

THE FUTURE OF THE PRINTED NEWSPAPER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERNET IN AFRICA The Case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The internet has fundamentally transformed the media landscape in Africa not least in Zimbabwe. The technology has spawned new practices whose impact on the printed newspaper could be described as contradictory. The internet is a boon for small African publications that are now able to assert their presence globally through online editions thus, improving their readership. However, some scholars argue that the same technology portends the demise of the printed newspaper due to competition presented by these online editions, suggesting that the internet has been to the printed newspaper a “terrible beauty”. This pilot study examines the habits of newspaper readers in Zimbabwe in order to ascertain whether the internet is threatening the survival of the printed newspaper or otherwise. In particular the paper investigates newspaper reading habits of the printed newspaper vis-à-vis the internet newspaper. Key questions that the paper addresses are: What obstacles hinder access to the internet newspaper in Zimbabwe? Is the printed newspaper under threat from the internet newspaper? The present study combines survey method and in-depth interviews in order to glean insights on the future prospects of the printed newspaper in the internet age in an African context. Preliminary findings are that while considerable interest is shown for the internet newspaper the print newspaper is far from extinction suggesting instead a complementary relationship between the two. Reasons for this range from technical ones, such as low diffusion of the internet and a host of economic and socio-cultural factors.

KEYWORDS complementary effect; Internet newspaper; obstacles; printed newspaper; reading habits; replacement effect; Zimbabwe,

Introduction

The internet is increasingly asserting itself as a prime source of news and information globally thus threatening the future of traditional news media such as newspapers. Its negative impact on sales and revenue streams of newspapers on the one hand, and its potential and ability to enhance the newsgathering and dissemination of printed publications are issues that have fed debate about the impact of the internet on traditional media. Although the impact of the internet on traditional media is gaining currency scholars hardly agree on the precise impact of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper. While some argue that the internet is the new knight in a shining

amour with vast potential to uplift struggling publications others posit that it constitutes the biggest threat to the printed newspaper because newspaper readers are now spending more time surfing the internet while advertisers are migrating to the new medium leaving printed newspapers battling to keep their noses above water. Because of the polarized views on the subject the precise impact of the internet on the printed newspaper remains more a subject of conjecture than anything else. The connection between the internet and the printed newspaper is something worthy of academic inquiry given the enormous influence of the newspaper in Africa. This pilot study seeks to elicit data that may help to understand how the internet newspaper is affecting the printed newspaper in Zimbabwe. In particular the paper seeks to investigate whether the internet is a threat to the printed newspaper or not. Are there indications that the printed newspaper is being threatened by the internet newspaper? What elements of the internet newspaper exert a magnetic pull on readers of the printed newspaper?

In spite of an economic melt-down lasting close to a decade Zimbabwe has witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of internet users over the past few years. About three million Zimbabweans are believed to have emigrated to neighbouring countries mainly South Africa and Botswana and some European countries particularly the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia and others. This has created an extraordinarily large pool of citizens desiring to stay connected with relatives and friends back home through various channels of communication, chief among them email and internet. Stringent media laws particularly the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) have resulted in shrinkage of media space due to closure of some privately owned newspapers. Some of the closed newspapers have resurfaced on the internet while others are operating from outside the country catering for a news hungry readership back home. In addition, media polarization along political lines has resulted in mainstream newspapers being discredited as sources of news and information. Alienated readers have resorted to 'alternative' sources of information in order to counterbalance what they read in both the state and privately owned media. With one of the highest literacy rates in Africa Zimbabwe¹ has a critical mass of people with computer skills requisite for internet use than many African countries.

The Press Situation in Zimbabwe

The media in Zimbabwe traces its history to the colonial period beginning with the establishment of *The Herald* (1892) and the *Bulawayo Chronicle* (1894) by the South African based Argus Printing and Publishing Company (Gale, 1962). Argus remained the dominant player in the media sector until the country attained independence from Britain in 1980 when the company was acquired by the new majority government. At the onset of independence Zimbabwe inherited a fairly diversified media landscape and a blossoming privately owned press which reflected the dominance of white capital in the economy. Although the new government espoused socialism the economy and the press remained largely in private hands resulting in phenomenal growth of the press sector and the flourishing of media freedom (Saunders, 1991). The second decade of independence (1990-1999) could be remembered as the 'golden decade' of the press in Zimbabwe as it

witnessed phenomenal growth in privately owned press. A more tolerant political climate and reduced economic control induced by Bretton Woods institutions engineered Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) encouraged new investments in the press (Saunders, 1991). It is however, the formation of the *Daily News*ⁱⁱ at the turn of the century which completely changed the media landscape of the country. The *Daily News* reached a readership of 100 000 compared to the state run *The Herald* of 90 000 (Waldahl, 2004, p37). Its launch coincided with the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a strong and viable opposition party backed by a coalition of civil society organizations. *The Daily News* therefore became a strategic conduit for ventilating political discontent. In an attempt to tame militant media the Zanu PF government whose hegemony was being denuded due to poor performance of the economy promulgated the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) which made the registration of newspapers and journalists mandatory. *The Daily News* and its sister publication *The Daily News on Sunday* refused to comply with the law thus setting it on a collision with the government, resulting in its closure in September 2003. Due to the shrinkage of media space and job opportunities following the closure of the *Daily News* and other privately owned newspapers several journalists left for various countries in the region, Europe and the United States of America where they started online publications. Notable of these include *NewZimbabwe.com*, *ZWNews*, *ZimOnline*, *ZimDaily*, *Zimbabwejournalists.com*, *The Zimbabwe Times.com* among others. The Committee to Protect Journalists notes that Zimbabwe has the highest number of journalists (estimated to be 90) living outside their country making it “one of the largest groups of exiled journalists in the world” (Nyakunu, 2005).

After the closure of the *Daily News*, the *Daily News on Sunday*, *The Weekly Times* the *Business Tribune* and the *Weekend Tribune*ⁱⁱⁱ *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Mirror*^{iv} media space further shrunk, both in terms of job opportunities and voices alternative to the state, leaving *The Financial Gazette*, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard*^v and *The Zimbabwean*^{vi} as the only privately owned newspapers in the country. This leaves government claiming the lion’s share of the media space owning a vast empire of newspapers under the state owned Zimbabwe newspapers Pvt Ltd (1980) stable^{vii}. These include *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* (dailies), *The Sunday Mail* (national weekly), the *Sunday News* (provincial weekly) *The Manica Post* (provincial weekly) *Kwayedza* (indigenous language-Shona^{viii}, also national weekly) and *Umuthunywa* (regional weekly, indigenous weekly-Ndebele)^{ix}

The Internet in Zimbabwe

Although Zimbabwe is considered a latecomer in joining the information superhighway the country has made significant strides in internet connectivity. The number of internet users is believed to be around 135000 translating to 10.9% of the population (Internetworldstats, 2008). The internet penetration rate is 9.8%, the number of broadband subscribers is 10200 while broadband penetration rate stands at 0.1 percent In spite of the

economic meltdown the number of internet users has been growing steadily. Internet Service Providers (IPS) have grown from six in 2003 to 30 in 2009 (Internationalworldstats, ibid). This growth reflects the growing demand for internet service by the business community and the general public. A number of colleges in the capital, Harare and other smaller towns offer training in computers thus exposing the youth to computer skills. Government also has a programme of distributing computers to schools thus helping promote computer literacy skills requisite for internet use. The desire by young people to access educational and entertainment information has also contributed to the growth of internet use in the country. Internet and email have also become key tools of staying in touch with relatives and friends who emigrated abroad. Most people who have access to the internet do so via cyber cafes, colleges, universities and the work place. Only a few people access the internet at home (Ndlovu, 2009, (Government of Zimbabwe, 2005). Internet use among Zimbabweans is however, still very low. Many people are not aware of the opportunities that the internet provides resulting in very low internet use. Internet use is largely email-based, meaning that the internet is underutilized (The Business Mirror, 2004). Accessibility of the internet is hampered by poor a telecommunication infrastructure, prohibitive costs, lack of computer skills and a poor national and international bandwidth. The country's tele-density is estimated to be between 2.5 and 3 meaning that there are about 2.5 and three telephone lines per hundred citizens^x (Machigere, 2008, Ndlovu, 2009). The telecommunication infrastructure is antiquated and often results in the internet system malfunctioning while electricity generation is inadequate and only available to 872 008 households which translates to 36.9% of the households (Mutseyekwa, 2007). Unavailability of reliable electricity generation is one of the biggest problems confronting the telecommunications industry in the country. Chief Executive of Econet Wireless, which is one of the mobile cellular service providers, notes that: "Each time there is a major power failure in an area the company is forced to shut down the base station, effectively cutting off thousands of people from the service" (Cellular News, 2008). These problems are compounded by strict regulatory and licensing framework, censorship, control and shortage of skills resulting from a massive brain drain (Ndlovu, ibid). Costs of accessing the internet are also very high. For instance, internet cafes in the Central Business District of Harare and surrounding areas charge between USD1 and USD1.40 per hour for accessing the internet. Computers are equally pricy and unaffordable. A perusal of the classified advertisements of the main newspapers shows that a 19 inch monitor costs USD 360 while a 17 inch one is going for USD 330. A CPU costs USD690 while a full set is going for USD895. This is very high considering that the majority of the people do not have any income^{xi} while those who are employed earn an average of USD140 per month.

Newspapers and the Internet

The internet has become a key tool for newsgathering since the first newspaper went on the web in 1998. All major newspapers have fully functioning websites the majority of them having gone online at the beginning of the millennium. Most newspaper organizations subscribe to online news agencies such as Reuters, AFP, IPS, SAPA etc

which supply fresh news about global events. Some of these stories are used wholesale while others are re-edited to suit the local context.

The internet is a key source of breaking news for journalists and has become a key enabler of journalism because of the wealth of information which it provides. Email has become a key tool for contacting news sources and for cross-checking facts with sources around the world. Table 1 below gives an overview of the newspapers available on the internet in Zimbabwe.

Table 1: Newspapers with websites in Zimbabwe

Newspaper	Language/Frequency	City	Ownership	Year went on Website
<i>The Herald</i>	English-Daily	Harare	Zimpapers (51% government)	2001
<i>The Chronicle</i>	English-Daily	Bulawayo	Zimpapers (51% government)	2001
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	English-Weekly	Harare	Zimpapers (51% government)	2001
<i>The Manica Post</i>	English-Weekly	Mutare	Zimpapers	2001
<i>The Sunday News</i>	English-Weekly	Bulawayo	Zimpapers (51% government)	2001
<i>Kwayedza</i>	Shona-Weekly	Harare	Zimpapers (51% government)	2001
<i>Umuthunywa</i>	siNdebele-Weekly	Bulawayo	Zimpapers (51% government)	2001
<i>The Financial Gazette</i>	English-English Weekly	Harare	Fingaz Press	1999

<i>The Zimbabwe Independent</i>	English-Weekly	Harare	Zimind Publishers	1998
<i>The Standard</i>	English-Weekly	Harare	Zimind Publishers	1998
<i>The Zimbabwean</i>	English-weekly	London/Johannesburg	<i>The Zimbabwean Limited</i>	2004
<i>The Zimbabwean on Sunday</i>	English-weekly	London/Johannesburg	<i>The Zimbabwean Limited</i>	2008

All the newspapers above have open access to their web editions. Their electronic editions are normally posted on the internet when the print edition goes to the press meaning that it is accessible before the printed edition is available on the newsstands. In the initial stages most of the newspapers only published the main articles online and the web edition was substantially different from the printed edition. However, a few such as *The Herald*, *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* now have some digital editions that differ slightly with the printed editions. For example, digital editions have different display and classified adverts from the internet newspaper. Also digital editions do not carry all the stories found in printed newspapers.

All newspapers have standard sections such as News, Business Section, Opinion, Entertainment, Sports, cartoons etc. Some web editions provide archives, feedback facilities and internet polls. Most newspapers have hit counters that record the number of visitors to the websites. Some archives (for example, Zimpapers archives are patchy and non-searchable meaning that one can only access today's and yesterday's editions of the newspaper, (Gareth Willard, Interview, 2009-07-15). The cost of maintaining a fully functioning archive is very high and most newspapers cannot afford to operate fully functioning archives. Because of the poor telecommunication system internet servers at most newspaper organizations are always down. Websites are hardly updated until the next edition meaning that stories in the print and online edition are the same.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the impact of the internet on the printed newspaper particularly in Africa. There is however, burgeoning literature on Europe and the American context starting with Everret Rogers' work on the impact of television on film and radio in the 1950s in the United States (Zhanwei and Xigen, 2004). To a great extent, Maxwell McCombs's (1972) study on the impact of new technology on existing mass media, advertising revenue and consumer spending is widely acknowledged

(Bromely and Bowles 1995, Zhanwei and Xigen, 2004). McCombs postulated a theory of 'relative constancy' arguing that consumer spending on mass media was relative to the Gross National Product and was constant over time. More recent surveys in Europe and the United States of America appear to lend credibility to the view that the growth of the internet newspaper is threatening the printed newspaper. California's Annenberg School of Communications concluded that the printed newspaper would die at the hands of the internet newspaper (Leggart, 2009). The survey found that almost a quarter of internet users (22%) had traded a print subscription for an online one. The World Association of Newspapers (1997) on the other hand, noted that advertising levels, circulation and time spent reading newspapers were declining due to, among other factors the threat from online newspapers (cited by Ewart, 2003).

On the academic front views on the subject appear polarized between those who argue that traditional media is on the verge of being replaced by the internet newspaper, on the other hand there are those who argue that, rather than posing a threat to the traditional media the internet newspaper complements traditional media (Friedman and Friedman, 2008). Although Friedman and Friedman do not dwell much on the debate they provide a conceptual framework to guide research on the relationship between traditional media and new media.

Other studies worth noting include Bressels and Meeds (2007)'s focusing on the level of integration between traditional print media and the internet. Based on a survey of 63 US editors, the study revealed factors that influence the level of integration between online and printed newspapers. Significantly the study noted that print newspapers stand to benefit from creating synergies with online newspapers, an indication that online and print newspapers are not necessarily strange bedfellows. The study does not however, delve much on the impact of the internet newspapers on print publications. Bromley and Bowles (1995) investigated whether time spent on new technology was at the expense of traditional news media.

They argued that electronic services did not affect the amount of time spent with the newspaper or radio (Bromely and Bowles, 1995, p6). The study did not find significant evidence to support the hypothesis that users of interactive computer networks, at least during the initial start up will spend less time with newspapers, television and radio than they did before adopting the new technology.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents reported no change in the amount of time spent with traditional media after commencing use of the new technology while slightly fewer than 10% reported less time with traditional media (Bromely and Bowles, 1995, p17). Where time spent with traditional media decreased it was observed that it was more likely to be subtracted from television viewing than newspapers or radio. However, the study did not inquire about time spent on other activities such as reading newspapers since 'traditional media' were bundled together.

An exploratory study by Ewart (2003) on the other hand, examines issues affecting the news media in Australia and globally. Among other things Ewart notes that the growth of online newspapers has heralded dire warnings to the newspaper industry in Australia.

Ewart however, hazards that the threat of the internet newspaper on circulation, readership and profits of the printed newspaper is yet to be fully revealed suggesting that current studies on the subject are far from conclusive. The present study is motivated by this realization and seeks to broaden literature from earlier studies, albeit in an African context. Filistrucchi (2005) and Zhanwei and Xigen (2004)'s studies are more illuminating and somewhat strike a chord with the present study.

Filistrucchi, who investigated the impact of the internet on the daily newspapers in Italy found that opening a website had a negative impact on the sales of the printed edition of the newspaper and on those of its rivals. The study revealed that the internet had three substitution effects namely:

- (1) The first effect resulted from the general availability of the internet as people allocated less time reading newspapers because they prefer surfing the internet (effect 1)
- (2) The second resulted from the general availability of news online whereby people stopped buying newspapers preferring to read news via the internet (effect 2).
- (3) The third resulted from the opening of the website of the newspaper itself and the availability of the exact article of the printed edition whereby people stop buying a newspaper preferring to read it on the internet (Effect 3), (Filistrucchi, 2005, p1). Filistrucchi found that website provision had a negative effect on sales of newspapers that opened websites and on their rivals. The average short-run loss from an own website was 3.1% while loss accruing from the presence of a rival website was 1.5% and loss in sales was estimated to have led to substantial losses in profits due to a decline in both sales and advertising revenues. However, Filistrucchi does not completely rule out the fact that some people still regard online and print newspapers as complements. Significantly, the study notes that in the long-run printed newspapers are unlikely to disappear although sales may drop. Unlike previous studies, Filistrucchi makes a distinction between the impact of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper in the long-run and the short-run noting that substitutability is highest in the long-run when there is full access to the online edition. The extent to which these findings can be generalized is not known particularly given the fact that in some contexts the internet itself is still a pie in the sky for the majority of the citizens. Zhanwei and Xigen (2004) investigated the impact of internet newspapers on the circulation of printed newspapers in the United States of America and found that the growth of the internet yielded a slightly negative effect on the circulation of print newspapers. It was also found that the smaller the newspaper the larger the effect the online newspaper had on the printed newspaper. Accordingly, small and medium sized print newspapers showed obvious decreasing circulation since 1990 but there was no evidence of decreasing circulation in large newspapers. The scale of decline in circulation of print newspapers did not show evidence of a replacing effect of

the internet newspapers (Zhanwei and Xigen, 2004, p17). In addition, about half of the publishers and online editors did not regard the internet newspaper as a major factor that could reduce readership of print newspapers. The study lends weight to the relative constancy hypothesis which argues that when embracing new media, newspaper readers do not necessarily abandon the printed newspaper. A limitation of this study is that it relied on page impressions (the number of times a specific website has been accessed) and unique users (the number of different people who visit a site over a given period) as well as perceptions of editors and publishers to measure the impact of the internet on printed newspaper circulations. These indicators do not necessarily reveal the actual number of readers since opening a web page does not necessarily translate to reading it. Also, relying on the perceptions of editors and publishers is problematic in the sense that there is bound to be bias resulting from self-interest and lack of knowledge about the real impact of the new technology on their business. The present study combines a survey of the perceptions of newspaper readers and in-depth interviews in order to understand the impact of the internet newspaper on printed newspaper in an African context. The next section discusses methods of data collection for this study. Based on previous studies this study aims to test one hypothesis and to furnish answers to three research questions.

Hypothesis

The internet constitutes a threat to the printed newspaper.

The study is informed by McCombs's hypothesis of relative constancy and other previous studies which affirm the view that when the readership of online newspapers increases fewer people will buy the printed newspaper resulting in the decline of the printed newspaper's circulation. We have also noted how polarised the debate on the impact of the internet on the printed newspaper with some recent studies disputing the hypothesis of relative constancy arguing that the internet newspaper and the printed newspaper are 'cousins' which complement each other.

Although the present study does not focus on impact of the internet newspaper on circulations^{xii} of printed newspaper *per se* it seeks to shed light on the impact of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper based on the newspaper consumption patterns and perceptions of newspaper readers. The study seeks to address the following questions:

RQ1: What are the newspaper consumption patterns and habits of people like in Zimbabwe?

RQ2: What obstacles exist in accessing the internet newspaper in Zimbabwe?

RQ 3: Is the printed newspaper under threat from the internet newspaper?

Method

The present study was a pilot study meant to generate initial data on the impact of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper.

In order to answer the research questions a 21 item closed-ended questionnaire was administered to a sample of newspaper readers in the capital Harare. Eighty- (80) questionnaires were distributed to respondents to complete in the presence of the research assistant (n=80). Some were however, handed to respondents and collected later. Five questionnaires were partially completed by respondents who cited lack of time due to other engagements. As a result only 75 were successfully completed. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with randomly selected newspaper readers in the capital Harare in order to understand the existing newspaper reading habits and trends in the country. Respondents were asked questions relating to expenditure on newspapers, preferences between online newspaper and printed newspaper, news reading habits etc. In order to cater for the limitations of the closed-ended questionnaire and make sure certain specific responses on newspaper reading habits were extracted it was found prudent to complement the questionnaire with in-depth interviews.

Sampling Frame

Because this study was a pilot study the sampling procedure used was convenience sampling. A pre-requisite for someone to be selected for this study was that a respondent should have read both an online and a printed newspaper. This sampling procedure was justified on the grounds that internet diffusion and use in Zimbabwe are still very low. Using a random sample would have yielded very poor responses because most people do not access to the internet let alone have they read a newspaper online. Respondents were selected from places such as internet cafes in the central business district of the capital Harare, food outlets and some from workplaces. A sizeable number of respondents were selected from participants of an All Stakeholders Constitutional Conference which was being held at a Harare hotel. Some of the respondents were people who were known to have access to both online and printed newspapers. The advantage of convenience sampling particularly in pilot studies have been noted by many scholars (Du-Plooy, 1995, Bryman, 1989). Convenience sampling enabled the researcher to exclude respondents who had not read an online and a printed newspaper. The limitation for this sampling procedure was however, that it excluded some people who did not have access to the internet newspaper meaning that it became impossible to gauge the level of internet use and penetration in the county. Bryman notes that “ the problem of a convenience sample is two-fold: the first is that such samples unrepresentative of their population and secondly, they are not easily generalisable (Bryman, 1989, p113). As a result in-depth interviews were also used to gather data relating to newspaper reading habits. Because an in-depth interview gives the respondent more latitude to respond to some questions informants were able to provide personal information which could not have been extracted

by using a closed-ended questionnaire. The only limitation was that some respondents volunteered some information which fell outside the purview of the study.

Findings

Demographics

Fifty three (53%) percent of the respondents were male, while forty-seven (47%) were female. The youngest respondents (9%) were below the age of 20 while the oldest (7%) fell into the 46-60 age-group. The average respondent was a young professional with a minimum of college education. Table 2 below shows respondents according to their level of education.

Table 2: *Respondents according to educational level*

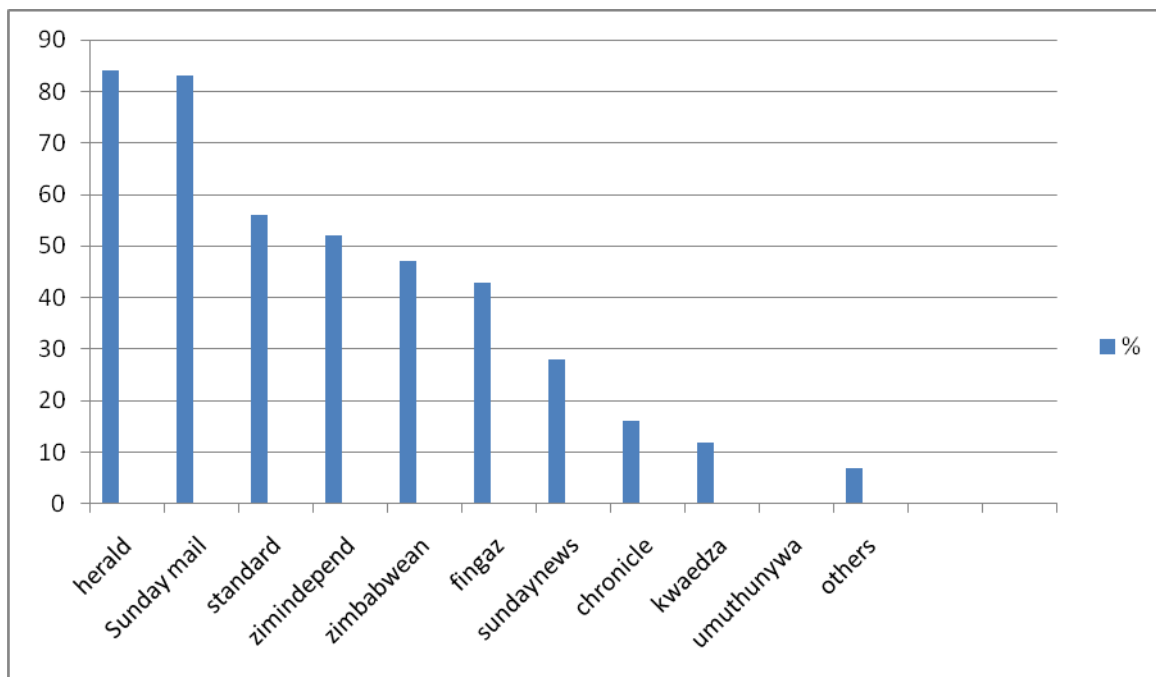
Educational Level	%
Primary level	0
Secondary	5
College	36
Bachelors Degree	35
Masters Degree	23
Doctorate	1

As shown in table 2 most of the respondents (36%) had a minimum of college education, while 35% were holders of a first degree.

Newspaper Readership

Far more respondents (99%) reported to have read any newspaper in the previous two months while a significant percentage (76%) reported that they had bought a printed newspaper in the past two months. The graph below shows the percentage of respondents who have read the main newspapers in the country.

Figure 1: Self-Reported readership of main newspapers %



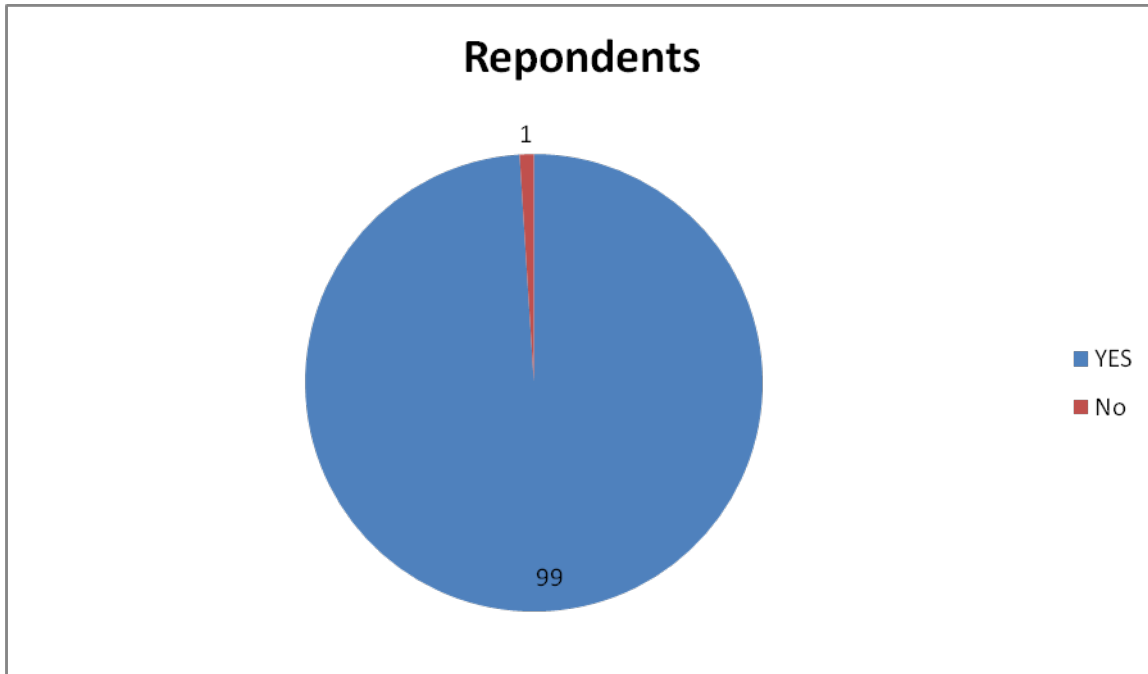
As shown in fig 1 above the most widely read newspapers are the stately owned daily, The Herald (83%) followed by its sister publication The *Sunday Mail* with a self-reported readership of 82%. *The Herald* appears to be taking advantage of its monopoly status after the demise of its main rival, The *Daily News*. *The Sunday Mail* on the other hand has been able to shrug off competition from the Standard after the closure of the *Daily News* on Sunday. None of the readers reported to have read *Umuthunywa*^{xiii} which is published in Ndebele.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 sought to investigate the consumption trends of online and printed newspapers among the respondents.

Results of the survey show that (99%) of the respondents had read a newspaper in the past two months while 1% reported that they had not read a newspaper in the previous two months.

Figure 2: Respondents who have read a newspaper in the past two months



As shown in fig 2 above far more respondents reported to have read a newspaper in the past two months while only 1% said they had not read a newspaper in the past two months. The high cost of newspapers might have contributed to the fact that although insignificant there are some people who cannot access a newspaper for two months. The pie chart below shows the percentage of respondents who had bought a newspaper over the past two months:

Figure 3: Purchase of Newspapers Past Two Months

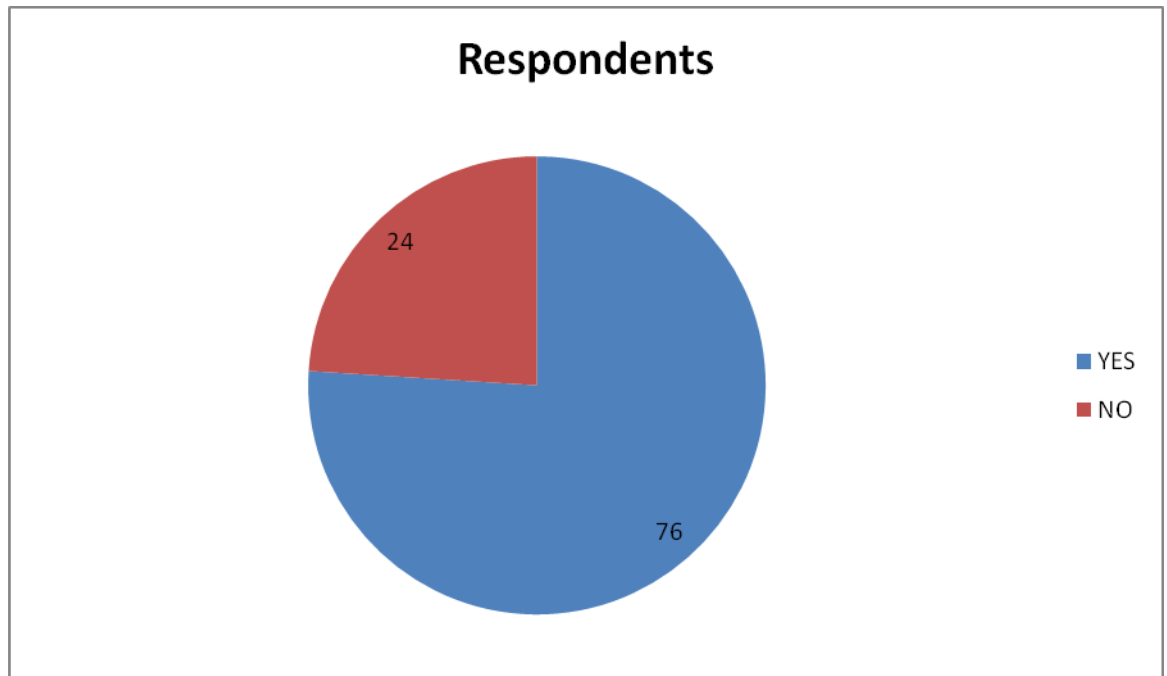
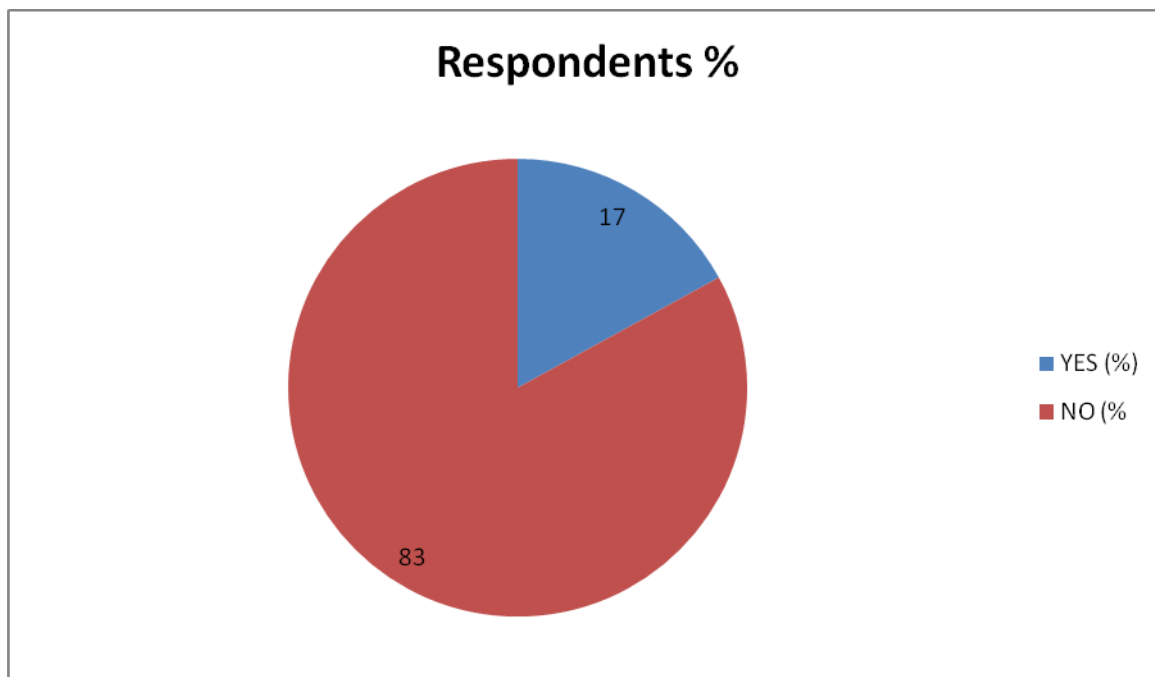


Fig 3 above shows that 76% of the respondents reported that they had bought a newspaper in the previous two months while 24% of the respondents reported that they had not bought a newspaper within the same period. The percentage of respondents who had not bought a newspaper in the previous two months is significant and reflects the soaring prices of newspapers in a dollarized economy where the average worker was earning USD 140 at the time. The pie chart below shows online subscription of newspapers.

Figure 4: Online Newspaper Subscription



Significant to note as is the fact that 83% of the respondents reported that they had never subscribed to an online newspaper compared to 17% who had done so.

The low percentage of respondents who subscribe to online newspapers could be a reflection of the high cost of newspapers and the persistent economic hardships in the country.

Daily newspapers cost USD1 while weeklies cost USD2, amounts which are beyond the reach of the majority citizens. Economic hardships persist and the majority of people cannot afford newspapers and still struggle to put bread on the table. The majority of households are living below the *poverty datum* line which was estimated to be around USD457. The graph below shows respondents' preferences of newspapers according to educational level.

Figure 5: Newspaper Preference according to educational level

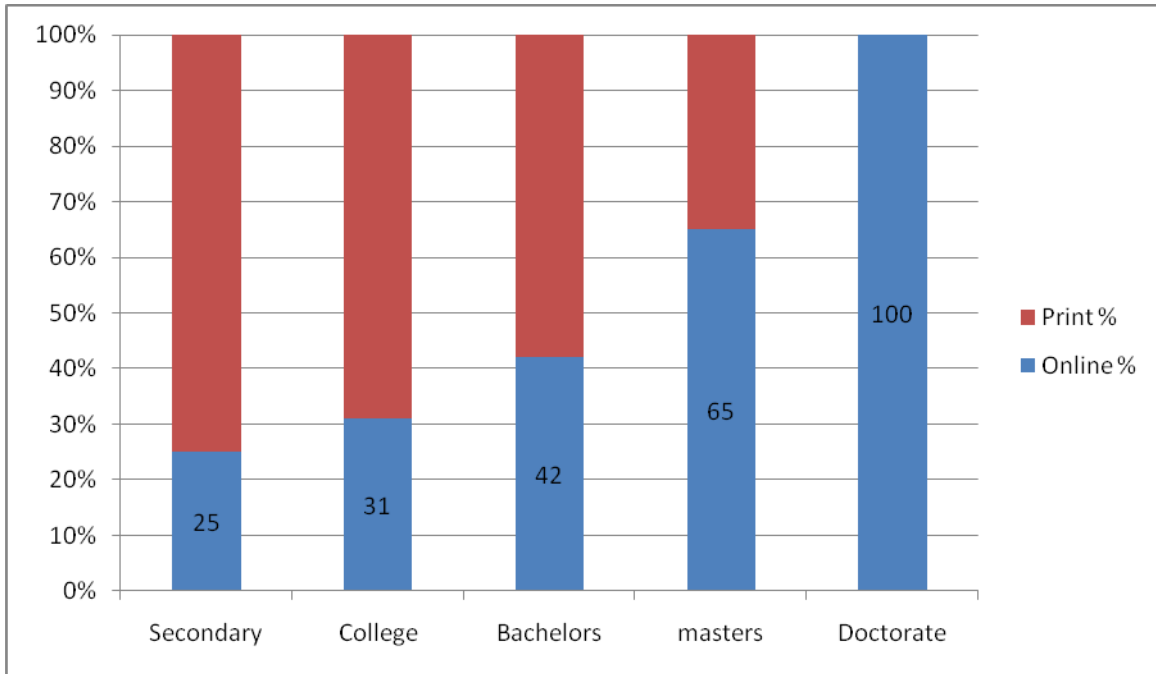
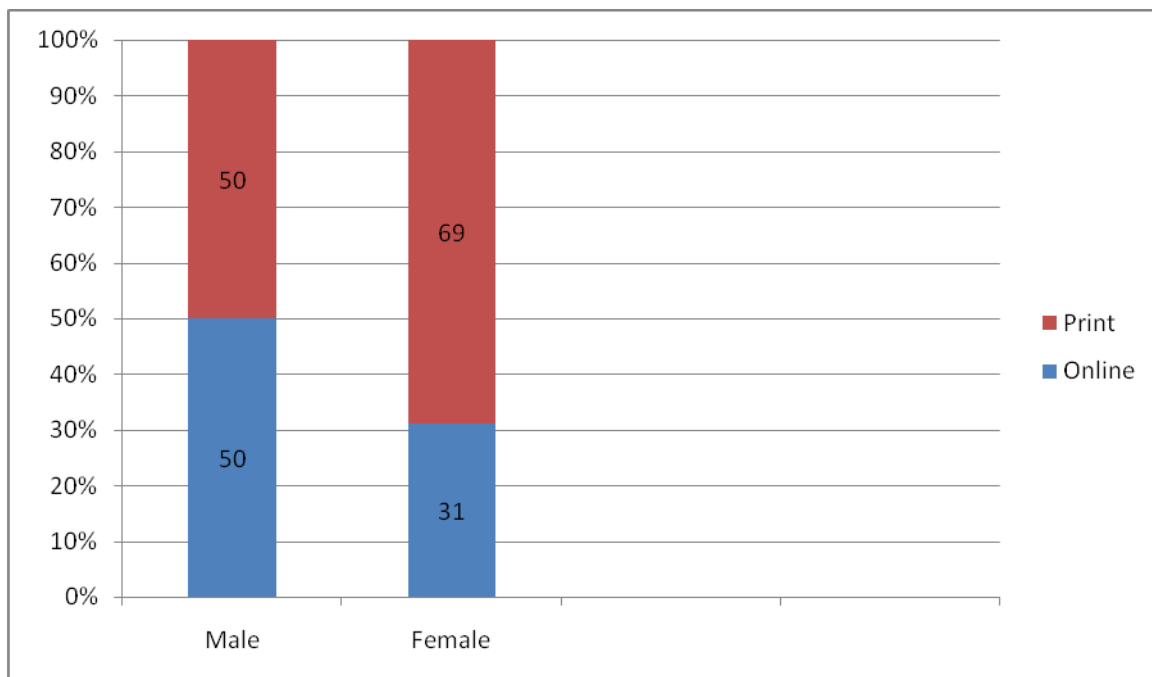


Fig 5 above shows that preference for online correlates with the level of education. Respondents with a higher level of education tend to prefer reading the newspaper online than the print version.

The reason for this could be that opportunities for accessing the internet increase with one's level of education. Most people access the internet in colleges, universities, internet cafes and at the workplace. Also, internet use requires technical skills and opportunities for these tend to increase as one's level of education increases. Fig 6 below shows newspaper preference according to gender:

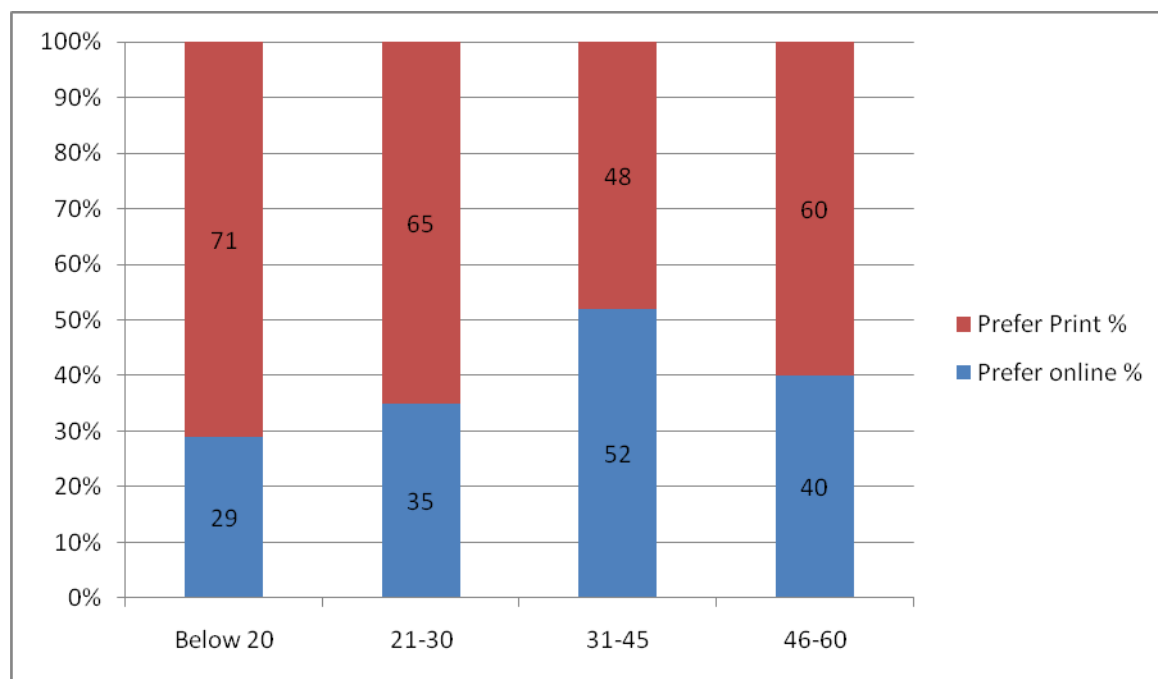
Figure 6:Newspaper Preference according to gender



Gender also tends to influence preferences between internet and printed newspaper. As shown in fig. 6 above 31% of the female respondents reported that they prefer the internet newspaper to the printed newspaper compared to 50% male respondents who prefer online to print. Because of their low economic status women have less access to the internet and are likely to choose printed newspapers because this is what they are likely to have access to than online newspapers. Also, these reflect the lopsided educational opportunities and literacy rates which are in favour of men. Men do not only command higher literacy rates than their female counterparts, but also have an edge over women in terms of computer skills which are mandatory for the use of the internet use.

These disparities also translate into skewed income distribution in favour of men. A visit to some internet cafes in the capital Harare also showed that there were more men than women demanding internet services. Besides gender and education, age also plays a significant role in internet use. The graph below shows newspaper consumption patterns according to age.

Figure 7: Newspaper Preference according to age



As shown in fig 7 above a statistically significant relationship exists between age and preference of medium. Preference for online newspapers is lower among respondents below 20 years of age, increases up to the 31-45 age group and then declines as age increases.

Respondents below 20 years are likely to be either unemployed, or students who are hungry for information, particularly job opportunities and entertainment. Although newspapers are expensive they are relatively available through relatives, friends or acquaintances.

Low preferences for online newspapers tends to correlate with non-availability of computer skills and the financial wherewithal required to access the internet since this group falls within the most unemployed. On the other hand, low preference for online newspapers among the 46-60 age group might suggest a tendency among the mature and elderly people to stick to tradition. Findings from interviews on this subject are illuminating:

“I cannot afford to surf the internet because I am unemployed. The internet requires a lot of money. I usually read *The Herald* which my brother brings from work because it is the only newspaper available. If you are looking for a job *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail* classifieds are the best” **ERIC a 19 year old men.**^{xiv}

“I prefer reading the hard copy because it has job columns. I finished my “O” level last year but one and since then I have been reading *The Herald*. Sometimes I buy my own copy but in most cases I borrow from other people because I cannot afford it every day. As for the internet I did not do computers at school so I do not know how to use it”. **Gladys an 18 year old lady.**

“Although I always read various newspapers on the internet there are some newspapers that I would not want to miss. I always make sure that I have my own copy because I can read it later. Printed newspapers have more information and can be read in a relaxed environment. As for internet newspapers it is difficult to read all the stories because I will be at work. I just scan through the major headlines to check what is going on around the world”. Godfrey **55 an Executive in at Insurance company in Harare.**

These views suggest that young people who do not have access to the internet tend to prefer the printed newspaper because this is what they are likely to have access to while older people look for convenience associated with the print medium.

Research Question 2

What are the obstacles to accessing the internet newspaper?

Although a statistically significant number of respondents (43%) said they prefer an online newspaper to a printed one the study revealed obstacles that militate against quick migration to the online medium. Question 11 asked respondents whether they had ever encountered any bad experiences while accessing an online newspaper. Table 4 below shows the ratings of the bad experiences encountered while reading online newspapers.

Figure 8: Obstacles to reading online newspaper

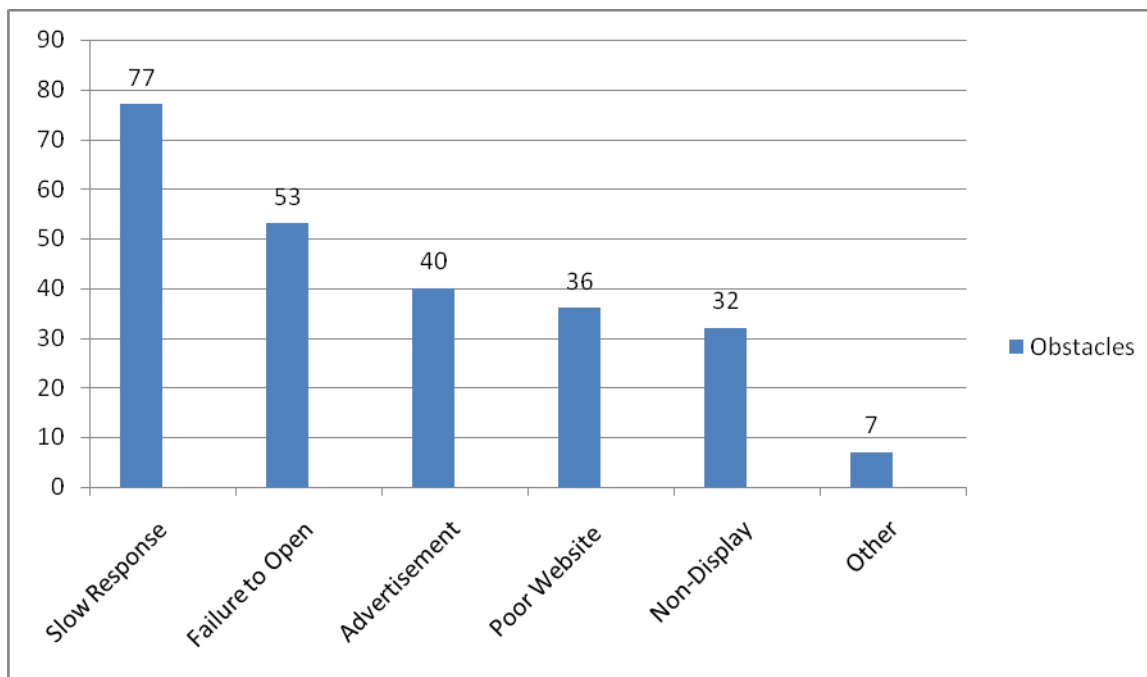


Fig 8 above shows that slow response time (77%), and failure to open a newspaper (53%) are viewed as the most serious hindering access to internet newspapers in Zimbabwe. Small national and international bandwidth and poor telecommunication infrastructure are some of the factors compounding difficulties in accessing the internet. This is corroborated by findings with respondents in Harare.

‘The internet is very slow here. It takes ages before you are able to get to the pages you want. I often download stories, print them and read them on the bus when going home because trying to read a newspaper on the computer is just a waste of time’ **Fredrick aged 39.**

‘I normally start reading newspapers online after finishing work at 4:30 pm every day. I hardly spent ten minutes before electricity is cut. I cannot afford newspapers because of my meager salary. The internet is my only saviour because I am able to keep myself updated about events around the world. But with these frequent electricity cuts I spend days without reading a single newspaper’. **Chioneso, A Sales Lady aged 29.**

These views are revealing in as much as they show that lack of access to the internet is not necessarily a result of access to technology but also infrastructural problems which if addressed internet use would significantly improve. Findings in this study show that the fate of the newspaper is not necessarily tied to the availability of the internet *per-se* but also to the broader social-economic conditions which affect the economy.

Research Question 3: Is the printed newspaper under threat from the internet?

The hypothesis formulated for this study is not supported by findings from this survey. Results show that more people prefer the printed newspaper to the Internet newspaper. The pie chart below shows reader preference between online and printed newspaper

Figure 9: Respondents preference of newspapers %

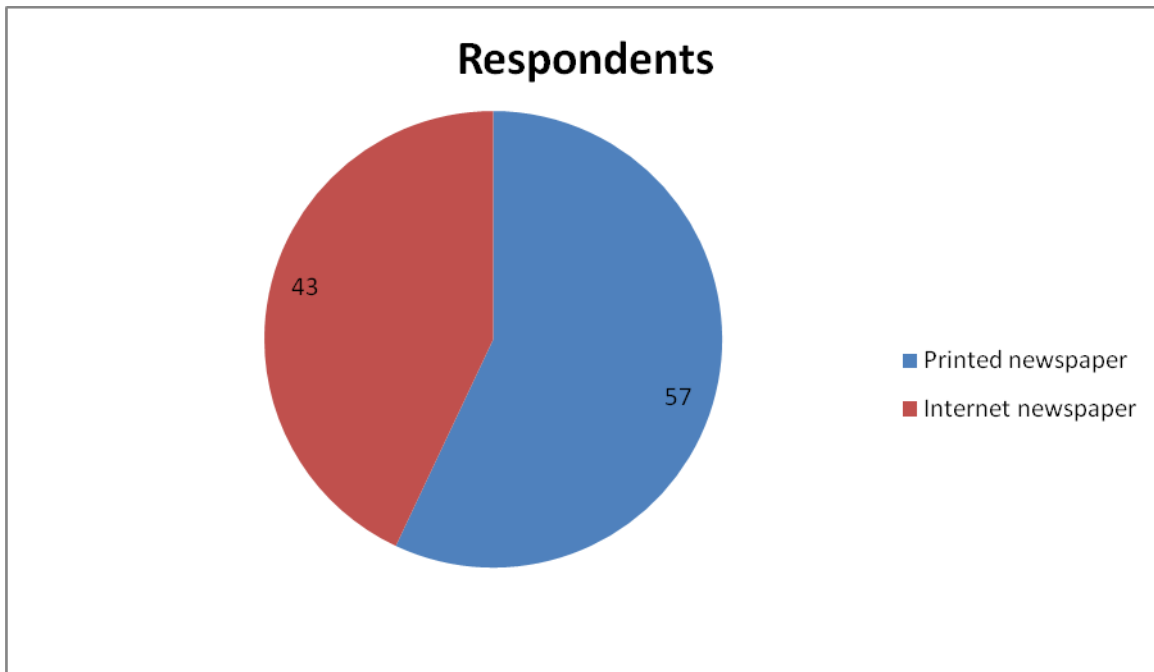
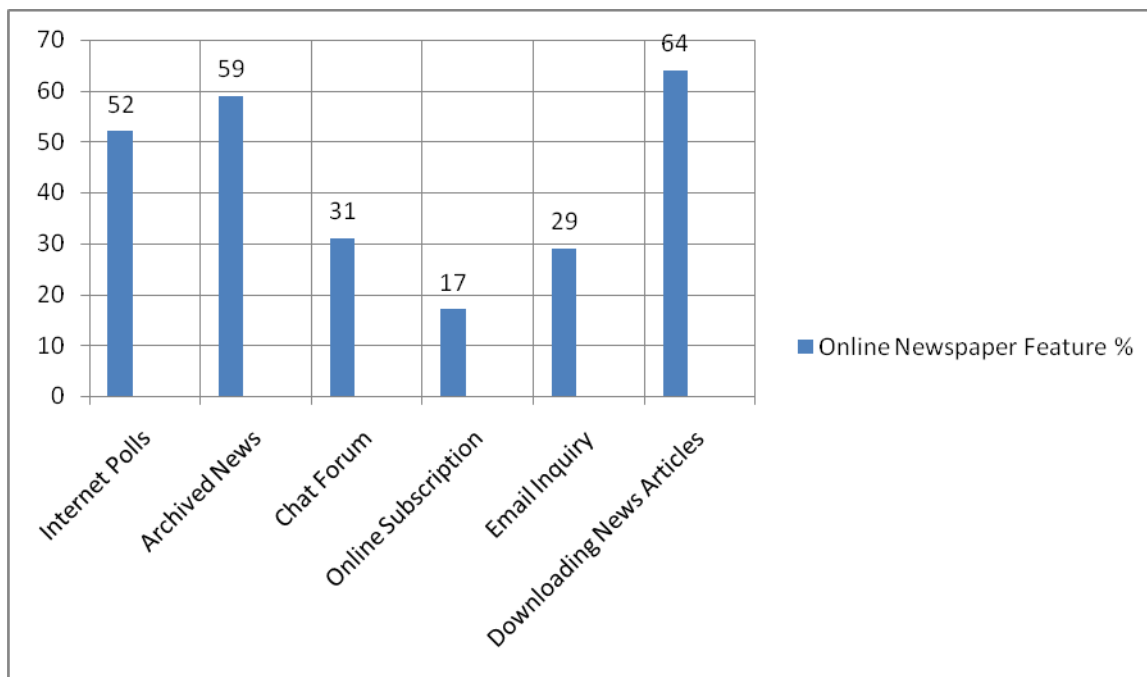


Fig 9 above a substantial percentage (57%) still prefer the printed newspaper to the online newspaper while 43% reported that they prefer an online newspaper to a printed one. The graph below shows that the most popular features of online newspapers which ever been tried by respondents.

Figure 11: Most popular features of online newspapers



Significant to in note in fig 11 is the fact that the most popular features of online newspapers are: downloading of news articles (64%), archived news (59%), and Internet polls (52%), Findings suggest that the main reason for accessing the internet is news. Also indications are that people do not find it convenient to read news on the internet probably due to shortage of time or the difficulties associated with the slow pace of the internet, electricity load shedding and the cost of accessing the internet.

Findings also show that 83% of the respondents have never subscribed to an online newspaper compared to 17% while average expenditure on online newspaper was USD2.96 per month compared to USD8.84 for print.

Another statistically significant observation is that 57% of the respondents reported that they would prefer a printed newspaper compared to 43% who reported that they prefer an online newspaper. Equally significant was that 77% of the respondents reported that they would not consider not buying a newspaper in printed form in future compared to 23% who said they would consider not buying a printed newspaper in future. Although there is a significant number of people who would prefer an online newspaper to a printed one it would appear that people are unlikely to trade their printed copy for an online version. Findings from interviews attest to this view.

‘Web editions do not have all the information that I want. Even after reading a newspaper online I still find myself borrowing someone’s newspaper in order to look at photographs, captions and classified adverts. Web editions only carry the main stories’ said **Mutukwa aged 40**.

‘I prefer reading the newspaper on the Kombi after work when everybody else is playing with their mobile phones. It is a convenient way of avoiding

unsolicited conversations from the person you would be sitting next to. But even when you do this you still find some people commenting on stories in your newspaper and by the time you get to your destination everybody in the Kombi would have joined the discussion' **Thandi, aged 26.**

'A hard copy newspaper is part of my library. I can keep it for many months to come. While reading a newspaper online is a lot cheaper most of our newspapers do not have functional archives. It is not possible to read last week's edition of *The Herald* online because the archives are not accessible' **Malcom, a University Lecturer, Aged 41.**

'Although I read the newspaper online because it is cheaper to do so I would prefer reading the printed one because people can see you reading it. If you read the newspaper in public people will know that you are educated and you can afford it. It gives you some prestige' **Revai a University Student Age 22.**

'I read the newspaper while waiting for my husband to pick me up after finishing work. I hate to be idle. It is not possible to read the online newspaper at work because there is a lot of work. Besides, if my boss sees me opening newspaper website there would be trouble. He might think that I am not doing my job' **Nyahsa a Secretary Aged 26.**

Evidence from the survey also suggests that the printed newspaper is a valued for attributes like non-requirement for computer skills (53%) and portability (47%). Respondents were asked to rate the following attributes of an online newspaper on a five point scale where 5 represents most important and 1 least important. Table 3 below shows the results of these ratings:

Table 3: Most important/Least important attribute-Printed newspaper

Attribute	Most important %	Least important %
Portability	47	12
More detail than online	47	12
No computer skills required	53	16
Easy to avoid adverts	33	16
Addiction to print newspaper	20	35

I can be seen reading it by others	36	33
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Results in table 4 show that non-requirement for computer skills, portability, and detail are considered the most important attributes of the printed newspaper. Results tally with findings from interviews which show that computer illiteracy militates against use of the internet particularly among the less educated and the youth who are unemployed. Findings attest to the reality that technical factors impose serious obstacles on the uptake of the internet newspaper. Questions A6 and A7 asked respondents to rate the importance of the following factors in relation to both the print and the internet newspaper on a five point scale where 5 represents most important and 1 least important. Results are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Comparison of most important attributes: Online and Print

Attribute	Online Score	Print Score
Reliability	2.8	2.7
Affordability	2.5	2.5
Convenience	2.9	2.6
Layout	2.7	2.7
Accessibility	2.9	2.7
Fewer Adverts	2.3	2.0
Timeliness	3.0	2.1
Updated Regularly	2.9	2.2
Interactivity	2.8	-

Results show that most respondents consider timeliness, accessibility, regular updates and convenience respectively to be most important attributes of online newspapers. On the other hand accessibility, reliability and layout are considered the most important attributes of the printed newspaper. The high score accorded to convenience could mean that convenience with regard to the online newspaper was interpreted to mean low cost since most web editions of newspapers are available free of charge. This sentiment was recurrent during the interviews.

‘The cost of newspapers is beyond the reach of many of us. I cannot pay one US dollar everyday for a newspaper. I would rather buy two loaves of bread than buy a newspaper. While it is important to stay informed, given the scarce resources I would

rather buy bread than read a newspaper and then starve. For those of us who are fortunate enough to have access to the internet at work we can read the newspaper on the internet and save the precious US dollar' **Kudakwashe, a journalist.**

Discussion

The central motivation for the current study was to investigate whether the printed newspaper is under threat from the internet newspaper so as to provide a starting point for testing theoretical claims regarding the replacement of the printed newspaper by the internet newspaper. The study explored the impact of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper using data from a survey of newspaper readers and in-depth interviews. Although the results are tentative there is an indication that while the internet newspaper is competing for attention with the printed newspaper there is no evidence to suggest a replacement effect. Findings do not support McCombs' Relative Constancy Hypothesis pointing rather to a complementary effect. It was found that most of the print newspapers in Zimbabwe do not publish web editions identical to the print edition. Judging by the overwhelming number of respondents who download news articles from websites in order to read them later indications are that the printed newspaper is still the preferred medium because of the relaxed environment in which it is consumed.

While the online paper provides quick scan to events happening around the world the range of information offered by the online newspaper is too small to warrant a replacement of the printed newspaper. Technical limitations such as a small national and international bandwidth, poor telecommunications infrastructure, prohibitive costs of computers and internet plus lack of computer skills militate against the extensive diffusion of the internet and the web newspaper. Although findings are tempered there are no indications that the printed newspaper will in the near future be seriously threatened by the internet newspaper. It has been observed in previous studies that the main reason people read an online newspaper is that they are frequent readers of the printed version (Hansen, 2001, cited in Lindner and Traub, 2003, p413). It has also been found that 50% of online newspaper readers also read and subscribe to print versions of the online newspapers (NAA Digital Edge Report cited in Lindner and Traub, *ibid*, p43). The following factors seem to explain the absence of a significant impact of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper in Zimbabwe:

- (1)The internet in Zimbabwe is still an elite medium available to a select few due to prohibitive costs of accessing requisite technology such as computers and telephone lines.
- (2)The internet requires technical skills which are not yet available to many citizens.
- (3)Internet newspapers only provide a fraction of the printed newspaper. Web editions do not provide everything that readers would be looking for.

(4)Most people still derive satisfaction from touching and feeling the newspaper and to be seen reading it because it is considered prestigious to so.

(5)People read the newspaper to fill 'empty time' while waiting do other things

(6)A newspaper still occupies an important place in people's relationships. It is read by many people, shared among families and friends and is used to initiate or cement social relationships.

It is instructive to note that 57% of the respondents reported that they prefer reading a printed newspaper while 43% said they prefer online newspaper. It is also instructive to note that 77% of the respondents reported that they would not consider not buying the printed newspaper in the foreseeable future suggesting that those who prefer an on online newspaper to a printed are influenced by the prohibitive costs of the printed newspapers than by intrinsic qualities of the online newspaper. In a sense push rather than pull factors appear to be responsible for the popularity of the internet newspaper in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

This study does not seem to support the view that the printed newspaper risks going the way of the dinosaur due to the growing popularity of the internet newspaper. Although the internet newspaper might be presenting considerable competition to the printed newspaper chances of it replacing the printed newspaper in *totto* appear a remote possibility in Africa because the medium is still a novelty in the continent. Economic and technical considerations still impose serious obstacles to the diffusion of the internet. However, the main limitation of this study is that it was a pilot study and pilot studies by their nature lack representativity and consequently generalizability. Be that as it may the study has significance in the sense that it might help provoke debate on possible impacts of the internet newspaper on the printed newspaper in Africa. Further studies could focus on investigating the relationship between newspaper circulations and readership and the growth of internet newspapers in order to shed light on the actual relationship between the internet newspaper and the printed newspaper.

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NOTES

ⁱ Zimbabwe has the second highest literacy rates in Africa after Tunisia.

ⁱⁱ The Daily News was formed in 1999 by the Associated Newspapers Zimbabwe by a consortium of local and international businessmen. The company launched newspapers almost in all ten provinces of the country. The provincial newspapers did not last long due to viability problems but The Daily News and its sister publication the *Daily News on Sunday* survived until September 2003 when they closed after their owners refused to register with the state appointed Media and Information Commission (MIC) in accordance with the stringent Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Weekend Tribune and the Business Tribune were closed in 2005 after failing to comply with certain sections of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

^{iv} The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror both privately owned newspapers which espoused a 'middle of the road' ideological and editorial stance shut down in March 2007 due to viability problems.

^v The Zimbabwe Independent and The Standard are owned by Zimbabwean South African based businessman Tervor Ncube. Ncube is also the owner of The Mail and Guardian (SA).

^{vi} The Zimbabwean is published in the UK by Wilf Mbanga a former executive of the Daily News and his wife Trish Mbanga.

^{vii} Argus Printing and Publishing Company was renamed Zimpapers after being acquired by the majority government using a grant provided by the Nigerian government.

^{viii} Shona is the indigenous language spoken by the majority of people in the country.

^{ix} Ndebele is the indigenous language spoken by the second largest group of people in the country.

^x These figures depend on the accuracy in measurement of the number of telephone lines which is then divided by the total population. The country has experienced unprecedented emigration makes it difficult to measure the number of people living in the country since millions have left the country in search of economic fortunes. On the other hand mobile telephone operators have released more cellular lines in the economy the latest being by Econet Wireless which released more than 50 000 lines.

^{xi} Unemployment is estimated to be 94% in Zimbabwe.

^{xii} Circulation figures of newspapers in Zimbabwe are hardly available and are a closely guarded corporate secret. Due to the economic meltdown costs of printing have shot through the roof resulting in circulation figures of most newspapers have falling drastically to levels.

^{xiii} Umuthunywa is published in Bulawayo in siNdebele which is largely spoken in Matebeleland and Midlands region. This study was conducted in Harare where the majority of people are Shona speaking.

^{xiv} All the names of respondents used in this study are not fictitious.