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Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

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The current issue is the fourth of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)*, published by the [Mass Media & Communication Unit](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
ATINER



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Refugee Crisis, News Crisis: The Framing of Episodic and Thematic Articles

By Keith Joseph Zukas & Panagiotis P. Liapis[‡]*

A main tenet of 21st Century journalism is to engage the public with highly informative and affective content. Through sociological journalistic processes of creating news content, however, audiences may lose the ability to completely conceptualize the level of human suffering observed in the coverage of refugee crises. This experimental survey tested the use of episodic and thematic frames in formatting American news articles about the Syrian refugee crisis of migrants landing on Grecian shores. It found that episodically framed articles increased moral understanding among Americans, as well as overall engagement in the crisis event. Respondents, however, were not more likely to participate in civic engagement about the refugee crisis with others. The results suggest that the use of episodic frames in the construction of refugee news articles may engage audiences more in the issue, however, alone are not enough to affect behavioral outcomes such as discussion. Further research should investigate the implications of framing choices made in the presentation of news stories about important issues such as mass human migrations.

Keywords: framing, news, refugee, diaspora

Introduction

Nearly 15 years since the Syrian civil war began, over 14 million people have fled their homes seeking safety, 6.8 million of which have fled the country for asylum behind other borders, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The crisis reached a climax in 2015 with over 100 refugees landing on Grecian shores daily, peaking at 3,000 daily arrivals that August and approximately 1.3 million displaced migrants traversing through the Greek islands into Europe that year (Connor & Krogstad, 2016). Classic migration theory states that “push factors” such as war and “pull factors” like economic opportunity are what drive such a diaspora (Arnon & Shamai, 2016, p. 322).

When a Syrian boy’s body washed ashore at a Turkish resort on September 2, 2015, the diaspora occurring through the Mediterranean made international headlines, bringing the world’s attention to how other countries would need to deal with such a large mass human migration. “The full horror of the human tragedy unfolding on the shores of Europe was brought home on Wednesday as images of the lifeless body of a young boy – one of at least 12 Syrians who drowned attempting to reach the Greek island of Kos – encapsulated the extraordinary risks refugees are taking to reach the west” (Smith, H, 2015). In May of that year a

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European Union Mediterranean Naval Force (EUNAVFOR MED) was launched with a focus on search and rescue operations, as well as work to stop human traffickers (Zichi, 2018).

To better understand the impact of this coverage, Google Trends analysis shows a dramatic increase in use of the search term “refugee” from just 16 percent the week before the story aired, to a peak of 93 percent in the proceeding days from September 6–12, 2015 across the world. In the United States, however, attention during this same time period reflected only a 42 percent peak interest in searching the term “refugee.” Searching more specifically for “Syrian refugee crisis” showed similar results jumping from 4 percent to a full 100 percent peak interest around the globe, yet reaching just 60 percent interest in the search term in the United States (Google Trends). While responses to the media coverage triggered online searches in the U.S., they were less pronounced than in many other countries.

So while contemporary journalism strives to engage the public through highly informative and affective content, American mass news media should explore best practices for coverage in the 21st Century. News media needs protect sensitive audiences, while also making major international issues relevant to disconnected Americans. Through production processes of routine story coverage, Americans may understand the Syrian refugee crisis, but lose the ability to completely conceptualize the level of human suffering in these refugees affected by political, economic and military conflict. Increased knowledge about immigration can stimulate integration between citizens and new populations, transform societies and promote knowledge of cultural heritage (Francese, Uz & Adamo, 2016). Inadequate media coverage can also create opportunity for misinformation such as overvaluations of the impact from migrations such as in the case of Mexico and the United States (Gonzalez-Rosas & Zarate-Gutierrez, 2018).

Thus American media may yet be too sanitized to create real civic discussion and more active engagement, but work is needed to provide information about these historically underrepresented immigrant and refugee groups (Lee & Weng, 2019). Alternative methods of covering conflict in contemporary refugee crises should be explored. Conflict-based journalism is based on providing audiences accurate information and generating public discourse aimed at the resolution of a posed issue. Further research should be conducted reviewing the degree of effectiveness obtained by the display of conflict-based graphic content such as in a diaspora. A review of American news media decency standards could allow for more appropriate use of the display of human suffering.

Thus, to analyze the effects on viewing audiences, we must first understand the current operating procedures of mass news media as an institution. Subsequently, the main areas of consideration for this study include journalistic framing of news stories about the refugee crisis, the aesthetic quality of suffering in visual reportage and audience perceptions of moral agency in the presentation of human suffering in news media.

Literature Review

Under the right circumstances, frames can exert influence on audiences exposed to them. Scheufele (1999) identifies the first step of framing as frame building, which is how media outlets construct frames to be used in communication. Next, frame setting is the psychological process that takes place in audiences when frames interact with individual predispositions to influence a variety of outcomes, including knowledge and perceptions. At the effects end of framing, individual-level effects occur when thought affects attitudes and behaviors. The last step of framing completes the cycle when citizens affect the journalists' frame building process through direct communication and participation in public affairs.

The Sociological Approach to Framing

The complexity of the framing process is perhaps why today, half a century since the word "framing" joined the mass communication lexicon, there is still debate about what constitutes a frame, how one is embedded in content by journalists, and ultimately how they should be measured by researchers. There is some agreement that framing effects involve how the construction of media messages influence individual thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, but divergent operationalizations rooted in sociological and psychological traditions remain a problem for examining frame construction and framing effects (Scheufele, 1999).

In sociology, framing analysis has roots in theory about the individual and society. At a young age individuals learn frames as a way of processing information in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Frames help people make sense of the physical and social world around them. They underlie all social activity, and guide the senses, determining what is seen, heard, smelled and tasted, as well as what is not noticed. To interpret information efficiently, it is placed into schemas, which then allow us to quickly make sense of the world around us (Goffman, 1959).

This natural framing of societal perceptions was later applied to media in the 1970s as a way of interpreting media messages. The social consequences of the way women were framed in magazines were studied by Goffman, in which he determined that advertisements could reinforce how women are portrayed in daily life. Women were found to be repeatedly portrayed as inferior and subordinate to men (Goffman, 1974). Studies continue to test how contemporary societal issues are framed in different media, exemplifying the importance of framing and audience perception (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

Because of the demanding nature of journalism as a profession, many sociologists maintain that common events and applicable frames were emerging as tools for journalists to more effectively explain complex information to the public. Journalists were believed to use different frames for covering issues in ways that would make complex information more salient for a general audience. This is understood as the sociological process of news construction with more focus on

the journalist and choices that are involved in developing news texts (Snow & Benford, 1988).

Some key examples of different viewpoints for framing news stories are found in Iyengar's distinctions of episodic and thematic frames (1991). Episodic frames use details about specific events or cases that are part of a larger political issue. They use a dramatic narrow picture to represent a larger societal issue (Iyengar, 1991). Thematic frames instead focus on "political issues and events in some general context" (Iyengar, 1991, p. 2). They are more abstract and often use metaphors to explain societal problems. "Visually episodic reports make 'good pictures,' while thematic reports feature 'talking heads'" (Iyengar, 1991, p. 14). These two distinct framing approaches for reporting the refugee crisis could have important implications for audience understanding of human suffering, depending on if the audience views a thematically or episodically framed news story. "Politicians and media tend to associate the general term of immigration with the specific term of illegal immigration, causing legal immigration to fade into the background" (Yang, 2021, p. 12). But historical studies show that education about diversity can foster change in the minds of citizens (Zervas, 2017). This makes for an even more challenging case to reframe an issue that is already problematically labeled in society.

The Psychological Approach to Framing

For other communication scholars, framing is understood in terms of the psychological dynamics of information processing (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). A landmark study in economics by Kahneman and Tversky (1979) connected the psychology of information processing with media effects. It found that an economic issue portrayed from different perspectives would change the resulting actions made by the study participants. The experiment used strict internal validity to prove that only a shift in the portrayal of the issue (while holding factual information constant) caused a change in action by the participant, proving that the framing of an issue affected the psychology of the participant, and ultimately the outcome of the decision-making process. Followers of Kahneman and Tversky utilize strict internal validity to ensure that effects are caused by the frame. This psychologically-based, perspective argues that maximizing the internal validity will isolate the effect caused by the different perspective of the news story.

Today, framing is still dissected even further, calling for recognition as a device used by both media producers and audience members (Scheufele, 1999). In studies such as the one presented here, frames can now play roles as both independent variables (media frames) and as dependent variables (audience schemas). This recognition calls for specific attention to the operationalization of framing.

Thus, this input from mass news media and subsequent audience interpretation applies to this study in the form of one key question: What type of news frame is most effective for completing the framing cycle by spurring discourse about

contemporary refugee crises and active participation in addressing this global issue?

Furthermore, is the American public able to adequately understand the level of human suffering involved in contemporary refugee crises because of censorship of graphic content? If news media frames must be interpreted by an audience, then the way in which the material is presented can be altered to increase the interpretive ability of the audience. Research conducted regarding news coverage during the first Gulf war which has shown how many production and political influences sanitize coverage (Pfau et al., 2004). Embedded journalists during the first few days of the invasion of Iraq in the second Gulf War were found to decontextualize and present content in a more favorable tone compared to non-embedded journalists (Pfau et al., 2004).

Jones, Sheets, & Rowling (2011) also found that journalists have used defensive techniques in reporting that lead to the omission of civilian casualty reports, which dampen a viewer's moral agency when interpreting a controversial news event. This is essential because news media frames have been shown to, "define problems . . . diagnose causes . . . make moral judgements . . . and suggest remedies" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). This past research of news media framing offers insight into a key question of this study: Does American news media frame stories in a way which removes the human element of suffering, thus creating a disproportionate response to conflict?

Aesthetic Quality of Suffering

While it has been shown that the audience interprets an event through a journalist's frame in mass news media, research in human suffering focuses on the object of viewership, who is called the "unfortunate," and the audience member is referred to as a "spectator." This relationship is identified by the aesthetic portrayal of graphic content within a news event, and the potential impact it can have upon spectators. With the aesthetic viewing of suffering, "there is an unfortunate who suffers and on the other a spectator who views the suffering without undergoing the same fate and without being directly exposed to the same misfortune . . . Pity exists in this" (Boltanski, 1999, p. 114).

The experience of the unfortunate can only be felt by the unfortunate, but as the spectator actively views the visual representation of the suffering the unfortunate has experienced, the spectator gains an element of empathy for the unfortunate. Removing the visual representation of the unfortunate's suffering impedes the spectator from empathizing with the unfortunate. This supports the importance of the aesthetic quality in the presentation of a news event, which is more often present in episodically framed news stories rather than those framed thematically. As found in Pfau et al.'s 2004 study, episodic frames were used significantly more often than thematic frames, which decontextualized the traumatic events being reported.

Moreover, the presentation of an event by mass news media must first be compiled by a journalist, "he is a creator and displays the horror in the materiality

of a picture. The spectator does nothing. He sympathizes with the painter; he is a painter who does not paint. It is at the cost of doing nothing that his contemplation of the horrific can be total” (Boltanski, 1999, p 117). The action of leaving actually-occurring footage un-edited is critical to this study, as the current method of American mass news media is to edit portions of content which are too graphic in nature.

The concept of un-edited footage having a greater impact upon an audience is also supported by Nohrstedt (2009), who references the grotesque images captured from United States armed forces torturing inmates of Abu-Gharib prison in Iraq. Spectators being exposed to these images ultimately saw the uncompromised effects of war upon involved humans. It is through this close-up portrayal of human suffering that enables spectators to understand and substantiate the ramifications of war. As it has been shown, the un-edited presentation of conflict allows for a greater level of compassion from the audience.

Furthermore, Chouliaraki (2006) found that conflict-oriented coverage can potentially be manipulated to reduce the production of empathy within spectators. Journalists have portrayed atrocities, such as the unsanctioned bombing of a civilian populace, without emphasizing the human toll of the atrocity. This creates an ambiguous environment for the spectator. By presenting stories without the element of human suffering, the audience is left without a candid moral gauge of the event. This information is essential to this study because it suggests that the removal of human suffering can potentially skew spectator perception of a conflict-oriented news event.

Witnessing Derived Moral Agency

Understanding how spectators will be prompted by observing the element of suffering is essential to this study as it allows for the reaction to the aesthetic element to be interpreted. “The about-to-die image freezes a particularly memorable moment in death’s unfolding and thereby generates an emotional identification with the person facing impending death” (Zelizer, 2005, p. 34). The moral impacts of viewing death allow for the spectator to account for an unfortunate’s situation on an unadulterated level which all humans share — death. Research conducted by Sumiala (2009) has shown that individuals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and geographical locations can be brought together by having experienced suffering. Thus, individuals can connect on the basis of having witnessed violence and have a higher likelihood of discussion and participation.

To further connect the aesthetic portrayal of an unfortunate to the moral interpretation of the spectator, Peters (2001) defined past examples of witnessing versus reading. Solely reading or listening to information regarding a news event has been shown to lend itself to an element of ambiguity. However, by witnessing an event first hand, truth and understanding are obtained by actively viewing suffering, as opposed to dry summations and statistical recreations of suffering (Peters, 2001).

Thus, three hypotheses were generated to provide the framework of this study:

H1) News stories with thematic frames will affect perceptions of importance about the refugee crisis more than episodic frames.

H2) News stories with episodic frames accompanied by the cue of a photograph will affect moral evaluations about the refugee crisis more than thematic frames.

H3) News stories with episodic frames will affect motivations for civic engagement in the refugee crisis more than thematic frames.

Methodology

The methodology for this study was conducted using an experimental survey design involving 515 participants randomly selected from the student body of midwestern university in the United States of America. All participants were given the same survey after being randomly selected to be fragmented into two groups for reading an episodically or thematically framed conflict-based news story with an accompanying visual cue of a refugee camp.

To adequately show the effect that graphic content has upon an audience, excerpts were taken from two news sources, which covered the same news event. The story was created by content from American-based Associated Press (AP) and by Greek-based ΣΚΑΪ (SKAI). The resulting story provided informative content with references to loss of life and injury during the news event, as well as presented traumatic events as statistics and facts, which could be analyzed.

The survey given to all 515 participants contained basic demographic information, age and ethnicity. A YES/NO question asking if each participant had any prior knowledge of the news event, and 14 participant news event interpretation-based questions aligned on a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale questions were generated to accommodate for three dependent variables:

- a) Importance: Demonstrating participants' overall reaction of the news excerpt;
- b) Empathy: Participants' ethical response to the news excerpt; and
- c) Engagement: The effectiveness of a call to action attained by participants from each news excerpt.

The questions relating to the overall reaction of the news event act to gauge the differences in news media frame interpretation of the event between the episodic and thematic participant groups. The questions relating to each participant's ethical interpretations of their given news excerpt are valuable to this study as it acts to contrast the impact which episodic and thematic news coverage may have upon each participant group's moral agency and feelings of empathy. The questions relating to the call to action act to measure the effectiveness of episodic and thematic news coverage in persuading participants to actively go out of their way to communicate information from the news excerpt to others, or support domestic/international intervention regarding the news event.

The results of each participant group's survey was coded and analyzed through Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Dependent variables within the episodic story/thematic story populations were analyzed against each other using an Independent-Samples T-test for statistical significance. This was done to validate the variances, or lack thereof, regarding the participant's interpretation of the news event. In addition to the participant's interpretation-based survey questions, demographic information, such as gender, age, and ethnicity, was added to the survey. This methodology was the best fit for the study because it partially accounts for preconceived bias, captures each participants' response psychological to variables, and allows for further comparison of gender, age, and ethnicity within and between the participant groups.

Results

The results of this study will be presented in the order of the three main variables examined:

- a) Importance: Overall reaction of the news excerpt;
- b) Empathy: Ethical response to the news excerpt; and
- c) Engagement: Effectiveness of participants' call to action from the news excerpt.

Initial hypotheses predicted that the thematic participant group would report stronger responses for questions measuring importance while the episodic participant group would report a stronger response in terms of empathy and civic engagement.

Importance

The questions relating to participants' overall reaction to the story elicited an overall stronger reaction from the thematic test group means, supporting hypothesis 1. The first question of this variable group, "Do you believe this is an important issue?" reported a significant difference in the scores for episodic participants ($M=3.31$, $SD=.73$) and thematic participants ($M=4.02$, $SD=.89$); $t(100) = 4.39$, ($p=.001$). The second question of this group, "Do you think there should be more news about this issue?" also reported a significant difference in the scores for episodic participants ($M=1.98$, $SD=.927$) and thematic participants ($M=3.00$, $SD=.69$); $t(100) = 2.17$, ($p=.032$).

Thus, the outcome of the participants' overall reaction does not reject hypothesis 1, suggesting that the episodically framed news story had a significant effect upon the perceived importance of this diaspora news event (Table 1).

Table 1. Importance, by Structural Frame

	Episodic	Thematic	t (100)
Importance	3.31	4.02	4.39***
More News	1.98	3.0	2.17*
N	257	258	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. A t test compares the means between each group of frames.

Empathy

The results regarding participants' ethical response to their given excerpt also reported an overall stronger reaction from the episodic group means, which confirms hypothesis 2. The first question of this variable group, "Do you feel morally affected by the news story?" reported a significant difference in the scores for episodic participants ($M=2.76$, $SD=.79$) and thematic participants ($M=2.24$, $SD=.99$); $t(100) = 2.98$, ($p=.004$). The second question of this group, "Do you feel empathy for the refugee population?" also reported a significant difference in the scores for episodic participants ($M=2.25$, $SD=.69$) and thematic participants ($M=1.84$, $SD=.70$); $t(100) = 2.99$, ($p=.004$).

The outcome of the participants' ethical response does not reject the hypothesis 2, indicating that an episodically framed diaspora news event has an impact on participants' amount of empathy (Table 2).

Table 2. Empathy, by Structural Frame

	Episodic	Thematic	t (100)
Morals	2.76	2.24	2.98***
Empathy	2.25	1.84	2.99**
N	257	258	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. A t test compares the means between each group of frames.

Engagement

The results regarding the participants' call to action reported the most equal variances of all the question groups means, which did not support hypothesis 3. The first question of this variable group, "Do you believe political action should be taken to address the refugee crisis?" reported a significant difference in the scores for episodic participants ($M=2.37$, $SD=.72$) and thematic participants ($M=1.92$, $SD=.66$) conditions; $t(100) = 3.30$, ($p=.001$). The second question of this group, "Would you communicate with others to raise awareness for the refugees?" reported no significant difference in the scores for thematic participants ($M=2.74$, $SD=.84$) and episodic participants ($M=2.4902$, $SD=.85726$); $t(100) = 1.512$, ($p=.134$).

The results of hypothesis 3 show that an episodically framed news story influences participants' call to action, however, does not influence participants'

individual willingness to actively discuss or engage in participatory acts. Thus, hypothesis 3 is not fully supported nor confirmed (Table 3).

Table 3. Engagement, by Structural Frame

	Episodic	Thematic	T (100)
Political Action	2.37	1.92	3.30***
Raise Awareness	2.74	2.4902	1.512
N	257	258	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. A t test compares the means between each group of frames.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine if the framing of American news media has resulted in ineffective understanding of contemporary refugee crises, resulting in disproportionate responses to refugee conflicts by Americans, dependent upon the format in which information was delivered. It was initially predicted that participants shown the episodically framed news story would report a stronger response than the participants shown the thematically-framed story. The hypotheses were found to be proven in areas of importance and ethics, however, not for civic discussion and participation after viewing the episodically framed news story.

These outcomes give insight into the initial question for this study: does American news media frame stories in a way which removes the human element of suffering, thus creating a disproportionate response to conflict? Findings indeed support the prediction that the way in which American news media frame stories without the human element of suffering has created a disproportionate response to conflict. These results also align with the findings of Scheufele (1999) on the basis that news media frames can alter the interpretation of an event by viewers.

Participants in the episodic story treatment disclosed stronger overall reactions to the event in alignment with research conducted by Jones, Sheets, & Rowling (2011), which proposed defensive mode journalistic reporting dampens a spectator's response. This further strengthens the auxiliary connections between news media framing and a disproportionate response to conflict. However, the extent of influence that content has within an episodically framed news story has upon a spectator's schema can only be speculated. For this reason, future research in this subject should take the aspect of spectator overreaction to a conflict news event via the observation of suffering into account.

Given all the scores reported in reference to the participants' ethical response to their excerpt lie within statistical significance, it can be suggested that the episodic frame elicited a stronger ethical response from participants. These outcomes provide insight into past research produced by Boltanski (1999) suggesting pity can be derived from watching another suffer. Furthermore, the collected data of this grouping is supported by Chouliaraki (2006) and Peters (2001) on the basis that removing the aesthetic element of an unfortunate's suffering creates a sense of ambiguity, thus reducing the empathetic reaction of

spectators. In addition, the results of this grouping are supported by Chouliaraki (2009) and Zelizer (1999, p. 34) in reference to the formation of emotional identification within a spectator via the bearing witness of an unfortunate's death.

The results of the call-to-action grouping did not elicit a statistically significant enough response to predict if the presentation of episodically framed news stories have a greater impact on audiences than thematically framed news stories. Journalism is grounded in enabling public discourse regarding news events and public discourse actively leads to a call to action remedying that event. Therefore, future research regarding news media presentation and interpretation should take into account the rationale behind the mobilization of spectators call to action.

Limitations

For continuation of research on the censoring of graphic content, there are several limitations which should be taken into consideration. First, it is difficult to fully account for participants' pre-conceived biases, however, designing a pre-experiment survey which gauges participant bias of relevant parties or interests that are involved in the chosen news excerpt is an adequate screening.

A second consideration that should be taken into account when designing the format of the Likert-scale questions is central tendency. For this reason, a five-point Likert-scale design was used, however, a seven-point Likert-scale format would allow the participants a greater range of agreement or disagreement.

A third limitation of the methods used in this study is the overall length and informational content of each excerpt. While the excerpts in this study provide adequate background information for the interpretation of the event, excerpts providing more information rather than less would allow for the researcher to ask a greater range and more in-depth questions regarding the event.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to question whether there is need for alternative methods of news media reporting of conflict in contemporary refugee crises. Conflict-based journalism is based on providing viewers accurate information and generating public discourse aimed at the resolution of a posed issue. Further research should be conducted reviewing the degree of effectiveness obtained by the formatting of news stories. In addition to this, American news media should review decency standards to allow for the appropriate use of the display of human suffering. Perhaps news media platforms could invest in an internet-based program which would act as a loophole to the strict decency standards of traditional media. An internet-based program could potentially allow for the display of conflict-based graphic content and story details, to only be viewed by those over eighteen or those who have a subscription. This would allow for more episodic news stories with conflict-based content to be displayed in a manner which not only protects minors, but also members of the public who are sensitive to viewing such images.

This would simultaneously allow the remaining spectators a verified forum to obtain news devoid of conflict-based censorship.

In news events where material containing human suffering is available, consideration should be given to displaying this information to viewers, as it has been suggested by data to provoke a stronger element of sensitivity with the presented refugees. Nath, Pedriana, Gifford, McAuley & Fulop found that in the United States, alternative framing of pro-immigration appeals can moderate attitudes (2022). This could be especially persuasive in news events where civilian casualties are present or acts of genocide are being committed. To suppress these images passively influences audiences' emotional interpretation of refugee conflict events, thus skewing public knowledge, discourse and calls to action (Allen, 2018).

An increase in technological capabilities has allowed for an increase in the availability of conflict-oriented footage. This modern rationale caters more recently to research conducted by Plaisance (2011) who suggests that technological advancement and a globalized world has opened the door for different forms of journalistic reporting. Rimoldi & Belgiojoso cite the poverty equivalence scale as a tool to measure levels of poverty (2016). Thus, changes should be proposed to lift the ethics-based censorship standards because these constraints have an impact on the moral interpretation of a news event by audiences and thus limit a society's power to address ethical problems.

By understanding there has been a shift in the way news can be broadcasted and obtained, a new method to safeguard what content is allowed must be established. This lies within ensuring audiences can interpret conflict-based news based on genuine ethical consideration. In an era of smartphones with readily available recording equipment and ease of access to the world-wide web, the range of first-hand visual content of conflicts is readily available and yet American mass news media is still restricted to stay in line with outdated American standards of decency.

Chouliaraki (2009) further supports the interconnectedness of moral agency and witnessing, which refines witnessing into two categories, bearing witness and eye-witnessing. Eye-witnessing is visual coverage of a news event which omits extremely graphic content. Footage is used to create a story of the event which appeals to spectators. Eye-witnessing is ultimately the less constructive of the two as it relies upon a journalist to set the frame of the event. Conversely, bearing witness displays the event as it actually unfolded with no content omitted. This allows for frames of thinking to be constructed and then interpreted within the viewer. Which allows for the news event to be experienced as if the viewer were present and thus is more authentic.

There is also a difference in spectator interpretation regarding each form of witnessing. The spectator receiving the eye-witness report holds a politically-motivated frame of objective truth. Whereas the bearing witness report holds the morally-motivated frame of identifying with the unfortunate and those the unfortunate represents. The distinction between a journalist relating the events of an unfortunate's suffering to spectators and the genuine aesthetic presentation of the unfortunate's suffering supports a key question of this study: Does American

news media frame stories in a way which removes the human element of suffering, thus creating a disproportionate response to conflict? This also supports the notion that witnessing allows for a more sensitive discussion on the basis of moral agency. The witnessing of an unfortunates suffering by a spectator holds a greater element of sensitivity than written, verbal, edited-visual content, and the way in which news content is presently constrained is not adequate.

The information obtained regarding news media framing, the aesthetic quality, and witnessing derived moral agency are essential to sustaining the validity of continuing research. Without this knowledge, the impact of presenting the un-edited human element of suffering in broadcast media to viewers cannot be interpreted.

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Nigerian Audience Views on Mainstream Media and Moulding of Public Opinion in the 21st Century

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The mass media have been long known to shape and mould public opinion in every human society. However, with the influence of web 2.0 technologies that have affected mainstream journalism practice in the 21st century, this study investigated the extent to which mainstream media still mould public opinion in Nigeria. The paper was anchored on agenda-setting and media dependency theories as it investigated journalism's ability to mould the views of people on issues of public concern. The survey research design was used where the multi-stage sampling technique was adopted and an online Australian Calculator was used to draw the sample size of 371, the questionnaire was deployed as the instrument for data collection. The results among other things revealed that, though social media and blogs' usage have influenced mass media and public communication generally, mainstream journalism still moulds public opinion in Nigeria. This was revealed as respondents disclosed that in making decisions, they believe and use more information they obtained from mainstream media platforms than information they got from blogs and social media sites.

Keywords: blogs, information, mainstream media, public opinion, public agenda, social media

Introduction

There is a belief that mass media are the major public institutions that galvanise, refine, evaluate, and to a very large extent define the opinions expressed by the people in every human society. It is through the media that the leaders and the lead get to know what constitutes public opinion and the slant of it in every nation at any given point in time. This is often chiefly achieved through “the agenda-setting prowess of the media,” (Osisanwo, 2022, p.76). Being a profession that assembles, dissects and presents the divergent views of the people on any issue, journalism has been instrumental to shaping what is known as public opinion. Sometimes, in the process of performing their agenda-setting roles, journalists through the mass media stimulate the people to air their opinion on certain issues of public interest. They do not only provide the audience with the platforms for expression of views and counter views on any matter but they (the

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media) exert influence on what could stand as the opinion of the people. The mass media could twist and even thwart the aggregate opinions held in any society by influencing the direction or what people would give consideration. Perhaps, that is why Bernard Cohen cited in Ohaja (2005) noted that the mass media may not always succeed in telling people what to think, but they could be succinctly successful in telling people what to think about. So, in Cohen's view, the mainstream media contribute subtly in guiding the psyche of the members of the public towards many things they consider worthwhile to think about.

Public opinion could be expressed on variegated matters bordering on multi-dimensional areas of human endeavours. That is captured in the submission that, all matters pertaining to people, "their welfare in political, religious, technological, socio-economical and other ways form the fulcrum of the mass media's regular reporting," (Edogor, 2018). Thus, from its inception, journalism has its thrust on coverage of anything from all walks of life. It is not circumscribed to a particular area. The import is that as much as the ethics and legal demands permit, journalism is expected to squarely concentrate on human beings and what affects them regardless of their gender, race, tribe, religion, age, social, economic, or political status. The mass media could scrutinise and streamline the opinions of the people expressed in any or combination of those divergent areas. That is made possible as the media were the only or at least the cardinal social institution that played a significant role in moulding the views expressed by the people. In fact, "ever since the advent of the mass media, it has been assumed that journalists had a strong influence on the formation of public opinion," (Petersen, 2019).

Before the twenty-first century, whenever one mentioned the term 'mass media,' the picture of magazines, newspapers, radio and television would easily come to mind. Before now, public opinion was seen as the views of the members of the public expressed through the outlined means of social communication. Also, those who are behind the production of mass media content are always known as their identities are not hidden at all. At that time, journalism practice and those in the profession had an incontestable definition even in the views of non-journalists. However, with time especially within the twenty-first century, the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has altered a series of things about journalism and mass media generally. The innovations brought by the ICTs did not only influence the processes of assembling messages or opinions for interpersonal and mass communication, they also influenced the media used in both of them Edogor (2008). That is evident in the observation that "the traditional lines between media are disappearing. The internet has eroded the distinctions among media, thus merging them up into one," Oyero (2007, p. 169).

With the availability of ICT devices and applications like blog sites and social media sites in the twenty-first century, everyone could participate in the processes of assembling and delivering messages, information, ideas, et cetera meant for public consumption. This informs the submission that, "we live in an age where media are seemingly ubiquitous and impactful, with mobile media, Internet connectivity, drones and video surveillance often bringing nonstop news and information to a public with an oftentimes thirsty appetite for news" (Pavlik, 2023, p. 223). Thus, individuals and non-human sources who were not hitherto used in

the production of the contents of communication intended for public consumption can now gather messages and deliver them to a mass audience using the alternative media provided by the ICTs. The European Society of Professional Journalists (2004, p. 1) cited in Aja (2011) observes that the news and information from the mainstream media are being increasingly circumvented by mass media audiences who use alternative media platforms as sources of getting messages. The popularity of alternative media platforms has made them expedient and the extent the mainstream media could still determine or shape public opinion in the twenty-first century has to be examined. That forms part of the matters this paper has attempted to provide empirical solutions to.

Statement of the Problem

In every democracy, the opinions of the people are considered essential to each branch of the government. This is essentially because the people ideally engineer the emergence as well as hold the power to dethrone or make any government lose legitimacy in democracy. Thus, the legitimacy of every democratic government is dependent on the people's acceptance of the government and their policies. Public opinion could largely show when the people support the government or not. That is the reason every reasonable government strives to ascertain the position of public opinion about their administration and or their policies. Also, governments make concerted efforts to ensure that their policies are endorsed by a greater number of people in different strata of society. Through the instrumentality of public opinion among other ways, people's support to government policies and programmes could be measured and seen for relevant actions or reasons.

The mainstream mass media x-ray the government and showcase governmental agenda, plans policies and programmes to the people and elicit their (people's) responses towards any policy initiated by the government. These roles count for the premium value which many societies place on the mass media as the watchdog that watches over and relays the actions and the activities of the government to the masses. Perhaps, such a watchdog role of the mass media could be seen in Chapter II, section 22, of the *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended*, which states that "the mass media shall at all times be free to...uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people." This provision by extension includes bringing the yearnings of the masses to the government which has to cater for the collective interest of the people.

The foregoing shows that the Nigerian constitution places a sacred responsibility on the mass media as an institution known hitherto to be the radio, television, magazine or newspaper. However, in the twenty-first century where there is a reportedly subtle usurpation of the works of the mainstream mass media by the users of alternative media sources (blogs and social media sits), the rate at which the mass media monitor the opinion of the masses about everything including the governance and report to the government needs to be re-examined. There are no empirical studies known to the researchers that have examined the ability of the mass media towards galvanization of public opinion vis-à-vis the existence of other

extant sources of getting information in Nigeria of the 21st century. Thus, this study investigated the extent at which the people view the mainstream media as the sources of moulding public opinion at the present age where bloggers and social media users or influencers have provided alternative platforms for galvanization of public opinion.

Objectives of the study: The following objectives guided this study: (1) To ascertain the extent at which members of the public accept the mainstream media as an institution that moulds public opinion in the twenty-first century; (2) To find out if there are alternative means which the members of the public understand as other sources that mould public opinion in the twenty-first century; (3) To determine whether members of the public believe that the Nigerian Government respected public opinion in the last eight years.

Research questions: This study was guided by the following research questions below: (1) To what extent do members of the public in Nigeria accept the mainstream media as an institution that moulds public opinion in the twenty-first century? (2) What are the alternative means which the members of the public understand as other sources that mould public opinion in the twenty-first century? (3) Do members of the public believe that the Nigerian Government respected public opinion in the last eight years?

Literature Review

The researchers examined some useful pieces of previous literature that are relevant to this study in order to throw light on the key subject matter of the work. The literature was reviewed under some subheadings for easy comprehension. Also, two theories were considered and applied to the study.

Overview of Public Opinion

According to facts from recorded history, public opinion could be traced back to the 18th century when it was believed to have originated. From that point, the crude perspective of what eventually became known as public opinion was formed. As expected, the nature of that time differs from what it is in the present century. This could be gleaned from the submission of Davison (2021) who recounts that:

Although the term *public opinion* was not used until the 18th century, phenomena that closely resemble public opinion seem to have occurred in many historical epochs. The ancient histories of Babylonia and Assyria, for example, contain references to popular attitudes, including the legend of a caliph who would disguise himself and mingle with the people to hear what they said about his governance. The prophets of ancient Israel sometimes justified the policies of the government to the people and sometimes appealed to the people to oppose the government. In both cases, they were concerned with swaying the opinion of the crowd. And in the classical democracy of Athens, it was commonly observed that everything depended

on the people, and the people were dependent on the word. Wealth, fame, and respect—all could be given or taken away by persuading the populace.

One underlying fact from Davison's bird's eye-view of the origin of public opinion is that, it entails influencing the opinion of the crowd or people to offer support or to oppose an idea. In essence, public opinion is not expected to always be the consensus of any particular social group over an issue. It is expected to portray both the views of those who agree on an issue and the views of others who hold a sharp contrary view on the same issue from the same group. So, public opinion encapsulates the divergent views of diverse members of a certain group. In line with this view, MacDougall (1966) cited in Ukonu (2007, p. 101) states that "public opinion can be said to be the state of opinion in a public on certain issues or matters when there are differences as well as agreements. Public opinion is just the opinions of the members of a group plus their differences." It refers to the collective opinions of those who constitute the majority on a particular matter and those who hold the minority view on the same matter of public concern.

The bottom-line in the foregoing is that the issue where the opinion is expressed should be what members of the public have an interest in or the issue that affects a greater percentage of the populace or their means of livelihood. Perhaps, the submission beneath better summarises the nitty-gritty of what public opinion entails as expressed by Ukonu (2007, p. 101) who argues that:

Therefore, the centripetal force within a public is an interest for all, upon which they may be divided or agreed in debate about them. If the matter does not concern the public, it is private. A member of NLC might have had a radically different opinion from that presented by the NLC as a body about privatization of the petroleum industry. This is the more reason such groups are not publics, and when the newspaper says public opinion, it should not be the aggregation of the voices of ASUU, NLC, political parties or health organisation...

In her explanation of public opinion, Hasan (2013) included the age distinction as a factor in the meaning of the term. Thus, she notes that "public opinion is the aggregate of individual attitudes or beliefs held by the adult population," Hasan (2013, p. 124). By inference, this definition does not include the opinion of the teens as what would make up public opinion. In Nigeria particularly, where the constitution of the country recognises adults from the age of eighteen years and above, it implies that the opinions of students who would not be up to the age categorised as adults should not be taken into consideration in public opinion as Hasan (2013) posits. The exclusion of the views of children or those who are not adults in the estimation of what constitutes public opinion in the idea of Hasan (2013) is not an acceptable standard across the world.

Thus, we do not share the age distinction which Hasan (2013) cited earlier in the explanation of public opinion. The reason is that it is unfair to relegate the reasonable opinion expressed by children as what could count in the views of the public. It amounts to utter denial of children's right of expression which the contemporary world does not espouse because children have some essential needs that are paramount to their development. For instance, secondary school children

could express their opinion on matters pertaining to their welfare in education or health related matters and that has to be taken seriously and not be side-lined or discarded on the premise that they are not adults. Article 12 of the Child Rights Convention (CRC) cited in Edogor and Okunna (2020, p. 93) provides that, “children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.”

In an explanation of public opinion, Key (1961) cited in Davison (2021) states that public opinion is “opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed.” The famous MacBride Communication Commission corroborates the definition of Key (1961) when it emphasises that public opinion entails the opinion of all those who are not in the position of decision-making in society. “Public opinion is considered to be that of people outside the decision-making process, external to the power centres, and differs from that of people who because of their specific position, knowledge and skills, are responsible for decisions. Therefore the individuals concerned have to contribute their voices to the issue in question,” (MacBride, 1981, p. 196).

The emphasis here is on public opinion being seen as the opinion of people outside the corridors of power. This is simply because the root word ‘public’ implies ‘the people.’ Strictly speaking, the term ‘public’ is referred to as ‘the electorate’ or ‘the masses,’ in political science. In the mass media field, it could be seen as ‘the audience.’ All these refer to those at the receiving end of the actions of others who dish out policies, take actions that would have effect, or enact laws that could impact on others. So, it would be a kind of aberration to use public opinion about those who occupy seats of power. Most often, the decisions and actions of the people who are in various positions to make policies that would affect the people or members of the public are what could stimulate reactions or responses that could be technically taken as ‘public opinion.’

Davison (2021) sees public opinion as “an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community. Some scholars treat the aggregate as a synthesis of the views of all or a certain segment of society; others regard it as a collection of many differing or opposing views.” This explanation summarises the divergent views of some scholars who have tried to give the definition of public opinion as cited earlier herein. Many sociologists, political scientists and communication scholars have their distinct perceptions of what public opinion is. However, public opinion should reflect the views expressed by the people on a matter(s) that affect(s) them collectively or on what affects a greater portion of the society. It is seen in a scenario where the crowd or group of people make expression of their opposition or position of support to a decision, action, policy, law, bill, etc.

Mass Media and Public Opinion

The media as an institution found in human societies contribute to formation of public opinion. They could equally determine the magnitude of permeation of public opinion in the society and the likely resultant response to it (public opinion). This makes the media an indispensable institution in shaping and defining public

discourse. Be that as it may, some scholars have argued that each medium of mass communication captures the public opinion in accordance with what the organisation believes as a corporate entity. Perhaps, Beniger and Herbst (1990) narrate the view better in the observation that, “within a separate and growing sphere of thought and behaviour, public opinion *is* what the monitoring system measures, and reality *is* what the mass media system reports-not by scientific or technical achievement but by institutional intent.” The import is that when properly measured, each media outfit’s intent towards swaying public opinion differs from others’ intent depending on what each of them pursues as a guiding principle.

The sovereign position of the mass media as the efficacious instrument that commandeers the majority view has not been hidden. Although the notion that the effects of mass media on humans are likened to the impact of a bullet on the body has been repealed with the findings of some studies, the power of the mass media to exert influence on any society has not been invalidated. “During the era of limited effects, several important ideas were developed that began to cast some doubt on the assumption that media influence on people and cultures was minimal. These ideas are still respected and examined even today,” (Baran, 2010, p. 368). This submission is akin to the observation of Ojobor (2002, p. 18) who notes that, “because of the known power of the media to affect the way people think and things, they were credited with incredible persuasive ability to change attitude and behaviour. It was feared that people did exactly what they saw in the media.”

The capacity of the mass media to influence society with a piece of dependable information which people could use to make both group and individual decisions has been made known before now. For instance, Murshed (2014) cited in Ullah and Khan (2020) observed that “media have become the supreme source of information which is held to be true at any cost. Thus it gives license to the people who use mass media personally to shape the opinion of the people and thereby adversely affect the society.” Neuman (1979) cited in Okoro and Agbo (2003) observe that the mass media make people adopt common values on issues. In corroboration of the above submissions, Morah and Okunna (2020, p. 712) note that, “the media are not just channels but are also diverse environments that enable communications to occur; they may influence the meaning and sense of the information transferred.”

The role of the mass media in shaping the views of people in politics particularly was admitted by Edogor (2018, p. 75) who notes that, “at least scholars have consensus that the media determine the extent of the discourse on politics.” Hasan (2013, p. 528) affirms that “it is the media through which people form an opinion...” Also, Neiger (2007, p. 311) succinctly avers that, “...communication scholars are in agreement that the elusive concept of ‘public opinion,’ those ‘pictures inside people’s heads’, is influenced by the way events are presented in the symbolic reality of the media.” The views of the cited scholars provide at least the perspective of the mass media’s impact on what is referred to as ‘public opinion’ regardless of the differences in the definition of the term.

Mass Media Landscape of the 21st Century

Generally, the 21st century era is known as a period where there are multidimensional and unparalleled changes in the ways things are done prior to the century. However, the 21st century mass media landscape seem to have experienced the changes more than any other sphere of human endeavour. The ICT devices and software have transformed the channels of mass communication as well as the consumers. The 21st century mass media vista is characterised by the use of web 2.0 applications or technologies that allow media users to generate and share contents to individuals and groups including mainstream media outfits. In observation of the changes in the century, Ciboh (2005, p. 146) succinctly notes that presently, “anybody with a computer can now become a reporter, editor and publisher.” While corroborating the submission, Akpan and Nnaane (2011, p. 34) state that, “some of the latest mobile phones allow users to take still pictures or video clips. For instance, when breaking news occurs, people in the area can take video and still pictures, before the media arrive on the scene...”

In a nutshell, the technologies of the 21st century have provided rooms for the mass media to reach their audiences through multiple means and allow the audiences as well, to participate in the work of sharing information and messages to others. This uphold the idea of a communication philosopher, Habermas (2008, p. 70) who observes that, “free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Everyone can therefore speak, write, and print freely...” These developments have made public opinion process more complex than what used to be obtained over the years before this current period.

So, the 21st century era is a period of democratization of the sources of information assemblage and delivery. Thus, through the instrumentality of social media and blog sites, the mainstream media audiences could equally participate in the art and science of gathering and dissemination of messages, information, ideas and opinions to members of the public. The 21st century media milieu is characteristically where there are prevalent new forms of media devices that encourage self-publishing or reporting, which has made mass communication less sophisticated, very attractive with immediate feed-back as well as more audience-friendly. Even in the present era where the new media are in vogue, the mass media and the new media combine to help the people more avalanche platforms for expression of their views. So, the existence of the multiple means of communication expectedly is helpful for expressing of public opinion. This submission was better captured in the observation that, “public opinion is not fragmented. People who read news online identify the same issues as most important for improving society. This research provides empirical evidence that proves this, contradicting those who argue that the proliferation of online media leads to the fragmentation of society,” (Majo-Vazquez, 2017). In the 21st century, the audiences’ use of social media particularly to participate in public opinion and information dissemination as well as the efficaciousness of the channels in reaching the audience are useful in moulding public opinion.

The new media bring their advantages in news dissemination to public opinion formation. It was Onomo (2012, p. 38) who notes that social media have

become “widespread tools for communication and exchange of ideas, helping individuals and organizations with just causes to reach a phenomenally vast audience that could hitherto not be reached by traditional media.” Osahenye (2011, p. 52) captures the gamut of the influence of the social media by referring to it (the power) as the “unstoppable power of the social media.” This implies that social media or the new media extends the tentacles of the mass media in assembling the views or opinions of the members of society. “Social media have become a mainstream activity and have become a major mode of communication,” (Idakwo, 2011), so, they are sources of public opinion today. Given the extent of social media’s influence on other contemporary channels of communication, the 21st century mass media landscape could be referred to as the ‘era or generation of digital media.’

Theoretical Framework

This paper was anchored on agenda-setting and media dependency theories. The proposition that mass media programmes determine the matters people could give attention to in society has been in vogue for a considerable length of time. That is the fundamental argument of the proponents of agenda-setting theory propounded by McCombs and Shaw in the year 1972. According to Folarin (2002, p. 75), “agenda-setting implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society.” Another mass media scholar Bittner (1989, p. 376) cited in Ojobor (2002, p. 18) observes that agenda-setting theory is “based on the thinking that people receive information directly from the media without intermediaries and that reaction to such information was a personal or individual thing, not based on how other people might influence them.” The notion that the media command a very reasonable percentage of any issue the people give consideration or devote their time to deliberate implies that, members of the public would still see the media as the influencers of public opinion. This is why agenda-setting theory was considered very to be applied to this study.

Also, there is a belief that mass media have become a reliable and powerful body in which people rely on the contents of their messages. This idea was captured in the media dependency theory propounded by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach in 1975. They “offered a view of potentially powerful mass media, tying that power to audience members’ dependence on media content,” (Baran, 2010, p. 369). The essential point here is that the scholars projected the mass media as powerful channels whose contents are dependable enough for the members of the public to take cognisance of the contents while making their various individual or collective decisions.

Invariably, as concerns this study, it means that the members of the public who are exposed to the contents of the mainstream media would still value their offerings in what they (the mainstream media) project as public opinion. That is, if the mass media have consistently maintained publication or presentation of dependable information to the audience in various issues reported as public

opinion. This points to the idea of upholding the ethics of giving respect to public interest by mass media professionals.

Methodology

The survey research method was adopted for this paper as the primary data used for it were gathered from the opinions of members of the public. The population used for the study is ten thousand, one hundred and ninety-eight (10,198), which is the total number of both academic and non-academic staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State as revealed by the Information from the Administrative Unit of the institution.

A sample size of 371 (three hundred and seventy-one) was obtained using an online Australian Calculator from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. For the stated population, the calculator gives the confidence level as 95%, at a confidence interval of 0.055001, with a standard error of 0.02552 and a relative standard error of 5.10. The population of the study was stratified into academic and non-academic staff. The academic staff under their union (Academic Staff Union of Universities) do not have a strict division(s) among their members unlike the non-academic staff union that divided their union along- Senior Staff Union of Nigeria Universities (SSANU) and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU).

Nnamdi Azikiwe University has three Campuses where the Academic and Non-academic staff of the institution work. However, the researchers purposively chose the Awka Campus of the university as the greater number of the staff work there. The researchers used simple random sampling (balloting) to choose between the SSANU and NASU to be studied, and after the balloting, SSANU was selected. Similarly, the ASUU members were stratified into the 10 faculties of the university where lecturers are found. The researchers employed the services of 2 research assistants who were guided to distribute the instruments (the questionnaire) equally among the ASUU and SSANU members selected for the study.

Data Presentation

The researchers drafted and validated 370 copies of questionnaire that were administered for the study where the chosen sample size was distributed at equal proportion between the members of the Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) both of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Chapter. Out of the 370 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 10 copies were not returned. Thus, 360 copies were used for data collation and the data collated were presented on tables using frequency and simple percentages. The information captured about the respondents are presented in Tables 1-5.

Table 1. Respondents' Age and Gender Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
30 – 40	98	27%	Female	160	44%
41 – 50	92	26%	Male	200	56%
51 – 60	93	26%	Others specify	Nil	Nil
Less than 70	77	21%	Total	360	100
Total	360	100	-----	-----	-----

Source: The researchers' survey, 2023.

The data in Table 1 show that the respondents are within the working-class statutory age brackets of academic and non-academic staff in Nigeria as indicated by the information in Column 1 of the table above, and the frequency as well as the percentages of their responses were presented on columns 2 and 3. Also, the information presented in other columns of the table shows that the male gender dominated the staff of the university sampled. The researchers would not be able to infer the reason for the preponderance of the male population in the university's workforce.

Table 2. Respondents' Marital Status and Educational Qualification

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentages (%)	Educational Status	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Married	202	56%	HND	61	17%
Single	128	36%	B.A/B.Sc.	85	24%
Divorced	02	0%	MA/M.Eng./M.Sc.	124	34%
Widowed	28	8%	PhD	90	25%
Total	360	100	Total	360	100

Source: The researchers' survey, 2023.

The data in table two above show that greater respondents are married and they were followed by those who are still single while there is an insignificant number of the respondents who accepted that they are divorcees. The insignificant number of the respondents indicating that they are divorcees points to the premium significance which Nigerians, nay, Africans attach to marriage as an institution. Though, the point has no direct bearing on the objectives of the study, it is necessary to highlight that the data revealed that even while in the condition of anonymity as in a research scenario like this, not many Africans could accept to be known as divorcees. Also, the insignificant number of the respondents with HND qualification could be attributed to the dichotomy which Nigerians place on HND certificates and university first degree certificates.

Research question one: To what extent do members of the public accept the mainstream media as an institution that moulds public opinion presently?

Table 3. Public's Opinion on the Mainstream Media and Moulding of Public Opinion Presently

Question and Responses: To what extent do you think that mainstream media: radio, television, magazine and newspaper, still mould public opinion presently	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No extent at all	22	6%
To a large extent	330	92%
No idea	8	2%
Total	360	100

Source: The researchers' survey, 2023.

The respondents accepted that the mainstream mass media remain the institution that moulds public opinion as defined in the instrument used for the data collation in the study. This was revealed when a greater number of them (92%) in table three above accepted that they are aware that the mainstream media help to bring the divergent views of members of the public together to form a whole called 'public opinion.' Thus, to a very large extent, the members of the public are aware of the role of the mainstream media in the formation of public opinion.

Research question two: What are the alternative means that the members of the public understand as other sources that mould public opinion in the twenty-first century?

Table 4. People's Views on the Alternative Sources that Mould Public Opinion Presently

What are other alternative sources that mould public opinion?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Market leaders/unions, Religious leaders: pastors and Imams	22	6%
Leaders of Professional Bodies/Unions and Community leaders	38	10%
New media: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, blog sites, etc	287	80%
Teachers/lecturers	13	4%
Total	360	100

Source: The researchers' survey, 2023.

A greater number of the respondents (80%) accepted that new media: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, blog sites, etc are the alternative sources that contribute towards moulding public opinion in the twenty-first century.

Research question three: Do members of the public believe that the Nigerian Government respected public opinion in the last eight years? This research question was used to elicit the views of the respondents on whether the immediate past government of Nigeria led by former President Muhammadu Buhari respected public opinion?

Table 5. People's Views on Whether Nigerian Government Respected Public Opinion in the Last Eight Years

Do you accept that the Nigerian Government respected public opinion in the last eight years?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	331	92%
Yes	23	6%
No idea	6	2%
Total	360	100

Source: The researchers' survey, 2023.

The respondents accepted that the previous Nigerian Government as led by former President Muhammadu Buhari did not respect public opinion in the eight years of the administration. This could be seen in the responses presented on table five above. The views of the respondents representing 92 percent of the sample showed that the administration had no regard for public opinion in the country.

Discussion of Findings

In the course of this paper, the extent to which members of the public accept that the mainstream media still hold sway in moulding public opinion was assessed. The respondents revealed that the mainstream media are still the institution that moulds public opinion in Nigeria. This finding corroborates the finding of Majo-Vazquez (2017) which found that “the conventional media that have online edition have a better reputation than the new digital media. That is, they are recognized more readily as authoritative information sources.” Perhaps, this may be attributed to the fact that despite the wide usage and popularity of the new media as revealed in the study of (Edogor et al., 2014); they are largely believed to be a means of spreading fake news and misinformation (Ezeonyejiaku et al., 2022). So, this finding points to the fact that even with the popularity of the new media, they are not rated much as the sources of moulding public opinion compared to the traditional media. In a nutshell, the import of the finding is that regardless of the influence of the new media on journalism practice, the mainstream media still maintain their relevance in galvanising the views of members of the public in Nigeria.

In addition, this paper also found that the new media have become the alternative sources that mould public opinion in the twenty-first century after the mainstream media. This could be obviously attributed to the whirlwind of changes which the new media have ushered into the hitherto order of things in the media sphere. This revelation is not farfetched as it is obvious in the twenty-first century that as the new media have offered members of the public multiple options of receiving and sharing information and messages. The submission corroborates the view of Majo-Vazquez (2017) who observes that the online media sites have had a considerable impact on the internal dynamics of news and information production and dissemination. It should be noted that before the twenty-first century, the mainstream media were virtually the only sources of receiving and imparting information and opinions.

Besides, with the availability and the use of other means of receiving opinions and information in the twenty-first century, this paper also, sought to find out whether other sources of receiving opinions and information have replaced the mainstream mass media in moulding public opinion. The result was that the traditional media have not been displaced in their position as the main source of shaping public opinion in Nigeria. This finding is in line with the views of Edogor et al. (2014, p. 55) who opines that “no new form of mass medium had ever displaced the existing one prior to it.” Also, as regards the position of the new media in distribution of news and information in this present time, Majo-Vazquez

(2017) notes that the new media have brought a lot of changes yet they “have not eroded the central position of the traditional media in the distribution of information.” Even though there are more media and the news diets are more varied, there is still a broad consensus as to the issues on which public debate should focus. And these issues are determined by the traditional media’s agenda.” This observation still adds to the fact that the conventional media with their online presence command the aggregate views of members of the public in Nigeria.

One of the results of the study shows that members of the public revealed that the Nigerian government under former President Muhammadu Buhari did not respect public opinion in his eight years. Perhaps, this revelation corroborated the stance of the *Punch* newspaper’s editorial of December 11, 2019, where the paper decided to prefix Buhari’s name with his military rank in the 1980s. Also, the same publication chose to refer to the Buhari’s administration as regime. All these were decisions of the media outfit owing to their conviction that Buhari’s government lacks respect for public opinion and disregard for rule of law generally (The Punch Editorial, 2019). This position of a national daily in Nigeria about the then sitting president of the country is one of the means to measure the ambiance of the government vis-à-vis regard for public opinion. Considering the fact that this study has revealed that the conventional media mould public opinion, it could be said that the view of the *Punch* newspaper reflects the views of reasonable portion of the Nigerian people on President Buhari.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the views of the Nigerian mass media audience concerning the mainstream media and moulding of public opinion in the 21st century. This was done to ascertain the position of the traditional media as the hitherto major force in galvanising public opinion. The findings have defined the key sources and the alternative sources of moulding public opinion in the 21st century Nigeria. The researchers also probed to find out the audiences’ perception of the immediate past Nigerian Government as regards upholding public opinion expressed in the country. The data presented indicated that the Nigerian government led by former President Muhammadu Buhari had no regard to public opinion most often in the affairs of the country. All these were the efforts made to achieve the objectives of this study.

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Social Actors' Representations in Newspaper Headlines on Domestic Violence against Men and Women in Sub-Saharan, Africa

*By Tolulope Akinseye**

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Sub-Saharan Africa, shaped by socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, and systemic inequalities. Media representations of domestic violence, particularly through newspaper headlines, play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and responses to this pressing societal issue. This study conducts a comparative analysis of social actors' representation in newspaper headlines of domestic violence against men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through a discursive analysis, the paper explores the representation of the victims, perpetrators, and authorities, across various newspapers within the regions. The findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions show a pronounced media focus on victims rather than perpetrators in the headlines. Additionally, the inclusion of OTHERS enriches the narrative, with Western Africa showing the highest. Furthermore, the analysis reveals distinct patterns in role allocation, with perpetrators often depicted as active agents and conversely, sometimes represented as passive agents, shifting the narrative to victims' experiences and suffering. The study also highlights regional differences, with Eastern Africa less frequently activating perpetrators in headlines. Finally, the use of nomination, categorization, and collectivization in headlines adds depth, emphasizes collective efforts, and highlights the prevalence of domestic violence, although sometimes at the expense of individual experiences.

Keywords: media representations, social actors, domestic violence, men and women

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue that affects individuals and communities worldwide. Lenore (1999) characterizes domestic violence as an incredibly damaging pattern of behavior that needs thorough characterization. Similarly, Itzin et al. (2010) define domestic violence as “a pattern of abusive behaviors involving a wide range of physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment perpetrated by one person in an intimate relationship against another to gain or maintain unfair power, control, and authority”.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-cultural norms and patriarchy intersect with economic disparities and systemic inequalities, the impact of domestic violence is particularly pronounced. These factors place victims in disadvantaged positions within the family structure, significantly contributing to the high prevalence of

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intimate partner violence (IPV) in the region. Previous studies have revealed that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest IPV rates globally, with an overall prevalence of 36%, surpassing the global average of 30% (Devries et al., 2013; García-Moreno et al., 2013). While men can also be victims of domestic violence, the prevalence is significantly higher among women (Chukwudeh, 2022). This issue is further compounded by the troubling reality that both men and women in these societies have largely come to accept domestic violence as a societal norm (Islam et al., 2017; Uthman, Moradi, and Lawoko, 2011).

Central to the discourse surrounding domestic violence is the role of the media in shaping public perceptions, attitudes, and responses. Media representations play a critical role in framing the narrative around domestic violence, influencing how it is understood, discussed, and addressed within society. Despite increased awareness and advocacy efforts, the prevalence of domestic violence in the region remains alarmingly high, affecting individuals irrespective of gender identity. Bakuuro & Diedong (2021) stressed the fact that media discourse analysis allows us to tap into the minds of the author and the audience to know their levels of understanding of the issues at table. Within this context, the representations of social actors—victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and authorities—holds significant implications for both the perpetuation and prevention of domestic violence.

This article seeks to explore the representation of social actors in media reportage of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on Violence Against Men (VAM) and Violence against Women (VAW). Understanding the complexities of social actor representation in media coverage is essential for advancing efforts to combat this pervasive issue. Through this exploration, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of media in shaping perceptions of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and inform strategies for promoting more inclusive, equitable, and effective responses to this critical public health and human rights challenge. Thus, the research questions that will guide this research are:

1. How are social actors involved in domestic violence, including victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and authorities, portrayed in newspaper headlines in Sub-Saharan Africa?
2. To what extent do newspaper headlines represent social actors involved in domestic violence against men and women differently in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the 1990s, CDA evolved from Critical Linguistics (CL) into its current form, with the aim of uncovering hidden ideologies and intentions within texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). Unlike Discourse Analysis (DA), CDA is a "constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary" method that focuses not on linguistic

units but on social phenomena. This requires a unique approach that is both multi-methodological and multi-disciplinary (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 2). van Leeuwen (2006) distinguishes Critical Linguistics (CL) from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in several key ways. While CL and CDA share common foundations, CDA seeks to establish critical social theory and explores the links between "discourse and the social practices in which they are embedded" (p. 167). Additionally, CDA adopts a more sophisticated interdisciplinary approach, extending beyond the analysis of texts and spoken discourse to investigate their meanings through methods such as historiography or Discourse Analysis (DA).

Another important concept in CDA research is dominance. CDA aims to investigate both opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as they manifest in language. By critically evaluating texts, CDA seeks to highlight issues of injustice, repression, and marginalization, thereby revealing underlying dominance (Wodak, 2001, p. 204). In a conventional setting, domination may manifest through social conflict or various forms of conflicts between groups competing for material or symbolic resources. The power dynamics between different groups and the accompanying ideologies frequently give rise to disparities and oppression, prompting marginalized groups to resist and strive for change. Moreover, the theory of dominance, which posits that variations in discourse stem from the unequal power distribution between men and women, offers insights into these disparities.

CDA encompasses a range of methodologies, including Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework, van Dijk's (1998a) socio-cognitive approach, Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach, and Van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of social actor representation.

Fairclough (1992) presents the three-dimensional approach to critical discourse analysis, encompassing (1) the textual aspects (including vocabulary, grammar, and text structure), (2) discursive practices, and (3) sociocultural practices. Wodak's framework comprises three interconnected components: discourse immanent critique, sociodiagnostic critique, and prognostic critique. Discourse immanent critique involves scrutinizing the variability, contradictions, and challenges within the internal structure of discourse. Socio-diagnostic critique extends beyond discourse boundaries, leveraging the analyst's background and contextual understanding to contextualize the discourse within broader social, political, and situational contexts. Prognostic critique entails considering the implications of discourse analysis findings for enhancing and reforming discourse. Furthermore, van Leeuwen (2008) introduces the socio-semantic approach as the way to agglomerate the social actors and the ideological consequences in the texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Theory

van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) discusses a 'socio-semantic inventory' as a tool for examining the representation of participants in social practices within a text. The significance of representation lies in its potential to be more salient than the actual

social behavior itself. A fundamental premise of van Leeuwen's theory is the examination of how social actors are depicted within the English language. Rather than centering on linguistic classifications (such as transitivity categories) and linguistic processes (like nominalization and passive agent omission), van Leeuwen directs attention to the "sociosemantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented and establish the sociological and critical relevance" to the various categories, which are then analyzed in terms of their linguistic realization (van Leeuwen, 2008, p.23).

Discourse Feature Description

Inclusion & Exclusion	In any social practice, there are some social actors involved in the process. When representing the practice, some of these actors may be included (explicitly mentioned), some excluded. Exclusion with no trace is suppression (deletion). Exclusion with the possibility to infer the actor's involvement is backgrounding. In the latter case, the actor is deemphasized, pushed into the background, but not completely deleted.
Role allocation	Role allocation This feature concerns the roles that social actors are given to play in the representation. They may be activated (depicted as active, dynamic forces in an activity) or passivated (pictured as receiving end of the activity).
Genericization & Specification	Social actors can be represented through generic (as classes) or specific (as identifiable individuals) reference.
Association & Dissociation	This feature refers to forming and unforming the groups of social actors in a text as the text's proceeds. In association, social actors are represented in conjunction with others, while they are represented separately in dissociation.
Indetermination & Determination	Indetermination occurs when social actors are represented as unspecified, 'anonymous' individuals or groups, determination, when their identity is, one way or another, specified.
Nomination & Categorization	Social actors can be represented either in terms of their unique identity (nomination), or in terms of identities and functions they share with others (categorization).
Functionalization & Identification	Functionalization occurs when social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do, for instance an occupation or role. Identification occurs when social actors are defined, not in terms of what they do, but in terms of what they,

	more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are.
Personalization & Impersonalization	Social actors can be personalized (represented as human beings) or impersonalized (through concrete or abstract nouns whose meaning does not include the semantic features of human).
Overdetermination	Overdetermination occurs when social actors are represented as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice. Here the social actor comes to symbolize different social practices which may be related to one another, be opposite, etc.

Thus, the representation of social actors plays a crucial role in shaping readers' perceptions of domestic violence against men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa. The choice of words and the frequency of their use can significantly influence how domestic violence issues are understood by the public. For instance, as Fowler (1991) and Richardson (2007) discuss, the specific terminology used to describe victims and perpetrators can convey underlying social values and priorities. If headlines frequently use terms that emphasize the victim's vulnerability or the perpetrator's criminality, this framing can affect how readers perceive the severity and nature of domestic violence.

In this context, the study employs van Leeuwen's (2008) 'sociosemantic' system to analyze how social actors are represented in headlines related to domestic violence. van Leeuwen's framework helps in understanding how linguistic choices, such as whether social actors are included or excluded, impact readers' perceptions. For example, headlines that use suppression to omit the mention of certain actors or backgrounding to minimally reference them can obscure the roles and responsibilities associated with domestic violence. This form of representation might lead to a lack of clarity about who is involved and responsible for the violence, which can influence public perception and policy responses. Additionally, as Conboy (2007) notes, newspaper headlines often use emotive language and rhetorical devices to attract readers' attention. This representation can significantly shape readers' attitudes towards domestic violence and gender roles in the region.

Numerous studies have been undertaken regarding the portrayal of social actors in the past. Risdaneva's (2018) research into the portrayal of women in news reporting on sexual violence shed light on the nuanced ways in which media depict victims and perpetrators. This study revealed disparities in how individuals involved in such incidents are characterized, uncovering subtle yet significant differences in the language and terminology employed, highlighting potential biases or preconceptions embedded within media representations.

Similarly, Pekkarinen (2016) focused specifically on the portrayal of victims and alleged perpetrators of sexual violence in US news articles. Through a thorough analysis of news coverage, the study identified patterns in how victims

are depicted as passive subjects while alleged perpetrators are framed in ways that either humanize or vilify them. This dichotomy in representation not only reflects broader societal attitudes towards victims and perpetrators but also has implications for public understanding and empathy towards survivors of sexual violence.

In a related vein, Qanitat (2015) explored the representation of social actors in the context of coverage on Islamic issues in online newspapers. By examining the strategies used by media outlets to depict various actors within the Muslim community, the study provided insights into the construction of media narratives surrounding sensitive socio-cultural topics. This research highlighted the role of media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards specific groups or communities, underscoring the importance of critical media analysis in understanding the complexities of social actor representation.

However, while these studies collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of how media narratives are constructed and the implications of these representations for societal attitudes and behaviors, there are still some gaps that the present study aims to address. Specifically, the existing literature primarily focuses on specific contexts such as sexual violence and Islamic issues, neglecting the nuanced dynamics of representation in the context of domestic violence against both men and women. Therefore, this present study seeks to examine the representation of social actors in media coverage of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on violence against both men and women. By analyzing newspaper headlines, this study aims to uncover how different social actors are portrayed and framed within media narratives, shedding light on the nuances of representation in this particular context.

Methodology

This study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the representation of social actors in newspaper headlines on domestic violence against men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 170 newspaper reports were obtained from the LexisNexis database, which covers a wide array of news articles. The selected reports spanned the period from 2019 to 2023, using keywords such as 'domestic violence', 'gender-based violence', and 'intimate partner violence' to identify relevant articles. The focus was on articles reporting specific incidents or cases involving violence against both men and women.

The data collection process specifically targeted three distinct regions within Sub-Saharan Africa—Eastern Africa, Western Africa, and Southern Africa—ensuring a broad representation of media perspectives from various socio-political contexts within the region. Newspapers were carefully chosen to include both state-owned and privately-owned outlets, reflecting diverse affiliations and providing a balanced view of the media landscape in each region.

For Southern Africa, the newspapers analyzed included *Daily News*, *The Star*, *Mail and Guardian*, *Post*, and *Cape Times*. Eastern Africa's headlines were

sourced from *Daily Monitor*, *Daily Nation*, and *The Herald*. Western Africa's data came from *The Punch*, *The Sun*, *Nigeria Tribune*, *Daily Independent*, *The Nation*, *PM News*, *Weekly Trust*, and *This Day*. These selections were designed to capture a wide range of reporting styles and viewpoints.

The selected timeframe of 2019 to 2023, while showing some uneven distribution of headlines across the years, provided a comprehensive overview of recent media coverage of domestic violence. Despite the unequal distribution of headlines, all headlines within this period were thoroughly analyzed to capture contemporary issues and trends in the representation of domestic violence in the media across the different regions.

After the data was collected from LexisNexis, the headlines were manually categorized using van Leeuwen's socio-semantic framework for the representation of social actors. A meticulous process was undertaken where each headline was analyzed to identify various discursive strategies and patterns of representation. For the quantitative analysis, simple percentages were calculated to quantify the distribution of headlines across different categories. These percentages were then used to create column charts, which provided a pictorial representation of the data. This approach facilitated a clear visualization of the distribution of headlines by region and social actor, allowing for easier comparison and interpretation of how domestic violence is reported in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Data Analysis

Theo van Leeuwen's framework provides a comprehensive tool for understanding how different participants in a discourse are represented. This framework is particularly useful in examining media representations of complex social issues like domestic violence.

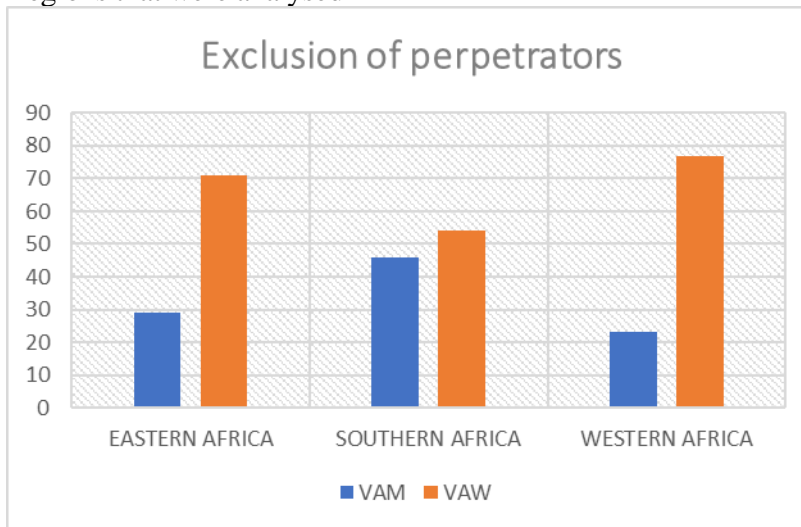
Exclusion of Social Actors

In this context, exclusion refers to the omission of certain social actors from the headlines reporting violence against men and women in the regions analysed. This happens through suppression and backgrounding, where social actors are left out from the headlines, or rather they are not giving significant roles.

Exclusion of the Perpetrators

Here, actions that are de-agentilised present the victims as the goal of the violence without making reference to the perpetrators. The newspaper reporters shift the focus to other victims in the headlines on the violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW).

Figure 1. The Chart Below shows the Distribution of Exclusion across the Regions that were analysed



The results presented in the graph above indicate the frequency of headlines in the analysed African regions. These headlines excluded the perpetrators from the headlines in cases of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW). The findings indicate a greater frequency of headlines excluding perpetrators in cases of violence against women compared to those involving violence against men.

The exclusion of perpetrators in headlines about violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW) shows a media focus on victims. The findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions reveal that in cases of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW), perpetrators are more frequently excluded from the headlines, especially in VAW cases. In Eastern Africa, there are significantly more VAW headlines (71%) compared to VAM headlines (29%). Western Africa shows the smallest number of VAM headlines (23%) and the highest number of VAW headlines (77%). Southern Africa has a more balanced number of headlines, with 46% for VAM and 54% for VAW.

Also from the result, there are regional differences. For instance, in Eastern Africa, there is a significant difference between the reportage on VAM and VAW, emphasizing a stronger focus on headlines that exclude perpetrators. Similarly, in Western Africa, which has the smallest number of VAM headlines and the highest number of VAW headlines, there is an even more pronounced focus on female victims rather than the perpetrators. However, in Southern Africa, there tends to be a more balanced reportage between VAM and VAW (54).

Example 1:

- i. 1108 men reported being abused in 6 years(Western Africa)
- ii. Men still prefer silence after being raped(Eastern Africa)
- iii. You Know What, men get abused(Southern Africa)

Example 2:

- i. No! Women don't condone domestic violence (Western Africa)
- ii. Demand justice for women assaulted in 18 cities (Eastern Africa)
- iii. *Virus is one more woe for abused women*(Southern Africa)

From example 1 above, the headlines backgrounded and suppressed the perpetrators and focused on victims, thereby emphasizing the experiences and challenges faced by victims. The headlines avoid potentially stigmatizing any gender, as discourse of domestic violence is a sensitive case, thereby keeping the discussion more neutral. The media try as much as possible to maintain their integrity at the same time creating a safer environment for victims to come forward and report their experiences. However, there is a breaking of gender stereotypes in some headlines as seen in example (i) above. Before now, society often perceives men as strong and capable of protecting themselves, so when they are portrayed as victims of abuse, it challenges traditional gender roles. By emphasizing the experiences of male victims, the headlines aim to shed light on an often-overlooked issue and encourage conversations about domestic abuse against men. Apart from that, the media focuses on support for these male victims of abuse, thereby foregrounding their experiences, omitting perpetrators, and shifting focus towards acknowledging and addressing the needs of men who have experienced abuse.

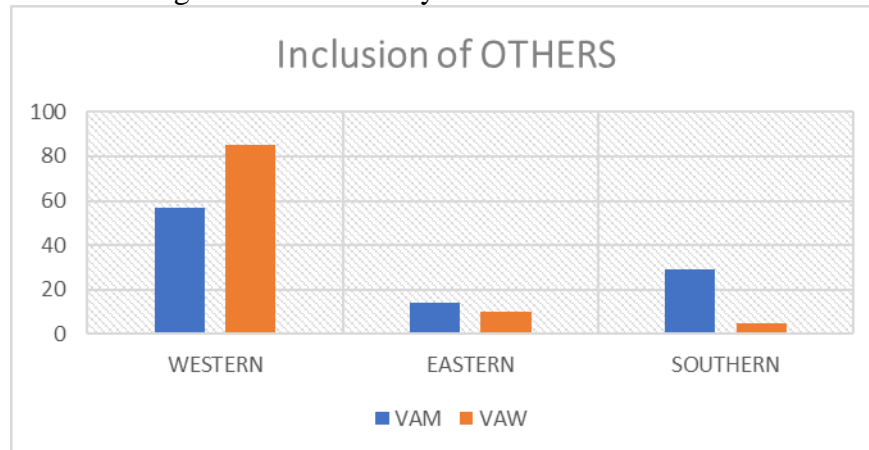
Furthermore, in example 2, backgrounding is achieved by excluding the perpetrators from the headlines. In many cultures and contexts, it is implicitly understood that men are the primary perpetrators of domestic violence. This implicit understanding often led to less frequent and explicit mention of perpetrators in headlines. It could be inferred from most of the headlines that societies often take it for granted that men are the primary perpetrators of gender-based violence and domestic abuse. This assumption is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, such as Africa, where patriarchal norms prevail, perpetuating the idea of male dominance and control over women. As a result, media outlets refrain from explicitly stating the gender of perpetrators in headlines, as it is implied that men are commonly associated with these crimes. While statistics often indicate that men are disproportionately represented as perpetrators of gender-based violence, it is essential to recognize that not all men engage in such behavior.

In summary, the assumption, which reflect cultural and societal norms, as illustrated in the analysed examples, suggests that men are predominantly the perpetrators of domestic violence. On the other hand, the mention of perpetrators in VAM headlines, although fewer, indicates a growing recognition of men as victims of domestic violence. This helps to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, acknowledging that men too can suffer from abuse. Meanwhile, the differences in regional reporting can influence local and international advocacy and policy-making efforts, targeting specific cultural and societal contexts to address domestic violence more effectively.

Inclusion of OTHERS

The concept of 'inclusion of OTHERS' refers to acknowledging and considering additional social actors who are neither victims nor perpetrators in the context of newspapers headlines on domestic violence. This involves identifying individuals or groups who play secondary or supporting roles in the reported incidents.

Figure 2. The Chart Below Shows the Distribution of the Inclusion of OTHERS across the Regions that were analysed



From the chart above, the inclusion of other social actors is significantly high in Western Africa, with 57.1% for men and 85% for women. This suggests more robust engagement and interventions of various entities and individuals in the discourse on domestic violence against women. The presence of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), and notable figures such as academics and government officials highlight the extensive efforts to address both women's and men's issues related to domestic violence. For instance, the involvement of the NHRC and CDHR emphasizes the role of authoritative bodies in advocating for women's rights, while academic experts lend credibility to reports on domestic violence.

Furthermore, in Eastern Africa, the inclusion percentages are lower, with 14.3% for men and 10% for women. This indicates less frequent involvement of other social actors in the media coverage of domestic violence against men and women. However, the inclusion of high-profile figures such as Camilla, The Duchess of Cornwall, and local influencers like Sungura musician Aleck Musuki, still brings significant attention to the issue. The involvement of organizations like the Centre for Rights, Education, and Awareness (CREAW) working with the National Police Service showcases the efforts to improve systemic responses to domestic violence through specialized training. Although the percentages are lower, the presence of these actors highlights ongoing efforts to address domestic violence and protect victims in the region, while more comprehensive and localized initiatives may be necessary to enhance the impact and reach of these efforts.

Interestingly in Southern Africa, the inclusion of others stands at 28.6% for men and 5% for women. Since violence against men is less commonly reported or acknowledged in many societies, media outlets seek to provide additional context or validation by emphasizing the broader societal response to such incidents. Furthermore, the inclusion of others in these headlines reflect a growing recognition of the importance of addressing gender-based violence in all its forms, including violence perpetrated against men. As societal attitudes towards masculinity and vulnerability evolve, there may be increasing efforts within media organizations to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes by portraying men as multidimensional beings who can be victims of violence and also receive support and intervention. On the other hand, headlines related to violence against women may exhibit lower levels of inclusion of others due to several factors, including entrenched gender biases, victim-blaming attitudes, and the normalization of violence against women in some contexts. Media representations of violence against women may sometimes focus primarily on the actions of perpetrators or the experiences of victims, neglecting the broader social dynamics and support networks that play a crucial role in addressing and preventing such violence.

Example 1:

- i. More Women Beating Men Now - (DOVVSU)
- ii. More Men Suffer Domestic Abuse Than Women, (LASU Don) Reveals
- iii. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist
- iv. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: 25% OF MEN SUFFER ABUSE IN NIGERIA — (NGO)

Example 1 above has headlines on VAM. Here, the inclusion of various social actors beyond the primary victims and perpetrators enhances the narrative's credibility and depth. The Police Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) highlights law enforcement's acknowledgment and action on domestic violence against men, lending authority to the issue. The reference to a Lagos State University (LASU) academic indicates that scholarly research underpins these findings, adding academic validation. Similarly, a criminologist from a university provides an expert perspective, emphasizing that professionals are noting and reporting the rise in domestic violence against men. The inclusion of an NGO, Purple Lifeline Connection, underscores civil society's advocacy and support roles, offering crucial data and perspectives. Incorporating these social actors present a multifaceted view of domestic violence against men, validating the reported trends and promoting a nuanced public discourse.

Example 2:

- i. Camilla to Give Speech at Violence Against Women and Girls Event in Rwanda
- ii. African Activists Fight Violence Against Women One Law at a Time
- iii. Pirates Decries Alarming Violence Against Women, Minors
- iv. Sanwo-Olu Charges Women to Take Their Place in Emerging World

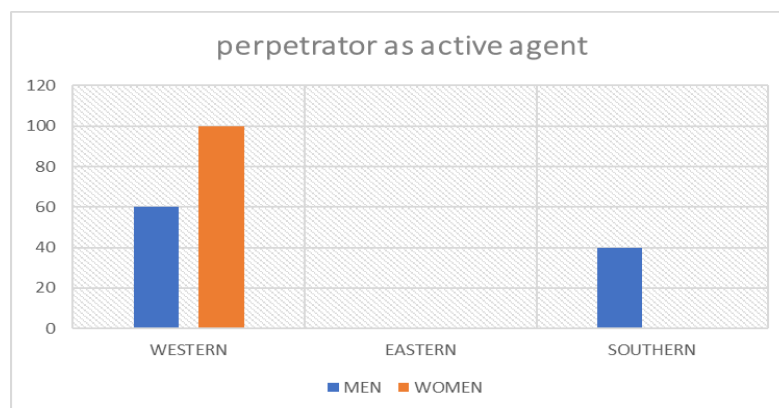
In example 2 above, the headlines on VAW illustrate the inclusion of various social actors, from international figures to local activists and governmental officials, contributing to a comprehensive narrative on combating violence against women. Camilla, The Duchess of Cornwall, brings international attention and credibility to the issue, emphasizing its global importance. The mention of African activists highlights grassroots efforts and the role of civil society in driving legislative and social reforms. The National Association of Seadogs (Pirates Confraternity) points to fraternal organizations' involvement in advocating for women's rights, showing a proactive stance in supporting victims. Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu's commitment to empowering women underscores the local government's role in promoting gender equality. Including these diverse social actors enriches the media coverage, fostering a more informed and multidimensional public discourse on domestic violence against women.

Role Allocation

This refers to the different roles the social actors play in a discourse. van Leeuwen argues that the representation can reallocate or rearrange the social relations between the participants. this can be realized through activation and passivation. In the former, social actors are represented as active participants, performing actions, while in the latter they are depicted as undergoing actions or being affected by them.

In this context, the victims or the perpetrators of domestic violence might be activated as those urging action or making statements, while victims might be passivated as those experiencing violence.

Perpetrators as Active Agents



The analysis of the data reveals notable differences in how perpetrators are framed as active agents across the three regions. In the Western region, perpetrators in cases of violence against men (VAM) are depicted as active agents 60% of the time, while in cases of violence against women (VAW), this figure

rises to 100%. This suggests a strong tendency in Western media to portray perpetrators, especially in cases of violence against women, as actively engaged in the acts of violence. In contrast, the Eastern region shows no instances where perpetrators are framed as active agents, with 0% representation for both VAM and VAW. This absence indicates a potential lack of emphasis on the agency of perpetrators in media portrayals within this region. The Southern region presents a mixed picture, where 40% of perpetrators in VAM cases are depicted as active agents, while, similar to the Eastern region, there is no representation of active agents in VAW cases. This variation might reflect regional differences in media focus and the framing of social actors involved in domestic violence.

Example 1.

- i. More Women Beating Men Now- DOVVSU(Western)
- ii. How my wife beats me at will, man shares ordeal (Western)
- iii. Female soldier reported for abusing Hubby (Southern)

Example 2

- i. Man shoot wife to death at Ashaiman(Western)
- ii. Man pours hot water on wife in Ondo(Western)

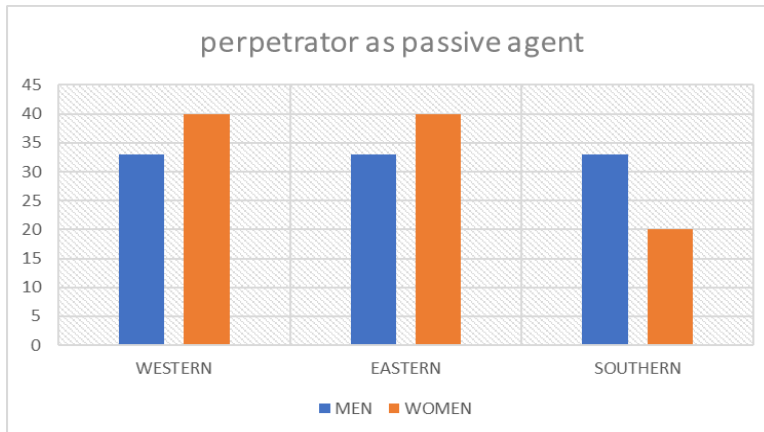
In example 1 above, the headlines activate the agents 'women,' 'my wife,' and 'female soldier' as perpetrators of violence, highlighting an increase in instances where women are actively beating men. The use of activation in these headlines draws attention to a shift in societal dynamics and addresses the underreported issue of female-perpetrated domestic violence. On the other hand, in example 2, the noun 'man' is activated in both instances as perpetrators who actively committed the violent acts of shooting his wife to death and pouring hot water on his wife, respectively.

In the provided examples, perpetrators are represented as active agents to draw attention to the seriousness and prevalence of domestic violence. The use of activation in these headlines ensures that the focus remains on the material actions of 'beating, abusing, pouring, shooting' by the perpetrators.

Notably, there are fewer occurrences of this representation across the regions, with no instances at all in Eastern Africa. This absence suggests cultural or media practices that focus more on the victims rather than the perpetrators.

Perpetrators as Passive Agents

Here, perpetrators are represented as performers of the action (domestic violence). This can be realised through grammatical constructs that shift the focus away from the agent performing the action and instead emphasize the experience or impact on the affected party. For a perpetrator to be passivated in discourse, the representation would shift away from them as active agents committing the violence and instead focus on the violence itself or its effects.



The data on perpetrators framed as passive agents across Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa reveals distinct patterns for both violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW). For VAM, there is an equal distribution of 33% across all three regions, indicating a consistent narrative where perpetrators of violence against men are uniformly depicted as passive agents. This uniformity in VAM suggests a widespread and common approach across these regions, reflecting a shared tendency in how these cases are represented in the media. In contrast, the representation of VAW perpetrators as passive agents varies across the regions. Western and Eastern Africa both have a higher percentage of 40%, indicating a stronger inclination in these regions to depict perpetrators of VAW as passive. Meanwhile, Southern Africa shows a significantly lower percentage at 20%, suggesting a different media narrative or cultural perspective that is less likely to frame VAW perpetrators as passive. This variation highlights regional differences in the portrayal of domestic violence, which may be influenced by differing cultural attitudes or media practices concerning gender and accountability.

Here are a few ways this can be achieved:

Bypass Agency

Bypass agency refers to the omission of the perpetrator in a statement, thereby foregrounding the action itself. This technique often shifts the focus from who is performing the action to the action's impact or the victims.

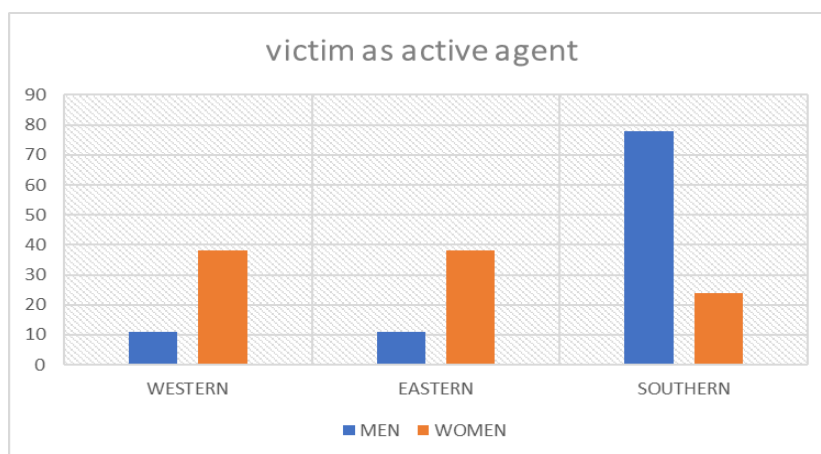
- i. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist (Western Africa)
- ii. Men also suffer domestic violence (Western Africa)
- iii. No! Women don't condone domestic violence (Eastern Africa)
- iv. Domestic violence: the real plight of experiences of abused women (Southern Africa)

In the first headline, the focus is on the rising cases of spousal abuse against men. The agency (the perpetrators of the abuse) is bypassed, and the emphasis is on the trend and the victims (men). Likewise, the second example highlights those

men are victims of domestic violence. It does not specify who is committing the violence, thus bypassing the agency and focusing on the suffering of men. Finally in (iii) and (iv) above, the focus is on women's stance against domestic violence, as well as the experiences and plight of abused women. The examples do not specify who is committing the violence, thus bypassing the perpetrators and foregrounding the opposition to the violence.

Victims as Active Agents

The victims of domestic violence can also be made active participants of discourse by giving the active roles. They can function as agents of material process that are used to construe the actions that they perform.



The above illustrates the regional distribution of male and female subjects across Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa. In Western and Eastern Africa, there is an identical representation of men and women, with men accounting for 11% and women for 38% in both regions. This indicates a consistent pattern in how men and women are represented across these two regions, suggesting that similar cultural or social factors may influence these percentages. The significant difference in percentages between men and women in both regions highlights a gender disparity, with women being more prominently featured or involved compared to men.

In contrast, Southern Africa shows a markedly different trend. Here, men make up 78% of the subjects, a stark contrast to the 11% in the other regions. Conversely, women account for only 24%, significantly lower than in Western and Eastern Africa. This regional variation suggests a distinct approach or focus in Southern Africa regarding gender representation. The data indicates that men are much more prominently featured or involved in Southern Africa than women, differing significantly from the patterns observed in Western and Eastern Africa. This disparity reflects varying regional dynamics, societal structures, or issues specific to Southern Africa that warrant further exploration.

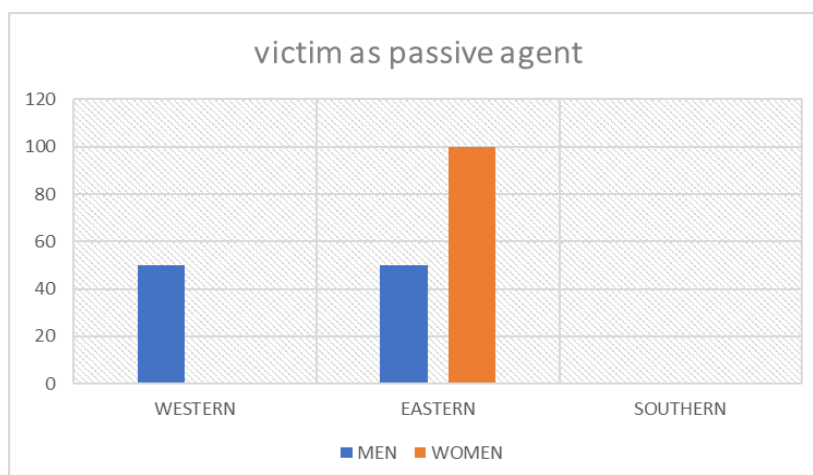
Examples:

- i. Men break silence on GBV in Rukwa
- ii. Women group move to stop adolescent prostitution in Delta
- iii. Every woman should fight for Gender inclusion

The first example portrays men as active agents in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). The phrase 'break silence' indicates that men are taking an active role in speaking out about their experiences and challenges related to GBV. Instead of being passive victims, these men are shown as proactive participants in the discourse, which can help in raising awareness and seeking solutions. In the second example, a women's group is depicted as taking concrete material action in addressing the issue of adolescent prostitution in Delta. The phrase 'move to stop' highlights their proactive stance and efforts to initiate change. This construction presents the women not just as affected parties but as active agents working to solve a societal problem. The final example encourages individual women to take an active role in the pursuit of gender inclusion. The use of "should fight" implies that every woman has a responsibility and the capability to advocate for equal rights and opportunities. It presents women as empowered individuals who can influence and drive societal changes. By suggesting that each woman can and should engage in this fight, the narrative shifts from seeing women as merely needing protection or advocacy from others to recognizing them as capable agents of change in the struggle for gender equality. In these examples, the victims or potential victims of social issues are not depicted as passive sufferers but instead, they are given active roles, transforming them into agents who perform actions and contribute to the discourse on their terms.

Victims as Passive Agents

Newspaper reporters can sometimes depict victims of certain actions or situations as passive participants rather than active ones. Passive voice is used to describe actions in a way that the agent (the doer) is not explicitly mentioned or the agents are placed later in the sentence, thus shifting the focus to the action or the recipient of the action. In this context, passive agents are individuals who are primarily acted upon rather than acting themselves. When victims are portrayed as passive agents, the focus is often on the harm they suffer or the events happening to them, rather than their capacity to respond, resist, or take action. However, this is not to mean that the media is in full support of the abuse or women are to blame for their victimization (Islam & Siddique: 2023).



The data on victims framed as passive agents across Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa shows distinct regional variations in the portrayal of both violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW). For VAM, both Western and Eastern Africa present a consistent picture, with 50% of male victims being depicted as passive agents. Interestingly, Southern Africa reports 0% in this category, indicating a complete absence of portrayals that frame male victims as passive agents. This suggests that, unlike in Western and Eastern Africa, there is either a different narrative approach or a possible underrepresentation of passive male victims in Southern Africa.

In the case of VAW, the data reveals an extreme contrast. Eastern Africa stands out with 100% of female victims being portrayed as passive agents, whereas Western and Southern Africa both report 0% in this category. This stark difference indicates that Eastern Africa predominantly depicts female victims as lacking agency, potentially reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes where women are seen as passive in situations of violence. The absence of such portrayals in Western and Southern Africa could reflect a different approach to gender representation in these regions, possibly highlighting a focus on more active roles for female victims or simply a lack of representation of passive female victims in the media.

Examples:

- i. Women hospitalised after attack by husbands (Eastern)
- ii. Domestic Violence - 340 Husbands Beaten By Their Wives in One Year - Lagos Govt (Western)

In samples (i) and (ii), the sentences are passive structures in which the acting persons are explicitly mentioned, but the sentences seem to focus on the grammatical subjects, which are the victims (women, 340 husbands) in the headlines. In this case, the acting persons are the perpetrators, while the victims are depicted as passive agents by focusing on their hospitalization after being attacked by their husbands, as well as the act of being beaten by their wives. In other words, in the first example, the action (being attacked) is emphasized, and the women's

role in the narrative is one of being acted upon rather than taking action themselves. This type of reporting highlights the severity of the situation and the immediate impact on the victims, but it does not provide information on the women's responses or actions following the attack. In the second example, the narrative emphasizes the husbands' victimhood and the physical violence they endured. The use of the passive construction "beaten by their wives" highlights the action done to the husbands and their role as recipients of the abuse. In both examples, the victims are depicted primarily as recipients of violence or abuse. The focus is on their suffering and the actions done to them, with less emphasis on their responses, actions, or resilience.

Nominalization

Nominalization involves turning actions or verbs into nouns, which often removes the agent from the statement. This technique abstracts the action and focuses on the concept rather than specific actions or individuals.

- i. Domestic abuse of men needs to be recognised (Southern Africa)
- ii. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist (Western Africa)

From the above, the verb "to abuse" is turned into the noun "abuse." In the former, the example focuses on the need for recognition of the issue rather than who is committing the abuse, while the latter focuses on the rising trend of abuse rather than the specific actions or perpetrators.

Genericization and Specification

These concepts help in understanding how language can either generalize or specify individuals or groups in discourse. Genericisation refers to the practice of representing social actors as a general class rather than as specific individuals. It involves using language that abstracts and generalizes social actors, making them stand for a whole category or type of people. This can often be seen in the use of plural nouns without specific identifiers or in the use of indefinite articles. Specification, on the other hand, involves representing social actors as specific individuals or as distinct groups with identifiable characteristics. This process makes the actors more concrete and individualized in the discourse. Specification can be achieved through the use of proper nouns, definite articles, or specific descriptions that differentiate the actors from the general category. For instance, in media reports on social issues like domestic violence, the choice between genericisation and specification can influence public perception.

Perpetrators as a Group

In discourse, representing perpetrators as a group involves generalizing the actors involved in particular actions, often leading to stereotypes and

oversimplifications. This approach shifts focus from individuals to a broader category, which can obscure the complexities of social realities.

Examples:

- i. More women beating men now
- ii. Lagos govt records 340 cases of wives assaulting their husbands in one year
- iii. Father's Day: A call to action for men

The first example presents the perpetrators as a generalized group (women). Here, the focus is on a growing trend of women as perpetrators of violence against men. The phrase "more women" implies an increase in such incidents and this generalization can lead to stereotypes about women being violent and shifts attention away from individual cases and the specific circumstances surrounding each incident. Similarly, in (ii), the perpetrators are represented as 'wives' again forming a group rather than focusing on individual actors. The headline emphasizes the quantity (340 cases) and the relationship (wives assaulting husbands), presenting this as a significant trend. Finally, the last headline groups "men" as the target audience for a call to action, presumably regarding issues related to fatherhood or men's roles in society. Although it does not explicitly label men as perpetrators, the grouping can imply a collective responsibility or a need for change among men.

Representing perpetrators as a group, as seen in these examples, can simplify complex social realities and contribute to stereotypes. This form of representation obscures individual contexts, creates stereotypes and simplifies complex societal issues such as domestic violence.

Perpetrators as Individuals

In this case, there is a more nuanced and detailed understanding of social actors, acknowledging their individuality and unique circumstances. The perpetrators can also be identified as specific individual that are responsible for the crime they have been accused of.

- i. How my wife beats me at will, man shares ordeal
- ii. Man pours hot water on wife in Ondo
- iii. SAPS policewoman has been abusing her husband of 12 years-claim

In (i), the headline identifies the perpetrator as a specific individual, "my wife," and provides context through the phrase "man shares ordeal." The use of the pronoun "my" personalizes the account, highlighting the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The individualization above adds depth by indicating that this is a personal account, which can elicit empathy and a deeper understanding of the specific situation and prevent stereotypes about women or wives in general. Also, in (ii) the headline identifies the perpetrator as a specific individual, 'man' and provides additional detail by mentioning the location. In this context, the headline

avoids generalisation about men or husbands as a group, which helps maintain a nuanced view of such incidents. Lastly in (iii) the headline specifies the perpetrator as a 'SAPS policewoman' adding an additional layer of detail by mentioning her profession and the duration of the abuse. This individualized approach helps avoid broad stereotypes about policewomen or women in general.

Assimilation

Here, the social actors can be quantified as a group of participants (aggregation), or they are seen as general opinion (collectivization). In aggregation, social actors are represented as part of a quantifiable group or category. This often entails depersonalizing individuals and treating them as statistical entities. Collectivization, on the other hand, involves representing social actors as part of a generalized opinion or consensus within a group or society.

Example 1:

- i. Domestic violence: 25% of men suffer abuse in Nigeria-NGO
- ii. Domestic violence- 340 Husbands beaten by their wives in one year- Lagos Govt
- iii. 46 (men) killed in Gender-based Violence disputes: Men coming forth to report cases

Example 2:

- iv. More men victims of spousal abuse
- v. Married men suffer sexual abuse in silence

In example 1, the social actors are quantified and represented as part of a quantifiable group or category, which is characteristic of aggregation. These examples depersonalize individuals and treat them as statistical entities, focusing on the collective experience rather than individual circumstances.

In example 2, the phrases 'more men victims of spousal abuse' and 'married men suffer sexual abuse in silence' exhibit collectivization. Rather than focusing on individual experiences or cases, these statements generalize the experiences of men as part of a broader social trend or consensus within a group or society. The use of "more men" and "married men" suggests a collective experience shared by a significant portion of the male population, implying that these experiences are representative of a larger societal issue rather than isolated incidents. This approach overlooks the diversity of individual experiences and circumstances, instead emphasizing the prevalence of these issues among men as a group.

Nomination and Categorization

Nomination refers to the practice of referring to social actors by their proper names. This includes personal names and other forms of address that specifically

identify individuals. Nomination focuses on the unique identity of the person and often adds a level of personalization and specificity to the discourse. Categorization, on the other hand, involves referring to social actors as members of a certain category or group. This can include social, occupational, ethnic, gender, or age groups. Categorization emphasizes the common characteristics and shared identity of the members of the group, often highlighting similarities rather than individual differences.

Example 1:

- i. African activists fight violence against women one law at a time
- ii. Camilla to give speech at Violence Against Women and Girls event in Rwanda
- iii. Speaker says violence against women, girls forbidden in Nasarawa State

Example 2:

- iv. Communities key in fighting violence
- v. Abusive men exist in your daily life

In example 1, the headlines categorise the social actors as ‘African activists, Camilla, speakers’. In (i), the headline highlights a specific group based on their geographical and activist identity, emphasizing their collective efforts and shared mission to combat violence against women. In (ii) the headline personalizes the event and adds a level of specificity and prominence. It also highlights her involvement in addressing violence against women and girls, which can draw attention due to her public stature. Also, the term ‘Speaker’ in (iii) refers to a specific person, from the House in Nasarawa State, who holds a specific office.

In example 2, the headline in (iv) categorizes the social actors as ‘communities’. It emphasizes the collective role and shared responsibility of various communities in combating violence. This broad category focuses on the collaborative effort rather than the actions of specific individuals within those communities. Finally, the last headline categorizes the social actors as ‘abusive men’. It generalizes the issue by highlighting a category of people—men who are abusive—without naming any individuals.

Discussion of Findings

The exclusion of perpetrators in headlines about violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW) shows a media focus on victims. This aligns with Fairclough's observation that ‘exclusion may be politically or socially significant’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 149). The findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions reveal that in cases of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW), perpetrators are more frequently excluded from the headlines, especially in VAW cases. In Eastern Africa, there are significantly more VAW headlines (71%) compared to VAM headlines (29%). Western Africa shows the smallest number of VAM headlines (23%) and the highest number of

VAW headlines (77%). Southern Africa has a more balanced number of headlines, with 46% for VAM and 54% for VAW.

Similarly, the inclusion of other social actors in media coverage on domestic violence across different regions of Africa significantly enriches the narrative. This inclusion enhances the credibility of reports and fosters a more informed, balanced, and supportive societal response to domestic violence. This concept mirrors White's (2002a) idea of extra-vocalisation, where external voices are integrated into the text, often through attribution. This is notably seen in the media's practice of referencing reputable organizations and influential figures to underscore the gravity of domestic violence. While Western Africa shows the highest inclusion rates, indicating extensive collaborative efforts, Eastern and Southern Africa also highlight important contributions from various actors. The involvement of reputable organizations and influential figures ensures that domestic violence is recognized as a serious issue validated by authoritative sources. Also, including various social actors helps raise awareness and visibility of domestic violence issues. This broader representation ensures that different aspects of the problem are addressed, from legal reforms to cultural stigmas, reaching diverse audiences. Finally, the inclusion of other actors advocating for both men and women ensures balanced representation. Their involvement can lead to stronger advocacy, more robust legal frameworks, and a greater societal commitment to preventing domestic violence. Also, it challenges gender stereotypes and promotes an inclusive understanding of domestic violence, recognizing that it affects individuals regardless of gender.

Furthermore, the role allocation reveals distinct patterns in how perpetrators and victims are portrayed. In many instances, perpetrators (men or women) are activated, meaning they are depicted as active agents performing violent actions. This aligns with previous studies indicating that men and women have an equal risk of being both abusers and victims (Colorado-Yohar et al., 2016; Fawson, 2015; Hamberger & Larsen, 2015). The analysed headlines highlight instances where women are perpetrators of violence against men, drawing attention to the issue of female-perpetrated domestic violence. Thobejane (2012), who also noted that violence committed by women against their male partners has been largely ignored due to stereotypes portraying men as inherently strong, emphasizes that this growing recognition challenges these deeply ingrained perceptions. On the other hand, the headlines portrayed men as active agents committing violent acts against women. This use of activation underscores the seriousness and prevalence of domestic violence by focusing on the actions of the perpetrators. Conversely, perpetrators either men or women are sometimes represented as passive agents, where the focus shifts away from the individuals committing the violence to the actions' effects on the victims. This can be achieved through grammatical constructs that background the perpetrator and foreground the experience of the victims. This approach shifts the narrative to the suffering of the victims, highlighting the severity of domestic violence without explicitly naming the perpetrators. Notably, the representation of perpetrators as active agents is less common in Eastern Africa, suggesting regional differences in media practices. This absence reflects cultural or media tendencies to focus more on victims rather

than on those committing the violence. The findings indicate that media representations in sub-Saharan Africa vary significantly, with some regions prioritizing the activation of perpetrators to highlight their actions, while others emphasize the victims' experiences, often bypassing the agency of the perpetrators. Additionally, victims are sometimes portrayed as active agents, taking on proactive roles in addressing domestic violence. These constructions present the victims not merely as passive sufferers but as empowered individuals and groups taking action to address and combat domestic violence. This portrayal shifts the narrative from seeing victims solely as needing protection to recognizing them as capable agents of change, contributing actively to the discourse on their terms. These differences in role allocation can influence public perception and societal attitudes towards domestic violence, shaping advocacy and policy-making efforts accordingly.

The nominalization in headlines effectively removes the agent from the statement and shifts the focus to broader issues rather than specific actions or individuals. Here, the media highlights the increasing trend of abuse, concentrating on the prevalence of the issue rather than the specific actions or identities of those involved. While the distinct patterns in the use of genericization present perpetrators as a generalized group, specification presents them as different individuals. The findings suggest that genericization can contribute to stereotypes and oversimplified perceptions by abstracting individual cases into broader trends. As Van Leeuwen (2008) explains, this process allows social actors to be represented as members of a generalized class. In contrast, specification in the analyzed data offers a more nuanced portrayal by highlighting individuals with specific details, which adds depth and context to the stories. This individualized approach not only personalizes the incidents but also avoids broad generalizations about groups, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in each case. In other words, the differentiation between genericization and specification in media reporting on domestic violence significantly influences public perception. Generic headlines can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and obscure the personal nature of each case, while specific headlines provide clarity and context, highlighting the unique dynamics at play. This distinction underscores the importance of mindful language use in media to ensure a balanced and accurate representation of domestic violence incidents, whether involving men or women as victims or perpetrators.

Nomination, as observed in the selected headlines, refers to specific individuals by name, adding a personal and specific element to the discourse. For instance, headlines mentioning prominent individuals adds prominence and a personal touch to the discussion of violence against women. In contrast, categorization groups social actors into broad categories. This approach highlights common characteristics and shared identities, emphasising collective efforts or issues rather than focusing on individual differences.

Finally, the analysis also indicates that assimilation plays a significant role in these headlines, either through aggregation or collectivization. Headlines like "25% of men suffer abuse in Nigeria" or "340 husbands beaten by their wives" illustrate how aggregation treats individuals as part of a larger statistical trend, focusing on the collective experience rather than specific incidents. van Leeuwen

(2008) explains that this process involves quantifying social actors as part of a statistical group, which can depersonalize their individual experiences. This method emphasizes the prevalence and scope of the issue but may overlook the nuances of individual cases. Notably, there are more instances of aggregation than collectivization, with aggregation being the dominant method of representing social actors in these headlines.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of media representation in shaping public perceptions of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis of newspaper headlines reveals regional differences in the representation of social actors involved in domestic violence, highlighting the media's focus on victims rather than perpetrators. Additionally, the inclusion of diverse social actors enriches the narrative and enhances the credibility of reports, fostering a more informed and balanced societal response to domestic violence. Furthermore, the patterns of role allocation in media coverage play a significant role in public understanding of domestic violence. The representations of perpetrators as active or passive agents and the use of linguistic techniques such as nominalization, genericization, and specification significantly influence how domestic violence is perceived and addressed. These findings emphasize the need for mindful and accurate media reporting to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of domestic violence.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of media representations of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. By identifying underlying biases and disparities, the research informs efforts to challenge stereotypes, and advocate for more responsive media coverage of domestic violence. The insights gained from this analysis can drive policy changes and resource allocation to support victims more effectively and encourage comprehensive approaches to combating domestic violence across genders.

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Theorizing Social Media from Capitalism and Culture Industry Perspective

*By Zelalem Jabessa Gabul**

This article proposes PRANC as a theoretical framework to help rethink, understand, and deconstruct the monopolizing influence of mass media in this social media age. From Marxist perspective, mass media centered on and dominated capital accumulation through excessive culture production such as television drama programs. Mass media was also manipulated and controlled from the center with producer-consumer dichotomy. However, I argue in this article that through its affordances social media disrupts a centralized information production and dissemination discouraging mass media's monopoly on capitalism and culture industry. Social media also serves as a platform with which societies challenge dictatorship, expose, and withstand various forms of oppression as has been witnessed in different parts of the world over the last decade. Portability of communication technologies enabled users to carry along their devices that enables them have access to social media anytime anywhere, while retrievability allows users to search and recover information shared on social media. Affordability is another social media feature that promotes broader participation in sociocultural and political activities, while networkability is the ability of agile social media to empower marginalized voices to stand united for a common good fighting oppression. On the other hand, customizability of social media enables users to conceal and shape their identities to protect themselves from attack due to the content they share or due to their engagement with contents users share. Social media viewed from PRANC framework offers a new opportunity for the powerless communities to struggle for their rights. It fosters inclusivity, democratizes cultural landscapes, and redefines how culture is produced, disseminated, and consumed in the digital age, challenging capitalism and culture industry.

Keywords: PRANC, portability, retrievability, affordability, networkability, customizability, capitalism, culture industry, creative culture

Introduction

In this digital age, social media has opened up new experiences challenging the hitherto dominant influence of mass media. It altered mass media's longstanding hegemonic supremacy by granting everyone with little technological knowhow the ability to produce and disseminate contents (Lisa Anderson, 2011; Aytaç & Stokes, 2019b; Orth et al., 2020). The advancement in communication technologies offered netizens with a hybridized opportunity referred to as

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prosumption—production and consumption of contents through portable devices such as smartphones (Aytaç & Stokes, 2019b; Yamamoto et al., 2020; Zajc, 2015). This article proposes a theoretical framework with an acronym PRANC to argue how social media has disrupted long-standing notions of capitalism and the culture industry. In this article I offer a detailed theoretical discussion focusing on the concepts of *portability*, *retrievability*, *affordability*, *networkability*, and *customizability* encapsulated in PRANC shedding light on how social media has reshaped the landscape of sociocultural and political engagement. Through the lens of PRANC, I try to bring to the fore that the rise of social media platforms has triggered a shift in the dynamics of influence, with the dwindling impact of mass media leading to a diminishing significance of concepts such as capitalism and the culture industry.

While capitalism and the culture industry have historically been associated with homogenization and commodification, social media has introduced new avenues for individual expression and information consumption. The customizable nature of social media platforms empowers users to shape their online identities. The networkability of social media fosters the amplification of marginalized voices, providing a platform for alternative form of cultural narrative and dissent (Allsop, 2016; Arora, 2020; Harb, 2011; Moussa, 2013; Nummi et al., 2019).

In this social media era, the conventional understanding of capitalism and the culture industry requires reevaluation. The PRANC framework offers a lens through which we can explore the evolving dynamics of cultural production that transforms the majority from only-- consumers to *prosumers* (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018). Social media's dynamic nature of *portability*, *retrievability*, *affordability*, *networkability*, and *customizability* challenge the traditional power structure and producer-consumer dichotomy whose target was capital accumulation by the few through controlling the culture industry at the expense of the majority. Through critical observation of social media's transformative impact, valuable insights emerge regarding its potential influence on sociocultural dynamics and the engagement of everyday internet users.

Marxism vs Neo-Marxism

This section elaborates on the classical theories of capitalism and the culture industry through the lens of social media theoretical framework proposed in the article. It highlights both theories within the context of social media one after the other. However, before delving further, it is important to explain the intrinsic human creative culture in relation to these classical theories. Marxism highlights the dominance of means of production, while Neo-Marxism builds on mass media technology as products of human creativity. By analyzing the applicability of these theories to social media, we gain insights into the evolving dynamics of cultural production and the inevitable transformation of the ordinary people into *prosumers* from consumers. Social media's transformative power challenges traditional power structures and offers new avenues for cultural expression. This examination allows us to reconsider the theories of capitalism and the culture industry with

specific focus on the impact of social media on cultural landscapes and human creativity in the digital era.

Undoubtedly, human beings possess an innate capacity for creativity that knows no bounds (Hilton, 2010; Veale & Pérez, 2020). Throughout history, we have witnessed the manifestation of this creativity from simple tools to the most advanced state-of-the-art technologies (Sawyer & Henriksen, 2024). Not long before a new product leaves manufacturing site, another one emerges with enhanced functions and features as a result of continuous innovation. Scholars have recognized the perpetuity of human creative capacity and its profound influence on our lives, which they refer to as creative culture (Bezklubaya, 2021; Sherman, 2006; Ucar, 2019; Wayne, 2012). Creative culture encompasses the culture of continuous creativity and its interconnectedness with the inherent creative potential of human beings, driven by real or perceived needs. The underlying motivation behind the concept of creative culture is the desire to address human needs and overcome challenges (Cabra & Guerrero, 2022; Gaut, 2010; Gomez, 2013; Sternberg, 2006). It is noteworthy that both Marxist and Neo-Marxist perspectives have gained significant prominence in academic and public discourse, applying concepts related to capitalism and the culture industry within the context of creative culture.

When the producers of creative culture are subjected to domination, control, abuse, or manipulation by a select few, they are transformed into tools of oppression (O'Connor, 2016; Rubio-Arostegui et al., 2016). The monopolization and domination of creative culture by a privileged few result in inequality, injustice, and repression (Cherrier, 2009; Gartman, 2012). This truth is evident in Karl Marx's theory of capitalism and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry.

According to Marx, power lies in controlling the *economic base* through ownership of the means of production, such as manufacturing industries, machinery, production processes, and labor power (Bryer, 2006). The rich exert control over the working class and their labor, commodifying it to dictate social functions (Tucker, 1978; Wayne, 2012). This control over the economic base allows capitalists to wield power and influence over other social and political structures, known as the *superstructure* (Barker & Jane, 2016; Tucker, 1978).

Another crucial aspect of Marx's theory of capitalism is the concept of alienation, wherein the capitalists disconnect the working class from their inherent human potential by exploiting their labor for their own gain. The rich accumulate wealth at the expense of the labor of the poor, who receive meager wages in return for their continuous toil, far less than the value of their production (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016; Tucker, 1978). Therefore, Marx envisioned communism as a solution to this crisis perpetuated by capitalism.

However, the realization of the communist dream advocated by Marx and his followers resulted in destruction and crisis, as seen in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations, which eventually transitioned into capitalism and related democratic systems (Bogdan, 2012; Brzezinski, 1989). Even countries like Russia and China, which adhered to communism for a significant period, have pragmatically embraced capitalism (Novokmet et al., 2018).

Although Marx proposed communism as an alternative to the capitalist system, capitalism continues to exert significant influence even after two centuries. This is due to the nature of capitalism, which encourages privatization of properties, companies, industries, and means of production. As a result, the rich continue to amass wealth while the majority, the working class, remains impoverished. Workers, whether white collar or lower-level employees, depend on the wages they receive from their employers in exchange for their full-time labor, without having any control, ownership, or management rights over the products they produce. Marx refers to this condition as alienation (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). In the subsequent section, I will discuss the concept of the culture industry, a pivotal concept that extends the reach of capitalism and its influence on cultural production and consumption.

Culture Industry

Neo-Marxist thinkers and critical social theorists transcended capitalist view of control to another level through attaching the influencing power and control to the media industry. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in particular critically argued that control over the media industry exposes the mass to media programs that condition the audience to become obsessed with and enslaved by those programs in the long run (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). The programs broadcast in the form of reality shows, TV dramas, movies as well as magazines, etc. along with the advertisement industry are believed to differentiate between the consuming majority working class and the producing capitalist minority of cultural products (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022).

For these critical theorists, media industries overtook the influencing power off from economy. Drawing on Marxism, they stressed that radio and television programs and magazines perpetuate class division shifting the power from 'economic base' to the cultural products (Adorno & Rabinbach, 1975; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Likewise, Herbert Marcuse contended that the media industry shapes human society towards observing their social and material world unidirectionally thereof producing what he calls *one dimensional society* (Marcuse, 2006). Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of *culture industry* therefore followed the creation and proliferation of mass media industry. They critically theorized that the rich legitimize and perpetuate their dominion over the majority mass by monopolizing and controlling the media and its products (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022).

However, the critical theorists particularly, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse asserted that media has a lasting controlling effect on emotional and behavior sphere of a society than Karl Marx's capitalism (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). The theorists further observed that the media and its cultural products serve as a powerful mechanism to maintain power. Cultural products fabricated and disseminated conditioned by the advertisement industry strongly controlling the working class by reducing them to mere consuming subjects (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Marcuse, 2006). Influenced by the multitude and continued

dissemination of media products, the working-class lose the ability to think critically resulting in eliciting in them false need and false satisfaction therein which Marcuse refers to as *false consciousness* (Marcuse, 2006, p. 13; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022).

These Neo-Marxist thinkers critiqued the influence of culture industry that it has lasting effects unlike capitalism because working in factories require physical engagement resulting in bodily fatigue while culture industry inculcates strong and enduring psychological and mental effects that lasts (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Over time, cultural products create false desire where consumers need to work restlessly, often more than one job a day, to satisfy their desire and their family's (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). According to these theorists, it is not capitalism but culture industry that holds fast control over the mass (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). The owners' control over media has been so strong because the production and dissemination was from the center with no room for the consumers to decide on the contents produced nor the contents consumed. Now the question is whether the influence of and control over media by owners (whosoever owns) fully apply in this era of social media. The remaining sections will focus on elaborating this question and related concerns through the lens of social media theoretical framework introduced earlier.

Communication Technologies

The effects of culture industry reverberate even today for dependency on media is undeniably growing stronger with agile social media. The internet technology that enhances connectedness and social networking leads to stronger dependency on mass media shaping social behavior (Moussa, 2013). Attachment to media and communication technologies becomes stronger than ever (Cohen, 2016). We depend on portable communication devices for online shopping, checking on news, content production, socializing, fast health status checking etc., by the help of customizable social media apps (Jain & Murugesan, 2021).

The widespread of the COVID-2019 virus taught us a new experience that mobile phones become more important communication devices than before not only for socialization and other benefits but also for instant checking up of individuals' vaccine status to access some designated public areas and locations (Al-turjman et al., 2021; Gandhi et al., 2020). This implies that living without the new media technology particularly mobile phones and the internet connection is unimaginable (Jia, 2021; Joy et al., 2021). The ubiquitous internet connection and social media and the growing dependency on communication technology is perhaps an indication of the pervasiveness and persistence of culture industry theory even today (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022).

Marxist thinkers critique social media as an agent of capitalism through capacitating and accelerating its accumulation (Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014). However, it is worth raising the following questions. Does the influence of capitalism and culture industry fully apply in relation to social media? Are social media users only passive consumers? Does agency of individual users at stake?

How does heuristic experience help to deconstruct the monopolizing influence of culture industry in the context of social media?

From a heuristic point of view, it is worth considering the following overarching reasons as to why capitalism and culture industry do not apply in the context of social media. Firstly, the culture industry theory overemphasized the negative impact of social media. Secondly, unlike the traditional media where contents were produced and disseminated from the center, the demarcation between producer and consumer is blurring in the case of social media (Adem, 2019; Arora, 2020). That is, audiences are not necessarily passive consumers for they have the room to produce contents, react to the produced contents, debate and contest the contents published (Fuchs, 2015; Rodriguez, 2011). Finally and most importantly social media do not necessarily compromise agency of the users (Warburton & Hatzipanagos, 2013), but rather created user-centered business facilities by overturning the top down traditional communication model (Rathore et al., 2016).

Social Media as a Mobilizing Tool of the Oppressed

As slightly discussed earlier social media is intruding every aspect of our life. From online shopping and e-banking to socialization, political activism to news consumption, “self-promotion” or impression management and many more, people depend much on social media (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2019; Wang et al., 2015). The ubiquity of the internet with the proliferating social networking apps is widely leveraging its sphere of influence over social media users (Mitri et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2015). Unlike the static and centralized traditional media, social media is customer-centered with public membership internet-based media accessible 24/7 on various electronic devices wherever there is internet connection (Marlowe et al., 2017; Rathore et al., 2016). From Critical Theory and Neo-Marxist point of view these functions could be considered as mechanisms of attention distraction (Marcuse, 2006; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2019).

However, I argue that culture industry theory underestimates the positive aspect of media technology particularly social media by overemphasizing its negative effects. To establish my argument, I utilize PRANC—an acronym theoretical framework—that stands for the concepts of **P**ortability, **R**etrievability, **A**ffordability, **N**etworkability, and **C**ustomizability respectively. I will discuss and theorize social media by deploying the PRANC framework' under the next section in detail. The framework will help to demarcate the distinction between the traditional media and social media. The conceptual framework will also enable us to recognize that social media plays a significant role to raise awareness, hold debates and discussions over sociopolitical concerns, enhances social and political activism, mobilize oppressed groups for change etc. (Franklin & Sharupi, 2020; Moussa, 2013; Nummi et al., 2019).

Social media is designed to function differently from traditional media. It is innovated with inbuilt functions where users or producers and consumers alike create their own contents which encourages active engagement of content

prosumption (Beer & Burrows, 2010; Mitri et al., 2022; Rathore et al., 2016). This trend of social media's user-centered approach transcends the traditional media's centralized producer-consumer dichotomy, respecting users' agency to decide which content to consume, engage with the content they consume, and providing them with equal opportunities as content producers, rather than being victims of passively consuming contents others produce (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Ritzer, 2015, 2014).

In other words, social media users are no longer passive consumers of contents as they have the agency to decide which content to consume, react to, like or dislike, or share addition to creating contents of their own (Beer & Burrows, 2010; Scheg, 2018). Due to its engaging facility, social media enables the oppressed and marginalized social groups to expose oppressive systems in their struggle for emancipation (Lisa Anderson, 2011; Forsén & Tronvoll, 2021; Moussa, 2013; Ortiz et al., 2019). Social media is useful to engage in and mobilize social movements, strengthen socio-political activism, and facilitate struggle against dictatorship and repression in different parts of the world (Franklin & Sharupi, 2020; Poell, 2019).

The Black Lives Matter, the Arab Spring, occupy movements, the 2014-2018 Oromo peaceful protest, and other social movements in encountered by nations across the globe over the past few years whether they achieved expected goal or not were all mobilized and organized through social media (Harb, 2011; Moussa, 2013; Nummi et al., 2019). Undeniably, social media assumes an irreplaceable function in empowering marginalized social groups, notwithstanding its inherent limitations. For example, the pervasive and deeply rooted racism entrenched within the government security system against Black individuals in the United States would have remained veiled if not for the intervention of social media. The world would have remained oblivious to the tragic assassination of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and a unified global condemnation of this abhorrent act would not have materialized had it not been for the pivotal role played by social media (Beckett & Hankinsk, 2021; Johnson, 2023; Peele et al., 2022). While the above case is a singular instance, it made a powerful impact in highlighting the power of social media to expose incidents of police brutality only through the sharing of a short video by a teenager named Darnella Frazier (Anderson et al., 2022).

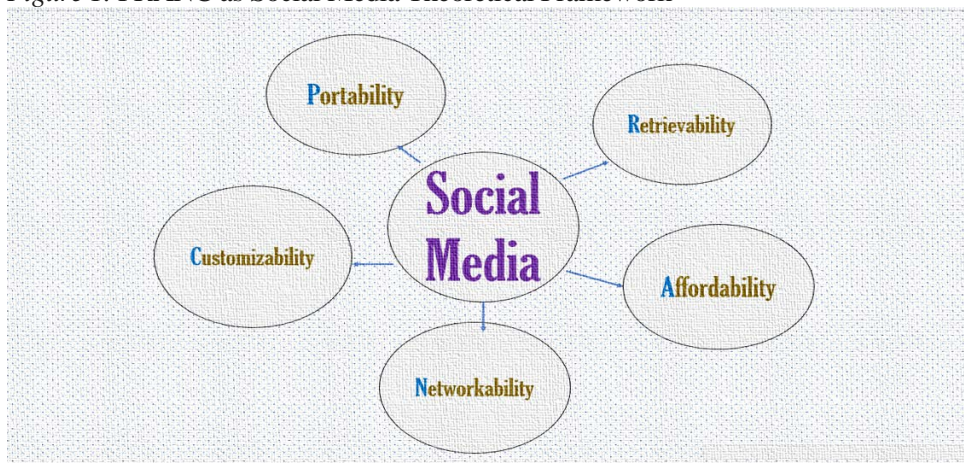
As argued time and again, it needs to establish that social media era generation is beyond passive consumers and its usage is by far better than the traditional mainstream media specially in letting the voices of the voiceless heard as in the previous case. It is also very important to clarify that I am not making a totalizing argument regarding social media nor denying the negative aspects of social media specially in relation to *mis/disinformation* (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Carmi et al., 2020). However, my argument rather grounds on the difference between the traditional media and social media specifically based on Neo-Marxist arguments to shed light on the overlooked positive aspects of social media. Next, I will turn to discussing the theoretical framework to further elaborate the concepts encapsulated in PRANC to recognize the potential advantage of social media to emancipate humanity through mobilizing them in the fight against any form of dominance or oppression (Karimi, 2017).

PRANC as a Theoretical Lens

The distinction between traditional media and social media specially from the vantage point of capitalism and culture industry can effectively be captured through the lens of PRANC. The acronym PRANC that encompasses the key concepts of *Portability*, *Retrievability*, *Affordability*, *Networkability*, and *Customizability* serve as invaluable tools to re-examine and deconstruct the underlying assumptions that theories of capitalism and culture industry extrapolate to the context of social media. It is undeniable that the influence of capitalism and the culture industry has dominantly been felt in the media industry. And the applicability of Marxist and Neo-Marxist theories remains pertinent and enduring, even in the context of social media (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014). However, by employing the PRANC lens we can recognize and appreciate social media as a medium for the marginalized and oppressed whose voices could have remain silent otherwise (Karimi, 2017; Kasana, 2014; Ortiz et al., 2019; Tayebi, 2013; Turková et al., 2021).

As previously elucidated, it is imperative to acknowledge that social media users are not passive consumers devoid of agency, but rather active creators of contents that profoundly influence the social, political, and cultural fabric of society (Mitri et al., 2022; Ortiz et al., 2019). To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of this dynamic, a conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1, serving as a visual representation that guides subsequent discussions.

Figure 1. PRANC as Social Media Theoretical Framework



The concept of *portability*, in the context of this work, is related to portable devices including smartphones and tablets which enable social media users to remain connected and networked through the internet anytime anywhere (Cohen, 2016; Madianou, 2014; Rainie, 2020; Schrock, 2015). *Portability* as a concept can be traced back to the works of scholars like Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, who explored the transformation of media from one form to another throughout history, such as the transition from stone to papyrus (Innis, 1950; McLuhan, 1967). In contemporary times, social media users could carry their portable devices with them, in contrast to traditional media, which is characterized by

stationary controlled from center where the mass audience have no agency on the content produced and consumed alike (Stratton et al., 2020).

Nowadays the advancement of communication technologies, through portable devices, enable users to engage with various platforms and networks, facilitating socialization, advocacy, content creation and sharing, commenting, and many more (Bhanye et al., 2023; Helm & Jones, 2016). Individuals can connect with others, advocate for causes of marginalized groups in the fight against any form of domination and oppression (Schrock, 2015; Uzuegbunam, 2015). The integration of portable communication devices with social media apps and their convenience empower users to engage with these platforms on-the-go and influence the dissemination and consumption of media content (Storsul & Stuedahl, 2009).

The *portability* of social media devices also has transformed the way individuals interact with information and engage in social activities. Users are no longer under the strict influence of nor dependent on traditional media channels (de Streel et al., 2021). They can seamlessly integrate social media into their daily lives, enabling continuous connectivity and participation in online communities (Helm & Jones, 2016). This *portability* has significant implications for the construction of social identities, the formation of social networks, and the dissemination of information, as individuals can actively shape and contribute to the digital landscape (Da Silva et al., 2014). Hereby, I argue that the concept of *portability* within PRANC highlights the transformative nature of social media, offering users newfound agency and flexibility in their engagement with digital platforms thereby liberating them from the influence of capitalism and culture industry (Barns, 2020). On the other hand, the concept of *retrievability* pertains to the accessibility, recallability and availability of social media contents that distinguishes the traditional media's *once-passed forever gone* contents from recallable social media contents (Levy-Dreyfus & Corsi, 2020). Unlike traditional media, which often had limited or no possibility of retrieval, social media platforms offer users the ability to easily reference and access a wide range of contents after they are posted or broadcasted (Madianou, 2015).

Retrieval of social media contents are facilitated by the continuous connectivity and pervasive nature of social media platforms, which operate 24/7, subject to the availability of internet connections (Rainie, 2020). Through the utilization of algorithmic functions and search engines, users can efficiently locate and retrieve specific social media content. This level of accessibility ensures that social media content remains readily available for reference, analysis, and engagement (de Streel et al., 2021).

The concept of *retrievability* has significant implications for the way individuals interact with and consume media content. Unlike traditional media, which often relied on predetermined schedules and limited access, social media platforms provide users with instant access to a vast array of content, allowing for greater flexibility and choice in information retrieval (Pavlova & Berkers, 2020). Furthermore, the ability to retrieve user reactions enhances the engagement and participatory nature of social media, as users can actively respond to and interact with the content they encounter (Takhshid, 2020).

Furthermore, *retrievability* emphasizes the accessibility and availability of social media posts and contents, enabling users to reference and have their access anytime (de Streel et al., 2021; Walters, 2012). The continuous connectivity of social media platforms, coupled with algorithmic functions and search engines, ensures 24/7 accessibility of contents, transforming the way individuals engage with and consume media products. This encourages participation of social media users allowing them to recall contents (Taprial & Kanwar, 2017).

Another integral concept within PRANC is *affordability*, which pertains to the increasing accessibility and availability of communication technology infrastructure, allowing users to access internet connections including via their mobile data (Chinoza, 2019; Lu et al., 2016). This heightened accessibility empowers users to connect with one another through social media platforms, facilitating discussions, information sharing, and negotiations on social, cultural, and political issues (Acquisti & Gross, 2009; Chawla & Chodak, 2018).

It is important to note that, in this context, *affordability* is not solely understood from a global internet penetration perspective. Instead, it is assessed based on the trade-off between the benefits users derive from being connected and the potential losses they may experience when disconnected. For instance, the influential role of social media activism in mobilizing social revolutions and challenging authoritarian regimes in developing countries serves as a compelling illustration of affordability's impact (Arora, 2020; Madianou, 2014; Moussa, 2013).

Affordability, in relation to social media, has democratized access to information, enabling previously marginalized voices to be heard and empowering individuals to engage in socio-political discussions. The *affordability* of mobile internet connections has significantly reduced barriers to entry, allowing a broader range of individuals to participate in online conversations and contribute to societal discourse (Can & Alatas, 2017). This has led to the emergence of grassroots movements and the amplification of marginalized perspectives, ultimately challenging existing power structures (Arora, 2020; Aytac & Stokes, 2019a; Balci & Gölcü, 2013; Moussa, 2013; Postill, 2014).

Furthermore, the *affordability* of social media has facilitated the exchange of ideas, cultural experiences, and knowledge, transcended geographical boundaries and fostering global interconnectedness. Users from diverse backgrounds can engage in meaningful interactions, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. This affordability aspect of PRANC underscores the transformative potential of social media in empowering individuals, fostering social change, and promoting inclusive dialogue.

It is essential to recognize that *affordability* extends beyond financial considerations. While economic *affordability* is a crucial aspect, the concept also encompasses the social and political implications of being connected or disconnected (Batinca & Treleaven, 2015). Understanding affordability within this broader framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of social media on individuals, societies, and political systems.

Affordability facilitates increasing accessibility and availability of communication technologies, particularly mobile internet connections. This concept emphasizes the affordability of social media platforms, enabling users to engage in

discussions, share information, and negotiate social, cultural, and political issues at an affordable cost. By democratizing access to information and facilitating global connectivity, affordability has played a pivotal role in empowering marginalized voices and fostering social change. The role of affordability in social media activism, particularly in mobilizing social revolutions, serves as a compelling example of its transformative potential.

The concept of *networkability* in the context of this study encompasses the various functions of social media platforms that facilitate networking and socialization among users within specific social groups, based on shared social, cultural, or political interests (Au, 2022). *Networkability* emphasizes the capacity of these platforms to connect users, fostering discussions and interactions that have the potential to spur collective action on social issues (Dolata, 2020; Richardson, 2005).

Furthermore, *networkability* reflects the functional capabilities of specific social media platforms enabling users to share content across different networks (Au, 2022). These platforms provide a space for hundreds of millions of individuals to disseminate content that represents their concerns and experiences. For instance, Darnella Frazier's social media post of a video exposing the brutality of the Minnesota police in the 2020 incident involving the tragic death of George Floyd serves as a powerful illustration of the impact of networked media.

The concept of *networkability* encompasses both the networking potential within social groups and the cross-platform sharing of content. Through the networking capabilities of social media platforms, users can connect with others who share similar interests, beliefs, or objectives (Kaufmann & Jeandesboz, 2017). This fosters the formation of online communities and facilitates the exchange of ideas, information, and support. These networks can serve as catalysts for collective action, enabling individuals to mobilize around social causes and effect meaningful change.

Users can disseminate their perspectives, experiences, and concerns to a vast audience, sparking conversations, raising awareness, and potentially influencing public opinion and discourse. The concept of *networkability* highlights the transformative power of social media in facilitating connections, fostering collective action, and amplifying individual voices (Au, 2022). The ability to network and share content within and across social groups has revolutionized the way individuals engage with society and advocate for change. Through networked media, users can transcend geographical boundaries, bridge social divides, and collectively address pressing social, cultural, or political issues.

Networkability within PRANC enable users to network and socialize within specific social groups, as well as the capacity to share content across different platforms (Hazra & Priyo, 2021). It emphasizes the networking potential of social media, which facilitates collective action on social matters and fosters the formation of online communities. The cross-platform sharing of content enhances the reach and impact of user-generated content, allowing for wider engagement and influence. *Networkability* underscores the transformative role of social media in connecting individuals, empowering collective voices, and driving social change. Lastly, the concept of *customizability* within the PRANC framework

pertains to the usability of social media platforms, offering customizable features that allow users to modify their profiles, reset settings, readjust locations, and even rename themselves in order to safeguard their real identity and protect themselves from potential harm (Yang et al., 2019). Additionally, users have the option to delete sensitive content that they no longer wish to be associated with. These customizable functions empower individuals to exercise control over their online presence and mitigate potential risks (Bode, 2016).

The ability to customize one's profile and settings as well as posts on social media platforms provides users with a sense of agency and autonomy, allowing them to shape their online identity and manage their digital footprint (Yang et al., 2019). By concealing or altering their real identity, users can mitigate the potential repercussions of expressing their views or engaging in sensitive discussions. This feature is particularly relevant in contexts where individuals may face repressive measures or fear backlash for their online activities.

Moreover, the user-friendly nature of social media platforms ensures that these customizable functions require minimal technological know-how. This accessibility lowers the barrier of entry and allows individuals from diverse backgrounds and skill levels to navigate and utilize social media platforms effectively. This democratizing aspect of social media usability sets it apart from the traditional media, which often requires specialized knowledge or resources to exert control over one's personal information or content.

The customizable features of social media not only promote individual autonomy but also contribute to a fairer and less oppressive digital environment. By granting users the ability to reset, readjust, and delete sensitive content, social media platforms empower individuals to manage their online presence and exercise control over their personal information. This level of control helps mitigate the potential risks associated with online engagement, fostering a more inclusive and secure online space (Meier & Peters, 2023).

To sum up, *customizability* within PRANC encompasses the customizable functions offered by social media platforms, enabling users to modify their profiles, reset settings, readjust privacy settings, and even conceal their real identity. These features provide users with a sense of agency and control over their online presence, allowing them to protect themselves from repressive measures and delete sensitive content (Hazra & Priyo, 2021). The user-friendly nature of these customizable functions ensures accessibility for individuals with varying levels of technological proficiency.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented PRANC as framework to theorize shed light on the positive impact of social media on marginalized and oppressed communities. Drawing upon the assumptions of capitalism and culture industry in the context of mass media, this article aims to unveil the transformative nature of social media through the lens of the proposed framework. The article argues that social media possesses distinct characteristics that empower its users, enabling them to pursue

their own interests and benefit their communities. This stands in contrast to the traditional mass media, which is characterized by manipulation and centralized control, leaving no room for the majority audience to exercise agency in determining both the production and consumption of information.

Although it is vital to acknowledge the presence of arguments suggesting that the influence of capitalism and culture industry theories persists even in the era of social media, the theoretical lens I presented clearly distinguishes between traditional mass media and social media. The theoretical lens highlights that social media is no longer dominated and controlled solely by a privileged few who accumulate wealth at the expense of the majority, but can be utilized to mobilize the oppressed and marginalized to have their voice heard and have their own say. The framework highlights that when social media is utilized responsibly and with a purpose for social good, it has the potential to create a significant impact in the lives of those who have been victimized, as well as in addressing social, economic, or political challenges. In essence, while social media is not without drawbacks and must be critically examined within the context of capitalist forces, it is essential to recognize its potential for positive impact. By harnessing the power of social media for social good, individuals and groups can contribute to addressing societal problems and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. As this article is theoretical in nature and is based on heuristic understanding supported by existing literature where no primary data was collected, further studies that are based on primary data would bring forth more insight.

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