



National University of Science and Technology

Think in Other Terms



FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON POLITICAL LEADERS: A CASE
STUDY OF MORGAN TSVANGIRAI.

BY

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A RESEARCH THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE
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ABSTRACT

The study analysed the role of the media in shaping public perceptions on political leaders. It took the case study approach and had its focus on the way Morgan Tsvangirai was covered in the media, perceptions raised by the media, and audience responses to these perceptions on Morgan Tsvangirai. Respondents were drawn from Chinhoyi. In order to meet its objectives, the study adopted discourse analysis, content analysis, interviews and focus group discussions. Using these data gathering tools the study was able to interrogate the meaning making process that happened both at the locus of textual production and also at the locus of reception. In as much as a lot has been written on the power of texts, from a structural point of view, this study went further by also including audience perspectives in line with arguments raised in multiculturalism. Methodologically, the study used both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms in taking a preview into the encoding and decoding of media messages on Morgan Tsvangirai, and the ultimate perceptions motivated or reinforced into audiences by the media messages on the character and leadership qualities of Morgan Tsvangirai. Texts considered were those that focused on the conduct of Morgan Tsvangirai, from both local and foreign private and public media. In getting inferences from these texts, the research was informed by theories such as the agenda setting theory, discourse, ideology, intertextuality and hegemony. These among others were the theories that informed the meaning making process at the locus of production. At the locus of reception, multicultural theories such as Hall's encoding and decoding model was applied and they proved to be still relevant in explaining how audiences make sense of perceptual information on politicians in news stories. The research also found out that indeed the media particularly print managed to set the agenda as Tsvangirai became a theme of many discussions as evidenced by the number of people who followed his media coverage on the protocol blunders he made in saluting the Guard of Honour in Germany and on his love relationship woes. The role of culture (religion) was also amplified as evidenced by views obtained from respondents with Christian and Moslem backgrounds, in how they chose to agree with or differ from mediated perceptions on Morgan Tsvangirai, basing on their religious beliefs.