

Assessing the Effectiveness of Media Funding on Investigative Journalism in Lusaka District of Zambia: A Case Study of Zambia Daily Mail

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: August 2026 Keywords: Funding Investigative Journalism Financial Sustainability Resource Allocation Zambia Daily Mail Journalistic Capacity	This study seeks to assess the effectiveness of media funding on Investigative Journalism in Lusaka District of Zambia, using the Zambia Daily Mail as a case study. Guided by the Political Economy of Media framework, the study explores how funding availability, allocation, and management influence the quality, scope, and sustainability of investigative reporting. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with journalists, editors, and managers. Results indicate that insufficient funding significantly limits investigative capacity, constraining access to technical tools, field research, professional development, and legal support. These financial constraints reduce the depth and impact of investigative reporting, fostering a culture of operational compromise and self-censorship. The study concludes that funding inadequacies are a critical barrier to investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail, impeding its ability to hold power accountable and fulfill its democratic mandate. The findings highlight the need for dedicated investigative journalism funds, equitable resource allocation, investment in technical and human resources, professional training, and collaborative investigative models to enhance sustainability and impact.

1. Introduction

Investigative journalism promotes accountability, transparency, and social justice by exposing corruption and systemic injustices (Waisbord, 2000; De Burgh, 2008; Franklin, 2008). High-quality investigations require substantial funding for travel, data collection, legal advice, and research (Hamilton, 2016; Schiffrin, 2017), and limited resources create tension between journalistic goals and economic realities.

Globally, inadequate funding restricts high-risk or resource-intensive stories, weakening the press's watchdog role (Meyer, 2010; McChesney, 2000; Schiffrin, 2017; Franklin, 2008). Private media face market pressures, while state-owned outlets often experience political influence, with funding tied to national agendas (Djankov et al., 2003; Benson & Powers, 2011; UNESCO, 2022).

In Africa, reliance on donors, government subventions, or state-controlled advertising fosters self-censorship and limits sustainability (Berger, 2010; Banda, 2010; Mutsavairo & Ragnedda, 2019). Donor funding is temporary and rarely ensures long-term viability. In Zambia, the state-funded Zambia Daily Mail operates under political oversight and limited commercial independence (Kasoma, 1996; Chibamba, 2015; Banda, 2010). Government allocations and politically influenced management constrain investigative work, with stories exposing inefficiency or corruption often censored or reframed (Chibamba, 2015; Banda, 2010). Private media, while economically constrained, maintain more editorial autonomy, showing that funding source affects investigative outcomes.

The Political Economy of Media framework emphasizes how funding structure shapes content and priorities (McChesney, 2000; Hamilton, 2016). At Zambia Daily Mail, financial and institutional factors determine which stories are pursued and how. Sustainable investigative journalism requires both editorial independence and predictable, transparent funding (UNESCO, 2022).

In summary, Zambia illustrates how limited funding and political oversight constrain investigative journalism. While financial limits affect newsrooms globally (Meyer, 2010; Schiffrin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016), state-influenced funding uniquely impacts the scope, resilience, and independence of reporting (Djankov et al., 2003; Chibamba, 2015).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Investigative journalism requires significant resources, including skilled personnel, technical tools, legal support, and travel budgets. At the Zambia Daily Mail, limited funding has been observed to hinder journalists' capacity to conduct in-depth reporting, forcing them to prioritize low-cost stories over comprehensive investigations. These constraints undermine the media's watchdog role and reduce transparency and accountability in governance.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objectives

To assess the effectiveness of media funding on investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- To examine how media funding affects the quality of investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail.

- To identify challenges faced by investigative journalists due to funding limitations.
- To evaluate whether the availability of funding influences the investigative topics covered.

1.3 Research Questions

- How does media funding impact the quality of investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail?
- What challenges do investigative journalists encounter as a result of funding limitations?
- To what extent does the availability of funding influence the selection of investigative topics covered?
- Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the Political Economy of Media framework, which examines how ownership structures, funding sources, and economic pressures shape news production, editorial priorities, and journalistic autonomy. Funding constraints, economic dependency, and managerial influence are central to understanding how investigative journalism is practiced at the Zambia Daily Mail.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Thematic Area Developed from Objective One: Funding Availability and Allocation

Globally, investigative journalism is resource-intensive, requiring strong funding for thorough, evidence-based reporting (Downie & Schudson, 2009; UNESCO, 2019). Adequate support provides time, tools, and institutional backing, while insufficient funding limits investigative scope and quality, especially in state-owned media like Zambia Daily Mail.

Dependence on government subventions or public-sector advertising exposes media to political influence and budget fluctuations, discouraging critical reporting, fostering self-censorship, and weakening editorial independence (MISA Zambia, 2018; Djankov et al., 2003; Banda, 2010; Chibamba, 2015; Freedom House, 2023). Declining advertising revenue and digital disruption further strain finances, while donor support is temporary and may shape priorities (Newman et al., 2023; Curran, 2016; GIJN, 2023).

In Africa, small markets, weak advertising, and economic instability intensify funding challenges, with governments often using financial leverage to influence media (Willems & Mano, 2010; Berger, 2016; Freedom House, 2023). In Zambia, state-owned outlets face similar tensions, forcing journalists to rely on desk-based reporting and limiting investigative depth and impact (Kasoma, 2010; Banda, 2020).

2.2 Thematic Area Developed from Objective Two: Funding Effectiveness in Supporting Investigative Journalism

Funding effectiveness refers to how financial resources enable quality investigative reporting. At Zambia Daily Mail, reliance on government funding shaped editorial priorities and limited high-risk or long-term investigations (Moyo, 2013; Banda, 2020).

Globally, well-funded units can support legal advice, travel, and data analysis, while poorly funded teams focus on shorter, cheaper stories (Picard, 2014; Silverman, 2021; Downie & Schudson, 2009; Waisbord, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Sporadic funding delays investigations and reduces accountability (Downie & Schudson, 2009; Schiffrin, 2017). In Africa, non-profits like AmaBhungane and CIJ Malawi use dedicated funds to enable impactful reporting (ACIJ, 2023; GIJN, 2023; Mabweazara, 2021).

State-owned media often prioritize administration over investigations, with political influence limiting capacity. At Zambia Daily Mail, dependence on government subventions and advertising caused funding gaps that delayed major investigations. Even available funds are ineffective without proper allocation, training, technology, and time (Berger, 2016; Waisbord, 2019; UNESCO, 2021; GIJN, 2023).

2.3 Thematic Area Developed from Objective Three: Journalists' Perceptions of Funding Constraints

Journalists' views on funding are key to understanding support for investigative journalism. Globally, inadequate or inconsistent funding limits investigations that require time, travel, and expert input, forcing journalists to avoid high-risk stories and weakening the watchdog role (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; Deuze, 2007). Unstable or politically influenced funding also fosters self-censorship (Hamilton, 2016). In Africa, investigative journalism is underfunded, with limited resources and concerns about editorial independence from state subsidies, political advertisers, or donors (Berger, 2019; Mutsvairo & Salgado, 2021).

In Zambia, state dependence at Zambia Daily Mail means government allocations and advertising shape which stories proceed, restricting legal support, data access, and fieldwork while favoring low-cost, politically neutral stories (MISA Zambia, 2018; Chirwa, 2021; Banda, 2020). These funding constraints reduce morale, autonomy, and investigative ambition, affecting sustainability, risk-taking, and ethical integrity.

3. Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.1 Target Population

The target population comprised 100 key stakeholders associated with investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail and related media oversight bodies in Lusaka, ensuring validity, representativeness, and accurate sampling (Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

3.1.1 Reporters and Sub-editors/Editors at Zambia Daily Mail

Included were 30 reporters, 10 sub-editors/editors, and 50 supporting staff (10 researchers, 12 photographers/digital media personnel, 8 IT staff, 10 layout/design staff, 10 production assistants). These stakeholders contribute directly or indirectly to story sourcing, field reporting, editorial refinement, multimedia documentation, workflow management, and logistical support. Including them ensured perspectives from all levels were captured, aligning with Bryman (2016).

3.1.2 Sampling for Quantitative

The Yamane formula was applied for unbiased purposive sampling:

Where;

- N= Desired sample size
- N= population size
- δ = Margin of error (the allowed probability of committing an error in selecting a small representative of the population). In this study, it is set at 5% (0.05).

Substitution

$$n = \frac{100}{1 + 100(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{100}{1 + 100(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{100}{1 + 0.25}$$

$$n = \frac{100}{1.25}$$

$$n = 80$$

Thus, the sample size for the quantitative part of the study was 80 respondents.

3.1.3 Purposive Sampling:

Newsroom Management: 1 media manager, 1 news editor, 1 chief reporter, 2 senior reporters, providing insights into funding allocation and institutional decision-making (Yin, 2018). Media Oversight Organizations: 2 representatives (1 from MISA Zambia, 1 from ZUJ) for specialized knowledge on funding, operations, and policies (Patton, 2015).

This population captured diverse perspectives across operational, managerial, and oversight levels, allowing a comprehensive understanding of how funding availability, allocation, and prioritization influence investigative journalism practices at the Zambia Daily Mail (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Sampling Design

Participants were selected using purposive and stratified sampling. Reporters, editors, and management were stratified to capture diverse experiences, while MISA Zambia and ZUJ representatives were purposively chosen for their expertise. This ensured both operational and expert perspectives, enhancing study comprehensiveness (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019; Patton, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.3 Sample Size Determination

The quantitative sample included 80 participants (30 reporters, 10 editors/sub-editors, and 40 support staff), while 7 key informants participated in qualitative interviews. Sample size was determined using the Yamane formula for quantitative data and saturation principles for qualitative data. This approach ensured representation across newsroom levels and oversight bodies, capturing both operational trends and in-depth perspectives on investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail.

3.4 Triangulation

Triangulation compared data from interviews, document analysis, and surveys to enhance validity and reliability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Denzin, 2012). Interviews captured journalists' views on funding, documents provided empirical evidence, and surveys showed broader patterns.

Comparing these sources reinforced credibility, addressed discrepancies, and strengthened analytic rigor (Yin, 2018). Integrating qualitative and quantitative data improved validity and gave a clearer understanding of funding's impact on investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail (Flick, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Patton, 2015).

4. Findings and Results

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents (Bio Data)

Respondents' professional roles and years of experience provide context for their perspectives on funding and investigative journalism. These characteristics help link experience and responsibility to perceptions of funding adequacy, resource allocation, and the capacity to conduct in-depth investigations, clarifying how professional background shapes views on sustaining investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4.1.1 Distribution by Professional Role

Table 1. Quantitative sample distribution of 80 respondents who participated in the structured questionnaire

Role	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Reporters	30	37.5%
Sub-editors/Editors	10	12.5%
Researchers	10	12.5%
Photographers/Digital Media	12	15%
IT/Design/Layout Staff	8	10%
Production/Administrative Assistants	10	12.5%
Total Operational/Supporting Staff	40	50%
Total Sample	80	100%

Source: 2025 Field data

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The sample included 80 respondents: 30 reporters, 10 sub-editors/editors, and 40 operational/supporting staff. Reporters (37.5%) cover field reporting and funding challenges, sub-editors/editors (12.5%) handle editorial decisions, and operational/supporting staff (50%) manage verification, documentation, and workflow. This distribution ensures representation across newsroom levels, providing a clear view of the challenges and resource constraints affecting investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail.

4.1.2 Years of Experience

Table 2. Years of Experience in Journalism

Years in Journalism	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 year	11	13.8%
1–5 years	27	33.8%
6–10 years	25	31.2%
11 years or more	17	21.2%

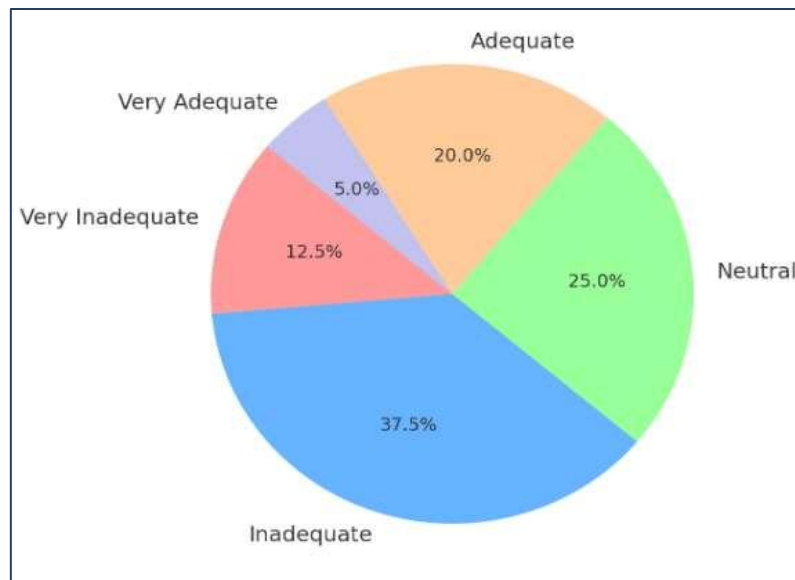
Source: 2025 Field data

Respondents have diverse experience affecting investigative journalism. The largest group (33.8%) has 1–5 years, 31.2% have 6–10 years, 21.2% have over 11 years, and 13.8% have less than one year.

This mix captures both immediate and long-term realities, integrating perspectives from all career stages on funding's impact.

4.2.1 Perceived Adequacy of Funding

Figure 1. Adequacy of Financial Resources



Source: 2025 Field data

Respondents assessed the adequacy of funding for investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail. Results show concern: 12.5% rated funding very inadequate, 37.5% inadequate, 25% neutral, 20% adequate, and 5% very adequate.

This indicates many perceive resources as insufficient, limiting investigative depth and quality. Interviews revealed that projects requiring travel, specialized equipment, or extended research are often delayed or scaled down.

Overall, inadequate funding significantly affects investigative journalism, constraining its reach, depth, and impact.

4.2.2 Sources of Funding Decisions

Table 3. Sources Controlling Funding Allocation

Source of Pressure	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Management Influence	40	50%
Owner Influence	20	25%
Both Management & Owners	14	17.5%
No Specific Influence	6	7.5%

Source: 2025 Field data

Respondents' perceptions indicate that management mainly controls funding at the Zambia Daily Mail, with 50% citing senior administrators as primary decision-makers. Ownership influences 25%, while 17.5% see decisions as shared between management and owners. Only 7.5% believe funding occurs independently.

Interviews confirmed that managerial priorities dictate which investigative projects proceed, often forcing competition with other departmental needs.

Overall, funding decisions are shaped by management and ownership, limiting autonomy, scope, and effectiveness of investigative journalism.

4.2.3 Effect of Funding on Investigative Work

Table 4. Effect of Funding on Investigative Journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail

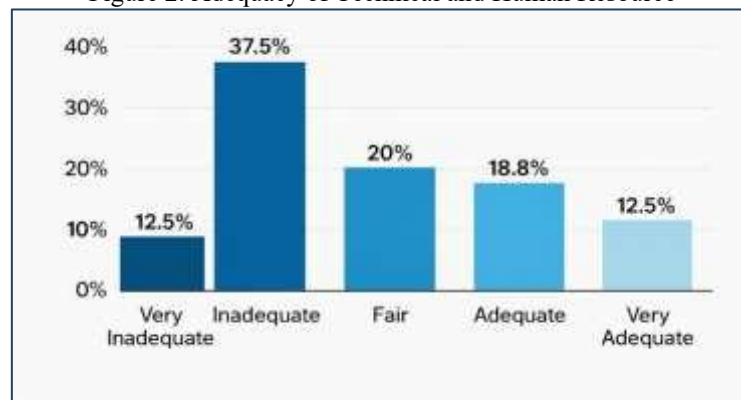
Effect of Funding on Investigative Work	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Delays or prevents investigative projects	48	60%
Reduces depth and scope of investigations	19	23.8%
Little impact due to alternative resources	13	16.2%

Source: 2025 Field data

Findings show funding strongly affects investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail. Most respondents (60%) report that insufficient funds delay or halt projects, 23.8% say it limits story depth, and 16.2% rely on personal resources. Interviews confirm that inadequate funding restricts travel, research, and legal vetting, limiting investigative quality and impact. Overall, financial constraints shape journalistic practice and the newsroom's ability to pursue complex accountability stories.

4.2.4 Technical and Human Resource Support

Figure 2. Adequacy of Technical and Human Resource



Source: 2025 Field data

Assessment of technical and human resources at Zambia Daily Mail is largely unsatisfactory: 12.5% rate them very inadequate, 37.5% inadequate, 20% fair, 18.8% adequate, and 12.5% very adequate. Challenges include outdated equipment, limited digital tools, unreliable internet, and a shortage of skilled investigative reporters, causing work overload, fewer in-depth stories, and limited collaboration. Overall, constraints highlight the urgent need for investment in equipment, digital tools, and capacity-building to enhance the scope, depth, and effectiveness of investigative journalism.

4.2.5 Training and Capacity Building

Table 5. Access and Relevance of Investigative Journalism Training

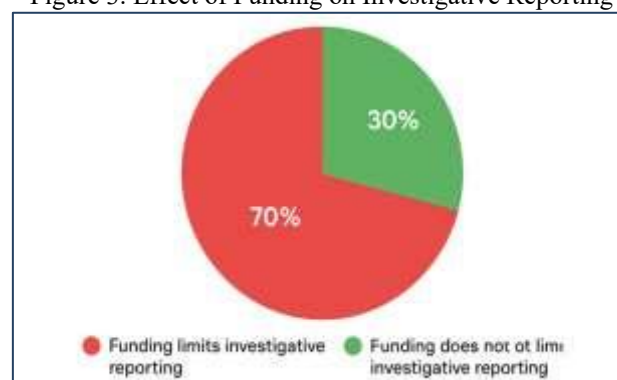
Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very Relevant	25	31.3%
Relevant	35	43.8%
Not Relevant	20	25%

Source: 2025 Field data

Training for investigative journalism at the Zambia Daily Mail received mixed ratings: 31.3% very relevant, 43.8% relevant, and 25% not relevant. Some programs are outdated or lack practical focus. While generally beneficial, gaps remain, highlighting the need for targeted funding, hands-on exercises, and digital and data training to improve quality and impact.

4.3.1 Does Insufficient Funding Limit Investigative Reporting?

Figure 3. Effect of Funding on Investigative Reporting



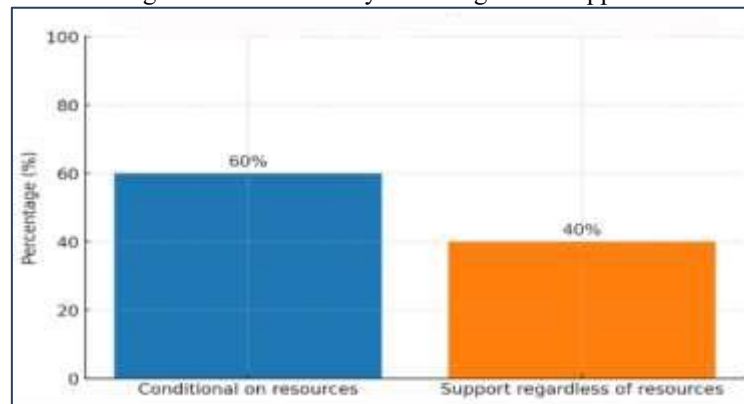
Source: 2025 Field data

As shown in figure 3, the majority of respondents (70%) indicate that insufficient funding limits coverage of sensitive or high-cost investigations, while only 30% report that funding does not significantly constrain their reporting. This suggests that a lack of adequate financial resources is a major factor shaping investigative agendas and the ability to pursue in-depth reporting.

One senior journalist explained: "High-cost investigations rarely get funded, and we often have to scale down or abandon important stories."

4.3.2 Is Management Support Conditional on Funding Availability

Figure 4. Conditionality of Management Support

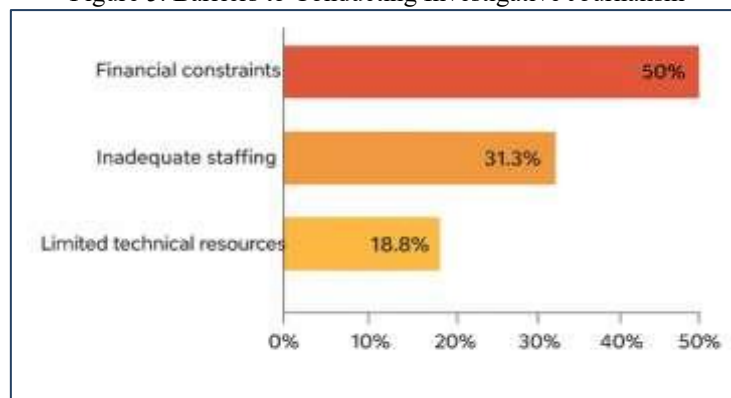


Source: 2025 Field data

As illustrated in Figure 4, 60% of respondents perceive that management support for investigative projects is contingent on resource availability, whereas 40% report that support is provided regardless of funding constraints. This indicates that financial resources not only affect the scope of reporting but also influence the level of managerial endorsement and prioritization for investigative assignments.

4.3.3 Key Barriers to Investigative Journalism

Figure 5. Barriers to Conducting Investigative Journalism



Source: 2025 Field data

Barriers to investigative journalism include financial constraints (50%), inadequate staffing (31.3%), and limited technical resources (18.8%). Journalists often use personal funds; one editor noted, "Money dictates which investigations can proceed; without adequate funding, even critical stories are shelved." These resource limitations affect morale, standards, and the ability to pursue sensitive stories, highlighting the need for sustained investment, staffing, and better technical support.

4.2 Discussion.

This section integrates findings from the survey and interviews, structured around the research objectives. Results show that limited funding, conditional management support, and insufficient technical and human resources constrain the scope, depth, and frequency of investigative stories. Training initiatives are relevant but unevenly applied. Overall, adequate and well-allocated funding is key to sustaining investigative journalism and newsroom effectiveness at the Zambia Daily Mail.

4.3 Conclusion

The study confirms that funding is a key determinant of investigative journalism's quality, scope, and sustainability at the Zambia Daily Mail. Insufficient resources limit journalists' ability to conduct in-depth investigations, access essential tools, and sustain long-term reporting, forcing them to prioritize less resource-intensive stories.

Underfunding affects salaries, travel budgets, data access, and advanced reporting tools, reducing both ambition and impact. Unequal access to professional development further limits journalistic capacity, highlighting the link between funding and competence.

Funding constraints also shape editorial priorities, often favoring low-cost or politically safe stories, which narrows the investigative agenda and weakens the media's watchdog role. Stable, sufficient, and well-managed funding is therefore crucial for professional excellence, editorial independence, and the media's accountability function. Addressing funding gaps through innovative, independent financing is essential to strengthen investigative journalism and its long-term sustainability in Zambia.

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