk from participation. Buttressing this viewpoint is Sandra Nyaira’s assessment that “the only problem in using online media for a country such as Zimbabwe, and indeed much of Africa and the Third World, is that these countries are not wired enough to allow the majority of citizens, who live in poor rural

² Dana Ott, “Power to The People: The Role of Electronic Media in Promoting Democracy in Africa”, http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issues3_4/ott/index.html, Accessed 5 February 2011.

³ Alfred Kagan, “The Growing Gap between the Information Rich and the Information Poor, Both Within Countries and Between Countries - A Composite Policy Paper”, Presented at the 65th IFLA Council and General Conference Bangkok, Thailand, August 20 - August 28, 1999.

⁴ Tendai Chari, “Ethical challenges facing Zimbabwean media in the context of the Internet,” *Global Media Journal (African Edition)* Vol. 3 No. 1, (2009) pp. 46-79.

areas, to access the news and be part of the public discourse on events which affect them.”⁵

The term “electronic democracy” has its roots in studies by a pool of scholars, including Rosa Tsagaraousianou, Damian Tambini, Cathy Brian, Andrew Chadwick and Christopher May.⁶ Tsagaraousianou *et al.* say electronic democracy best describes the intermediary role of digital technologies in augmenting citizen participation in the political stratum. The flourishing usage of the Internet has, for example, helped *New Zimbabwe.com* establish itself as one of the leading providers of digital news, drawing readers both in the West and Africa. Its concentration on social and political events allowed it to provide the “Zimbabwean” viewpoint, as opposed to the mainstream news providers that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora have become accustomed to in their various locations across the globe. While the majority of Zimbabwean emigrants have moved to Western countries, some have opted to stay within Southern Africa. Many, especially academics, have moved to Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho.⁷

1.2 Structure outline

In the first part of this project, I will explore the historical aspects of Zimbabwean politics and media. This is a significant part of the research, as it introduces the reader to the roots of political and social dependency in contemporary Zimbabwe. This historical

⁵ Sandra Nyaira, “Mugabe’s Media War: How New Media Help Zimbabwean Journalists Tell Their Story”, *Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy*, Discussion Paper Series, 2009 http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/discussion_papers/d51_nyaira.pdf Accessed 15 May 2010.

⁶ Rosa Tsagaraousianou, Damian Tambini and Cathy Bryan (eds) *Cyber democracy Technology, Cities and Civic Networks*. (London: Routledge, 1998); Andrew Chadwick, and Christopher May, “Interaction Between States and Citizens in the Age of the Internet: ‘E-Government’ in the United States, Britain and the European Union” *Governance* Vol. 16. No. 2 (2003) pp. 271-300.

⁷ “A crumbling education system,” <http://www.educatedhorizon.org/news-events/81-a-crumbling-education-system> Accessed 2 February 2011.

perspective elucidates how and why things have gone badly politically in contemporary Zimbabwean society. The British colonial involvement is the crucial backdrop to the nation's politics of today. I will introduce Zimbabwe's contested land reforms, for which the bone of contention stems from a 1980 conference in Britain that laid the groundwork for the establishment of the state of Zimbabwe. This chapter, which also includes an up-to-date profile of President Mugabe, will also explore Zimbabwe's media history, critically looking at its supposedly stringent media laws. Literature related to changes in political communication, as a direct result of market penetration of ICTs, will then be analysed, after which I will profile dissident news websites run by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora and assess their impact and contribution towards political participation at home.

The methodological part of this study will explore the key research methods, largely reviewing qualitative research mechanisms and the justification for using them. I will explain in this part how data was collected and analysed. I also intend to examine ethical issues in research and why they are relevant. The section will draw on my ethnographical interviews and observational research stemming from my role as an active participant and member of the Diaspora, as well as a comparative content analysis of dissident and pro-government news sites to measure the impact they had on the electorate.

The theoretical framework will deductively explore key theories of mass communication, including the hypodermic needle theory, the agenda-setting thesis, the knowledge-gap theory as well as the four theories of press, based on authoritarian, libertarian, social-responsibility and totalitarian discourses. The Marxist media theory sponsored by

Frankfurt school stalwarts Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse will also be examined, as will the role of Jurgen Habermas' public sphere discourse. The research will inductively offer sociological-oriented, theoretical explanations as to why, despite the Internet's potential, activists still have a long way to go in making a case against regimes as seemingly invulnerable as Mugabe's.

Chapter 4 looks at the gaps and ideological differences between new and traditional media. Through a discourse analysis of *The Herald* newspaper, criticised by some for allegedly being a Mugabe mouthpiece, I intend to show the importance of traditional media to regimes with a traditional school of political thought such as Mugabe's. An unpublished book chapter and scientific article focusing on participatory journalism in Zimbabwe provide a counter narrative on how media is received and shared in the conventional and digital arenas. Interestingly, traditional media such as *The Herald* have also been forced to adopt new media characteristics. What does this mean, then, for a conventional political leadership which is sceptical about the influence and power of the Internet and new media voices? *The Herald* assessment will go as far as looking at the paper's historical ties with Mugabe, how it is surviving in the digital age and whether it has supposedly lost its monopoly as the country's provider of news. While the Internet has been credited with disseminating information on the victims of violence as the government attempted to suppress the media, this research will specifically look at the Internet's role in empowering the electorate with pro-opposition news material.

The reflection and conclusion discuss the general, scientific, theoretical and empirical assessment attached to this research. I will also attempt to revisit the main questions raised earlier in this research. The conclusion will also summarise arguments on why (or why not) I think the Zimbabwean Diaspora has played a major role in democratic participation, and in what ways. The final part of the research will also provide an analysis of how dissident journalists as well as citizens living in the Diaspora could maintain and reinforce their momentum on the Internet and help sustain democracy at home, while also assessing the opportunities for future research in this field.

1.3 Research aims

The research seeks to answer two key questions: Did the Internet in broad terms, and online news specifically, play a role in Mugabe's election loss to Morgan Tsvangirai; and if so, to what extent, how and with what impact? Second, in what way and with what success and potentiality is the Internet influencing and enhancing democratic reforms in Zimbabwe? The case study only deals with the first round of voting won by Tsvangirai, and not the run-off of 27 June 2008, which according to Simon Badza was “inexcusably flawed and therefore discredited, particularly by the West”.⁸ A critical analysis of news articles published by so-called dissident websites will help this research investigate the overall influence of the Internet in shaping the 2008 outcome.

⁸ Simon Badza, “Zimbabwe’s 2008 Harmonized Elections: Regional & International Reaction,” *African Security Review* Vol. 17, No. 4, (2009) pp. 149-175.

The research is based on an already-developed hypothesis asserting that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora had a crucial role in determining the first-round result in March 2008. Facing a grim future because of a struggling economy back home and angry that Mugabe had denied them the right to vote, they bombarded friends and relatives with anti-Mugabe messages. In this context, this research is dedicated to proving or disproving the contention that the largely Britain-based community of Zimbabweans, whether deliberately or not, used the Internet as a communications tool to discredit the Mugabe government and encouraged relatives back home to vote for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). It also will seek to test whether this pro-opposition Internet onslaught, which led to Mugabe's first electoral loss since independence, effectively enhanced democratic participation where local publicity was dominated by pro-Mugabe forces.

The introduction of ICTs, powered principally by the ever-increasing usage of Internet and mobile phone networks and based on their perceptible potential, provides an excellent opportunity for changing the operations of political landscapes in Africa and beyond. The digital media's potential is indeed detectable. In 2009 alone there were an estimated 2.2 billion mobile phones in the developing world and 305 million computers.⁹ This research questioned and sought answers on the view that widespread exposure to online news could have promoted citizenry participation in the 2008 election and was used effectively as a platform for political change. Under e-democracy, participating citizens have the sovereignty to use information and communications technologies to influence a political process. Indeed, cyber democracy could be seen as an essential

⁹ Helpdesk Research Report, New ICTs for Development, Governance and Social Development Research Centre, 2010 www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HD691.pdf Accessed 1 February 2011.

element of free expression that could be used in Zimbabwe or elsewhere as a building block of public participation. Brian Loader argues that the ICT revolution has offered citizens a chance to engineer change in democratic institutions and practices.¹⁰ Thus, new media, just like the voters, could directly or indirectly play a critical role in influencing political and governmental changes throughout the world. Is such a scenario applicable to the Zimbabwe case?

The key argument to be tested in this research is based on the notion that an Internet-based radio station, along with daily news websites run independently by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora, helped sell the opposition message in the face of what others viewed as Mugabe's media monopoly at home. It can be assumed that in today's globalised world the emergence of new media technologies has jump-started the "democratisation" of media content in terms of its creation, publication, distribution and consumption. Andrew Chadwick and Nick Anstead argue that the Internet's increasingly influential role in election campaigning and voter participation was long predicted in the mid-1990s.¹¹ Raphael Cohen-Almagor emphasises the critical role that the Internet is playing in contemporary society suggesting "the Internet has affected virtually every aspect of society".¹² Alluding to the American case, Aaron Smith states that a majority of American adults went online in "2008 to keep informed about political developments and

¹⁰ Brian Loader, "The Citizens' Voice in a Wired World: Experiments in e-democracy," Paper presented at the ANA Hotel, Tokyo, 14 November 2001.

¹¹ Nick Anstead and Andrew Chadwick, "Parties, election campaigning, and the Internet: Toward a comparative institutional approach." In Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (London: Routledge 2008), p. 56.

¹² Raphael Cohen-Almagor "Responsibility of Net Users", in M. Fackler. and R. S. Fortner (eds), *Global Communication and Media Ethics*, Vol 1, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, (2011) Chapter 22, p. 416.

to get involved with the election”.¹³ While not every Zimbabwean citizen has access to the Internet, I assumed that the nation’s expatriates used their own access to spearhead campaigns that helped shape events at home. Electronic mailing lists, chat rooms and blogs centred on the political crisis emerged before, during and after the March 2008 vote. Ahead of the elections, I interviewed opposition candidate Simba Makoni, who even maintained a profile on the social-networking site Facebook, and then-opposition senator David Coltart (current Minister of Education), who reached out to voters on his personal website, by gauging their sentiments through the potential boost from the web. They were equally upbeat. As this research will argue, their efforts were sustained by Zimbabweans abroad who supposedly sought to use their Internet spotlight to “educate” others back home.

The Swedish International Development Agency concluded in a report that ICTs had proven to be the engine for economic and social development in the 21st century. It added: “Since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005, African governments have been far more proactive in pursuing policies and public-private partnerships that will bring affordable connectivity to their countries.”¹⁴ But democracy, as understood as “rule by the people”, is a highly debatable process. Orwell argues that democracy is a difficult concept with no agreed definition, as the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. In theory, Robert A. Dahl’s view that democracy revolves around competition and participation -- meaning candidates for public office

¹³ Aaron Smith, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, (Washington, 2008).

¹⁴Theoretical Study – Democracy and ICTs in Africa, SIDA Report, (Stockholm: Edita Press, 2009). <http://sidapublications.citat.se/interface/stream/mabstream.asp?filetype=1&orderlistmainid=310&printfileid=310&filex=415758703480n> Accessed 16 June 2010.

compete in elections and citizens participate by determining who the winners and losers are -- appears comprehensible. In practical terms, however, there is a wealth of evidence that shows unequal patterns of voter access to balanced media, for instance. Also, when everyone claims to respect democracy, how is a “true believer or defender of democracy” distinguished from the rest? Despite leading the country uninterrupted for more than 30 years, President Mugabe still maintains his allegiance and commitment to democracy, even though critics openly talk about his alleged failures to guarantee equality and freedom to members of the opposition.¹⁵

During the political crisis, Mugabe’s government made decisions that some critics said demonstrated the regime’s contempt for press freedom – supposedly another key element of democracy – by launching a crackdown on media firms perceived to be against Mugabe’s policies. The president and his party have always maintained that they have done nothing wrong, arguing that every country has its own laws that citizens must abide by. Mugabe argues that he is, in fact, the champion of democracy who overthrew the racist White regime of Ian Smith that never allowed Blacks to vote or to enrol in schools. It is an argument that resonates among supporters at home and around Africa. Mugabe justly claims credit for not only bringing majority rule with independence in 1980, but also instituting policies that have given Zimbabwe the highest literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the United Nations.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sebastien Berger, “Blair: Mugabe should be toppled.” *The Telegraph*, (22 July 2009) p. 7.

¹⁶ “UNDP: Zimbabwe has highest literacy rate in Africa,” *The Southern Times*, 16 July 2010.

1.4 Rationale behind the study

Covering the Zimbabwean elections in 2008 for The Associated Press indirectly influenced my decision to conduct this research. I was the news organisation's only accredited journalist on the ground. Rumours were spreading that journalists were either being abducted or facing imminent arrest. State security agents were scattered across the country as international interest in Zimbabwe's political landscape reached fever pitch, with the European Union and the United States clamouring for "free and fair" elections. Mugabe ignored their calls, rhetorically arguing that Zimbabwe had successfully organised democratic elections since 1980 and therefore had nothing to learn from the West. He even went so far as mocking former President George Bush's election victory after the disputed Florida recount in the United States.

While in Zimbabwe, I talked to a number of people, many of whom appeared eager to convince me the source of their news went beyond Zimbabwe's borders. As a Zimbabwean, I knew state media monopoly was historically prevalent, if not accepted. The rural areas were technically less developed and marginalised, with some districts such as the border town of Beitbridge receiving no local television and radio signals until July 2011. Suddenly, these areas became hotbeds of political activism. What was causing this impulsive change? Opposition activists were making inroads in these areas, which traditionally had supported the ruling ZANU PF party. I was curious to find out what was the main instigation of this sudden change. NGO activity was quite noticeable but as I was confident, there was more.

I have lived outside Zimbabwe since 1999 so I was well aware of the political crisis that was engulfing the country, forcing millions to flee. With such a huge Diaspora community, it was quite evident to me Zimbabweans were maintaining their roots by forging and extending ties with relatives back home. That meant those fortunate enough to have secure jobs abroad would send home money to support relatives and friends in then-economically-ravaged Zimbabwe. I was in that situation myself so I knew exactly what was going on. I talked to many Zimbabweans who expressed concern over a law that made it illegal for expatriate Zimbabweans to vote. For some, the government was taking away their democratic right to vote. Faced with this situation, many Zimbabweans, I concluded, had found a good reason to support the opposition. Besides, it was common knowledge at that time that several Zimbabwean-run online newspapers were supporting the opposition's call for change. I was eager, then, to find out whether the expatriates actively supported the opposition and whether they had an influence on the political choices of their relatives back home. And if so, how did they sell their messages?

Having spoken to Zimbabweans abroad as well as those living in the country, I established a direct correlation between what the anti- and pro-Mugabe camps were trying to achieve. Obviously to have any sort of influence on their relatives back home, Zimbabweans abroad used some form of communication. Their rigorous exposure to Internet meant they not only knew what was happening in the country but they also had the means to relay the information to their family and friends back home. That assumption alone helped me establish my hypothesis, which asserted that the Internet had a major influence on the elections that saw President Mugabe lose an election for the first time. As a researcher, I was quite convinced there was no room for unsubstantiated and

unverifiable assumptions like the ones that I had, so I sought to corroborate my claims by pursuing this MPhil.

2 ZIMBABWEAN POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe, a landlocked country in southern Africa, attained its independence from British colonial rule on 18 April 1980. The British presence in Zimbabwe, which began when ambitious colonial entrepreneur Cecil John Rhodes arrived in the country in 1888, was not without controversy. Under colonial rule, the British settlers introduced a racially skewed agricultural policy that gave the vast majority of the country's fertile land to the new arrivals at the expense of the then-10 million poverty-stricken Blacks. At independence – nearly 100 years later – around two-fifths of the total land area was still occupied by the minority White commercial farmers.¹⁷ Reflecting on the colonial agrarian imbalances, Moyana, as quoted by James Hlongwana, Daniel Gamira and Richard S. Maposa, calculated that minority White “commercial community owned 51% of the total arable land in the country, whilst the majority of African peasants owned about 22%.”¹⁸

Susan Booyesen observes that the bequest of colonialism – land and power politics – was directly challenged in the post-independence years, chiefly through land seizures and rightful discourses of pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism.¹⁹ Mugabe launched an accelerated land reform program in 2000. He rejected a colonial-era law demanding the respect for property rights as an obstacle to what he described as a necessary correction of historical and social inequalities. The land reform forcefully seized fertile property from White farmers for redistribution to landless Black peasants. The move showed the

¹⁷ Zimbabwe Land Conflict <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/zimbabwe.htm> Accessed September 2009.

¹⁸ James Hlongwana, Daniel Gamira and Richard S. Maposa, “Land As Sacrificial Lamb: A Critical Reflection on the Effects of Colonial and Post-Independent Land Management Policies in Zimbabwe” *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol. 12, No.6, (2010) pp 192-207.

¹⁹Susan Booyesen, “The Dualities of Contemporary Zimbabwean Politics: Constitutionalism versus the Law of Power and the Land, 1999-2002.” *African Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No.2&3, <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i1.htm>, Accessed 6 June 2011.

extent to which land was – and remains – a potent tool of political manipulation in contemporary Zimbabwean politics.

Hoping to capitalise on the momentum of the reform, Mugabe drafted a new constitution that would have extended his powers. Put up for a popular vote in a referendum, it was soundly rejected. In a surprise turn of events, 578,000 voted in favour of the new constitution while 697,754 voted against. Commentators said the result would strengthen the MDC party, formed just several months earlier.²⁰ In his 20 years in power until then, Mugabe had not lost any vote, and his defeat in the referendum was a massive victory for his opponents.

The land reform had supporters in Zimbabwe and beyond, but it was widely criticised at home and abroad. Mugabe reminded his critics that land acquisitions in what was then Rhodesia allowed the minority White settlers to grab the country's most productive areas for occupation without compensation. This process inevitably triggered a succession of forced resettlement for poor Blacks while resource exploitation gathered pace. Mugabe vowed to correct these historical injustices, insisting his government was right to claim back for the Blacks what was historically theirs. But detractors, as suggested by Anne Hellum and Bill Derman, argued that the policy led to a sharp decline in food and export

²⁰ Edmond Musengi Jaricha, *The Politics of Food in Zimbabwe*, Unpublished MA Thesis, (University of Alberta: 2009).

crop production, rising inflation, loss of jobs, food shortages and a battered health and education system.²¹

Mugabe had been widely admired in the West. More importantly, he had enjoyed positive coverage in the Western press. He was the liberation fighter who had fought successive White regimes to bring freedom and justice to Zimbabwe. His democratic credentials were rarely questioned, and he was praised for pursuing a free market economy. But the land reform cost him his media backing. He had come under criticism earlier for sending 11,000 Zimbabwean troops to protect his ally in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the late President Laurent Kabila. But the seizure of White farms seemed to be the last straw. The reform programme of 2000 was indeed the turning point in Mugabe's political career, as he faced unprecedented media and political scrutiny and isolation from former Western allies.

Mugabe retaliated by targeting the independent media, closing down newspapers critical of his policies and throwing out Western correspondents. Andrew Meldrum, an American-born correspondent for *The Guardian*, was a victim of this process. Prior to his deportation, Meldrum had covered Zimbabwe for 23 years. *The Telegraph's* David Blair was also expelled. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the US-based Cable News Network (CNN) were banned from covering Zimbabwe from within as Mugabe intensified his war on Western media. Mugabe became a media pariah in the West. Britain's diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe have yet to recover since the land reform.

²¹ Anne Hellum and Bill Derman, "Land Reform and Human Rights in Contemporary Zimbabwe: Balancing Individual and Social Justice through an Integrated Human Rights Framework" *World Development* Vol. 32 No.10, (2004) pp. 1785-1805.

Any association with Mugabe attracts an outcry from the British press, as Prince Charles learned when he offered his “golden handshake” to Mugabe at Pope John Paul’s funeral.²²

While criticism of Mugabe’s policies is almost universal, articles are rarely found in the West critically exposing the British role in the Zimbabwean mess. It all appears as if Mugabe is to blame, while the British, as will be argued in the latter part of this research, have played a significantly larger role in Zimbabwe’s political downfall.

Despite the political instability that ensued from the land reform, Mugabe won two consecutive national elections in 2002 and 2005. He has long maintained that these elections were “free and fair”.²³ Independent observers, however, have questioned the outcome of these elections by pointing to the lack of evidence of certain freedoms, both during and after the elections.²⁴ These include the freedom of political expression, the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. Then, in March 2008, President Mugabe lost to then-opposition leader Tsvangirai, leading to a disputed run-off election. Tsvangirai later joined the Mugabe government as prime minister. But the defeat for Mugabe, the nation’s sole ruler since independence, was a landmark, the first time apart from the national referendum in 2000 that he had lost a vote. It was this extraordinary

²² Press Association, “Charles shakes hands with Mugabe” *The Guardian* (8 April 2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/apr/08/zimbabwe.catholicism1> Accessed 1 June 2011.

²³ Chris McGreal and Ewen MacAskill “Mugabe’s victory leaves west policy on Zimbabwe in tatters” *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/mar/14/zimbabwe.chrismcgreal> Accessed 14 July 2011.

²⁴ “Mugabe wins ‘rigged’ Zimbabwean poll,” BBC World News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1870864.stm>, Accessed 11 July 2011.

event that inspired this research, to see what lay behind it and to assess its overall effect on the process of democratic change in Zimbabwe.

While emigration figures are certainly contested, since 2000 an estimated three million Zimbabweans have left the country seeking greener pastures in countries such as Britain, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.²⁵ During the ten-year political crisis, remittances from the Diaspora to family members in Zimbabwe to pay rent, buy food and cover school tuitions contributed significantly to keeping the country going, as the formal economy shrunk and unemployment soared.²⁶ Under Zimbabwean election laws, nationals living abroad, as noted already, were and still are not allowed to vote. Despite this setback, this research assumed that Zimbabweans living abroad still played a crucial role in Mugabe's loss. While my assumption was that the rise and overall popularity of the anti-Mugabe sites played a significant part in his defeat, this study also sought to investigate the extent to which these websites were contributing to democratic changes in Zimbabwe. Given that Zimbabweans abroad had more exposure to the Internet, did they promote the opposition's campaign messages while discrediting Mugabe, who presumably enjoyed privileged exposure in the tightly-controlled government media in Zimbabwe?

'Infighting' is a word many followers of Zimbabwean politics would certainly be familiar with. The disputed 2008 elections led to a South African-mediated Global Political

25 Daniel Molokele, "Let the Diaspora Vote," *Zimbabwe Metro*, 19 May 2009.

<http://www.zimbabwemetro.com/current-affairs/daniel-molokele-let-the-diaspora-vote/> Accessed 16 May 2010.

26 "Potential Contribution of the Zimbabwe Diaspora to Economic Recovery," United Nations Development Programme, Working Paper 11, 2010.

http://www.kubatana.net/docs/econ/undp_contribution_diaspora_eco_recovery_100511.pdf Accessed 4 July 2011.

Agreement to end a five-month stalemate. Mugabe and Tsvangirai agreed to share power, with the former retaining most of his authority as president and the latter becoming the country's new prime minister. While the deal was expected to pave the way for Zimbabwe's reconstruction, little on that front has been achieved. Notably, however, within days of taking over as new finance minister, Tendai Biti of the MDC introduced the US dollar and the South African rand as official legal tenders in a bid to rescue the country from crippling inflation.

While the economy has improved slightly and food is back on supermarket shelves, the West has refused to drop sanctions against Mugabe and his associates, arguing that the president has refused to honour his part of the agreement with the MDC. This has angered Mugabe, who has vowed not to step down despite the fact that he turned 88 in 2012. Mugabe has continued to attack the MDC as a Western-backed party. For its part, the MDC has accused Mugabe of disregarding human rights and democracy. Due to the continuing political bickering, Zimbabwe's political future is difficult to predict. Two factions have traditionally sought to take over the presidency should Mugabe resign, retire or die in office. As long as Mugabe is still alive, it appears no one from within his party is prepared to openly oppose him. It is also his massive support among Zimbabweans that keeps him going. While he has been largely seen in the West as a pariah, I think it is fair to say he could still win an election in Zimbabwe without using force or brutality based largely on how the multitudes comprehend his pan-African ideas. He now has stiff opposition to beat, but it is not true to say that Mugabe is an unwanted political figure. On the other hand, Tsvangirai has got a tough task convincing hardliners, among whom the army and security chiefs, that he is not a Western stooge.

2.1 Opportunities for Change

“Revolution in information, and communication and technology and production, all these things make democracy more likely”, former US President Bill Clinton famously said in an address to Russians.²⁷ Predictably, digital technologies have had, and will most likely unavoidably continue to have profound impacts in information-gathering and content-sharing on a global scale as more and more people embark on the fight for democratic participation. According to Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward, new media technologies are transforming the engagement of political participation across the globe.²⁸ The way the media operates in a society, argues Jacob Enoh-Eben, remains “a very strong maxim pitting the relationship between the two, media and society.”²⁹

Primarily using content analysis of the Zimbabwean news websites as well as interviews with journalists, political and social figures, this research sought to document the political relevance of Internet usage in determining the overall participation of the electorate in national elections, effectively investigating the websites’ role in potentially providing a powerful platform for political participation. The qualitative interviews sought to either confirm or deny the conclusions of a content analysis of four online newspapers owned and edited by Zimbabwean journalists.

²⁷ Bill Clinton, “Live Telecast to Russian People,” *Ostankino TV Station*, Moscow, Russia (January 14, 1994).

²⁸ Rachel Gibson, and Stephen Ward, “U.K. political parties and the Internet: prospects for democracy” Salford: University of Salford, European Studies Research Institute. *Working Papers in Contemporary History & Politics*, Series 2, No. 13 (1997); See also Pippa Norris, *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 4-14; Graeme Browning, *Electronic democracy: using the Internet to influence American politics*. (Wilton, CT: Pemberton Press, 1996) pp. 23-40.

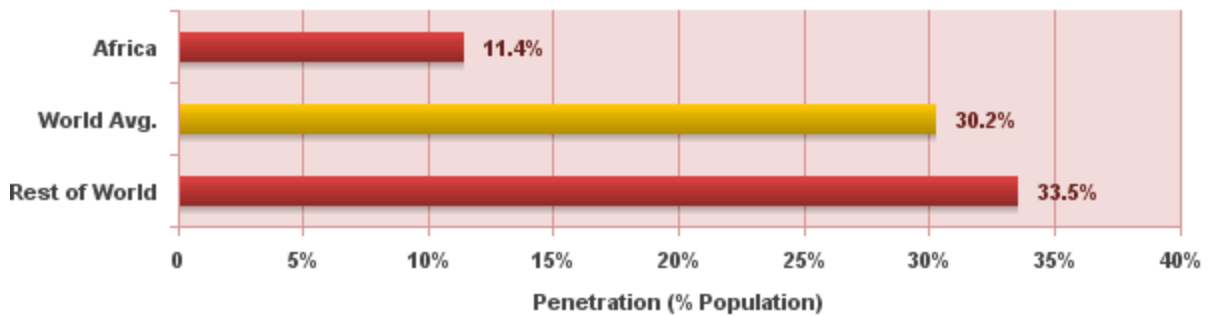
²⁹ Jacob Enoh-Eben, “Ethical challenges in media coverage of the Zimbabwe crisis,” *Peace and Conflict Review* Vol. 5, No. 1, (2008) http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=483 Accessed 4 March 2010.

With prospects for independent journalism diminishing due to the government's supposed media-unfriendly laws,³⁰ several Zimbabweans in the Diaspora set up mostly pro-opposition web-based magazines. Since 2000, these web-based magazines have freely and openly reported on issues affecting the country, allowing the nation's citizenry to participate in debates aimed at finding solutions to problems at home. When an authoritarian ruler loses an election, questions will be raised – especially when the defeat is the first in nearly 30 years of uninterrupted rule. That happened when President Mugabe lost the first round of voting in March 2008 to Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This research will question the extent to which, and with what impact, the opposition benefited from openly biased, anti-Mugabe websites, which appeared to have outfoxed the perceived repressive media laws. The hypothesis is crucially supported by statistical evidence of the growth of Internet penetration in Africa, which as shown in Figure 1, has enjoyed a remarkable rise in comparison with other regions of the world.

Figure 1: Internet penetration in Africa, 31 March 2011

³⁰ Chris Mhike, "Press Freedom Remains Elusive," *The Standard*, (2 May 2009) p. 8.

Internet Penetration in Africa March 31, 2011



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm
118,609,620 estimated Internet users in Africa for March 31, 2011
Copyright © 2011, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Depending on one's definition of democracy, democratic participation has had a long history of constrained success in Africa. But it seems likely the waves of change marshalled by innovation and Internet technology are set to dominate the continent's state of affairs over the next few decades. In the case of Zimbabwe, various websites, including swradioafrica.com, newzimbabwe.com, thezimbabwean.co.uk and Zimdaily.com, seem to have given Zimbabweans an unlikely podium to read, debate, criticise and, through interactive forums, even suggest ways to solve the problems they face. In fact, "community stations and individuals print out stories from these websites for friends and family, thereby providing information to those without access to newspapers", says Zimbabwean journalist Sandra Nyaira.³¹ To determine the level of effectiveness of this seemingly potent online presence and participation, this research sought to investigate the nature of reactions by politicians when they read news published

³¹ Sandra Nyaira, "Mugabe's Media War: How New Media Help Zimbabwean Journalists Tell Their Story" *Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy*, Discussion Paper Series, 2009
http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/discussion_papers/d51_nyaira.pdf Accessed 15 May 2010.

or broadcast through these sites, some of which may have been considered ‘illegal’ around the time of the 2008 elections.

Compared with other continents, Africa has historically had limited connectivity options and low initial traffic volumes. However, the last decade alone has witnessed an explosive expansion: in December 2011, according to Internet World Stats, 13.5 percent of the world's total Internet users were living in Africa.³² There is growing evidence that Zimbabweans are increasingly making use of the Internet. In a 2009 report, the Internet World Stats ranked Zimbabwe 10th in Africa in terms of the citizens’ access to the Internet, stating that about 1.4 million out of the nation’s 12 million people had access.³³ This figure does not include Zimbabweans living abroad. Eight years before these statistics were released, the penetration rate was only 0.4 percent.³⁴ Several factors, including the formation of the ICT Ministry in the coalition government, have facilitated the rapid growth of Internet presence in Zimbabwe. The ministry has not only introduced the ICT Strategic Plan covering 2010-2014, but it has also published plans to set up Internet cafes at post offices in the nation’s rural areas, which have historically been marginalised.³⁵ Official World Bank statistics showed there were 2,002,721 mobile and fixed-line telephone subscribers in Zimbabwe in 2008. Figure 2 shows growth patterns from 1976.

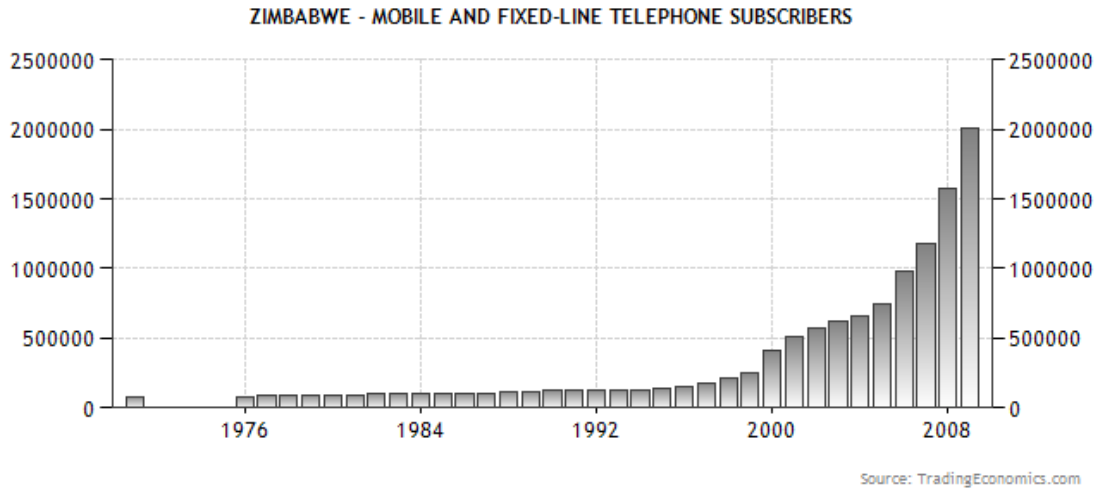
Figure 2: Growth of mobile and fixed-line telephone subscribers

³² “Internet in Africa” http://www.child-sponsorship.com/internet_in_africa.html Accessed 1 October 2011.

³³ Chipso Kadzere, “New report says 1,4m Zimbabweans use Internet,” *New Zimbabwe.com* (11 December 2009), <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/email21.18645.html> Accessed 14 August 2010.

³⁴ International Telecommunications Union, “ITU Internet Indicators 2000,” <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reporting/ShowReportFrame.aspx?ReportNam...> Accessed 1 October 2011.

³⁵ “Internet Cafes Planned for Zimpost Rural Depots” *The Herald*, 29 April 2009 <http://allafrica.com/stories/200904210070.html> Accessed 1 October 2011.



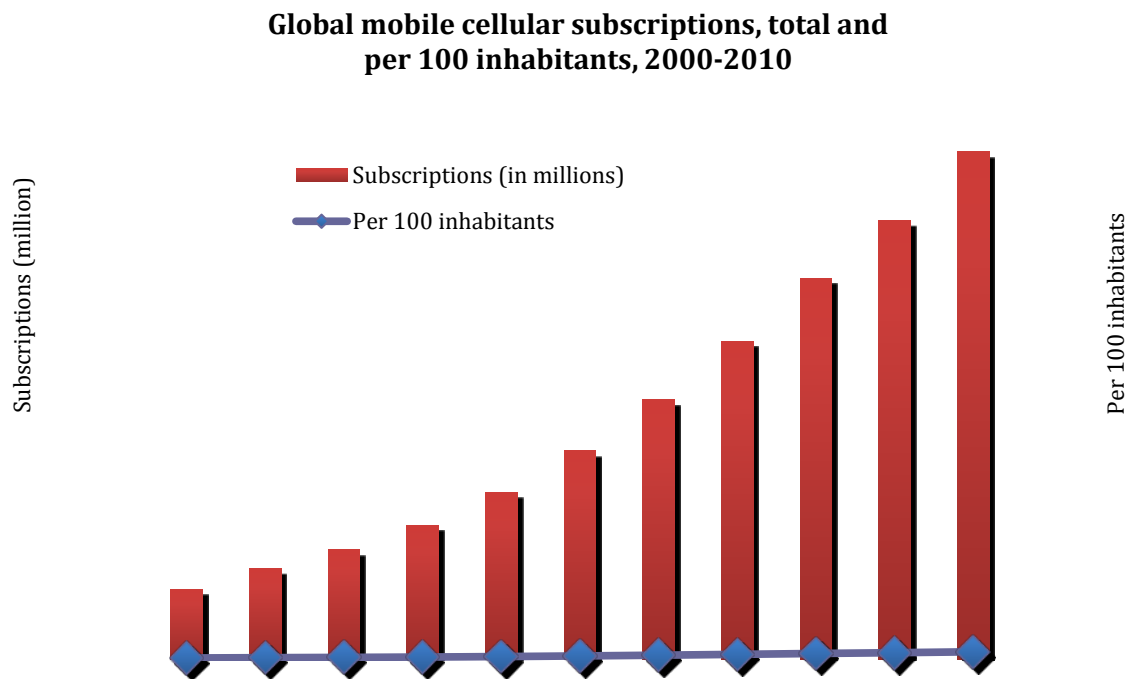
Though these figures are modest, Internet World Stats shows Zimbabwe as having one of the highest rates of Internet usage in Africa. Bearing in mind the fact that there are currently no laws restricting Internet use in Zimbabwe, one has to consider the notion that new media technologies may have played a role in the widely unexpected results, which showed Tsvangirai gaining 1,195,562 (47.9 percent) votes to Mugabe’s 1,079,730 (43.2 percent). A February 2011 survey conducted by the Zimbabwe All Media Products and Services Survey (ZAMPS) claimed that 24 percent of adults living in urban areas were now using the Internet, a “2 percent increase in the last 3 months alone”.³⁶ An expected 83 percent of the Internet users go online at least once a week. The social networking site Facebook is the most popular, frequented by people of all age groups.³⁷ With a global trend indicating a rise in mobile cellular subscriptions, as shown in Figure 3, mobile telephony is the main provider of Internet access in Zimbabwe.

³⁶ Lance Gama, “Survey reveals increase in internet use in Zimbabwe,” *SW Radio Africa* (18 February 2011).

<http://www.swradioafrica.com/news180211/survey180211.htm> Accessed 1 June 2011.

³⁷ Dingilizwe Ntuli, “Zimbabwe: Internet’s Fantasy, Porn Sites Hook Youths,” *Zimbabwe Independent* (20 April 2011) <http://allafrica.com/stories/201104220512.html> Accessed 1 June 2011.

Figure 3: Global mobile cellular subscriptions, 2000-2010



Source: ITU World Telecommunication /ICT Indicators database

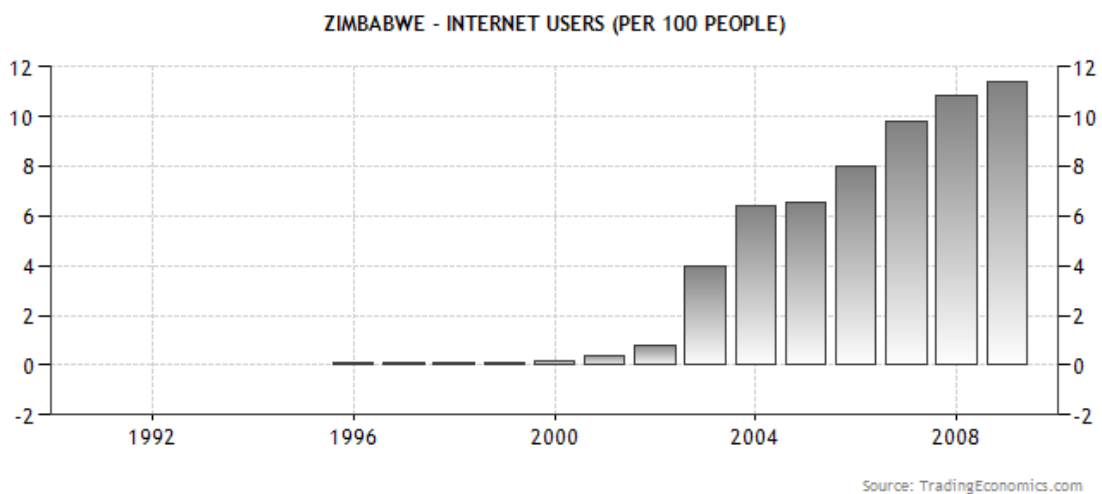
Long before the 2008 elections, Zimbabweans abroad were already making use of the Internet to assist relatives and friends back home in various ways. It was common practice to purchase products and foodstuffs online for delivery to relatives in Zimbabwe through a third party. Zimbabwean physician Dr. Brighton Chireka started a pioneering project allowing Zimbabwean expatriates to electronically transfer cash into a UK-registered account to pay for “ambulance services, a private doctor and even send life-saving drugs to their relatives back home.”³⁸ While there are no known statistics to confirm the number of Zimbabweans making use of online services at that time, it is widely known and accepted among Zimbabweans that the country’s citizens abroad made

³⁸ Staff Writer, “Expat Zimbabweans use internet to deliver health care back home” *New Zimbabwe.com*, (11 December 2009) <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/featuredbusiness10.16773.html> Accessed 2 May 2010.

use of online services to assist relatives and friends back home. The Canadian daily *Globe and Mail*, for instance, quoted the owner of www.zimbuyer.com as saying, “You've got Zimbabweans who are economic migrants all over the world. What they have in common is that everyone wants to support their families.”³⁹

Back in Zimbabwe, Internet users (per 100 people) were reported to be at 11.40 in 2008, according to official World Bank statistics as shown on Figure 4.

Figure 4: Internet users in Zimbabwe (per 100 people)



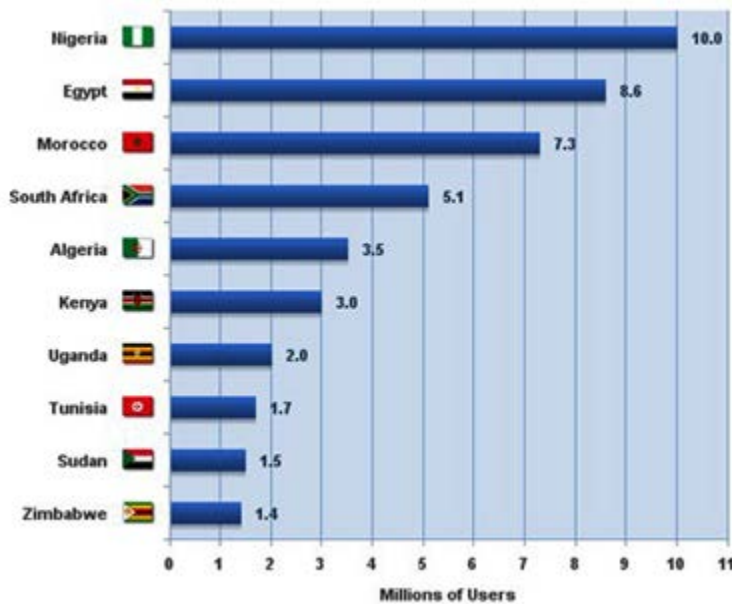
In general, during an election, the media plays an immense role in informing the public about the promises being made by candidates, as well as providing a reality check for those promises.⁴⁰ Considering the fact that the nation’s one and only influential state broadcaster and its various daily newspapers all ran pro-government news, how

³⁹ Stephanie Nolen, “Expat Zimbabweans use the Internet to arrange care packages for the folks back home,” *Globe and Mail* (4 July 2007) p. 8.

⁴⁰ Harego Bensa, “What media should do in the upcoming Ethiopian elections,” *Hebrezema* Addis Ababa: http://www.hebrezema.com/files/A_free_and_independent_media_plays_a_crucial_role_in_consolidating_democratic_process.pdf Accessed 19 May 2010.

Tsvangirai managed to win the elections should be a mini-mystery. Furthermore, Mugabe lost in most of his long-established rural strongholds, which traditionally have had little or no Internet access. Thus hypothetically, it can be concluded that the Zimbabwe Diaspora community, the majority of who live in Britain and South Africa, benefited from the supremacy of the World Wide Web, using their digital exposure to read news before disseminating anti-Mugabe information into the country.

Figure 5: Africa’s top ten internet countries, March 2008



Source: *Internet World Stats* – www.internetworldstats.com, Copyright © 2008, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Daniel Garcia claims that citizens in a democratic society count on the media to articulate and circulate “a full and open discussion of ideas and issues that provide them with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their government and their lives.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Daniel Garcia, “Newt, Ted, and Rupert Take on Democracy” *Harvard Digitas*, November 1995 issue.

However, recent events in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa suggest a tense relationship between Garcia's rationalisation and what exists in practice. Correspondingly, Robert McChesney defines democracy as "rule of the many",⁴² a view ostensibly defied by many regimes in Africa, among them Zimbabwe, where some scholars have argued that democracy appears to be tailor-made with the aim of defending the political power of the ruling ZANU PF party.⁴³ Several Western nations vigorously criticize Mugabe's regime for allegedly failing to implement democratic reforms. Mugabe brushes such criticism aside, arguing that he is not prepared to take democracy lessons from the West since it was his fight against White-minority rule that a new, democratic Zimbabwe was born.⁴⁴ If democracy thus has different meanings for different people, is there any room to investigate what exactly "real democracy" is? Indeed, the real meaning of democracy is the subject of heated debate. However, according to the Western paradigm, a nation's democratic credentials can be measured by its ability to hold "free and fair" elections, a measurement this research keenly applied to the Zimbabwean case, especially insofar as the role of media is concerned.

This study suggested and sought to validate the claim that websites sponsored and edited by Zimbabwean journalists living in exile influenced Mugabe's loss, critically expounding the wider role of the Internet in ushering democratic changes in Zimbabwe. It is often said among Zimbabweans that every citizen has a relative or friend or at least

⁴² Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) p. 6.

⁴³ Munamato Chemhuru, "Democracy and the Paradox of Zimbabwe: Lessons from Traditional Systems of Governance," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.3, No.10, (2010) pp. 180-191. See also Jonathan Moyo, "State, Politics and Social Domination in Zimbabwe," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1992) pp. 305-330.

⁴⁴ Mike Nyoni, "Mugabe Uses UN Speech to Attack West," *Institute of War & Peace Reporting*, (14 April 2008) <http://iwpr.net/report-news/mugabe-uses-un-speech-attack-west> Accessed 12 June 2010.

knows someone who has left the country to escape the economic and political crisis that engulfed the country between 2000 and 2010. With inflation officially pegged at 2 million percent at the time of the 2008 election, one cannot help but conclude that this catastrophe was central to Mugabe's defeat. Many Zimbabweans may have been confused about who exactly to castigate, whether it was Mugabe's fault or whether, as the president repeatedly argued, the West's economic sanctions were to blame. What little remained of economic life at that time, according to analysts, was being boosted by remittances sent to relatives by the country's Diaspora community.⁴⁵ Drawing upon my own experience and knowledge based on community engagement with fellow Zimbabweans living abroad, I noted that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora were warning friends and relatives that rations would be discontinued if Mugabe stayed in power. With unemployment officially running at 90 percent, I assumed, and indeed sought to scientifically prove, that those at home had to react because they were relying chiefly on the remittances sent from abroad.

One of the key aims of this research was therefore to contribute to the overall understanding of the role of the Internet in political and democratic participation, with specific reference to Zimbabwe. The Internet, it can be argued, has forced dictators to rethink their positions, particularly in terms of maintaining monopolies over the media. Nowhere was this more evident than after the political unrest in 2011 throughout the Middle East known as the Arab Spring. This research explored similarities and differences in articles published by state media and those published by anti-Mugabe

⁴⁵ Daniel Tevera and Lovemore Zinyama, "Zimbabweans who move: perspectives on international migration in Zimbabwe" *Southern African Migration Project, Migration Policy Series 25*. (Cape Town: IDASA and Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University, 2002).

websites in order to determine their individual relevance for the electorate. Similarly, shortwave broadcasts from an openly anti-Mugabe, Western-sponsored London-based radio station, SW Africa, were assessed. According to Nyaira, the popular station's website receives up to 250,000 hits a day – just fewer than two million a week.⁴⁶ Against the backdrop of its classification as an “illegal pirate radio” station and the government's decision to ban its Zimbabwean-born broadcasters from visiting the country, SW Africa played an enormous role in shifting voting patterns in the country's rural areas, which were traditionally a bastion of Mugabe's ZANU PF party.

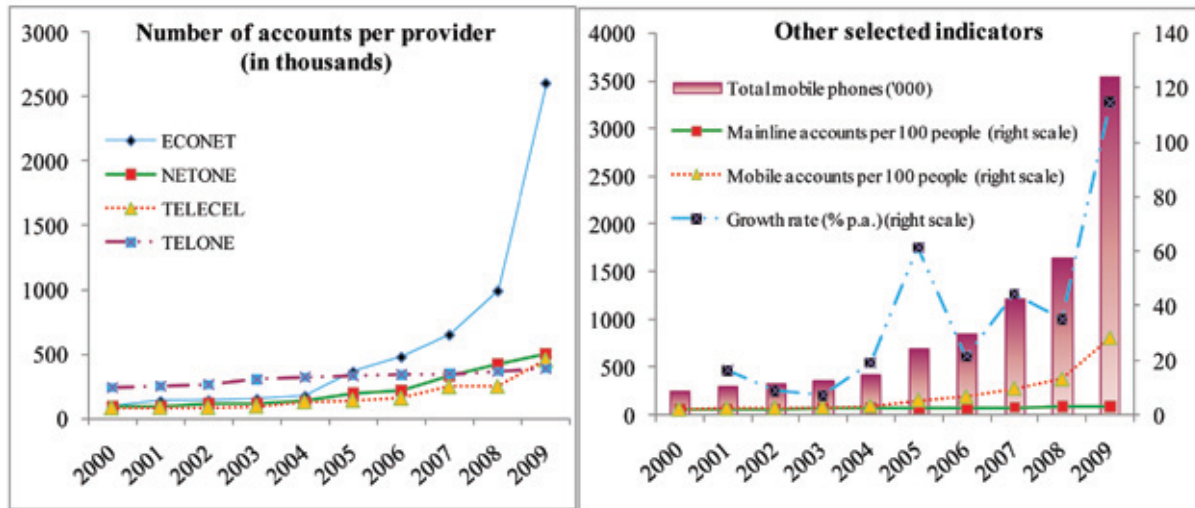
As already noted, the state-run Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) is the only broadcaster allowed on the Zimbabwean airwaves. SW Africa successfully challenged ZBC's broadcasting monopoly in the Supreme Court, winning the right to open the country's first independent radio station in 2000. Within six days of its existence, it was forced to close shop after gun-toting policemen stormed its office and ordered journalists to shutter the office. However, the station re-emerged a few months later operating from London, thanks to funding from the US State department. The station says its broadcasts are “also available as MP3 podcast downloads and our news headlines are sent three times a week, via SMS, to tens of thousands of mobile phones in Zimbabwe.”⁴⁷

Figure 6: Growth in subscriber accounts with main service providers

⁴⁶ Sandra Nyaira, “Mugabe's Media War: How New Media Help Zimbabwean Journalists Tell Their Story,” Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Discussion Paper Series, 2009

⁴⁷ SW Africa's Aims and Objectives, <http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/mission020609.htm>, Accessed 1 February 2011.

Figure 12.2: Growth in Subscriber Accounts with Main Service Providers



Source: POTRAZ.

Subscriptions for mobile telephones have seen an unprecedented rise between 2004 and 2010, as shown in Figure 6. The *Financial Gazette* newspaper reported in January 2011 that the mobile phone industry garnered in excess of “117, 500 percent mark up on SIM card sales during the hyper-inflationary period between 2007 and 2008”.⁴⁸ Since the Internet is accessed primarily via mobile phones, it is reasonable to conclude that *SW Africa*, just like *New Zimbabwe.com* and *ZimDaily.com*, had a broad reach by the time of the election. Zimbabwe is one of the five African countries listed by Mike Jensen known to have “pervasive local dialup facilities outside of the capital city while Benin, Botswana, Egypt, and Kenya have services in the second major city.”⁴⁹ Hence, its telecom services are not centred only on the capital, Harare.

The radio’s significance as a dissemination weapon also cannot be understated, especially in rural areas. A survey carried out by global media research company InterMedia

⁴⁸ Shame Makoshori, “Zimbabwe: Sim Card Shocker,” *Financial Gazette*, 27 January 2011 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201101271074.html> Accessed 14 April 2011.

⁴⁹ Mike Jensen, “Internet Connectivity for Africa,” <http://demiurge.wn.apc.org/africa/afstat.htm>, Accessed 1 February 2011.

showed 85.3 percent of the surveyed Zimbabwean population saying that they had been listening to the radio in the year 2005.⁵⁰ It is understandable why some political establishments are not eager to free the airwaves.

2.2.1 Zimbabwean politics: A historical perspective

A nation haunted by its own past, Zimbabwe celebrates the day it became an independent state on 18 April. While Britain is applauded for promoting human rights and democracy across the world, the same cannot be said of its record of questionable practices in colonial Rhodesia. Among Zimbabweans, including Mugabe's opponents, Ian Smith, the one-time prime minister of Southern Rhodesia, is a loathed man. After rejecting British conditions for independence in 1964, the following year he unveiled the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), ruling out Black majority rule, despite Britain's threat to withhold recognition.⁵¹ Gerald Horney has argued that the United States secretly supported the Smith regime.⁵² Knox Chitiyo and Martin Rupiya have pointed out that the British government rejected calls by Nigeria, Zambia and Tanzania to censure Rhodesia, and used its veto powers to block an anti-Smith resolution before the UN Security Council.⁵³

With apartheid South Africa the only country openly recognising his state, Smith was forced to open negotiations with opposition Black leaders Joshua Nkomo of Zimbabwe

⁵⁰ Alex Wooley, "Understanding how the world understands," *InterMedia Report on the Proliferation in New Media and Communication Technologies throughout the Developing World*, Washington DC: InterMedia. (2006) http://www.intermedia.org/press_releases/release_2006-01-12.pdf Accessed 1 August 2010.

⁵¹ Peter Stearns and William Leonard Lange, *The Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, Chronologically Arranged*, 2001. p.1069.

⁵² Gerald Horney, *From the barrel of a gun: The United States and the war against Zimbabwe 1965-1980*, (Chapell Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2001) p 6.

⁵³ Knox Chitiyo and Martin Rupiya "Tracking Zimbabwe's political history: The Zimbabwe Defence Force from 1980–2005" in Martin Rupiya (ed.), *Evolutions & Revolutions A contemporary history of militaries in southern Africa*(Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2005), p.332.

African People's Union (ZAPU) and Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The 1979 elections led to the country's first Black Prime Minister, Abel Muzorewa, and in the same year Britain invited Zimbabwean leaders to a conference that was to shape the future of the country.

The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 – a document that I personally believe should be faulted for its failures to deal with the thorny land reform – gave Zimbabwe its independence. At the end of the conference, it was agreed the government would only take possession of land from Whites on a “willing buyer willing seller basis”. On a closer look, that agreement was virtually meaningless since the majority of White farmers, most of them Zimbabweans by birth, would be unlikely to sell their homes and only source of income. To understand Zimbabwe's political problems, one has to look at the way the country handled the battle for land ownership in the aftermath of the conference. The majority of Blacks, who had been victims of the racial colonial past and whose fertile land had been forcibly taken by the new White arrivals from Britain saw Mugabe's ascension to power in 1980 as a sign that they would for the first time enjoy the economic advantages of the nation's natural wealth. They were wrong.

Even though the Land Acquisition Act gave the government the first right to purchase excess land for redistribution to the landless,⁵⁴ the Act had an inadequate impact, largely because the government did not have adequate funds to recompense the White landowners. In addition, White farmers understandably mounted a spirited opposition to the Act. As a result, between 1980 and 1990 only 71,000 families out of a target of

⁵⁴ Encyclopedia on Zimbabwe land reform, chronicling the important dates and events.

162,000 were resettled.⁵⁵ In 1998, the government called a donor conference in Harare on land reform, which was attended by 48 countries and international organisations, with Britain fine-tuning it with a 44 million pound “land resettlement grant”.⁵⁶ The objective was to inform and involve the donor community in the program. The donors, including the UK, unanimously endorsed the land program, saying it was vital for poverty reduction, political stability and economic growth. However, after the World Bank pulled out, no one was prepared to fund the program, further enraging the war veterans, who, following the rejection of the referendum in 2000, led the dramatic, chaotic land invasions. Mugabe’s decision not to condemn the land invasions, most of which became violent, has made him a man vilified and admired in equal measure.

2.2.2 Who is Robert Mugabe?

Since the land reform of 2000, opinions about Mugabe have sharpened. He is seen by many Africans as a hero who robustly and fearlessly fought for the justice and independence of Blacks and continues to empower them with previously White-owned land. In the West he is largely seen as a failed political figure whose authoritarian rule is condemnable.⁵⁷ But Mugabe is no fool. Imprisoned by the White-minority government between August 1964 and December 1974 for his political activities and opposition to colonial rule, Mugabe used detention and prison time to pursue his education, acquiring three degrees in the process. He currently holds nine university degrees, six of which were earned through distance learning. He has a Bachelor of Administration and

⁵⁵ Encyclopedia on Zimbabwe land reform chronicling the important dates and events Ibid.

⁵⁶ Manby Bronwen, “Fast Track land reform in Zimbabwe,” *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 12, No.1 (2002) pp. 1-44.

⁵⁷ “EU sanctions tighten screw on Mugabe,” <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/articles/17098> Accessed 12 May 2011.

Bachelor of Education from the University of South Africa, and a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Laws, Master of Science, and Master of Laws, all from the University of London's External Programme.⁵⁸ A Jesuit-educated secondary school teacher by training, as the nation's leader, he sponsored robust educational policies. According to UNICEF, the country has Africa's highest number of primary school enrolment,⁵⁹ one reason why Mugabe has retained plenty of respect even among most of his critics.

As noted previously, up until 2000, when the land invasions began in earnest, Mugabe was rarely criticised in the West. Human rights activists point to the *Gukurahundi*, a term used to describe the Matabeleland Conflict of 1982-87. Estimates of the number of dead range from 700 to 20,000, a figure impossible to pin down. The victims were mostly anti-Mugabe people from Zimbabwe's minority Ndebele tribe.⁶⁰ Mugabe and most of his party cadres deny any knowledge of these killings. Despite the scale of the slaughter, the massacres only received attention in the Western media after 2000.⁶¹ Some of Mugabe's closest political allies, including those from the Ndebele tribe, have called *Gukurahundi* a "Western conspiracy".⁶² Clearly aware that his support was waning and media criticism was on the rise, Mugabe strategically brought the Western-educated Professor Jonathan

⁵⁸ Christine Kenyon Jones, *The People's University: 150 years of the University of London and its External students* (University of London External System 2008), p. 148.

⁵⁹ UNICEF country statistics: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zimbabwe_statistics.html#67
Accessed 3 February 2011.

⁶⁰ "Report on the 1980s disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands", *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe*, March 1997.

⁶¹ "The Art That Robert Mugabe Doesn't Want You to See," *The Huffington Post*, 27 January 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/27/the-art-that-robert-mugab_n_814899.html Accessed 5 February 2011.

⁶² Staff Reporter "Gukurahundi storm envoy posted to SA" *New Zimbabwe.com*, 24 July 2010, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-2906-Gukurahundi+storm+envoy+posted+to+SA/news.aspx>
Accessed 1 October 2011.

Moyo into the government in 2000, assigned to the task of revamping media policies to protect the government from criticism and scrutiny.

Before joining the government, the widely-published Moyo had been known in the Zimbabwean media and academic circles for his fearless, acerbic criticism and opposition to Mugabe. Referring to Mugabe, he wrote in 1999: “His uncanny propensity to shoot himself in the foot has become a national problem which needs urgent containment.”⁶³

Under Moyo’s reign, foreign correspondents including Meldrum and the BBC’s Joseph Winter were expelled and the BBC and CNN were banned from reporting from within Zimbabwe. In addition, the nation’s only independent daily, the *Daily News*, which was openly critical of Mugabe’s policies, was shut down after it refused to apply for a license. Scores of journalists who worked without a state license were either arrested or risked spending two years in prison. A tactician at heart and blessed with imaginative spin abilities, Moyo in 2002, introduced the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). The law gave a commission comprised of handpicked Mugabe defenders powers to handle accreditation applications for both local and international journalists. This way the government took command of who could or could not practice journalism in Zimbabwe. In a 2004 report, the Media Institute for Southern Africa argued that AIPPA may “accurately be described as the leading weapon of the government and the ruling ZANU PF party in their ongoing campaign to stifle independent media reporting in Zimbabwe.”⁶⁴

⁶³ “Moyo's new party to challenge Mugabe,” *New Zimbabwe.com*, 11 December 2009, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/sky73.12357.html> Accessed 6 February 2011.

⁶⁴ Rushweat Mukundu, Toby Mendel, “Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act: Two years on,” *Article 19*, (London: 2004).

With Moyo watching his back and capable of crushing negative views in the media, Mugabe rode his political luck. Moyo operated in conformity with Zimbabwean law. The legislation that he sponsored was all backed by the then ZANU PF-dominated parliament. One such law was POSA, which in its present state makes it a criminal offence to publish or communicate “false statements prejudicial to the state”.⁶⁵ It must be noted that even though several journalists feared arrest and fines under POSA or AIPPA, the nation’s two independent weeklies, *The Standard*, and *The Independent* newspapers, known for their full-bodied criticism of Mugabe, continued to publish without much hassle. I think the government never saw them as threats because they are weeklies, publishing on Fridays and Sunday, respectively. This way they were not seen as a major threat even though notably *The Standard*’s late editor, Mark Chavhunduka, and reporter Ray Choto were arrested in 1999. It became a high-profile case that saw the pair bringing up allegations of torture against state agents.⁶⁶ The story for which they were arrested claimed some sections of the army had plotted to get rid of President Mugabe in a coup.

Among other restrictions, AIPPA and the Broadcasting Service Act (BSA) banned foreign participation in the country's broadcasting industry. Despite being largely seen as draconian in the West, such laws were roundly defended by Moyo and Mugabe’s ZANU PF party. After he was fired by Mugabe, Moyo defended AIPPA in an interview conducted by prominent Zimbabwean journalist Dumisani Muleya: “Aippa has been

⁶⁵ “2008 Human Rights Report: Zimbabwe,” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US Government document, 25 February 2009.

⁶⁶ “Tortured Zimbabwean journalist dies,” 13 November 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2461387.stm> Accessed 1 October 2011.

misrepresented and demonized but I can tell you without qualms it is a very good law. The situation needed such a law to curb bad media practices.”⁶⁷

I believe in a free press but I also firmly believe in a system that has checks and balances. The Western media has demonstrated some double standards in their coverage of Zimbabwe. When Mugabe was allegedly involved in the Matabeleland massacres, the Western media outlets were silent because at that time he was a positive figure in the West. Soon after he launched the land reform, they started attacking him. Moyo, thus, to some extent has got a point.

2.2.3 Media law in Zimbabwe

Media in Zimbabwe operate in one of the most repressive environments on the continent according to media rights organisation Media Monitoring Project in Zimbabwe (MMPZ). “Media workers are regularly harassed, detained and beaten by the police; with the cumulative effect, that self-censorship prevails in the media”, claims MMPZ.⁶⁸ How then is it possible for the government to stifle media, going by MMPZ’s assessment? Section 20 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe reads: “No person shall be prevented from exercising his or her freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and/or communicate ideas and information without interference.”⁶⁹ But there are exceptions under Clause 2, which says freedom of expression can be controlled if needed: i) in the interest of defence, public safety and

⁶⁷ Dumisani Muleya, “Moyo bares it all,” *Zimbabwe Independent*, 4 March 2005.

⁶⁸ “Reclaiming the People’s Voice: Broadcasting reforms in Zimbabwe” *MMPZ Report* <http://www.mmpz.org/category/resource-centre/pamphlets/reclaiming-people%E2%80%99s-voice-broadcasting-reforms-zimbabwe> Accessed 17 August 2011.

⁶⁹ Constitution of Zimbabwe <http://www.sokwanele.com/zimbabweconstitution/sections/221> Accessed 27 January 2011.

economic interest of the state, public morality/ public health; ii) to protect the independence of courts and parliament; iii) to protect the freedoms and reputation of others.⁷⁰

These provisions were quoted by Moyo to justify the legislation of the controversial media-regulating laws. The Lancaster House conference – which, as I argued earlier, failed to deal with the Zimbabwean land crisis – is again the reference document for these laws. While it can be argued that these provisions explicitly guarantee freedom of expression, they do not unambiguously give an assurance of press freedom, which I believe again, was a mistake on the side of those who drafted the constitution. Geoff Feltoe provides an excellent assessment of the current media law: “There is no specific guarantee of freedom of the press in the Zimbabwean Constitution. By contrast, Article 21(1) (a) of Namibia’s Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, makes explicit reference to the freedom of the press and other media. Similarly, the freedom of the press and other media is expressly guaranteed in Article 16 of the South African Constitution.”⁷¹

Indeed, in closing down the *Daily News*, Moyo argued that “freedom of expression is guaranteed, not freedom of the press.”⁷² This assertion is in direct contrast to E.B.

White’s call for an unfettered media when he says, “The press in our free country (US) is

⁷⁰ Constitution of Zimbabwe: Also available on line, www.parlzim.gov.zw/cms/.../ZimbabweConstitution.pdf Accessed 27 January 2010.

⁷¹ Geoff Feltoe, “A Guide to Media Law in Zimbabwe,” *Legal Resources Foundation (LRF)*, (2002) p. 5.

⁷² Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Media Institute of Southern Africa (eds) (2006/07), “African Media Barometer”, <http://www.misa.org/mediabarometer.html>; http://www.fes.de/in_afrika/pl_namm.htm. Accessed 4 February 2011.

reliable and useful not because of its good character but because of its great diversity. As long as there are many owners, each pursuing his own brand of truth, we the people have the opportunity to arrive at the truth and dwell in the light. ...There is safety in numbers.”⁷³ But Raphael Cohen-Almagor’s assertion that there must be a clear line of distinction between the right to freedom of expression versus the need to maintain public order is one that Moyo, the former Zimbabwean information minister, would certainly agree with. Cohen Almagor states: “Citizens have a right to freedom of expression, but the state can limit that right in order to prevent a threat to public order, the security of the state, or third parties in need of protection (such as children).”⁷⁴

While the significance of both freedom of expression and freedom of the media as non-negotiable and priceless facets of democracy should be emphasised, I believe the two have underlying differences in contextual and practical meaning. Freedom of expression could literally refer to an individual’s right to convey or articulate a message, while freedom of media is much more complicated because it involves an additional third party that takes the role of disseminating the message. For example, three opposition activists may freely criticise Mugabe while sipping a cup of tea. However, as Moyo could argue, the transmission, broadcast or reportage of that criticism via a media channel such as television or newspaper, will be considered illegal in the Zimbabwean case because it is not guaranteed in the constitution.

⁷³ Howard Cincotta “What is democracy” Policy paper, US embassy China, 2009.

⁷⁴ Raphael Cohen-Almagor “Exploring the boundaries of freedom” *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. Vol. 3 No.1 (2006)
http://www.hull.ac.uk/rca/docs/articles/Book_Description-Ethical_Space.pdf Accessed 16 May 2012.

Faced with an uncompromising media onslaught, President Mugabe had to act. Laws were enacted under the constitution to help the president escape scrutiny. Section 16 of POSA, for example, makes it an offence to publicly discuss or produce a statement that knowingly or intentionally challenges the “authority of, or insults, the President”.⁷⁵ As such, publicly making statements that may cause “hatred, contempt or ridicule” of the president, or any “abusive, indecent, obscene or false statement”⁷⁶ about his person or his office is considered a crime, punishable by a minimum of one year imprisonment. Indeed, scores of people have been arrested under this law.⁷⁷ The Interception of Communications Act, passed in August 2007, decriminalised the surveillance of all communication including Internet traffic. Due to lack of advanced technology, it would appear as if the law has yet to spring to full force.

2.3 Media ownership in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe’s first newspaper, the *Mashonaland and Zambesian Times*, was published on 27 June 1891, making it one of the first newspapers in Africa.⁷⁸ Following British Colonial statesman Leander Starr Jameson’s preference for Rhodesia in place of Zambesia, the newspaper was rebranded the *Rhodesia Herald*, effectively replacing the *Mashonaland and Zambesian Times* as the country’s only daily newspaper in October 1982.⁷⁹ The South African-based Argus Company later took over the newspaper through its Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company subsidiary. Argus spread its control of

⁷⁵ POSA 2007 [tp://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa_amd_071214.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa_amd_071214.pdf) Accessed 11 August 2011.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Angus Shaw, “Anti-Mugabe Artist Arrested,” *Associated Press*, 30 March 2010.

⁷⁸ Peter Fox, *Cambridge University Library: The Great collections*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 176.

⁷⁹ Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The white conquest of Zimbabwe 1884-1902*(Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press 1983) pp. 225-289.

the country's media landscape by launching the *Bulawayo Chronicle* in Bulawayo, the nation's second largest city after Harare, which was then called Salisbury. When Smith declared a UDI state of emergency, his government censored news published in the two newspapers.⁸⁰ Today, interference with the press, undoubtedly inherited from the Smith era, is systematically practiced by politicians in Zimbabwe. In Smith's time, Rhodesian media promoted interests of the White minority while negative news dominated the coverage of the Black population. Again this practice is commonplace today in Zimbabwe. *The Herald*, although a notable source of Zimbabwean news, also is a master of partisan reporting, largely directed against the opposition MDC.

One year into independent Zimbabwe, the government bought *The Herald* and all other newspapers owned by Argus group thanks to a generous \$20 million grant from the Nigerian government. The government established the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), which was tasked with running the day-to-day operations of the paper.⁸¹ The Trust in turn established Zimbabwe Newspapers, Ltd., which to this day is the chief publisher of the former White-owned newspapers. The ZMMT holds overriding shares in Zimbabwean Newspapers, often referred to as Zimpapers, which publishes dailies *The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, *The Manica Post* and weeklies *The Sunday Mail*, *The Sunday News*, and the local vernacular newspaper, *Kwayedza*. The Mass Media Trust also had interests in The Community Newspaper Group (CNG), which publishes five regional titles. The country's sole national news agency, Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency

⁸⁰ Last Moyo "Status of Media in Zimbabwe," National University of Science and Technology, (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe).

⁸¹ Tim Nyahunzvi, "The Zimbabwean Mass Media Trust - an experiment that failed" Media Development Vol. XLVIII No. 2, 2001, pp. 31-36.

(ZIANA) is also 100 percent government controlled.⁸² The Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), which went on to publish the country's first daily, the *Daily News*, was formed in 1998. Other private weeklies that have flourished for decades are *The Financial Gazette*, *The Independent*, *The Standard* and the now defunct *Mirror*

Figure 7

Herald shareholders	Zimbabwe newspaper circulation figures
Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust – 51.09%	Daily Papers:-
Old Mutual Life Assurance – 23.80%	<i>The Herald</i> - 45,000
Intermarket Nominees – 3.38%	<i>The Chronicle</i> - 20,000
National Social Security Authority – 3.10%	
Zimpapers Pension Fund – 2.28%	Weekly Papers:-
EFE Securities Nominees – 1.53%	<i>The Sunday Mail</i> - 60,000
Munich Reins, Co of Africa Ltd – 1.04%	<i>The Sunday News</i> - 18,000
Edwards Nominees Private Ltd – 11.36	<i>The Manica Post</i> - 8,000
NNR& FCA - 0.91%	<i>Kwayedza</i> - 5,000
Shara Sheperd – 0.82%	<i>Umthunywa</i> - 2,000
Glenhazel Investments – 0.69%	

Source: Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2005

⁸² Guthrie Munyuki, *Media ownership in Zimbabwe*, A paper presented the International Conference on Media Support Strategies for Zimbabwe, (Johannesburg, November 28-30 2005).

2.3.1 Uneven landscape: Broadcasting in Zimbabwe

According to Dumisani Moyo, broadcasting in Zimbabwe has been the subject of enormous debate since its introduction in the then-colonial Rhodesia in the 1930s.⁸³ It is remarkably ironic that the state that championed Black independence still uses the same colonial laws that it once criticised as unfair. In Zimbabwe, broadcasting services, both radio and television, remain firmly in the hands of the government. Even though some changes have been forced through over the last few years, broadcast is still based on the monopolisation and regulatory laws of the Rhodesian era, which only allowed state-sanctioned material to be broadcast. The Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) was founded in 1957 under the auspices of the Broadcasting Act of the same year. At Independence in 1980, it was renamed the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). The 1957 Act remained in force until the introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) in 2001, also credited to former minister Moyo.

A major restructuring exercise, again Moyo's brainchild, paved the way for the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Commercialisation Act in 2001. As a direct result of the Act, ZBC was split into two entities, ZBH and the state-controlled Transmedia, a signal-transmission service provider.⁸⁴ Munyuki says the Act was designed to boost the state broadcaster's commercial stamina. ZBH has continued to enjoy domination of the broadcasting services industry through its radio and television stations, although a new law to regulate and open the airwaves – the Broadcasting Services Act – was unveiled in

⁸³ Dumisani Moyo, "From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: Change without Change? Broadcasting Policy Reform and Political Control in Henning Melber Media Public Discourse and Political contestation in Zimbabwe," *Current African issues*, 27, Nordic African Institute, Uppsala 2004 pp.12-29.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

2001. Any changes in the broadcasting sector have been made to strengthen the ruling party, argues Martin Nkosi Ndlela. He says, “In Zimbabwe, despite pressures from both domestic and external actors, the government has maintained a monopoly-like situation in the broadcasting sector, albeit in a legal framework that established a three-tier system of broadcasting -- public service broadcasting, commercial and community broadcasting.”⁸⁵

The state-owned ZBH owns eight entities, Spot FM, Power FM, Zimbabwe Television, Sportnet, Radio Zimbabwe, National Languages, Newsnet, and Production Services. Before Moyo’s reign, BBC news bulletins were aired on ZBC or by a separate short-lived station called Joy TV. However, when Moyo rose to power, he banned all BBC-related content on local television networks. Discussing broadcasting regulations in Africa and specifically in Zimbabwe, James Zaffiro posits that for many political regimes on the continent, broadcasting has proven to be one useful instrument of “political reality definition and self-promotion, through its capacity to collect, articulate, select, and disseminate political information state-wide, while controlling access and terms of use.”⁸⁶ Zaffiro’s observation explains why political regimes in Africa are always keen to control the airwaves.

For Susan Manhando-Makore, deregulation of broadcasting in Zimbabwe is long overdue. She says “the ZBC has failed to fulfill its role as public service provider because of lack of autonomy to formulate policies and control its budget. Its pay-television project

⁸⁵ Martin Nkosi Ndlela, “Mediating Democratic Engagement: Reflections on the role of the media in electoral processes,” Paper presented at Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa conference, 8-11 April 2010: Maputo, Mozambique.

⁸⁶ James Zaffiro, “Political Change, Regime Legitimation and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation: Lessons for a Post-Apartheid South Africa” *Critical Arts* Vol. 6 No. 1 (1992) pp. 61-83.

has failed to take off because of interference from government.”⁸⁷ A 2003 parliamentary investigation into the conduct of the ZBC concluded that opponents of the state and greater civil society were less likely to have their views aired by state broadcaster. In this regard ZBC was failing to fulfil its national mandate as a public broadcaster. The inquiry found there was outright interference in its editorial process from the responsible government ministry, and that no official Code of Ethics was operational at ZBC. The same sentiments were echoed by yet another parliamentary probe, this time under the new coalition government that included both ZANU PF and MDC. “There were concerns that ZBC was wholly controlled by the Minister of Media, Information and Publicity who appoints the body and issues directives to the board and management and that it was highly regarded as a state controlled broadcaster, serving the interests of the state rather than those of the public”, the committee said in a report.⁸⁸

2.3.2 Change paradigm: MDC’s call for change

Say “opposition party” in Zimbabwe and people either laugh or cry, observes Sara Rich Dorman.⁸⁹ Over the past decade electoral politics have been characterised by violence and intimidation, plunging Mugabe’s opponents into a sea of despair. It must be noted though that members of Mugabe’s party also have been victims of violence allegedly perpetrated by MDC elements.

⁸⁷ Susan Manhando-Makore, “Free for all? The case of Zimbabwe’s media” Political Communication for Social Change <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/20012-media-scenarios-in-southern-africa/740-Free-for-all-The-case-of-Zimbabwes-media.html> Accessed 17 June 2011.

⁸⁸ “Parliamentary group calls for end of ZBC monopoly,” *The Zimbabwean* (26 June 2011) <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/news/zimbabwe/50303/parliamentary-group-calls-for-end.html> Accessed 6 July 2011.

⁸⁹ Sarah Rich Dorman, “Going it alone: Opposition politics in Zimbabwe” *Southern Africa Report SAR*, Vol. 12 No. 4, (1997), p. 24.

During the 1980s, the government's intention was to establish a one-party state.⁹⁰ That was not to be. The labour-backed MDC was formed in 1999, motivated by the state's failures to deal with workers' concerns. Before its entrance on the political scene, several small-scale parties had tried without success to challenge Mugabe's dominance. These included the late Edgar Tekere's Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) and Margaret Dongo's Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD), the latter formed a year before the MDC. These parties embody what Wondwosen Teshome meant when he concluded that opposition politics in Africa "appear or become active only during an election, and disappear when the election is over."⁹¹ Teshome's assessment explains why real challenges to Mugabe's power had been limited before the formation of the MDC.

The MDC takes its origins largely from the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and a coalition of civic society groups which sought to challenge Mugabe's reign. Having just finished high school and facing a gloomy future because of the rising unemployment rate, I attended the "historic launch" of the MDC party at Rufaro Stadium on 11 September 1999. Anyone opposed to Mugabe was invited, and the gathering was well attended. The crowd included diverse groups such as trade unions, the unemployed, university and polytechnic students, both men and women, the disabled, informal traders, academics, businesspeople, community associations, diplomats and human rights defenders. I was far from convinced the MDC would usher in a new era of hope, but nonetheless the venue was just 200 metres away from home. Arousing cries of delight and hope, Tsvangirai gave an invigorating speech promising that Mugabe's days in office were numbered.

⁹⁰ Liisa Laakso, "Opposition Politics in Independent Zimbabwe", *African Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2&3, 2003, <http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a6.htm> Accessed 14 December 2010..

⁹¹ Wondwosen Teshome, "Opposition Parties and the Politics of Opposition in Africa: A Critical Analysis" *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences* Vol. 4, No. 5 (2009) p

More than a decade later, Mugabe is still in power. But the MDC has had an impact. A few months after its launch, Mugabe lost the vote on the constitutional referendum due to the MDC's "NO" campaign. It was only after the referendum that Mugabe realised that the MDC, unlike the previously ineffective ZUM or ZUD opposition parties, had to be taken seriously.

I believe the MDC was doomed from day one. Political leaders are defined as much by what they oppose as what they propose, argues John Uhr.⁹² Tsvangirai has deservedly earned praise for his vigorous opposition to Mugabe, yet he has failed to convincingly defend his stance on his perceptible association with the West. Among those who sat alongside Tsvangirai on the high table at Rufaro Stadium were many White dignitaries, some of whom may have been Western embassy officials. Standing in the public arena among the 15,000 people who packed the stadium were also hundreds of White opposition activists. The MDC carefully chose to launch the party in Mbare, a historically poor suburb of Harare, which had been a centre of opposition to Mugabe. But the ubiquitous presence of Whites and Westerners on the suburb's dusty roads offered Mugabe's supporters a platform to attack the very basis of the party's existence.

The MDC's policy of White inclusivity – while being remarkably righteous considering the country's historical ties to Britain – set the party on a rough road to recognition as Mugabe sought to dismiss it as a Western-sponsored party. Tsvangirai made a huge mistake by associating the party with the West, or as he normally says, the "international

⁹² John Uhr, "The Power of Opposition: Reconsidering Bolingbroke's Political Theory of Opposition." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott, Loews Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia, PA, Aug 31, 2006.

community”. Mugabe’s party has used every chance to represent itself as the real “people’s party”. Tsvangirai has always been depicted in the dominant state press as being “un-African.” Much of what is said about him is outright propaganda, but it has proven to be effective. Ahead of the elections, I attended a rally at Murewa Business Centre on 10 March 2008, where a ZANU PF official told the crowd that Tsvangirai was “White”. Some people I interviewed after the rally believed it. There is little doubt that Tsvangirai’s agenda for change suffered from its grassroots association with Britain and the US. Indeed, those two nations along with several other Western countries have publicly backed Tsvangirai in his quest to end Mugabe’s reign, opening the way for ZANU PF, to brand him “a Western puppet” at every opportunity. Without any doubt, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s public admission that he was working with Tsvangirai to effect regime change in Zimbabwe undermined the MDC’s fight against Mugabe.⁹³

After the formation of the MDC, Mugabe’s party severed ties with its own White party cadres, including long-serving ministers Dennis Norman and Timothy Stamps. While the two ex-ministers have remained unswerving in their support of Mugabe, publicly they have stayed silent. There should be no doubt that the MDC, in spite of its infinite problems, remains the only party that can strongly mount any challenge to Mugabe’s rule. But strategically the party remains considerably weakened because of its choice of allies. Mugabe is convinced the West is ready to re-colonise Zimbabwe by fronting the MDC party. While this populist view may sound far-fetched, it cannot be ignored. It is

⁹³ “Zimbabwe Prime Minister Tsvangirai brings out autobiography” *VOA News* 30 September 2011. <http://www.voanews.com/zimbabwe/news/Zimbabwe-Prime-Minister-Tsvangirai-Publishes-Autobiography-130859653.html> Accessed 1 October 2011.

espoused not just by the ordinary man on the street but also by the country's academic community, which by all standards is resolutely behind Mugabe. The MDC strongly rejects this assumption, yet some of the party's own actions have not helped the situation. Fearing for his life, Tsvangirai, for example, sought refuge at the Dutch embassy in 2008. Considering the Zimbabwe capital Harare is home to nearly 30 African embassies, this proved to be a strategically unwise move, once again offering Mugabe a chance to denounce the opposition leader as representing White interests.

Many pundits and activists are at loss to explain the peculiar circumstances leading to the MDC's failure to gain power. The struggle has been rocky for the opposition party even though it indeed has made plenty of inroads in the dozen years of its existence. Tsvangirai's defeat of Mugabe in March 2008 was celebrated as a "big victory", yet despite moving into the prime minister's office he is still marginalised. The formation of the MDC nearly coincided with the arrival of the *Daily News* on the Zimbabwean media landscape. The newspaper claimed to be the country's first "independent daily", but it set out clearly in defiance of the government and sought to challenge the status quo. Its refusal to register with the accreditation commission gave the government an excuse to forcefully close it down. Without any doubt this forced closure of the *Daily News* robbed the MDC of its main ally.

Tsvangirai also has publicly called for Western countries to enforce sanctions against Mugabe's regime imposed after the disputed 2000 elections.⁹⁴ The sanctions issue has attracted immense debate in Zimbabwe. Many people, especially those aligned to

⁹⁴“Zimbabwe: Tsvangirai warned not to call for further sanctions,” *IRIN News* Johannesburg 18 November 2004 <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=52099> Accessed 2 February 2011.

Mugabe, are convinced that the sanctions were wholly responsible for crushing the Zimbabwean economy, while Tsvangirai and his supporters have said the sanctions are “only targeted” at ZANU PF and its allies. I strongly disagree with that view. I do not believe in “targeted” sanctions, as European and American officials have called their restrictive measures. I believe they have hurt ordinary Zimbabweans, and not Mugabe’s inner-circle, at which supposedly they are supposedly targeted.

There is plenty of evidence supporting this argument. In a testimony to the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs on 2 December 2010, Zimbabwean-born journalist and known Mugabe critic Sydney Masamvu said the sanctions had been ineffective: “The objectives of restrictive measures placed on top government officials, their associates and affiliated entities for undermining the rule of law, perpetuating flawed elections, inciting violence, and creating an overall environment of instability have largely failed to curb the undemocratic behavior of these individuals.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, Heather Chingono says EU measures on Zimbabwe “are not near ‘sanctions’ in the traditional sense, despite sanctioning Zimbabwean beef and tobacco exports into Europe, its long-established, conventional and largest market.”⁹⁶ Additionally, donor countries froze their funding to Zimbabwe in the aftermath of the sanctions. Zimbabwean students, who for years had benefited from European and American university scholarships, suffered as funds were withdrawn or Zimbabwe was simply removed from the list of countries eligible for funding. Several prestigious

⁹⁵ Sydney Masamvu, “Testimony to the US Committee on Foreign Affairs,” 2 December 2010 foreignaffairs.house.gov/111/mas120210.pdf, Accessed 2 February 2011.

⁹⁶ Heather Chingono, “Zimbabwe sanctions: An analysis of the Lingo guiding the perception of sanctioners and sanctionees,” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2010), pp. 66-74.

educational initiatives, including the Fulbright Program, were suspended, despite Zimbabwe having one of the highest number of scholars and students sent to American colleges in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁷ When I applied for the Collins Cannon Trust scholarship in 2009 to support my PhD studies, I was notified in an email that due to “ongoing EU sanctions”, Zimbabwe had been struck off the list of beneficiary countries. European supermarket giants such as Britain’s Tesco dumped Zimbabwean products, arguing they were coming from farms ‘illegally’ seized from White farmers.⁹⁸ All this fuels ZANU PF’s propaganda blaming the MDC for its position for sanctions. However, while MDC should certainly take its share of blame, it cannot be forgotten that the sanctions were imposed after a disputed election that Mugabe’s party won.⁹⁹

Despite its problems, MDC’s successes cannot be undervalued. In June 2000, just a year after its creation, the party claimed 57 seats against ZANU PF’s 62 in parliament, in the first serious challenge to the ruling party. In 2008, Tsvangirai’s MDC took 99 seats, two more than Mugabe’s party, while a breakaway faction of the MDC, then led by Arthur Mutambara had 10. These results denied ZANU PF a legislative majority for the first time in the country’s then 28-year history. Mugabe’s party became an opposition party in parliament. However, internal infighting has afflicted the MDC, leading to the formation of the Mutambara faction in October 2005 and lending momentum to ZANU PF. Mutambara acknowledged the need for the opposition parties to work together when he

⁹⁷ “List of Zimbabwean beneficiaries of the Fulbright programme” US embassy, Harare Zimbabwe http://harare.usembassy.gov/fulbright_zimbabwean_scholars.html Accessed 1 October 2011.

⁹⁸ “Tesco to end trade with Zimbabwe,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7482383.stm>, Accessed 2 February 2011.

⁹⁹ Blessing Zulu, “Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Says Budget Insufficient for 2011 Elections” Voice of America, 7 January 2011 <http://www.voanews.com/zimbabwe/news/Zimbabwe-Too-Broke-To-Hold-Elections-113083464.html> Accessed 5 February 2011.

said that “there is no alternative to all democratic forces working together to bring about democratic change”.¹⁰⁰

2.4 Breaking the taboos: Introducing *New Zimbabwe.com*

Established in 2003, *New Zimbabwe.com* takes a tabloid slant in reporting its news, largely focused on Zimbabwean sports, entertainment and political news. To improve its competitive market position, it also unveiled a print version in 2007, with the distribution focused on the UK. The increasing significance of *New Zimbabwe.com* among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora may be measured by the contributions of op-ed pieces by prominent Zimbabweans including Jonathan Moyo, businessman Mutumwa Mawere, and emerging academics such as Alex Magaisa and Brilliant Mhlanga.

The online newspaper’s editor Mduzuzi Mathuthu came to the UK to do a short-term journalism course in Cardiff before he acquired political asylum, settling in Wales in 2002. The *Daily News* was closed down after Mathuthu had already left country. In Zimbabwe, he had made a name for himself as a rising news star at the newspaper from his home-town base in Bulawayo. Mathuthu also covered events in Harare, especially football matches. He was in his early 20s, and one of the newspaper’s leading reporters, when he was arrested “five times on trumped-up charges and beaten by Mugabe loyalists”, according to the version he gave to Steve Tucker of the South Wales Echo. Mathuthu told Tucker his publication was “privately funded” without elaborating. Explaining his reasons for moving to the UK, he said: “It was terrifying, incredible pressure to try to work in that way. You have to ask yourself if you want to be a dead

¹⁰⁰International Crisis Group interview, with Arthur Mutambara, Harare, 19 October 2006.

hero or a living coward. I'm afraid I chose the latter".¹⁰¹ Mathuthu, whose name appeared on this list of University of Glamorgan's Bachelor of Laws graduates for 2008,¹⁰² claimed in the same article that his publication attracted a "staggering 250,000 hits" a day.

A 2006 IOM report claimed that the majority of Zimbabweans in the UK "are highly skilled in accessing the Internet, having become so in their homeland. A significant finding of this research is the extent to which the Zimbabwean Diaspora uses the Internet."¹⁰³ While Mathuthu's publication continues to influence public opinion, it also is the target of criticism, much of it stemming from the editor's rough, tabloid-style reporting. Mathuthu openly declares himself to be a disciple of Piers Morgan, the former editor of Britain's *Mirror* newspaper. "The reality is that I am a strong-headed character who thinks independently and is not afraid to say what I think. I have been variously described as cold-hearted, brutal and arrogant. I can't disagree with any of that, but I am also a very sensitive and caring individual."¹⁰⁴

Mathuthu's *New Zimbabwe.com* has broken taboos by offering readers an electronic podium to discuss issues, not only on politics but on tribalism as well. Zimbabwe is dominated by two tribes, Shona and Ndebele. With its origins in South Africa, the minority Ndebele tribe, from which Mathuthu hails, is based in the country's south. The Ndebeles believe they have traditionally been politically and socially marginalised.

¹⁰¹ Steve Tucker, "The man who's fighting for democracy in Zimbabwe from his humble flat in Cardiff," *South Wales Echo*, 29 June 2005.

¹⁰² Katie Bodinger "University of Glamorgan results 2008" <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2008/07/16/university-of-glamorgan-results-2008-91466-21344574/> Accessed 1 February 2011.

¹⁰³ Zimbabwe: Mapping Exercise, International Organisation for Migration 2006 report, www.iomlondon.org/doc/mapping/IOM_ZIMBABWE_MR.pdf Accessed 16 February 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Mduduzi Mathuthu, <http://www.myspace.com/mathuthu> Accessed 6 February 2011.

Mathuthu's publication has thrown the issue into the public domain, allowing hate messages and responses to thrive on his website. That has made Mathuthu a divisive figure. His perplexing pride has not helped his cause either. He refers to himself as "one of the best writers of the 21st century".¹⁰⁵ But the importance of allowing Zimbabweans to air these political and social issues cannot be underestimated. Winston Mano and Wendy Willem provide figures that show number of registered participants on the website. "Apart from news articles and advertisements, visitors are also encouraged to join 'the debate' on the discussion forum section of the website, which proved very popular with the 8,152 members registered by May 2006."¹⁰⁶

Figure 8: Common Sources of Information for Zimbabweans in the UK

Word of Mouth (36%)
Radio (14%)
Newspapers (9%)
Internet (19%)
TV (11%)
Leaflets in English (11%)
Source: IOM 2005

Figure 8 provides evidence that the majority of Zimbabwean living in the UK use the Internet as one of their main sources of information. Word of mouth is still the most important channel for disseminating information followed by the Internet.

Although *New Zimbabwe.com* claims to offer a balanced view, the IOM report said that "it is generally biased towards Matabeleland and the Ndebele people. On the other hand,

¹⁰⁵ Mduduzi Mathuthu profile, <http://km-kh.hi5.com/friend/p39716208--Mduduzi--html> Accessed 16 February 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Winston Mano and Wendy Willems "Emerging Communities, Emerging Media: the Case of a Zimbabwean Nurse in the British Big Brother show" *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 2008 22.1, pp. 101-128.

Zimdaily.com is biased towards Mashonaland and the Shona people.” Both publications benefit from the larger use of the Internet as the second source of news after word-of-mouth communication, as suggested in Figure 8. *New Zimbabwe* has ventured into the untapped ICT market, using technology to open doors for freedom of speech, thereby providing an escape from the widespread censorship to which Zimbabweans are accustomed. Mathuthu has on several occasions defended his publication as one catering to both sides of the political divide. But his historical background and association with the *Daily News* contradict this claim. As a regular visitor to the site, I recall reading countless stories portraying the MDC in a positive light. The content analysis will show that *New Zimbabwe.com* published more anti-Mugabe stories than any other online publication surveyed in the period leading up to the 2008 elections.

2.4.1 An acid test for ZANU PF: *The Zimbabwean* meets *ZimDaily*

Zimbabwean Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology Columbus Mavhunga argues that the presence of the Internet has made it possible for exiled musicians critical of Mugabe to instantly become journalists, activists and disc jockeys.¹⁰⁷ Cultural and political icon Thomas Mapfumo, undoubtedly Zimbabwe’s best known musician who won fame with Chimurenga (war of liberation) songs, denounces the ZANU PF regime with protest songs from his base in the United States. Most of them are banned on ZBC. *The Zimbabwean*, whose editor is one of the severest critics of Mugabe and his regime, has changed the Zimbabwean media landscape since it was officially launched. Unlike

¹⁰⁷ Columbus Mavhunga, “The Glass Fortress: Zimbabwe’s Cyber-Guerrilla Warfare” www.concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin80-4.pdf Accessed 12 February 2011.

New Zimbabwe.com and *ZimDaily.com* which are targeted at the Diaspora, *The Zimbabwean's* print edition is distributed on the streets of Harare. In 2008, it added a sister publication to its stable, *The Zimbabwean on Sunday*. The editor, Wilf Mbanga, is a veteran journalist, but it is worth noting here that he has relied chiefly on people with no journalistic background for much of the paper's content. In defining citizen journalism, Scot Gant focuses more on the 'democratic participatory' aspects of the citizens.¹⁰⁸ True, trained journalists also contribute to Mbanga's paper, but its editorial position is influenced by the work of citizen journalists. Mbanga explained: "We gather our news from a variety of sources. Zimbabweans love to tell stories. There is no shortage of well informed, thinking people to offer opinion pieces and analysis. We have countless contributors—all unpaid."¹⁰⁹

Mbanga also pays tribute to advanced technologies, which make it possible for his "reporters" to send news quickly to his base in England. Some have questioned the reliability of news packages supplied by people without a formal journalism background or training. However, the extent to which citizen journalism as practiced by Mbanga and his "reporters" has contributed to accountability on the part of government officials cannot be underrated. In the discussion part, I offer my views on the future of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe. Mbanga explained:

Modern technology has been a helpful partner in enabling us to publish news about Zimbabwe while being thousands of miles away. (Those of us directing

¹⁰⁸ Scott Gant, *We're All Journalists Now: The Transformation of the Press and Reshaping of the Law in the Internet Age*. (New York: Free Press, 2007) p. 23.

¹⁰⁹ Wilf Mbanga, "Zimbabwe: Telling the Story, Reporting the News" *Nieman Reports*, Fall 2008. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100420> Accessed 1 February 2011.

publication of *The Zimbabwean* face the threat of death at the hands of Mugabe's forces if we return to Zimbabwe.) Digital media allow citizens within Zimbabwe to report news and send the information and photographs to us. *The Zimbabwean* receives more than its fair share of its news in this way; today, reports received from non-journalists in Zimbabwe are perhaps the main source of the information contained in our columns.¹¹⁰

The CIA World Fact book reported that in 2009 alone 1.423 million Zimbabweans (excluding those in the Diaspora) were able to access the Internet in a country with more than 25 Internet service providers.¹¹¹ The probability that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora channelled anti-Mugabe material into the country is thus predictably as good as certain. However, data obtained from this research will prove or disprove this view. The politically-charged *ZimDaily.com* was a brainchild of Zimbabwean businessmen based in Canada, the US and Britain, according to Mavhunga, the Zimbabwean academic at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Initially launched in 2004, the paper styles itself as “a force that President Robert Mugabe cannot stop”.¹¹² *ZimDaily* made a name through the widely-known “Fair Deal”, an online activism initiative initiated in April 2007 to get children and spouses of ZANU PF officials deported from Western countries, providing contact details for these supposed Mugabe loyalists to officials in these Western

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “CIA World Factbook” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html> Accessed 5 February 2011.

¹¹² Columbus Mavhunga, “The Glass Fortress: Zimbabwe’s Cyber-Guerrilla Warfare” www.concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin80-4.pdf Accessed 12 February 2011.

countries. “After all, ZANU PF hates the West and castigates those who leave land redistribution and go West. The project has been a huge success.”¹¹³

ZimDaily has not concealed its dislike of Mugabe. In fact, nothing published on the site seems to represent a view likely to depict the person of Mugabe or his party in a positive light. On the contrary, it has attracted staunchly vocal critics of Mugabe. Their loathing of Mugabe is seen through the way they cover stories, their selection of news, the comments posted as well as the contributors to the debate. Similarly, the site’s forums and chatrooms are awash with anti-Mugabe undertones. Of all the three news sites, *ZimDaily* stands alone in its robust use of pictures to portray – normally with a rancorous twist – the sorry state of ZANU PF, its supporters, its leaders, allies and sponsors. On the other side, it portrays the MDC as a party of hope, one that is set to play an instrumental role in ending Mugabe’s rule. The MDC is rarely criticised on *ZimDaily*. The MDC’s own problems have either been forgiven or ignored by *ZimDaily*. It barely mentioned the factional battles and the invitation by Welshman Ncube to Prof. Aurther Mutambara to lead a breakaway group. *ZimDaily*, it can be concluded, is to the MDC what *The Herald* is to ZANU PF.

Retaining an overtly and blatantly critical stance towards the Zimbabwean ruler since its commencement, *The Zimbabwean*, like *ZimDaily*, has also been unambiguous in its animosity towards Mugabe and his cohorts. ZANU PF voices are given no space in the paper and its fondness for the MDC is decidedly open. The majority of its contributors have longstanding ties to the MDC. Stories and comments that ridicule Mugabe and his

¹¹³ Ibid.

party members are given prominence. Any reader of *The Zimbabwean* will be familiar with the publication's attempt to dwell largely on issues that present ZANU PF negatively, including alleged human rights abuses, journalists' arrests, corruption by party officials, scandals within the party, rumours about Mugabe's poor health, EU sanctions and much more. The "Letters to the Editor" section also reveals an incontestable slant towards the MDC and its leadership.

2.4.2 *ZimbabweGuardian.com*: Mugabe fights back

Not every Zimbabwean in the Diaspora is opposed to Mugabe. Faced with a cyber-guerrilla war in which government policies were under constant attack, London-based businessmen with ties to ZANU PF unveiled their own pro-Mugabe digital news weapon, *ZimbabweanGuardian.com*. As the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis raged on, Zimbabwean lawyer Itayi Garande, launched his site to provide readers with the "other side". It quickly got the attention of former Zimbabwean Deputy Minister for Information Bright Matonga, thanks to its devoted defence of Mugabe's policies. Matonga, who had studied in the UK before working a stint with the BBC, was recalled to Zimbabwe by Moyo, who put him in charge at ZBC. Garande went on to launch a fierce crusade against Zimbabwean news websites, which he accused of supporting the West's regime-change agenda in Zimbabwe. Garande has since resigned from his post and the website now operates as talkzimbabwe.com. In its present form, the website's reports are still tilted towards ZANU PF, though not as defiantly as they were under Garande's reign.

Zimbabwean activists based in the UK tried to get Garande deported for his loyalty towards ZANU PF. Garande rejected accusations he was a Mugabe apologist, asking a radio talk-show host: “Do I fit the criteria of someone who supports Mugabe?”¹¹⁴ Despite these denials, Garande’s publication focused on news promoting Mugabe and his loyalists, often echoing coverage or stories in *The Herald*. Stories from *The Herald* were often simply reproduced on the site. For example, ZANU PF’s exposure of Mugabe critic and former Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube, which coincidentally gained prominence around election time in March 2008, was widely covered by Garande’s publication. This online newspaper provided another good example that not all Zimbabweans who moved abroad were critical of Mugabe’s policies. It offered an alternative discourse to the pro-West coverage of Zimbabwean news online.

2.4.3 Role of new media in democracy

Any student of politics or media has at one point heard repeated claims suggesting freedom of speech and expression is the lifeblood of democracy. We are often told that media and democracy are inseparable, and the two words are often used interchangeably. “We should care about journalism because it’s central to democracy, citizenship, and everyday life, and we should care about journalism studies because it helps us understand this key social institution”, claim Karin Wahl-Jorgenson and Thomas Hanitzsch.¹¹⁵

The power of the media, however, is sometimes overrated. Can media alone instigate change? Some have pointed to recent developments in North Africa to support the school

¹¹⁴ “Itayi Garande defends himself on Reporters’ forum” *Zimdiaspora* 28 December 2008.

¹¹⁵ Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds), *Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) p. 11.

of thought that media can indeed foster change. In the case of Zimbabwe, new media may certainly be helping advance democratic change, but it could also be argued that it takes a combination of factors. These include the political climate in the country, infrastructure, access to the Internet, illiteracy etc. Eric Bucy and Kimberly Gregson are of the view that the emergent form of technology-driven democracy goes beyond net activism, taking into broader consideration the participatory engagement of citizens online and the wide exposure to political messages¹¹⁶ Their position further strengthens the view that even though new media has the power to effect change, people in a particular country still need to have access to the digital technology. This gap can, however, be drastically reduced if one considers a potentially mediating role played by the Diaspora, as is the case in this research.¹¹⁷

Democracy, explains Benjamin Barber, is a process of learning and sharing information.¹¹⁸ This view strengthens the deep-seated relationship between media and democracy. Martin Nkosi Ndlela concurs when he says, “One of the main justifications for freedom of expression is therefore that it is a vital part of democracy, facilitating participation in decision-making, facilitating the formation of public opinion.”¹¹⁹ New media technologies are impacting this seemingly ever-changing relationship between the two paradigms. Using China as a case study, Randolph Kluver and Indrajit Banerjee say

¹¹⁶ Eric Bucy and Kimberly Gregson, “Media participation: a legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy”, *New Media & Society* Vol. 3, No. 3 (2001): pp. 357-380.

¹¹⁷ Randolph Kluver and Indrajit Banerjee, “Political Culture, Regulation, and Democratization: The Internet in Nine Asia Nations” *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 8 (2005): pp. 30-46.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin Barber “Which Technology and Which Democracy?” in *Democracy and New Media*,. edited by Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (Cambridge: MIT , 2003) pp. 33-48.

¹¹⁹ Martin Nkosi Ndlela, “Mediating Democratic Engagement: Reflections on the role of the media in electoral processes,” Paper presented at Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa conference, 8-11 April 2010: Maputo, Mozambique.

they are supportive of using the Internet as a good apparatus for promoting democracy. Online news and social media are considered democratising tools for the Internet. However, other forces such as email also play a large role in communicating messages among activists. As already noted, in 2006 the Zimbabwean government introduced the Interception of Communications Bill, which would have allowed the military, intelligence services, police and the office of the President to monitor e-mail correspondence, Internet access and telephone conversations. Even though the bill became law in 2007, the lack of technological capability, manpower and monitoring equipment needed to intercept communication appears to have scuttled the government's plans. To the best of my knowledge, no one has been jailed under the provisions of this law.

But what role can the media play in a deeply divided political situation like that of Zimbabwe? While the media's main role may be to provide access to information that empowers citizens to make good decisions, the Zimbabwean case is rather more contested and complicated. Zimbabwean media always take positions on issues, whether minor or major. It is very difficult to find a newspaper that represents views from the political "centre". Privately-owned newspapers vehemently attack Mugabe's policies and tend to favour the West, while *The Herald* and its sister publications disseminate news that positively represents Mugabe and his "look East" policy, designed to disavow continued ties with Western establishments in favour of emerging markets in the east – including Asian powerhouse China. Politics is that very much at the centre of editorial decisions. It is also difficult for young reporters who have worked for the state media to

find jobs with independent newspapers and vice versa. Media in Zimbabwe could help reduce the political differences among local camps through advocating journalism that is based on informing citizens rather than misinforming them or reporting on issues that only serve to widen the gaps in political differences.

CHAPTER 3: SETTING THE STAGE: METHODOGY

In his assessment of the use of interviews in qualitative research, William Trochim singles out preparation as one of the key elements in gathering data.¹²⁰ That view is supported by Zina O’Leary, who goes on to refute the idea that some research methodologies are superior to others. Getting the right supervisory advice is also crucial to the success of the research, O’Leary argues.¹²¹ Following O’Leary’s lead, I elected to principally use questionnaire and face-to-face interviews as the main research methodology, along with content analysis of selected news sites. I resolved to carry out 50 interviews with Britain-based Zimbabweans. In Zimbabwe, I also conducted 20 interviews with policy-makers and politicians, journalists and members of the NGO community, as well as Zimbabweans with relatives living abroad.

¹²⁰ William Trochim, *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*, 2nd edition. (Cincinnati: Atomic Dog Publishing, 2000), p. 23.

¹²¹ Zina O’Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*. (London: Sage Publications 2004), p. 18.

Engaging Zimbabwean living in Zimbabwe served to verify or reject the hypothesis that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora made use of their exposure to the Internet to discredit President Mugabe in the 2008 elections, leading to his unprecedented loss. Since content analysis of websites is also a key methodology for my MPhil, I elected to analyse four Zimbabwean websites. Altogether, I assessed 100 news items, including readers' comments, columns and editorials focusing on the period of February to March 2008. I decided to look into articles only in the month leading up to the elections simply because it is during this period that the sites were completely geared towards reporting election-related news. The same method of analysis applies also to the websites below.

www.newzimbabwe.com

This is an online newspaper established nearly 10 years ago by a Zimbabwean journalist, who fled the country after the government forcibly closed the *Daily News*, which as has already noted, called itself the nation's first independent daily.

www.zimdaily.com

This is a news website independently run by Zimbabwean journalists based in Texas, in the US. Like several other dissident news sites, it is regularly updated with news focusing on developments in the country. Anti-ZANU PF articles dominate the website, which also roundly criticise Mugabe's policies.

www.thezimbabwean.co.uk

This is a UK-based, Western-funded, Zimbabwean newspaper, led by a veteran Zimbabwean newsman who also is a former editor at the *Daily News*, based in the UK. It has made a name for itself through its fierce criticism of Robert Mugabe since its inception in 2004.

www.swradioafrica.com

This is another Western-sponsored independent radio station broadcasting from London. It employs Zimbabwean journalists. It is also fair to say its content is largely anti-Mugabe.

3.1. Content analysis

The foundations of content analysis can easily be attributable to Harold Lasswell's method: "Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect".¹²² John Vivian brings forward the view that content analysis involves measuring media content to establish a database for analysis.¹²³ Similarly, Werner Severin and James Tankard believe that content analysis is a "systematic method of analysing message content".¹²⁴ While agreeing with Vivian along with Severin and Tankard, Joseph Turow puts emphasis on the fact that content analysis allows the researcher to "present the results quantitatively".¹²⁵ Perhaps a broader, all-gathering definition of content analysis is provided by Kimberly A. Neuendorf, who says "content analysis is a summarising,

¹²² Donald H. McBurney and Theresa L. White, *Research Methods*, 8th edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009) p. 234.

¹²³ John Vivian, *The Mass Media of Mass Communication*, 7th edition (Boston: Pearson Education Inc, 2006) p. 354.

¹²⁴ Werner Severin and James Tankard, *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods and Uses in the Mass Media*, 5th edition (New York: Pearson Education, 2010) p. 35.

¹²⁵ Joseph Turow, *Media Today: An Introduction to Mass Communication* 3rd edition (New York: Routledge 2010) p. 46.

quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalisability, replicability, and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented."¹²⁶

My research attempted to cover every aspect of Neuendorf's definition from the design to the analysis stage, incorporating key attributes such as the generalisability and replicability of data. Content analysis, according to Steve Stemler, also allows "inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection".¹²⁷ Stemler's assumptions also fit well in my research since, apart from content analysis, I used other forms of data collection and analysis. Klaus Krippendorff and Mary Angela Bock suggest that six questions are central to the success of a content analysis: which data are analysed, how are they defined, what is the population from which they are drawn, what is the context relative to which the data are analysed, what are the boundaries of the analysis, what is the target of the inferences.¹²⁸ Content analysis of the four Zimbabwean websites in the period leading up to the elections was used as part of my research methodology. The main purpose of using this methodology was to quantitatively measure the extent to which these websites published articles that had a slant towards the MDC, the results of which were assessed to see if they matched up with the outcomes of the interviews and questionnaire. For instance, if the website had content favouring the opposition and there is confirmation from a respondent that he/she

¹²⁶ Kimberly Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook Online* (2002) <http://academic.csuohio.edu/kneuendorf/content> Accessed 7 February 2011.

¹²⁷ Steve Stemler, "An overview of content analysis", *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, Vol. 7, No. 17 (2001) <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17> Accessed 16 February 2011.

¹²⁸ Klaus Krippendorff and Mary Angela Bock (eds), *The Content Analysis Reader*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008).

disseminated such information to family and friends at home, then that would mean that the hypothesis has been affirmed.

I therefore looked at 100 articles (25 from each of the four news sites) published between 1 February 2008 and 29 March 2008, the day the elections were held. I carefully perused them and placed the results of my assessment into referential units for coding. Referential units, posits Stemler, are useful when a researcher is pursuing inferences on attitudes, values, or preferences. My research sought to investigate the values and attitudes of the three websites, which were then measured to see if the way they represented news allowed Zimbabwean exiles to circulate and share the news with voters at home, which is why I made a case to follow Stemler's lead. All articles – read and analysed with a view to gathering the extent to which they may have influenced reader perception of President Mugabe – were coded into subsets that included the introduction, headline, length of article, and the availability of photos and reader comments. Content related to broadcasts by SW Africa was also analysed using the same method, because even though the station transmitted broadcast material, it also has a website that is constantly updated with news. The assumption, according to Stemler, which this research will also confirm, is that “the words that are mentioned most often are the words that reflect the greatest concerns.”¹²⁹

3.2 Interviews

One of my initial research targets was to ensure that the interviews would be complete.

To reach that goal, one has to record and transcribe the interviews making sure that each and every interviewee's views are correctly represented. How accurate are the interviews,

¹²⁹ Stemler “An overview of content analysis” (see n. 127)
Accessed February 16, 2011 This paper has been viewed 213,608 times since 6/7/2001.

and, more importantly, how accurate is the interview sample? Good preparation appears very important in ensuring that the results obtained from interviews are accurate. There is a need to educate and inform the interviewees on the purpose of conducting this research, the content of the research, as well as the implications of participating in the research. This is in line with Steinar Kvale's view that both parties involved in the interview process should value human interaction for knowledge production.¹³⁰ It is likely that when interviewees are aware of what is expected from them, they will be expected to provide accurate answers. Next to that, there is need to prepare and put together questions capable of allowing those interviewed to reveal their true feelings or assessment of the situations. These questions can normally be both descriptive and explanatory, requesting the interviewee to cover the "what", "why" and "how" aspects. From my professional journalism experience, I had learned that the manner in which a question is formulated subsequently plays a role in the accuracy of the responses one gets. Considering that there were an estimated 3 million Zimbabweans said to be living outside the country, a representative sample, which involves the selection of a small number of individuals capable of representing a larger population, was used.

Gabriella Rundblad pinpoints that the rationale for selecting a representative sample is a two-way argument, since firstly, "no one can test an entire population because even the smallest population would take too long to recruit and test and secondly most researchers seek general conclusions that apply to a population and not just a few individuals."¹³¹

¹³⁰ Steinar Kvale, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks California, 1996), p. 14.

¹³¹ Gabriella Rundblad, "Recruiting a representative sample," (2006) www.appliedlinguistics.co.uk

Results were extrapolated, allowing me to make generalisations about the entire Zimbabwean community in the UK. The biggest challenge of using a representative sample is without a doubt ensuring that all aspects of the population are being studied. Can the views of 50 people fully represent those of all Zimbabweans in the UK? To ensure accuracy, I endeavoured to interview people from across the political, educational and racial divide. To be more precise, students currently studying in the UK on a Zimbabwean government scholarship, a representative of the Zimbabwean embassy in London, Zimbabwean professors lecturing at UK universities, nurses, factory workers, as well as undocumented Zimbabweans living in the UK were all interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with former White farmers, representatives of the Movement for Democratic Change in London, Zimbabwean musicians and several Zimbabwean journalists. In Zimbabwe, random selections of people that have relatives abroad were selected as part of the 20 face-to-face interviews with officials and citizens living in the country, also ensuring that the country's 10 provinces are fully represented.

Of fundamental importance was my acknowledgement that my views about the subject under study were not relevant. To acquire the much-needed peer acknowledgment, every researcher needs to disregard any forms of bias in the research process. According to Mugo Fridah, sampling bias is defined as a tendency to favour the selection of units that have particular characteristics.¹³² It is thus the researcher's responsibility to obtain

Accessed February 2 2011.

¹³² Fridah Mugo, "Sampling in Research," (2008) <http://christcollegemsw.blogspot.nl/2008/04/research-notes-sampling.html> Accessed 15 June 2010.

informed consent from the respondents before the research process starts and to ensure that among other things, their confidentiality is respected.

Structured and semi-structured interviews, which collect qualitative data by setting up a two-way communication-based interview with the respondents, who have the time and scope to reveal their opinions, were of particularly great value to my research design.

According to Christa Wessel, Fredric Weymann and Cord Spreckelsen, semi-structured interviews signify two corresponding aspects: (a) the interviewer is aware of the topics and (b) the interviewee has the opportunity to talk freely on a certain point.¹³³ The use of semi-structured interviews is preferred largely because of their ability to get the respondent's opinion through the use of open-ended questions. The Zimbabwean elections provide an intricate situation due to the political sensitivities involved. From experience, many Zimbabweans including those in Diaspora, are unwilling to openly discuss their political preferences with strangers. In such a given context, semi-structured interviews could be used because they can deal with complex questions and give informants the freedom to express their views on their own terms while – thanks to their flexibility – enabling the researcher to build trust and a rapport with potential interviewees ahead of the interview.

¹³³ Christa Wessel, Frédéric Weymann and Cord Spreckelsen “Streamlining Qualitative Research Methods for Medical Informatics – A methodological Approach”, Aachen University
http://134.130.12.3:8880/pdf/Wes_06_Streamlining%20Qualitative%20Research%20Methods.pdf
Accessed 17 June 2011.

After a thorough analysis of literature related to research methods, I came to the conclusion that I would use both semi-structured and structured interviews to increase the likelihood of objectivity. When all participants are asked to respond to a uniform set of questions and given an identical timeframe for interview engagement, their answers are likely to provide an objective analysis. Furthermore, providing a uniform context of questioning allowed me to aggregate the responses. To my own advantage, the use of a common format made it easier to analyse, compare and contrast interview results. The overall applicability of the same tone of voice during all interview sessions is important according to David Gray, who argues that uniformity in this aspect ensures that the respondents' answers are not influenced by the interviewer's tone, perhaps another key element to ensuring accuracy.¹³⁴ My main goal was to ensure objectivity in my research; therefore, I recorded, transcribed and analysed the non-verbal elements of the interview, including gestures and pauses, as well. I was aware of the constraints of structured interviews, including the fact that by using an interview guide I would possibly miss out on questions excluded in the guide, hence the assumption that restrictive questioning may also lead to restrictive answers. Nevertheless, a structured interview was the best method to use in this particular research, since it turned out to be relatively easy to quantify data that came from a uniform set of questions. I also believe that data obtained from this particular type of interview is reliable – which is crucial – because the same questions were posed to all respondents. Of particular importance was also the fact that a standardised form of interview bode well with the generalisation element of representative sample, which, as has already been stated, was elected in this research.

¹³⁴ David Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World*. (London: Sage Publications 2004) p. 215.

In addition I used semi-structured interviews even though Matthew David and Carole Sutton argue that they are primarily used when a researcher has no intentions of testing a specific hypothesis.¹³⁵ I do not fully subscribe to the idea that semi-structured interviews are better than structured ones because they allow the interviewer to probe all aspects of the research. It is also possible to look into several issues of the research when employing structured interviews, especially when the researcher has factual knowledge of the topic. The key element, I suppose, is good preparation, for there is no guarantee a researcher will acquire some important data simply because he/she has engaged in a particular type of interview. An unstructured interview, on the other hand, did not seem ideal for this particular type of research because it does not allow for the possibility of replicating data, and as O’Leary argues, unstructured interviews are not particularly generalisable to a wider population.

Face-to-face interviews were supplemented by questionnaire interviews sent directly to Zimbabweans living in the UK. I did not want to make a distinctive sample in this case because I feared results from the respondents would not be representative. Through a network of friends and students, a surveymonkey.com questionnaire link was sent to Zimbabwean expatriates who were previously unknown to me by digital means.

Respondents were asked to indicate their age, gender and profession. They were then asked to indicate whether they, directly or indirectly, participated in influencing relatives in Zimbabwe to vote against Mugabe; how frequently they read Internet news sites and

¹³⁵ Matthew David and Carole Sutton, *Social Research the Basics*.(London: SAGE Publications, 2004) p. 87.

which ones specifically; how often they spoke with their relatives, and using which method; whether they felt it was unfair that they were not allowed to vote just because they do not live in Zimbabwe; and to further elucidate their political preferences and their views on the economy, as well as which candidate they would have voted for had they been allowed to vote in the March 2008 elections. As stated earlier, Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe were interviewed so as to corroborate or deny the results of the data obtained in Britain. I wanted to know whether their voting choices were influenced by what was fed to them by relatives in Britain; whom they voted for and why they voted for that particular candidate; what influenced them to vote for a particular candidate; how informed they were about the candidates; whether they attended any rallies; and whether they would vote for the same candidate again.

An interview is a qualitative data collection tool. According to Kvale, qualitative research interviews attempt to establish the meaning of people's experiences on a particular subject.¹³⁶ Thus, the main task in interviewing is attempting to make sense of what the interviewees say. Carter McNamara concurs with Kvale's observation, stating that interviews are principally useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. Interviews, argues McNamara, allow the interviewer to comprehensively pursue information about a given topic.¹³⁷ For a research that seeks to expound the role played by the Internet in the Zimbabwe, interviews seemed more valuable as a qualitative method of research because they allow the respondents to freely share their opinions and

¹³⁶ Steinar Kvale, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (see n. 130 above), p. 15.

¹³⁷ Carter McNamara, PhD research (1999). General guidelines for conducting interviews, Minnesota, <http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/intrview.htm>
[Accessed 17 September 2010.](#)

impressions. Working directly with the respondent makes the interview personal and open, potentially boosting the quantity of information an interviewer can get as respondents share their opinions without restraint. However, quantity does not always reflect the quality of the material that an interview may bring to a researcher.

Kvale describes the seven stages of an interview investigation as thematising, designing the study so it addresses the research questions, the interview itself, transcribing, analysing, verification, and reporting.¹³⁸ Thematisation, which largely involves the formulation of the rationale behind the investigation, also seeks to illustrate the concept for the topic under investigation. It must be clear in the opening stages why the interview is being conducted and what the subject matter under investigation is. Explaining vividly why the interview is being conducted makes it easier to move on to how the interview will be pursued, argues Kvale. For the purpose of this research, in seeking to appreciate the role of the Internet in the Zimbabwean elections, research interviews were conducted to determine whether Internet-exposed Zimbabweans in the Diaspora had a hand in deciding the national elections in 2008. Since this is a comparative research, the same question will be applied to the British case albeit with a few alterations.

The planning stage centres on designing the questions to be used in the interview. Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison say this stage involves the translation of research objectives into the questions that will make up the main body of the schedule.¹³⁹ Questions should thus reflect the objectives of the research. The format and response

¹³⁸ Steinar Kvale, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (see n. 130 above), p. 88.

¹³⁹ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000), p. 274.

mode – taking into consideration the aims of the interview, nature of the subject under investigation, kind and circumstances of the respondents to be used and anticipated information to come from respondents – should also be considered. David Morgan mentions focus groups as another method that allows for considerable flexibility in how questions are asked.¹⁴⁰ Unlike targeted interviews, he argues, focus groups give respondents a chance to supply in-depth answers. In a focus group, respondents are grouped together and they answer questions at the same time. According to Fatemeh Rabiee, focus groups aim to understand, and explain, the meanings, beliefs and cultures that “influence the feelings, attitudes and behaviours of individuals”.¹⁴¹ I considered the possible engagement of focus groups, separately sampling groups of Zimbabwean-educated nurses, who had then moved to the UK in search of greener pastures upon graduation. Even though on paper they seemed more likely to be willing to openly give their views as they shared similar backgrounds and experiences, I felt I would be not be able to gain credible, open and unbiased data, since naturally Zimbabweans tend not to openly enjoy discussion about their political affiliations in public.

I also considered using purposive sampling to bring together Britain-based victims of alleged Zimbabwean repression. One reason for purposive sampling could have been to investigate how many Zimbabweans were exposed to the Internet and how many of them visited, read and then shared political information from news websites with family members, who then voted out President Mugabe. Selecting a smaller, more manageable

¹⁴⁰ David L Morgan *The Focus Group Guidebook*. Edited by Morgan, D. L. and Krueger, R. A. Vol. 1, The Focus GroupKit. (Sage London: 1998). p. 30.

¹⁴¹ Fatemeh Rabiee, “Focus-group interview and data analysis” *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* Vol. 63 No. 4, (2004) pp. 655–660.

number of people to interview seemed more logical simply because talking to the entire population is not only impossible, but would require more time and perhaps more interviewers. Purposive sampling limits the researcher to only a specific group of people one feels will be beneficial to the research. While a certain group of people, for instance Zimbabwean nurses, may have been considered under purposive sampling, it could have proven difficult to elucidate how their views represented the entire exile community. Nurses may have represented the views of educated or degree-holding members of the community, meaning Zimbabweans without a university degree would have been excluded under purposive sampling. The advantage of using a random selection is its ability to eliminate potential bias, but using it as a methodology also means one needs be prepared to come across citizens who have not been exposed to the Internet and are thus not useful for this research.

It was also my responsibility to clearly spell out the target groups of people to be interviewed, in addition to clarifying reasons for their inclusion or exclusion. To put this into context for the research, I looked at the circumstances that forced expatriate Zimbabweans out of the country in order to fully comprehend their contribution in the elections. For instance, it is highly unlikely that a Zimbabwean studying in the UK on a bursary from the Zimbabwean government would be the one spreading an anti-Robert Mugabe tirade to relatives back home since he or she may be thankful for Mugabe's generous support. On the other hand, those who were allegedly forced out of their jobs by the regime or those whose relatives were supposedly killed by the militias linked to the president would have a higher chance of pursuing a strong, anti-Mugabe agenda.

Moreover, considering the sensitivity of the subject matter, some people may be uncomfortable giving their full names and addresses, while others may not like the idea of tape-recording the interview.

Laying down the research design allows the research to determine what kind of questions to be used. Information sought attempted to ascertain the respondent's opinion, background, behaviour, feelings or knowledge on the subject matter, hence the need to define whether the questions used in the interview were open or closed questions and whether they should be direct or non-direct questions. An example of an open question, which was asked to the respondents, was: "Do you like President Robert Mugabe?" An indirect question posed was: "What are your views on President Mugabe's style of leadership?" Specific and non-specific questions were also employed. "Do Zimbabweans in England dislike President Mugabe?" amounted to a general question while, "what's your opinion on the way elections were conducted in Zimbabwe?" was rather more specific. One also needs to decide the types of interviews to be conducted. If it is a standardised, open-ended interview, then the question is whether identical set of questions should be used for each interviewee. Or is it an informal, conversational interview with no clearly thought-out questions? A telephone interview? Highlighting the importance of clarity prior to, during and after the interview, William Foddy introduces the symbolic interaction theory, arguing that if questions are not clear, respondents will constantly try to reach a mutually-shared definition of the situation which may or may not coalesce with the research.¹⁴²

¹⁴² William Foddy, *Constructing Questions for Interviews*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 21.

In the interviewing stage, Kvale notes that the interview should have a reflective approach to the knowledge sought. Important at this stage is the setting. The interviewee needs to be comfortable with the setting of the interview. Some may want privacy, so it is important to ensure that their privacy is guaranteed. Body language may also play a role. Obviously, if you cannot look the interviewee in the eye, some people may see that as lack of interest. It should be noted that in some African and Asian countries, however, making direct eye contact can be considered offensive. Planning is also important. The interviewer needs to ask one single question at a time. While it is important to check if your audiotape is working, taking notes is encouraged as well. I followed these steps as given by Kvale.

Kvale's transcribing stage involves preparing the interview material for analysis, which normally involves the time-consuming process of dictating the oral speech into written text. Justifying tape-recording and transcribing the data, Alan Bryman argues that qualitative researchers do not just need to focus on what people say, but also on the way in which they say it.¹⁴³ Verbatim transcription means that everything recorded in the transcript is typed up, including coughing or pauses. It allows the researcher to have the interview as it is, word for word with no edits. In an intelligent verbatim transcription, the typist edits out repetitions or laughter, paying attention mostly to what he feels is important. This research uses verbatim transcription in order to remain accurate and focused on everything that the interviewees say, thereby staying in line with Daniel G. Oliver, Julianne M. Serovich, and Tina L. Mason's argument that transcribing data could

¹⁴³ Alan Bryman, *Interviewing in qualitative research: Social Research Methods*, 2nd edition (OxfordUniversity Press; 2004) p. 321.

strongly affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions drawn.¹⁴⁴

The analysing stage follows next with the researcher having to decide on appropriate methods of analysis. Scholars like Bogdan and Biklin consider coding, shaped by one's central questions or hypotheses, as a first step in analysing interviews.¹⁴⁵ Coding becomes apparent when the interviewer analysing data comes across words and phrases that highlight an issue of importance to the research. The process of assembling these words is defined as coding. Daily interpretive analysis is one way of looking at interviews. It involves assembling and analysing data collected on each day.¹⁴⁶ Content analysis could also be employed in assessing interviews. Steve Stemler suggests that the most commonly-accepted notion in qualitative research is that a content analysis involves engaging in a word-frequency count. He argues that when conducting a word-frequency count an assumption is made that the words that are mentioned most often are the "words that reflect the greatest concerns".¹⁴⁷ The material needs to be analysed step by step, following rules of procedure and devising the material into content analytical units.¹⁴⁸ Philipp Mayring argues that the object of qualitative content analysis can be all sorts of recorded communication including transcripts of interviews, discourses, and protocols of

¹⁴⁴ Oliver G Daniel, Serovich Julianne and Mason Tina "Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (2005) pp.1273–1289.

¹⁴⁵ Bogdan R. B. and Biklin, S. K. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, 3rd edition. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon. 1998) p. 67.

¹⁴⁶ Charles H Wood, *Collecting and Analysing Interview Data*, 2000, http://www.rsmas.miami.edu/IAI/Inst2000/lectures/wood_jul20/reading/qual_appr_2.pdf Accessed 14 September 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Stemler "An overview of content analysis" (see n. 127)..

¹⁴⁸ Philipp Mayring "Qualitative Content Analysis," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, Vol. 1, No 2, (2000) Available online <http://217.160.35.246/fqs-texte/2-00/2-00mayring-e.htm#g2> Accessed 8 March 2010.

observations, videotapes or other documents. The verifying stage of the interview ascertains what Kvale calls the generalisability, reliability, and validity of the interview findings. Reliability is based on the consistency of the results while validity tries to establish whether the intended goals of the research have been met by the interview. The final stage involves communicating the findings of the study and the methods applied.

3.3 Qualitative approach

Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman agree that when thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspective worlds that can only be captured through face-to-face interactions.¹⁴⁹ Qualitative methods have thus been preferred largely because of the nature of the research, which inherently lends itself to a qualitative investigation based on the view that it is the “how” instead of “how many” question that needs to be explored. According to Mildred Patten, qualitative methods should be used when little is known about the topic, when participants belong to a culture that is secretive and when potential participants are available for extensive interactions and observations.¹⁵⁰

The research objectives fit well into Patten’s description if one considers that this study was carried out with the hope of establishing the first thought-provoking assessment of the way Zimbabwean exiles used the Internet to influence voting patterns in Zimbabwe. Studies on the momentum that the Internet has gained over the years, especially with specific reference to citizens’ political participation in Africa and particularly Zimbabwe,

¹⁴⁹ Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 4th edition (London: Sage, 2006) pp.14-56.

¹⁵⁰ Mildred L Patten, *Understanding Research Methods*, (Greendale CA: Pycszak Publishing, 2005), p. 21.

are limited. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora tend to remain secretive when it comes to issues concerning their political association, possibly for fear of reprisals. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that there was plenty of time to conduct interviews with Zimbabweans at home. While it is entirely untrue that quantitative methods cannot be used in this research, it goes without saying that human experience is a strong characteristic of qualitative methodology, which I was keen to explore.

Making a simple distinction between quantitative and qualitative empirical research, Keith Punch concludes that the two are separated by the fact that numbers, which are central to the success of the former, have no major part to play in the latter.¹⁵¹ Be it in a quantitative or qualitative research, question development is key to understanding the process. A researcher needs to clearly identify and lay out the questions to be researched, also robustly explaining the motive of the research before deciding which methodology to use. According to Punch, different questions require different methods to answer them. Patten agrees with Punch's view. Arguing observations and empirical research are inseparable, she contends that prior to research engagement a researcher needs to sturdily outline the main motives for undertaking research, who is to be observed, and how and when to carry out the observations. The significance of well-defined objectives cannot be over-emphasised, she argues, adding that the "why" question establishes the main motive for the research and outlines its potential. For example, funding bodies are more inclined to assess the research aims before deciding whether to fund it or not. In fact, clarity on

¹⁵¹ Keith F Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, (London: Sage Publications 2005) p. 24.

the questions to be investigated is largely in the researcher's interest as it simplifies the process of looking for answers.

Patten sees case studies as research strategies that focus on the exploration of a complex phenomenon and related contexts, stating they are mostly useful when exploring the "why" and "how" questions. This research's main objective has been clearly spelt out as intending to explore the extent to which Internet exposure may have helped Zimbabweans in the Diaspora share and spread anti-Mugabe information, effectively discrediting the long-serving president. Thus, can the Internet influence the outcome of an election and if so, to what extent? There were plenty of questions that logically cannot be ignored. For example, how many Zimbabweans have left the country? Where have they gone to? Why did they leave the country? How many of them had access to the Internet before and during the elections? How many of them encouraged relatives to vote out President Mugabe? Was that decision based on what they had read on the Internet? How many of them are willing to disclose their political affiliation? What evidence is there to prove that their relatives and friends followed their advice not to vote for President Mugabe?

Having outlined the research questions, one has to consider the methods to be used. Following Immy Holloway and Stephanie Wheeler's assertion that the aim of a qualitative researcher is to explore people's experiences, feelings and beliefs, this research chose to prioritise qualitative research methods.¹⁵² An ethnographic approach

¹⁵² Immy Holloway and Stephanie Wheeler *Qualitative research for nurses* (Oxford: Blackwell Science, 1996) p. 4

was effectively used as a form of methodology in this research, considering the interviews were embedded in ethnography. I spent an extended period of time identifying, studying and observing any cultural trends and patterns among exiled Zimbabweans that helped me explain, approve or dismiss the above-mentioned hypothesis. I concluded that community engagement played a crucial role in sharing information among Zimbabweans. Churches are good examples of this. While people may be entitled to their own opinions, visiting the same church meant that people shared the same ideology and values. One such example is a confirmation by a church pastor during an interview that while his congregation tried as much as they could to stay away from politics, the majority of its members were openly critical of Mugabe's policies.

Ethnography is a multi-purpose qualitative methodology involving participant observation, interviewing, and discourse analyses of natural language. Defined by David F. Fetterman as a credible, rigorous and authentic story, ethnography thus involves extensive fieldwork under which one abandons any preconceived assumptions of a particular group of people in order to effectively learn something about them.¹⁵³ Punch says listening to what people say, asking questions and collecting any relevant data is central to understanding ethnography, which he argues is based on the assumption that shared cultural meanings among a group of people helps define their actions and behaviour.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ David F Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*, (London: Sage Publications, 2010) pp. 1-10.

¹⁵⁴ Keith F Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 150.

Some scholars, however, believe ethnographical work cannot be separated from grounded theory, which calls for throwing out any preconceptions or hypotheses before engaging in research. To this end, Fetterman argues that the beginning phase of an ethnographic study often involves considering all biases and preconceived notions that the ethnographer may have. Arguing that biases may have both a positive and negative impact on the research and are indeed part of the research process, he says choosing a problem, geographical area or the people to study demonstrates a degree of bias. Grounded theory, which largely involves the inductive discovery of theory from data collected, has indeed been considered as a potential research methodology for this research. However, since a clearly-defined hypothesis has been developed, engaging grounded theory would possibly conflict with the hypotheses to be tested. However, as a theoretical contribution of this research it is inductively provided in Chapter 5.

Audio-taped and transcribed interviews were used as part of the research methodology requirements. Interviews were aligned to ethnography, as the researcher in the field does not just make observations but also talks to the people involved. As noted earlier, face-to-face and computerised questionnaire surveys were also used in this research. Using web surveys, the research attracted respondents to questions by randomly sending survey questions to readers. The use of questionnaires was driven by the view that information from a large portion of the group could potentially be collated. Also considering the researcher's budget constraints, web surveys were considerably less expensive to administer.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Social science scholars need to make several ethical considerations when studying human behaviour and attitudes. Ethics are a professional requirement. In a broad sense, they safeguard the interests and rights of the people involved in or affected by research. David B. Resnik defines research ethics as standards of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the process of conducting research. John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles consider mutual respect, non-coercion, non-manipulation, and support for democratic values to be the most basic codes for good ethical practice in social science research.¹⁵⁵ The issue of the researcher's moral integrity is thus important insofar as the general understanding of research ethics is concerned. Fundamental ethical guidelines for the conduct of research were codified by the Nuremberg Code.¹⁵⁶ The code, which emerged in 1947 in the aftermath of the gruesome atrocities conducted under the guise of scientific research on Jews in the Nazi concentration camps, gave birth to ten conditions to justify research involving human subjects. Chief among these are the voluntary consent of the subjects involved in the research and that "something good" for society has to emerge from the research.

Ethics not only promote best practice among researchers but they also help establish and maintain accountability. Research misconduct involves what Denise Carter calls "fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing or reviewing research or

¹⁵⁵ John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles, *Visual Research Ethics at Crossroads Realities Working Papers*, Working Paper 10, p.10.

¹⁵⁶ Nuremberg Code <http://www.cirp.org/library/ethics/nuremberg/>
Accessed [1 April 2010](#).

in reporting research results”.¹⁵⁷ Fabrication involves making up data or results and recording and reporting them. In order to tame potential cheating, professional bodies have developed specific guidelines for ethical codes of conduct for researchers. For example, many universities have a research ethics policy, which all researchers must adhere to. This policy is intended to help researchers appreciate the rights of the participants, consider risk assessment of their research and observe equally important matters such as confidentiality and informed consent.

While deception should always be avoided, Jamie McIntosh argues that researchers frequently use it. This possibly explains why not only scholars but also educational entities across the world have developed norms and guidelines for making research practice more acceptable. McIntosh argues that deception should be kept out of any form of research unless one determines that there is no other way of getting information. Thus, the potential use of any form of deception needs to be justified before the research is carried out. The question is, however, whether deception can be defended when honesty is considered a paramount academic virtue.

McIntosh is of the opinion that researchers conducting a study on how students of different races interact would be excused if they chose not to reveal the purpose of the study, so as to counter the possibility of participants acting unnaturally during the research.¹⁵⁸ However, researchers would still have an obligation to inform participants

¹⁵⁷ Dennis Carter delivering a lecture during the University of Hull’s 2010 Easter School.

¹⁵⁸ Jamie McIntosh, Ethics in Social Science Research: Scholars Must Follow a Code of Ethics to Maintain Integrity. http://scientificethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/ethics_in_social_science_research#ixzz0icShoWdj Accessed 16 April 2010

about the use of deception no later than at the conclusion of the research. Deception is potentially dangerous because it may harm participants. Afflicting harm on someone may point to a failure by the researcher to respect human dignity and privacy. Eleanor Singer observes that failure to guarantee confidentiality is the most serious harm to which participants in social research are exposed.¹⁵⁹ Harm resulting from participating in research may be physical, social, psychological, emotional, financial or legal.¹⁶⁰ To put this ethical requirement into the context of this MPhil research, there always was a chance that participants in a politically-centred probe into the influence of the Internet in the 2008 election would risk victimisation from either members of the president's party or opposition cadres if the research findings were publicised without their consent. Insensitive exposure of attributes and opinions could lead to the political marginalisation of the participants, their friends or families, which is why various scholars including McIntosh argue that it must be avoided.

While informants and other research participants should be accorded the right to remain anonymous and to have their privacy and confidentiality respected, it is the researcher's responsibility to obtain informed consent from the respondents before the research process starts. The procedure involves an agreement reached with the participants to take part in the research after potential risks, benefits, purposes and uses of the research have been thoroughly explained to them. Prosser, Clark and Wiles argue that not only is

¹⁵⁹ Eleanor Singer, "Ethical issues in surveys", in Edith De Leeuw, Joop Hox and Don Dillman (eds), *International Handbook of Survey Methodology* (New York: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis, 2008) p. 90.

¹⁶⁰ Chris MacDonald and Nancy Walton, *Research in the Social Sciences & Humanities*. Available on the Internet <http://www.researchethics.ca/social-science-humanities.htm> Accessed 16 May 2010

gaining consent a key requirement to the process of getting good quality data, but it also helps develop and maintain a rapport of trust between a researcher and participants. Consent could come in various forms. It could be written or implied, meaning if someone for instance agrees to an interview and answers the questions, then implied consent has been automatically obtained. Prosser, Clark and Wiles argue, however, that consent may have different meanings in other cultures, and worse yet, it may be not be possible to gain consent from every participant in the research. Such a development leaves a researcher in the position of evaluating the need to continue with the research.

According to Resnik, publishing one's work should be in the interest of the advancement of research and scholarship, not the researcher's own career. That way, wasteful and duplicative publication should be avoided.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, there should be no economic exploitation of individual informants, translators or research participants. This principle aligns itself with the need to consider conflicts of interest when conducting research. For a researcher who is on the payroll of the opposition party in Zimbabwe, conducting research that involves the ruling party may attract issues involving conflict of interest. Equally important is the thorny issue of objectivity. Resnik suggests a researcher should avoid bias in all aspects of research including experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, personnel decisions, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required. Debriefing is another important element of the research ethical framework. According to Pattern, debriefing takes place when the researcher reviews the purposes and procedures used in the research

¹⁶¹ David B Rensik, What is Ethics in Research & Why is It Important? Available on the Internet <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis.cfm>

or shares research results with the participants.¹⁶² One key element of debriefing is an assurance that data will remain confidential, further stressing the importance of confidentiality in research.

I made sure that the right to privacy and informed consent was guaranteed to the interviewees and survey participants. Guaranteeing participants their right to informed consent also offers them the right to refuse being surveyed or interviewed. My research therefore ensured that participation in the interviews was purely on a voluntary basis. This procedure involves reaching an agreement with the participants after purposes, procedures, time period, risks and benefits of the research have been thoroughly explained to them. In a cover letter inviting candidates to participate, I explained how interview data was to be used, how harmful it could be for them if their privacy were not maintained and how I intended to safeguard their privacy. The cover letter also gave assurances that their privacy was to be respected as they would not necessarily need to give their full names and addresses, and all information gathered would likely not be shared publicly. However, I also explained to them that unless they had reservations, research data could be made available for use by other researchers.

The issue of confidentiality underpins all qualitative research, according to Jack Fraenkel.¹⁶³ It is also one element I strongly feel should be guaranteed to potential participants because it is highly likely most of them will seek those assurances before participating. The failure to respect the principle of confidentiality may expose their

¹⁶² Mildred L Patten, *Understanding Research Methods*, (Greendale CA:Pyrczak Publishing, 2005), p. 25.

¹⁶³ Fraenkel, Jack, *How to design and evaluate research in education*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1990), 43

political affiliation, potentially leading to political marginalisation back home. Since all interviews were audio-taped, I explained to them that transcripts would identify interviewees by coding and not by name to protect their privacy in the unlikely event of the tape or transcript getting lost or stolen. I also gave them a guarantee that I took the sole responsibility for transcribing the interviews, as some may feel uncomfortable if third parties were hired for the transcription process. Fraenkel is of the view that the return of interview transcripts to interviewees is another way of showing concern about protecting their interests. I also intend to return the transcripts as a sign of courtesy. They may choose whether to receive the transcripts or not. A cover letter also gave details on the interviewee's rights during and after the interview. These included their right not to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable as well as their right to abandon the interview whenever they felt it was appropriate to do so. It was also in their right to choose the interview location.

Angelica Orb, Laurel Eisenhauer and Dianne Wynaden argue that researchers have the obligation to anticipate the possible outcomes of an interview and to weigh both benefits and potential harm.¹⁶⁴ Research involving Zimbabwean politics is normally considered delicate among citizens both at home and abroad. For this reason, the ability to enlighten respondents with sufficient information is important as participants will base their decision to take part or not after evaluating the information they receive. It has to be clear to participants that the purpose of the research is to investigate the contribution played by the Internet in the Zimbabwean electioneering process of March 2008. The potential

¹⁶⁴ Angelica Orb, Laurel Eisenhauer and Dianne Wynaden, "Ethics in Qualitative Research", *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (2000), pp. 93-96.

benefits of conducting this research, the participants were informed, were to gain knowledge, understanding and insight concerning previously uncovered information on the contribution of Internet news sites to the Zimbabwean elections, thereby contributing to overall national political scholarship on the subject.

John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles argue that not only is gaining consent a key requirement to the process of getting good quality data, but it also helps develop and maintain a rapport of trust between a researcher and participants.¹⁶⁵ I believe developing trust is an important element in my research. Since some may have considered the topic sensitive, participants sought assurances that anything they said would not potentially endanger their lives or that of their relatives or friends back home, which is why establishing a good working relationship with them was crucial. They were, as I noted, most likely to share their true feelings and opinions when they felt comfortable and confident that there were no prospects of being targeted by political opponents back home. While attempting to determine the role that the Internet plays in national elections, the Zimbabwean case specifically analyses content on websites set up by its citizens in the Diaspora including *New Zimbabwe.com*.

¹⁶⁵ John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles, *Visual Research Ethics at Crossroads Realities Working Papers*, Working Paper 10, p. 10.

4 NEW MEDIA MEETS OLD MEDIA

A discussion of Zimbabwean politics would be incomplete without a comprehensive analysis of *The Herald's* relationship with the country's political fabric. The paper has historically enjoyed a monopoly, to the extent that it was claimed, "If you hear it, you get it from *The Herald*." This chapter examines *The Herald's* role in contributing to the longevity of Zimbabwe's ZANU PF party. Using a sample of stories from the paper's print and online editions, I trace the origins of the broadsheet's pro-ZANU PF editorial positions, analysing content and critically probing not only the motive but also the impact of the newspaper's allegiance to the revolutionary party. In a nation battered by state brutality and widening political differences, *The Herald* has been deployed as a semi-official organ, manipulating information to prop up Mugabe's regime. So important has the paper become over the years that its uncompromising, one-sided style of reporting has earned it praise among militant ZANU PF hardliners while attracting bitter denunciations from critics of the long-serving party.

One of the most commonly accepted norms to the success of democracy is the system's inseparable relationship to a free press. The media provides citizens with information essential to the decisions they make, especially when choosing the country's political leaders.¹⁶⁶ The media is a source of power that influences, controls, and promotes new standards in society and reinforces existing ones.¹⁶⁷ During his decades-long rule, Mugabe – deliberately or not – has had a dependable mouthpiece for disbursing information. While critics have dismissed it as a cheap propaganda platform, the availability of several weekly newspapers – including those fiercely critical of President Mugabe – has failed to hold back *The Herald's* market dominance. With the exception of the short-lived *Daily News*, which doubled its circulation from an initial 60,000 to 120,000 within a few months of its 1999 launch, *The Herald*, with 90,000 readers, has been the overwhelming force on the Zimbabwean media scene, argues Dumisani Moyo.¹⁶⁸ Neither did the arrival of several other post-independence political parties, including the MDC, shake the newspaper's support for ZANU PF.

4.1 *The Herald's* role in Zimbabwean politics

Propaganda, for the right or wrong reasons, is often associated with negative connotations. It is often perceived that propaganda techniques can only be employed by autocratic and despotic regimes. Nevertheless, it has been argued that practically all governments, including the so-called democratic ones, use some form of propaganda to

¹⁶⁶ Agner Fog "The supposed and the real role of media in a modern democracy" Working Paper, (2004) pp. 1-49.

¹⁶⁷ Ratan Mani Lal, Sushil K. Sharma and Nazim Ahmed, "Inherent barriers for mass media impact on Indian society" *International Journal of Business Research*, Vol 7. No. 6 (2007). pp. 47-63

¹⁶⁸ Dumisani Moyo "The 'independent press' and the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned Daily News" *Westminster Paper in Communication and Culture Special Issue*, (2005) pp. 109-128.

bolster their support from other nations and their citizenry.¹⁶⁹ In its quest to discredit and disqualify President Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe, one may argue that the British government also used propaganda techniques. Repeatedly labelling President Mugabe a dictator who cares nothing for his people helped Britain convince its allies in the European Union, Australia, Canada, the US and New Zealand to impose sanctions against the Zimbabwean leader and his closest associates in 2002.

While *The Herald* does not hide its allegiance to ZANU PF, it offers an alternative to the coverage of Zimbabwean politics, which since the launch of the land reform programme in 2000 has largely been biased against the government of Zimbabwe. While the foreign and independent media has sought to delegitimise Mugabe's rule because of perceived land reform injustices and allegations of elections rigging, *The Herald* maintained its national ideologist stance. It echoes the government in blaming Zimbabwe's woes on a coalition of local and international foes including White farmers, the British government and the opposition MDC party.

A newspaper must be judged for its credibility and reputation as an honest provider of reliable news. Yet without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but from governments, lawmakers, and neighbouring towns and cities. *The Herald's* approach to reporting, I believe, has damaged its standard as a harbinger of fair-minded, unbiased coverage of news and events. Indeed, the newspaper often fails to provide an accurate picture of Zimbabwean news. However, as Fog would

¹⁶⁹ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, "The Age of propaganda: Everyday use and abuse of persuasion" W H Freeman & Co (1991) pp. 4-19.

argue, how different is it from other media, which adopt an editorial line aligned with their advertisers or sponsors?¹⁷⁰ If *The Herald* has failed to provide a fair and balanced coverage of developments in Zimbabwe, has anybody been able to achieve that goal elsewhere?

A closer analysis of the newspaper's ownership helps explain the paper's bias towards ZANU PF. The newspaper is majority-owned by Zimbabwe Newspapers Group, or Zimpapers, which holds 51.09 percent of the shares. The remaining shares are owned by the nation's leading financial firm, Old Mutual, and several other government-connected private companies.¹⁷¹ It is not surprising, then, that *The Herald* would take orders from its masters. Yet it is the newspaper's failure to give a platform to a variety of voices and its deliberate labelling of critics as traitors that help undermine its authority. By choosing to abandon impartial and objective reporting, instead maintaining an unswerving nationalistic pro-ZANU PF agenda, the newspaper has ignored a fundamental ethic of modern journalism. Examples abound. One could argue that the ubiquitous barrage of criticism levelled against the MDC for supporting the European Union's "targeted" sanctions ignores ZANU PF's actions that prompted the sanctions, including allegations of gross human rights violations brought by independent players such as the United Nations.¹⁷² ZANU PF politicians – even those born after independence – are addressed as "Comrade", to reflect their supposed credentials as veteran bush-war fighters. MDC

¹⁷⁰ Agner Fog "The supposed and the real role of media in a modern democracy" Working Paper, (2004) pp. 1-49.

¹⁷¹ Open Society Institute Media Programme Publication (2009) Public Broadcasting in Africa Series

¹⁷² UN-commissioned report was critical of Operation Murambatsvina or Drive out trash, a drive of mass evictions. The author read the BBC website report "Zimbabwe slum demolitions continue" on the BBC website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4715635.stm>, Accessed 9 September 2009.

officials, by contrast, are referred to as “Mr.,” including those who fought in the 1970s guerrilla wars. *The Herald* thus measures patriotism by party allegiance.

The Herald's relationship with the government is symbiotic. While faithfully disseminating the ruling party's political, social and economical agenda, it has been guaranteed exclusivity to news, ensuring that it “scoops” independent journalists and maintains its journalistic edge against competitors. President Mugabe historically travels with a reporter from *The Herald* on most of his foreign trips. This favour is not extended to journalists from the private media, according the newspaper unchallenged access to the President. Thus, while the reports may be dismissed as manipulative propaganda, they may actually be informative, despite the fact that the objective, like most forms of propaganda, is to create a favourable public response. Though its content is one-sided, the paper has long been a vital and usually credible source of Zimbabwean news. For instance, while various foreign media incorrectly reported that President Mugabe had left the country in the aftermath of his first-round 2008 defeat to Tsvangirai, *The Herald* had it right: the president had not left the country.

4.1.1 Historical Overview

Among several challenges faced by any new nation, Eric Hobsbawm introduces the question of loyalty to, and identification with, the state and ruling system.¹⁷³ A carefully crafted ZANU PF art of dominance has seen the nationalist party controlling Zimbabwe's

¹⁷³ Hobsbawm, Eric. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 23-45.

political landscape uninterrupted over the past three decades. *The Herald's* pro-state stance can be traced back to the heyday of its predecessor, *The Rhodesian Herald*, which was then a powerful propaganda platform for the Rhodesian Front in 1963, according to Elaine Windrich.¹⁷⁴ The patent control of the press is a deep-seated characteristic of the legacy of colonialism in post-colonial Africa.¹⁷⁵ Determined to discontinue foreign ownership of the press, President Mugabe's government created the state-controlled Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), a watchdog that eventually took overall ownership of *The Herald* and its sister papers. The Trust was established amid assurances of a free media, with the then Information Minister Nathan Shamuyarira commenting: "Government remains committed to the freedom of press as stated in the Election manifesto. We will neither publish nor edit any of the newspapers."¹⁷⁶ Those pledges would become history a few years later, prompted by what appears to be the government's determination to keep a grip on power. Nyahunzvi concedes that the formation of ZMMT in 1981, just a year after gaining independence from Britain, kick-started a string of problems for the ambitious young media houses. Among them, he notes, were fears from ordinary citizens about the potential use of newspapers for state propaganda.

There is a wealth of evidence to show *The Herald* has been fronting ZANU PF's political ideologies since its inception in 1981. Political rivalry pitting Mugabe's ZANU and old

¹⁷⁴ Windrich, Elaine "The Mass Media in the Struggle for Zimbabwe: Censorship and Propaganda under Rhodesian Front Rule" Gweru: Mambo Press, Mambo Occasional Papers, Socio-Economic Series 15 (1981)

¹⁷⁵ Stanford Mukasa, *Press and Politics in Zimbabwe* in M'Bayo, R. T. *et al.* (eds) *Press and Politics in Africa* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 2000)

¹⁷⁶ Tim M. Nyahunzvi "The Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust: An experiment that failed" *Promoting Communication for Social Change* <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/20012-media-scenarios-in-southern-africa/742-The-Zimbabwe-Mass-Media-Trust-An-experiment-that-failed.html> Access on 5 March 2010

foe Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union spilled over into the state media newsrooms. Nkomo claimed editors either ignored or twisted his speeches following a government decree restricting his speeches to parliament. Furthermore, Willie Musarurwa, who in 1981 became the first Black editor of *The Herald's* sister paper *The Sunday Mail*, was fired for his connections with Nkomo's ZAPU although some scholars have argued that his independent editorial line cost him his job.¹⁷⁷ Even though several editors may have graced the nation's oldest newspaper, nothing seems to bring them together more than their unbending support for government policies. Those who refused to toe the ZANU PF line have paid a heavy price. Both Nyahunzvi and Chikuhwa point to Henry Muradzikwa, the paper's former editor, who was removed from his job over a story that claimed that 60 Zimbabwean students had been deported from Cuba for unspecified "health reasons". The story implied that the students had AIDS, which was seen as potentially damaging to Zimbabwe's relations with the communist island. With its monopoly during the first years of independence, *The Herald* undoubtedly had to address an array of challenges that included serving a racially and ethnically divided nation fresh from the horrors of war. Satisfying the believers of press freedom could not have been tougher. However, it appears the lack of independent media players at independence proved detrimental to the overall government media policy over the years.

While Makasa argues that ZANU PF's media control was tested in the 1990s with the rise of weekly newspapers such as the *Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard* and the *Daily News*, it goes without saying that *The Herald's* political and social influence has remained steadfast. The *Daily News*, the first independent Zimbabwean daily newspaper,

¹⁷⁷ Jacob Chikuhwa, *A Crisis of Governance: Zimbabwe* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004) pp. 6-21.

did not last long, falling victim to a catalogue of new media laws introduced by the government under Moyo's five-year reign as information minister. Moyo's period in office witnessed one of the most unalleviated propaganda campaigns in postcolonial Africa.¹⁷⁸ The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), as noted in Chapter 1, introduced a rigorous licensing system for media outlets, restricting foreign ownership of the media and prolonging *The Herald's* monopoly since the other privately run newspapers were weeklies. Despite their influence, they could not challenge *The Herald's* circulation figures. Intimidation against journalists regardless of their political affiliation has been commonplace in Zimbabwe, but working for the independent press has been especially daunting. Examples of state-sanctioned repression and intimidation of the private media can be seen in the 2007 incident involving veteran journalist Bill Saidi. A soldier, unhappy with an article published in Saidi's *Standard* newspaper, left an envelope with a bullet and a handwritten note reading, "What is this? Watch your step"¹⁷⁹

Despite its fierce support for ZANU PF, there have been several occasions when the newspaper attacked the government. *The Herald*, Chikuhwa reckons, bitterly criticised the government in the aftermath of the December 1997 national protest and the food riots a year later. Also according to Mukasa, police brutality, which rarely gets attention in *The Herald*, won headlines after teargas hit the newspaper's headquarters during the 1998 disturbances, prompting editor Tommy Sithole to make a rare public attack on the police.

¹⁷⁸ Ezra Chitando "In the beginning was the land': the appropriation of religious themes in political discourses in Zimbabwe" *Africa* **75** (2) (2005) pp. 220-239.

¹⁷⁹ "Charamba's comments on Saidi rile journalists," 13 February 2007. http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com/print.php?art_id=1749 Accessed 14 September 2010.

This extraordinary criticism should not be taken as a sign of balanced journalism. The newspaper has always supported ZANU PF. In the unlikely event of the party being exiled as the opposition party, there is no evidence to suggest the paper is prepared to drop its loyalty. Its roots are deeply enmeshed in the revolution against colonialism, and that identity is likely to remain its characteristic feature. President Mugabe's credibility as a freedom fighter, *The Herald* is keen to remind its readers, is there for everyone to see. At a World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002, Mugabe was treated to elated applause for his "braveness" in telling Tony Blair to keep his Britain while he kept "his little Zimbabwe". Mugabe's popularity, readers are told, is based on his desire to see colonial injustices corrected. This is without a doubt a non-negotiable stance shared by Mugabe, *The Herald* and their supporters.

4.1.2 Discourses: Representation and coverage

Race plays a major role in the newspaper's coverage of news. President Mugabe has on a few occasions openly declared his dislike of White people.¹⁸⁰ *The Herald* has followed his cue. That antipathy, however, is not extended to the country's White Olympic gold winner, Kristy Coventry. Mugabe has declared: "What we hate is not the color of their skins but the evil that emanates from them."¹⁸¹ And the newspaper referred to Coventry as a "golden girl", to whom Mugabe gave a diplomatic passport. Coventry's sporting heroics offers *The Herald* a chance to portray the Zimbabwean government's "liberal"

¹⁸⁰ "Robert Mugabe: White Farmers Must Vacate Their Land" Associated Press, 28 February, 2009 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/28/robert-mugabe-white-farmer_n_170752.html Accessed 5 June 2010.

¹⁸¹ Robert Mugabe Speech in Harlem, New York (September 2000), in Michael Radu, "State of Disaster", *National Review*, 27 May 2002.

policy towards a multiracial society.¹⁸² In contrast, another White sportsman, Andy Flower was lambasted for teaming up with a Black teammate in openly denouncing President Mugabe during a cricket match in Harare February 2003.¹⁸³ Equally interesting is the way White ZANU PF financial supporters John Bredenkamp and Billy Rautenbach, appear in the paper. The two businessmen are subject to unfriendly scrutiny and sometimes to scornful attack in the Western press. But *The Herald* represents them as Zimbabwean businessmen with the country's interests at heart. Using these few examples of White Zimbabweans sympathetic to the regime, *The Herald* seeks to discount allegations of anti-White antagonism by the government.

The Herald sees itself as the perfect answer to Africa's often negative and contrived image in the Western and independent media. It accuses Western media outlets with correspondents based in the region and local independent newspapers of distorting and misrepresenting facts about Zimbabwe. Bashing the MDC for its alleged connections to the independent media, *The Herald* asks on its opinion page: "The question is, are the media in reality mouthpieces of political powers and governments for which they express sympathy?"¹⁸⁴ While *The Herald* claims bias by other newspapers against ZANU PF, it does not address charges that its own reporting is slanted towards meeting coverage expectations of the party. But can that be quantified? A sample of 25 political stories in February 2008 prior to national elections showed that ZANU PF received

¹⁸² In *The Herald* edition of 30 August 2008, Coventry, a White Zimbabwean, is referred to as the "Daughter of Zimbabwe".

¹⁸³ In *The Herald* edition of 23 February 2003, an opinion writer attacked Andy Flower and Henry Olonga as the two were warned by cricket authorities in the country that they risked sacking if they wore their "death of democracy" armbands.

¹⁸⁴ *The Herald*, 14 December 2009.

overwhelmingly favourable coverage, with 17 stories profiling, reporting or openly professing a slanted opinion towards ZANU PF candidates. There was minimal coverage of campaign rallies for the opposition parties during this period.

A close look at headlines in *The Herald* also discloses an ideological bent towards ZANU PF. “Annan forced to abort visit” is a headline in a story suggesting the former UN Secretary-General would not visit Zimbabwe for a first-hand examination of the country’s clean-up exercise. Annan, who had been accused by several pro-government commentators of siding with the US and Britain on the issue, possibly handed the party some degree of victory by calling off the trip, which Mugabe had previously called “politicized”.¹⁸⁵ Another headline, “Guarantee Safety of Scribes, MDC Leadership Told”, appears to put the blame on the opposition party after two journalists covering a rally were allegedly threatened.¹⁸⁶ A headline of this nature intended for the ZANU PF leadership would not find space in *The Herald*, as it not only betrays the interests of the party also potentially exposes it to readership scrutiny.

4.1.3. Conceptual Framework

In his article on “patriotic journalism”, Terrance Ranger argues that hate journalism has flourished in controlled media for many years.¹⁸⁷ Die-hards in President Mugabe’s government view the state monopoly of media as an effective tool to sell ZANU PF’s viewpoint while enforcing its patriotic agenda. After nearly 90 years of colonial and

¹⁸⁵ *The Herald*, 26 September 2005.

¹⁸⁶ *The Herald*, 22 November 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Terrance Ranger, “The rise of patriotic journalism in Zimbabwe and its possible implications”, Conference paper, Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture (University of Westminster, London), Special Issue, 2005 pp. 6-17.

settler rule, it is understandable that nationalism and patriotism were paramount topics at independence in 1980. However, the two concepts remain on today's agenda thanks largely to *The Herald*, which is keen to promote values endorsed by ZANU PF. In a weekly column that appears each Saturday in *The Herald*, a government official using the pseudo-by-line "Nathaniel Manheru" lashes out at President Mugabe's critics. The column introduced by Moyo, which enjoys a fair amount of popularity, has never had kind words for anyone who disagrees with the government. Its approach is a deliberate division of the world into two racial pillars, namely "Black" and "White." Anyone who disagrees with the Zimbabwean government is seen as siding with the White colonialists. Others are treated as patriots or nationalists.

Despite Western sanctions, Manheru portrays a picture of hope, arguing that Zimbabwe does not need to make friends outside the developing world. His column leaves little room for any intermediate position other than "for us or against us". Here's what he had to say on Kofi Annan's departure from the UN's top office in 2006:

In Shona, Annan means "who is he with"? One last word for the United Nations. Kofi Annan is an African, and may the good African Lord be with him in his last days in office. Zimbabwe's land question started in 2000, a good six years before the end of his term. He had lots of time to come, and indeed he came to the region countable times between then and now. Kofi Annan is an African who knows the West only too well. After all, the West is in his home, so to speak.

According to Marxist media theory, the media is a “means of production” that is used by the ruling class to deny or defuse alternative ideas. *The Herald*’s mission is evident on many of its pages. *The Herald* does not only “tell the truth” but also ensures that alternative versions are discredited. The story headlined “Tsvangirai Begs for VP Post”, does not only not tell the truth, it also denies other options being suggested by the rumour mill.¹⁸⁸ The message is clear: Zimbabwe may be facing plenty of economic, political and social challenges, but in Mugabe, it has the only tried and tested leader to deliver.¹⁸⁹

In Gramsci’s hegemony theory (1971), the intellectual community plays an important role in the success of hegemonic domination. Exerting government control over the people is impossible without intellectuals. In the case of Zimbabwe, academics regularly contribute to *The Herald* trumpeting nationalist positions. Among them are professors Tafataona Mahoso, known to his opponents as “the Media Hangman”, and Vimbai Chivaura, both educated in the US where they received doctorates. The majority of Mugabe’s cabinet ministers and close associates hold degrees from Western universities, where they also send their children. Yet, their articles or comments in *The Herald* are decidedly anti-Western. The paper was scathing in response to Australia’s decision to deport the children of ZANU PF officials under the sanctions, denouncing it as a racist state.¹⁹⁰ Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his predecessor Tony Blair are portrayed as the main culprits responsible for Zimbabwe’s isolation. *The Herald*,

¹⁸⁸ “Tsvangirai Begs for VP Post” *The Herald*, 8 April 2008

¹⁸⁹ “Zimbabwe: Zim not for Sale” *The Herald*, 19 April 2008

¹⁹⁰ “Tsvangirai thanks paymasters for sanctions”, *The Herald*, 28 October 2007.

which makes no apologies for its support of ZANU PF, has always maintained this view, arguing in its 22 September 2007 issue:

Communicating with fellow Europeans through the British press (Brown) clearly indicated British diplomacy had come unstuck. Clearly British diplomacy has foundered in its backyard, with Brown adopting for the rest of Europe Blair's odious megaphone diplomacy against Zimbabwe.

As noted by Frankfurt school stalwarts Adorno and Horkheimer, the media has the ability to transform enlightenment into barbarism.¹⁹¹ True to their view that economic prosperity breeds mass deception, *The Herald* has used Zimbabwe's once affluent economy to foster a formidable relationship with the country's ruling elite. As the only daily available in the country, it certainly is a widely-read paper, powerfully delivering Mugabe's message of hope, political independence and economic prosperity. When annual inflation was topping over 231 million percent,¹⁹² *The Herald* still chose to defend the country's economic policies, dedicating pages of praise to central bank governor Gideon Gono, the man critics accuse of bringing down the country's economy. The newspaper also ran articles in which Zimbabwe was allegedly commended by its southern African neighbours for pioneering "innovative economic policies".¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Brian Neve "Theoretical Approaches to Mass Media"
<http://people.bath.ac.uk/hssbpn/theories%20of%20media.htm> Accessed 7 December 2010.

¹⁹² "Zimbabwe inflation hit 231 percent", *Associated Press*, 9 October 2008.

¹⁹³ "Zimbabwe hailed over economic policies", *The Herald* 14 October 2008.

Perhaps indicative of the anger *The Herald* aroused among its critics, the paper's online version was brought down in May 2008 by an unknown hacker.¹⁹⁴ That happened after the vicious election campaign in which dozens of opposition supporters were beaten or killed, in a well-documented campaign of violence.¹⁹⁵ Victims included Harare deputy mayor Emmanuel Chiroto, whose wife Abigail was reportedly kidnapped and killed by suspected ruling-party militias.¹⁹⁶ *The Herald* stood its ground, reporting pro-ZANU PF stories while taking its usual line of attacking the opposition as a Western puppet, diverting attention from coverage over alleged killings.

Chief among its editorial lines is the continued endorsement of the land reforms. While critics argue that it is unjustified to hand over seized farms to Black "war veterans" based on their war credentials rather than their agricultural expertise, *The Herald* sees no problem with that. It views the reform as enhancing economic expansion.

Without its political steadfastness, it could be argued that Mugabe wouldn't have managed to stay in power for 28 years. When the government lost the referendum that sought to give Mugabe more powers, *The Herald* was unapologetic for its pre-election pro-Mugabe stand. Faced with new Western-sponsored hostility, Mugabe turned to the paper for much-needed support in the 2005 national elections. The MDC accused *The Herald* of refusing its campaign materials. As long as Zimbabwe remains a one-party state dominated by ZANU PF, *The Herald's* disappearance from the Zimbabwean political arena cannot be foretold. Its determination to sell ZANU PF's ideologies has

¹⁹⁴ "Zimbabwe official newspaper hacked", *Reuters*, 12 May 2008.

¹⁹⁵ "Zimbabwe elections: Four activists found dead, says opposition", *The Guardian*, 19 June 2008.

¹⁹⁶ "Harare mayor in hiding after Mugabe thugs kill wife", *The Independent*, 19 June 2008.

reaped rewards, with the country's educated elite apparently buying most of Mugabe's line of thinking. The paper offers no alternative to Mugabe.

To *The Herald* Mugabe has become a cult-like figure, incapable of error, victimized by a Western distortion of history. But *The Herald* cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. It is regularly used to sell the ZANU PF brand. It is a weapon in the party's tactics to preserve power among all sectors of the society, as is the party's relationship with war veterans and the educated elite. As the newspaper's majority shareholder, the government may seek to justify its control of the newspaper merely on grounds of its overpowering investments in the company, which gives it absolute decision-making powers.

4.2 Perspectives on participatory journalism in Zimbabwe

Non-professional media actors, empowered by digitally networked technologies, are changing the media landscape in the West. In contrast, this is less obvious in the case of sub-Saharan Africa. Recent years, however, have seen the emergence of a diverse range of citizen media in Africa, employing mobile phones, blogs, micro blogs, video-sharing platforms, and mapping. Through observational research and extensive interviews with selected experts and citizen journalists, as well as a review of the existing research, this study aims to critically analyse current and emerging patterns and trends in African citizen journalism. Specifically, it will explore the Zimbabwean case, where citizen journalism appears uniquely non-integrated with traditional reporting, as journalists continue to question the ethical basis for commercially engaging in "unverified" journalism. While others like the South Africa-based *Mail and Guardian's* "Thought Leader" continue to coerce citizen participation, evidence on the ground shows that

conventional media in Zimbabwe is still sceptical about the prospects of embedding the works of citizen journalists into their mainstream packages. However, operating on their own, others like kubatana.net have thrived, further underscoring the perceived democratic value of citizen journalism. The research endeavours to examine the success and overall potential of Zimbabwe's blogosphere and hopefully establish the notion that digital technology-enabled citizen journalism, though still restricted to a subset of African countries, provides a powerful counter-narrative to professional media that are often constrained, or even controlled, by national governments.

The pervasive availability of digital technologies has given non-professional audiences unmatched access to the tools of media production and dissemination¹⁹⁷ Africa has not been spared the rapid emergence and seamless exposition of new media technologies, which have served as springboards for social and democratic change.¹⁹⁸ This chapter seeks to explain the extent to which Zimbabweans are actively engaged in participatory journalism, elaborating on their purposes and methods of participation before evaluating the overall impact of their involvement. Two key methodologies were employed in this research, which not only sought to deconstruct the Western notions of news, but also provide an assessment of different forms of contesting participation-based journalism initiatives and narratives in an African setting. Using observational research conducted in remote Zimbabwean villages and extensive interviews with media practitioners and bloggers living in the capital Harare, I argue that the concept of participatory journalism is not new to Zimbabwe. I also categorise the participation into two camps, namely the

¹⁹⁷ Brian Loader, "The Citizens' Voice in a Wired World" (see n. 10 above).

¹⁹⁸ S. Craig Watkins, *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2009), p. 18.

traditional African and the Western-sponsored form of participatory journalism. Observational research was carried in March 2008 during a one-month field trip to Murewa, a farming district located roughly 78km north of the capital Harare. A follow-up visit was also made in July 2011. Interviews with professional and non-professional journalism actors were conducted during the second trip. The two-way methodology directly allowed me to elect a comparative study of behaviours and attitudes in participatory journalism from both a Western and traditional African context.

4.2.1 Review of existing body of research

Often referred to as “citizen journalism”, “open source journalism”,¹⁹⁹ or “user generated content”,²⁰⁰ participatory journalism embodies mass-media-related content produced, published and distributed by non-professional journalists for mostly free consumption. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis have been credited with coining the term “participatory journalism”.²⁰¹ While examining its relationship with social movements, John Downing called it “alternative media”.²⁰² In his attempt to define participatory journalism, Joseph Daniel Lasica argued that “when small independent online publications and collaborative news sites with an amateur staff perform original reporting on community affairs, few would contest that they're engaged in journalism.”²⁰³ An element of dynamic

199 Clyde H Bentley, C.H., *et al.* “The Citizen Journalist Movement: MyMissourian as a case study,” paper presented to the Communication Technology and Policy Division AEJMC Annual Convention, San Antonio, Texas, 10-13 August, 2005.

200 Wolfgang Schweiger and Oliver Quiring “User-generated content on mass media web sites --just a kind of interactivity or something completely different?” Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, New York, 2006.

201 Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, *We media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information* (Reston, VA: Media Center at the American Press Institute, 2003), p. 7.

202 John Downing *Radical media: The political experience of alternative communication* (Boston, MA: South End Press,) 1984.

²⁰³ Joseph Daniel Lasica “What is participatory journalism?” *Online Journalism Review*, <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1060217106.php> Accessed 1 October 2011.

commitment is central to understanding participatory journalism with Alfred Hermida declaring “the underlying assumption behind the notion of participatory journalism is a shift from passive consumption to active engagement.”²⁰⁴ Bowman and Willis define participatory journalism as an “act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information.”²⁰⁵ But others like Hayley Watson believe “there is little consensus over what constitutes citizen journalism.”²⁰⁶

Joyce Nip sees a difference between citizen and participatory journalism, asserting that under participatory journalism, non-professionals engage trained journalists to produce content, while citizen journalism is the work of untrained professionals working independently.²⁰⁷ Nico Carpentier points to a need to make a clear distinction between participation “in” the media and “through” the media.²⁰⁸ But similarities can be drawn between content from traditional outlets and that from citizen journalism, as was shown by Wilson Lowrey and Jenn Burleson Mackay’s study of blogs, which concluded that “topics and information in news-oriented blogs are similar to those in traditional news content, at times uncomfortably similar.”²⁰⁹ Tom Johnson furthers the argument by

²⁰⁴ Alfred Hermida “The Active Recipient: Participatory Journalism Through the Lens of the Dewey-Lippmann Debate,” Paper presented at the International Symposium on Online Journalism 2011, University of Texas Austin

²⁰⁵ Bowman and Willis, *We media*:(see n. 201 above), p. 9.

²⁰⁶ Hayley Watson “Preconditions for Citizen Journalism: A Sociological Assessment” *Sociological Research Online* Vol. 16 No. 3 <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/3/6.html> Accessed 18 October 2011.

²⁰⁷ Joyce Nip, “Exploring the second phase of public journalism,” *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 7 No.2 (2006), pp. 212-236.

²⁰⁸ Nico Carpentier (ed.) *Media technologies and democracy in an enlarged Europe. The intellectual work of the 2007 European media and communication doctoral summer school* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2007).

²⁰⁹ Wilson Lowrey and Jenn Burleson Mackay, “Journalism and Blogging: A test of a model of occupational competition” *Journalism Practice* Vol. 2, No.1, (2008), pp.64-81.

claiming blogs rely “heavily on traditional media for information gathering”.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, citizen journalism is redefining the whole essence of journalism, as the “wisdom of the crowds” has been shown to be more empowering than that of experts, such as reporters and editors, in terms of making good decisions and finding solutions to societal problems.²¹¹

Furthermore, the concept of citizen journalism is “literally as old as a rock” argues Clyde H. Bentley, who traces its origins to Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, whose 85 essays were published in 1787.²¹² While Bentley’s argument traces the traditional foundations of citizen journalism in the American context, my research sought to solidify and justify the viewpoint that participatory journalism was already in existence in Zimbabwe long before the arrival of the British colonialists in the 1880s. Regrettably, the only notable distinction between what is frequently considered news or journalism in the West and what was practiced in pre-colonial Africa, and particularly Zimbabwe, stems from the fact that no one has portrayed the traditional one-to-one or one-to-many exchange of information among Africans as “news”, since such a conclusion may not be in line with the Western conceptualisation of news.

Technically reinforcing Bentley’s argument is the view that if the University of Missouri opened the doors to the world’s first journalism school in 1908, it then means that anyone

²¹⁰ Tom Johnson “Agenda Setting in the Internet Age,” (2009), <http://mediaconvergence.org/blog/?p=163> Accessed 1 October 2011.

²¹¹ James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. 5.

²¹² Clyde H Bentley, “Citizen Journalism: Back to the feature?” Discussion paper prepared for the Carnegie Knight Conference on the Future of Journalism, Cambridge, MA June 20-21, 2008.

engaged in professional journalism work before that period could be considered a “citizen journalist” on the grounds that they did not receive any formal professional training. Kirsten Johnson and Susan Weidenbeck propose that lack of professional training is the central characteristic of citizen journalism.²¹³ The Internet has arguably been the key precipitating factor in the development of participatory journalism; “online journalist” is presently an acceptable professional term in journalism practice.²¹⁴ Hence, technological innovation has enhanced the work of citizen journalists, even though the concept is not entirely new. While scholars such as Frankson Banda consider the ICT revolution as a stepping-stone to improving democratic and developmental institutions on the continent,²¹⁵ others like Eli N. Noam are less optimistic. Whilst acknowledging the Internet’s mediating role in facilitating direct access to public officials, Noam is keen to remind us that “only a few messages will get through”.²¹⁶ For Noam, the Internet disconnects as much as it connects. In Africa, others argue that the historically negative depiction of the continent in the traditional Western press is the main driving force behind the surging need for alternative sources of media.²¹⁷ In its present form, the concept of participatory journalism is rather more appealing to those citizens opposed to the institutionalised coverage of African issues in the Western press because it offers an enabling platform for participants to air and share likeminded views and opinions.

²¹³ Kirsten Johnson, and Susan Weidenbeck, “Enhancing perceived credibility of Citizen Journalism Websites,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 2009, pp. 332-348.

²¹⁴ Robert Hernandez, “Online Journalism or Journalism Online. There is a difference” *Online Journalism Review*, 2010 <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/webjournalist/201009/1885/> Accessed 1 October 2011.

²¹⁵ Frankson Banda, *Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa: An Exploratory Study* (Grahamstown, South Africa: Highway Africa, 2010).

²¹⁶ Eli H Noam, “Why the Internet is bad for Democracy,” *Communications of AMC* Vol 48 No. 10, pp. 57-58, 2002.

²¹⁷ Bruce Mutsvairo and Lisa Kleeven, “Seeking self-determinism through social media: A critical analysis of representation issues for Zimbabwean youths,” Paper presented at the International conference on youth and media (University of Westminster, London, England, March 12-13, 2011).

Participatory journalism is pioneering new ways of content development and content sharing, as suggested by Dan Gillmor: “For the first time in history, at least in the developed world, anyone with a computer and Internet connection could own a press. Just about anyone could make the news.”²¹⁸ Gillmor’s assessment, which is based on the Western conceptualisation of the news discourse, leaves several questions unanswered. What is news? Who determines what news is? Should news only be technologically deterministic as proposed by Marshall McLuhan? Can news still be conveyed or disseminated through any other formats outside the dominant means of print, broadcasting and new media attributes such as the Internet and mobile telephony? Geographic location does not hinder the production of news, with Randy Reddick and Elliot King suggesting the Internet allows journalists to “do their jobs better no matter where they are physically located.”²¹⁹ Yet several factors have led to the indispensable spread of participatory journalism. Ben Scott argues that for the commercial press, the need to make profits has eclipsed journalism’s traditional roles in healthy democracies, concluding, “it has become increasingly clear that the public service mission of democratic journalism has been abandoned by the commercial press in favour of expanding profit margins.”²²⁰ For Stuart Allan, “the spontaneous actions of ordinary

²¹⁸ Dan Gillmor, *We The Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (California: O’Reilly Media, 2004), p. 24.

²¹⁹ Randy Reddick and Elliot King, *The Online Journalist*, (Ft. Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace & Co, , 1997), p. 4.

²²⁰ Ben Scott, “A contemporary history of digital journalism.” *Television & New Media*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2005, pp. 89-126.

citizens compelled to adopt the role of a journalist in order to participate in the making of online news”, is central to the rise of the concept of citizen journalism.²²¹

4.2.2 Conceptual and theoretical discourses

Defining what constitutes “news” can be highly subjective. James Glen Stovall defines news as “information that journalists believe is important or interesting for their audiences.”²²² Admitting it is a difficult concept to define, Pamela Shoemaker simply says news is “what comes in the newspaper everyday.”²²³ Taking a cue from Harold Evans’ definition suggesting, “news is people. It’s people talking and doing”,²²⁴ I defined news as the conveyance of previously unknown information to individuals and masses. This also means that gossip, or a professor introducing a new concept to students, could both be seen as providing news as well. The universally accepted characteristics of news include the fact that it needs to be relevant to a large number of people while being timely and sometimes unusual. In line with Shoemaker’s argument, the providers of news, including television, radio and newspaper outlets, take on an intermediary role of seeking, editing and publishing news for the readers. Apart from having an audience following, they are also widely considered knowledge providers, argues Inge Brinkman.²²⁵ Most of these agents seek to make profit for their services and are also guided by a set of ethics. Similarly, in the traditional African setting, news agents, as was the case in the Murewa villages, are either paid or unpaid servants who convey news to

²²¹ Stuart Allan *Online News: Journalism and the Internet*. Maidenhead and New York: Open University Press, p. 10.

²²² James Glen Stovall, *Journalism: Who, what, when, where, why and how* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 2005)

²²³ Pamela Shoemaker, “News and newsworthiness: A commentary”, *Communications*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (2006), pp. 105-111.

²²⁴ Beth Whittaker “Shout it out” Viva Communications, 2010, p.8.

²²⁵ Inge Brinkman, “What is News?” Guest lecture delivered at the Amsterdam University College, 3 October 2011.

the villagers on behalf of the headman, for instance. They deliver news through word of mouth, a less popular medium in the technologically-rich West. After news has been delivered in one homestead, the family members take on the role of informing others within their community about the new development. This way, word spreads speedily. Inaccuracies are widespread, as also frequently occurs in the technologically-enabled news on TV, print or digital mediums.

Zimbabweans are accustomed to using word of mouth as an important source of news. As indicated earlier on in Figure 8, word of mouth is shown to be the most popular way of obtaining information for Zimbabweans living in the UK, where they certainly have an extensive pool of news options to choose from.

Exploring the historical origins of news, contemporary media scholar Melissa Wall recognises the assumption that “news itself can be said to have existed since people needed to exchange information between villages or tribes.”²²⁶ Des Wilson, making a case for traditional forms of communication, argues that customary African communication methods are mostly considered antagonistic and inferior to modern ones developed in the West.²²⁷ That assumption is not always accurate. When a funeral occurred, one village headman told me, it would not be broadcast on TV or published in a newspaper, yet mourners would gather literally within hours of the initial announcement. While his subjects would deliver the news to selected groups of villagers and the word

²²⁶ Melissa Wall, “Blogs as black market journalism: A new paradigm for news” *Journal of Education, Community and Values*, Vol. 11, No 10,

²²⁷ Des Wilson “Traditional Systems of Communication in Modern African development: An Analytical Viewpoint” *Africa Media Review* Vol. 1 No. 2, 1987, pp. 87-104.

would spread from there, the use of membranophonic drums and aerophones was a more effective way of grabbing the villagers' attention. Villagers are traditionally familiar with a range of sounds and their meanings and hence will be aware of an upcoming funeral.

No million-dollar technology is used here, yet news is meticulously delivered. Also, the practice of seeking medical or psychological treatment from witch doctors is common in several African cultures. It could also be argued traditional healers "break the news" about their clients' source of misfortune, for instance, in the same way a weather presenter would warn viewers about an impending typhoon on TV. The only difference is that in the Western context, seeking medical assistance would not be classified as "news." Nor do witch doctors consider themselves newsmen as such, even though they unknowingly deliver important news just like a commercial TV channel. The only problem with calling this "citizen journalism" might be the fact that the notion of "citizenship" could be applicable to every profession, including "citizen professor" or "citizen lawyer". I consider citizen journalism an informal version of the profession, and there can be no better place to find unofficial versions of professions than in Zimbabwe. Moreover, to understand citizen journalism in the African traditional context, one needs to accept the perception that it is not a profession but rather a practice, which has and will always be available for everyone to pursue.

In the West, news and advertising depend heavily on each other. In traditional African communication, advertising is present in many different forms. In Murewa, villagers use tree stumps and mountain paintings to showcase their products. Vendors selling products

also perform door-to-door advertising. Most of these vendors also convey news. Singing and drumming, as was the case with Inge Brinkman's findings in remote southern Angolan villages, also play a crucial role in disseminating news or advertising events. In Murewa, I have attended several ancestor-appeasing services known in local language as *bira*. Nobody is allowed to sleep on this day and villagers sing and dance in honour of the deceased. They also listen to the music of *mbira* or the thump piano, as well as the rattling sounds of *hosho*, a round-shaped gourd filled with kernels.

According to A. J. Liebling, "the function of the press is to inform, but its role is to make money."²²⁸ This assertion also explains the reason behind the near-collapse of journalism we are witnessing. Journalism is in crisis, hence the confusion over what exactly constitutes news. It is for that reason that citizen journalism has gained momentum, with others seeing it as a good alternative to traditional journalism. Whereas in the old days "good journalism" was about reporting important issues such as people dying in wars or starving to death due to hunger, many of the stories that sell these days are about celebrities like Lady Gaga, David Beckham or Charlie Sheen. Developments such as these have indirectly popularised participatory journalism, with participants deciding what should be on the news agenda rather than being spoon-fed by mass media. Therefore, instead of mass media deciding what is important for them, citizens have embarked on a mission to self decide. The business focus of journalism is right at the centre of these changing dimensions. For instance, a story about African immigrants sinking in a boat near Morocco in their attempt to reach Europe is considered less

²²⁸ William S Solomon, "The Newspaper Business", in Alan Wells and Ernest A. Hakanen (eds), *Mass Media and Society* (Greenwich, CT: Albex Publishing Corporation, 1997), p. 71.

appealing to readers than Jennifer Aniston going on holiday in the Bahamas. Business-minded editors will argue that they try to report what readers want.

Technological determinism is defined by Bruce Bimber as “what is really a variety of distinct views about the relationship of technological enterprise to other aspects of human activity.”²²⁹ The theory has been attributed to Karl Marx, Bimber says. However, others like Roderick Munday have linked the theory to Marshall McLuhan’s “medium is the message” verbatim.²³⁰ Is technology the force shaping society in Zimbabwe? Do the rural folk need technology to speed up the way they communicate? Do they understand technology and does it positively change their lives? It is indeed being celebrated as a potential catalyst for democratic change, but there is little evidence to support this school of thought. Technology is overrated. It is dangerous to conclude that technology is good for the rural dwellers in Murewa, because some of them have never encountered mobile phones, and if they were offered laptops, they would not know how to use them, and might not even be willing to learn. The determination of the people can effect democratic changes in Zimbabwe. Technology may have little to do with it. There are societies where technology has been credited with spearheading democratic changes. Zimbabwe is a different case. For instance, state security agents have in the past confiscated solar-powered radio transmitters said to be broadcasting anti-Mugabe propaganda. NGOs were behind this campaign. Eventually, when all enabling technology was impounded, the people still had to start afresh.

²²⁹ Bruce Bimber “Karl Marx and the three faces of Technological Determinism” *Social Studies of Science* Working Paper 11 pp. 1-22.

²³⁰ Roderick Munday “Marshall McLuhan declared that ‘the medium is the message.’ What did he mean and does this notion have any value?” (2003) <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/ram0202.html> Accessed 6 October 2011.

The agenda-setting theory is based on the assumption that mass media retains plenty of power, influence and authority over audiences in terms of what stories they should regard as more important than the others and just how much prominence they should give to these stories.²³¹ Introduced in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, the theory followed the authors' examination of the 1968 US presidential campaign in North Carolina.²³² It is believed that under the agenda-setting model, if audiences follow the media, the things they will consider important will likely be the same. McCombs and Shaw concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign. The results of the study indicated an almost perfect correlation between the media and public agendas, inferring an extremely strong connection between what the media provides the public and the public's perception of important issues. Although prior, similar surveys had been conducted to link public and media agendas, Shaw and McCombs were the first to institute the agenda-setting theory.

The mass ability to participate in online activities in Zimbabwe has instituted a paradigm shift from media-agenda setting to content-agenda setting. But this trend is more noticeable in the more affluent city cultures than in villages, where subsistence methods of communication are still in place.

²³¹ Brian Brooks, George Kennedy, Daryl R. Moen and Don Ranly, "News Reporting and Writing," 7th edition. (Bedford: Missouri Group, 2007), p. 27.

²³² Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 36, No. 2, (1972), pp. 176-187.

Government documents show that currently there are four separate pieces of legislation governing regulatory powers over the ICT industry in Zimbabwe. These are the Postal and Telecommunications Act of 2000, which gives the government full powers to monitor email usage; the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001; the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2002; and the Interception of Communications Act of 2007, which gives the government legal authority to intercept mobile and email communication.²³³ In June 2009, the new coalition government proposed the Information Communication and Technology Bill, which is set to replace the Broadcasting Services Act and the Postal and Telecommunications Act, setting up a single authority to regulate the ICT sector. Presently, regulation of the ICT sector is shared among the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), POTRAZ, and the Media and Information Commission (MIC), which are all accountable to the Minister of Transport and Communications as well as the Minister of Media, Information, and Publicity. Both are controlled by the ZANU PF party. The future of these entities, particularly POTRAZ, may be hanging in balance should the new bill, proposed by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC party, become law. The bill is currently awaiting Cabinet approval before heading to the Parliament for debate. It is likely to face hurdles from President Mugabe's ZANU PF party, which may be unwilling to lose its long-time control over regulating the broadcasting services. To date, the pro-state Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) is the only outlet allowed to broadcast on national airwaves. The new bill could bring the ZBC's broadcasting monopoly to an end.

²³³ "Strategic Plan 2010-2014" Ministry of Information Communication Technology (MICT) (Harare: 2010) pp. 1-54.

Blogs, argue Stephen Quinn and Stephen Lambie, have played a leading role in the increasing recognition of citizen journalism. They define a blog as “a type of Web site where entries are written, or posted, the same way you would update a journal or diary.”²³⁴ Blog reports have much to do with the writer’s “personality, passion and point of view” say Bonnie H Nardi *et al.*²³⁵ While American Jorn Barger is credited for starting the world’s first blog in 1997,²³⁶ blogs failed to garner momentum in Zimbabwe until the height of the country’s political crisis in the 2000s. Zimbabwean blogs are epicentres of political activism. These include Sokwanele.com or *enough is enough* in local vernacular. Quinn and Lambie recall Salam Pax, a blog run by Baghdad resident Salam al-Janbabi, which gained global recognition in 2003. Zimbabwe’s most recognised online advocacy platform Kubatana.net was established in 2001 but only launched its first blog five years later. “The repressive environment over the last 8 years made Kubatana develop online activism to regularly encourage Zimbabweans to use the information communication technologies (ICTs) that they have access to and advocate, mobilize and lobby”,²³⁷ commented one of the platform’s co-founders, Bev Clarke.

Breaking away from the old characteristic of mass communication, which denotes a complex relationship between media outlets and the audience in terms of disseminating feedback messages, traditional news outlets such as the pro-state *Herald* newspaper now accept web-based comments and in some cases even news stories from readers. “Internet

²³⁴ Stephen Quinn and Stephen Lambie. *Online Newsgathering: Research and Reporting for Journalism*. (Amsterdam: Focal Press, 2008),, p. 31.

²³⁵ Bonnie H. Nardie, Diane J Schiano, Michelle Gumbrecht and Luke Swartz, “Why we Blog” *Communications of ACM* , Vol. 47, No. 12 (2004), pp. 41-46.

²³⁶ Rebecca Blood, “How blogging software reshapes the online community,” *Communications of ACM* Vol. 47, No. 12 (2004), pp. 53-55.

²³⁷ Technology for Transparency Network <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kubatananet> Accessed 30 September 2011.

has brought us more closer to reality. Everyone can reach us from everywhere”, commented a Herald reporter.²³⁸ Correspondingly, non-professional interview respondents also said they only had become regular visitors to *The Herald*’s online page upon realising it was possible for them to comment on the newspaper’s stories, underscoring that active participation increases public trust for a certain publication. *The Herald* is not alone in allowing citizens to comment on its web-based stories. Other newspapers including *Newsday*, *The Standard* and *The Independent* offer the same service to readers. Facebook links are also available for citizens to comment on and otherwise react to stories. *The Sunday Mail* also offers blogging opportunities for readers. This seemingly unprecedented development reduces the previously noticeable gap between readers and journalists. However, it must be noted that the “Letters to the Editor” section already existed in these newspapers long before they went online, another reason to believe participatory journalism is not a new concept. However, while Zimbabwean citizen journalists in Harare were equally convinced that they had embraced “journalism” through their active online participation, their counterparts in Murewa, despite abstaining from calling themselves “journalists”, could also be considered citizen journalists because they do not need a trained journalist from Harare or anywhere else to tell them what is news. They determine what is news on their own and literally deliver and systematically share news among each other in their communities on a daily basis. Hence the notion that “everyone is a reporter.”

²³⁸ Interview with a *Herald* Reporter conducted 17 July 2011.

According to Last Moyo, Zimbabweans are no longer “helplessly bombarded with messages by mass media: they are actively producing news and initiating news flows among themselves.”²³⁹ Stand-alone sites dedicated to unedited blogging are another form of participatory journalism, as suggested by Steve Outing.²⁴⁰ *LivinginZimbabwe.com* is one such site. It says it is “open to content submissions on anything to do with Zimbabwe”.²⁴¹ Furthermore, 3Gmedia, a Diaspora-based company that publishes seven online newspapers dedicated to Zimbabwean news including *ZimDaily.com*, unveiled its citizen journalism programme in July 2009, claiming it would offer “accurate, unfiltered news”.²⁴² Using what it calls “e-activism”, Kubatana.net has made use of Western funding to provide a platform where Zimbabweans are encouraged to lobby and mobilise (mostly politically engaged) initiatives through the use the information communication technologies (ICTs). The majority of people in the rural areas have not heard about it. In the three Murewa villages sampled for this research, several people owned pre-paid mobile phones, which they called “receivers”, meaning they mostly waited for someone to call them. It is generally expensive for them to top-up credit, which is available at USD \$1 each. They have other priorities such as buying basic food for their families. Their financial predicaments meant SW Radio Africa’s free SMS campaigns were more appealing. Villagers acknowledged benefiting from the campaign launched in December 2006 by the London-based radio station, which sent headlines of its largely anti-Mugabe news packages to subscribed telephone numbers in Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans in the

²³⁹ Last Moyo, “Blogging down a dictatorship: Human rights, citizen journalist and the right to communicate in Zimbabwe” *Journalism* Vol. 12 No. 6, (2011), pp. 745-760.

²⁴⁰ Steve Outing “Eleven layers of citizen journalism” <http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/69328/the-11-layers-of-citizen-journalism> Accessed 7 October 2011.

²⁴¹ Living in Zimbabwe “About” <http://www.livingzimbabwe.com/about> Accessed 7 October 2011.

²⁴² “3MG launches Citizenship Journalism Programme” 22 July 2009 http://gmricapital.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=103 Accessed 6 October 2011.

Diaspora would send an email to the newspaper containing the phone numbers of relatives and friends whom they wished to receive the news.

4.2.3 Citizen Journalism: Roles and Criticism

Journalism's fundamental role in a society, according to Randy Reddick and Elliot King, is to act as public watchdog, seeking truth, operating independently and transparently, disseminating the message to the audiences and readers.²⁴³ However, the Internet can facilitate the redundancy of professional journalists, as claimed by Jo Bardoel and Mark Deuze.²⁴⁴ It has also, however, facilitated affordable communication on "a one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many basis", acknowledges Jamie Cowling.²⁴⁵ Still, citizen journalism has had its own share of criticism. While proponents of citizen journalism, including Mark Glaser, believe that citizens potentially contribute important information that otherwise gets ignored by traditional media,²⁴⁶ citizen journalists lack transparency, especially by choosing to remain anonymous when they publish or broadcast their work. Kirsten A. Johnson and Susan Weidenbeck believe that unless they carry by-lined stories, stories by citizen journalists will lack credibility.²⁴⁷ It must, however, be noted that the non-use of by-lines is also prevalent in professional journalism. Many papers carry stories by "staff writer" or "own correspondent". Others, such as Leonard Pitts Jr., reject the importance of citizen journalism because it fails to honour ethics and standards of the

²⁴³Randy Reddick and Elliot King, *The online Journalist* (Dallas TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994).

²⁴⁴ Jo Bardoel and Mark Deuze, Network "Journalism: Converging Competences of Media Professionals and Professionalism". *Australian Journalism Review* Vol. 23 No. 2, 2001, pp. 91-103.

²⁴⁵ Jamie Cowling, "Digital News: Genie's Lamp or Pandora's Box? Digital Manifesto Project", 2005, http://www.ippr.org/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Digital_Society/news_and_info_jcowling.pdf Accessed 6 October 2011.

²⁴⁶ Mark Glaser, "Your Guide to Citizen Journalism" Public Broadcasting Service, 2006. <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/09/your-guide-to-citizen-journalism270.html>. Accessed 1 October 2011.

²⁴⁷ Kirsten Johnson, and Susan Weidenbeck, "Enhancing perceived credibility of Citizen Journalism Websites," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (2009), pp. 332-348.

profession. “Journalism – like any profession worthy of the name – has standards and ethics, and if you don't sign on to those, I can no more trust you than I can a doctor who refused the Hippocratic oath or a lawyer who failed the bar exam.”²⁴⁸

Stephen Reese *et al.* have shown through content analysis that work produced by citizen journalists lacks originality.²⁴⁹ Identifying a gradual decline in the quality of traditional journalism, Axel Bruns credits citizen journalists for displaying “persistence and determination both in uncovering political and other scandals and in highlighting the shortcomings of professional journalism.”²⁵⁰ As noted, the ethical standards and overall credibility of citizen journalism has been the main point of discussion among journalists and academics alike. This is despite the fact that in a global trend, traditional media organisations have also launched citizen journalism initiatives.²⁵¹ Wilson Lowrey, for instance, concluded that most of the content on blogs run by professionals is commentary on news stories.²⁵² Scholars such as Melissa Wall have argued that content produced by citizen journalists can be considered “news”, since others within their ranks have equally adopted universal norms recognised by professionals.²⁵³ This view is not shared by Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, who are convinced that online activists use new media devices such as blogs to promote their own agendas and interests, a view that

²⁴⁸ Leonard Pitts Jr. “Citizen journalists? Spreading like a cold” *Miami Herald* 10 June 2010 <http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/10/06/1859362/citizen-journalists-spreading.html> Accessed 1 October 2011.

²⁴⁹ Stephen Reese, Lou Rutigliano, Kideuk Hyun and Jaekwan. Jeong “Mapping the blogosphere: Professional and citizen-based media in the global news arena”, *Journalism*, Vol. 8 No. 3 (2007), pp. 235-261.

²⁵⁰ Axel Bruns, “New Blogs and Citizen Journalism: New directions for e-Journalism” in Kiran Prasad (ed.) *e-Journalism: New Media and News Media* (Delhi, India: BR Publishing, 2008), pp. 101-126.

²⁵¹ Jonathan Weber “Citizen Journalism and the challenge to credibility” *The Times of London*, 6 October 2008.

²⁵² Wilson Lowrey, “Mapping the journalism-blogging relationship,” *Journalism*, Vol. 7 No. 4 (2006), pp. 477-500.

²⁵³ Melissa Wall “Blogs of war: Weblogs as news,” *Journalism*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (2005), pp. 153-172.

strongly contradicts the demand for “balanced and fair” coverage embedded in traditional ethics of journalism.²⁵⁴ Discussions on whether citizen journalists should be accountable to journalistic integrity will always attract attention and debate and predictably, there is no consensus on this topic.

Traditional journalism, which supposedly values standards and ethics, has nevertheless attracted criticism over the last two decades. Notorious instances of plagiarism and of fabricating stories have stained the reputations of some of the most respected of publications, including the cases of the *New York Times*' Jayson Blair and *USA Today*'s Jack Kelley. Supporters of participatory journalism will most likely argue that it is better to have no ethics than to cheat on those we have. They may also question whether the information of professional journalists soliciting money from readers to enable them to cover an event can be truly objective and balanced. An example of the latter occurring is when freelance science journalist David Appell, according to Glenn Harlan Reynolds, “asked his readers to finance an article on the World Health Organization’s relations with the sugar industry; readers contributed more than he had requested within a few days.”²⁵⁵ Despite its shortcomings, the Internet remains curiously more appealing because it offers a different and unmatched set of dynamics, argues Robert W. McChesney, who is adamant that there is no evidence that the Internet will be subject to “corporate control as have broadcasting and traditional media”.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴Richard Kahn, and Douglas Kellner, “New Media and Internet Activism.” *New Media & Society*, Vol. 6 No.1 (2004), pp. 87–95.

²⁵⁵ Glenn Harlan Reynolds, “Weblogs and Journalism: Back to the future” *Nieman Reports* (2003), <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101063/Weblogs-and-Journalism-Back-to-the-Future.aspx> Accessed 5 October 2011.

²⁵⁶ Robert W. McChesney “The Internet and U. S. Communication Policy-Making in Historical and Critical Perspective” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1996), pp. 98-124.

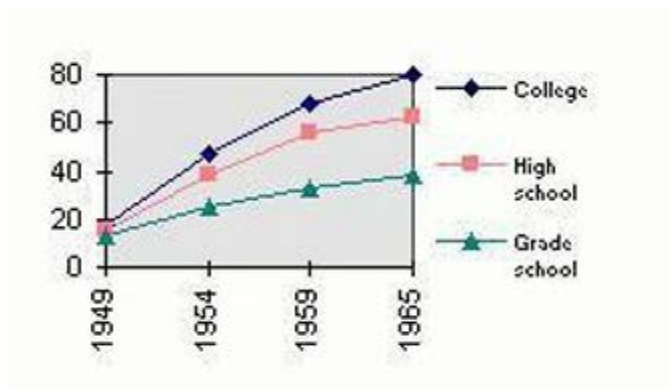
And yet, all Zimbabwean journalists interviewed for this research agreed that activities oriented to online participation do not constitute journalism. While citizen journalism offers a unique platform where nonprofessionals are free to share their opinions, journalism was bigger than this, they said. Their unanimous view was that journalism goes beyond sharing opinions. They suggested that by granting access to everyone to air their views, citizen journalism ideally presents a more personalised form of reporting. But that contradicts the central call for a balanced and objective approach, itself a non-negotiable principle of traditional Western-based journalism, known to the Zimbabwean journalists interviewed in this research who all graduated from colonial tertiary institutions that supported this model.

In the common understanding that new media has revolutionised the process of producing and sharing content, unsubstantiated claims have emerged that attribute increased democratic participation to citizen journalism. This chapter has argued that while the potential of citizen journalism to democratise the political space cannot be underestimated, participatory journalism is a misunderstood concept. New technologies have indeed helped activists build up their case against tyranny. However, technology only plays an enabling role. While the technological use of social media can be considered a relatively new concept, there certainly is nothing new about citizen participation. Citizens will always participate in issues that affect their communities, and even though they may find citizen journalism an interesting platform, they could just as well do without it.

5. IN PURSUIT OF THEORY

Establishing and developing a theory is an important process essential to professional social science research. David Silverman argues that without a theory, “there is nothing to research”.²⁵⁷ Max Webber’s oft-quoted line – “in order to understand Caesar, it is not necessary to have been Caesar” – also underpins the fundamental role of theory-guided research. This chapter assesses the three different theories of mass communication and mass media: the hypodermic needle, knowledge gap and agenda-setting theories. It then critically evaluates the historical and contemporary perspectives of the authoritarian theory of the press. Jurgen Habermas’ contribution to the overall understanding of democracy and public sphere is another area to be tackled in this chapter, paying particular attention to the tacit origins of the public sphere before contextualising its arguments to the current digital age.

Figure 9: Knowledge gap hypothesis



Source: Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (Figure 5.1), 1970.

²⁵⁷ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, (London: Sage Publications, 2010), p.110.

5.1 Knowledge Gap Theory

In simpler terms, the knowledge gap hypothesis emerged from the view that segments of the society with higher education acquire knowledge from mass media much more easily than those with lower education.²⁵⁸ In this process, the media is seen to have a hugely significant role in perpetuating gaps in knowledge between the higher and lower socioeconomic strata of society. In a groundbreaking study that looked at the effects of newspaper readership in Minnesota communities in the 1960s, Phillip Tichenor, George Donohue and Clarice Olien claimed that education led to knowledge gain, consequently leading to superior “comprehension, retention and communication capabilities, higher levels of previous stored knowledge, and increased numbers of relevant social contacts.”²⁵⁹ Thomas Holbrook argues that “the knowledge gap hypothesis holds that when new information enters a social system via a mass media campaign, it is likely to exacerbate underlying inequalities in previously held information.”²⁶⁰

Attempts to evaluate public information campaigns are therefore central to the origins of the knowledge gap theory. Tichenor *et al.* were convinced that with the concoction, ubiquity and rapid injection of mass media information into social and political systems augmenting some parts of the society, those enjoying a higher socioeconomic status tended to acquire information at a much quicker rate than other segments, indicating an increase rather than a decline in knowledge between these segments. The authors

²⁵⁸ Phillip Tichenor, George Donohue and Clarice Olien, “Mass media flow and differential growth in knowledge” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1970) pp. 159–170.

²⁵⁹ Wayne Wanta, and William Elliott, “Did the ‘magic’ work? Knowledge of HIV/AIDS and the knowledge gap hypothesis” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 72 No. 2 (1995) pp. 312-321.

²⁶⁰ Thomas Holbrook, “Presidential Campaigns and Knowledge Gap” *Political Communication*, Vol. 19 (2002) pp. 437–454.

assumed that the more poorly educated elements of the society had little if no knowledge about political, economic, and social issues because of their supposed disconnection from societal developments, which we can assume are mostly covered in news bulletins.

Testing the knowledge gap is possible under two conditions, they said:

a) Over time, acquisition of knowledge of a heavily publicised topic will proceed at a faster rate among better-educated persons than among those with less education. b) At a given time, there should be a higher correlation between acquisition of knowledge and education for topics highly publicised in the media than for topics less highly publicised.²⁶¹

These conclusions led to the birth of the knowledge gap theory with Tichenor *et al.* giving five specific arguments for explaining the gap. First, they opined that should someone be from a higher socioeconomic status they would not only have better communication skills but they tended to be better positioned when it came to reading as well as retention of information. They have an ability to stock up on information more easily or remember the topic from background knowledge; probably have a more relevant social context; and are better in selective exposure, acceptance and retention. Finally, mass media is specifically produced for people belonging to a higher socioeconomic status group.²⁶² As stated, according to the knowledge gap hypothesis, mass media commonly inform people of higher socioeconomic standing better than those of lower standing. These groups were defined by using the SES, or socioeconomic status, of

²⁶¹ Phillip Tichenor, George Donohue and Clarice Olien, "Mass media flow and differential growth in knowledge," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1970) pp. 159–170.

²⁶² Knowledge gap hypothesis, University of Twente, http://www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/knowledge_gap.doc/ Accessed 14 July 2010.

individuals. The specific status, the theorists argued, is determined by considering income, education and occupation of an individual. In conclusion, the gap between the two segments would get considerably larger over time. As stated by Werner Severin, and James Tankard, the essence of the knowledge gap hypothesis is that in general terms, information is not equally distributed in society. More specifically, there is a direct relationship between wealth and acquiring of information.²⁶³

In fact, a gap in knowledge already exists between society's "haves" and "have-nots", argues William Eveland and Dietram Scheufele.²⁶⁴ Their assumption is further supported by the theorists' view that each new medium increases the gap between the "information rich" and "information poor" because of differences in access to the medium, and control over its use, among several other factors. The theorists asserted that the upsurge of information in a given society would not be uniformly acquired by members of the public since people with higher socioeconomic status acquire information more easily than the rest. Since "information rich" people acquire and absorb new information more readily than "information poor" people, information gaps are likely to rise. There was no assurance that providing access to more information would close an existing gap; in fact, it even had the ability to widen it, they argued. According to Norman Nie and Lutz Erbring, who studied the influence of the online presence, Internet use leads to gaps, because not everyone has access to it, producing a digital divide.²⁶⁵ They argue that less

²⁶³ Severin Werner and James Tankard, "Uses of Mass Media", in W. J. Severin and J. W. Tankard (eds) *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media* (4th ed.). (New York: Longman, 1992) pp. 101-134.

²⁶⁴ William Eveland, and Dietram Scheufele, Connecting news media use with gaps in knowledge and participation. *Political Communication*, Vol. 17 No. 3 (2000), pp. 215-237.

²⁶⁵ Norman Nie and Lutz Erbring (2000). "Internet and Society: A Preliminary Report." *Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society*. <http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss> Accessed June 2, 2011.

educated groups and people with modest financial means have less access to the Internet.

The Internet age has been celebrated for its ability to provide inexpensive and brisk access to information to the masses and some scholars have seen it as a tool for reversing the widening knowledge gap. But this, as several scholars have argued, may prove to be a utopian view, as information and communication technologies struggle to foster citizen participation. On the Internet, information is not structured the way it is in “old media”. Online journalists do not decide what information reaches people, unlike newspapers where editors, who are responsible for prioritising news and setting the layout of the paper, have an impact on what reaches consumers. Another advantage of the Internet that could lead to decreasing knowledge gaps, as proposed by Heinz Bonfadelli, is the fact that education and motivation play a smaller role there than for people reading a paper.²⁶⁶ But a study by Joonghwa Lee, Chang Dae Ham and Esther Thorson, concluded that traditional gaps in knowledge still existed in the Internet age, also noting that “new gaps had been created by the in-home presence of new media”.²⁶⁷ The Internet example clearly shows a conflict between the knowledge gap and agenda-setting theories in that while scholars have maintained that media has the power and supremacy to set the agenda on what people should read or listen to, the advent of the Internet potentially means that (some) people can make choices of their own. J.D Lasica for example, comprehends that bloggers “take part in the editorial function of selecting newsworthy and interesting topics, they add analysis, insight and commentary, and they occasionally provide a first-

²⁶⁶ Heinz Bonfadelli, “The Internet and Knowledge Gaps,” *European Journal of Communication*. Vol. 17, No. 1, (2002) pp. 65-84.

²⁶⁷ Joonghwa Lee, Chang Dae Ham, and Esther Thorson, “Knowledge gap in the media-saturated '08 presidential election,” *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Marriott, Chicago, IL, May 20, 2009*, pp. 1-38.

person report about an event, a trend, a subject”.²⁶⁸

Criticism of the knowledge gap theory has been led by scholars such as Cecilie Gaziano and Emanuel Gaziano who argue that there is a danger in using one-time snapshot studies in measuring knowledge gaps, rather than emphasising the role of the topic studied. Evatt, as quoted by Severin and Tankard, concurs, arguing that researchers exploring knowledge gap studies should be sure the information they are testing with surveys is useful and relevant for the audience being studied.²⁶⁹ For their part, James Ettema and Gerald Kline have argued that highly developed information processing skills are not necessarily needed to understand public affairs. However, they contend that these issues are naturally more important and useful to people in higher socioeconomic groups.²⁷⁰ A study by Maria Elizabeth Grabe, Annie Lang, Shuhua Zhou and Paul Bolls brought together participants with different educational backgrounds between high school and postgraduate levels. Their experimental research concluded that “the idea that people with little education have less knowledge about important social issues than people who achieved higher levels of education challenges democratic ideals of equality.”²⁷¹ They argued that the knowledge gap has no relationship with the outcome of attention to mass media messages. Mienieke Weenig and Cees Midden use Rogers’s argument that the “the possibility of an information processing problem among the lower educated stemming

²⁶⁸ J.D. Lasica, “Blogs and journalism need each other” *Nieman Reports*, Vol 57, No. 3 (2003), 70–73. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/03-3NRfall/V57N3.pdf> Accessed 9 May 2011.

²⁶⁹ Severin and Tankard, *Communication Theories* (see n. 124 above), p. 257.

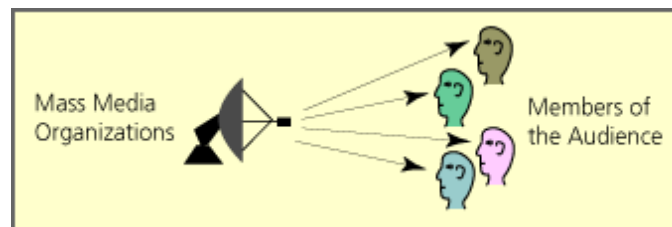
²⁷⁰ James Ettema, and Gerald Kline, “Deficits, differences and ceilings: Contingent conditions for understanding the knowledge gap.” *Communication Research*, Vol 2, No. 4, (1977) pp. 179-202.

²⁷¹ Maria Elizabeth Grabe, Annie Lang, Shuhua Zhou and Paul Bolls, “The Impact Of Education Of Education on information processing: An experimental Investigation of the Knowledge Gap.” *Information System* (1999) <http://astro.temple.edu/~lombard/InfoSys/99/Grabe.htm> Accessed 12 May 2011.

from lower cognitive abilities as a result of which they might gain less knowledge out of the same amount of information.”²⁷²

5.2 Hypodermic Needle Theory

Figure 10: Hypodermic needle (or magic bullet) theory



Source: Richard W. Dillman Tutorial (2008)

The hypodermic needle theory, also known as the magic bullet theory, is the oldest theory of mass communication effects. It holds that individuals, in isolation from one another, are easily influenced by media messages. As Severin and Tankard put it, “this essentially naïve and simplistic view predicts strong and more or less universal effects of mass communication messages on audience members who happen to be exposed to them.”²⁷³

The theory suggests that mass media can easily influence a large group of people with no challenge and opposition from those people.²⁷⁴ The impact on audiences is thus not only direct but immediate and powerful. A hypodermic needle, in practice, is a piston syringe that is fitted with a hypodermic needle for the purposes of giving injections. Invented in Scotland, the World Health Organisation (WHO) says it is a depressed needle used to

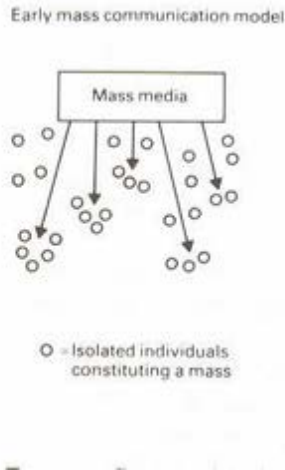
²⁷² Mienieke Weenig and Cees Midden, “Mass-Media Information Campaigns and Knowledge-Gap Effects,” *Journal of applied Social Psychology* Vol. 27, No. 11 (1997), pp. 945-958.

²⁷³ Severin and Tankard *Communication Theories* (see n. 124 above)), p. 263.

²⁷⁴ Severin and Tankard, “Uses of Mass Media”(see n. 263 above)) pp. 101-134.

inject and extract liquids from the body. In communication research, the hypodermic needle theory is a type of media approach that penetrates information into the minds of an audience who may be quite vulnerable and willing to passively accept the message without question.

Figure 11: Hypodermic needle (or magic bullet) theory model



Source: Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955)

It suggests that the producers of media messages have the power to get people to do whatever they want them to do. The theory explains that when a message is communicated to the public, it is fully accepted by its audience, normally without question. Adorno and Horkheimer of the Frankfurt school support the theory and cite it as the method successfully used by Nazi Minister of Propaganda Josef Goebbels to achieve his goals. Sent out by the powerful media organisations, magic bullets "hit" the audience in their "minds" and changed their thoughts. The theory helps explain how media marketers get their messages across to an unsuspecting audience without their awareness that they are being manipulated. The information is subconsciously absorbed into their

thoughts, and motivates them to act, dress, speak, communicate, and even think a certain way.

The hypodermic needle theory is largely considered outmoded by scholars, superseded by newer theories of mass communication. Besides, the theory was not based on empirical findings from research but rather on assumptions of the time about human nature, one reason why contemporary researchers dismiss it. Some argue that as society became accustomed to large amounts of information, the magic bullet theory appeared oversimplified and irrelevant.²⁷⁵ Other scholars like Elizabeth Perse still maintain that the magic bullet model remains relevant, especially when conducting studies pertaining to vulnerable audiences who are exposed to media content such as young children or the illiterate.²⁷⁶

A model that proved the hypodermic needle theory to be imprecise was the limited effects model. The model, first proposed by Joseph Klapper, argues that instead of having a large influence on the public, the media barely has any influence on its audience. According to Klapper, the media do not have the power to directly impact people, because the influences are weakened by mediating factors in society. The “uses and gratification theory” is another good component of the limited-effect school of thought. Other examples of mediating factors can be group norms and opinions that are common in a specific society or culture. According to Klapper, they “typically render mass communication a contributory agent but not the sole cause in a process of reinforcing the

²⁷⁵ Dietram A. Scheufele and David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Model,” *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2007) pp. 9–20.

²⁷⁶ Elizabeth Perse, *Media effects and society*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001) p. 25.

existing conditions.”²⁷⁷ Media influence is considered weaker because of the attitude that the audience has towards information that is “shot” at them.

One example to demonstrate how the theory works could also be used to criticise its premise as being too one-dimensional. The well-known Orson Welles Mercury Theatre of the Air "Martian invasion" radio broadcast in 1938 exhibited the way in which the audiences react to a media message. According to the theory, anyone who listened to the broadcast should have believed that invaders from Mars had landed in southern New Jersey. Yet, although some did believe it, most did not. “Some listeners switched channels to see if the news was being carried elsewhere; some picked up the phone and called friends to see if they were listening and if so, to ask what they thought about it; some paid enough critical attention to the show to recognize that it was fiction.”²⁷⁸

During the decades prior to the theory’s development, the vulnerability of people to propaganda was evident during World War I and World War II. It is now known that individual differences define this susceptibility, such as the context of a situation, personality characteristics and lower education levels. The media with the “needle” stitches thoughts and beliefs into people’s heads. Additionally, when referring to the theory as the “magic bullet theory”, the media fire the “bullet” into the people’s minds, planting ideas. Theorists such as Harold Lasswell, an early proponent of the hypodermic needle theory, applied it to explain the propaganda efforts of the Nazi regime. By controlling the content of the news and injecting ideas into the public mind, manipulating people became easy. People believed what they heard because it was the only thing they

²⁷⁷ Severin and Tankard, *Communication Theories* (see n. 124 above), p. 263.

²⁷⁸ Richard W. Dillman, “Tutorial Mass Communication” (2008) Accessed 1 June 2011
<http://www.rdillman.com/HFCL/TUTOR/Media/media3.html>

heard.²⁷⁹

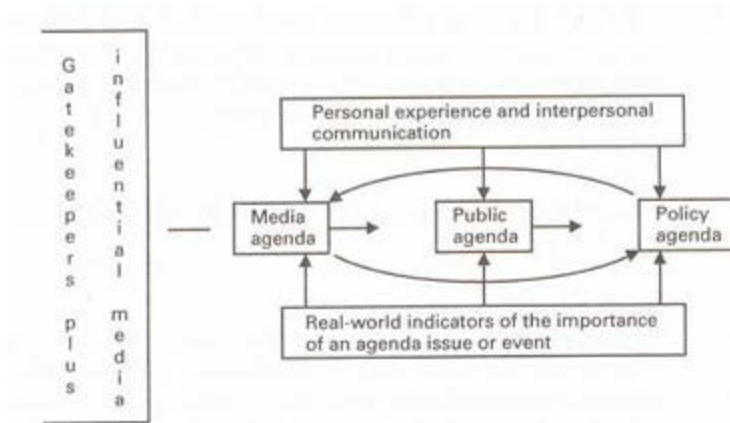
One of the first attempts to define propaganda was in 1927 by Lasswell: “Propaganda refers solely to the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication.” Propaganda, as argued by Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, is “the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”²⁸⁰ The magic bullet theory is thus significantly connected to propaganda, which is basically an art of persuasion, convincing others that one’s side of the story is correct at all costs. Among several characteristics of propaganda is the notion that it tries to reach a large number of people at once, appealing mostly to emotions and not intellect. Targets of the propagandist must have something in common. That way people can identify themselves with a crowd and are more easily persuaded.

5.3 Agenda-Setting Theory

Figure 12: Agenda-setting theory

²⁷⁹ Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (London: Sage, 2006) p. 25.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.



Source: McQuail and Windahl (1993)

Media scholars Werner Severin, and James Tankard say that the agenda-setting theory is derived from the assumption that the media is highly capable of augmenting the importance of a certain issue in the public's eyes.²⁸¹ It refers to "the idea that media does not tell people what to think, but what to think about."²⁸² Eugene Shaw says the agenda-setting theory states that because of newspapers, television, and other news media, people are aware or not aware, pay attention to or neglect, play up or downgrade specific features of the public scene.²⁸³ Like the magic bullet theory, the agenda-setting theory asserts a high degree of influence that media have on audiences. This influence is exerted through the choice that editors make on what stories to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them.²⁸⁴ To highlight the press's influence, Bernard Cohen interpreted the media's role according to the agenda-setting theory as follows: "The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It

²⁸¹ Werner and Tankard, "Uses of Mass Media" (see n. 263 above), pp. 101-134.

²⁸² Stanley Baran and Dennis Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future*, 5th edition (Boston: Wadsworth, 2003) p. 279.

²⁸³ Eugene Shaw, "Agenda-Setting and Mass Communication Theory" *International Communication Gazette* Vol. 25, No.2 (1979) pp. 96-105.

²⁸⁴ Brian Brooks, *et al. News Reporting and Writing*. (7th Ed) (Bedford: Missouri Group, 2003). pp. 27 – 30.

may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”²⁸⁵

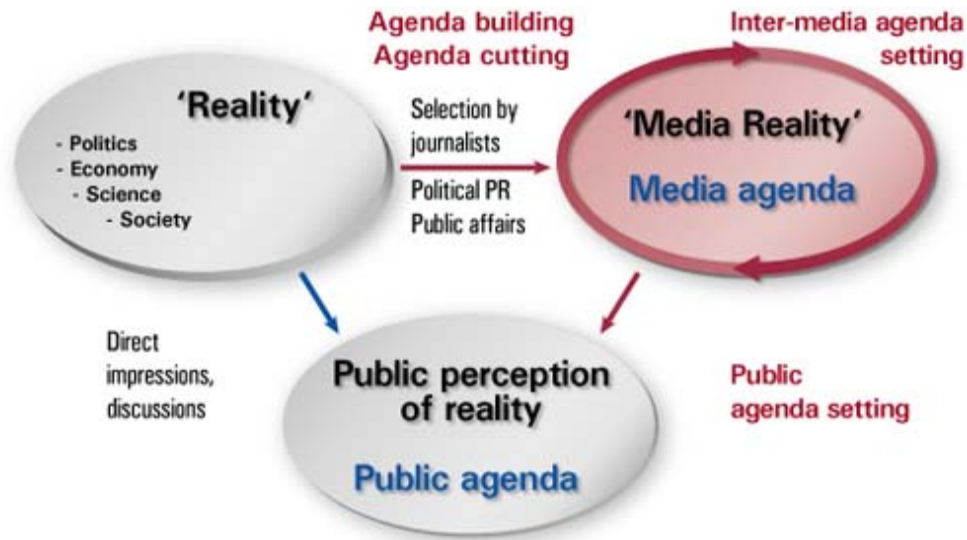
To reach their conclusion, McCombs and Shaw investigated US presidential campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1976 to examine concerns by American journalist Walter Lippman that the media had the power to present images to the public the way they liked it. Maxwell McCombs and Tamara Bell call Lippman the “intellectual father of the agenda setting idea.”²⁸⁶ The goal of the study was to discover a connection between the issues that the media was highlighting at the time and the eventual choice of candidate.²⁸⁷ McCombs and Shaw concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign. The results of the study indicated an almost perfect correlation between the media and public agendas, inferring an extremely strong connection between what the media provides the public and the public’s perception of important issues. Although prior similar surveys had been conducted to link public and media agendas, Shaw and McCombs were the first to propagate the agenda-setting theory. Public perception is normally formulated by what appears or does not appear in the media, argues Frank Brettschneider. Issues that are not covered in the media have consequently turned out to be irrelevant.

Figure 13: Agenda-setting in reality

²⁸⁵ Bernard Cohen, *The press and foreign policy*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 13

²⁸⁶ McCombs, Maxwell and Tamara Bell, ‘The agenda-setting role of mass communication’, In M. B. Salwen, and D. W. Stacks (eds), *An integrated approach to communication theory and research* NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), p. 96.

²⁸⁷ Donald Shaw, Robert Stevenson, & Bradley Hamm, *Agenda setting theory and public opinion studies in a post-mass media age*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the World Association for Public Opinion Research, Rome (2001).



Source: Frank Brettschneider, University Hohenheim, Germany

The theory proved that the media had the power to affect public opinion, not necessarily by supporting one view over another, but by emphasising certain issues in the public sphere. In general, the premise supported the view that the things we see in newspapers and the things we hear on the radio are things that people all over the country are talking about, and therefore consider important. However, others have questioned whether it is the media that set the news agenda or whether the audience themselves decide what they want to read, view or consume. The latter is the central argument of the uses and gratification theory, which places the emphasis on the preferences of the consumer. With the knowledge gap theory in mind, one may question whether people can decide for themselves what they consider to be important. An illiterate person may not be able to choose what is important. It is even more questionable whether the media still maintain the ability to set the agenda in the new era of the Internet and new media technologies.

5.4 Democracy and public sphere

Public sphere as a concept is difficult to grasp, and it still lacks a clear definition, argues Marian Adolf and Cornelia Wallner.²⁸⁸ Seen by others as the focal point for participatory approaches to democracy, the concept of public sphere is defined “as an arena where citizens come together, exchange opinions regarding public affairs, discuss, deliberate, and eventually form public opinion.”²⁸⁹ Thanks to their unrivalled democratic potential, the Internet and new media technologies have led to the emergency of cosmopolitan, reform-based movements in journalism, with the potential of creating a new public sphere avenue. The concepts of public journalism, civic journalism, citizen journalism and blogging, it can be argued, are tied to the central discourse that intends to diminish the gap between news and civic life and redefine the societal role of public sphere. The new instruments of political communication, used by agents of change and social groups through new media devices, fashion a centrepiece for political debate and action, and accordingly have become constituents of the public sphere. But while the Internet has created a new space for democratic dialogues, the real question is whether it has actually strengthened the public sphere.

Universally drawn from Jurgen Habermas’ theories on the role of the public sphere in democratic discourse, the concept is defined by Gerard Hauser as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where

²⁸⁸ Marian Adolf and Cornelia Wallner, “Probing the Public Sphere in Europe. Theoretical Problems, Problems of Theory and Prospects for further Communication Research”, *Paper for the First European Communication Conference 24.-26.11.2005, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*.

²⁸⁹ World Bank paper for the Communication for Governance & Accountability Program <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/PubSphereweb.pdf> Accessed 1 June 2011.

possible, to reach a common judgment.”²⁹⁰ Habermas hypothesised that early modern capitalism created the conditions for the bourgeois public sphere, effectively creating an area for rational and egalitarian public debate. He called the public sphere a “network for communicating information and points of view, the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions.”²⁹¹ In attempting to define public sphere, Woodruff D. Smith suggests the first step is determining what it is not. “It does not denote vaguely defined affective features of social life such as ‘public spirit’, ‘patriotism’, or even ‘citizenship’ unless the last is used to refer to how to act effectively in the public life of society.”²⁹²

Conditions that make it possible for the sphere to operate historically include, according to David Beers, the rise of private property, literary influences, coffee houses and salons, and primarily the independent market-based press.²⁹³ Public sphere, Habermas opines, was central to creating a conducive environment for citizens to make informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt in matters related to their own affairs. Another way of looking at it is to follow Nancy Fraser’s view that it involves the establishment of a “theatre in modern societies” where “political participation is enacted through the

²⁹⁰ Gerard Hauser, “Vernacular Dialogue and the Rhetorality of Public Opinion,” *Communication Monographs* Vol. 65, No. 2 (1998) pp. 83–107.

²⁹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. (Cambridge: Polity, 1992) p. 360.

²⁹² Woodruff D. Smith, “Higher education, Democracy and the Public Sphere,” *Thought and Action* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2003) pp. 61-73.

²⁹³ David Beers, “The Public Sphere and Online, Independent Journalism”, Canadian Society for the Study of Education www.csse-scee.ca/CJE/Articles/FullText/CJE29-1/CJE29-1-beers.pdf Accessed 1 June 2011.

medium of the talk.”²⁹⁴ Habermas is of the view that an operational and democratic public sphere allows government officials to be put in the open and be judged for the accountability of their actions, thereby giving citizens the leeway to claim some influence over political decisions.

Habermas pays tribute to evolving historical circumstances, which were central to the emergence of a new civic society in the eighteenth century. He also attributes several factors for the new arrivals, arguing the need for open commercial arenas where news and matters of common concern could be freely exchanged and discussed. A new wave of intellectuals had moved into the European public sphere, augmented by a growing literacy rate, accessibility to news and books, and a new form of critical journalism. The public sphere was well established in various public locations such as coffee shops and salons, evenly allowing people to freely gather and discuss matters of common interest. Habermas argues that the public sphere, thanks to the undoubted domination of mass media, developed into an arena of power struggles as practitioners jostled for influence.²⁹⁵ Fraser assumed that it was central to Habermas' account that the bourgeois public sphere was to be a discursive arena in which “private persons” deliberated about “public matters”.²⁹⁶ Fraser’s observation sits well with John Dewey’s assertion that there are two major types of humanity. These are private ones that “affect the persons directly engaged in a transaction,” and public ones, “which affect others beyond those

²⁹⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* (Duke University Press) Vol. 25, No. 26 (1990), pp. 56–80.

²⁹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere”, in Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT press, 1992) p. 437.

²⁹⁶ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* (Duke University Press) Vol. 25, No. 26 (1990), pp. 56–80.

immediately concerned”.²⁹⁷ Dewey was concerned that the ability to acquire or purchase a democratic institution was in itself not enough to sustain democracy. In a democratic society, the public is naturally expected to fully participate and oversee the functioning of government.

The Habermasian public paradigm has in the wake of the Internet’s rapidly increasing influence in advancing society’s communication causes, extensively gone through critical debates, analyses, and discourses. Public sphere, concludes Antje Gimmler, “manipulates people, hinders the development of individuality, fragments communities, and simply creates consumers of information rather than knowledgeable and critical subjects with the capacity to make informed judgments make informed judgments.”²⁹⁸ Lincoln Dahlberg refutes any suggestions the Internet has been successful in creating a public sphere, arguing “a cursory examination of the thousands of diverse conversations taking place every day online and open to anyone with Internet access seems to indicate the expansion on a global scale of the loose webs of rational-critical discourse that constitute what is known as the public sphere.”²⁹⁹ Dahlberg offers a six-point criterion which could eventually lead to the Internet’s acceptance as a public sphere. These are autonomy from state and economic power; exchange and critique of criticisable moral-practical validity claims; reflexivity; ideal role-taking; sincerity; and discursive inclusion and equality.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*. (Denver: Swallow: 1954) p.12.

²⁹⁸ Antje Gimmler, “Deliberative democracy, the public sphere and the internet,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol 27 No. 4 (2001) pp. 21-39.

²⁹⁹ Lincoln Dahlberg, “Extending the public sphere through cyberspace: The case of Minnesota E-Democracy”, *Peer Reviewed Journal on the Internet*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (2001).
<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/838/747> Accessed 1 June 2011.

³⁰⁰ Kasun Ubayasiri. The Internet and the public Sphere: A glimpse of YouTube. *Ejournalist: A Refereed Media Journal*, Vol 6, No. 2 (2006), pp. 1-13.

The Internet, argues Bruce Bimber, “may be broadening the democratic base of those who express themselves to government”, therefore disqualifying any notions the Internet provides the basis for “everyone” to “meet” and air their democratic view against and for the government.³⁰¹ Slavko Splichal brings the Internet closer to the theory, arguing that the workability of public sphere is defined by the underlying principles of openness and publicity.³⁰² This debate could even be drawn back to Immanuel Kant’s articulation that recognisable democracy is one that is open for public scrutiny. If the Internet should thus be considered the new watershed for public sphere, it should be noted that the technological revolution has created social isolation, also leading to a lack of face-to-face contact, which are among the most notable characteristics of Habermas’ original public sphere thesis.

5.5 Authoritarian theory of press

The authoritarian doctrine is a normative theory of the press originated by Siebert, Peterson, and Schuman and initially released in 1956. Under this theory, the press is tightly controlled by the government and operates to encourage solidarity and union in the nation. Interference through challenging, questioning or criticising the workings of the government is not permissible. The role of the press, instead, is to strength the power and authority of the head of state or government. It is a theory under which “the press as an institution is controlled in its functions and operations by organized society through

³⁰¹ Bruce Bimber , "The Internet and Citizen Communication With Government: Does the Medium Matter?", *Political Communication*, Vol 6, No. 4 (1999), pp. 409 – 428.

³⁰² Slavko Splichal, ” In search of a strong European public sphere: Some critical observations on conceptualizations of publicness and the (European) public sphere” *Media, culture & society*, Vol. 28, No. 5 (2006), pp. 695–7147.

another institution, government.”³⁰³ Baran and Davis define it simply as a “normative theory ³⁰⁴advocating the complete domination of media by a government for the purpose of forcing those media to serve the government.” Developed in sixteenth-century England, it is widely practiced in several countries across the globe. It may, according to Werner and Tankard, either be “publicly or privately owned; nevertheless, it is regarded as an instrument for furthering government policy.”³⁰⁵

The authoritarian theory of the press is best understood in a comparative analysis with other theories, as suggested by Siebert, Peterson and Schuman. They are the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory and Soviet Communist concept. Werner and Tankard say the libertarian theory of the press was first adopted in England after 1688 and in the United States in the First Amendment to the Constitution. It holds that the press is fundamentally there to inform the public and protect their rights and liberties. A clear distinction between the authoritative and libertarian concepts is offered by John Stuart Mill, who asserted that for the latter, which has also been called the “free press theory” to function well, there needs to be no authoritative state intervention.³⁰⁶ Dennis McQuail offers seven principles that clearly define the free press theory:

1. Publication should be free from any prior censorship by any third party;
2. The act of publication and distribution should be open to a person or group without permit or license;

³⁰³ Fred Siebert, Theodore Paterson and Wilbur Schramm *Four Theories of Press*,(Illini Books Edition: Chicago, 1963) p. 10.

³⁰⁴ Stanley Baran and Dennis Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future*, 3rd edition (Wadsworth: Belmont, 2009) p. 118.

³⁰⁵ Severin and Tankard, *Communication Theories* (see n. 124 above), p. 311.

³⁰⁶ John Stuart Mill *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, J. M. Robson (ed.),(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963) pp. 44 -45.

3. Attack on any government official or political party (as distinct from attacks on private individuals or treason and breaches of security) should not be punishable, even after the event;
4. There should be no compulsion to publish anything;
5. Publication of “error” is protected equally with that of truth in matters of opinion and belief;
6. No restriction should be placed on the collection, by legal means, of information for publication;
7. There should be no restriction on export or import or sending or receiving “messages” across national frontiers.

in addition, journalists should be able to claim a considerable degree of professional autonomy within their organisations.³⁰⁷

Unlike the authoritarian concept, this theory clearly does not allow for government ownership of the press. Associated with several Western democracies, it unequivocally states that the right to publish is essential for the success of any democracy. Siebert, Peterson and Schuman said the theory took a “philosophical view that man is rational and able to discern between truth and falsehood and, therefore, can choose between a better and worse alternative. Man is capable of determining his own destiny, and given all the facts will make the right choice.”³⁰⁸ Again unlike the authoritarian doctrine, ownership

³⁰⁷ Dennis McQuail *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. (London: Sage Publications, 1987). Quoted in Bayo Oyelede, “Press Freedom: A conceptual analysis” *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2005), pp. 101-109.

³⁰⁸ Fred Siebert, Theodore Paterson and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of Press*, (Illini Books Edition: Chicago, 1963) <http://www.coolschool.k12.or.us/courses/190200/lessons/lesson3/fourtheories.html> Accessed 2 June 2011.

under the libertarian theory of the press is exclusively private.

The social responsibility theory is considered an offshoot of the libertarian concept sharing many similarities, although one clear distinction is that it places moral and ethical restrictions on the press. While the former advocates absolute freedom, the latter believes in freedom with responsibility. Under this theory, journalists are accountable to the public and the government, which means that state intervention can be justified, as is the case of the authoritarian doctrine. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm also note that “freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory. [...] One's right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against vital social interests.”³⁰⁹ As noted by the Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947, the press has an important role to play in the development and stability of modern society and, as such, it is imperative that a commitment of social responsibility be imposed on mass media. Hence Jennifer Ostini and Anthony Fung’s analysis that social responsibility model is based on “the idea that media have a moral obligation to society to provide adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions.”³¹⁰

The Soviet Communist theory of press, which was developed during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, shares plenty of similarities with the authoritarian press theory. Oyedele argues that the theory “which evolved from Marxist – Leninist – Stalinist

³⁰⁹ Fred Siebert, Theodore Paterson & Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of Press*, (Illini Books Edition: Chicago, 1963) <http://www.coolschool.k12.or.us/courses/190200/lessons/lesson3/fourtheories.html> Accessed 2 June 2011.

³¹⁰ Jennifer Ostini and Anthony Fung, “Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A New Model of National Media” *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2002), pp. 41–56.

thought, with mixture of Hegel and 19th Century Russian thinking, the chief purpose of the press is to contribute to the success and continuance of the socialist system, and especially to the dictatorship of the party.”³¹¹ Journalists are there to transmit government policy and not to aid in searching for the truth. The Soviet Communist model is seen as an extreme application of authoritarian ideas – in that media are “totally subordinated to the interests and functions of the state.”³¹² In assessing the relationship between the authoritarian model with other theories, it is relevant to take note of Siebert’s view that “in fact practically all Western Europe [...] utilized the basic principles of authoritarianism as the theoretical foundation for their systems of press control.”³¹³

³¹¹ Bayo Oyelede, “Press Freedom: A conceptual analysis” *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2005), pp. 101-109.

³¹² Jennifer Ostini and Anthony Fung, “Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A New Model of National Media” *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2002), pp. 41–56.

³¹³ Fred Siebert, Theodore Paterson and Wilbur Schramm *Four Theories of Press*, (Chicago: Illini Books Edition, 1963) p. 9.

6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter gives an overview of findings of the research, which, as has already been noted, used qualitative interviews and content analysis as prime methods. Results are given first, followed by a thorough analysis and conclusion.

6.1 Results overview

Interviews with Zimbabweans in the Diaspora (Face-to-Face)

Total Number of respondents: 25

How long have you lived in the UK?

All respondents stated they had lived in the UK for a period between three to ten years.

Do you see the Internet as a major factor in improving democratic participation in Zimbabwe?

Mixed results emerged from this question. Thirteen respondents were quite clear the Internet has no major role to play in supporting the Zimbabwean democratic process.

They all gave different reasons for their standpoints but one thing that was clear was that they seemed to agree that not everyone was as interested in politics as the media. Their assumption was that the Internet in Zimbabwe is firstly used for various other purposes, such as making financial transfers, rather than for political reasons. Politicians – especially those from ZANU PF – were seen as so traditionally minded that they doubted if half the cabinet had an email address. They said people used Facebook, for example, to discuss issues related to their social lives. Zimbabweans, they claimed, were too tired of politics to be discussing it every day on the Internet. The Internet, they added, made it easier for people to communicate but it “could not decide what has to be discussed” as one of them said. Four respondents, however, gave the Internet a thumbs up. They said dictators would not withhold information as they had, in their view, historically done. The other respondents gave answers that both doubted the Internet’s ability in contributing to enhancing democratic participation, but also made it clear it was difficult to predict.

Do you think the Internet has been used to unfairly target Mugabe?

Twenty-two respondents did not shy away from making it clear Mugabe was a victim of Western media bias. Only three were adamant Mugabe’s “propaganda machine” *The Herald* peddled lies against other nations and the president’s rivals, so as far as they were concerned there was nothing wrong with other media doing the same against Mugabe.

Do you think Mugabe has overstayed?

All but four agreed that Mugabe should hand over power to a younger, capable leader. However, in another sign Mugabe's policies are not as unpopular as the private media normally claims, five of them said whoever takes over from him should continue with his pan-African ideas. One respondent said Mugabe was giving back the land and mines stolen by colonialists so there was nothing wrong with him staying in power. A staggering 21 respondents said they were afraid that whoever takes over from him would be too pro-West, with one disclosing his fears for a leader that would "give back the country to the foreigners." While supporting Mugabe, they said his less diplomatic, hard-hitting stance was not always the solution.

Do you think Zimbabweans should be left to sort their own problems?

Mixed results came from this question. At least slightly more than half of those interviewed said Zimbabwe did not have the capacity to solve its problems. One of them even went as far as suggesting that since we are living in a globalised world, no country could solve its problems alone. Much of their reasoning was based on the fact leaving Zimbabwe to sort its problems would enable Mugabe to extend his perceived illegitimacy. Interestingly, some of the respondents who had said Mugabe should stay in power also admitted they doubted his legitimacy. "Give me an example of a legitimate leader in Africa. None", one of them declared. Eleven respondents said only African countries should be left to deal with Zimbabwean problems while a paltry two suggested all means possible, including military action, should be used to get rid of Mugabe.

Do you trust the media, be it Zimbabwean or foreign?

All respondents apart from one were quite clear they did not trust Zimbabwean or foreign media. They said all media outlets always have their own agendas. “Media is business. It’s like selling tomatoes. Do you go around telling people I am selling rotten tomatoes even when you know your tomatoes are rotten”, one respondent said. Some of them however also admitted that even though they did not fully trust the media, they were left with few options in terms of where to get their information. They said while reliability was a major issue among media organisations reporting on Zimbabwe, they needed news organisations to supply them with information. One respondent said she had never been let down by the British Broadcasting Corporation so she trusted it.

Would you rather have citizen journalists as the main source of your news?

Only seven respondents recognized citizen journalism as an alternative to traditional media. Despite their dislike of traditional media, respondents said citizen journalism was too new to be trusted. Some of them didn’t understand the concept. Some said everyone writes what they want about Zimbabwe to such an extent that it did not really matter which platform was used. Professionalism was emphasised here by at least six respondents. Even though trusting them was a big concern, at least traditional journalists were professionals. Unlike citizen journalists, they had a duty to serve. The most underlining issue here was trust. Zimbabweans do not trust the media and this is perhaps a result of ZANU PF’s protracted domination of the local media scene. Interestingly, respondents also categorically stated that they did not trust the Western media. “I don’t even trust myself, why should I trust someone (else)”, a respondent declared.

Why do you not trust news reports on Zimbabwe?

Respondents pointed to the fact that politics was at play in Zimbabwe. Responses given by 20 respondents shared the similar argument that it was difficult to trust the media due to constant political meddling. In Zimbabwe, they said politicians would use the local media to defend their political stances while the Western media was used as a platform to support the anti-Mugabe notion. Other respondents said their source of news was talking to their relatives and friends at home. Again trust emerged as a major issue here.

What's the alternative?

Respondents said that left without much of an option, they opted to use websites run by Zimbabweans when it came to the Zimbabwean story. *New Zimbabwe.com*'s dominance was confirmed as every respondent made reference to it. Some respondents accused the website of tribalism. Supporters of both sides of the political divide accused it of being either pro or anti-Mugabe. I concluded the website must be doing a good job then.

Did you supply news to relatives and friends back home ahead of the 2008 elections?

All respondents said they had supplied information about what was going on in Zimbabwe, but only five of them said they had unconditionally demanded a no-Mugabe vote from their parents. They said they still did not know if their parents went on to vote against Mugabe because as you know "a vote is a secret. Not even your father will tell you which candidate they voted." Other respondents said they were not sure if relaying information back home had an impact because they could not force their relatives to vote a certain way. Their relaying of information was not structured. When they talked about

what was happening in the country they did not make it clear that it was time for Mugabe to go even though some of them confirmed their dislike of Mugabe ahead of the elections.

Is Mugabe right when he takes land from Whites to Blacks?

While some of the respondents said they did not agree with Mugabe's methods, 17 of them said the land belonged to Zimbabwe regardless of colour or creed. The land, in their eyes, should therefore be given to landless citizens of Zimbabwe.

Interviews with Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe (Face-to-Face)

Total Number of respondents: 20 plus 1 (non-Zimbabwean)

Do you have relatives and friends abroad?: (Yes – All)

Did they influence your decision on who to vote for during the 2008 elections? Six respondents said they had planned to vote for Tsvangirai regardless. Other respondents said there was some influence in the sense that they heard about things that they were not aware of but ultimately it was their decision to choose who to vote for. At least five respondents said their friends and relatives abroad tried to influence them to vote against Mugabe but they could not buy such “misguided” – as one of them put it – advice . They had always voted for Mugabe and they were quite sure they would continue to vote for him.

Did you vote for Tsvangirai? Three respondents said “Yes”, Five respondents said “No”, the rest did not want to disclose what they did.

Do you have access to the Internet at home? Only seven had uninterrupted access to the Internet via their mobile phones. Three said they had Internet access through their workplace. One respondent had no idea what the Internet was. The rest knew what it was and had email addresses but did not have regular access.

What is your major source of news? Interestingly, all but seven had access to CNN, BBC and major television stations via satellite. Seven respondents said *ZBC* and *The Herald* were their major sources of news. Five respondents said they read online newspapers via the Internet.

Are you concerned about world news at all or do you only care about Zimbabwe?

Seventeen respondents said they cared a lot about what was happening in the world. They insisted that worldview was very important insofar as developments in Zimbabwe were concerned. The remaining eight respondents said what was interesting to them was only what was happening in Zimbabwe. They only heard about international news through their relatives and friends living abroad

Have you ever heard of SW Africa Radio? All respondents said they knew the foreign-funded station. Eight respondents accused the radio of peddling lies about Zimbabwe. They said since it was foreign funded, they found it hard to trust it. Other respondents

said they listened to it because it told a story “you will never hear on ZBC”, as one of them declared.

Do you consider yourself a citizen journalist? Fifteen respondents said they did not think they were citizen journalists because they had little to do with the Internet. Some of them wanted me to first explain what exactly citizen journalism was. Two respondents, who had previously worked as journalists, insisted that they were citizen journalists. Two other former journalists, including a non-Zimbabwean, working for Western institutions said they were citizen journalists, pointing to their weekly blogs that are posted on their employers’ official websites. One other respondent, who had no formal journalism background, said she considered herself a citizen blogger. One other respondent claimed everyone who has a cell phone, including his 71-year-old mother, is a citizen journalist. Five respondents did not know whether to classify themselves as citizen journalists or not.

Do you feel you are empowered with information that helps you make political decisions?

All respondent said they had enough information about what was going on politically. Seventeen respondents including those who supported Mugabe said they would not even try to participate in demonstration to topple Mugabe because they were too afraid to do so. They said they would be beaten. Eight of them said they would not participate in demonstrations because they believed in peaceful means.

Interview questions – Questionnaire-based (with results in parenthesis)

Total number of respondents: 20

- 1) Do you consider yourself as a Zimbabwean? **(20 out of 20 Answered Yes)**
- 2) Do you live in the Diaspora? **(20 out of 20 Answered Yes)**
- 3) Do you consider yourself anti-Mugabe? **(6 Yes vs. 14 No)**
- 4) Do you want to see political change in Zimbabwe? **(5 Yes vs. 15 No)**
- 5) Would you mind if a ZANU-PF official takes over from Mugabe? **(5 Yes vs. 15 No)**
- 6) The Internet can bring political change in Zimbabwe **(6 Yes vs. 4 No vs. 10 Don't know)**
- 7) I urged relatives to vote for Tsvangirai during the 2008 election **(4 Yes vs. 16 No)**
- 8) I shared information with relatives and friends at home during the 2008 elections **(18 Yes vs. 2 No)**
- 9) My primary source of news has always been online news sites such as newzimbabwe.com **(20 out of 20 answered Yes)**
- 10) Morgan Tsvangirai is unfairly represented in local news **(10 Agree vs. 5 Disagree vs. 5 Don't care)**
- 11) I would go back to a new democratic Zimbabwe **(8 Yes vs. 18 No vs. 2 Zimbabwe is a democracy)**
- 12) Western Press misrepresent the Zimbabwean story **(10 Yes vs. 10 No)**
- 13) If I had the means I would become a blogger and participate in actively removing Mugabe **(5 Yes vs. 3 No vs. 10 Don't know vs. 2 Unanswered)**
- 14) Zimbabwean crisis needs no foreign intervention **(9 Yes vs. 11 No)**
- 15) I have access to the Internet and I consider myself an activist **(7 Yes vs. 7 No vs. 6 Don't know)**
- 16) Mugabe is right when it comes to land reform **(16 Yes, 14 No)**

6.2 Reflections and Implications

Herman Wasserman is keen to remind us of the contested nature of the debate over the efficacy of new media technologies in bringing about social change. When I started conducting my research I was quite convinced that the Zimbabwean Diaspora movement was playing a prominent role in advancing democracy at home. The research results were fairly mixed, however. As a member of this disenchanted Zimbabwean Diaspora, I observed that websites run by Zimbabwean exiles were indeed helping foster political participation. To their credit, these websites are enabling Zimbabwe expatriates to engage in political and social activism. These websites are at the forefront of introducing a completely different and unprecedented information-gathering and information-sharing

spectrum. But are they helping boost the number of citizens participating in the country's political processes? Not entirely, according to the findings of my research. You cannot fault the websites or the brains behind them for failing to do their work. There are several reasons why they fall short of achieving their goals, if encouraging the masses to participate in political engagement is indeed one of their aims. Zimbabwe has a unique political context, one that is often misread by people, especially and perhaps mostly, by those who think they have the solutions.

There was a great deal of renewed hope among Mugabe's opponents that the Internet could be a tool to remove him from power and usher in a new era of democracy. For some, the Arab Spring could have been a point of departure to unseat the long-entrenched president. But Mugabe's image in the West in recent years has been one-dimensional, lacking nuance or historical context. Despite his noticeable mistakes, is he the evil caricature often portrayed in the Western media? Possibly not. Does Zimbabwe need democratic changes? Maybe. But then again, what exactly is democracy? As this study has shown, democracy is a contested subject – one that is theoretically discussable, but practically difficult to implement.

From the findings from the interviews, it became clear that Zimbabweans were actively involved in the political process back home. All 50 respondents, for example, acknowledged transmitting and to some extent sharing news with friends and relatives at home. However, not all of them said they had distributed anti-Mugabe views. Two students, who both admitted to having relatives within Mugabe's party for example, said

they saw it useless to relay anti-Mugabe news back home because it would have little impact since most of their relatives were Mugabe supporters and would vote for him in any case. In Zimbabwe, some respondents admitted being influenced in their voting choices by relatives from abroad, but still chose to vote for a candidate of their own choice. This, therefore, leads us to question whether Mugabe was entirely disadvantaged by the views from the Diaspora. As has already been shown in this study, Mugabe himself has a large following among the Diaspora, contrary to the popular belief that Zimbabweans living abroad exclusively approve of Tsvangirai's policies.

Clearly, new media technologies played a crucial role in selling the image of the opposition party. Some pro-Tsvangirai respondents admitted telling their parents they would stop sending money home if they voted for Mugabe. They said they were convinced Zimbabwe's economy would improve if Tsvangirai took over the leadership, thanks to Western aid that his government presumably would receive. Notably however, six of the 20 respondents interviewed in Zimbabwe said they had planned to vote for Tsvangirai whether they had been advised by relatives and friends abroad or not. This confirms that relaying information to relatives abroad in some cases had a minimal effect on the voting patterns. Still, the Internet offered Tsvangirai an unmatched platform for political campaigning, considering the state media gave minimal coverage of his political campaign compared to Mugabe's.

The involvement of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora in the country's political affairs was always going to be there. After all, Zimbabwe is not the only country that has citizens

abroad. The need to improve the political situation at home was one of the main answers I got when I asked respondents why they were particularly using new media voices as a way of communicating with those at home. While some were bluntly clear that they were eager to effect regime change, the majority of them said they were not concerned who the political leader in Harare was as long as their families and friends could afford the basics. The regime-change agenda purportedly instigated by Western powers has been one of the major bones of contention between President Mugabe and his erstwhile allies in the West. Interestingly, only three respondents suggested that they were seeking regime change in Zimbabwe at all costs, including the possibility of a Western-backed military action. For the rest, a “free and fair” democratic election was the only way to solve the problem, even though they expressed reservations that the possibility was slim given the history of violence-led voting in Zimbabwe.

What made my involvement in this research more interesting, I believe, is the fact that I consider myself an active participant in Diaspora’s efforts to find political solutions at home. Far from just accepting unsubstantiated claims that the Internet was contributing to political participation in Zimbabwe, I saw my involvement as a member of the Zimbabwean Diaspora community as an opportunity to further examine these optimistic claims connecting new media technologies to increased political participation. When I started conducting my research, I was very optimistic that the Internet was at the centre of furthering democratic participation in Africa. I read several articles that supported this hypothesis and I talked to people, especially in the NGO communities, who

understandably also backed these claims since most of them were being funded by Western governments to advance this cause.

Two years into my research, I started analysing my data and I for the first time started questioning some of these claims with the help of my data. The Internet, it seemed, offered plenty of opportunities in terms of mobilising, informing and disseminating information to the citizens. Whether it increased political participation remains an area of debate, offering opportunities for further research. There is no doubt that to some extent, it did change the dynamics of participation. However, Zimbabwe is a completely different case from Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. In general, even though they had information about what was going on around them, the majority of Zimbabweans were afraid to even participate in a peaceful demonstration.

As an active member of the Zimbabwean Diaspora, how did I ensure that I was not biased in the first place? First of all, I wanted to make sure that President Mugabe's voice was represented in this research. I had read plenty of books, news articles etc, in which the bias against Mugabe was quite clear. Mugabe was demonised and rarely got an international platform to share his views. In this study, Mugabe and those who share his views were given adequate space to share their own views through a critical analysis of news articles and interviews. While developing questions for my interviewees, I made sure that I did not frame them with a political slant. What I wanted was to get not only a true but also a broader picture of the influence of technology in Zimbabwean politics. Then when I selected the interviewees I also picked potential Mugabe supporters just like

I selected those sharing Tsvangirai's political ideology. I also selected students who had benefited from Mugabe-sponsored scholarships, and professionals whose views had in the past been supportive of Mugabe. Also when I selected websites for content analysis, I was careful not to choose content that was brusquely pro-Tsvangirai. The aim of the content analysis was to investigate the way these news sites covered the Zimbabwean story, with the hope that Zimbabweans who frequented these sites would read and then transfer their "knowledge" to relatives and friends back home. Content relating to the *Zimbabwean Guardian*, for example, was not directly offered to profile it and represent it as a sternly anti-Tsvangirai online news site.

6.3 Content analysis results

The results of the content analysis showed unquestionable evidence of favouritism towards Tsvangirai's MDC party. The content analysis revealed how the use of words that depicted ZANU PF in negative tones may have benefited Tsvangirai's MDC. For example, words associated with propagandistic techniques featured prominently in the articles published within the prescribed timeline. Glittering generalities such as the use of the word "hope" featured prominently in articles published on the four news sites. The same can be said with the use of "God." In deeply conservative Zimbabwe, "God" plays a very important role. More than 50 articles made reference to God, especially when pleading for peaceful, free and fair elections in the country. Tsvangirai also may have benefited from being portrayed as a common man. A former labour leader, he never had the higher education that Mugabe received. Figure 14 below shows the frequency of words in the four digital newspaper in the period leading up to the elections.

Figure 14: Frequency of words in digital newspapers

Key Word	Frequency
<input type="checkbox"/> Intimidation	48
<input type="checkbox"/> Corruption	38
<input type="checkbox"/> Hope	53
<input type="checkbox"/> Economy	63
<input type="checkbox"/> Bias	35
<input type="checkbox"/> God	59

Headlines showed the extent to which the four newspapers favoured Tsvangirai. From the four, only *New Zimbabwe.com*, which normally reproduced articles from press agencies such as Reuters, published articles that also gave a voice to Mugabe's ZANU-PF. For instance, the site ran a story headlined "Mugabe says Makoni worse than a prostitute" on 1 February 2008. The item referred to Mugabe's virulent attack on former Finance Minister Simba Makoni, who had formed his own Mavambo party, which was due to contest the elections. *New Zimbabwe.com* attempted to publish "fair" articles representing Mugabe and his party prior to the elections. Among its headlines: "Mugabe's spokesman reads riot act on foreign correspondents", "Mugabe will not concede defeat", and "Bomb explodes at ZANU candidate's home". The other three newspapers gave no room whatsoever to positive coverage of Mugabe. Coverage of Mugabe in *ZimDaily*, *The Zimbabwean* and *SW Africa* was scathing, while Tsvangirai's image was consistently positive. *SW Africa* claimed to expose potential election fraud with articles such as "Mugabe changes law to allow Policemen in Polling booth" on March 19. In March

alone, SW Africa, as shown through its archive pages, published 201 articles.³¹⁴ None of them came close to giving Mugabe a voice. Examples of the articles the radio station ran are: “Zanu PF heavyweights lose in landmark elections”, “MDC wins in ZANU PF strongholds”, “Riot Police intimidate voters in Bikita”, “Opposition polling agents flee Bikita”, “Tension in Bulawayo as army trucks and water cannons on streets”, “Mugabe threatens business with price cuts”, and “Mugabe says MDC will never rule Zimbabwe”.

Figure 15: Number of endorsements of four online newspapers

Number of endorsements of four online newspapers

Online newspaper	Mugabe	Tsvangirai
<i>New Zimbabwe.com</i>	9	16
<i>The Zimbabwean</i>	0	42
<i>SW Africa</i>	0	39
<i>Zim Daily</i>	0	47

The four online newspapers that I reviewed in the content analysis displayed pro-Tsvangirai voting. Only four articles that appeared on *New Zimbabwe.com* were slanted towards endorsing Mugabe. Even in those cases, the stories were not editorials from the newspaper itself but were written by its pool of commentators. The other three online newspapers chose to neglect pro-Mugabe endorsements altogether. News material endorsing Tsvangirai or the policies of his party were given priority in these newspapers, clearly revealing an anti-Mugabe bias. This shows to some extent how these newspapers had played a critical role in campaigning for Tsvangirai, even though as is argued in this research, there is no evidence that these newspapers boosted outright the participation of

³¹⁴ “Previous news stories March 2008” http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/previous_mar2008.htm, Accessed 15 December 2011.

citizens in the political playground. The content analysis showed that journalism is on the decaying end in the age of the Internet. The honesty and objectivity of the news propounded by De Jong as good values in journalism are no longer the top priorities of news organisations. Online newspapers take stances with the aim of buttressing their political candidates' support bases.

For its part, *The Zimbabwean* repeatedly trashed Mugabe and his followers. The article "Torture widespread" published on 27 February was based on an "exclusive interview" with Professor Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Interestingly, there was only one direct quote from Nowak and the story, less than 400 words, is too short to be an exclusive. It is not clear what exactly Nowak said. No views from the Zimbabwean government were sought for this article, which is blatantly biased against Mugabe. On the same day, *The Zimbabwean* ran a story headlined "Soldiers, diplomats vote in secrecy". In the story, an official from the pro-Tsvangirai Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) is quoted as telling the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to ensure voting by security forces and diplomats was transparent. That is as far as it goes. Neither the official nor the newspaper give any thread of evidence showing diplomats and soldiers were voting in secrecy as part of what the newspaper called election fraud. This is more evidence of open bias toward Tsvangirai

New media thus empowered Zimbabweans with information, but political participation requires more than just access to information. While they may be exposed to information, the biggest threat to full and enhanced participation lay in their ability to overcome fear

of the unknown. As far as I am concerned, they are fighting and perhaps winning a cyber war against Mugabe, but that does not change the status quo in Zimbabwe. Mugabe remains in power and it looks like he alone, and not the West, will decide when and how he can go. Notably, even though there are conspicuously thousands of brave people who by all means choose to fight Mugabe's alleged totalitarianism, one quotation from an interviewee summarises what appears to me as the general view about active participation in Zimbabwe politics: "To live happily in Zimbabwe, stay out of politics". In other words, the masses are afraid. The fear factor plays a crucial role in keeping the Mugabe regime intact. If you read newspapers, you will of course find articles about citizens being abducted or tortured by the secret service. Empirical evidence showing people are indeed abducted, however, is lacking.

6.4 Citizen journalism in Zimbabwe: Key lessons

To best assess the future of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe, we need to first look not only at who is sponsoring efforts in participatory journalism in the country but also profile the "types" of citizen journalists we have. Citizen journalists in Zimbabwe – as five of the 20 interviews conducted with journalists and members of the NGO community in Zimbabwe revealed – do not always meet the widely accepted definition of having no formal training in journalism education. The decade-long political and economic crisis, which ended in 2009 when ZANU-PF and the MDC joined forces to form a new government, affected almost every professional in the country. Many journalists left the country. These are the journalists now leading the online networks that were analysed in this research. Some journalists chose to stay in Zimbabwe and some of them chose to become citizen journalists. As one of them revealed in an interview, for the "purposes of

survival” they were happy to do anything that paid them. “I was working for the *Zimbabwe Independent* but at the same time I was writing for *The Zimbabwean* and Voice of America’s studio 7. I also blogged for an international website earning 100 USD a month. That’s how I survived.”

Notably, this journalist has not stopped sending citizen-based stories to *The Zimbabwean* newspaper. Trained at the Christian College of Southern Africa in Harare, he is a professional journalist, who has since stopped working professionally but earns a living by contributing “blogging material to sites run by NGOs”. Another journalist, who also considers himself a citizen journalist, insisted that very few people “I know are trained journalists. You don’t train journalists. They just become [a] journalist themselves.” He has a degree in Sociology from the University of Zimbabwe and has written stories for local dailies, also supplying new material to international newspapers. But most of his money, he says, comes from blogging. He is one of the journalists that frequent a place in central Harare where American press freedom giant Freedom House has an open space where journalists can freely use computers and submit their stories. He believes the world deserves to know what is happening in Zimbabwe, but the reality is “I also need to live and survive.”

My concern in talking to these journalists was twofold. First I struggled categorising them as citizen journalists. They both thought they were, but their idea of citizen journalism was centred on the idea that they were citizens who happened to have journalistic skills which they were using to tell the world the Zimbabwean story. The

other problem was the ethical side of their work. Dedicated and determined as they seemed, it looked to me like they were equally ready to write stories tarnishing Mugabe and his party in a bad light as long as they would get paid. One of them did not mince his words: “No one out there wants to hear anything legitimate about Mugabe. He hasn’t got anything legitimate anyway.” This statement goes to show why stories about Mugabe have not always been accurately presented in Zimbabwe and abroad and it seems like no one cares, because for the sake of getting paid some journalists have turned to citizen journalism, which has little or no ethical requirements than the more demanding traditional school of journalism.

I also interviewed a foreign blogger working for a leading NGO in Zimbabwe, as well as a Zimbabwean working in the communication department of the Western Embassy. They both maintained a blog in which they wrote about their experiences in Zimbabwe and they considered themselves citizen journalists. They had also both worked as journalists previously. They said that they were free to write what they wanted. Their bosses did not interfere with what they wrote, even though their stories were published on the official websites of their employers. The embassy official said her views did not reflect the official policy of her mother country towards Zimbabwe. Both said they had no hidden agenda concerning Zimbabwe. “I find it hard to write about positive things because there is very little positive to note. They have a new government but squabbles are all over the place”, the embassy official noted. Asked whether he also tried to post positive material about Zimbabwe on his blog, the NGO worker differed with the embassy official even though they both knew each other: “I am looking for positive stories here. The accusation

we get from the Zimbabwean government is that we only want to tarnish the image of the country. I write about the positive reflections and resilience of the people here.”

One non-affiliated blogger said she wrote about “everything but politics”. Her views were that journalists only focused on politics “as if there is nothing to talk about it Zimbabwe.” She said she was not a journalist but a social activist. She enjoyed writing about people living in rural Zimbabwe and documenting their interesting, “beautiful stories”. She did not have a personal blog, but she contributed her stories to several blogs for free. She did not consider blogging “a profession but more of a hobby.” Data from the five respondents show the confusing dynamics of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe. It is no easy task defining who is a citizen journalist and who is not because those who post pictures that reveal information that politicians may want to conceal (on Facebook) also call themselves citizens journalists. Citizen journalism in Zimbabwe is thus seen through the lens of political activism. Only one respondent felt politics did not define what she wanted to write, the majority of the respondents admitted it was difficult to separate politics from the Zimbabwean way of life. Political activists, who also considered themselves citizen journalists, clearly confirmed that their presence on Facebook was politically-inclined. As one of them said, “I wouldn’t have a Facebook account had I not been a political activist for the MDC”.

The problem with citizen journalism in Zimbabwe is that it is not people-driven. The educated elite living in bigger cities and towns are in most cases the driving force behind this revolution. When I put it to a politician that the rural dwellers were mostly left out in

this citizen participation since not all of them had the technological knowhow to report and send stories to other people, the politician retorted: “You are wrong there. You should not underestimate our people. My mother is 71. She has a cell phone. When she has no credit in her phone, she sends me a message, asking me to call her back. So you think if some political rivals attack her, she won’t be able to send me a sms telling me what’s going on.” The politician revealed that her mother’s cell phone could take pictures and she knew “how to take pictures”. That made the politician’s mother a potential political participant, but I could not verify how many 71 year olds in Zimbabwe were in possession of a cell phone.

6.4.1 Theoretical contribution

Given the scope of an overpowering and commonly accepted view that new media technologies are at the centre of bringing democratic revolution globally, this study’s contribution appears twofold. Firstly and perhaps more significantly, there has never been a better time to undertake research in this area, as such an undertaking will only serve to avoid empirically unproven notions such as those seeking to link the Internet with humanising the democratic institutions of a country. This study has without a doubt shown how powerful the Internet and new technologies have been in empowering people with information in Zimbabwe. However, it has also highlighted some of the complexities surrounding the possible success of the digitalised culture, exploring issues such as access, availability, legal frameworks and state scepticism. Therefore, there should be no reason to think that just because the Internet has been instrumental in democratising Egypt, the same can be done in Zimbabwe, simply because of the geopolitical and cultural differences between those countries. It is dangerous to assume

that the same tactics used in the Egyptian revolution can be reproduced with corresponding success in another country, as no evidence has been given to support such a position.

Secondly, through this study we have learned that the biggest obstacle to the success of digital technologies in improving the citizens' democratic participation in Zimbabwe is fear. Participation can be subjective. Clearly, it does not necessarily entail voting against Mugabe. Zimbabweans need to overcome fear in order to realise the full potential of the digitalised world. Through the Internet, citizens can have access to empowering information. But more important is what they do with that information. True, knowledge is power, but without understanding how to utilise knowledge, power remains out of reach. In the March 2008 elections, citizens had information about what was going on in the country through access to the Internet or via messages from relatives and friends abroad. That information empowered them to make their choice of candidate, yet some still voted for President Mugabe because they feared the consequences of voting for the opposition.

A chapter analysis of the inductive parts of this research also shows the important contribution of this research to the field of media and African politics. Through a critical reflection on the conflicting historical and contemporary positions of Zimbabwean politics, it is apparent that Zimbabwe has seen itself facing the challenges it is encountering since long before 2000. These problems did not just begin with the land reform. They go back to the colonial involvement of the British in Zimbabwe. Land is a

highly emotive and contested issue, which despite all its agrarian potential, has literally contributed to the downfall of the country. The same chapter also revealed how, ironically, many of the colonial laws that were issued by the previous White governments have now been used by Mugabe to oppress his own people. Rhodesian media laws, which gave dominance to the state-run broadcaster, are still very much alive. At the same time, the chapter shows the origins of media discontent. Zimbabwean journalists had good cause to embrace the Internet revolution. The Internet offered a voice to those who could not criticise Mugabe from within the country, and the same digital technologies could be manipulated to tarnish the image of ZANU-PF.

Chapter four also shows the relationships between new and old media in the Zimbabwean context. *The Herald* newspaper's position in the Zimbabwean political market is scrutinized to understand its power and to show how difficult it may have been for Mugabe to achieve his political aspirations without the assistance of this brazenly loyal newspaper. But the advent of the Internet has forced *The Herald* to adopt and embrace the new media. Citizens' participation through citizen journalism, I also conclude, is not a distinctively new phenomenon, as citizens have historically participated in issues surrounding their own interests. This conclusion also reveals a rather pessimistic view on the overall contribution of the Internet in improving the way citizens participate in the Zimbabwean political space. This is a significant contribution because I have yet to see other studies that question the notion that new media technologies have significantly improved the way Zimbabweans participate politically.

6.4.2 Conclusion

After a few years of examining the issues under discussion, I came to the conclusion that new media technologies – far from eloquently improving the way Zimbabweans participate politically – have yet to fully demonstrate their full potential. This is not due to their inability, but rather the citizens' unwillingness – or powerlessness – to actively participate in politics because they fear the unknown. You may have the Internet, you may even have unrestricted access to it, but what is important is your willingness and determination to use it for political purposes. That is still lacking in the case of Zimbabwe. Obviously, this is a generalised view that came out my research. There are plenty of fearless people who have confronted Mugabe. Indeed, there are plenty of people who have taken Mugabe to task by using the Internet and new media platforms to denounce his alleged misrule. However, there is still a long way to go before the platforms can have a direct influence on the Zimbabwean political climate.

Fear, as already discussed, is one of the reasons why it will probably take a long time before Zimbabweans realise the full potential of the Internet. Another factor affecting the dichotomy of information-sharing between the Zimbabweans at home and their fellow citizens abroad pertains to a general mistrust among the former of Zimbabweans who are living in the Diaspora. While many people can easily identify their contribution to the country's economy, not everyone – as shown from the analysis of interviews with Zimbabweans living in the country – is happy with their attitudes towards the country. Some are not happy that among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora there were people who created versions of alleged brutality from Mugabe with the hope of securing visas and residence permits in the West. All these factors have contributed to the general mistrust

of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Some see them as sell-outs, while others consider them cowards who could not stand the heat when the country was facing an economic crisis. Now that the economy is back on its feet, an unrelenting stream of Zimbabweans has been pouring back into the country and those who never left view them with suspicion. Local initiative will bring change. Change cannot be entirely Diaspora-driven as is the case with Zimbabwe

While the Internet should be credited for providing information to previously underprivileged citizens, it should not entirely be credited for influencing the way people participate in their political affairs. Within the context of the 2008 elections, it can be argued that the Internet played an information-providing role, as evidenced by the confirmation given by some of the 50 interview respondents in the Diaspora. However, not everybody who got the information from the Diaspora unconditionally chose to vote for Tsvangirai, as some of the voters confirmed that they decided to vote for Makoni or Mugabe instead. Five of the voters who were advised to vote against Mugabe still decided to vote for him, against the wishes of their friends and relatives abroad, thereby proving the hypothesis wrong. In this case, the Internet was not entirely central to the voters' choices.

There is only one thing that can strongly validate my hypothesis. If participation means going on the Internet and sending emails to politicians, questioning their positions in order to ensure transparency, then Zimbabweans still have a long way to go before they can solidly conclude that the advent of the Internet has boosted their online political

activism. However, if participation just means accessing and sharing online political information with friends and relatives, then Zimbabweans are already doing that. But not everyone is participating. In fact the majority of the rural population has no idea what Facebook is. My view is that participation should not be half-baked. It should be a process that not only involves making voting choices, but also taking politicians to task on the decisions they make. Participation should also mean that the distance between the political players and the constituencies they represent is shortened. That is still not the case in Zimbabwe. Politicians remain relatively untouchable, and it is still rather early to think that the Internet is helping make them accountable for their decisions and actions. Zimbabweans should first deal with more pressing issues such as securing access to the Internet. Despite all these problems, it would be foolish to dismiss the democratic potential of the Internet – as has been argued throughout.

6.4.3 Possibilities for further research

The fact that power of the Internet and new media technologies to influence democratic participation have not been wholly proven in Zimbabwe should not be taken to mean the case is the same in each and every country. The Internet, I predict, is going to play a much bigger role in determining the pace of democratic participation in the future. It takes a significant amount of time for people to realise their potential. Confronting supposedly autocratic regimes is a risky business and many people living in Zimbabwe are well aware of this. But then the question should also be asked if that is what people want. Is it true that the people of Zimbabwe are sick and tired of Mugabe, or would they rather keep him in power? This offers plenty of possibilities for future research. The

growing mobile phone technology is being seen as playing a leading role in democratising the political space in Africa.

Elsewhere in Africa, cell phones have been credited with helping the independent media, mostly radio, provide accurate coverage of elections. Can Zimbabweans also turn to mobile phones to help end President Mugabe's decades-old political reign? Mobile phones have virtually changed the communication landscape across the African continent. Loader is of the view that new media technologies provide citizens with a chance to engineer change in democratic institutions and practices.³¹⁵ But it is important to note that optimism has dominated largely unsubstantiated and seemingly idealistic claims linking participatory journalism and digital technologies with the enhancement of democratic participation in Africa. But once again empirical evidence backing these notions remains lacking. Rigorous research is thus needed.

6.4.4 Limitations of this research

It is not always easy writing about a subject that you feel attached to emotionally. As a Zimbabwean by birth, I have naturally followed almost every news item in which Zimbabwe features. I have read news from traditional news sites as well as new media websites. I have also read a great deal of literature tied to this research. I have obviously formed my own opinions about the subject. To this end, I have also contributed several opinion articles in newspapers in the Netherlands and Zimbabwe. Writing about the Diaspora's contribution towards democratic participation was therefore very difficult, since I was also an active member of the Diaspora community. Still, I ensured that my

³¹⁵ Brian Loader, "The Citizens' Voice in a Wired World" (see n. 10 above).

research was not by and large influenced by my own views.

I could have spent more time in Zimbabwe directly observing the impact of the crisis. In the last three years, I have made five trips to Zimbabwe, three of them specifically as part of my data-gathering process. In total, I spent 91 days in Zimbabwe working on my research. Even though most of the interviews were conducted in the UK with Zimbabwean expatriates there, I still feel spending more time in Zimbabwe could have boosted the analysis of this research. I have become very sceptical about the Western media's reports on Zimbabwe. I tend to prefer good empirical work rather than media reports, hence the argument that spending more time observing and talking to people on the ground would have complemented the findings of this research. At the same time, however, I am quite pleased with the amount of data I got obtained and used for this research.

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