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**AN ASSESSMENT ON THE PUBLIC DEPENDENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS AND  
ITS IMPACT ON TRADITIONAL PRINT NEWSPAPERS:**

**A Case Study of Lusaka District**

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**ABSTRACT**

Globally and in Zambia at large, social media has typically changed the way people in various societies convey between and amongst themselves and absorbs information and news respectively. Equally, it is confirmed that traditional media has remained a crucial part of society as it is an effective means of communicating to consumers all over the world, Kopano (2013). Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was **to conduct an assessment of the public's dependence on social media news and its impact of traditional print newspapers: a case study of Lusaka district.** With the aim of **assessing the public's dependence on social media news and its impact of traditional print newspapers,** this research was conducted in Lusaka district, targeting 78 respondents including 12 trained staff (management) from the Zambia Daily Mail, Times of Zambia, The Must and Daily Nations Newspaper Company, 13 newspaper readers, and the 53 respondents comprising of newspaper vendors and social media users was selected using random sampling, purposive and convenience sampling at various levels in this study. **Also, the study used the questionnaire as main instrument of data collection.** Qualitative method was applied during data analysis. The results of the study indicated that social media platforms are not very worthy to be the main sources for news which the public can seriously rely on. Interactive online content, easy on the eye, cheaper, more opportunities to

explore other news source, spread of fake news, rise of plagiarism, decline in revenue for newspapers and digitization influence on consumption habits are the main indicators influencing the public's dependence of social media for news, thereby imposing this paradigm shift of interest away from traditional print newspapers. The recommendations made in light to this problem included the following: media institutions in collaboration with government, should organize workshops and seminars to sensitize and education the public and journalists to appreciate the impact that social media platforms bears on traditional (print newspapers), government and all press bodies should provide facilities for retraining journalists on new ICT, finding news means of cubing the spread of fake news as a collective effort including media organizations among others.

**Key words:** Assessment, impact, public dependence, social media news, traditional print newspapers



## 1:0. INTRODUCTION

Globally and in Zambia at large, social media has typically changed the way people in various societies convey between and amongst themselves and absorbs information and news respectively. Equally, it is confirmed that traditional media has remained a crucial part of society as it is an effective means of communicating to consumers all over the world, Kopano (2013) quoted. Social media space encompasses information published and accessed via different forms of digital platforms stemming from websites, Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp among others while traditional media consists of television, radio, and print media such as newspapers and magazines.

Markozashvili (2017) stated that worldwide, it is clear that the internet and mobile phones are disrupting media systems. In particular, print newspapers are in decline, although traditional media outlets are still considered as valuable and trusted brands. Trying to understand the changing environment around news across countries, Kopano (2013) cited that the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism commissioned the ‘Digital News Report of 2016’ that across their entire sample of the study conducted, 51% of those interviewed (over 50,000 people in 26 countries) used social media as a source of news each week. For this group one in ten of them used social media as their main source of news. The digital news report 2016 confirms what many studies highlighted before: television news and online news are the most frequently accessed in most countries while readership of printed media newspapers has declined significantly (Lomas, 2014). The Zambian public had been looking for a balanced and objective media that would provide the checks and balances for the public and corporate elite. However, the new trend shows that the percentage of news accessed via social media is growing everywhere.

In a similar context, a reviewed article by Margaret (2019) in which she quoted Florence that, “...ever since she got a smartphone, she no longer needs a newspaper to update herself on current affairs.” George equally said, “K12 for a copy of a newspaper is too high when he can access the same information online.” According to Moller (2012), Facebook was in 2011 November the popular social network with more than 75% of active users who log on to Facebook in any given day. At the same time, Internet and mobile technologies are at the center of how people’s relationship to news is changing. The importance of social networks for news

consumption is growing. People use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess and react to news.

Arising from legal reforms and norms that oversee the activities of mass media in Zambia, there are frameworks which have been put in place to regulate media houses and limit journalists to work within the confines of the law. The other principal duties and guidelines of media laws in Zambia is to regulate the dissemination of media products and affect the content produced by media houses (Handzhiyska and Mackay, 2016). While some regulations apply to specific types of media such as broadcasting laws, general legal provisions ought to be respected and observed by all media houses. According to chapter 38 of the law of Zambia, the press is guided by the contempt of court act which intends to restrict the publication details of certain proceedings and the defamation act contained in chapter 68 of the laws of Zambia basically amend the law relating to libel and to provide matters incidental.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

The challenges faced by conventional media, especially newspapers are as a result of the global economic crisis, dwindling readership and advertisement, and the inability of newspapers to monetize their online efforts as opposed to social media Yap (2009). Unlike print newspapers, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram among others allow people without professional journalistic backgrounds to create news and cover events that news agencies might not cover. This situation has bared negative effects on the circulation and sales of print newspapers in Zambia. Some noticeable and possible elements propelling this situation emanate from people's heavily dependence on social media: Facebook as it is easily accessible and cheap for its users Sinyangwe (2017).

### **1.2 Objectives**

- i. To examine people's perception of social media platforms for accessing news compared to traditional print newspapers.
- ii. To establish the factors influencing people's preference for social media as a primary source for news over traditional print newspapers in Zambia.
- iii. To examine the implications of dependence on social media for news than on traditional print newspapers in Zambia, including the impact on information accuracy, credibility and diverse perspectives.

### **1.3. Purpose of the study.**

The purpose of this study was to assess the public's dependence on social media news and its impact on traditional print Newspapers in Zambia.

### **4.3. Theoretical Framework**

The study on assessing public's dependence on social media news and its impact on traditional print Newspapers in Zambia was guided by *The Agenda Setting Theory* formally developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 Presidential elections, which found a correlation between the issues covered by the media and the issues perceived as important by the public and was first used in 1972. However, the Agenda Setting Theory suggests that the media has the ability to shape public opinion by determining what issues are given the most attention, and has been widely studied and applied to various forms of media. This theory elaborates the connection in term of relationships between the emphasis that the mass media put as an issue and the media audiences or the public's reaction or opinion to such an issue, Littlejohn and Foss (2009). The agenda setting theory therefore begins as an explanation on how the mass media affects to change the pattern in political behavior during elections. In the field of mass communication, Cohen (1963) affirms that the theory has inspired and developed hundreds of latter explorations on how the mass media primes and frames issues for their audiences. Not only is it limited to such, this theory also highlights on how the mass media colors a particular event for their media audiences.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

This study has three-fold beneficiaries: respondents, the author and the body of knowledge. The respondents were offered an opportunity to assess their knowledge on the public's dependence on social media news and its impact on traditional print Newspapers in Zambia. Also, the study was expected to provide enhanced understanding of the reviewed literature on the assessment of the impact that social media news has on the consumption of traditional print newspapers in Zambia. as well as broaden the researchers' analytical skills. Extensively, the current existing body of knowledge was sort to certainly benefit from this research in that new information was going to add value to the future research studies yet to be conducted by another generation of researchers.

## **2:0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 People's Perception On Social Media News and Traditional Print Newspapers in Zambia.**

Social media had changed the way people consumed news and how news was created. The news industry had been transformed due to the rise of services like Facebook and Twitter, and that change happened in three major ways, namely, speed, touch of a button and being more personal than ever (Thought Leaders, 2017). Facebook was a Social networking site that made it easy for people to connect and share messages with friends and family through the use of internet. This platform was originally designed in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg whilst he was a student at Harvard University. With roughly 2.85 billion monthly active users currently, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide. In the third quarter of 2012, the number of active Facebook users surpassed one billion, making it the first social network ever to do so. During the first quarter of 2021, 3.45 billion people were on social media using at least one of the company's core products, namely, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, or Messenger each month (Mohsin, 2019; Topkin, 2020).

Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2015) noted that Social networking sites such as Facebook provided new ways of sharing news stories that allowed users to act as opinion leaders in their networks, encouraged discussion, and potentially increased their involvement in current events. User involvement in the news content depended on the social affordances of the site, particularly those that allowed for audience customization and those that drove network feedback. Asking the network's opinions and targeting specific friends led to greater involvement in the news content. Discussion through comments led to a greater sense of influence and greater involvement for those sharing the news story. This underlined the importance of encouraging individuals to act as sources of information in their networks to drive engagement in current events in the changing news landscape. Mitchell et al. (2013) found that on Facebook, the largest social media platform, news was a common but incidental experience. Overall, about half of adult Facebook users were ever getting news there. In the US, most adults did not go to Facebook seeking news outlets. Instead, the vast majority of Facebook news consumers, about 78% got news when they were on Facebook for other reasons.

In Zambia, top Facebook pages with high engagement in Zambia included Mwebantu with over 3.6 million people reached, Zambian Weddings and Kitchen Parties with 2.3 million people

reached, Zambian Watchdog with 2.1 million people reached, Milly Beauty Products with 1.1 million people reached, Smart Eagles with 860,900 people reached, Tumfweko with 531,000 people reached, Chilufya Tayali with 501,600 people reached, Edgar Chagwa Lungu with 440,100 people reached, Hakainde Hichilema with 405,900 people reached, Simon Mwewa Lane with 383,900 people reached, Koswe with 331,100 people reached and Zambia Reports with 174,000 people reached (Zulu, 2019). All in all, then, it may be the very incidental nature of the site that ultimately exposes more people to news there. With twitter one could get connected to the latest information on what they found of use to them. Each twitter could only accommodate 140 characters at length (Twitter, 2020). WhatsApp was a free download messenger application for smart phones. It used internet to send text, images, audio and video. WhatsApp was quickly becoming the world most popular text and voice messaging application. WhatsApp was launched in 2009 by former yahoo employees. In 2014 it was acquired by Facebook and had by July 2017 reached 1 billion users. The reasons for adding WhatsApp were very similar to the reasons for adding Facebook Messenger. There were so many users on WhatsApp that the platform was somewhat hard to ignore. In early 2020, WhatsApp hit 2 billion users, up from 1.5 billion users in the fourth quarter of 2017. This was an amazing feat considering it was approaching the numbers of Facebook, which currently claimed 2.5 billion users as of the last quarter of 2019. Instagram was a free, online photo sharing application which was acquired by Facebook in 2012. It allowed users to edit and post both photos and short videos. About 71 Percent of the billion monthly users on Instagram below the age of 35, and most of these were women. YouTube was a video platform that allowed users to watch videos and upload them.

Social media news is believed to be more beneficial than traditional newspaper in that it provides easy access to information and gives the public an opportunity to express their opinions which can be used in decision making with unlimited accessibility in that, those who are physically disabled can access and contribute through comments. Online newspaper or digital newspaper can let you get more benefits than traditional newspapers, such as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timeline manner. The credibility and strong brand recognition of well-established newspapers, and the close relationships they have with advertisers, are also seen by many in the newspaper industry as strengthening their chances of survival. The movement away from printing process can also help decrease costs (Singer, 2001). Because of the quick spread of information, social media is perceived to be more influential on the public than traditional newspapers in that it shapes the way people think and conduct themselves in their daily lives, information gotten from social media is mostly considered

authentic because it shows pictures and videos to help the public reflect on what is been revealed, and based on that, people can easily adopt the contents revealed to them as beneficial.

The disabled on the other hand, in particular those who are unable to read or write, can easily access information through social media as much opposed to traditional newspapers, which ultimately may result in shaping the way people's perception towards the environment. Dixon (1998), further asserts that the reproduction of a print article online without the permission of the author, even if the originating newspaper is the reproducer, is a violation of the author's copyright. Thus, while the internet provides newspapers with limitless space for their content, the content they are able to upload can be limited, which can lead to a lack of coverage on certain topics. This lack of content for the newspaper's web versions could prevent the newspaper's sites from attracting readers. Because newspaper's profit for both print and online, editions are made mostly through advertising, the revenue of which is correlated to the number of readers, the lack of content and thus the lack of readership could result in newspapers not bringing in enough online revenue to offset the cost of the web ventures. The newspapers could then lose more money than if they had remained print only, in which case the internet would be having a negative impact on the traditional print publishing industry. Social media may also be negatively affecting newspapers in several other ways, including staffing and finances difficulties and increased competition.

In spite several changes in media agencies and the switch in public dependence on social media news, Cohnaim (2006) argued that these benefits of online newspapers over traditional newspapers equivalents, the layout of a traditional newspaper is still desired or at least thought necessary, since papers reproduce a facsimile of the hard copy front page on the website. This feature of some newspapers' online versions could be an indication that the actual print format is of importance to readers, and thus the format and even traditional newspapers themselves may not suffer a complete displacement as a result of the internet.

Newspapers have a traditional way of seeking, gathering, processing and producing news in a one-way delivery, but the internet can give users the ability to make the reporting process more transparent if site visitors can see, hear, or read the sources reporters relied on. In order to get to a point where sites make full use of the online functions that make the web unique. Lowrey (1999) suggested, that both journalists and users must develop new schemes for processing news online instead of viewing it as a modified version of print journalism. This is an opportunity for



newspapers to move past shovel ware content pushed directly from the print products to a web page and convert stories into forms that make them worthwhile for the online user.

Greer & Mensing (2004), however, argued that newspapers are still working to find interactive elements that function well in an online news environment. Finding an online model that is valuable to users and cost-effective for newspapers will not happen overnight, but it is important in producing print and online media that continue to be viable. Although many newspapers have separate staffs for their online product, often web site is essentially the same as print editions (Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000), or has fewer stories that what appears in the newspaper (print media). With a new hole limited only by the size of a newspaper in daily content has no unique quality to draw users, and without this, a site has no leverage to make a profit with advertisers or through paid content (Chyi, 2005; Chyi and Sylvie, 1998).

## **2.2 Factors That Influence Social Media Dependence Than Traditional Newspapers**

As many Zambians turn to social media to get their news, are they abandoning the traditional forms of news media such as television and newspaper? To what extent will individuals utilize this new media channel? Can social media entirely wipe out the traditional news outlets? Is social media trying to take away just a portion of the traditional market, but still leave room for competition? What are the factors that lead to social media dependence? Or is social media trying to become an additional source for those who crave a constant supply and variety of news information? Finally, what criteria do users demand of their media channels? These are all questions relating to replacement, displacement, and complement theories of media channel usage.

Researchers have looked closely at these areas of study to try to find the answers to these important questions.

Many studies have essentially supported the “displacement effect” which suggests that a number of consumers will switch from traditional newspapers to social media for news gathering purposes. Dimmick’s (2004) conducted a telephone survey study of 211 adults in Columbus Ohio and found clear indications of a competitive ‘displacement effect’ within the population studied. In addition, this study also looked at ‘niche theory’ as a contributor to this effect. Niche theory contends that new media will compete with old media for a consumer’s attention,

preference, time and ultimately advertising spent (Gimmick, Kline, and Stanford, 2000). The term niche is used because a specific target market with unique needs is sought. In conjunction, 'gratification opportunities' are considered to be attributes of a news medium that may also affect the displacement, of a competing medium. Gratification-opportunities for satisfaction, more specifically, the perceived attributes of a medium relating to time use and expanded choice of content (Dimmick et al, 2000).

The thematic theories developed below are premised on the factors that influence social media dependence than traditional newspapers. However, it is worth noting to indicate that these factors vary from person to person. While they may be so many factors that influence social media dependence, below are some of them.

### **2.2.1. Cost Effectiveness**

Lipschultz (2015) indicated that, social media has led to loss of revenue for conventional media organizations. As offline audiences shrink, online users are increasing usually comprised of younger generation. However, these young people are not financially stable and prefer to get the content free of charge. Wellbrock (2016) therefore, says traditional newspaper houses are still grappling with ways of generating income from their online platforms to supplement money from advertising. Newspapers do not rely on the revenue from newsstands or subscribers, but advertisers (Paine, 2015). But newspapers have been making small adjustments.

Kung, Picard and Towse (2008) further point out that digital technologies have adversely affected value chains, market structures and business strategies. But on the other hand, digital technologies have created value chains, for instance, cutting down the cost of production and distribution (Kung et al, 2008). With the advent of new media, some media houses have had to re-strategies, with some doing a complete overhaul of their management to remain competitive. Slightly more than half of online newspapers improved slightly in 2001 (Trombly, 2002).

Dorroh (2005) indicated that online advertising is a long-term investment. This is because in as much as most audiences are tech-savvy, it is easier to see and publish in a newspaper as compared with online platforms. But online ads are easy to monitor and offer more flexibility. Additionally, online ads can be tailored for specific audiences. Robertson (2005) says subscriptions for printed papers are declining because they can access same stories online for free. Increased subscriptions will therefore hurt newspaper revenue. Even if digital onlu

newspapers hit their targets, the income will only rise to 3.3% of the firm's annual revenue, which is not sufficient to reverse the decline in circulation (Myllylathi, 2013). Consequently, the advent of new media and convergence has led to casualization, with the terms of employment becoming less and less secure, leading to no pay or low pay despite increased roles of a journalist (Bakker, 2012).

Social media has facilitated the de-professionalization of traditional media even as economic, quality and ethical questions are raised. Media houses are seeking entrepreneurial journalists and freelancers in a bid to cut operating costs, and the new workforce contribute to innovations in newsrooms (Gynnild, 2014).

### **2.2.2. Economic implications**

In Zambia, viability of professional journalism has come under intense pressure, which has undermined the democratic role of reporting as journalism seems to lie in social media platforms, it is not clear how new media recover ground loss in democratic reporting.

Social media, unlike newspapers also called daily newspapers or print media, have not felt economic decline, which has hit hard mainstream media channels. New economic and cultural trends have also transformed journalism with focus shifting to 'big data', largely because of online users who are more visual. Data journalism enables new ways of storytelling, news-gathering, access to news by the public and journalists and visualization. Big data has been key in reviving investigative journalism in geodetic and financial reports as it provides evidence to support facts (Coddington, 2015). However, this has given rise to "clickbait" and obsession with numbers which is not driven by professional judgement (Anderson, 2011).

Despite the risks involved, the new business models brought about legacy through social media, has diversified sources of income, for example crowd funding projects on platforms such as Kickstarter allowing news to be generated from diverse earnings, even if it is for a brief period (Carvajal, Garcia-Aviles and Gonzalez, 2012).

New technological advancement has made the job of the conventional reporting easier but have changed how audiences get social media platforms offer flexibility and convenience. Apart from being an alternative source of revenue for newspapers, they have additional features. For

instance, interactivity, which gives readers an opportunity to comment on the stories, seek answers and question content has been published (Gleason, 2010).

### **2.2.3. News Contents and Income**

The extent of public dependence on social media platforms such as Facebook, enables people to personalize news stories and respond to the sources of the news, express ideas, and concerns (Farhi, 2009). Farhi says this has consequently transformed the landscape of newspapers. This involvement of audiences is a significant advantage of adopting innovative technologies, which make readers feel valued. The technologies give readers a certain degree of power (Bly, 2010). Bly says interaction on social media platforms is newspaper industry new big thing.

With the management making efforts to cash in on the social media craze, some traditional newspapers have been transformed into online newspapers (Frye, 2003). A good example is the Zambia daily mail, a product of the Zambia media news group. However, many newspapers are losing out on additional revenue and struggling because they are hesitant to spend money and time on the latest technologies, something that should have been done like a decade ago (Morton, 2007). Wamunyu (2016) however argues that to attract high web traffic, some Zambian websites publish content that appeals to readers but has no depth.

Print newspapers cannot shun technologies such as mobile phones and internet but must combine all news outlets available (Mckenna, 1993). In the article “ The Ever-Evolving Newspaper”, text messages and mobile apps are gaining traction in media houses because they send information instantly to various audiences (Frye, 2006). Embracing the new phenomena will keep audiences engaged. As such, blogs will in future contribute to the growth of online newspapers (Yahr, 2008). Consumers feel more connected and will keep visiting the sites because interaction with the content makes them feel part of an intellectual conversation being carried out. Blog editors will also be tasked with the role of monitoring online conversations, which complements news-related websites.

Online newspapers are usually free of charge and are constantly updated as a story develops, even four times a day. Any tech-savvy person can access them and one can visit news websites while working on their PC. More than a decade ago, about 23 percent of US web users visited online publications at least once a week (Runett, 2002). Online newspapers provide links to internal archives, rarely do they direct web users to external content (Jankowski and Van Selm,

2000). This means that users do not encounter other unrelated stories and variety of information published on any platform, which may drift their attention; they select stories that interest them (Cameron and Curtin, 1995; Peng et al, 1999). However, designing web content takes more effort, and so is coming up with the right structure of the website (Van Oostendorp & Van Nimwegan, 1998; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2000).

Digital publications come in handy as alarm medium for breaking news (Sparks, 2000). Print newspapers are today being used to disseminate information that does not necessarily interest readers, but offer news that surprise audiences (Schoenbach and Lauf, 2004). Kaigwa, Madung and Costello (2015) state Kenyan media for example share updates and stories through social platforms to drive conversations. They further remarked that social media users tip reporters or journalists on new leads, stories and potential follow-ups.

Print newspapers readers, as opposed to online audiences, come across a variety of information, which they read without much effort. Therefore, newspaper readers are likely to remember more public affairs stories with the public agenda, than their online news counterparts (Tewsbury and Althaus, 2000). Social media users do not expand the agenda of the perceived topics, but rather get more awareness of the most important events. Most online audiences may spend more time surfing to do an in-depth research of the published information or for greater orientation (Eveland and Dunwoody, 2000). Print newspapers therefore still set agenda and help to expand it (Schoenbach and Lauf, 2004).

### **2.3 The Effects of Social Media Consumption Than Traditional Print Newspapers**

There are various studies of literature at global level which have been conducted by different scholars, reviewing the findings of the effects of social media consumption than traditional print newspapers.

Public dependence or interest in social media than newspapers are premised on the most prominent characteristic of news consumption today globally and the amount of information that consumers are exposed to. According to Milne (1999), a single Sunday edition of The New York Times today contains more information than typical 19th-century citizens faced in their entire lifetime and more new information has been produced in the last 30 years than in the last 5000 (Pollar, 2003). Also, the soaring number of sources that provide news via print, broadcast, and interactive modes, spewing text, pictures and video at any time and in any place. As a result, we

must cope with a surfeit of extra information, often unrelated to our interests and needs, (Denning, 2006).

Dominick (2002) cited Barth (2005) in a study conducted in Germany titled a comparative study on the utilization of the three forms of publication of the daily newspapers, gave a brief history of how newspapers evolved from print to online editions and finally had an addition of the digital version from the 17th century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He opined that, the print media in Germany dominated for a long time until the 21<sup>st</sup> when online news publication was introduced (Barth, 2005). He established that both the print and online editions have been produced for some good number of years in the country. The study further indicated that it was only later when the newspaper industry saw another version of the newspaper called electronic (ePaper) being introduced, bringing the number to three in the industry. The research revealed that the ePaper had optimized functionalities that stimulate the printed pages by displaying them one-to-one on a smaller scale and enable users to navigate them and give them that experience they get from the print newspaper.

Barth (2005) also established the impacts that the different versions have on both the business economics and user aspects. Economically, the findings revealed that it makes sense to produce offerings mainly if there is the prospect of charging for them and thus generating profits, while on the readers or user point of view, the research established that there are some advantages and disadvantages of each edition of the newspaper and that some readers prefer different versions due to various reasons (Lasica, 2003).

Teng and Kit (2014) conducted a study, “The Traditional Newspaper versus Online News Media: A Quantitative Study on Young Generation Preference” in Malaysia. The research focused on the preferences between the two types of papers among the young generations. The researchers considered a lot of issues which determined the outcome of the research. One aspect that was taken into consideration was the domination of technological advancement in the media industry. The research indicated that there has been a lot of technology advancements in this industry. The paper also looked at the trend of readership for both online and printed newspapers. It referred to a number of media houses using both versions of the newspaper. The research also established some impacts that have been observed as a result of the introduction of the electronic newspaper version in Malaysia and gave out some figures in terms of statistics and percentages of readership accessibility of both versions of the newspaper in that country.

With this advent of social media platforms, the public means to receive information has changed. Apart from news, social media platforms are considered to be the best means for organizational to advertise their products and share information with potential customers (Jin et al, 2019). When social media platforms were not available to customers, they got information regarding products from organizations through traditional means and consumers directly accepted the message, but with the advent of social media platforms customers are no more passive reader, instead, they are the active participants, who can give reviews regarding different products and it became essential for the brands to provide quality products to the customers. At the same time, it became easy for brands to share information regarding their products with customers on social media platforms with ease as more than half of the world's is social platforms (Chetioui et al, 2020). In 2020, 3.84 Billion individuals are using internet social platforms and more than 50% of 3.84 Billion are using social media platforms to search for products and services offered by the brands (Statista, 2020).

Instead of believing brands, the customer prefers to believe other customers' reviews regarding products and services offered by brands, and social media platforms is best for this activity, as a huge number of customers are connected through online platforms (Lanberstone & Andrew, 2016). Therefore, before making a purchasing decision, users search for the reviews and comments of the customer about specific product and service. Customers are more likely to share their experiences on social media platforms and give their opinions on social media platforms i.e. Facebook, Instagram, etc. as well as on firms' websites and e-commerce platforms. These reviews enable new customers decide on purchase and they also impact the attitude of customers. Reviews provided by the customers and any third party seen more reliable to the new users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Recently, social media has become a means for people to connect with society and establish a relationship with others (Nicole & Boyd, 2017). As the name implies, social media carries a social undertone in which the users are allowed to interact with others in order to promote interpersonal relationships and give a certain effect on the social behaviors of individuals worldwide (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Social behavior is a part of human psychology against unacceptable behaviors. It centers on the attitude, perception, reaction, and disposition of an individual to others around him (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). There are positive and negative social behaviors. Positive social behavior is acceptable behavior due to positive and favorable attitudes and dispositions. Negative social behavior is the opposite of

positive social due to negative and unfavorable attitudes and dispositions. Both of them affect the youths because the majority of users are them. Currently, they learn bullying in youth, blackmail, involvement in fraud, impersonation among other negative influences through WhatsApp, Facebook, and google classroom (Abdullah, Ellias & Jegak, 2009).

Thus, Zambia has several social media platforms accessed by consumers for information, Chialdine (2001) contended that social media space encompass information published and accessed via different forms of digital platforms stemming from websites: Mwebantu, Koswe, Tumfweko, Smart Eagles, and Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp as very influential sources of news. Also, four (4) main print media publications, namely the Zambia Daily Mail Limited (ZDML), Times of Zambia (TOZ), the Must Newspaper and the News Diggers (ND). They deal in newspaper production plus many other emerging publications being introduced at present. Out of all these, two (2) of them are public organizations with three quarters of the shares owned by the government of the republic of Zambia, while the other two are private owned.

There are few studies conducted on the extent of public reliability on social media than on newspapers locally. However, the findings review the popularity of social media use than newspapers due to affordability. In his research, Rogers (1975) opined that “social media is a cheap and accessible source of information and have impacted the production and distribution of journalistic content. Also, Rogers (1975) added that, people can write their own stories. Social media grants its users access to a larger audience and will then control the stories by filtering the material from the sources, and selecting what to publish.

### **3:0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research design**

The study used a descriptive survey because this is a social inquiry, targeted towards various sources and many levels that influence a given problem (for example; policies, organizations, family, individual). Qualitative (mainly inductive) methods allow for identification of previously unknown processes, explanations of why and how phenomena occur, and the range of their effects (Pasick et al., 2009) and Creswell et al (2007 In this study, random sampling, purposive and convenience sampling was used at various levels. The population was grouped according to the respondents’ current working departments and jobs from which simple random sampling was conducted. Purposive and convenient sampling was applied to the data collected through questionnaire sources, Kombo and Tromp (2006),



### **3.2. Research sites**

Lusaka District where most of the respondents were found (Daily Mail Limited, Times of Zambia, The Mast, Daily Nation Newspaper, Newspaper Vendors and Newspaper Readers)

### **3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure**

This study drew its targeted population from respondents who are journalists, newspaper readership to social media (online media), the newspaper vendors, newspaper readers and other key stakeholders, Oso and Onen (2009). 78 respondents were sampled using simple random sampling, purposive and convenience sampling was used at various levels. The population was grouped according to the respondents' current working departments and jobs from which simple random sampling was conducted. Purposive and convenient sampling was applied to the data collected through questionnaire sources.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Makinde (1994) defines data analysis as the examination of the given problem in the light of the information collected after which some tentative inferences were possibly made. The researcher had after field work, transcribed qualitative data, checking for completeness and consistency as well as for various omissions, incomplete or unusual responses. Since data analysis involves editing, cleaning, transformation and tabulation of the data collected, micro-soft Excel and Google forms was used to analyze the data collected and to represent it in the form of graphs, tables and charts.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

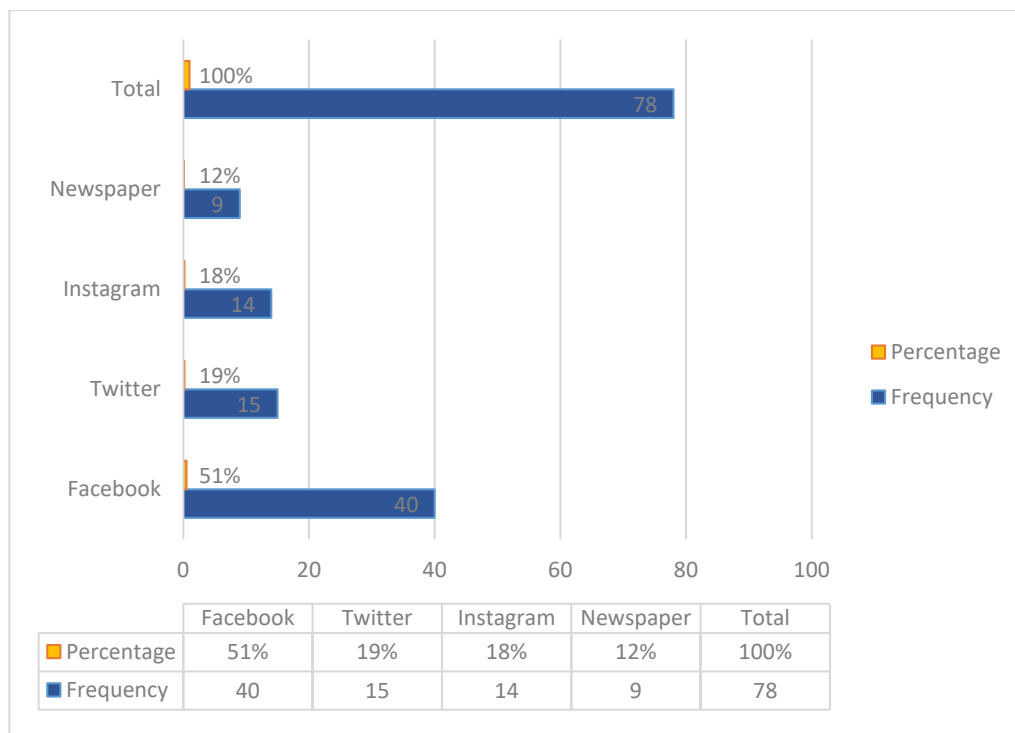
Since qualitative research involves direct interaction with respondents, the researcher upheld the principles of honesty, integrity and mutual trust between himself and the participants in order to yield objective and quality information. The researcher furthermore assured the respondents regarding the data which was collected and their identities that they remained or were kept confidential and that the information was used only for academic purposes.

## 4:0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 People’s Perception of Social Media Platforms

According to research findings, Figure 1 below shows the platforms which are commonly used by respondents for accessing news. (40 respondents) were sampled of the (78) total, in the quest to ascertain the drastic shift of news information away from newspaper consumption to other social media platforms including Facebook standing at 51%, twitter with (15 respondents) which was translated to 19%, Instagram depicting a proportional representation of (18% of users) and newspapers reflecting (12% of the users), creating a paradigm shift to the dependence on social media by its users.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents’ preferred media platforms for News**



*Source: Field data 2023*

The study reviewed that social media news is believed to be more beneficial than traditional newspaper in that it provides easy access to information and gives the public an opportunity to express their opinions which can be used in decision making with unlimited accessibility in that, those who are physically disabled can access and contribute through comments. Online newspaper or digital newspaper can let you get more benefits than traditional newspapers, such

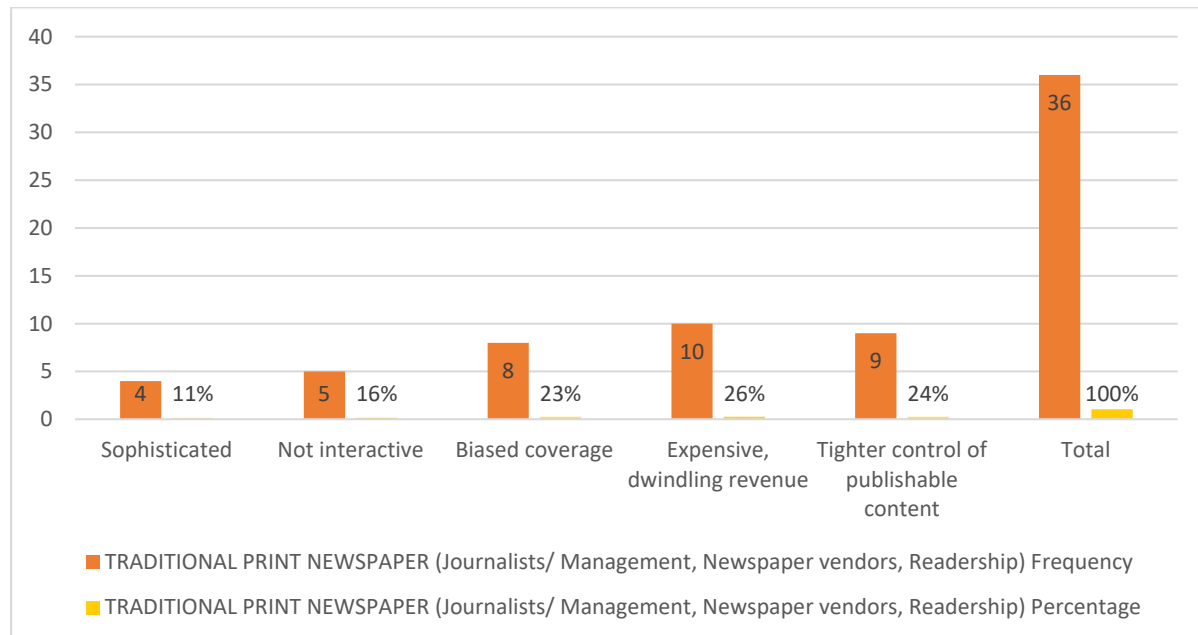
as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timeline manner Ahlers, and Hessen, (2012).

The study further reviewed that the credibility and strong brand recognition of well-established newspapers, and the close relationships they have with advertisers, are also seen by many in the newspaper industry as strengthening their chances of survival. The movement away from printing process can also help decrease costs (Singer, 2001). Because of the quick spread of information, social media is perceived to be more influential on the public than traditional newspapers in that it shapes the way people think and conduct themselves in their daily lives, information gotten from social media is mostly considered authentic because it shows pictures and videos to help the public reflect on what is been revealed, and based on that, people can easily adopt the contents revealed to them as beneficial, Lomas (2014).

#### **4.2 Factors influencing people's usage of Media Platforms**

The data captured in Figure 2 below constitutes information from respondents that were involved during the proceedings of this research to establish factors that influenced people's preference for social media as a primary source for News over traditional Newspapers in Zambia. In light to the aforementioned, (10 of the 42) sampled social media user respondents with a representation of 25% highlighted that social media is easy-on-the-eye. Another factor that was brought to the fore by (7 social media users with 15%) that influenced people's preferential use of social media as a primary source for News over traditional Newspapers in Zambia was the interactive aspect of online content with other users. (4 respondents) representing 10% cited that social media had a wider news coverage, (15 users) corresponding to 38% said social media was cheaper as opposed to traditional newspapers and the last (6 respondents) corresponding to 12% cited that social media provides more opportunities to explore other news sources.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Factors influencing use of Social Media platforms**



*Source: Field data 2023*

The study findings reviewed that the public's dependence on social media news and its impact on traditional Newspapers in Zambia has been largely attributed to the fact that 38% of the consumers of news are young people, K15 ZMW and the price of a print traditional newspaper cost is expensive to afford and this is one among many factors that have compelled a drastic shift in public's dependence on social media news and its impact on traditional Newspapers in Zambia thus, creating a dwindling revenue generation to our local newspaper publishing companies. also, it was established by the research through the respondents from Daily Mail Newspaper Printing Company that the hike in the cost of print newspapers is tied to the high cost of running and maintenance of equipment used for the production of the Newspapers, Hussein, (2009).. To a great extent, this problem was equally linked to a situation which has seen newspapers only been bought largely by Cooperate companies, learning institutions for stocking libraries and a few Individuals buying from the vendors on the streets thereby, narrowing.

The study furthermore reviewed that 16% of respondents highlighting Traditional newspapers not being or having interactive content as opposed to 15% of the social media users indicating that social media provides an interactive online content, this gave the researcher an insight regarding people's dependence on social media news over traditional newspapers that it is

influenced by the desire people develop to be able to control through choosing what they think and feel is appealing to their eyes and be able to interact with other social media users in real time, sharing their thoughts on a particular subject and give or get feedback, which is contrary to the readership of traditional newspapers whom at often times face mechanical challenges as they browse through the newspaper, Barth, (2005). In addition, the understanding that 24% of the respondents; journalists in particular indicated that there's a subjection of tighter control of publishable content by management of print newspaper companies in Zambia, this has necessitated the shift to social media for accessing news, owing to the fact that traditional newspaper companies are biased when it comes to content coverage, more especially government owned newspaper companies. Basing on this finding, social media platforms such as Facebook has won most of the members simply because it provides its users with more opportunities to explore news sources Gesetz, (2019).

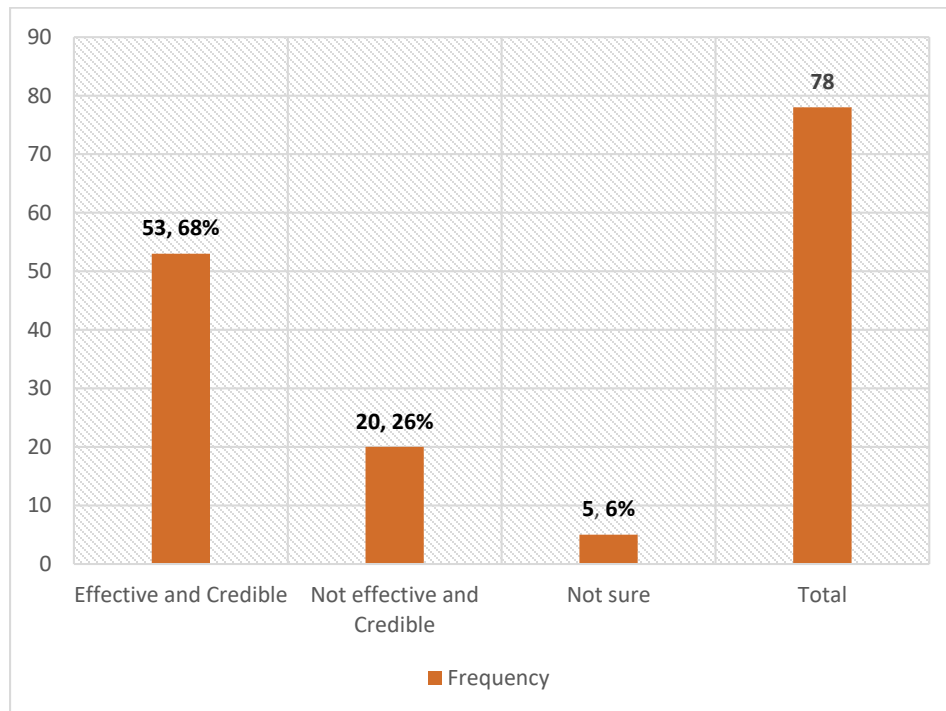
Additionally, it was reviewed by the study that the way individuals consume news in today's digital age is influenced by a multitude of factors, one of which is household income. Household income has a profound impact on the choice between traditional print newspapers and the resort to social media for news updates. The data presented suggests that print newspapers have long been a staple of news consumption in households across the world Harrington, & McNair. (2012). However, their continued relevance in the digital age and information consumption is closely tied to household income. On one hand, the findings reviewed that the majority of the lower-income households may find the cost of print newspaper subscriptions prohibitive. This was backed by the statistics captured in table 8 suggesting that lower-income households may opt for more affordable or free alternatives, such as online news sources or social media platforms, due to budget constraints. Clearly, it was concluded that household income directly impacts whether print newspapers continue to be a part of the daily routine Moller, (2012).

### **4.3 Perception on Dependence of Social Media as News Source**

According to research findings, the potential implication of depending on social media for access to news over traditional newspapers, including the impact this bears on information accuracy, credibility and diverse perspectives therefore, the table above shows responses from respondents depicting the reasons of the aforementioned. In the table above, 5 respondents translating to 66% said *Yes* that social media spreads fake news, 1 respondent of the 4% indicated that *No* and 2 respondents of the 30% indicated by saying *Sometimes*. 8 respondents of the 97% responded that

**Yes** social media gives rise to plagiarism and 1 respondent of the 3% indicated by saying **No**. it was also asserted in the responses given that social media creates a decline in revenue collection for newspapers in which 1 participant of the 2% said **Yes**, 6 participants of the 79% said **No** and 2 participants of the 19% said **Sometimes**. Lastly, 1 respondent of 1% indicated **Yes** that digitization bears influence on consumption habits of information, 6 respondents of the 89% said **No** and 2 respondents indicated that **Sometimes**. As shown in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Perception on Dependence of social media as News Source**



**Source: Field data 2023**

The study equally exposed that information accuracy was one among other primary implications of depending on social media for news in Zambia. 70% of the respondents that were involved in this survey highlighted that the major problem with social media and internet bloggers has been the challenge of ensuring information accuracy. It was then understood that social media platforms often lack the rigorous editorial standards and fact-checking mechanisms that traditional newspapers adhere to. As a result, misinformation and fake news easily spread, leading to a distorted public understanding of events. The researcher concluded that in Zambia where accurate and reliable news is essential for an informed citizenry, the prevalence of false

or misleading information on social media can have far-reaching consequences, Fielding (2007).

Another implication brought to light during the review of the findings in this study was traced from the point that traditional print newspapers in Zambia have historically been regarded as credible sources of information due to their professional journalism standards, editorial oversight, and adherence to ethical principles, Dominick (2002). However, it was discovered that the rise of social media as a news source has challenged the credibility of traditional print newspapers. The discovery on the findings showed that social media allows anyone to become a news distributor, regardless of their expertise or journalistic integrity. It was then realized that in Zambia, the proliferation of citizen journalism on social media platforms means that news can be reported by individuals without formal training or editorial oversight Pollar, (2003).. While citizen journalism can be valuable in some instances, it also poses a risk to credibility. This also implied that readers may question the authenticity and reliability of news stories, especially when they lack attribution or verification.

Lastly, it was reviewed in this study that one of the strengths of traditional print newspapers has been their ability to provide diverse perspectives on news stories. Responses gotten from the respondents at the four targeted companies; Daily mail, the must, Daily nation and the Times newspaper suggested that professional journalists are trained to present balanced and well-researched viewpoints, ensuring that readers are exposed to a variety of opinions and analyses. However, most of the respondents indicated that social media can create echo chambers, where users are exposed only to information and viewpoints that align with their existing beliefs Kit. and Teng. (2014),

An inference made in this study therefore posit that in Zambia, the dependence on social media for news can lead to polarization and a lack of exposure to diverse perspectives. An estimate of about 68% of social media users mainly engage with sources that reinforce their pre-existing opinions, creating an environment where critical thinking and open dialogue are hindered, Lomas, (2014). The recommendation made was that traditional print newspapers must actively promote diverse perspectives as it should be and ensure that the reporting represents a wide range of voices and viewpoints.

## 5:0 CONCLUSION

The study found out factors influencing the public's dependence on social media news and the potential implications that the former has on traditional newspapers. In light to the revelations made by the study, the researcher therefore concludes that social media platforms are not very worthy to be the main sources for news that the public can seriously rely on. This follows pertinent issues of concern brought to light during presentation and discussion of the findings which included; interactive online content, easy on the eye, cheaper, more opportunities to explore other news source, spread of fake news, rise of plagiarism, decline in revenue for newspapers and digitization influence on consumption habits. This then means that the impact social media platforms have on traditional newspapers affect in a special way information credibility, accessibility and diverse problems which has heralded the negative perception among the respondents.

## 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Media institutions in collaboration with government, should organize workshops and seminars to sensitize and education the public and journalists to appreciate the impact that social media platforms bears on traditional (print newspapers).
- ii. Government and all press bodies should provide facilities for retraining journalists on new ICT.
- iii. Finding news means of cubing the spread of fake news as a collective effort including media organizations, press bodies, government and all stakeholders.
- iv. Through MISA Zambia, IBA and other press bodies, editors should call for stiffer laws that will deter and regulate social media journalists and provide a framework on how to share authentic online news with the local communities.

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