



Zimbabwe Media Use 2012

Methodology

Data is based on 1,512 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 15 and older living in Zimbabwe. The total adult population covered by the survey numbers 6,776,000. Trained interviewers conducted interviews July 19 – August 6, 2012, in English, Shona and Ndebele. No geographic areas were excluded from the sample. All results are weighted by age, gender, and educational attainment to reflect characteristics of the national population. Results contained in this report are based on an analysis that accounts for stratification and clustering of the sample.

General Media Environment

The news media in Zimbabwe are highly restricted, and most major outlets are controlled by the state. The 2002 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act forced all journalists and media companies to obtain licenses and allowed the country's information minister to decide which outlets can operate legally. Various other laws, such as the Public Order and Security Act, place severe restrictions on what journalists are allowed to publish and come with harsh penalties.

A March 2012 Gallup World Poll found that Zimbabweans are among the least likely in the world to perceive their media to be free, and their perceptions of media freedom have not improved over the past two years. About one in three Zimbabweans (32.4%) say the media in their country have a lot of freedom. That figure is little changed from the 36.8% measured in 2011, and 35.2% in 2010. The 2011 score, for which there are comparable data in 135 countries, ranks Zimbabwe number 126.

Six in 10 Zimbabwean households have a radio; TV ownership prevalent only in urban areas

About 6 in 10 Zimbabweans say they have a working radio in their home (59.8%), and half have a working television (47.2%). Mobile phones are prevalent in Zimbabwe – 75.6% overall have a mobile phone in their household (personal ownership of mobile phones is at 68.8%), and the number approaches 100% in urban areas. Meanwhile, landline phones are rare at just 4.7% of Zimbabwean households. While 18.5% of Zimbabweans say they have access to the Internet in their home, just 10.0% have a working computer, indicating that for many Internet users a mobile device is their primary source of access.

The data also demonstrate the extent of the urban/rural divide in ownership of most devices used to access media, but particularly televisions. Almost 9 in 10 city-dwelling Zimbabweans (88.3%) have a television in their households, versus about one-third of those in rural areas (34.3%).

Zimbabwe's restrictive media environment and limited access to media devices in many places help explain the importance of word-of-mouth as a source of news and information. Just over 7 in 10 Zimbabweans (71.9%) say they get news from friends or family at least weekly. About two-thirds (65.0%) get news from radio that often – a figure that is consistent across urban and rural areas. Reliance on television for news diverges sharply between urban and rural areas, reflecting TV ownership patterns.

About half of Zimbabweans (51.2%) overall say they access news through SMS/text message at least weekly; in urban areas this figure rises to 71.1%. Weekly use of the Internet for news has also become common in the cities (48.0%), though it remains relatively rare in rural areas (15.4%). The increasing reliance on the Internet for news has more than doubled in urban areas from the 2011 level of 20.5%.

Health, education news among media topics of greatest interest to Zimbabweans

Zimbabweans are interested in a variety of news and information topics. They are most likely to express interest in health (74.1%), followed by education (72.2%), religion (66.2%), and human rights issues (54.7%). Political news (31.3%), science and technology (32.2%), and news about business and the economy (36.8%) are the topics of least interest.

Women are more likely to be interested in health, and religion than are men, while men tend to be more interested in sports and political news.

Zimbabweans tend to be focused on news about domestic and regional problems, with almost all saying they are "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in news about Zimbabwe, and the vast majority also interested in news from neighboring countries. About half are very or somewhat interested in stories about the U.S. and Europe.

FM radio dominant, though one-third of past-week listeners used shortwave

Asked when they last listened to the radio, 59.5% said they had listened in the past week. The vast majority (84.9%) of past-week radio listeners used the FM band; about one-third

(35.4%) listened via shortwave and 10.0% listened to the medium-wave band. Reflecting on the growth of mobile phone use, a full third of past-week radio listeners (33.1%) used a mobile phone to listen. 10.2% listen to the radio via satellite.

Two-thirds of TV owners use a satellite dish

47.2% of Zimbabweans have a working television in their homes, with a huge divide between urban and rural households. Similarly, about half of Zimbabweans overall (50.1%) said they watched television in the past seven days, with urban residents more than twice as likely as rural residents to respond this way. TV viewership also increases dramatically with education and income levels.

About two-thirds of Zimbabwean television owners say their TV receives its signal via an individual satellite dish (65.8%) or shared satellite dish (2.0%), while a similar percentage (68.2%) use an antenna on or around their TV set. 39.4% of Zimbabwean television owners say they use both. Use of an individual satellite dish use is somewhat more common in among urban TV owners than those in rural areas – 73.0% vs. 60.1%, respectively.

About three in four (73.6%) satellite dish owners say they only use the channels that are aired for free with the dish, while 26.4% pay extra to access additional channels.

Most Zimbabweans say they have had their decoder for at least 2 years (62.4%), while 13.8% obtained their decoder within the last year. Many dish owners (38.7%) say members of their household use their decoder to access radio channels. When asked how well they understand how to use a decoder, almost three-quarters of dish owners (72.8%) say they can use it to find specific channels they are looking for, while 22.4% say they have to browse to find audio or TV channels.

More than 8 in 10 weekly mobile phone users send and receive text messages

The majority of Zimbabweans (68.8%) personally own a mobile phone, a rate that has increased sharply over the last five years as the cell phone infrastructure has improved throughout the country.

Mobile phone ownership is similar among men and women, but people aged 55 and older are significantly less likely than their younger counterparts to own a mobile phone. Ownership is also more common in urban areas, where service coverage is more widespread. In cities such as Harare and Bulawayo, cell phone penetration nears 100% of households.

More than 8 in 10 of those who have their own mobile phone or have access to one (85.1%) say they used their phone to send an SMS/text message in the last week. Approximately one in four users accessed the Internet (25.6%), accessed Facebook or other social media (24.3%) or listened to the radio (24.1%) on their phones. Just 14.2% said they received

text-based information from their mobile operator, while 4.9% received news reports by text from other news organizations.

Overall, about one in four mobile phone users (23.9%) say their phones are smartphones, with urban users (39.6%) more than twice as likely as rural users (16.5%) to respond this way. This helps explain why mobile phone users in urban areas use a wider variety of function on their phones than rural users.

Mobile phone owners are interested in receiving most types of information on their phone if it is of no cost to them. News headlines about events around the country elicit the highest interest level, at 87.6%. However, most Zimbabweans are interested in each of the topics asked about, including health advice (81.0%), news headlines about world events (70.1%), information on crop prices (65.9%), sports scores (59.7%), and weather reports (67.4%).

When asked how they would prefer to receive free information on the above topics, almost 9 in 10 mobile phone users say via SMS (88.5%) while almost half (45.0%) say they would like to receive a call on their mobile phone. They are less likely to say they would prefer to access such free information from the Internet on their phone (25.7%).

News sharing in Zimbabwe

Zimbabweans are asked about the frequency with which they share news with people in their communities. About half are frequent news sharers, with 23.2% saying they share news with community members almost daily and 27.4% who say they do so at least weekly. About one in three overall say they rarely (16.9%) or never (11.9%) share news. Men tend to share news more frequently than women, as do people living in urban areas. Those with at least some high school education, and those who say they are living comfortably on present income are significantly more likely than less educated and lower income Zimbabweans to say they share news at least weekly.

Among those who share news at least weekly, text messaging is the most popular method, with 51.9% of frequent sharers reporting that they use text messaging to share news or information about current events. Facebook or similar social networking sites (35.1%) are also a popular option for discussing current events. Options that require greater bandwidth, such as posting online videos, are much less common. The most popular methods require nothing more than a basic mobile phone, something most Zimbabweans have access to.

Contact

For any questions or further information on this data, please contact the Broadcasting Board of Governors at pubaff@bbg.gov or 202-203-4400