



**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES**

DISSERTATION TOPIC:

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
ON MEDIA CONTENT: A CASE OF THE HERALD BUSINESS**

BY

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA CONTENT: A CASE OF THE
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DECLARATION

I Makoma James do hereby declare that this project has been as a result of my own original effort and investigations and such work has not been presented elsewhere for academic purpose or any purpose.

Makoma James (R13533P)
Signature Date

Checked and approved by supervisor

Mr Shoko
Signature Date

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA CONTENT: A CASE OF THE
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DEDICATION

To my wife Rujeko and my children Nenyashadzashe Pearl and Nethaneel Unashe

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ACRONYMS

AFP	Agence France Presse
CCOSA	Christian College of Southern Africa
FBC	First Banking Corporation
ICTs	Information communication technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MHPR	Mike Hamilton Public Relations
MIT	Multimedia Investment Trust
NSSA	National Social Security Authority
PSMAS	Premier Medical Aid Society
PR	Public Relations
RPPC	Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company
RSE	Rhodesia Stock Exchange
ZSE	Zimbabwe Stock Exchange
ZMMT	Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust
ZIMPAPERS	Zimbabwe newspapers
ZAMPS	Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey
ZARF	Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation

ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate why public relations copy has been freely finding its way into media content with the end result being the fourth estate, journalism, losing its watchdog role to has now come to be known as the ‘fifth estate’, which happens to be public relations departments of various organisations. The researcher subjected to empirical study the phenomenon that led to media under study, *The Herald Business* to be a channel through which public relations copy reappeared as news, sometimes wholesomely and in other cases with minor alterations. In other cases public relations copy was found to have been disguised as donations and corporate functions such as breakfast meetings among other corporate events. The researcher sought to understand why there was that shift, by mass media practitioners, from relying on traditional sources of news such as the law courts and parliament and even the stock exchange activities to relying more on public relations practitioners and the material that they churned out. The researcher examined why despite all the gatekeeping mechanisms found at *The Herald* in general and *The Herald Business* in particular, public relations copy freely found its way into the newspaper. The researcher also sought to understand if there were other factors that might have led public relations copy to find its way into *The Herald Business* outside of the known lack of adequate resources and time constrains. The researcher found the existence of “safety first” journalism which happens to be an interplay between active public departments and fear. The research predominantly used the qualitative research approach although the quantitative paradigm was made use of to analyse statistical data.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Media in an ideal society should educate, inform and entertain people. It should give publicity to government and political establishments. It should also scrutinize these institutions and provide a platform for public political discussion (McNair 1995: 21). These roles are very important and should be respected. However, there appeared to have emerged a phenomenon that threatening these roles of the media in the name of public relations. News media are businesses that should also fulfill a public service role by providing citizens with valuable information as Picard (2005) cited in Lee-Wright (et al 2012) argue. This study sought to examine whether the business reporters at *The Herald Business* were still getting their stories from the traditional news sources, such are the law courts, parliament and government sources among others or have resorted to dependence on public relations departments as sources of their stories. It is also going to delve deeper into the content of *The Herald Business*, which is an inset found inside *The Herald*, to ascertain whether it is still carrying out its watchdog role or has gone to bed with the corporate world and is now simply mimicking their interests as advanced by their public relations departments. This study seeks to find out if we can locate public relations among some of the filters that news has to pass through. Herman and Chomsky (1988)'s propaganda model only identifies advertisements, flak, ideology, size, ownership and sources of news as filters of media content. This study seeks to find out if public relations is now one of the extra-media variables influencing media content, particularly in *The Herald Business*.

1.2 Background of study

The emerging trend in the media, particularly in *The Herald Business*, of regurgitating content coming from public relations departments of different organisations and passing it on to the readers as news has moved this researcher to embark on this study. If the media is not taking wholesomely content from the press releases, they are quoting public relations personnel, or chief executive officers and managing directors of various corporates with the help of public relations departments without being critical.

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The reporters appeared to be over relying on content from public relations departments despite the fact that there are a lot of possible sources of news such as independent experts, government departments, the law courts, police, chains of enquiry, blogs and internet chatrooms among others.

Protest (et al 1991) cited in Manning (2001) argue that journalism has abandoned its responsibility to hold the corporate world to account and has instead tended to go for the soft target of “government” and “bureaucracy”. A journalist is as good as his sources, so the old saying goes. Penenberg, in the NYU Journalism Handbook for Students stresses that reporters should critique the activities of other people and institutions because what they publish can have a profound impact on the people, businesses and institutions that they cover, as well as society at large. He says journalists should seek to be fair and truthful in reporting what their sources tell them and factual accuracy entails checking and double checking and that is a cardinal rule in journalism although evidence abound that a lot of journalists are throwing it through the window.

A lot of research that was carried out before has focused on the effect of the five filters on media content, namely advertisements, size and ownership, flak and sources of news. Few, if any has focused on the influence of public relations as this study now seek to establish.

Public relations, which Bates (2006) describes as the management function that seeks to maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organization, commercial or non-commercial and the audiences or publics on which its success depends, lacks serious and comprehensive history, but dates back to time immemorial. Edward Barnayes (1928) is generally considered as the founder of modern day public relations as observed by Graham (ND).

Baistov (1985) contends that public relations emerged as a distinctive practice in United States of America towards the end of the 19th century. In those early days, public relations was largely interpreted as a defensive response to the emerging investigative (muckraker) journalism that generated a good deal of hostile and critical probing and reporting of contemporary business practices , a series of corporate scandals and industry responses to a succession of industrial disputes and strikes (White and Hobsbawn 2007:283) According to Cutlip (1994) “these attacks

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created the need for institutions and industries under attack to defend themselves in the court of public opinion". Miller and Dinan (2008) cited in Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) uses the spin interchangeably with public relations and concurs with Baistov (1985) that public relations was adopted as a strategic response by capital and (the state) to the threat of extended franchise and organized labour. They further observe that the growth of public relations industry is closely related to corporate globalization and forms of neoliberal governance, including deregulation and privatization. The major objective of public relations is to do good and communicate and media act as the conduit through which communication takes place. Media relations, which Jefkins (1992) also refers to as press relations is part of public relations and is crucial in earning intangible assets such as good corporate reputation and visibility, which then lead to corporate celebrity status. This status then leads the organization to be the preferred. As the conduit of communication, especially for business news, *The Herald Business* is worthy studying.

Jefkins (1992) observes that firms should send material of "interest and value" to readers, listeners or viewers to increase the chances of such material being used and in the process generating publicity for a company. Jefkins (2004) is of the view that press or media relations aim to achieve maximum publication or broadcasting in an effort to create knowledge and understanding. Cutlip et al (2000) observes that:

"Knowing how to work with each media, produce content for each and meet the deadlines of each, adhere to specific style requirements and appeal to each medium's audience is an important part of a public relations practitioner's job".

To maintain good media relations, Jefkins (1992), postulates that public relations practitioners should co-operate. Moreso, public relations practitioners should provide accurate information and material where and when wanted. The information should also be of interest to the readers, listeners or viewers. Put simply, the material supplied should be newsworthy.

According to Jefkins (2004), the difference between advertising and public relations is that in advertising, space is bought in whatever quantity and the advertiser can control the dates and

position . With public relations, there is no such control, the power lies with the editor. In fact the editor can rewrite a news release, add good or bad comments or put it in the waste paper basket.

Jefkins (2004) highlights that public relations educates and informs and is impartial, but advertising persuades and sells and is partial. He also argues that public relations practitioners should provide reproducible pictures, properly written captions. They should also arrange press interviews with personalities when requested. Jefkins (1992) is of the view that providing verification facilities, for instance, allowing journalists to see things for themselves is a tried and tested way of maintaining harmonious media relations.

Public relations practitioners should build personal relationships with the media. This relationship should be based on frankness and mutual professional respect. Public relations practitioners can create personal relationships with the media through hosting cocktails for journalists among other platforms where public relations practitioners and journalists can interact in an informal way (Jefkins 1992).

Cutlip et al (2000) are of the view that the relationship, although mutually beneficial, remains an adversarial relationship at its core because journalists and practitioners are not in the same business and often do not have the same communication goals. Jefkins (1992) further notes that the public relations practitioner's allegiance is with a client or employer, while the journalist's is with the media organization.

Cutlip (2000) posits that there is a dynamic tension in the relationship between practitioners and journalists that is "firmly embedded in journalistic culture". He says all too often neither practitioners' employers nor journalists understand practitioners' mediator role in establishing and maintaining media relations.

Cutlip (2000) postulates that media relations is an investment. He further highlights that the relationship between practitioners and journalists has an impact on the quality of news coverage about an organization. He argues that good media relations can be achieved if a few basic rules are followed. The first rule that Cutlip (2000) suggests is "shoot squarely", which means to tell the truth. It is good business and good common sense. He says "honesty is the best policy". The

second rule according to Cutlip (2000) is not to beg to cap. He points out that nothing irritates journalists and their editors than the practitioner who begs to have stories used or complains about story treatment. The rule of the thumb is that advertising belongs in the advertising department and news, good or bad is for journalists to report. The third is give service. The quickest way to gain popularity is to provide the media with newsworthy, interesting and timely stories. Press statements, news releases, facility tours, press receptions and press cocktails all contribute to good media relations for public relations practitioners and their organisations but is a cause of concern to the practice of journalism if public relations material is churned out as news in its raw form.

1.3 Justification of the study

The study of the influence of public relations on media content is long overdue and necessary given that the practice is as old as humanity and has not been thoroughly researched. The choice of *The Herald Business* is appropriate and crucial as it is one of the biggest bearers of business news in the country. Business news is at the mercy of public relations as there is a direct relationship between public relations practitioners and business reporters. *The Herald* has won the Super Brand award for the print category since inception, the brand of the year (2014) by Megafest, Brand of the year (2014) and is the leading daily paper according to Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey (ZAMPS) conducted by Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation (ZARF), making it worth to study its business section.

All these awards amassed by *The Herald*, particularly its business section has shown that it has become the preferred among the readers and advertisers and public relations practitioners. It therefore naturally follows that in an effort to maintain corporate visibility and a good corporate image, public relations practitioners of different media houses would then seek to have their stories on their firms carried in *The Herald Business*.

1.4 Statement of the problem

This study is trying to establish whether print media especially *The Herald Business*, are still dependent on traditional sources of information. This is because on a day to day basis, media talk

of everyday happenings from the society based on traditional sources of news, or has there been a shift in approach. Throughout history, certain privileged groups (priests, kings, bureaucrats, soldiers, scientists) have enjoyed a monopoly of access to certain kinds of knowledge (Innis 1942, 1944, 1950, 1951a, 1951b). Likewise, public relations practitioners have privileged access to the media and the publics. In this study, the researcher problematises the by-passing of the media by public relations as it seeks to speak directly to particular publics in the likes of decision-makers and power brokers. This does not, however, mean that media are not important, but they play a critical role in amplifying and legitimating “systematically distorted communication”.

1.5 Main Research question

- To what extent has public relations influenced stories carried in *The Herald Business*?

1.6 Sub Research questions

- a) What were the reasons of that influence on stories?
- b) What are the consequences of unfiltered publications copy in the media?
- c) What were other factors that affected content in *The Herald Business*?

1.7 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- a) Establish the extent to which public relations has influenced business stories carried in *The Herald Business*.
- b) Determine the reasons that would have led to that influence.
- c) Find out if there were other factors that affected the business stories.

1.8 Assumptions/Hypothesis

The assumption is that *The Business Herald* has become a conduit through which raw public relations copy is just passed out as news to the readers.

1.9 Delimitation

This study is going to focus on *The Herald Business* stories from 1 January 2013 to 30 September 2015. *The Herald Business* is an inset found in The Herald, not a stand-alone paper. It is important to note that the study would also quote other business stories that would have carried in The Herald main paper because of their importance.

1.10 Limitations

The results of this research effort cannot to be generalised to another no matter how similar they appear. The methods of data gathering and data analysis that have been used by the researcher could have led to flaws although efforts were made by the researcher to triangulate them. The researcher is employed by Zimpapers and one of his duties is to edit and design *The Herald Business* pages, implying that he is bringing inside information, although it might also lead to the researcher overlooking some shortcomings as a result of being attached to the paper for a long time. Efforts were, however, made to be as critical as possible and make conclusions only based on empirical research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is going to look at the literature that has been written by other scholars on the issue of journalists and their sources of news. It is also going to look at how and why material from public relations departments has gone to overtake traditional sources of news such as the law courts and parliament among others. It is also going to look at the theoretical frame work of the study, which will basically explain the research in terms of more applicable theories.

2.2 Literature review

Literature review as defined by Gunter (2000) is published information on a particular subject with a certain period of time. Literature review, if effectively, done can expose gaps in previous researches as has been argued by Branston and Stafford (1999).

There has been extensive research on the sources of news and the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners, although little has been done to closely look at the influence that public relations is having on business stories, which is what this study is going to look, focusing on *The Herald Business*. There has been research studies that were done earlier to look at the influence that advertising has on media content directly and indirectly, but there no study that had tried to look at the influence of public relations on media content, particularly by a Zimbabwean, looking at a newspaper. The literature reviewed in this study would be presented thematically.

2.2.1 Traditional sources of news

A journalist can be no better than his or her sources as observed by Mencher (1984). He further notes that the quality of the journalist's story depends on the quality of sources. He adds that the source is the reporter's lifeblood, without which the journalist cannot function. McQuail (2010) concurs with the above mentioned assertion and adds that media, in their various forms depend on readily available supply of information from their various sources. He further notes that one thing that journalists do not share with their colleagues is their sources. Shudson (2011) posits that the only important tool of the journalist is his news sources and how he uses them. Reporter

J. Anthony Lukas cited in Schudson (2011) observes that “the relationship between journalist and source, particularly one of long term is filled with collaboration and manipulation, with affection and distrust, with a yearning for communion and a yearning to flee”.

Rolands and Lewin (2005) are of the view that journalists should cultivate sources who can provide them with information on particular issues. The two scholars argue that the sources do not necessarily have to be official spokespersons of organisations, but people who are close enough to the top to be trusted on the information that they give. They add that this is very important in checking or cross-checking the information obtained from the official spokesperson. This view had been supported before by a renowned New York Times reporter James Reston quoted in Mencher (1984) as saying, “the best way to get ahead of the news in Washington is to look for it not at the centre, but at the fringes where anonymous officials usually tell the big shots what is coming”. A journalist, assert Rolands and Lewin (2005) should consult more than source to get all sides of an issue, especially if it is controversial. Callison (2004) found that sources that are associated with a company are in fact viewed more negatively than those not associated with a company.

There have been traditional sources of news such as the law courts, parliaments and government departments with whom journalists were expected to cultivate a relationship with to ensure a constant supply of news. By quoting authoritative sources and dependable sources of news, McQuail (2010) argues that journalists validated their news reports. The journalists were also expected to observe “the rule of the feet”, which meant that they were expected to try to see, and not depend on what they could have heard.

2.2.2 Journalism is changing

Journalism is changing, journalists are being made redundant and newsrooms are being closed (Lee-Wright et al 2012). News organisations in an effort to reduce costs are cutting staff while increasing output. The remaining journalists in the newsroom are increasingly expected to supply more and more material “taking material from other news sites in order to fill gaps more quickly” (Davies 2008; Philips 2010). The net effect of all these measures has been the

production of homogeneous content by the media. Some scholars are of the view that the changing context, changing practices and the changing outputs of news journalism are for the better, while others contend that it signals the demise of journalism.

Technological advancement has been both a good and bad development of journalists. Instead of relying on traditional sources of news, a new set of sources has come into being. Journalists can now get news from the internet and localize them or get material to write their stories from leaks, such as wikileaks. Although leaks have been part of the traditional sources of news, these leaks have been made more useful and accessible to the journalist through the coming in of information communication technologies (ICTs). Dahlgren (2009), in his piece, “The Troubling Evolution of Journalism”, talks about how journalism has reached a troubling historical juncture. He argues that due to the hardening of the commercial imperatives in the media, the balance between public responsibility and private profit has been steadily tipping in favour of the latter. He further asserts that the harsh market imperatives are bulldozing over journalistic values and raises concern over a too closer relationship of the media with the elites. Dahlgren is of the view that journalism is under threat from various fronts such as public relations, political communication and citizen journalism among others. He posits that contemporary journalism has been contributing to the decline in audience expectation as it drifted further from the traditional ideas of the profession. However, Dahlgren argues that the return to “quality journalism” does not automatically guarantee the attraction of large audiences again.

The internet and other related or integrated forms of ICT have in so many ways revolutionised the way journalism gets done, altering the processes of newsgathering, production, storage, editing and distribution as observed by Dahlgren (2009).

2.2.3 Public relations and journalism: Stereotypes and identity crisis

As with most stereotypes, there is an element of truth in the negative image that public relations practitioners and journalists portray of each other as observed by Davis (2008).

“The public relations practitioner is portrayed as a paid mouth and spin doctor intent on promoting his client’s interests at the price of truth. The journalist is portrayed as

someone who neither distinguishes between fact and opinion nor lets the facts get in the way of spinning a good story. In terms of public perception of both professions perhaps those images are widespread which may explain why both journalists and public relations practitioners tend to be rated poorly in surveys of public esteem” (Davies 2008).

Favourable stereotypes abound for journalists as observed by Davies (2008). They are described as impartial journalists who constitute the fourth estate, investigative journalists, who in public interest expose breach of trust. The scholar observes that there are no positive stereotypes for public relations. He sees this as the reason why many job advertisements now tend to advertise “communications” rather than “public relations”.

Some scholars like Moloney (2006) view public relations as weak propaganda. They see its role as fundamentally to do with persuasion and selling. The public relations practitioners, however, identify themselves as being paid to represent the interests of their organisations in the most persuasive way but do not associate personally with the cause they seek to promote. Others, however, view themselves in terms of being engaged in building relationships on behalf of their clients and organizations, where the role is not concerned with persuasion.

Despite their likeness in form and language, Moloney et al (2013) argues that public relations and journalism are chalk and cheese. He notes that the former is advocacy and is always a partial case, while journalism is reportage, done with cross-checking and skepticism. He further asserts that the two communication systems should remain separate in a healthy democracy.

2.2.4 Churnalisation and PR-isation of news

During and after the end of the First World War saw the emergence of public relations as a dominant force, particularly in America where the government went on a massive recruitment drive of public relations officers.

Davies (2008) observes that the relationship between journalism and public relations is complex and it is difficult to see the wood from the trees. Smith (2007) points out that Waseem Zakir, a business journalist with British Broadcasting Information Scotland, came up with a word

“churnalism” to describe how journalists are now reactive, rather than being proactive and are now depending on news being churned out from the wires and public relations.

Churnalism is also defined by Davies (2008) as a process where press releases and other forms of pre-packed material are churned out by journalists, who are no longer gathering news but are instead reduced to passive processors of whatever material that come their way. He contends that churnalism “is a symptom of media market where PR has become too powerful relative to news organisations that are too weak”, according to Stefan Stern cited in Moloney (2010). Related to churnalism is the concept of PR-isation of media, which Moloney (2010;152) defines as the professional state where PR attitudes are incorporated into journalism’s mindset and where PR-biased material is published without sourcing”. He further described it as the colonization of the news media by stealth. He further observes that it is the process by which journalists become increasingly deskbound and end up with less original PR material. When the scrutiny by journalism is absent, when facts and opinions are not checked and sources are not revealed, PR-isation of the media occurs.

Maloney (2006) asserts that journalists today are processors of news rather than generators. Time constraints also mean that the cardinal rules of journalism of fact-checking, balancing, criticizing and interrogating sources has been compromised. Journalists who have crossed the floor to public relations also stand accused of polluting PR.

The above concepts give credence to the argument that there is a growing phenomenon that the activities of public relations professionals are helping to shape news contents (Franklin 1997;19-21).This has led the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners, which traditionally had been adversarial to be recast into “trading” or “exchange” relationship in which under-resourced journalists, working in understaffed newsrooms increasingly rely on PR sources and content (Gans 1978, Jones 2006). An editor of the *PR Week*, according to Baistov (1985) a decade ago estimated that a minimum 50 percent of broadsheet newspapers’ copy and more for tabloids is now written and provided by public relations practitioners who “do a lot for journalists “thinking for them” (Franklin 1997: 20). A lot of scholars agree that the influence of

public relations on stories has grown, with distinguished Jurgen Habermas positing that “public relations. . . techniques have come to dominate the public sphere” (1989:193), while McNair (1996), Schlesinger (1990) and Miller (1998) have also criticized the implications of PR for citizen access to the public sphere.

While acknowledging the structural effects of change over time, investigative journalist Nick Davies launches a strong critique of his own profession. He asserts that “the ignorance of journalists is at the root of media failure to meet high professional standards and fulfill their informal constitutional scrutiny of powerful institutions in a democracy” Davies (2008:28) cited in Moloney et al (2013). He further observes that:

“. . . modern media failure is complicated and subtle. It involves all kinds of manipulation, occasional conspiracy, lying, cheating, stupidity, cupidity, gullibility, a collapse of skill and a new wave of deliberate propaganda” Davies (2008:28) cited in Moloney et al (2013).

Moloney et al (2013) observes that this is the mess that PR-isation has taken advantage of. He urges journalists to be skeptical of public relations professional who present themselves (most of the time) as helpers. He also contends that journalists should also check data with many sources. They adds that journalists should treat ideas and suggestions from public relations sources with caution. They further elaborate that journalists should remember that the public relations professionals always seek to advance the interests of their clients or of the causes they believe in. Moloney et al (2013) observes that journalists should remember that their use of public relations copy will invariably mean tensions with their roles as guardians of public interest.

2.2.5 Relationship between journalists and public relations: Conflict and cooperation

The relationship between journalists and public relations officers as observed by Charron (ND) is characterized by conflict and cooperation. He further asserts that as a result of that two-sided relationship, the two partners end up negotiating “in exchange for some specifiable benefit in spite of their divergent interests”.

Journalism and public relations, asserts Charron (ND) are involved in two levels of negotiation. He identifies the first level as the exchange of resources (publicity and information) between

journalists and public relations practitioners and the second level as the distribution of influence that accrues from the rules of the game. In explaining the second level, Charron (ND) says the behaviour patterns of first level negotiations are governed by rules, which are themselves the product of second level negotiations. He observes that scholars studying news production processes have shown that the professional conduct of journalists is largely influenced by organizational and institutional settings in which they find themselves (Gans 1978; Tuchman 1978). Charron (ND), however, contends that these settings also influence the conduct of news sources, particularly public relations officers. He asserts that organizational and institutional settings of news thus impose a “framework”, which all actors must respect. He avers that it is by conforming to this “framework” that public relations officers gain influence over news production.

In the first level of negotiation, Charron (ND) observes that the benefit that the journalist seeks is news item, while for the public relations practitioner is publicity. He asserts that both sides are prepared to make concessions to obtain what they are looking for. He further observes that public relations practitioners attempt to “convince” the journalists by making their source’s message conform to journalistic production requirements. This, Charron (ND) argues, is done to ensure that the message makes a “good story”, originating from a credible and newsworthy source.

In all these negotiations, observes Charron (ND), both sides have resources at their disposal which allow them to influence each other in some way. The actors’ main influence is related to their interdependence.

“Control of the access to sources and information, time constraints and an awareness of the needs and preferences of journalists as well as the general characteristics of their "adversary" are some of the kinds of resources which public relations practitioners use in their negotiations with journalists. The combination of resources and constraints establishes the work for negotiations and, therefore, the ability of one player to influence the conduct of the other. In effect it is through the relationship between resources and constraints that a given actor is able to influence another” (Charron ND).

Citing the example of public relations practitioners trying to influence journalists, Charron (ND) argues that they will use their resources to take advantage of the constraints faced by journalists, causing them to act in ways in agreement with their own interests. He posits that journalists' constraints thus become resources and opportunities for public relations practitioners.

“For example, the source could manipulate the time by calling an important press conference close to the journalists' deadline. Under these time constraints journalists cannot prepare themselves, nor can they critically analyse the message, and contact other competing sources. Journalists are consequently more likely to report the sources' views unedited” (Charron (ND)).

Charron (ND) raises a very crucial point with regards influence of public relations on media content. He argues that we cannot raise the issue of influence in general terms without taking specific situations into account.

Lewis (et al 2008) is of the view that most PR-informed topics are found in business. They argue that an increase in pagination of national newspapers across the last two decades, achieved with a relatively static number of journalists have prompted questions about the impact these journalistic practices have on the quality and independence.

A lot of journalists deny source supremacy in news making because it offends the journalists' professional culture, which emphasizes independence and editorial autonomy, Lewis (et al 2008) points out that journalists favour a more robust conflict model, based on the assumption that media are to function as watchdogs of powerful economic and politics interests. Journalists should establish independence of sources or risk the fourth estate being driven by the fifth estate of public relations (Baistov 1985: 67-77).

2.2.6 News journalism and public relations: A dangerous relationship

Maloney et al (2013) observes that at a time when public relations is on the rise, contemporary journalism is facing a challenge to produce news that retains a critical distance from the source despite a strong tide from public relations.

2.2.7: PR offering information subsidy to journalists

Grandy (1982)'s "Information subsidy" theoretical intervention is very important in the debate about sources. He argues that public relations practitioners and other suppliers of pre-packed news offer a subsidy to news organisations (through press releases, press conferences, video news releases, press briefings, lobbying and special reports). He further observes that these subsidies assist news organisations to maintain profitability through cutting journalism wages and number of journalists employed, while sustaining, if not increasing news output. The increase in output is achieved through increasing pagination, including more supplements, and the development of online editions and other news services.

As observed by Franklin (2005), the drive for profit maximization compromises the independence of the press, thereby blurring the line between factual reporting and partisan narrative. Lewis (et al 2008), however, warns that public relations activity, particularly the sophisticated kind, may leave few traces. Public relations professionals now prefer "filtering out" selected sound-bites to journalists using personal contacts.

The "fourth-estate" has increasingly been corrupted and replaced by the "fifth estate" of public relations practitioners who are increasingly becoming influential in news making and reporting (Baistov 1985:67-76; Davis 2002:173). Some critics suggest that journalists are now akin to "lapdogs" than "watchdogs" because of their support of governments and corporate interests rather than any opposition to them (Franklin 1997:38). Some of the critics have even gone a step further to describe journalists as "guard dogs" protecting particular group interests within power elites.

2.2.4: Death of independent journalism

The convergence or integration of media and public relations is a tendency that undermines the independence of the media. There is a trend towards direct corporate control of the media as observed by Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009).

The growth of public relations industry, as observed by Moloney (2013) represents a serious threat to the quality and independence of contemporary journalism. Moloney (2013) argues that :

“We view this power shift away from independent journalism to PR-isation as an unwelcome challenge to modern democracy. PR always has consequences for democracy because it is a powerful set of persuasive techniques available to all interests in the political economy and civil society. This wide access, however, has been more theoretical than actual, and it has not brought communicative equality to all interests, pressure and cause groups.”

To maintain their independence, Moloney et al (2013) encourages journalists to keep their distance from public relations practitioners due to role incompatibility.

2.3 Theoretical framework

There are a number of theories in media studies that seek to understand while media operate and behave in the manner that they do. This section is going to look at the most appropriate theories and how they apply to this study.

2.3.1 Public sphere

The public sphere theory was propounded by Jugern Harbamus. He conceptualized the public sphere as the realm of social life where the exchange of information and news on questions of concern takes place so that public opinion can be formed as observed by McQuail (2013). The mass media has become the chief institution of the public sphere as the scale of the modern society does not allow more than relatively small number of citizens to be co-present.

The original public sphere, points out McQuail (2013), referred to the actual place where bourgeois intellectuals (from 18th century onwards) discussed and developed ideas for political reform. Coffee shops and pages of newspapers were the typical locales, equivalent of an imagined Athenian Agora or marketplace. Physical access to such space was free and freedom of speech and association was assured. McQuail (2013) contends that the more significant metaphorical space lies between the sphere of government and state action and the “basis of societies where personal lives of citizens are conducted. He contends that this image captures the role of media in society and sufficiently educated, informed or interested body of citizens are some of the necessary conditions for the operation of the public sphere.

Smith (2007) argues that the idea of public sphere rests on the existence of a space in which informed citizens can engage with one another in debate and critical reflection, hence its relevance to the discussion of the media. He argues that increasing commercialization and in our case, PR-isation, has led to subsequent decline of the public sphere. Instead of focusing on critical issues affecting the society, corporate rot rampant in the corporate world, the media is preoccupied with issues played up in public relations copy that is sent to them through press releases and statements. Today, that reasoned public discussion has been replaced by the progressive privatization of the citizenry and the trivialization of question of public concern, asserts Stevenson (2002), cited in Smith (2007).

Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) talk of the “neoliberalisation of the public sphere” as the process that involves the commercialization of news production and the way in which professional public relations tend to serve powerful interests. Harbamas, however, has been accused of idealizing a “bygone and elitist form of political life.

2.3.2 Agenda setting theory

The agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. Agenda setting, as defined by Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009), is the process of the mass media presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others. They simplified the essence of this theory by explaining that the more coverage an issue receives, the more important it becomes to the people.

One of the most noted contributions to the understanding of the media effects as a multistep and multilevel process has been agenda setting research. Its insight is summed up in the formulation that, while media may not tell people *what* to think, they can tell people what to think *about* (Cohen 1963) cited in Jensen (2012).

The intellectual roots of this mass communication theory have been credited to journalist Walter Lippman, who in his book, *Public Opinion*, argued that the news media construct our world view when they “create pictures in our minds” (Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009: 147). One of the most

important points that Lippmann make in his book is that agenda setting “is not a result of any diabolical plan by the journalist to control the minds of the public, but “an inadvertent by-product of the necessity to focus” the news as observed by McCombs (2004) cited in Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009).

Newspapers, magazines, radio and television, contend Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009), have limited amount of space and time, so only a fraction of the day’s news can be included. They observe that “it is the necessary editing process, guided by agreed upon professional news values that results in the public attention being directed to a few issues and other topics as the most important of the day. Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) point out that numerous studies have found high correlations between media and public agendas.

Kebrown and Blundell et al (2009) assert that agenda setting, which refers to the media influence in laying down the list of subjects or agenda for public discussion. They note that people only discuss and form opinions about things they have been informed about and further observe that mass media provide this information in most cases. Kebrown and Blundell et al (2009) aver that:

“This gives those people who own, control and work in the mass media a great deal of power in society, for what they choose to include or leave out of their newspapers... This may mean that the public never discuss some subjects because they are not informed about them:

Public relations is now setting the agenda (agenda setting theory) as public relations practitioners are now among people who control the media. Their raw public relations stories are finding their way into the media without being critiqued. This scenario therefore means that organisations with more vibrant public relations department like Nssa, Seed Co and Delta among others will have more stories in the media, like *The Herald Business* and will therefore be able to set their own agendas. Moloney et al (2013) observes that public relations practitioners who have been senior reporters for a long time know how to set their agenda in the media. Witness Phil Hall

Associates, a public relations firm in America, led by the former editor of The News of the World, boasts on their website cited by Moloney et al (2013) that:

“No Public Relations Company knows the media industry better than we do and no one has better access. We take your business right to the top of the news agenda” (Moore, 2007 cited in Moloney et al).

The quotation shows how public relations practitioners value the ability to have an influence in media content and the capability to set the agenda in the media. In setting the agenda and being branded the fifth estate, public relations is now constricting the public sphere, where people were supposed to discuss freely economic issues affecting them. Instead, the public sphere has been refeudalised as the corporate, particularly those with adequately resourced public relations department are the ones only actively participating in the public sphere. This therefore spells doom to the democratic participant media theory, which says everyone should be granted an opportunity to actively participant in the governance of the society in which they live, as the media is seen as a conduit through which that process can be achieved.

In short public relations practitioners, through the stories that they produce which are channeled to the people through the media, such as *The Herald Business* are now influencing the main topics for discussion, meaning that public relations is now determining what the public discusses as shown by the salience given to stories originating from public relations departments in the appendixes.

2.3.3 The theory of hegemony

The researcher felt that the theory of hegemony, propounded by the Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci is also central to this study. He was investigating why Fascism was still surviving in Germany. Gramsci himself defines hegemony as rule by consent, while Lull (1995) defines it as the power that one social group holds over others. Through the use of the media, corporate organizations through their public relations departments are therefore always in the process of gaining and regaining their hegemony over different stakeholders (clients/ customers and the media). When the corporate establish hegemony, they become the preferred and maximize their

profits in the process. The mass media are very critical in the creation of hegemony. Moloney et al (2013) citing Beder (2006) observes that:

“Access to PR has been and still is more available to the powerful as a service industry for advancing and defending their positions”.

The above quotation shows that public relations is a powerful weapon for the powerful and the rich in their bid to maintain their hegemonic control through manipulating media content.

Hegemony explains extreme forms of loyalty. It sheds light into the effectiveness of soft power which leads to mental colonization. In the case of this study, the research sought to understand certain levers that public relations practitioners pulled and continue to do so to enable that to maintain hegemonic control over media content, especially in the case of *The Herald Business*.

Hegemony operates by elevating certain creations to the level of the natural like what has been highlighted in the literature review that public relations practitioners want it to appear natural that journalists should embrace public relations copy and do so more when they are under pressure from deadlines and their press releases and statements come in as a stitch in time.

Hegemony refers to the level of liking with regards to ideas. Public relations practitioners are always out to create a high level of liking for their organisations, the products that they produce and the ideas that they seek to promote. When the hegemonic status of organisations wane, it means the public relations department of that organization has failed, that explains why public relations practitioners continually seek to influence media content to their advantage.

Moloney et al (2013) observes with concern:

“PR-isation begins with material transfer of words, briefings, data and then turns into an ideological transmission of PR attitudes into the newsrooms.”

From the statement above, it is therefore apparent that hegemonic status that public relations practitioners seek to maintain over journalists is meant to ensure that they transmit their ideologies (set of beliefs) and attitudes into the newsroom without encountering opposition.

Chapter 3: Research methods and methodology

3.1 Introduction

So far the researcher has clearly laid out the objectives of the study. Literature crucial to this study has also been reviewed. The purpose of this chapter is to present the methods by which the study was carried out. This chapter lays out the specific set of procedures that direct the researcher in the administration of the research. It is going to look at the data that would be required to meet the objectives of the study and how the relevant data will be collected.

3.2 Research methods and methodologies

Research methods as observed by Frey et al (2000) are particular strategies the researcher uses to collect evidence necessary for building and testing theories. Kothari (2004) further avers that research methods may be understood as all those methods/techniques that are used for conduction of research. These research methods include methods of data collection, data analysis and methods of presentation. As Kothari (2004), points out, research methods or techniques thus refer the methods the researcher uses in performing research operations. In other words all those methods which are used by the researcher during the course of studying his research problem are termed as research methods (Kothari 2004:8). Research methodologies on the other hand are defined by Harris (2003) as the analysis of the principles of the methods, rules and the postulates used by a discipline. He goes on to describe research methodologies as guidelines for solving a problem using specified methods, tools and techniques.

Methodology can be likened to a path which the researcher travels on his way to finding answers to research questions. Just like on any other path, there are signposts that act as guidelines to the practical steps through which you must pass in your research journey in order to find answers to research questions. Kothari (2004) asserts that research methodology is a systematic way to solve the research problem. He further observes that it may be understood as a science of how research is done scientifically. In it, Kothari (2004) further elucidates, the researcher studies the various steps that are generally adopted in studying the research problem along with the logic behind them. It is apparent from the input of the scholars mentioned above that research methods do

constitute only a part of the research methodology. This chapter is therefore going to closely look at the path of the research from the research approach, research design, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis and finally methods of data presentation.

3.2 Research approach

The research largely makes use of qualitative approach, although it will also use quantitative approach in coming up with the figures on the number of stories that have been influenced by public relations. The qualitative aspects were exploited as they are more fluid and very useful in an attempt to understand the influence of public relations in business stories published in *The Herald Business* section of *The Herald*. The quantitative approach rests on the logic of mathematics, the principles of numbers and methods of statistical analysis.

The major weakness of qualitative approach is that the results of the study cannot be generalized beyond the immediate case as observed by Tellis (1997). This therefore means that the results of this study cannot be generalized wholesomely to other newspapers such as the *NewsDay* or *dailynews*. As has been discussed in the literature review, the influence of public relations is best studied in a given context. Maxwell (1992) also posits that the focus of qualitative research is primarily on understanding particulars rather than generalizing to universals. The quantitative aspect was included to make it easier to analyse statistical data on the number of stories that were found to have a strong public relations influence among that the research is seeking to find out.

3.3 Research design

Research design is the structure of inquiry as observed by Yin (1993). Mouton (2006) points out that a research design is plan or blueprint regarding how one intends to carry out research. It focuses at the end product as opposed to research methodology which focuses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used. Gray (2009:131) defines a research design as “the overarching plan for the collection, measurement and analysis of data.”

Kumar (2011) asserts that a research design should include the following: the study design per se, the logistical arrangements that you wish to undertake, measurement procedures, the sampling strategy, the frame of analysis and the time frame. The study design is a small part of

research design. Selection of an appropriate research design is crucial as a faulty design results in misleading findings and is tantamount to wasting human and financial resources.

This study employed the case study research design. It looked at the influence of public relations on media content and zeroed in on *The Herald Business* content to make the study more accurate and achievable within the set timeframe.

The researcher thought this design was more appropriate as it is the most flexible of all research designs as observed by Schell (1992). He adds that case study allows the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events.

Schell (1992) further notes that in general, a case study is an empirical inquiry which:

“1) Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (ethnographic study): when

“2) The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which

“3) multiple sources of evidence are used.

“The case study is best suited to considering the **how** and **why** questions, or when the investigator has little control over events. It has significant limitations, and misapplication can produce incorrect or inconsistent findings.”

In the case of our study, the researcher went out to find out if, how and why public relations was in position to influence media content of *The Herald Business*. The research also made use of several other various versions of case study. It is informed by a single case study as it is only focusing on *The Herald Business*.

The research, however, made use of all the descriptive, exploratory and explanatory variations of case studies. Schell (1992) asserts that there is no exclusivity between exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. He even adds that some of the best case studies are either exploratory and descriptive or descriptive and explanatory.

3.4 Research procedure and sampling

The study made use of case study, which is a known research design. Stake (1995) contends that the protocols that are used to ensure accuracy and alternative explanations are called triangulation. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In case studies, this could be achieved by triangulating data gathering techniques in order to obtain multiple sources of data as observed by Yin (1994). Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) identify at least six sources of evidence in case studies. They both advocate for evidence from at least:

- *Documents* – could be letters, memoranda, agendas, administrative documents, newspaper articles, or any document that is germane to the investigation. In this case, the study made use of evidence from newspapers.
- *Archival records* – can be service records, organizational records, lists of names, survey data, and other such records.
- *Interviews* – may propose solutions or provide insight into events. They may also corroborate evidence obtained from other sources. This study also used interviews to corroborate evidence obtained from newspapers that were studied.
- *Direct observation* – occurs when a field visit is conducted during the case study.
- *Participant-observation* – makes the researcher into an active participant in the events being studied.
- *Physical artefacts* – can be tools, instruments, or some other physical evidence that may be collected during the study as part of a field visit.

The triangulated data gathering techniques as will be discussed when the researcher mentions how those techniques were applied in this research.

3.4.1 Unit of analysis

A unit of analysis can easily be understood as that critical aspect that is being studied. Bless and Smith (1965) defines the unit of analysis as a person or subject from whom a social researcher

collects data. In this study the unit of analysis are *The Herald Business* stories, especially the sample of eight business stories from each year under study.

3.4.2 Research population

The word population generally refers to the number of people, however, research population according Trochim (2006) is the universe from which the sample is to be selected. Saunders *et al* (2009: 212) notes that research population is:

“The full set of cases from which a sample is taken is called a population.

In the case of this study, the research population are all *The Business Herald* stories from January 1, 2013 to September 30.

3.4.2 Sampling

Sampling as defined by Searle (1995), is the selection of units of analysis such as people or institutions for the study. Adams (1989) concurs with the above definition and adds that sampling is done to create a “miniature replica of the population, reflecting the range of its characteristics” so as to generate representative results with great accuracy, focus and at reduced costs. The rationale is to select a sample from a bigger group (sampling population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting a fact, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group. Sampling is a statistical practice concerned with the selection of individual observations intended to yield some knowledge about population under study especially for the purpose of statistical inference. Sampling is therefore the process of selecting units from a population of interest so that by studying the sample one can fairly generalize the results back to the population from which they were chosen.

Frey et al (2000) describe a sample as a “subgroup of population”. It has also been described as a representative “taste” of a group (Berinstein 2003:7). The fact that this study makes use of a single case study, that of *The Herald Business* to look at the influence of public relations means

that somehow the research has already come up with a sample of this study from various media. The researcher chose *The Herald Business* as a single case to be studied.

The researcher also made use of purposive sampling. As observed by Babbie (1990), purposive sampling is selecting a sample on the basis of your own knowledge about the research population, its elements, and nature of your research aims. In applying this method of sampling, the researcher purposively selected people he knew were interested in business issues in the distribution of questionnaires. This was done in the full knowledge that not everyone is interested in business issues and stories as it is a special area that needs people who understand it. There are, however, some business issues that the generally everyone know and have a rough understanding like issues to do with inflation and tax-free bonus, although the majority of such issues remain beyond the comprehension of many.

Frey et al (2000) further avers that the population is non-randomly selected based on a particular characteristic. MacNair weighs in and states that individual characteristics are selected to answer necessary questions about a “certain product”.

The researcher is then able to select participants on internal knowledge of said characteristics. This method of sampling has proved to be useful if the researcher wants to study “a small subset of a larger population in which many members of the subset are easily identified but the enumeration of all is nearly impossible” (Babbie 1990). More details of how this method of sampling has been used is found in the methods of data collection below. The research also made use of simple random sampling as shown in the methods of data collection.

3.5 Methods of data collection

3.5.2 Individual in-depth interviews

The individual in-depth interviews were carried out to solicit for answers from media practitioners. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the interviewees. Wimmer and Dominick (2003; 183) contend that one – on – one interviewees are selected based on a pre-determined set of screening requirements. The interviewees were decided beforehand, based on their expertise and knowledge of topics of enquiry. Individual in-depth interviews were used by

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the researcher because they allowed him to follow up on questions that the interviewees would not have answered satisfactorily. They also allowed the researcher to make readings of paralanguage such as body language and facial expressions. The method of sampling used can also shift to convenience sampling when we consider that the researcher works at *The Herald* as a sub-editor and already had a cordial relationship with the interviews who happen to be his workmates. The researcher interviewed *The Herald Business* editor Happiness Zengeni, her assistant Walter Muchinguri, senior business reporter Golden Sibanda and junior reporter Tinashe Makichi.

3.5.3 Digital archival research

Kaleva (2015:27-28) observes that:

“Digital archives are repositories systematically designed to store, locate and provide access to digital material that can date back several years. The objective of digital archives is to standardise access as well as to preserve material in digital format so that it is available globally in digital format.”

The researcher also used digital archival research analysis stories that were uploaded at *The Herald* website, particularly under the business section, which were carried in *The Herald Business* print version. The searcher took a sample of 8 stories for each of the periods under study, that is from January to December 2013, from January to December 2014 and from January to September 2015. The researcher randomly selected stories that were carried on Tuesday and Thursday for this study.

The researcher was also given full access to *The Herald Business* assistant business editor’s email address to ascertain the amount of public relations pressure that they work under. The mails that were studied dated back to January 3013, which falls within the jurisdiction of this study.

3.5.4 Participant observation

In participant observation, Gunter (2000) observes that the researchers record their observations about the way their subjects behave. This method of collecting data demands that the researcher

has firsthand experience in the social world chosen for study. Through that immersion, the researcher begins to hear, see and even experience a given reality as the real participants understudy do. The researcher being *The Herald* sub-editor also used part of his experience to gain insight into the influence that public relations professionals' work have on media content, particularly at business stories. Having been a reporter before joining the sub-editors' desk, the researcher continued to receive press conference invitations, press releases and statements from public relations practitioners', especially Mike Hamilton, who owns MHPR Public Relations consultancy firm. Press releases and statements that found their way into *The Herald Business* pages a few days down the line were strong enough to arouse inquisitiveness inside the researcher that lead to pursuance of this study.

3.6. Methods of data analysis

3.6. 1 Content analysis

The researcher used content analysis in this study. Mytton (1997) defines content analysis as a systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain categories that are usually predetermined. These predetermined categories in the case of this study are; stories based on public relations content, government sources and unofficial sources in investigative stories. Kerlinger (1986) suggests that content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantifiable manner for the purpose of measurable variables. It is concerned with unleashing the apparent content of the item in question and the hidden content behalf of their clients. This came in handy in bringing out the agendas that various public relations practitioners from different organizations sought to bring into the media agendas and the hegemonic status that they sought to maintain over the media and readers. According to Lowery and Defleur (1995) it becomes necessary to probe beneath the surface in order to ask deeper questions of what would be happening. The two scholars stress that content analysis has the advantage of stressing the relationship between content and background. Krippendorff (2004) posits that, analyzing texts in the contexts of their uses distinguishes contents analysis from other methods of inquiry. The researcher carefully examined

content of *The Herald Business* to ascertain the degree to which public relations is having an influence on the business stories.

3.6. 2 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to lay bare the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. Van Dijk (1998) notes that critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. Fairclough (1993) defines critical discourse analysis as discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events, texts and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes, to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. This method of data analysis came in handy in examining the power dynamics between public relations as a source of news and the journalists, representing their various media.

3.7 Data presentation methods

After the collected data has been analyzed, the findings were then presented qualitatively and quantitatively. Descriptive and narrative presentation methods were preferred by the research over other methods because they gave the research the leeway to explain and describe his findings as identified. Since there is risk of the results being subjective, the research decided to triangulate these methods with quantitative methods like graphs and tables. In narrative analysis, texts are considered as stories. All kinds of media products and media contents can be described from narrative point of view. Gunter (2000) notes that narrative analysis distinguishes itself from other texts by a clearly marked beginning and ending.

Pictorial presentation of data in the form of graphs were used by the research to document the data gathered. Rose (2011) notes that, a graph is a diagram showing the relation between variable

quantities. Graphs ranging from pie charts, histograms were used because they have the ability to reflect a visual image that can simplify complex information as well as highlighting trends in the data

3.8 Research instrument

3.8.1 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a document containing questions designed to solicit information that is appropriate for analysis as observed by Trellis (1997). The scholar further notes that collected data can then be converted into quantifiable data, which is analysed and interpreted to form some conclusions.

The questionnaire that was administered in this study had the purpose of giving voices to the newspaper reader. It was useful in getting the opinion of the readers on the influence of public relations on stories, particularly those carried by *The Herald Business*. In selecting the respondents, the researcher used simple random sampling method.

Wimmer and Dominick (2003; 156) identify these five main problems associated with questionnaires:

1. Respondents need to cooperate when completing a questionnaire. Sometimes they do not have the time and when they rush through the questionnaire, they might not give serious thought to the questions and give inaccurate responses.
2. Respondents must respond by giving facts. However, some respondents may decide to be unduly helpful by attempting to anticipate what researchers want to hear or find out.
3. Questionnaires many require respondents to give information on topics that are unfamiliar to them.
4. Some respondents may withhold the information because they do not wish to give it for some reason.

5. Questionnaires to not probe the respondents if they either give an inadequate answer or an interesting one.

The sampling technique and structure of the questionnaire reduced the problems highlighted above and enhanced internal validity in the data gathering process. The probabilistic sampling method of stratified random sampling was used to correct gender, age, social class and educational level disparities in the population under study. The researcher ensured that questionnaires were distributed to newspaper readers of various ages, different sex, occupations, and economic classes. Consideration was given to the fact an equal and balanced distribution of questionnaires to respondents of different sex (equated to gender) in each age category that was considered.

Tellis (1997; 8) highlights that questionnaires boost confidence in respondents because of the nature of privacy which they accord to respondents. The particular questionnaire that was used did not request respondents to reveal their identities. Questions were brief and the questionnaire simply requested audiences to tick in boxes.

3.8.2 Readers feel short changed by PR-based stories

Table 1: Questionnaires return rate

	Administered	Returned
Questionnaires	25	20

Through the use of questionnaires, the researcher managed to get inputs from readers. Given the fact that the respondents were mainly people who were well-versed with business issues, they were quick to notice that business reporters at *The Herald Business* had public relations copy as their main source of news. However, they felt that it was mainly because they were lazy, rather than the issue of resources that were raised by *The Herald Business* editor and her assistant in the in-depth interviews. The researcher, however, considering the views from *The Herald Business* editors plus views gained from participant observation felt it was an issue of fear of the known

more than laziness that the public relations managed to determine issues for public discussion in the media although it was supposed to be vice-versa. The normative role of the media in an ideal society is that it should play a watchdog role and set the agenda for issues for discussion in the public sphere. It is, however, no longer as Cohen (1963) cited in Jensen (2012) observes that:

Media may not tell people what to think, they can tell people what to think about.

Rather, it is now public relations not telling people what to think, but telling them what to think about. On the issue of a certain number of companies such as Econet and Fly Emarites dominating, business news, some felt that it was because those companies were the only performing well in the harsh economic climate, while others felt that it was because they were the biggest advertisers in the paper. The majority felt that it was a combination of the fact that they were the biggest performing companies and that they had very active public relations departments that kept churning out press releases and statements on any development in their companies.

They felt that the likely effect if unfiltered public relations copy finding its way freely into media content and *The Herald Business* in particular was the fact that the newspaper was likely to fire some of their journalists and rely more on public relations copy, that will, however, put off readers the moment they felt that they were being sold a dummy through “soft propaganda, which happens to be public relations. The readers also felt that the readers were more likely to migrate to social media for their news when they felt that they were getting a raw deal from traditional media like *The Herald Business*, although they felt that public relations professional were also likely to follow suit.

On the issue of independence from sources, the readers recommended that *The Herald Business* should follow international best practices on dealing with sources, which includes the reporters declaring anything that they would have received from the sources as it has a tendency of influencing of influencing content. They felt that business reporters and their editors were more susceptible to bribes as they dealt with large corporate with huge financial muscles.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the strategies and tactics that the research used in this study so as to come up with results that are representative of the situation on the ground. Various methods of data gathering like personal in-depth interviews and questionnaires as well as data analysis methods like semiotics and critical discourse analysis were articulated. The aspect of the respondent population has also been chronicled. The next chapter gives an analysis of the historical background, structure and performance of *The Herald*.

Chapter 4: Organisational analysis

4.1: Introduction

This chapter is going to look at the historical background and establishment of *The Herald*, in which *The Herald Business* is found as an insert. It is going to look at the organisation's funding mechanism and its link with other organisations within and outside the country's borders. It is also going to look at the structure of *The Herald Business* in particular to see how decisions on sources of news are made and how some stories are given space and prominence over others, especially those emanating from public relations departments of various organisations.

4.2: Historical background of The Herald

The Herald is one of the oldest newspapers, having been established in 1891 with its first editor being Ernest William Fairbridge. Gale (1962) observes that the paper has grown from being handwritten and duplicated using a damaged cyclostyle in a pole and dagga hut to a renowned paper it is today. Fairbridge handled every detail of production himself. He was his own editor, reporter, advertisement canvasser, painter, debt collector and delivery clerk. He wrote every word of the articles, reports and advertisements himself, from the title to the last paragraph of social news (1962:8). The paper was meant to serve the interests of the whites as its editorial policy was closely linked with that of the British South Africa Company

Francis Domer, the managing director of the Argus Printing and Publishing Company and had dispatched Fairbridge to the land south of the Limpopo as his agent, changed the name of *Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times* to *Rhodesian Herald* as observed by Gale (1962). This was at a time when a printing plant was on its way to Salisbury and the last cyclostyled copies of the *Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times* were last produced on September 8, 1892.

According to Gale (1962), in between the cyclostyled paper and the printed copies of *The Rhodesian Herald* that later hit the streets on October 29, 1892 were printed copies of News and Advertisements that were produced by Fairbridge, "pending completion of arrangements for the

printing of the forthcoming *The Rhodesia Herald*". Gale (1962) avers that *The Rhodesia Herald* was a four-page weekly that was published on Saturdays.

The Rhodesia Herald became a daily paper on March 1898 and it was produced at 7am so that Salisbury subscribers could peruse their paper at breakfast. Sanders (1999) pointed out that the Argus Printing and Publishing Company established their local subsidiary, the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing (RPP) Company in 1926. As noted by Rusike (1990) and Sanders (1999) Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company Limited was formed as a separate entity from the Argus Company to publish *The Rhodesia Herald* and *The Bulawayo Chronicle* in 1926. It was registered in the Rhodesia Stock Exchange (RSE) on October 15, 1951.

On May 30, 1980, after Independence according to Saunders (1999), the company changed its name from Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company (RPPC) Pvt Ltd to Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Pvt Ltd (Zimpapers) after a US\$6 million grant from Nigeria enabled the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) under the new Government to buy the Argus interests in Zimpapers. Initially ZMMT bought 45 percent of the Zimpapers shares and bought some more shares years later to increase its shareholding to more than 50 percent.

ZMMT was established to handle taxpayer's money and to protect the public's shareholding in the newspaper stable. The Trust's major mandate was to protect the papers from political interference (Mararika 1993:57). Mukasa (2003) points out that the role of the ZMMT was to promote the representation of black interests in the media

However ZMMT was dissolved in December 2001 to pave way for an organisation called Multimedia Investment Trust (MIT) whose legal status, authorities are yet to elaborate. Up to the date of printing of this dissertation, nothing concrete had been done to constitute the new organisation.

4.3 The nature of the organisation's core business

Zimpapers, who are the publishers of *The Herald's* core business is printing and publishing. Zimpapers also publishes *The Sunday Mail, H-Metro, B-Metro, Sunday News, Chronicle, The Manica Post, The Southern Times, ZimTravel, Kwayedza, Umthunywa* and the *Bridal Magazine*.

Zimpapers also owns and operate a talk radio station, Star FM, which now beams to almost three quarters of the country. The organization is also in the process of setting up a television station, Star TV.

The organization also owns and operates a commercial printing division, NatPrint. It has also recently introduced electronically distributed business bulletin, *BH24*, which targets top business executives and a sport newsletter *Sports Zone*. The group is also in the process of putting in place a new radio station to be based in Mutare, Diamond FM, which is expected to beam to the Mutare and surrounding communities.

The commercial printing division, Natprint does the printing of labels for Castle Lager, Black Label, Lyons and is also in the process of making box packages for ice cream for Dairibord among other things.

This shows that Zimpapers is an organisations that is expanding and in that process is developing a lot of relations and synergies with a lot of other organisations who will also have an effect on the media content that they produce. An example is Daibord and Delta beverages that *The Herald* or rather *The Herald Business* will find it hard to expose the corporate rot within their organisations.

4.4 Ownership and control

Government owns a controlling 51 percent stake in Zimpapers which publishes *The Herald*, in which *The Herald Business* is found as an insert. This explains why Government through the Minister of Information can at times determine who becomes Editor of *The Herald* and subsequently editor of *The Herald Business*. Government-owned companies and institutions are also largely given positive coverage in the paper, in a typical "he who pays the piper, calls the tune" fashion. This scenario has resonance with what Kebrowne et al (2009) call the

manipulative or instrumentalist approach, which suggest that the concentration of the media enable the owners to control media output and serve the ruling class interests. According to this approach, the media are seen as an instrument that enables the ruling class to manipulate media content and even media audiences in its own interests. The control of the media, in this case The Herald Business is facilitated by the editorial policy of the newspaper, that sets the parameters within which the media manager, in this the editor and his team can work:

Kebrowne et al (2009) observes that:

“Media managers have little choice other than to run the media within the boundaries set down by the owners and journalists depend for their jobs on supporting the interests of the owners – the reports of journalists are therefore biased (one-sided). Journalists censor their own reports to avoid criticism of the interests of the dominant class; ideas or groups that threaten the status quo (the existing arrangements in society) are attacked, ridiculed or ignored

4.5 Role of editors and journalists

It is important at this point to understand that *The Herald Business* editor reports to *The Herald Editor* Caesar Zvayi, who reports directly to the Zimpapers Chief Executive Officer. At times, especially during the reign of Professor Jonathan Moyo as the Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, who appointed Caesar Zvayi editor of the Zimpapers’ flagship, Zvayi reported directly to the minister. Even the elevation of Happiness Zengeni on November 1, 2013, replacing Phaniel Kangondo is strongly linked to the echelons of political power, hence a semblance of autonomy, invincibility and assertiveness that she at times exhibited, especially in relation to the kind of sources that the business reporters could quote and the type of stories *The Herald Business* could carry. Some of the stories that come to mind are: “Weak economy slows down Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE)” of June 5 2014, “Improve the country’s insolvency resolution” of June 9 2014, “Wake up to reality- some firms are not coming back” of June 12 2014 and “Economy in precarious position- IMF” of June 24, 2014

Hence the political economy of *The Herald* remains the same even after the reign of Prof Jonathan Moyo as the Minister of Information, that is because of the 51 percent shareholding by government makes the editorial policy of the paper to be pro-government.

4.5. 1 The Herald Business editor

The *Herald Business* editor, Happiness Zengeni reports to *The Herald* Editor Caesar Zvayi whose promotion was on the behest of Minister Jonathan Moyo and knows what is expected of him by his principals who is now largely the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information, Media and Publicity George Charamba (see the appendices for the organogram). The stories whether business or political are supposed to be in line with the expectations of government at *The Herald* as it owns 51 percent of the shares in Zimpapers that publishes *The Herald*.

The editor of *The Herald* exercises his power through the desk editors, who are fully aware of what is expected of them. The desk editors are fully aware of what is expected of them. They are also fully aware of what is expected of them, the agendas that they must set and the issues that they must gatekeep and must reconfirm that in the daily dairy meetings which are chaired by the editor himself.

The business editor is the one who then assigns reporters to do certain tasks on a daily basis based on the instructions that she has either received on that particular day or on a set of values that she has internalized and is fully aware that it is in line with what her bosses expect. Based on those values, anchored by the editorial policy, the business editor approves story ideas, known as dairies for the reporters and attends the dairy meeting everyday in the morning where she presents the story ideas to the editor, his deputy, assistant editors and all other desk editors in order to seek their approval. The deputy business editor post is currently vacant at *The Herald Business* although Walter Muchinguri, the assistant business editor performs the duty of the deputy business reporter, which to basically supervise the reporters and edit the stories that they would have written and makes sure that they conform not only to the editorial policy of the paper, but also to the professional journalistic standards before passing them on to the sub-editors who then assigns the stories to the pages.

4.5.2 Business reporters

The duty of business reporters is to go out and gather news. Most of the reporters come up with their own story ideas, or get them from the business editor and her deputy and assistant. They carry out their duties fully aware of the expectations of their superiors, which is captured in the editorial policy of the paper and even through the unwritten laws that are entrenched in the organizational behaviour. Senior business reporters like Martin Kadzere and Golden Sibanda have spent a long time in the journalism field and have cultivated a number of sources that are acceptable and give views that in line with the expectations of the newspaper, views that do not radically go against the government but criticize mildly in a manner that does not cause alarm and despondency.

Journalists and the organization they work for produce news. In other words, according to Jorgensen and Henitzsch (2009), news is both an individual product and an organizational product. The observation that journalists and media organisations follow identifiable routines in producing the news has had strong impact on the study of news work. The identification of these routines has contributed to a major theoretical argument in the literature, namely that news should be viewed as constructed social reality rather than a mirror image of events that have taken place.

According to Tunstall (1971) cited in Jorgensen and Henitzsch (2009) made a distinction between news organisations and media organisations. He defined news organisations as editorial departments employing primarily journalists and media organisations, which are larger entities that contain more than one news organization plus other types of communication units , such as magazines and publishing houses. In Tunstall's view, these categories differ in terms of goals and bureaucracy. Media organisations will be more commercially oriented, while news organisations will have fewer routines. In this view, Zimpapers is media organization, with news organisations such as The Herald, The Sunday Mail, Chronicle and The Manica Post among others under it.

4.5.3 Duty editor-business news

Duty editor for the business news is the last person assigned by the editor to approve the business pages before the chief sub-editor or his deputy sends them to the production department for printing. The duty editor is usually one of the seasoned assistant editors (most of the times Victoria Ruzvidzo and George Chisoko) take turns to carry out this duty.

They are the final gatekeepers and they are to blame if anything goes wrong in that section of the paper. That explains why Chisoko was suspended over the story “Feb inflation points to the dying economy” that appeared in *The Herald Business* on 17 March 2015. The editor of *The Herald* himself can once in a while look and if necessary make some changes or recommend that some important business stories are sent to the front page of the main paper.

4.6 Links with other organisations

The Herald in general and *The Herald Business* in particular does not exist in a vacuum. It is connected with almost all sections of the society by virtue of being a publicly-owned, through government.

The paper is one of the oldest, not only in the country but in the Southern Africa as well. Its continued existence, even against the harshest of conditions can be attributed to a network of organisations it is linked with. The network of organizations includes those from the media and non media industry. *The Herald* has a strong relationship with Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation as evidenced by the fact that reporters from the two media organisations constantly call each other and share stories that each one of them might have missed.

The Herald shares stories with other publications within the Zimpapers stable that include *The Sunday Mail*, *The Chronicle*, *The Southern Times* and *The Manica Post*. In fact, there are indications from the Zimpapers board and management that most of the staff at *The Chronicle* might be rendered redundant as a lost of the stories published in the paper are from Harare and clearly marked “Harare Bureau”.

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The Herald and *The Sunday Mail* also make use of stories from news agencies such as Xinhua, Reuters, Agency France Press (AFP), South Africa Press Association (SAPA), and Associated Press (AP) among other foreign agencies. Some of the international stories are also taken from websites of media organisations such as China Daily and Russia Today among others. The sports desk usually takes stories from BBC Sport, The Daily Mail, Cricinfo and SuperSport among other websites and television channels.

There is an unwritten law that *The Herald* and other papers from the Zimpapers stable should take a certain percentage of stories and pictures from New Ziana. The stories can be news general, health and business. *The Herald* also has links with New Era of Namibia, with which it publishes *The Southern Times*. It also has business links with First Banking Corporation, its bank, with which it has a special arrangement that allows it to get money to pay its employees, while FBC can also put its financial statements and adverts without paying a single sent.

The Herald also has links with other corporate organisations such as supermarkets such OK Zimbabwe, TM Pick n Pay and Spar among others, with whom they partner on a number of promotions. Zimpapers flagship also has links with mobile phone companies such as NetOne, Econet and Telecel with which it works with on Mobile News project, that enables subscribers to get newsheadlines on their cellphones.

Since *The Herald* is a daily paper and currently the widely distributed newspaper in Zimbabwe, people prefer to turn to the paper to cater for their diverse communication needs ranging from advertising, publicity among other things. The Government on behalf of the majority of Zimbabweans is a major shareholder, and strategic partner on the day to day business of the organisation. McChesney (2008) says the political economy of the mass media is a determinant of media content and ideologies that dominate all human societies. Government ownership of *The Herald* has resulted in the paper being accused of being Zanu-PF's political mouth piece propagating ideologies of the ruling party (class), while *The Herald Business* in particular stands accused of going to bed with capital.

Newspapers are simply not profit making entities only but also political institutions that propagate ideologies to maintain the status quo. Politics influences all aspects of life, be it business, social, religion and economy. It has to be accepted that newspapers are simply not profit- making capitalist enterprises but political organisations, which function as political clubs. Politics is one of the factors which affect all facets of life be it religious, economic or social. Chomsky (2004) argues that news of the day is either overtly or covertly embedded with political ideologies. Tuchman (1978) says “To talk about news, is to talk about politics.”

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked the historical background of Zimpapers and how *The Herald* came about. It has also looked at the core business of the organisations, ownership and control with the intention of bringing out how political economy has traceable consequences to media output. The chapter also looked at the division of labour in the newsroom and how different people in different positions also contribute in shaping content in their own ways. The chapter ends by closely looking at organizations that have a close and symbiotic relationship with *The Herald* in general and *The Herald Business* in particular.

Chapter 5: Data analysis and presentation

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher is going to analyze data and present findings. The data is largely presented using the qualitative method although the quantitative paradigm is also used in coming up with bar graphs and pie charts among other presentation of data techniques.

5.2 Data analysis and presentation

5.2.1 Death of investigative journalism

The researcher interviewed Happiness Zengeni, *The Herald Business* editor, on her perception of the current status of journalism in Zimbabwe, and below are some of her observations:

“Investigative journalism has died. It’s no more. Journalists now depend on what they can get. The ability to make the best use of the available news resources, especially in business stories goes back to the issues of training. The pressure from public relations departments of big corporates is obviously there because they have vibrant public relations offices.” (20/10/15)

In his response to the same question, Walter Muchinguri, *The Herald Business* assistant editor remarked that:

“We try by all means to be professional and shrug off the influence of public relations copy in the execution of our duties, but at times because of deadline, staff shortage and shortage of resources such as cars to go out there and get stories, we end up using some public relations copy. If we do, we try to panel beat it so that it does not read like the original public relations copy.” (20/10/15)

Discussion

What came out clearly from these in-depth interviews is that journalists in the newsroom are in agreement that there is dependency on PR copy. They further observed that an interplay between public relations copy and editorial policy determine the stories that emanate from the media. Journalists from *The Herald Business* all concurred that painting a gloomy picture of the

economy when you work for Zimpapers in which the state owns a controlling stake is tantamount to applying for instant dismissal. The example that the interviewees, especially Zengeni and Muchinguri cited was that of the Assistant Editor George Chisoko who was suspended when he approved the publication in *The Herald Business* headlined “February inflation pointing to dying economy” story.

Journalists, Muchinguri said, especially those from the government-controlled media house like *The Herald* were also humstrung by fear of the unknown, which make them depend on press releases and statements than dig deeper to expose corporate rot. He said in the case where the journalist goes out of his way to expose the rot, playing the watchdog role, those exposed are after all not punished for their misdeeds and walk away scot-free, citing the example of Cuthbert Dube, who despite being blamed of looting Premier Medical Aid Society (PSMAS) is being rewarded as the court ruled that he should be paid \$3 million as part of terminal benefits. Another factor that *The Herald Business* assistant editor raised was the issue of checkbook journalism. He referred to the Interfin issue, where some of the debtors that led to the demise of the financial institution was Lunar Chickens which is owned by Gideon Gono. Due to the fact that some journalists were given bribes to keep the story under raps, the story only came out when Interfin applied for liquidation and had, as a statutory requirement, to reveal a list of its creditors. Gideon Gono is a former Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor and has strong political ties with political heavyweights and President Mugabe himself.

The catch word in journalism, according to Muchinguri is “safety first” and journalists are on safe ground if they rely on press releases and statements. This situation has therefore disabled journalists and rendered them “purveyors of public relations copy”. The in-depth interview with Muchinguri also brought out the issue of resource constraints. He pointed out that unlike what is the case in the developed countries, *The Herald Business* could not assign a reporter to do a single investigative story that could stretch up to six months before being published, hence relying on public relations copy.

The Herald Business senior reporter Golden Sibanda (20/10/15)

The watchdog role concept does not apply here (in Zimbabwe). It is not practical. How can you scrutinise and expand every press release and statement that you get. It's not feasible.

From the statement above, the research found out that Sibanda, just like Muchiguri was raising the issue of resources as observed by Cherron (ND) in the literature review that public relations practitioners use various constraints faced by journalists as resources to influence them and manipulate their content.

When Muchinguri said that they tried to do away with pressure from public relations, the researcher also found this to resonate with the observation by The Financial Times and visiting professor at Cass Business School in London Stefan Stern in a preface to John Lloyd and Lura Toogood's book *Journalism and PR: News Media and Public Relations in the Digital Age*. He observed that:

“Journalists often flinch from an inconvenient truth: that without the PR industry their publications and bulletins would be poorer. Lloidy and Toogood offer a perspective analysis of the fast changing media market in which both journalists and PRs are having to learn new tricks.”

This statement shows the extent to which journalism is relying on information from public relations in forming the bulk of media content as confirmed by Golden Sibanda in the in-depth interview with this researcher.

The journalists interviewed by the researcher also pointed to the issue of chequebook journalism as one of the reasons why public relations material was creeping into the business stories. They also observed that sometimes money does not change hands but some favours such as t-shirts and free lunch disguised as business lunch among other kickbacks. This tallies with what Fletcher (2006) observes that “facility trips” and “freebies” are a kind of bonus currency, handed out as a reward for hard work or long service. He further cites this as one of the reasons why readers are subjected to subjective journalism. He further notes that it would be rather naïve to

claim that journalists covering facility trips do not write with a sense that the PR is at their elbow, however determined they are to keep him from them keyboard.

Junior business reporter at *The Herald Business*, Tinashe Makichi said he just uses press releases and press statements to develop stories, not to entirely depend on it. From content analysis of the stories that were developed from press statements and releases that the researcher analysed, there were no significant changes to the content but a little paraphrasing the public relations content (see appendix 4). Llody and Toogood (2015) contend that if journalism is “the first draft of history”, then public relations is the first draft’s first draft. This statement does nothing but confirm the fact that public relations copy, however, undesirable to professional journalists tend to find its way into stories, particularly business stories.

Zengeni raised the issue that her reporters got most of their stories from the events of the day, but upon further research based upon the digital archival research, the researcher found out that those events that she was referring to were mainly public relations-organised events such as media receptions, facility tours and press conferences among others. There were, however, a few that had nothing to do with public relations such as events at the ZSE and financial results among others. The researcher, however, also found that even some of the financial statements also had accompanying statements, especially from the board chairpersons or the chief executives of organizations that largely sounded like public relations-generated copy.

The pie chart below shows *The Herald Business*’s main sources of news according to Happiness Zengeni:

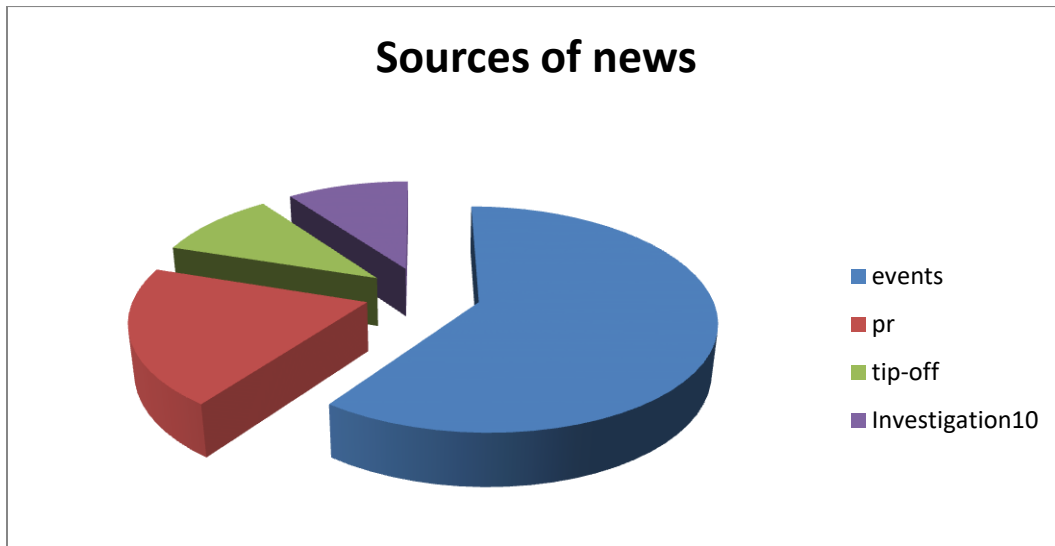


Fig 1: Sources of news for The Herald Business reporters according to The Herald Business editor Zengeni

The researcher also discovered that although a lot of companies had dismantled public relations departments as is the case with Zimbabwe National Roads Authority (Zinara), chief executive officers, managing directors and marketing managers quickly moved in to adopt some public relations duties. They started to play a crucial role in communicating the position of the company, not just through the press releases, but through interviews and opportunities offered by functions such as launches and other corporate functions.

Discourse analysis played a crucial role in analyzing and identifying public relations copy in the business stories under study. Stories that carried phrases like “in a statement”, “read the press statement” and “said the spokesperson” were some of the indicators that the story has strong public relations influence. Stories based on corporate events that went on to quote the chief executive officer of an organization or the managing director also pointed to the work of public relations practitioners. Even the language found in their speeches pointed to carefully crafted deliveries meant to project the organization in positive light, itself one of the key duties of public relations practitioners. Single-sourced

stories quoting the top hierarchy of an organization without verifying from other sources indicated “churnalisation” or “PR-risation of news.

Where discourse analysis ended, critical discourse analysis picked up the in identifying the presence of public relations copy in *The Herald Business* stories. Critical discourse analysis was instrumental in going beyond the surface of public relations-sourced business news. They indicated that the public relations practitioners were out to set the agenda in the business section of *The Herald* by giving salience to certain issues. The agendas varied from lobbying government to implement policies favourable to the corporate world as was the case in the labour law amendment saga. The other agenda was projecting different organisations and firms as good corporate citizens worthy trying to do business with. In times of crisis, such corporate organisations as Telecel, when the deregistration case raged on, their public relations department and consultant MHPR, through various media including *The Herald Business* articulated the position of firm and its commitment to abide by the regulations, in the process assuring their clients that the organization was trying everything within its power to resolve and end the crisis. Econet, during the period of study(1 January 2013 to 30 September 2015) , through their stories projected themselves an organization concerned with solving the people’s problems rather than chasing profits, which is itself a form of “soft propaganda” as all corporate organization has satisfying a need at a profit as their greatest aim.

5.2.2 Public relations copy disguising its self as events

As sub-editor who edited copy and designed pages for *The Herald Business* for a better period of time under study, the researcher can justifiably claim to have carried out participatory observation. The researcher observed that up a lot of public relations copy was finding its way into *The Herald Business* stories through overt and covert means. At times the corporate organizations could hold functions such launches, cocktails and media receptions as a way of channeling their public relations copy to the media.

Sometimes the corporate organizations could send their public relations material directly to the business reporter or editor clearly labeled “for immediate release”. The well-written press release, usually accompanied by publishable pictures would act a messiahnic role to short-staffed business desk that is under pressure from strict deadlines to produce a paper of acceptable journalistic standards.

Although the coming in of Happiness Zengeni as editor of *The Herald Business* saw the paper temporarily producing stories that took government departments, ministries and parastatals to account, exposing corporate rot, the shift was short lived. During that short period, the paper produced hard hitting stories such as “Weak economy slows down ZSE” on Thursday 5 June 2014, “Improve the country’s insolvency resolution on Monday 9 June 2014, “Wake up to reality- some firms are not coming back on Thursday 12 June 2014 and “Economy in precarious position” on Tuesday 24 June 2014. The story which was headlined “February inflation pointing to dying economy” story that saw that led to the suspension of *The Herald* assistant editor, who was the duty editor for *The Herald Business* on that particular day was the last straw that saw the paper return to the “safety first” approach of depending on press releases and statements that exuded optimism on the economic growth. Zengeni put it tersely in one of the in-depth interviews when they were asked why they decided to moderate their very critical approach:

“We were told to tone down our stories because we were deemed to be very critical of government and the corporate world, most of whom are our advertisers and took exception to the hard hitting stories that we produced. It is now back to the normal *The Herald* style”.

5.2.4 Mounting pressure from public relations copy

The data that the researcher obtained from digital archival research contradicted the information that *The Herald Business* editor gave on their major sources of news, especially after they had been cautioned about their hard hitting stance. The full access that the researcher was given to

the assistant business editor Walter Muchinguri's email was shocking. It revealed the strong and sustained effort by public relations practitioners to have their agenda into the media agenda. It also laid bare the amount of pressure that journalists are put under by public relations professionals. His inbox was chokingly full with press releases and statements, press conference invitations among other material from public relations. Some of the statements were even marked "for immediate release" (see appendix 5), putting pressure on the business editor and his team to quickly publish their copy. The biggest culprit of channeling out a lot of public relations material was Fly Emarites. The airline's public relations could send any kind of information ranging from new routes, change in fare and promotions among other several other things to the press, *The Herald Business* in particular. The other big culprit for the period under review was Econet followed by Mwana Africa and then other corporate such as Telecel, First Mutual and Mbada Diamonds were also responsible for the bulk of the public relations that found its way into *The Herald Business*. Not to be outdone were government-liked organisations such as Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) and Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) among others. It is important to explain at this point in time that although not every press release and statement found its way into *The Herald Business*, they nonetheless provided journalists with story ideas and leads that went on to dominate business stories. Corporates which were doing well on the market such as Fly Emarites and Econet, through EcoCash and Liquid Telecoms among other well-resourced and performing entities dominated business news in *The Herald Business*.

The archival research confirmed the "safety first" approach as shown by stories such as "Seed Co extends hand to charity", of Thursday 12 September 2013 quoting Seed Co public relations manager Marjorie Mutemererwa (see appendix 4).

One of the findings that the researcher came out with from the research is that despite the neat and seemingly unbreachable organisational system at *The Herald* and *The Herald Business* in particular, a lot of public relations copy found its way through into the media content. This can point to a "convenient weakness" in the system. A weakness that ensures that subsidised stories continue to trickle in or another form of manipulation by other variation of the same ruling class,

which although is not the one that decides the editorial policy, has the power and capacity to circumvent it in order to hence its hegemonic status in society.

5.3 Findings

5.3.1 Strong public relations stories presence: Sign of refeudalisation

of public sphere

One of the main findings that the researcher came out with was that public relations copy had a strong presence in *The Herald Business* stories as reporters relied more on public relations practitioners for news rather than traditional sources of news such parliament and law courts among others. Where the public relations influence was not very explicit, it came out disguised as workshops, donations, breakfast meetings among other corporate functions. It also became apparent in the study that although other organizations (like Zimbabwe National Road Authority) because of economic problems prevailing in the country no longer had formal public relations departments, the chief executive officers and board members would at times outsource and employ the services of public relations practitioners such as Mike Hamilton Public Relations (MHPR) to coin and polish their speeches, organize their functions and facilitate media relations. The strong public relations copy presence in *The Herald Business* stories meant that, the platform which was supposed to be for everyone to discuss issues affecting them with respect to business, had been constricted and been refeudalised by the owners of capital among other people and organisations that can afford the services of public relations practitioners.

5.3.2 The Herald Business mimicking corporate interests

The researcher found that *The Herald Business* stories mimicked the interests of the owners of capital and acted as a guard of their interests, opposing what McNair (1995) put forward, when he said the media should hold those owners of capital to account when they exhibit some excesses. This also affirmed Mitchell Foucault's assertions that discourse is power, implying that the corporate world, through their public relations have power since they proved to be dictating and dominating discourse *The Herald Business*.

5.3.3 Public relations material posing no threat to editorial policy: Maintaining Zanu-PF and big corporates' hegemonic status

The other observation that the researcher came out with was that public relations copy, which was always positive posed no threat to *The Herald editorial* policy, which is to support the government of the day. In fact it supported its cause and created the impression that the economy was up and running, against the claims of the “enemies of the state that the economy was dying”. One can argue that in fact public relations especially during the period understudy helped Public relations copy punctured huge holes in the argument of “pessimists” such as Tendai Biti who are always quoted in the private press claiming that Zanu-PF rigged the 2013 elections but was failing to rig the economy. This explains why despite a tight system of gatekeepers as ranging from the reporters, to the desk editors, sub-editors, assistant editors right up to the editor himself, public relations copy flowed freely and unfiltered into *The Herald Business* stories. When Happiness Zengeni came in to be the editor of *The Herald Business*, she tried to deviate from the norm and ditched churning out public relations-based copy and faced challenges that led to the suspension of the assistant editor George Chisoko despite the fact that the business editor herself had coined that headline against the advice of deputy chief sub-editor at *The Herald*, Simon Ngena. When she went back to *The Herald* way of publishing public relations copy whether wholesomely or partially, everything started flowing smoothly again. This a clear sign that *The Herald Business* has gone to bed with corporate world and has ditched its watchdog role to the fifth estate, which is public relations, lending credence to the idea that public relations has gone on to set the agenda (agenda setting theory) in the newspaper. The relationship, however, gets sour when the corporate world threatens the interests of the government, which is what it is careful not to do explicitly. This explains why despite being the biggest advertiser and getting a lot publicity in *The Herald*, it is an unwritten law at the newspaper that Strive Masiwa’s picture should now appear in *The Herald Business* or any other section or sister papers.

5.3.4 The emergence of “safety first” journalism

The research found the emergence of a new form of journalism known as “safety first” journalism (a variation of sunshine journalism) that is based on press releases and statements.

This type of journalism is a combination of a very active public relations industry and fear-crippled media industry that has journalists not prepared to embark on investigative journalism for fear that they might trample on the interests of the powerful in society (politicians and business people) and risk losing their lives.

5.3.5 Public relations taking advantage of journalists resource constrains

to set the agenda

The research reaffirmed the observations by scholars such as Charron (ND) that public relations professionals take advantage of the constrains faced by journalists to push their agendas into the media. In the case of *The Herald Business*, public relations practitioners took advantage of time constrains brought about by tight deadlines to send their copy just before deadline to ensure that their copy finds its way into the newspaper. The study also confirmed that public relations practitioners take advantage of staff shortage in the newsrooms by sending clean copy (see appendixes) that is publishable, at times accompanied with pictures and captions so that they are published with little or no changes at all. Public relations practitioners reduce the quality of media output and makes them rely more on pre-packed content (Rendal, 2007). The situation at *The Herald*, particularly at *The Business Herald*, was aggravated by the fact that the company retrenched journalists and photographers, while at the same time introduced convergence with new media which meant more workload for the already depleted workforce. The encroachment of public relations copy into news production processes has been brought about by the improvement in fortunes of public relations, while journalist resources have been stretched, bringing about dependency on external sources of supply, which Gandy (1982) referred to as “information subsidies” as noted by Davis cited in Franklin (2008).

The research also found out that public relations practitioners are not completely bad but are extremely helpful in crises and breaking news. They can also provide background about a company, reaffirming the findings by Herman and Chomsky (1988) that studies of news sources revealed that a significant proportion of news originates from public relations releases.

5.3.6 Yawning difference in educational qualifications and experience

One of the issues that came out clearly in the study is the issue of a wide gap of experience and levels of education between public relations practitioners and journalists working in the newsrooms. This finding is based on the content analysis of the press statements and press releases that showed excellent news writing skills and good command of English. It also comes partly from participant observation since the researcher had personal working relationship with a good number of public relations practitioners as well business editors, particularly *The Herald Business* editor. A lot of journalists manning newsrooms are greenhorns when they are compared with some public relations practitioners like Freddy Murehwa (for ZBC senior reporter), public relations officer for NSSA and Mike Hamilton (former senior reporter at Ziana, now New Ziana). There is also a yawning gap in their educational qualifications as seasoned journalists most of the time have to upgrade themselves educationally before migrating to a more rewarding public relations industry. This therefore explains the ability of Freddy Murehwa, a veteran journalist who now holds two masters degrees to manipulate Happiness Zengeni, who holds a diploma in journalism from Christian College of Southern Africa (CCOSA) and is still a greenhorn when compared with Murehwa.

Unfiltered public relations copy compromises the quality of stories, kills investigative journalism and makes journalism lose its fourth estate role to the fifth estate, which is public relations. In this state, the researcher found out journalism presides over corporate rot as in the Interfin saga where Farai Rwdzi and company looted and led the financial institution to liquidation with the assistance of their partner in crime Gideon Gono whose company Lunar Chicken owed the institution a lot of money, but the case was never brought out into the open up until the financial institution applied for liquidation.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher managed to present and analyse data that he gathered. The data was presented thematically to make sure that the research questions and objectives have been met. Issues from other chapters were also reflected on as well as the theories and concepts that

have crucial links to this research. The next chapter is going to look at the conclusions and research findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is going to briefly evaluate the findings of the research before looking at the conclusions that were arrived at. It is also going to suggest recommendations to the State and the corporate world. It also suggest recommendations *The Herald* in general and *The Herald Business* in particular.

6.2 Conclusions

The researcher set out to investigate the extent to which public relations copy have influenced stories carried in *The Herald Business* and also the consequences of unfiltered public relations copy in the media. The researcher concluded that public relations practitioners in fact were setting the agenda in the media, especially in *The Herald Business* when their copy was reproduced with little or no alterations at all. The researcher observed that there was a conspiracy by political and economic interests to dominate the public sphere through the control of (seizing) discourse in the media. The economic interests have managed to seize discourse through employing masters of appealing language (public relations practitioners) and politicians through the use of spin doctors, hence the assertion that public relations is “soft propaganda”. The subsequent result of all this actions was the constant renewal and maintenance of hegemonic status by both politicians and owners of capital.

The study also found out that there is an emergence of a new form of journalism known as “safety first” journalism that is based on press releases and statement, which is an interplay between very active public relations departments and practitioners and fear-crippled journalist.

6.3 Brief evaluation of findings

The research found out that there was a strong evidence of public relations copy in *The Herald Business* stories. It was also found out that the fifth estate, which is public relations is setting the agenda in *The Business Herald* as well constricting the public sphere as it removed the ordinary people’s agenda through copious content originating from its public departments and consultancy firms as is seen by Appendix 4 and at the same time cementing the hegemonic status

of those who could afford the services of public relations practitioners. It was also established that whereas it has always been the assumption that media set the agenda or norms, it is evident that there a role switch, where the agenda is now being set by PR and the media such as The Heald Business forwarding that agenda to the public. This therefore shows that the media are now a mere conduit to transmit the agenda set by public relations departments and its practitioners. It has also been established that state-controlled media houses, The Herald Business included are driven by fear

6.4 General recommendations to the state and the corporate world

Media should be independent so that they are independent politically and economically to effectively play their watchdog role.

6.5 Recommendations to The Herald Business

The Herald Business should encourage its reporter to have a healthy portion of skepticism when it comes to dealing with press releases and statements, as well as corporate functions as their reporter end up being reduced to uncritical purveyors of public relations copy, exposing the ordinary people to the whims of the owners of capital when they are supposed to perform the watchdog role.

Some of the issues that came out clearly in the research was that public relations took advantage of resources constrains of journalist to impose their agenda through their stories in *The Herald Business*. The researcher therefore recommends that *The Herald* adequately resources its business unit so that they are not at the mercy of public relations departments and consultancy firms of corporate organisations. This resourcing move should include employing adequate staff so that they have enough time to look for adequate stories for their paper without feeling the pressure of deadlines. This will also enable the journalists to have enough time to scrutinize public relations copy and make necessary changes, or even discarding it if necessary.

As a participatory observer, the researcher found out that The Herald was venturing into a lot of projects that include Diamond FM, a community radio which will operate in Mutare and starting a television channel to be known as Star TV. The Herald also launched two copies of suburban

newspapers for free distribution in Mt Pleasant and Avondale as well Borrowdale during the period of study. Over and above that, The Herald also started producing *The Southern Times*, Zimbabwe edition. All this meant stretching thin resource base over a lot projects, exacerbating the influence of public relations on the poorly-resourced *The Herald Business*.

The researcher therefore recommends that media houses retain seasoned journalists through attractive salaries and packages so that they do not lose journalists to public relations, who will then come back to haunt them when they sneak in their copy into their papers, thereby compromising the quality of their content in the process. The researcher also recommends that media houses should encourage and support life-long learning for their journalists to close the yawning gap in qualifications between journalists and public relations that leave journalists prone to manipulation. Zimpapers used to encourage and support its staff to further their education but stopped when company performance dipped. The researcher recommends the resumption of this noble programme as company performance, education and motivation have a positive correlation.

Based on the findings from the readers on independence from sources of news, the researcher recommends that it upholds international best practices on taking favours from sources. Everyone who gets favours “that cannot fit into their hands” should declare them to their bosses so that they do not go on to affect media content entirely based on them. Even the issue of being offered transport to and from functions should not be taken for granted.

6.6 Recommendations for further study

The researcher recommends that further study be carried out to ascertain whether or not “safety first” journalism is not directly responsible for the economic and political situation that the country currently finds itself in and also if does not jeopardize Zim-Asset.

This study only focused on the influence of public relations on media content, especially business stories carried by *The Herald Business*. It would be interesting if further studies could look at the reception dynamics of public relations copy in the media. The thrust of that study

would be to find out if people have not become enlightened to distinguish between factual news and “soft propaganda” channeled as news.

It would also be interesting to look at how public relations is in the perpetual process of rebranding itself to keep on serving its purpose without triggering negative response from people. It will be worthy exploring further why public relations departments in organisations have now been renamed “communications departments”.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1	<i>The Herald</i> Organogram
Appendix 2	Questionnaire
Appendix 3	Interview guide
Appendix 4	A sample of press releases and statements and business stories derived from them
Appendix 5	A general sample of public relations-based stories from the period under study
Appendix 6	Press release marked: For immediate release

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Appendix 1

