

Zambia Broadcasting Corporation

News: A Content Analysis

by Samwilu Mwaffisi

Abstract

This study of the news content of the Zambia Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) proceeds from the assumption that 'a national broadcasting system reflects the milieu in which it operates, thus taking on the colour of the social, political, economic and cultural climate' of its locale. Thus, hypothesizing that in Zambia, the broadcasting system would fulfil the objectives set by the ruling party and the government, namely, building a humanist nation, liberation of Africa, promotion of world peace and justice, and adherence to the policy of non-alignment, the study confirms that, indeed, the ZBC fulfils these objectives in its world news coverage. However, it identifies such structural constraints as news sourcing, lack of funds and transport, and lack of professional skills among ZBC newsroom staff as the major factors inhibiting quality performance.

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La Radio-Télévision Zambienne: La Nouvelle Analyse De Conte Nu

Résumé

Cette étude sur le contenu des nouvelles de la Compagnie Zambienne de Radiodiffusion procède de l'assomption qu'un système national de radiodiffusion reflète le milieu dans lequel il travaille, en l'occurrence, l'aspect social, politique, économique et culturel de ses nationaux.

Ainsi donc, l'article insinue qu'en Zambie le système de radio-diffusion réalise les objectifs du parti au pouvoir et du gouvernement à savoir, bâtir une nation humaniste, la libération de l'Afrique, promotion de la paix et de la justice dans le monde, et l'adhésion à la politique de non-alignement. L'article indique qu'en réalité, la Compagnie Zambienne de Radio diffusion réalise ces objectifs par le biais de ses nouvelles internationales.

L'article identifie cependant des problèmes structurels tels que les sources d'informations, le manque des finances de transport et de formation professionnelle pour le personnel opérant dans les studios des compagnies comme étant les facteurs majeurs qui font obstacle à la performance qualitative.

Introduction

Zambia gained political independence on October 24, 1964. Formerly known as Northern Rhodesia, Zambia is a large country with 752,620 square kilometres. The country is entirely land-locked and has a population of about six million. For administrative convenience, Zambia is divided into nine provinces and these are sub-divided into districts.

Although there are a number of dialects in Zambia, some of which vary only slightly, there are seven main local languages spoken: Bemba, Tonga, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Kaonde. While there is no lingua franca, Bemba is widely spoken on the Copperbelt and in Northern and Luapula provinces and Nyanja is common in the Eastern Province and Lusaka. English is the official language of the country.

Zambia became a one-party state in December 1972 when the Constitution of the Republic was amended to provide that there should only be one legal political party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP). The basis of all the policies and programmes of the Party and Government is the national philosophy of HUMANISM which emphasises the importance of MAN as the centre of all activity. As a publication of the Ministry of Information and National Guidance says:

The most important thing to this nation is MAN. MAN you, MAN me and MAN the other fellow. Everything we say and do evolves around MAN. Without him there can be no Zambia, there can be no nation. That is why we believe in HUMANISM. That is why we say MAN is the centre of all activities (Zambia in Brief, p.2)

There are two national dailies—the UNIP-owned *Times of Zambia* with a circulation of about 65,000 and the government-owned *Zambia Daily Mail* with a circulation of about 45,000. The mining companies publish a fortnightly newspaper in English—*The Mining Mirror*—while the department of Zambia Information Services publishes six monthly newspapers in vernacular. There are also journals serving various commercial and industrial interests.

Zambia Broadcasting Corporation

The Zambia Broadcasting Corporation runs a home service in the local languages and a general service which has the majority of programmes in English. A television service is provided to Lusaka, Kitwe, Livingstone and the Copperbelt towns.

Radio broadcasting started in Zambia in 1939 when the Copperbelt Amateur Wireless Club started experimental broadcasts on the Copperbelt. Officially, however, radio broadcasting started in 1941 when the Northern Rhodesia Government broadcast from a make-shift station situated at the old Lusaka airport.

The station, which was under the Department of Information, broadcast for three days in a week for one hour every day in the first year. The primary objective of the station was to inform Africans in the country about the progress of the Second World War. A little broadcasting was also done for Europeans for the same reason.

However, in the early days of transmission, the facilities were poor, reception was very unreliable, and receivers were very few. As a result, only a few Africans, mostly those in the upper class, owned them. Therefore, in 1945 the colonial administration placed 100 receivers at suitable centres throughout the territory and employers, especially the mining companies, were encouraged to place receivers at public places, such as beer halls, in their compounds.

According to the 1949 report on the development of broadcasting to Africans in Central Africa, however, Africans needed to listen from receivers at their homes like the Europeans and not from the community receivers. Following this report, the first batch of 2,000 simple and cheap receivers known as 'saucepan special' arrived in the country in September, 1949. The set was sold to Africans at five pounds each and a battery cost one pound five shillings. By the end of 1949, sets were available in markets in large numbers making reception of the radio programmes available to many Africans.

Despite the efforts of the colonial administration to improve broadcasting for Africans, after the War most Europeans were strongly opposed to broadcasting for Africans. These Europeans believed that if broadcasting for Africans continued, the Africans would listen to foreign stations, get wrong ideas and, therefore, cause revolutions in their country.

However, Europeans working in broadcasting supported the colonial administration in its efforts to improve broadcasting for Africans. These few Europeans believed that if broadcasting could reach the masses, it could play a big part in the sensible enlightenment of the masses and help to avoid the tragic consequences produced in some colonies where the native population consisted of a handful of formally educated 'intelligents' and a completely ignorant majority that could be easily misled by discontented agitators (Franklin 1950).

The European broadcasters, therefore, were all out to develop broadcasting for Africans despite the strong opposition from the majority of the Europeans. However, one of the major problems they faced was inadequate funds with which to improve transmission and listening facilities. To overcome this problem, it was agreed to start a regional broadcasting system that would involve the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland.

The regional broadcasting system took advantage of facilities that existed at Salisbury and Lusaka. The studios and a transmitter station at Salisbury were for European broadcasting only, whereas those in Lusaka were for African broadcasting, following an agreement to this effect by the Central African Council.

The agreement became effective in 1950 and the Lusaka station became the Central African Broadcasting Services (CABS), but was developed as part of the Information Department of the Northern Rhodesia government.

When the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was started in 1954, it was decided that broadcasting should become a Federal matter. As a result, in July, 1954 the Federal Ministry of Home Affairs assumed responsibility for the English language

broadcasts from Southern Rhodesia by establishing the Federal Broadcasting Service.

The Northern Rhodesia government opposed the decision to make broadcasting a Federal matter. As a result, the Federal Government agreed to reimburse the Northern Rhodesia government cost of running the Lusaka station which remained under the Territorial Government control, pending further discussion in the future. Later following the discussions, the Central African Broadcasting Service and the Federal Broadcasting Service were amalgamated on February 1, 1959 into the Federal broadcasting Corporation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

During the six years of its existence, the Federal Broadcasting Corporation recorded gradual developments. For example, by the end of 1963, the 'African Service' in Lusaka provided an average of 124 programme hours per week and the 'General Service' which was introduced for Europeans in Northern Rhodesia was providing, on a regional basis, an average of 14 programme hours per week.

When the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved in 1963, the Northern Rhodesia government established, on January 1, 1964, its own broadcasting service known as Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Service. The 'National Service' replaced the 'General Service' and broadcast in English only, catering for all listeners wishing to listen to programmes in the English language. The 'Vernacular Service' replaced the 'African Service' and broadcast in Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Lunda, Luvala and Konde. The new corporation aimed at providing a first class public service in the fields of news, education, entertainment and culture and from modest beginnings to become a vital force in the nation's progress' (Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation 1964).

Following independence on October 24, 1964, the Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation was replaced by the Zambia Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and on January, 1966, the ZBC became the Zambia Broadcasting Service (ZBS) under

the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. However, in 1984 it reverted to Zambia Broadcasting Corporation.

Broadcasting in Zambia is based on the policy of the Party and its Government. Basically, the policy aims at (a) building a humanist society based on the national philosophy of Humanism, (b) participating in the liberation of Africa, (c) promoting African unity, (d) promoting world peace and justice, (e) adhering to the non-aligned policy.

The news bulletins, like the rest of the programmes, aim at achieving these objectives. The research question that arises, then, is whether the contents of the news bulletins reflect these objectives. It is hypothesized that the objectives are met but structural constraints prevent their full implements.

Methodology

The news reports analysed comprised 360 stories covering the period from June—August, 1988 and were selected by using a random interval sample. The stories were coded for five variables. These were source, length, location, topics, actors and style. The sources included Reuters, AFP, TASS, Zambia News Agency and ZBC's own reporters. Location was the country in which the major event occurred. These countries were further categorized into nine regions: Africa, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, North America, Latin America, Oceania and Mideast. International organizations were placed in a separate category.

The topics included politics, military and defence matters, economic affairs, international aid, social services, crime-police-judicial-legal, natural disasters and ecology. The main actors were coded according to their ranks, national leaders, top executives, executives and ordinary people. The stories were coded by five first year students at the Tanzania School of Journalism. Fifty stories were chosen at random and coded. For straight forward choices such as source, location and length, inter-coding reliability approached 100 per cent. But for other topics, the agreement was nearly 95 per cent.

Results and Discussion

Source

Zambia Broadcasting Corporation has only one major source of news—Zambia News Agency (ZANA) and, occasionally, it uses its own reporters. However, ZANA receives news from at least nine news agencies including Reuters, AFP, TASS and others within the region on exchange programme.

According to an internal arrangement, only ZANA is required to receive stories from foreign news agencies and redistribute them to the mass media in Zambia. There are two reasons for this arrangement. First, it saves foreign currency since only ZANA subscribes to the major Western wire services which demand payment in foreign currency. Secondly, it controls the inflow of news of 'bad taste' to Zambia since ZANA screens the news, especially from the major Western news agencies, before redistributing it.

Almost all the journalists in the ZBC newsroom whom we interviewed were not happy with this arrangement. They argued that it is responsible for their bulletins not having much foreign news content because the foreign news budget is drastically reduced by ZANA. They believed that if they had access to all the news agencies now at the disposal of ZANA, they would have a bigger menu of foreign news from which to choose their stories. Peter Mwelwa, confirmed this.

But the Chief Sub-editor of ZANA, rejects this argument because ZANA files not less than 60 of what he called 'very good' foreign stories daily while ZBC uses only 50 per cent of the stories.

It was impossible to independently determine which foreign news agency is mostly used by ZBC because, unlike the newspapers which credit ZANA and the foreign news agency, ZBC credits only ZANA for all the foreign news. But according to the Chief Sub-editor, Reuters is the most frequently used agency; that TASS is hardly used because of its over editorialization of stories.

The journalists also argued that the arrangement casts doubt on their patriotism. They wondered if they were not patriotic enough to know what foreign news is bad or good for Zambians. They wanted all stories to flow directly into their newsroom for them to select rather than have ZANA select for them.

To diversify their news sources ZBC newsroom staff have started sending their own reporters on local assignments in and outside Lusaka. But reporting outside Lusaka is limited to very important national events, like the 10th Party Congress which was held in Kabwe where the newsroom sent two reporters. Reporting in Lusaka is hampered by lack of transport, the newsroom having no transport of its own. It relies on transport from a central transport pool of ZBC.

News Geography

ZBC puts great emphasis on news from Zambia and then Africa. The rest of the world is reported according to the news worthiness of the events rather than on a policy favouring one region against the other. The study showed that 71 per cent of the stories were from the developing region (Africa, Asia and Latin America) compared with 23 per cent from the developed region (Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North America and Oceania). However, if you take out Africa, then the developed region was more covered than developing region.

Africa was the most covered region. But most of the stories were from Zambia (42%). If you take out Zambia, Africa comes second to the developing region in frequency of coverage. However, each region taken separately, Africa minus Zambia is still the most frequently covered region.

Table 1. ZBC News Coverage by Region

Region	Percentage
Africa	63
Eastern Europe	9
Western Europe	8
Asia	4

Mideast	4
Latin America	4
North America	4
International Organisations	3
Oceania	1
Total	100

The wide coverage of Africa is based on Zambia's policy of supporting African unity, African liberation and African economic groupings. Therefore, most stories were centred on speeches of African leaders, OAU activities, African liberation movements and economic groupings mostly from southern, and eastern region such as the Preferential Trade Area (PTA), the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) and Frontline States.

Eastern Europe and Western Europe were almost equally covered with Eastern Europe leading by one per cent. Most of the stories from Eastern Europe were centred on Soviet 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' and the Polish conflict between the Communist Party and Solidarity. Speeches of East European leaders and either African leaders or African delegations visiting Eastern European countries were also responsible for the Eastern European lead over Western Europe.

Most of the stories from Western Europe centred on the region's aid to Third World countries. Therefore, most of the stories were on speeches or activities at meetings of European Economic Community, U.N. Agencies, IMF and World Bank. The story on three Italian Air Force jets that collided and plunged into spectators watching a military airshow at a US base in West Germany killing 31 people and injuring more than 100 and its follow-up stories boosted the coverage of Western Europe.

Asia, Middle East, North America and Latin America had an equal coverage of 4 per cent. The Afghanistan conflict and USSR pull-out from that country and student protests in Burma were responsible for most of the coverage in India. The truce between Iran and Iraq, and the UN efforts in making the truce stay were given wide publicity. PLO activities, Israel brutality

against Palestinians and the latter's protest against the former were also responsible for wider coverage on the Middle East. The deteriorating relation between U.S.A. and Nicaragua on the one hand, and USA/Mexico on the other, was responsible for higher coverage of North America and Latin America. However, Canada did not feature at all in the stories during the period under review.

Other than the UN, international organizations that featured were either economic groupings in eastern and southern region or Western international organizations involved in aid to Africa. Therefore, the most covered international organizations were PTA, SADCC, Frontline States and other international organizations and associations. Others were EEC, IMF, U.N. agencies, World Bank and other organizations which in one way or the other, were involved in reviving the economies of the African countries in the region, but particularly Zambia. The Oceania was the least covered region.

This study has, therefore, shown that ZBC devotes most of its attention to Africa, particularly Zambia. Eastern Europe and Western Europe were almost equally covered. But the reports no longer centre on the cold war' between the opposing camps. In Eastern Europe, the stories centred on the Polish conflict Soviet 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' and speeches of Eastern European leaders and other African leaders or African delegations or the situation in Africa.

Topics

Politics was the most covered topic followed by economics (Table 2). Local politics, meaning political affairs limited to a country's national boundaries, was the most covered political sub-topics (61%) followed by relations between states (34%) and diplomatic relations between states was the least covered political sub-topic (5%). Economic matters was the second most covered topic.

The most covered economic sub-topic is agriculture (60%) followed by industrial development (40%). This result is not surprising because, although agriculture stands second to

copper mining in importance in the national economy, about 85 per cent of the people of Zambia derive a living directly from agriculture. Also, the efforts of the Party and the Government to increase agricultural produce for local consumption and export accounts for the high coverage of agriculture.

Table 2. ZBC News Coverage by Topic

Topics	Percentage
Politics	43
Economics	25
Social services	8
Military and defence	6
Science and technology	5
Crime	4
Disasters	3
International aid	3
Sports	3
Total	100

Social services was the third most covered topic. Most of the stories centred on problems encountered in rendering social services to the public. This follows the economic crisis now facing the country. Stories on military and defence matters were mostly about the war between Iran and Iraq, South African military incursion into its neighbouring states, militancy of the southern Africa liberation movements, and the conflict in the Middle East. Sports stories were mostly on Zambian teams competing in international competitions.

Actors

The study showed that most of the main actors were Africans followed by international organizations (Table 3). However, the majority of the African actors were Zambians (67%). International organizations that provided most actors were UN, O.A.U, P.T.A., SADCC and Frontline States.

Table 3. ZBC News Coverage by Origin of Actors

National Origin of Actors	Percentage
Africa	61
International organizations	8
Western Europe	6
Asia	6
North America	6
Middle East	5
Eastern Europe	4
Latin America	2
Oceania	2
Total	100

Asia, North America and Western Europe took the third position with 6 percent each, followed by Middle East with 5 percent. Latin America and Oceania provided the fewest actors.

About 75 percent of the actors were chief executives and other senior officials. Out of the 360 stories, 310 concerned these low categories of actors. They were quoted in 260 stories. There is very little news about the activities of the ordinary people. These people are in the news when they are involved in crimes, protests, or illegal businesses. Otherwise, they are always the silent listeners to leaders' speeches and watchers of leaders activities.

Local Coverage

It was difficult to analyse local coverage because the stories did not have datelines. Even where a dateline was mentioned, it was not easy to specify the geographical location in Zambia. Therefore, we simply made general remarks about local coverage.

According to an internal directive, the first half of the bulletins must contain mostly stories originating from Zambia or have something to do with Zambia. For example, when President Kaunda is out of the country, his story will be placed within the first half of the bulletin. Stories about foreign leaders can only be on the first half of the bulletin when they are in Zambia. Very

rarely can a foreign story be placed in the first half of the bulletin.

Whereas on the one hand this arrangement can be said to be good because it emphasises local stories, on the other hand it is bad professionally because it ignores the newsworthiness of a story. Some of the international stories are more newsworthy than local stories but they are placed in the second half. A reporter in the newsroom commented on this situation saying: 'Sometimes I wish I could start the bulletin with a foreign story that I consider worth a lead, but I cannot because I am required to always put foreign stories in the second half of the bulletin'.

The number of stories originating from Lusaka are by far the largest. Most of the stories originating from outside Lusaka are mostly centred on either national leaders touring the regions or senior executives in the regions.

Style

This study reveals also that the ZBC newsroom does not have a house style. As a result, there is a lot of inconsistency in the writing style. One reporter would use a name followed by a title while another one would use a title followed by a name. For example, one reporter would put the word 'Comrade' before a Zambian personality, another one would simply drop it and use title and name thus: 'Prime Minister Comrade Kebby Musokotwane' and 'Prime Minister Kebby Musokotwane'.

In fact, the use of the word 'Comrade' is very confusing. According to the Chief Sub-editor, the word is used for only those people who are said to believe in humanism or socialism. However, whereas the Chairman of the Mozambican Parliament was addressed 'Mr. Marcelino Dos Santos' the Sierra Leone Foreign Minister was addressed as 'Comrade Hassan Kanu'.

The language used is mostly of print media. Some sentences are very long and overloaded with facts, whereas past tense is more used than present or present perfect tense which is more appropriate for broadcast news.

Conclusion

This study shows that the main source of news for ZBC is the Zambia News Agency. Reporters in the newsroom do some local reporting, especially in Lusaka, but they have a long way to go to be a challenge to ZANA as a source of local news. Africa is the most covered region and Zambia is the most covered African country. Eastern Europe and Western Europe are almost equally covered. The coverage is not based on cold war. Whereas coverage of Eastern Europe is based on political development taking place there, coverage on Western Europe is based on aid to Third World countries, especially Africa.

Politics was the most covered topic followed by economics. Local politics was the most covered political sub-topic followed by relations between states and diplomatic relations between states was the least covered political sub-topic. Economic matters was the second most covered topic. The most covered economic sub-topic is agriculture followed by industrial development.

The study has also shown that most of the main actors were Africans followed by those from international organizations. However, the majority of the African actors were Zambian. International organizations that provided most actors were U.N., O.A.U., P.T.A. SADCC and Frontline States.

According to an internal directive, the first half of the bulletins contains mostly stories originating from Zambia or have something to do with Zambia. Foreign stories are mostly placed in the second half of the bulletin. Very rarely can a foreign story be placed in the first half of the bulletin. This arrangement has its advantages and disadvantages. Most stories originate from Lusaka. Most of the stories from outside Lusaka are centred on either national leaders touring the regions or senior executives in the regions.

The study has shown that the newsroom does not have a house style as a result of which there is a lot of inconsistency in the writing style. The language and writing style used is more suitable for print media than electronic media. A style

book is important if the newsroom is to have consistency of style; the newsroom staff also need more training in Broadcast news writing.

This study confirms that broadcasting in Zambia reflects the official policy of the Party and government. However, full implementation of the policy is hindered by structural constraints facing ZBC. Among these are financial limitations, shortage of transport and internal and external controls.

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