

Interactivity Features of Online Newspapers: Use and Effect on Gratification Among Zambian Readers

Parkie Mbozi

University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

Interactivity in online newspapers is the focus of this chapter in eliciting readers' evaluation of Zambian online newspapers. This aspect of the study investigates and characterises the motivations (gratification sought) for use of interactivity features ("process motivation") and how widely they are used. It also attempts to ascertain the gratification obtained from their use among readers. The probable relationships between use of the interactivity features ("audience interactivity") and gratification obtained from them ("process gratification") and the impact of the perceived credibility of the online newspapers on gratification are also examined. Past studies present mixed results on use of interactivity and gratification obtained from it. This study finds that use of interactivity in Zambian online newspapers is at a low level, although among the three broad categorisations of features of online newspapers, interactivity attracts greater use than hyper-textuality and multi-mediality. Human interactivity features—"knowing what others think about an issue", "chat on the Facebook page of the newspaper", "ability to navigate on the Facebook page of the newspaper", and "posting own comments on stories"—are the main motivations for use of online newspapers, the most frequently used, and the most gratifying to the readers. While readers express an interest in interacting with other readers via online newspapers, they seem less interested in posting their own stories as "citizen journalists" and linking up with the publishers and editors. This finding challenges the notion that all new media are catalysts of participatory and cyclic communication.

Keywords: Zambian online newspapers, interactivity features, Internet, audiences, gratification

Introduction

Interactivity is the degree to which audiences engage in the communication process by interacting with the medium and/or other people with the aid of interactive features (Yoo, 2011). It is a unique quality of the Internet, of which the mass media have taken full advantage (Deuze, 2001; 2003; Chung, 2009), and the primary characteristic of online newspapers that distinguishes them from traditional print newspapers. Scholars note that interactivity in online newspapers has revolutionised the practice of journalism. It has given a new lease of life to an industry which has been on downward spiral due to loss of readership since the mid-1980s (Erlindson, 1995; Deuze, 2001; Chung & Yoo, 2008). It is presumed that readers—young and Internet-savvy ones in particular—would be attracted to the converge of mass media with "click" technologies that allow them to become active participants by posting content, conversing with other readers and producers and downloading material from the websites of the medium of their choice (Chung, 2009).

Of all the benefits that come with the Internet, interactivity is seen as the main novelty and as being unmatched as a value-addition to the practice of journalism for both producers and consumers of news. Interactivity has revolutionised journalism to levels never anticipated 25 years ago. Many online news sites today are serious publications incorporating various storytelling techniques and methods of audience engagement (Chung, 2009). The benefits of interactivity are summarised by Rich (2003, as cited in Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 376) as follows:

The implementation of interactivity through the use of interactive features has affected journalism practice in numerous ways and is changing how news is being presented, delivered, and perceived. The use of interactive features allows for immediacy of information, increased communication with and among readers, personalized journalism that is tailored to one's liking, and nonlinearity of information.

Consequently, the interactivity features of the Internet have rapidly been adopted as survival strategies of newspapers (Chung & Yoo, 2008; Erlindson, 1995). The shrinking audiences and loss of credibility of traditional media explain the cut-throat pace at which news organisations have been adopting online versions of their publications and the exponential growth of online newspapers since the advent of the Internet technology in the mid-1990s (Jones, 2004, as cited in Chung & Yoo, 2008). The back-and-forth communication between the news publication and its readers is one way that publishers envisaged to re-engage their audiences and to re-establish a relationship with them. The Online News Association (2003, as cited in Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 376) states: "Journalists expect to re-engage their audience through the implementation of various interactive features (e.g. e-mail links, chat features, and message boards), which are the essence of the Internet medium and have the potential to recreate the community".

Interactivity is also regarded as a *sine qua non* for citizen journalism and the enhancement of computer-mediated communication channels as effective contemporary public spheres, with astounding contributions to nourishing democracy (Mitchelstein, 2011). Despite the conflicting empirical data about the role of the Internet as a public sphere, several scholars agree that both face-to-face and mediated discussions among citizens are the cornerstone of democracy (Wyatt, 2000; Page, 1999, as cited in Mitchelstein, 2011). The Internet allows audiences to produce content that transforms the one-way model of traditional mass-mediated communication into a dialogical one among citizens (Deuze, 2003; Boczowski, 2004). Participation in discussion forums and other platforms is one role of the Internet as a public sphere, understood as the space where people engage in debate over political issues (Habermas, 1989, as cited in Mitchelstein, 2011). Interactivity is the sole facilitator of this envisaged audience participation in public affairs via the Internet. The role of interactivity as a "fun factor" is also widely acknowledged as a major catalyst for the growing popularity of online newspapers (Beyers, 2004).

Basic Scope and Dimensions of Interactivity

Interactivity is traced to the discipline of sociology, where it is defined as "the relationship between two or more people, who, in a given situation, mutually adjust their behaviours and actions to each other" (Chung, 2008, p. 660). It is also described as reciprocal awareness between the sender and recipient of a communication (Duncan, 1989, as cited in Chung, 2008). It entered the field of communication following the advent of the Internet and computer-aided journalism (Chung, 2008). Communication scholars now define interaction online as "interactivity" though acknowledging that it is not the perfect equivalent of face-to-face communication and that it falls short of the "ideal conversation mode" (Chung, 2008, p. 660). Despite this misgiving, there is

general consensus that interactivity is a practical conversation model that should be embraced and fortified in online media (Yoo, 2011).

Interactivity is a general typology consisting of three main dimensions (Deuze, 2001) of which two have been adopted in the present study to guide the structure of the instruments for data collection and the results. All three dimensions focus on classifying interactivity features of online newspapers (Deuze, 2001). The first dimension is what this study simply describes as a classification based on the functions that the features serve or what readers are able to do with them. It has three categories: interactivity, multi-mediality and hyper-textuality. The first, interactivity, is described as the “options for the public to respond, interact or even customize certain stories” (Deuze, 2001, p. 3) and as the hallmark of conversational or dialogical communication of online media (Chung & Yoo, 2008). It enables interaction between readers themselves and between readers and editors or publishers through such links as chat forums, posting views on a subject and commenting on stories. It has two sub-categories, human/medium and human or human-to-human interactivity, which are explained in Table 1.

Table 1

Dimensions of Interactivity—Descriptions and Orientations

Classification	Description	Sub-categories and orientations
Interactivity	“Options for the public to respond, interact or even customise certain stories” (Deuze, 2001, p. 3)	Human/medium: sending information Human or human-to-human: information exchange
Multi-mediality	“Media formats that best tell a certain story” (Deuze, 2001, p. 3)	Medium: information seeking
Hyper-textuality	“Ways to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so on through hyperlinks” (Deuze, 2001, p. 3)	Medium/human (Category 1): personalisation. Medium/human (Category 2): information collection by publishers

Source: Author’s field data.

The second category, multi-mediality, is described as “media formats that best tell a certain story” (Deuze 2001, p. 3), other than traditional ink-on-paper or plain text. Examples of such media formats are audio-visual files, such as YouTube and live streaming. Multi-mediality is also described as the trademark of convergence of media formats, which is unique to online news presentation. One sub-category, medium interactivity, falls under this classification.

The third category is hyper-textuality, which is defined as “ways to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so on through hyperlinks” (Deuze, 2001, p. 3). Through this function, the website of a newspaper is enabled to load important national documents. An example of the use of this function was the uploading and leaking of the draft constitution of Zambia in 2016 by an online newspaper, Watchdog. Hyper-textuality features also allow readers to navigate to other websites and social media pages of the site (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Medium/human interactivity, and its two strands of features (personalisation and information collection by publishers), fall under this category as shown in Table 1 (see also examples in Figure 2).

The second dimension of interactivity distinguishes between medium interactivity and human interactivity (Chung & Yoo, 2008). Medium interactivity, also known as user-to-medium, “refers to interactive communication through the nature of the medium itself and how users are able to work with the technology to make choices and exert control over the communication process” (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 378). In other words, it is interactivity based on the design of the medium itself. Two sub-categories of this classification are medium interactivity and medium/human interactivity. The former falls under multi-mediality and the latter under

hyper-textuality (see Table 1). Human interactivity, also known as human-to-human, refers to “communication between two or more individuals that takes place through a communication channel” (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 378).

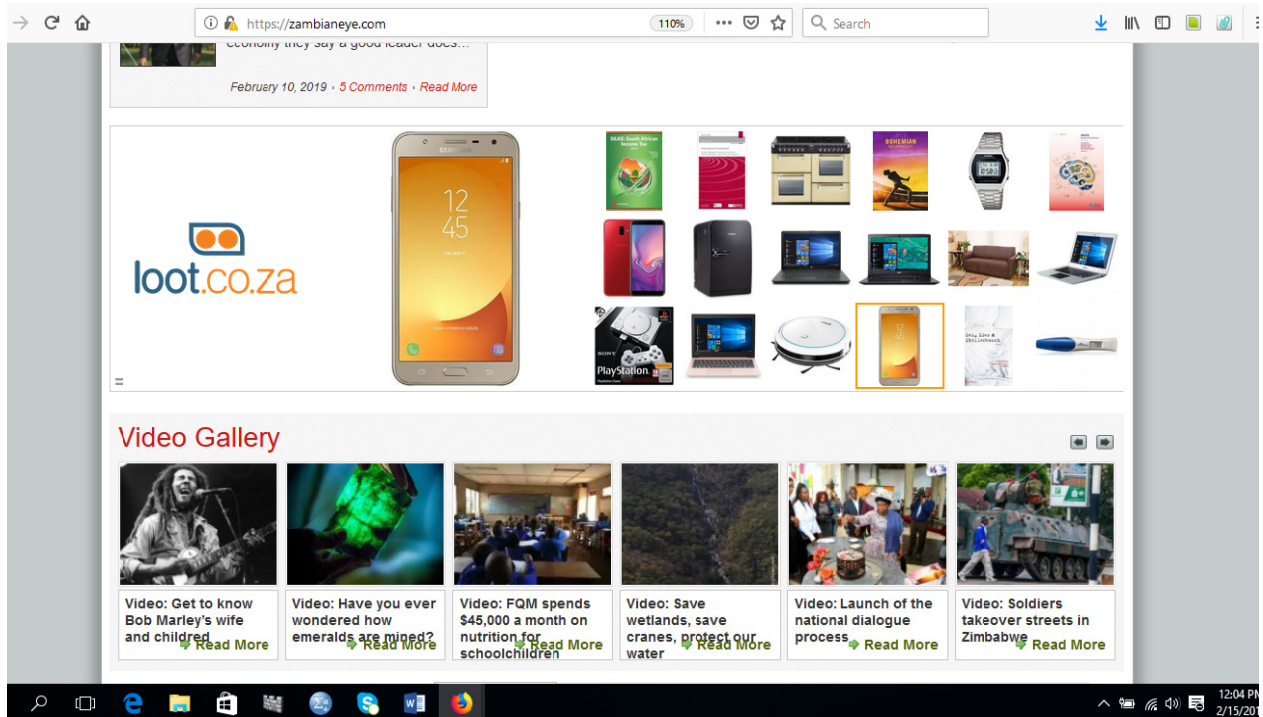


Figure 1. A video gallery link (multi-mediality) in the Zambia Eye online newspaper (Source: Author's field data).

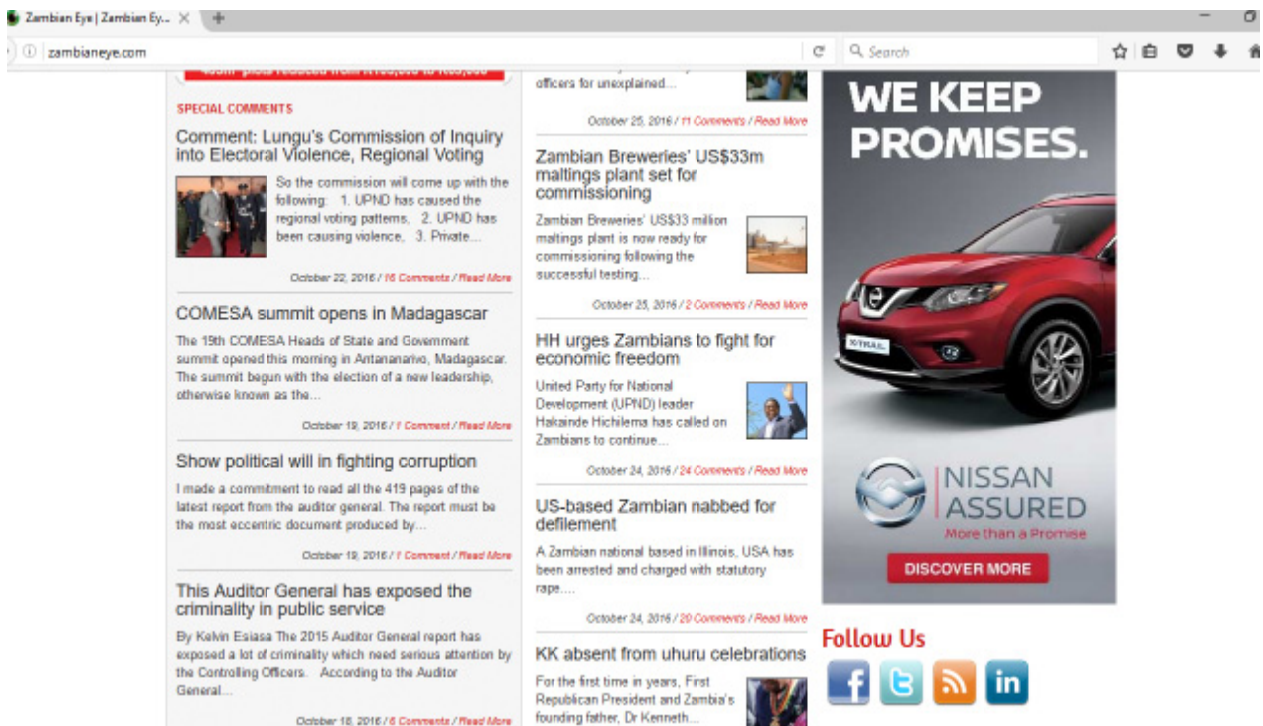


Figure 2. Links to social media pages (hyper-textuality) in Zambia Eye (Source: Author's field data).

In the context of network society theory, this group of features allows readers to talk to one another and/or to others connected to a particular story, being networked through the medium. Two sub-categories fall under human interactivity: human and human/medium interactive functionalities. Both of these sub-categories fall under the interactivity genre under the first dimension of classification (see also Table 2). Some scholars propose to define interactivity as a continuum with the highest level of interactivity occurring when there is human-to-human communication (Hashim et al., 2007; Chung, 2008; Chung & Yoo, 2008).

Table 2

Interactivity Categories, Sub-categories and Their Purposes

Classification	Sub-category	Purpose (orientation)
Human interactivity	Human/medium interactive functions	For posting personalised information or material, such as own news stories, views or photos, letters to the editor, news tips and polls
	Human interactive functions	For interaction with other readers, such as sharing views on a topic, exchanging views with publishers, knowing what other readers think about an issue, engaging other readers in debate, posting views on a subject and commenting on the paper's Facebook site or Twitter
Medium interactivity	Medium interactivity	Examples are searching for news, information and photos and audio and video files such as YouTube
	Medium/human interactive functions	Allows for personalisation, for example: navigating to Facebook and Twitter pages of the online newspaper or other websites; accessing adverts and documents; participating in opinion polls; downloading forms; and receiving weather information or news headlines

Source: Author's field data.

The last dimension of interactivity is the distinction between three elements of the design of the website (Levy, 1999, as cited in Chung & Yoo, 2008). These are: navigational interactivity, which “allows users to ‘navigate’ a site through hyperlinks and menu bars” (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 380); functional interactivity, “which allows users to communicate with each other” (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 380); and adaptive interactivity, which “allows users experience to have consequences for the content of the site” (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 380). This categorisation is not, however, a point of reference in this thesis. The first two distinctions are crucial to the present study, given its focus on understanding to what extent the readers of Zambian online newspapers make use of the different interactivity features and which are the types and the gratification derived from each of them. Research has proved that the functions provided by a particular medium influence how audiences perceive the medium's ability to gratify them. The extent to which this occurs with interactivity, however, remains largely an unknown (Kaye & Johnson, 2002).

Scope and Focus of the Study

Scholars recognise that knowledge of the different types of interactive features of online newspapers would facilitate the examination of audience use of these features. However, not much research has been devoted to the subject, especially in Africa. Very few studies have illuminated the extent to which audiences engage with the interactive features and identified the characteristics and backgrounds of audiences who engage with particular types of interactive features. “Discussions of online news audiences' uses of interactive features and lifestyle associations are almost completely absent in the literature” (Chung, 2008, p. 663).

Empirical data on the demographics of readers who use the different features are not readily available, despite the general agreement that different segments of the population use the Internet differently, especially in a country, like Zambia, where cost is a major factor in Internet access and use. There is also dearth of data on

whether interactivity is one of the motivations for readers to surf online newspapers and, of particular interest from the uses and gratification theory, the extent to which this (process) motivation is actually gratified. Chung and Yoo (2008) stated that “because of lack of studies, some uncertainties still exist in regard to the relationship between motivations for visiting an online newspaper and use of various interactive features of online newspapers” (p. 382).

The focus of interest in this study is process motivation and its contribution to overall gratification. Process motivation is defined as the gratification users gain “from the experience of purposeful navigating or random browsing of the Internet in its functional process, of which the predictor is the use of and gratification from interactive and functional features” (Mings, 1997, p. 21). T. F. Stafford and M. R. Stafford (2001) also describes it as the enjoyment of the act of using the medium, as opposed to interest in its content. Through the prism of the uses and gratification theory, the study interrogates earlier findings and assumptions about the use of interactive features of online newspapers and their contribution to reader gratification. It identifies the patterns of use of the different interactive features, background of users and gratification obtained from user engagement in interactivity (process gratification). It assesses the probable impact of credibility as an intervening variable in gratification obtained from use of interactivity features. It asks the following research questions:

- Does interactivity motivate *Zambian* readers to turn to online newspapers?
- To what extent are readers utilising the various interactivity features of *Zambian* online newspapers?
- Which of the features are readers motivated to use, making the most use of and obtaining greater satisfaction from?
- Is use of the interactive features of the online newspapers a predictor of overall reader gratification from *Zambian* online newspapers?
- What socio-demographic factors influence use of interactivity features on online newspapers?

There is not much literature that addresses the foregoing research questions. This may be because the online newspaper industry is still in its infancy, dating back to the mid-1990s, and most of the studies pre-date the fast-changing field of digital media. Only a handful of the studies under review were undertaken after the advent of social media apps, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. These are developments that have had a germane influence on online newspapers through the convergence of technologies.

Most studies on the subject of interactivity were dedicated to analysing the extent of use of interactive features rather than assessing the relationship between interactivity as a gratification sought and obtained. Pioneering studies—those undertaken between 1997 and 2005—indicate that users did not make optimum use of the interactivity features provided by online newspapers (Mings, 1997). Later studies acknowledge that some readers were fully aware of the information they were seeking from online newspapers and which features to use to navigate through the sites of their favourite newspapers to satisfy their information needs (Chung & Yoo, 2008; Yoo, 2011; Mitchelstein, 2011). For such studies, it was feasible to establish a correlation between gratification sought and gratification obtained from use of the features. The approaches used in these studies have been adopted for this research.

Motivations For and Extent of Use of Interactive Features

Mings (1997) examined how readers were spending their time on online newspapers and attempted to correlate their motivations with the types of human/medium interactive features (adaptive, navigational and

functional). From descriptive statistics, she found that many participants spent most of their time online viewing textual rather than audio-visual or graphic material and navigating online newspaper sites as opposed to viewing content on the sites. They spent very little time following links provided by advertisers. Participants who reported obtaining surveillance (information-seeking) gratification from print newspapers spent proportionately more time on navigational features (especially those on the front pages). These surveillance-oriented participants also spent proportionately more time reading system messages and viewing sports-related subjects. Mings' study, however, did not go as far as analysing and characterising the uses of the other types of features categorised in the opening sections of this chapter. Nor did it characterise the use of the features on the basis of the demographics of readers. Moreover, it focused on online versions of print newspapers, which is understandable given that the study was conducted during the early years of online journalism.

Eleven years after Mings' study, Chung and Yoo (2008) went a step further to examine audience uses of the four types of interactivity, as defined under Category 2 of the classifications discussed earlier in this chapter. They also analysed the user motivations for visiting an online newspaper and the relationship between user motivations and use of the different types of interactive features. Data for their study were obtained through a web-based survey. Participants were recruited via online advertisements on an online newspaper in a medium-sized mid-western city in the United States of America. The survey consisted of a self-administered questionnaire. The final sample size was 542 for which the survey completion rate was 77%.

The study found that readers infrequently used all types of interactive features; medium interactive features were the most frequently used, followed by human and human-medium interactive features. It established that readers visited online newspapers primarily for information/surveillance, entertainment and socialisation, in that order. The results allowed the authors to conclude that "online newspapers function primarily as tools for information and entertainment rather than as places of socialization" (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 390). The results supported earlier findings (Mings, 1997; Caruso, 1997), who concluded that online newspapers were serving the same purposes as traditional newspapers. "What consumers do want from online newspapers is news, preferably of local happenings and fast-breaking events, updated throughout the day" (Caruso, 1997, as cited in Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 391).

The authors concluded that the readers were seeking to gratify the same needs from online newspapers as they were from traditional publications. "It appears that online newspaper audiences are not currently looking for novel opportunities when visiting online newspapers and are instead sticking to traditional media motivations" (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 393).

Another important finding from the study was the correlation between the social gratification sought and the type of interactive features used. Regression analysis was employed to identify relationships between user motivations and use of interactive features. The results showed that all the three main motivations selected by the readers—socialisation, entertainment and information seeking—significantly predicted the use of medium interactive features, such as search features, audio and video downloads and photo galleries. The need for entertainment was most strongly associated with the use of medium interactivity, and socialisation with the use of human and human/medium features (Chung & Yoo, 2008).

Their findings suggested that online newspaper audiences had a good understanding of what could be achieved through the use of certain interactive features. Clearly, the medium interactive features, which allow

users to exert control over the communication process to actively search for and select information (Deuze, 2001; Chung, 2008), were used to find information, pass the time and socialise with others. The study also noted that although online newspaper audiences were not taking full advantage of the features that facilitated personal expression and interpersonal communication, those who made use of them were regarded as “early adopters of a new function and concept of news” (Chung & Yoo 2008, p. 392). The authors concluded that audiences were not utilising the full potential of interactivity partly due to the lack of motivation for socialisation (Chung & Yoo, 2008). Their study found that males and the Internet adept were more likely to use interactive features. They suggested that producers needed to understand their audiences and their motivations for visiting their newspapers and to educate their readers about the features that would best facilitate the search for their needs. That, they opined, would accentuate the paybacks the readers gained from online newspapers and potentially boost (re)visitation. “The more interactivity people exercise on an online site, the more likely they are to have favourable attitudes toward the site and greater attention to visit the site on a later occasion” (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 393).

Their findings are relevant to the present study in that they inform the methodology and the research questions and some of the hypotheses. Chung and Yoo acknowledge that the use of self-administered web-based questionnaire was a shortcoming given the complexity of the subject. Furthermore, the study did not assess the frequency of use and satisfaction obtained from the interactivity features under each of the four sub-categories (human, medium, human/medium and medium/human).

In a separate paper, Chung (2008) analysed the following: categories of interactivity which are promoted through different types of interactive features; patterns of online newspaper readers’ uses of interactive features; and factors that predict the use of different types of interactive features. In line with other studies (Chung & Yoo, 2008; Yoo, 2011), the analysis found that interactive features were generally used infrequently, especially those that facilitate human-to-human communication and that allow audiences to express their views. Chung (2008) stated that “human interactive features are what make online news truly different from news delivered through traditional media channels, but it appears that they are generally used infrequently” (p. 674).

Certain features were used significantly more or less than others; human and human/medium features were used least often. This led the author to conclude: “It appears that the news audience does not actively engage in use of interactive features on news websites, especially the features that facilitate communication and the expression of ideas—features that require more effort to be utilised” (Chung, 2008, p. 673).

The analysis attempted to fill the gaps in earlier studies (Mings, 1997; Chung & Yoo, 2008) in terms of segmentation of the audience demographics and backgrounds and use of interactive features of online newspapers. Table 3 matches interactive features and reader demographics.

Chung found that politically engaged individuals and those who perceived online news to be credible were most likely to use all forms of interactive features and were therefore making the most of online news. “While most news audiences are not using interactive features extensively, those who are taking advantage of the human/medium interactive features are individuals who are movers and shakers of their communities” (Chung, 2008, p. 673). The study suggested that news organisations need not worry about applying all types of interactive features to engage their readers as the features serve distinct functions. Instead, they should focus on building credibility, identifying their online news audiences and then providing interactive features (Chung, 2008).

Table 3

Segmentation of Type of Features, Key Purpose and Audience Demographics

Interactive feature	Key purposes	Demographics of most frequent users
Medium	Search and download news stories, features, audio and video files etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled users, males and individuals who perceived online news to be credible.
Medium/human	Customise news headlines, topics, and weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politically engaged users (strongest) • Users with Internet skills
Human/medium	Sending information—posts and expressions of views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young users – “Young individuals are less shy in expressing their views online and in making use of the human/medium interactive features that facilitate social expression” (Chung, 2008:661). • Individuals who perceived online news to be credible • Politically engaged users (by far the strongest) because the human/medium interactive features allow for audiences to express their views; hence socially and politically active natural users. • Users involved with communities
Human	User-to-user, two-way, interpersonal engagement; “key distinction between traditional forms of news delivery and online news” (Chung, 2008, p. 661)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politically engaged users (strongest) because the human/medium interactive features allow for audiences to express their views; hence socially and politically active natural users. • Individuals who perceived online news to be credible • Males

Source: Author's field data.

Blogs and online newspapers have some interactive features in common and both thrive on interactivity. To that end, Mitchelstein (2011) examined political talk in online newspapers and blogs using a mixed-methods approach on a sample of respondents who participated in interactive spaces provided by blogs and online newspapers. While blogs were mostly linked with discussions and socialisation—wishing to discuss issues with others, meeting others online and having fun—posting comments in online newspapers was usually associated with motives associated with self-expression, such as making opinions public and blowing off steam. The motivations for bloggers in online newspapers were distributed as follows: 72% to express opinions; 21% to discuss ideas and political views; 16% to curb media bias; and 14% to blow off steam. Only two respondents said they posted their comments for fun (Mitchelstein, 2011). Of the participants in blogs on the other hand, 44% mentioned the need to express their opinion; 32% said that they blogged because they enjoyed debating, 17% said they took account of the feelings of the community as a motivation for blogging, and 6% said that they blogged for entertainment. Only two respondents mentioned catharsis (letting off steam) as a motivation to post comments in blogs.

About half the respondents who participated in both spaces cited different motivations for posting comments in online newspapers and blogs (Mitchelstein, 2011). He concluded that online discussion was shaped by participants' and moderators' motivations and practices rather than by the technological advances of the Internet. As for audience characterisation, he found that Argentinians who posted comments in online newspapers and blogs were better educated and more likely to be male. The findings added a new dimension to online engagement: expressing opinions and linking up with other people generally were major motivations among Argentinian readers for visiting both blogs and online newspapers. However, the study was too narrow and not helpful methodologically because it had failed to analyse and characterise the use of features and to link the motivations.

In the only two relevant African studies, Matthew, Ogedebe, and Adeniji (2013), in their study of motivations for reading online newspapers, found that 62% of the readers of online versions of a newspaper

read them because it allowed them to make comments. Similarly, Hassan, Latiff, and Atek (2015) found that many readers (mean = 3.62) were motivated to read online newspapers because of their interactive features. Weber (2014) explored the ways in which news factors affected participation and interactivity. He found that posting comments on the news was one of the most popular forms of user participation in online newspapers and concluded that there was great potential for public discourse associated with this form of user communication.

Interactivity and Gratification Obtained

A few studies have analysed the contribution of interactivity to user satisfaction (process gratification). Some found a positive relationship between use of interactive features and reader gratification (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007; Chung, 2009; Yoo, 2011); others found a negative or boomerang effect on advertising (Bucy, 2004a); and yet others found no relationship at all (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). Yoo (2011) undertook a detailed analytical examination of the cause-and-effect relationships between the motives, audience interactivity, gratification obtained, attitude toward the online newspaper and repeat visit intention. She devised a model that examined four major relationships: influences of gratification sought; influences of audience interactivity as an intervening variable; outcomes of gratification obtained; and relationships among the outcomes. The study was one of the few that attempted to establish the role of audience interactivity within a gratification-seeking process model for online newspapers, as illustrated in Figure 3.

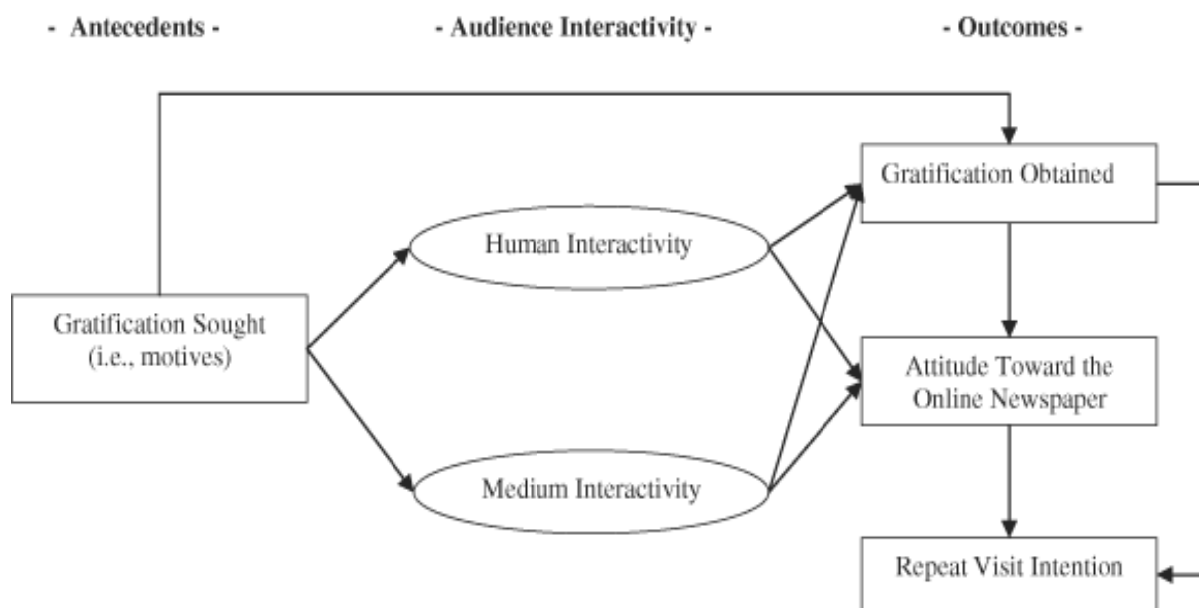


Figure 3. Hypothesised model of audience interactivity in online newspapers.

Yoo's study established four primary motives for visiting online newspapers, of which three had direct effects on audience interactivity: information-seeking (correlated with medium interactivity); entertainment (correlated with human and medium interactivity) and socialisation (correlated with human interactivity). "Pastime" did not correlate with any specific feature, implying that "pastimers" could use any of the interactive features to gratify their desires for being online.

Three out of the four GS [gratification sought] factors (socialization, entertainment, and information seeking) had significantly positive effects on audience interactivity. More specifically, socialization motive had a positive effect on

human interactivity ($\beta = 0.80, p < 0.01$), whereas information-seeking motive had a positive effect on medium interactivity ($\beta = 0.09, p < 0.01$). Entertainment motive had positive effects on both human ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$) and medium interactivity ($\beta = 0.75, p < 0.01$). (Yoo, 2011, p. 81)

The author concluded that the positive relationships between each gratification-seeking motive and corresponding gratification obtained suggested that survey respondents had a good understanding of what could be achieved from online newspapers. The findings supported the hypothesis that audience interactivity was a plausible intervening factor in the process of pursuing gratification in online newspapers. In essence, audience interactivity was both a significant effect for gratification-seeking motives and an important cause of gratification obtained. Yoo (2011) concluded that readers with a greater level of goal-directed motives engaged in the communication process by using various interactive features (i.e., human and medium interactivity). Consequently, greater use of interactivity features was a predictor of greater gratification levels, which in turn affected readers' attitudes toward the online newspaper and repeat visit intention. "The more goal-oriented purposes such as information seeking, entertainment, and socialization motives provide the driving force behind audience interactivity" (Yoo, 2011, p. 83).

Yoo noted that attitudes were a mediating factor in forming individuals' intention to visit the online newspaper in the future. This is a crucial finding in the context of the present study, one of whose objects is to examine the role of interactivity in reader gratification. The study contributed to the body of communication theories in four areas. First, it distinguished and unified interactivity with respect to the medium and other people. Second, it revived the uses and gratification approach, with respect to linking to interactive features of online newspapers. Third, it made a distinction between gratification sought and gratification obtained after media use. Finally, it connected the outcome of the comparison of this distinction to attitudes and repeat visit intention of online newspaper readers. More broadly, it connected motive gratification to media acceptance and continued use to audience interactivity.

Rafaeli and Ariel (2007) build on Rafael's 1988 study and concluded that there was a preponderance of field evidence which pointed to positive outcomes of interactivity. In the earlier study, though dated, Rafaeli (1988) concluded that the outcome of interactivity was satisfaction, motivation, fun, cognition and learning from the news medium. In a follow-up study, Chung (2009) concluded that there is a robust relationship between the use of interactive features and perceived satisfaction. Lowry, Romano, Jenkins, and Guthrie (2009) devised a computer-mediated communication (CMC) interactivity model to explain and predict how interactivity enhances communication quality which results in increased process satisfaction in CMC-supported workgroups. They found that perceived interactivity led to an increase in perceived community quality. Likewise, perceived communication quality was a significant positive predictor of process satisfaction, defined as "the degree to which group members are happy with the way (e.g. procedures, deliberations) they arrived at an outcome" (Lowry et al., 2009, p. 163).

Interactivity has also been tested in the field of marketing (Zhang & Gisela, 2000; Zviran et al., 2006, as cited in Chung, 2009), with particular interest in investigating how design characteristics affect customer evaluation of online service quality and risk, which ultimately lead to channel use or shunning (Chung, 2009). Literature in this field shows that web design affects customer evaluations and web quality affects use and repeat visitation, including recommending the site to others. Interactivity was also found to affect user attitudes and ultimately positive effects in advertising (Wu, 2005; Cho & Leckenby, 1999).

The present study adopted the uses and gratification theory in analysing motivations, use and gratification in regard to the interactive features of Zambian online newspapers. Analysis of causality between gratification sought and gratification obtained in Yoo's study had a profound influence on some of the relationships being investigated. However, whereas Yoo investigated interactivity as both an independent and intervening variable, this study assesses it only as an independent variable for gratification, with credibility as a probable intervening variable.

Literature in Summary

The studies referenced in this chapter suggest that the interactive features of online newspapers are less frequently used than the publishers probably anticipated. Ironically, the human interactive features—which are considered the hallmark of online media and the key difference with traditional news presentation—are among the least utilised. Human interactive features were premised on the need for socialisation and making the surfing of online newspapers a pleasurable experience, but the opportunities to use these features to enhance reader gratification and encourage repeat visitation are not fully exploited. The studies also point to a positive relationship between socialisation and repeat visitation—the outcome of gratification that readers obtain from online newspapers (Yoo, 2008). It is therefore plausible to conclude that less frequent use of human interactive features has an ultimate effect on the popularity and regularity of use of online newspapers.

Yoo (2011), Chung and Yoo (2008), and Chung (2008) reported a correlation between social motivations for visiting online newspapers and the type of interactive features the readers use. The authors are unanimous in their conclusion that most readers know exactly what they want and how to get what they want. Moreover, more engaged and goal-oriented readers tend to be more active and feature-specific surfers of the online newspapers. The findings by Yoo (2011) that use of interactive features is both a potential facilitator and intervening variable between gratification sought and gratification obtained add a new dimension to the study of attitude formations about online newspapers and consequently its long-term acceptability among readers, manifested through repeat visitations. Another noteworthy finding is that perceived credibility of newspapers has an effect on the use of interactive features, which is one of the relationships that the present study investigates.

The studies present the use of interactivity features of online newspapers as an empowering undertaking as well as a platform for participatory and citizen journalism. Interactivity is therefore seen as catalyst for attainment of the ideals of a network society as espoused by Manuel Castells (1991), one of the theories addressed in the present study. As for the characteristics of users of the four types of interactive features, the studies overwhelmingly suggest that males, the young and users who are Internet adept, politically active and who perceive online newspapers as credible are generally the main users of most of the features. Differences abound, though, in terms the features used among these audience groups. The findings of the previous studies referenced in this report thus lead to the following predictions:

Hypothesis 1: Readers of the Zambian online newspapers do not use the interactive features frequently.

Hypothesis 2: Medium interactivity features are the most frequently used and human interactive features the least.

Hypothesis 3: Negatively perceived credibility of online newspapers affects both the use of and gratification from Zambian online newspapers.

Gaps in Previous Studies

The referenced studies have the following limitations:

- Geographically, they were all conducted in environments different from Zambia's; their relevance is therefore negligible;
- They are all fairly dated—the latest being more than four years old—for a technology evolving as fast as the Internet;
- None involved samples from the general population; the sample sizes are too small and there is no evidence that they were selected scientifically;
- None purposefully set out to investigate the effect of credibility of online newspapers on gratification obtained, though Yoo's (2011) study examined it in regression analyses of audience characteristics;
- With the exception of Yoo's (2011) study, none examined the contribution of the interactive features to overall reader gratification from online newspapers;
- None of the studies undertook a further diagnostic analysis of the use of the functions of each of the four types of interactive features. This means that not much, if anything, is known to date about the most common uses of each of the categories

The present study confronts these shortcomings by addressing the research questions raised earlier in the chapter with the aim of contributing new knowledge of the subject.

Results

The following section presents the findings associated with the research questions. It is organised as follows:

1. Extent of use of interactivity features;
2. Interactivity, multi-mediality and hyper-textuality: comparison of reader use;
3. Human versus media interactivity: comparison of motivations (reasons) for use, frequency of use and satisfaction from use;
4. Comparison of frequency of use among the specific interactivity functions;
5. Interactivity and reader gratification.

Extent of Use of Interactivity Features

One section of the questionnaire asked respondents to state all the reasons why they turned to Zambian online newspapers. The lure of interactivity features emerged as one of the 10 motivations on the list. However, only 38% of the 335 readers cited the attraction of interactivity features. Most said they turned to online newspapers for "breaking and up-to-date news", 62% for adverts, 55% for "more independent news", 46% for "detailed news", 38% "due to Internet access", and another 38% due to the interactive features offered by the online newspapers. Thirty-five percent cited "credibility of the news", 34% "uncensored news", 30% "because they are cheaper than print", and 11% "posting personalised comments".

Sixty-six percent of respondents also agreed/strongly agreed with the statement, "Overall, the interactive features of Zambian standalone online newspapers make them more attractive to me than print newspapers". As for which readers were most attracted by the interactive features of online newspapers, the logistic regression model (not attached) shows that a reader living in a low-density suburb is 10.96 times more likely to have been

attracted by the interactivity features than one in a high-density area.¹ On the other hand, a reader with a tertiary education qualification is 0.92 times less likely to be attracted by interactivity features compared to a secondary school level reader. Likewise, a registered voter is 0.05 times less likely to be attracted by interactivity features than a non-registered voter.

Table 4

Factor Affecting Preference of Zambian Stand-Alone Online Newspapers Due to Interactivity Features, Multiple Logistic Regression

	Category	OR	aOR	SE	95%	CI
Sex: [Male]	Female	0.36	0.34	0.32	0.06	2.10
Age category: [18-25 years old]	26-35 years old	1.64	10.40	12.17	1.05	103.21
	36-45 years old	1	1	-	-	-
Education: [Secondary]	Primary	1	1	-	-	-
	Certificate/Diploma	1.26	0.92***	0.84	0.15	5.46
	University degree	0.38	1.71	2.45	0.10	28.54
Income [K50,000]	K50-100, 000	0.25	0.11	0.15	0.01	1.78
	K101-250, 000	1	1	-	-	-
	> K250, 000	4.55	19.11	35.90	0.48	758.98
Location [Urban]	Rural	1	1	-	-	-
Residence [High density]	Low density	3.75***	10.96***	12.30	1.21	98.93
	Rural	1	1	-	-	-
Registered voter: [No]	Yes	0.18***	0.05***	0.08	0.01	1.14
Voted in 2016: [No]	Yes	0.55	2.82	4.40	1.13	59.82
Internet use per day: [Once]	Twice	1	1	-	-	-
	Thrice	1.42	2.79	3.42	0.25	30.85
	Four times and more	1.24	0.99	0.94	0.15	6.42
Internet use per week: [High]	Low	1	1	-	-	-
	Moderate	1.50	7.23	9.31	0.58	90.10
Number of years using internet: [2-5 years]	< 2 years	1.45	0.56	0.78	0.04	8.83
	6-10 years	3.53	0.97	1.39	0.06	16.29
	> 10 years	4.76	0.73	1.26	0.02	21.62
Internet skills: [Poor]	Good	1	1	-	-	-
	Moderate	0.62	0.11	0.15	0.01	1.48
	Very poor	1	0.67	0.72	0.08	5.55
Years reading favorite newspaper	-	1.25	1.34	0.41	0.74	2.45
Days reading online newspaper per week	-	0.94	0.73	0.17	0.47	1.15

Source: Author's field data. Notes. *** $p < 0.05$. Reference category in bracket.

Interactivity, Multi-mediality and Hyper-textuality: Reader Use Compared

A computation of the mean scores of the first dimension of classifications of the functional features was undertaken to establish and compare the extent of use. As shown in Table 4, the interactivity group of features were the main motivation and the most frequently used features (an average of 75 or 22% of users), followed by the multi-mediality features. Hyper-textuality features were the least used (48 or 14% of users). The results confirm a very low level of use of the interactivity features of online newspapers and support Hypothesis 1: Readers of Zambian online newspapers do not frequently use interactive features.

¹ In Zambia, low-density areas are predominantly occupied by higher-income earners; high-density areas are typically home to low-income earners and include shanty compounds.

Table 5

Comparison of Use

Feature type	Average users	Average score
Interactivity	75	22%
Multi-mediality	67	20%
Hyper-textuality	48	14%

Source: Author's field data.

Human versus medium interactivity: comparison of motivations (reasons) for use, frequency of use and satisfaction from use. This section compares results relating to the motivations or reasons for use of each the four sub-categories of interactivity features, the extent or frequency of use and the level of satisfaction or gratification obtained from the use of the four types of interactivity features falling under human and medium interactivity typologies (as explained earlier in the chapter). Readers were asked to rank each of the three measures on a score of one to five, from which mean scores were computed as the basis of comparisons.

As shown in Table 5, human or human-to-human interactivity features were the greatest drawcard for online newspaper readers with a mean score of 2.64 (SD = 1.86). These features give readers the opportunity to find out the views of other readers, share their opinions, engage them in debate and exchange views with publishers. The second most frequently used were medium/human interactivity features with a mean score of 2.34 (SD = 1.78). These features allow readers to personalise an online newspaper site by navigating to its Facebook and Twitter pages or other websites and accessing adverts and documents, among other possibilities. The medium interactivity features, which allow readers to search for news, information, features, audio and video files, YouTube, or photos, for instance, ranked third with a mean score of 2.0 (SD = 1.71). The human/medium features, which provide for posting personalised information, news stories or views, letters to the editors, news tips, photos etc., scored the least with a mean score of 0.88 (SD = 1.59). The results suggest that interactivity in its general sense is not a major reason or motivation for readers to visit online newspapers.

The findings in regard to frequency of use revealed a similar pattern as those for motivation for use. The human interactivity features were the most frequently used among the respondents with a mean score of 3.65 (SD = 1.07). The medium/human interactive features were next with a mean score of 3.41 (SD = 1.36). The medium features emerged as the third most frequently used with a mean score of 3.11 (SD = 1.07) and the human/medium features were ranked fourth with a mean score of 2.86 (SD = 1.08). Again, the results confirm barely average frequency of use, although higher than the motivations for use (or reason for which readers turned to the Zambian online newspapers in the first place).

As for the level of satisfaction or gratification obtained from use of each of the four sub-groups of features, most respondents were satisfied with the human/medium interactivity features and human interactivity features, having a mean score of 3.69 (SD = 0.92 and SD = 1.08, respectively). The next most satisfying or gratifying groups of features were medium interactivity with a mean score of 3.53 (SD = 1.42) and medium/human features with a mean score of 3.42 (SD = 1.48). The leads to rejection of Hypothesis 2: Medium interactivity features are the most frequently used; human interactive features the least used.

Use of Specific Interactivity Features

This section presents the results of the extent of use of the functional interactivity features of online

newspapers. The features fall under the four sub-categories, which are located in the three classifications as defined by Deuze (2001): interactivity; multi-mediality; and hyper-textuality.

Table 6

Reason for Use, Frequency of Use and Level of Satisfaction Among the Broad Interactive Features

Sub-category	Reason (mean)	SD	N	Frequency (mean)	SD	N	Satisfaction (mean)	SD	N
Human/medium	0.88	1.593	236	2.86	1.084	37	3.69	0.925	45
Human	2.64	1.86	236	3.65	1.086	37	3.69	1.083	45
Medium	2	1.712	236	3.11	1.075	37	3.53	1.424	45
Medium/human	2.34	1.778	236	3.41	1.363	37	3.42	1.485	45

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

Use of interactivity features. This group consists of human/medium interactivity and human interactivity features. Table 6 shows that “posting stories” was the human/medium feature most used (by 64 or 19% of the 335 readers in the sample), followed by “submitting photos” (by 37 or 18% of the readers), “submitting news tips” (9%), “sending letters to the editor” (8%), and “sending emails to the editor” (7%). They were followed by “email link to the writer” of the article, “link to the publishers”, and “other sending information features” (all at 3%). The human/medium sub-category of features was used by an average of only 26 people (8%) of the 335 readers in the sample.

Table 7

Number of Users and Percentage of Use of Human/Medium Interactivity Features of Online Newspapers

Human/medium interactive feature—sending information	N	%
Posting stories	64	19
Submitting photos	37	11
Submitting news tips	29	9
Sending letter to editor	26	8
Sending email to editor	22	7
Emailing link to writer	11	3
Link to publishers	9	3
Other information—sending feature	10	3
Average score	26	8

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

As for the motivations for use of the features under the human interactivity sub-category, the second under the interactivity classification, the results in Table 8 show that “knowing what others think about an issue” was cited by most readers (278 or 83%), followed by “chat on Facebook of website” at 75% (252 readers), “post own comments on stories” at 54% (184 readers), “post my views on a subject” (47% or 158 of the readers) and “chat with other users” at 36% (120 readers). “Share my political views” and “engage others in a debate” were ranked sixth and seventh respectively (at 27% and 26%), while “chat on Twitter” page of the newspaper and “other exchange features” were cited least at 8% and 3% respectively. The human or human-to-human interactivity features came out as the main motivation for use of the functional features offered by Zambian online newspapers among an average of 125 (37%) of the 335 readers.

Table 8

Number of Users and Percentage of Use of the Human Interactivity Features of Online Newspapers

Human interactive feature/exchange	N	%
Knowing what others think about an issue	278	83
Chatting on Facebook	252	75
Posting own comments on stories	182	54
Posting own views on a subject	158	47
Chatting with other users	120	36
Engaging other readers in debate	88	26
Sharing political views	90	27
Question-and-answer links	50	15
Chatting on Twitter	26	8
Other exchange features	10	3
Average score	125	37

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

Use of multi-mediality interactivity features As explained in earlier sections, this category has only one group of features, medium interactivity. Seeking information is the main orientation of the features under this category. As shown in Table 8, “accessing video files” was cited for using these features by 45% (or 152 readers), followed by “information adverts” (42%), YouTube (23%) and “audio recorded files” (19%) and “live television streaming” (16%). “Radio streaming” and “other uses” were cited by 8% and 4% of readers respectively. Overall the medium interactivity group of features scored an average of 20% (67 readers).

Table 9

Number of Users and Percentage of Use for Medium Interactive Features—Information Seeking Orientation

Feature	N	%
Video files	152	45
Informational adverts	81	24
YouTube	76	23
Audio files	64	19
Live television streaming	52	16
Other information-seeking files	28	8
Radio streaming	15	4
Average score	67	20

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

Use of hyper-textuality functional interactivity features Hyper-textuality consists of one group of features, medium/human interactivity, which is further divided into two clusters characterised by the functions they serve: Category 1, personalisation orientation and Category 2, information collection by publishers. For the first, Table 9 shows that “ability to navigate to Facebook page of online newspaper” was cited the most (71% or 239 readers), followed by “ability to access other documents” (37%), “ability to navigate to other websites via the websites of the online newspaper” (29% or 98 of readers), “ability to avail statistics” (8%), and “greetings by site” (5%). The personalisation orientation functions were used by an average of only 68 (20%) of readers.

Table 10

Number of Users and Percentage of Use for Medium/Human Interactive Features—Personalisation Orientation

Feature	N	%
Ability to navigate Facebook page of newspaper	239	71
Ability to access other documents	123	37
Ability to navigate other websites	98	29
Community information	92	27
Search feature	65	19
Ability to access adverts	60	18
Weather information	50	15
Calendar events information	48	14
Customised topics	37	11
Emailing updates	37	11
Ability to navigate Twitter	33	10
Other personalisation orientation	33	10
Ability to avail statistics	27	8
Greetings by site	16	5
Average score	68	20

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335

As shown in Table 11, dealing with the information collection by publishers functions, “advertising information” and “participate in opinion polls” were cited as the most frequently used, both at 17% (58 readers). In joint second place were “contacting publishers” and “applying for a job from publishers” at 7% (or 23 readers). The least used features were “licensing information” and “fill in subscription form” at 4% and 3% respectively. The medium/human interactive features were cited by an average of 28 respondents (8%) as the reason for use.

Table 11

Number of Users and Percentage of Use for Medium/Human Interactive Features—Information Collection by Publishers

Feature	N	%
Advertising information	58	17
Participating in opinion polls	58	17
Contacting the publishers	23	7
Applying for job from publishers	23	7
Logging in information	16	5
Licensing information	10	4
Filling subscription form	9	3
Average score	28	8

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

Comparison of use of individual interactivity features. Comparing the individual features across all three classifications, four sub-categories and five clusters of features (see Table 12), the individual scores for frequency of use of the features were grouped as “high” (scores of 70-100%), “medium” (50-69%) and “low”

use (0-49%). Only three functional features fell in the “high” use category. They were “knowing what others think about an issue”, “chat on Facebook page of newspaper”, and “ability to navigate Facebook page of newspaper”. “Posting own comments on stories” fell under “medium” category and the rest of the features (42 in total) under “low” use. It was noteworthy that two of the top four features in the ‘low’ category facilitated “exchange” and were among the human-to-human category of features.

Table 12

Top 10 Most Used Specific Interactivity Features

Specific functional feature	N	%
High (70-100%)		
Knowing what others think about an issue	278	83
Chat on Facebook page of newspaper	252	75
Ability to navigate Facebook page of newspaper	239	71
Average score—medium (50-69%)	256	76
Posting own comments on stories	182	54
Average score—low (0-49%)	182	54
Posting own views on a subject	158	47
Accessing video files	152	45
Ability to access other documents	123	37
Chatting with other users	120	36
Ability to navigate other websites	98	29
Community information	92	27

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

As shown in Table 13, “radio streaming” (4%), “linking with publishers” (3%), “fill in subscription form” (3%) and “email link to the writer” (3%) were the least used interactivity features. The full list appears in Appendix.

Table 13

Ten Least Used Individual Specific Features

Specific functional feature	N	%
Chatting on Twitter	26	8
Sending email to editor	22	7
Contacting the publishers	23	7
Applying for job from publishers	23	7
Licensing information	10	4
Greetings by site	16	5
Radio streaming	15	4
Emailing link to writer	11	3
Filling subscription form	9	3
Link to publishers	9	3
Average score	68	24

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.

Interactivity and Overall Reader Gratification

The study sought to measure and approximated the readers' gratification from the use of online newspapers.

They were asked to state their agreement with five statements measured on a Likert scale: agreed/strongly agreed, neutral and disagreed/strongly disagreed. The results, summarised in Table 14, show that 56% of the readers are satisfied with the interactivity features of online newspapers; 90% said that interactivity features were the reason to continue reading them; and 87% indicated that the features were the main reason for re-visiting the online newspapers. Another 87% indicated that the interactivity features were what they liked in the online newspapers that they read and 76% said that the credibility of the online newspapers did not affect the satisfaction they obtained from the interactivity features. Given this expressed limited impact of credibility on gratification from interactive features, the results reject Hypothesis 3: Negative perceived credibility of online newspapers affects both the use of and gratification from Zambian online newspapers.

Table 14

Interactivity and Overall Reader Gratification

Statement	Agreed/Strongly agreed (%)	Disagreed/Strongly disagreed (%)	Not sure (%)
Overall, I am satisfied with the interactive features provided by Zambian stand-alone newspapers	56	34	10
Overall, the interactive features of the Zambian stand-alone online newspaper are the reasons for me to continue reading them	90	6	4
The interactive features of Zambian stand-alone online newspapers make me want to revisit them	87	4	8
The interactive features of Zambian stand-alone online newspapers have made me like them	87	4	8
Overall, the credibility (trust, truthfulness, believability, objectivity etc.) of Zambian stand-alone online newspapers does not affect the satisfaction I get from their interactive features	76	11	12

Source: Author's field data.

Demographic Factors Affecting Satisfaction From Features

The multiple logistic regression analysis (see Table 15) shows that length in years of reading is a positive predictor of whether a reader finds interactive features gratifying and is the reason for continued use of stand-alone online newspapers. Controlling for all factors, as the number of years reading online newspapers go up by 1.23 years, the desire to continue reading them due to satisfaction from the interactivity features increases by 1.54 times. Another multiple logistic regression model (not attached) shows that political activism, frequency of Internet use, Internet skills and years of reading online newspapers all had a bearing on the perception that credibility of online newspapers does not determine satisfaction from interactive features. In fact, a reader who voted in the 2016 election is 0.36 times less likely to find the interactivity features of online newspapers gratifying due to perceived credibility than a reader who did not vote. On the other hand, a moderate weekly Internet user is 2.69 more times likely to find features of online newspapers gratifying irrespective of perceived credibility than one who did not vote; a reader with good Internet skills is 10.42 times likely to find features of online newspapers gratifying irrespective of perceived credibility than one who rates his or her skills as poor; and as the number of years reading online newspapers go up by 1.36 years, the satisfaction from the interactivity features irrespective of perceived credibility also go up by 1.65 times.

Table 15

Interactive Features as Reason for Continued Use of Zambian Stand-Alone Online Newspapers, a Multiple Logistic Regression Model

	Category	OR	aOR	SE	95%	CI
Sex [male]	Female	1.07	0.94	0.55	0.30	2.94
Age category [18-25 years old]	26-35 years old	0.50	1.12	1.48	0.08	14.97
	36-45 years old	1	1	-	-	-
	Primary	1	1	-	-	-
Education [secondary]	Certificate/diploma	0.53	0.17	0.17	0.02	1.23
	University degree	0.19	0.16	0.20	0.01	1.84
Income [K50,000]	K50-100, 000	1.01	3.97	3.13	0.84	18.63
	K101-250, 000	1	1	-	-	-
Location [urban]	> K250, 000	1	1	-	-	-
Residence [high-density]	Rural	1.71	5.35	8.06	0.28	102.16
	Low-density	1.62	0.93	0.78	0.18	4.81
	Rural	1.47	0.37	0.62	0.01	10.23
Registered voter [No]	Yes	0.40***	0.92	0.71	0.20	4.20
Voted in 2016 [No]	Yes	0.34***	0.50	0.38	0.11	2.21
	Twice	2.28	2.45	2.01	0.49	12.19
Internet use per day [once]	Three times	1.24	1.17	1.02	0.21	6.48
	Four times and more	0.40	0.39	0.38	0.06	2.54
	Low	1	1	-	-	-
Internet use per week [high]	Moderate	0.53	0.40	0.38	0.06	2.56
	< 2 years	1.76	2.09	1.95	0.33	13.06
	6-10 years	1.23	0.67	0.87	0.05	8.60
Number of years using Internet [2-5 years]	> 10 years	3.97	10.94	15.37	0.69	171.84
	Good	5.04	8.01	11.52	0.47	132.11
	Moderate	1.92	1.94	1.43	0.46	8.25
Internet skills [Poor]	Very poor	1.42	1.45	1.18	0.29	7.11
	-	1.23	1.54***	0.35	0.99	2.40
Years reading favourite newspaper	-	1.23	1.54***	0.35	0.99	2.40
Days reading online newspaper per week	-	0.85	0.80	1.13	0.57	1.11

Source: Author's field data.

Notes. *** $p < 0.05$. Reference category in bracket.

Discussion

The first research question asks to what extent use of interactivity features motivates Zambian readers to turn to online newspapers. Interactivity (in the general sense) is cited as one of the motivations. However, only four in 10 readers said they were driven by the features of online newspapers to visit them. On their first visit, readers said, they were driven more by the search for latest news and information. A positive correlation was found for interactivity features between residing in a low-density residential area and attraction to online newspapers, implying that the well-do-to Zambians are more likely than residents of high-density areas to be drawn to online newspapers for their interactivity features. This could be explained mainly in terms of their ability to afford Internet data bundles that would enable them to stay longer on the Net and to “navigate” to the many “pages” and interactive features offered by the online news sites (for instance, to their Facebook,

Instagram and Twitter pages). Readers in high density areas are also likely to be more educated and, consequently, more active on the Net in general as reported in other sections of the thesis.

The second research question asked respondents to state their motivations for use and frequency of use of the three dimensions of interactivity features. The results reveal low use among Zambian readers measured by the numbers of users of each of the categories of features. Interactivity features, which give “options for the public to respond, interact or even customise certain stories” (Deuze, 2001, p. 3), emerged as the most frequently used among the three main (first dimension) categories of the functional features. Following them were hyper-textuality features, which provide for ways to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so on through hyperlinks (Deuze, 2001). Multi-mediality features, which provide for use of media formats that best tell a certain story (Deuze, 2001), were the least utilised. The result gives an early indication that Zambian online newspapers readers are more desirous of using features that allow them to socialise with other readers in one way or another.

Motivation and Frequency of Use: Human Versus Medium Interactivity

In terms of motivations for and use of sub-categories of features (human versus medium interactivity), the results are conclusive that the majority of Zambian readers seek and actually more frequently use the features that allow them to interact with other readers (human or human-to-human interactive features). In her typology, Chung (2009) describes these as “presentation of news with interpersonal communication opportunities” (p. 73). Next, as both reason for use and frequency of use, are medium/human interactivity features. These features allow for personalised searches, such as navigating to the Facebook or Twitter pages of an online newspaper, other websites, for adverts, to access documents posted by their online newspapers, etc. The relatively high use of this sub-category of features implies that Zambian readers were somewhat actively involved in the search for informational material on the net. Chung (2009) described this function as “presentation of news with features that allow audiences to experience news stories through increased choice options, such as different modalities” (p. 74).

Though no correlation analyses were undertaken, the results confirm a relationship between choice of features and the motivation for visiting an online newspaper, use of human-to-human features and the desire for socialisation, as reported in Chapter 6. The high-level use of human interactivity is consistent with the para-social motivation (the need to connect with other readers), which was ranked second by the respondents as the reason for visiting online newspapers (see also Chapter 6). The choice of medium/human interactivity features supports such findings (see also Chapter 6) as Facebook was rated the most regularly visited news medium, the most popular source of breaking news and the route through which the majority of the readers accessed their favourite online newspaper.

The human/medium features were the least favoured in terms of both what readers sought and frequency of use. These features allow for posting personalised material, such as news stories or views, letters to the editors, news tips and photos. This result is consistent with the conclusion that readers were not making frequent use of “features that require more effort to be utilised” (Chung, 2008, p. 673), such as posting own stories, searching for documents or connecting to other websites. However, the present study challenges the findings of earlier research on the high use of human interactivity features. Some earlier studies concluded that these features were among the least used of the set of features of online newspapers. For instance, as reported earlier, Chung (2008) concluded that the human interactive features, despite being what make online

news truly different from news delivered through traditional media channels, appeared to be generally used infrequently.

The high or frequent use of human interactivity features is an affirmation that online newspapers have become appreciable platforms or ‘public spheres’ for interpersonal communication in the online community in Zambia. It also epitomises the evolving role of online newspapers as facilitators of the network society as envisioned by Van Dijk (1991) and Manuel Castells (2009). The two “founding fathers” of the theory envisaged that in a network society new media, including online newspapers and other digital media, would contribute to enhancing interactivity and building connections among individuals and nodes in the network.

Use of Specific Individual Features

The study found that many of the 42 interactivity features were infrequently used. “Knowing what others think about an issue”, “chatting on Facebook page of newspaper”, “ability to navigate Facebook page of newspaper”, and “posting own comments on stories” attracted the greatest numbers of users. These four features are in the human-to-human and the medium/human sub-categories, once again confirming their popularity. The combination of these features suggests that the majority of Zambian readers are primarily involved in two main activities in browsing the sites of the online newspapers: deliberation online (as found Stromer-Galley, 2000, as cited in Chung, 2009); and simply connecting and networking with the Internet community. These motivations reflect the need to connect and network with other people in the Internet community, have their voices heard and stay updated with global goings-on. All these activities, if maximised by publishers, have the potential to turn Zambian online newspapers into truly audience-based and citizen-driven platforms.

The high use of features for posting comments is consistent with the findings of other African researchers in Nigeria (Matthew et al., 2013), who found that the majority of readers of online newspapers turned to this medium for this purpose. Weber (2014) found that posting comments was one of the most popular forms of user participation and discourse associated with this form of user communication. The fact that the readers were also active on the social media platforms of the online newspapers, especially Facebook (reported in Chapter 6), confirms that online newspapers serve a socialisation function among Zambian readers.

Posting comments in blogs is also associated with “meeting other people”, “having fun”, “expressing opinions”, and “the feeling of being part of the community” (Mitchelstein, 2011). However, the idea that readers in Zambia will assume the role of citizen journalists—in line with the comment below—is far-fetched because most of their posts are comments on published stories rather than news reports of activities in their neighbourhoods.

These features allow users to act as citizen journalists. In addition, these features invite users to work together with journalists to make journalism more meaningful and in the process allow news consumers to have more positive and satisfactory news consumption experiences. (Chung 2009, p. 74)

The present study finds that “linking to publishers”, “filling subscription form” and “emailing link to writer of a story”, in that order, were the least used features. This suggests that online newspaper readers in Zambia are less interested in direct communication with the inner workings of online newspapers than in the platforms they provide. This contradicts the assertion that this news medium is a manifestation of cyclic and dialogical communication between readers and publishers. In fact, it confirms that readers are more interested in horizontal communication with fellow readers rather than vertical communication with the editors and

publishers. The findings also contradict the assertion that online news community audiences do not consider online newspapers as platforms for interpersonal communication (Chung, 2009). On the contrary, Zambian online newspapers audiences seem to be warming up to the idea that these platforms can in fact be public spheres for socialisation, information and rhetoric. The question, though, is whether these platforms created by online newspaper chat forums meet the description of ‘public spheres’ in line with the definition of communication scholar Hauser (2002). He defines public spheres as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them” and as “a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk ... a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed” (Hauser, 2002). Nor has the study been able to explore whether Zambian online newspapers as popular medium have—in the words of Jensen (2002)—“signally failed to convert a people into a public fully involved in the process” (p. 44).

What is evident is that the public forums created and debates conducted in online newspapers in Zambia are not moderated and are not aimed at consensus building. They therefore fail to meet the test of an effective public sphere as defined by Habermas (Papacharissi, 2002), which he says require specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. To some extent, Zambian online newspapers fulfil the ethos of new media in that their readers are not confined to communication channels and protocols determined by the authorities. Rather they are expected to be an alternative to state-controlled traditional media (Moyo, 2007) and therefore able to take control of the processes in ways that limit potential for censorship and internal controls.

Interactivity and Reader Satisfaction From Online Newspapers

The use of interactivity in websites was expected to bring about a positive response from users, being designed to overcome the one-way communication paradigm associated with traditional news media. The adoption of interactivity was predicated on the need for news audiences to become more involved with fellow users and publishers and ultimately to find online news consumption a gratifying experience. The fourth research question for the present study thus asks about the contribution of interactivity features to reader gratification from online newspapers in Zambia.

The findings indicate that the interactivity features contribute only moderately contribute to perceived reader gratification. However, an overwhelming majority of readers indicated that they continued to read online newspapers and liked them specifically for these features. Repeat visitation is one of the major indicators of user gratification from a news medium (Chung & Yoo, 2008; Yoo, 2011). The fact that majority of readers continue to read online newspapers due to the interactivity features seems to suggest that they play a relatively significant part to overall gratification from online newspapers among Zambian readers. This assertion is in line with previous studies that established a causal relationship between interactivity and reader gratification (Rafaeli, 1988; Teo, Oh, Liu, & Wei, 2003; Chung, 2009; Yoo, 2011). Rafaeli (1988) concluded that the outcome of interactivity was satisfaction, motivation, fun, cognition and learning.

An aim of the study was to identify the demographic factors that influence whether or not a reader would be overtly satisfied with an online newspaper because of its interactivity features. Regression analysis shows that three factors play a significant part: length (number of years) of reading online newspapers, frequency of use of the Internet and good Internet skills. These factors are inter-related in that they are all associated with proficiency in use of the Internet and with the interactivity features offered by Zambian online news sites. On

the basis of the results, it is plausible to suggest a reciprocal relationship between use of interactivity and reader gratification. The longer users are exposed to a news site and the Internet generally, the more proficient they become in using the functional interactivity features. The more they use the features, the more they appreciate them and the site as whole and continue to visit it. This understanding is in line with the interactivity-gratification model developed by Yoo (2011) as discussed in the literature review section.

The results also indicate that although most readers were not initially lured to online newspapers by their interactivity features, it does appear that their interest in interactivity grew after experiencing them. Subsequently, interactivity turned out to be a factor leading to gratification, expressed through repeat visitation. The scores of readers' satisfaction from the four sub-categories of interactivity features ranged from moderate to low. The human interactive features, which allow for interpersonal interaction among readers, emerged as the most gratifying of all the four groups of features. Interestingly, the human/medium group of features, which was the least motivating to readers and less frequently used, was in joint top position as the most gratifying for the readers who experienced it. This would confirm the assertion that in some cases what users of news media look for is not what they find or what gives them satisfaction—gratification obtained is not always consistent with gratification sought, and vice versa. Earlier studies presented conflicting findings on reader gratification from among the four sub-groups of features (i.e., human versus medium interactivity). Some studies concluded that use of human interactivity features elicited higher satisfaction from online newspapers (Chyi & Lasorsa, 2002; Teo et al., 2003). Others (for instance, Chung, 2009) concluded that the medium/human interactive features were both a motivation for going online and the main factor contributing to reported satisfaction, despite the potential of human interactivity features to yield greater satisfaction and consequently appreciation of the medium. Chung (2008) stated that “human interactive features are what make online news truly different from news delivered through traditional media channels, but it appears that they are generally used infrequently” (p. 674).

The high level of frequent use of the human interactivity features makes it plausible therefore to assert potential reader appreciation and use of online newspapers in Zambia. This in itself is a *sine qua non* of the continuing growth of the online newspaper industry media in the country.

Conclusion

There is infrequent and low use of interactive features by Zambian online newspaper readers, judging from both the number of users for each type of feature and the expressed frequency of their use. Nor is interactivity one of the major reasons for readers to visit online newspapers for the first time. However, the interest in and use of the features develops as readers are exposed to them in their search for news and information. Most readers were found to use features falling under the interactivity category rather than multi-mediality and hyper-textuality features. Among the four sub-groups of features, the human-to-human interactivity features were the most sought after and most frequently used, followed by the medium/human interactive features. The choice of medium/human interactivity features correlates with the finding of the study that Facebook is the most regularly visited news medium, the most popular source of breaking news and the route through which most respondents in the study accessed their favourite online newspaper.

In visiting online newspapers and choosing their navigational features, Zambian readers were specifically seeking and finding satisfaction in the following: keeping up to date with prevailing public opinion on major national issues raised through these new media; inter-personal communication; and socialisation with other

readers. The readers were least interested in connecting with the publishers of the newspaper, its editors and writers of stories, which negates the prospect of cyclic communication between the readers and the sources of stories.

A combination of these motivations, uses and gratification obtained from online newspapers leads to the conclusion that Zambian readers view these platforms as a public sphere for engaging with, learning from and sharing thoughts with the cyber community. However, these platforms still fall short of the standard for genuine public spheres of consensus building and political socialisation. The major reason for this shortcoming is lack of moderation of the conversations and debates. On the basis of previous research, it can be concluded that the high use of and gratification from human-to-human features results in repeat visitation among the readers who use these features. This is the hallmark of sustainability of the media. If the use of these features can be maximised, then online newspapers have an assured place in Zambia.

In terms of gratification obtained, the results are conclusive that most Zambian online news readers perceive the interactivity features of these news media as catalysts of gratification from reading them. The human-to-human and human/medium features lead to greatest reader satisfaction. This implies that readers derive greatest satisfaction from interacting with other readers and posting personalised information or material, such as news stories or views. This result is consistent with the para-social motivation, chosen by a majority of readers as shown elsewhere in the study (Chapter 6), as the main reason for visiting online newspapers. The results are also conclusive that readers who have been reading online newspapers for many years, those who regularly surf the Internet and those with good Internet skills find the experience of using interactivity features of online newspapers, and subsequently the online news platforms themselves, most gratifying.

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Appendix

Table A1

Comparison of Use of Individual Specific Interactivity Features

Specific functional feature	N	%
High (70-100%)		
Knowing what others think about an issue	278	83
Chatting on Facebook page of newspaper	252	75
Ability to navigate Facebook page of newspaper	239	71
Average score—medium (50-69%)	256	76
Posting own comments on stories	182	54
Average score—low (0-49%)	182	54
Posting own views on a subject	158	47
Video files	152	45
Ability to access other documents	123	37
Chatting with other users	120	36
Ability to navigate other websites	98	29
Community information	92	27
Sharing political views	90	27
Engaging other readers in debate	88	26
Informational adverts	81	24
YouTube	76	23
Posting stories	64	19
Search feature	65	19
Audio recorded files	64	19
Ability to access adverts	60	18
Advertising information	58	17
Participating in opinion polls	58	17
Live television streaming	52	16
Weather information	50	15
Question-and-answer links	50	15
Calendar events information	48	14
Customised topics	37	11
Emailing updates	37	11
Submitting photos	37	11
Ability to navigate Twitter	33	10
Other personalisation orientation	33	10
Submitting news tips	29	9
Sending letters to editor	26	8
Ability to avail statistics	27	8
Other information-seeking files	28	8
Chatting on Twitter	26	8
Sending email to editor	22	7
Contacting the publishers	23	7
Applying for job from publishers	23	7
Licensing information	10	4
Greetings by site	16	5
Radio streaming	15	4
Emailing link to writer	11	3
Filling subscription form	9	3
Link to publishers	9	3
Average score	68	24

Source: Author's field data.

Note. N = 335.