CONFLICT OVER COVERAGE OF SALARYGATE BY THE PRINT MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE HERALD (JANUARY 2014 TO APRIL 2014) IN ZIMBABWE.

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Abstract
This study seeks to analyse the controversial issues about coverage of salarygate by the print media in Zimbabwe by The Herald, and the roles that the media play in curbing the problem. Both quantitative and qualitative data approaches were used to analyse the roles that media play and to analyse the frequency of coverage of corruption issues. Interviews and content analysis were used as research instruments. Among the findings of the study were that the war against corruption cannot be won without the involvement of media. It was also found out that the stories lacked legal analysis of the salarygate. That the media plays a crucial role in creating awareness as well as in putting the government in check and pressuring it to prosecute cases that were reported. The study recommended that there was need to enhance the freedom of the press to protect journalists through the law, as well as to ensure more effective and objective reporting of corruption stories and other stories of human interest.

Keywords: Media, Coverage, Salarygate, Corruption and Print media.

INTRODUCTION
The Herald is a government owned daily newspaper published in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. The Herald was established by the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) and operates under the flagship of Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd. The Herald faces limited competition from within Zimbabwe, from several independent newspapers based in Zimbabwe, such as News Day and Daily News just to mention a few. The paper has a circulation of about 250 000 daily (ZAMPS, 2013). In terms of coverage The Herald covers the major towns in Zimbabwe such as Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru and Masvingo among other small towns. The paper targets a mass market, with a readership of 22 to 60 year olds. In terms of content mix the herald has news features, sports and business and it uses English as its language.

There have been lots of noises in all forms of media about the apparent exorbitant salaries that have been pocketed by executives in State-Owned Enterprises (SOE’s) and parastatals. There was a time when there was a “salary scandal” headlines in the press every other alternative day. The press was quick to name the “scandal” trend the Salarygate. We had the Willowgate scandal around 1988-89; we had the Asiagate scandal around 2011-12 and now the Salarygate. Historic trends indicate how the suffix ‘Gate’ originates. It's now over 40 years since the world became familiar with the word “Watergate” (Kelly 2004). The original “Gate” takes its name from the Watergate hotel complex in Washington DC, scene of the burglary which triggered the cover-up, the scandal and the resignation of President Richard Nixon (Kelly 2004). Press editors are fond of the suffix “gate”. The suffix was used to embellish a noun or name to suggest the existence of a far-reaching scandal, particularly in politics and government. The term may “suggest unethical behaviour and a cover-up” (Erick, 2006).

Zimbabwe was ranked 156th out of 174 in the 2014 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. Reports of corruption throughout most sectors abound, making it both systemic and systematic and many inside and outside the country views it as part of the governing party’s ‘DNA’, thus making eradication a formidable task (Anti-corruption Trust of Southern Africa, 2013). Though a global problem, corruption disproportionately damages fragile economies and cash-strapped governments such as Zimbabwe.

In covering corruption issues investigative reporting provides the media’s audiences with reliable inside information about fraudulent activities that would have remained concealed. Much of this depends on the journalists’ understanding of the laws and systems in place relating to the issues they are investigating, and often this is a learning process for the journalist too. Corporate misgovernance is often disguised by corporate cultural practices that have developed over years and appear to be normal corporate activity, or involve abuse of authority or accountability avoidance behaviour which his difficult to detect if the journalist is unaware of the legal and policy structures that are in place to ensure transparency and accountability (Media Credibility Index (MMPZ), 2014).

The print media is an essential part of modern life in Zimbabwe. By covering current affairs newspapers are considered credible and reliable by many people. Even though the electronic media has developed over the last decade, most of the people still rely on newspapers for truth. Most Zimbabwean men start their day by reading a newspaper because newspapers are the mirror of the society. Newspapers reflect and report the trends and happenings from most parts of the country and the world at large covering local, national, international social, political and cultural life. Besides, the newspapers also add to the knowledge of the readers by informing them about new discoveries, inventions, and products. That is why from all the politicians, chief executive officers, unemployed youths all begin their day be reading the dailies. Print media provides a public forum for citizens to voice their opinions on and experiences with corruption. This mechanism goes back to the idea of the public sphere, which posits that communication flows between state and citizens form a space where accountability and legitimacy are exchanged between both sides (Stroh et al., 1997:177).

The Herald being a public service paper is expected to maintain and uphold a reputation as a source of reliable, accurate news content, factually based-opinion in terms of fairness, balance, factual content, accuracy and the quality of attribution/source. The newspaper is also expected to interpret the legal implications of the issues reported or covered. It was with this in mind that the depth and substance of print media coverage on salary gate was put to test.
Statement of the problem
This study aimed and at finding out what were the real conflicting issues surrounding coverage of salarygate by the print media.

Objectives
The objectives of the study are: -
- To analyse the role of the print media in the coverage of salarygate scandal/corruption in Zimbabwe.
- To analyse the frequency/range of coverage of the salarygate scandal in The Herald.
- To establish challenges faced by the print media journalists when reporting scandals/corruption cases in Zimbabwe.
- To suggest possible ways or means by which the print media can improve or enhance its reportage or coverage of scandals/corruption cases.

Research Questions
- What role did the print media play in the coverage of Salarygate scandal/corruption?
- What was the frequency of coverage of Salarygate scandal stories/news by The Herald?
- What challenges were faced by the print media while covering the salarygate?
- What are the cost effect ways to enhance and or to improve coverage of salarygate by the print media?

METHODOLOGY
This research study used the descriptive survey design which integrated the case study approach. This research study was descriptive in nature. Interviews and content analysis were used as research instruments; the study pursued the path of descriptive research.

Study Area
The Herald is a government owned and controlled daily newspaper published in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. The Herald was established by the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) and operates under the flagship of Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd.

Population
The population of this study was the Herald staff, news stories from January 2014 to April 2014 when the salary gate scandal had been a hot topic in the discourse of Zimbabwe media. Eight staff members; four editors (sub/editor) and four journalists/reporters involved in the research.

Sample and Sampling Technique
The researcher used multi stage sampling technique. The sampling was carried out in four stages. The first stage involved taking a sample of content sources, thus the Herald was chosen from the Zimpapers stable by virtue of being the oldest daily and family paper in Zimbabwe. The second stage involved selection of issue dates, the researcher settled for the period January 2014 to April 2014 because news is report of current events. As such, the reportage and commentary of the salarygate scandal was a major event that caused waves and is still causing waves. The third stage involved the selection of content to be studied. For the purpose of this research only salary scandal-related stories published during the period under review were chosen. Then the fourth and final stage of the sampling process had the task of choosing the units of analysis. For the newspaper it was easier to count the number of stories than to count individual words or phrases thus a total of 87 stories were used in the research under different categories.

Four Herald staff members were purposively selected as respondents. Two news Editors were selected as respondents because they have editorial powers and inside knowledge of day to day editorial decisions and their justifications. Two journalists, selected were the ones who most reported on the salary scandal. For both interviews of editors and journalists the researcher developed an interview schedule (attached in the appendices) to guide in the process.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS
Understanding of the term salary gate
This study wanted to understand the views of journalists and editors on the phrase salarygate. The popular view by journalists indicated that salarygate was a far-reaching scandal, where executives in State Owned Enterprises (SOE’s) and other public entities pocket exorbitant salaries at the expense of service delivery. The term was coined to refer to reports on the Premier Services Medical Aid Society’s (PSMAS) Chief Executive Officer, Cuthbert Dube who was earning over US$500 000 monthly in salary and allowances at the time the society was failing to pay service providers. The other journalist combined it with the ZBC’s CEO Happison Muchechetere who was earning at least US$42 000 monthly in salaries and allowances since his appointment in 2009 while most workers at ZBC went for months without pay.

All the editors concurred with the journalists saying the phrase salarygate saying the phrase refers to a scandal which is a failure of corporate governance on the part of Chief Executive officers in State owned Enterprises. One Editor had this to say “Salarygate is a result of failure on fiduciary duties and lack of moral or ethics on the part of parastatals heads who betray public trust on the scarce resources they are supposed to superintend”.

Content Analysis Data on Salarygate Phrase

Figure 1 above shows that salarygate phrase appeared in 40 top stories and headlines during the period under review followed by 23
articles in the Features, Analysis and Opinions; Local news had 16 articles, while Editorials had 6 and lastly Business which had 2 stories throughout the period.

The above findings indicate that the phrase salarygate is a far-reaching scandal where CEO are always after lining their pockets with money at the expense of service delivery. Erick, (2006) postulated that the term suggest "suggest unethical behaviour and a cover-up", the disease which has attacked most public entities in Zimbabwe during a time when the very same entities are reporting losses. All the respondents agreed that salarygate scandal is a moral and unethical behaviour by those in authority.

The phrase salarygate is a word linked to unethical behaviour, this is supported by Erick (2006) where he said the term suggests unethical behaviour and a cover up. The suffix gate also derives its name from the Watergate hotel complex in Washington- scene of the burglary which triggered the cover up, the scandal and resignation of President Nixon (Kelly 2004). In the Zimbabwean scenario the term salary gate was used to indicate the existence of a scandal related to pay at the expense of service delivery and other important issues. Also it was dubbed after the Willogate scandal and Asiagate scandal.

**Print media’s influence in raising awareness about salarygate scandal**

Interview data gathered through interviews attributed the firing of the ZBC, PSMAS and the suspension and resignation of the respective CEO to the print media’s effectiveness in raising awareness, causes and consequences about the salary gate through exposures with detailed information.

The editors interviewed pointed out that the print media was influential in raising awareness about salarygate scandal by exposing its causes and consequences was evidenced as seen by the Cabinet’s directive for all parastatals heads to submit to the Secretary for Cabinet Salary Schedules of salaries and board allowances also the Ministry of Health was forced to intervene on the issue of PSMAS, also at ZBC, the whole board was dissolved to pay way for an audit.

**Content Analysis on the print Media’s influence**

One article which quoted the Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, Professor Jonathan Moyo heaping praises on the effectiveness of the media’s watchdog role in exposing corruption for the public and national interest titled “Prof Moyo hails media” reads “The media, both public and private have in the past few weeks been covering extensively the abuse of public funds at premier Service Medical Aid Society, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, Air Zimbabwe and Harare City Council among others. He added so far the media has done justice to its expected national role as the public’s eye and it is indeed refreshing that the media is speaking with one voice in both the public and national interest against the scourge of corruption highlighted by some obscenely corrupt salaries paid by some parastatals and local authorities”.

The findings above indicated that it can be seen that the print media was effective in covering the salarygate. For the first time in the state print media was awash with information facts and figures exposing corruption in the state owned enterprises. Other players of note such as the civil society and transparency international Zimbabwe were taken by surprise by the Herald’s effectiveness on exposing the salary gate scandal. (Stapenhurst, 2000) stated that if the resulting public pressure leads to a reform of those bodies, the long-term effectiveness and potential of the media to act as a countereffect against corruption is strengthened.

**Impact of Salarygate Exposure to the General Public and the Society at Large**

Journalists interviewed explained that the exposure of the salary gate had a huge impact especially to the individuals concerned; in this case it led to the dissolving of the whole PSMAS Board and the resignation of Cuthbert Dube. The ZBC board was also dissolved and the CEO Happison Muchechetere was sent on leave to make way for audit and later suspended.

Editors interviewed pointed out that general public felt betrayed by those in power who are entrusted to manage public resources. The government was forced to put a salary cap of $6000 to all parastatals’ CEOs and start investigating as a result of the exposures.

**Content Analysis on impact of salarygate exposure**

The exposure of salarygate scandal made a huge impact to the general public and the society at large with “Call for Sandura types of probe” was one such heading in The Herald issue of 30 January 2014 and another editorial article headline “Salarygate: Heads torsos to roll” 10 February 2014 in these articles clearly shows the impact the exposure made to the extent of people calling for the proclamation and appointment of commission of inquiry for the public welfare to get to the bottom of this matter.

Apart from impacting negatively on service delivery, corruption undermines the credibility of democratic institutions and counteracts good governance. Mauro (1997) states that corruption has negative effects on investment and it lowers economic growth. Call for commission of inquiry would help to clarify matters to see if legally a crime was made or not.

The print media managed to play it’s forth estate and watchdog role on the salary gate a far reaching scandal which had hogged the lime light in the Zimbabwean newspapers. The exposures have hard hitting in tome and rooted in facts. Checks, balances and accountability were provided on the powerful sectors of society, including on leaders within the private and public domains. Stapenhurst (2000) stated that the media can act as a force against corruption in ways that are both tangible and intangible. The tangible, readily identifiable, ways in which the news media perform this function include those in which some sort of visible outcome can be attributed to a particular news story such as, the launching of investigation by authorities, the scrapping of a law or policy that fosters a climate ripe with opportunities for corruption, the impeachment or forced resignation of a crooked politician, the firing of an official and so on. Intangible effects, by contrast, can be characterized as those checks on corruption which arise from the broader social climate of enhanced political pluralism, enlivened public debate and a heightened sense of accountability among politicians, public bodies and institutions that are inevitably the by-product of a hard-hitting, independent news media.

**How important/relevant is corruption stories to the general public?**

All the informants interviewed indicated that corruption stories are very much relevant since they are affected by corruption in either way or the other; the vice in actual fact affects their customers. Corruption stories involving prominent people are what the public wants to hear about since the issue of state or public resources are involved.

**Content Analysis on importance of corruption stories**
Content analysis of frequency of coverage

Table(1) Analysis by placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page Placement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top half of page</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom half of page</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside pages</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that, the top half of the paper constituted 46% of stories placed during the period under review, followed by 29% which were placed in the inside pages, while 25% were on the bottom half of the paper.

From the above findings, corruption stories are importance to the general public as seen by the 46% in table 4.1 representing where the stories are place and the responses from the editors and journalists.

The print media made impact as evidenced in this case the CEOs of PSMAS and ZBC were all exposed for their double standards whereby they say the company is lacking funds to pay for services and workers while on the other hand they are busy lining their own pockets. This agrees with what Jibo, (2003) noted that in the speaker gate scandal of Nigeria where it was seen that the most effective way in which the media helps a country to fight graft is to beam the search light on those in authority to expose their criminal acts and double standards. Also apart from impacting negatively on service delivery, corruption undermines the credibility of democratic institutions and counteracts good governance. Mauro (1997) states that corruption has negative effects on investment and it lowers economic growth.

Feedback mechanism

The journalists explained that feedback mechanisms were in the form of opinions and letters to the editor. The opinion pieces sent to the editor and the online news comments on the salary gate scandal clearly showed that the public are really concerned with the rot that has engulfed the nation and are happy that the print media is talking about it; however their main concern was action that will be taken after the exposure.

Editors concurred with journalists that letters to the editor and opinion are the major forms of feedback from the public. The number of hits to indicate how many people have opened or accessed a certain story is another form of feedback mechanism employed by The Herald. Online news comments on the various topics are also taken into account, at time they carry out online surveys to determine how much people appreciate and understand a certain issue.

Content Analysis on Feedback mechanisms

26% of the letters to the editors, features opinions and analysis stories indicate that the public really want to see the problem of corruption eradicated. For instance one features, opinion & analysis titled “We cannot reward under performers forever” reads “One would think the senior council officials were rewarding themselves for a job well done but a look at the bleak state of affairs in the city tells a starkly different story. …………… Against this backdrop, questions arise as to why senior council officials are paying themselves handsomely despite poor service delivery and failure to pay workers? Why should they get bonuses for mediocrity and non delivery?……………… We welcome the intervention by Dr. Chombo to order all councils to trim salaries of senior officials by 50% and give these executives performance based contracts.

From the above findings it can be seen that letters to the editor are the most prominent type of feedback used by the print media. Hits and online comments on issues are the other type used and they are effective since they can be quantified. Feedback
mechanisms are an important component of media's role of information and educating the general public.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

The print media played the watchdog role effectively by exposing and condemning corruption in the country’s state owned enterprises. The print media managed to give salarygate scandal stories the prominence it deserves.

**Recommendations**

While the importance of newspapers and the media in general in raising awareness about corruption and encouraging anticorruption activity cannot be denied, this study proposes recommendations which can increase the print media efficiency and integrity in this role. There is also need for Newspaper reporters to engage in more investigative reporting that explores and explains the structure of institutions, in order to help understand systemic corruption.

Newspaper articles should incorporate a broader range of opinions and experiences, and not merely focus on elite with political powers and advantages.

**References**