

# Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

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# Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

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The ***Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)*** is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas from mass media and communication. The Journal encourages the submission of works that engages issues of international scope and that explore matters of theoretical importance across a diverse range of topics from journalism, to strategic communication, to economics, public policy, politics and technological change as they relate to media and society. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the [Mass Media & Communication Unit](#) of the Athens Institute. All papers are subject to Athens Institute's [Publication Ethical Policy and Statement](#).

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

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
Athens Institute



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*A World Association of Academics and Researchers*

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The [Mass Media & Communication Unit](#) of Athens Institute organizes its **24<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 12-15 May 2025, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Communications, Mass Media and other related disciplines. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2025/FORM-MED.doc>).

### **Academic Members Responsible for the Conference**

- **Dr. John Pavlik**, Head, [Mass Media and Communication Research Unit](#), Athens Institute & Professor, Rutgers University, USA.

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## **Unlocking Advertising Potentials of Live-Streaming Platforms: Investigating the Impact of Telepresence and Flow on Advertising Avoidance on Twitch**

*By Nam Young Kim<sup>\*</sup>, Ki Won Seo<sup>±</sup> & Masudul Biswas<sup>°</sup>*

Twitch provides a unique opportunity for exploring how users' experiences on live-streaming platforms, characterized by immersive virtual environments full of sensory richness and real-time interactivity, intersect with their perceptions of intrusive ad interruption. Given the frequent exposure of Twitch users to in-stream video advertisements, this research aims to unlock the psychological mechanism of advertising acceptance on Twitch. Expanding the psychological reactance framework, the researchers have developed a comprehensive theoretical framework that examines the intricate interplay between users' telepresence, flow experience, their reactance toward in-stream video ads, and the subsequent outcomes of such reactance (i.e., ad avoidance) within the context of live-broadcasts. The results of an online survey ( $N=297$ ) show that having a high flow status on Twitch appears to intensify users' reactance toward ad invasiveness and ad avoidance. Notably, anger emerges as a dominant cause for reactant users' avoidance of advertising. This study's key findings are discussed in-depth, along with theoretical and practical implications.

*Keywords:* live streaming platforms, telepresence, flow, reactance, ad avoidance, Twitch

### **Introduction**

Digital innovation changes the ways we consume and experience content across different media platforms. Now, people not only value specific media content but also seek a unique experience on the media platform as well as engagement with the platform. Twitch has embraced this trend and grown to become one of the most popular destinations for people looking for a highly interactive entertainment and global community experience. According to recent business trends, this interactive broadcast, also known as live broadcasts or streams, continues to grow in popularity. The 2022 industry report informed that Twitch topped the streaming market with 78.6% market shares by hours watched up, followed by YouTube Gaming with 16.2% and Mixer and Facebook Gaming with 5.3% (Stream Labs & Stream Hatchet, 2022). Twitch also held an average viewership of around 2,578,000 people, approximately 1346 billion minutes of video were viewed by Twitch users, and 92,600 average live channels streamed a

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<sup>\*</sup>Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Sam Houston State University, USA.

<sup>±</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Sam Houston State University, USA.

<sup>°</sup>Professor, Loyola University Maryland, USA.

variety of content (Twitch Tracker, 2022). With a continued increase in active younger users and time spent on Twitch by users, marketers view Twitch as an excellent platform for reaching young audiences, given that 75% of Twitch users are between the ages of 18 and 34 (Twitch Tracker, 2022). In line with the platform's remarkable business potential, Twitch's revenues surged to a staggering \$2.8 billion in 2022 (Business of Apps, 2023). Moreover, Twitch has continued offering a variety of advertising options for both advertisers and streamers, allowing them to optimize their profits.

On Twitch, one of the most popular advertising formats is in-stream video advertising, now known as *Twitch Premium Video*, which appears during a live broadcast or when viewers load a live stream's channel (Twitch Ads, 2023). Given that Twitch's in-stream video advertising appears as an unzippable format on the stream window, incorporated into Twitch live broadcasts, exposure to in-stream video advertising is inevitable on Twitch unless users subscribe to a channel or use a Twitch Turbo subscription. In the context of online advertising effectiveness, extensive research contends that forceful advertising interruptions can diminish users' perceived control over the web interface and heighten ad avoidance tendencies due to psychological reactance (Campbell et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2016; Li et al., 2002; Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2008).

According to psychological reactance theory (PRT), individuals may experience psychological reactance in environments where their own freedom is constrained owing to an external force (Brehm, 1966, 1972). This loss of autonomy can further elicit a desire for reactance, prompting individuals to engage in activities aimed at preventing additional loss of freedom, a phenomenon is known as a boomerang effect (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Clee & Wicklund, 1980; Quick & Kim, 2009; Quick & Stephenson, 2008). While prior research has extensively explored advertising avoidance in a range of contexts, the landscape of live-streaming platforms remains relatively unexplored within the advertising discipline. Therefore, understanding the intricate psychological processes underlying ad interruption and ad avoidance on live-streaming platforms is imperative, as it holds the potential to uncover novel perspectives on users' experiences within these dynamic media platforms.

In the case of Twitch, it stands out as an excellent live-streaming platform, providing a highly interactive experience through *live-streaming and real-time interaction*. The majority of content on Twitch comes from live-streaming, which records and broadcasts real-time sounds and images from an event, and broadcasters and viewers can engage with each other throughout live-streaming. As a result, instant transmission and real-time human interaction frequently induce feelings of being there (Chen & Lin, 2018; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018), which may impact users' perceptions of ad interruption within this immersive media platform. Despite Twitch's popularity as a live-streaming service, little is known about the factors that influence advertising effectiveness on the platform. Therefore, using PRT as a central framework, this study aims to develop and test an integrated theoretical model to understand how Twitch users' immersive experiences on live-streaming intersect with their perceptions of in-stream video advertising within the live-broadcast platform. By examining the relationship between users' perceived

telepresence, flow experience, and their perceptions of forceful ad interruption, the focal point of this research is to bridge the theoretical gap in our understanding of advertising avoidance tendencies in emerging digital environments. For practical implication, the study findings can provide practical guidance to advertisers navigating this evolving landscape and shed light on how advertisers can optimize their advertising strategies to align with users' experiences, ultimately improving users' attitudes toward ads on live-streaming platforms.

## Literature Review

### Telepresence and Flow Experience on Twitch

One unique aspect of computer-mediated communication is that users can feel a sense of being immersed, also known as telepresence, in the online environment (Steuer, 1992). In general, *telepresence* is the feeling of being present in a mediated environment rather than one's physical environment (Biocca, 1992; Kim & Biocca, 1997). When technological affordance allows users to interact with the mediated environment and provides a level of realism, it can generate a sense of telepresence (Coyle & Thorsen, 2001; Hernandez, 2011; Johnson & Wiles, 2003). With the growing popularity of an interactive medium, scholars have explored the causes and consequences of telepresence (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Steuer, 1992) and identified two essential attributes of telepresence, vividness, and interactivity. While interactivity is viewed as the medium's ability to allow users to make real-time changes to the content and platform features in a mediated environment, vividness is defined as the sensorial richness of the mediated environment through the presentation of graphic and more sensory content (Steuer, 1992). For instance, when a website presents explicit content and creates a more interactive and realistic virtual environment, scholars find that web users actively interact with the content, enhancing their perceptions of being transported to the website (Coyle & Thorsen, 2001).

Applying the concept of telepresence to Twitch, Twitch allows streamers to transmit real-time video and audio from their homes to viewers all over the world. For instance, video game streamers often embed a real-time webcam into their live gaming, allowing viewers to watch the streamers' gameplay and see their live broadcasting streams. This live-streaming platform setting frequently creates a sensory-rich atmosphere and allows Twitch viewers to communicate in real time in a chat room with other viewers and the streamer. During their engagement in a chat room, viewers can express their thoughts about the streaming channel and streamers, discuss unrelated or related topics to the streaming content, and socialize with others (Hu et al., 2017). Therefore, it is expected that Twitch users' active engagement in real-time interaction, media richness, and a significant number of sensory experiences in the live-broadcast platform would strengthen their perceptions of telepresence (Bründl et al., 2017).

When people are absorbed in an online activity, their feelings of telepresence can lead to a state of flow (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Huang et al., 2011; Kim &

Biocca, 1997; Van Noort et al., 2012). In online communication, *flow* is a state of concentration in which users are involved in their actions and focused on the content in the mediated environment (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Several scholars emphasize that flow experiences boost individuals' level of arousal and loss of time pass and even lead them to forget tasks they should complete, which may result in their positive attitudes towards the interactive interface. For instance, studies on social media platforms (Hung et al., 2016) and instant messages (Lu et al., 2009) discovered that users' flow experience strengthens the perceived value of a website and behavioral intention to use the platform (Wu, 2009). In conjunction with the characteristics of Twitch and concepts of telepresence and flow, the researchers, therefore, hypothesize:

**H1:** Twitch users' perceptions of telepresence will positively impact their Twitch flow experience.

### **The Effect of Twitch Users' Flow Experience on Reactance and Ad Avoidance**

Advertising intrusiveness is often seen as one of the primary causes of annoyance and a leading factor in ad avoidance on numerous occasions (Brechman et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2002; McCoy et al., 2008; Li et al., 2002; Li & Lo, 2015; Rejón-Guardia & Martínez-López, 2014; Smith, 2011). The intrusiveness of advertising is defined as an ad's ability to obstruct users' exposure to or active involvement in media content (Edwards et al., 2002; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011; McCoy et al., 2008; Li et al., 2002). While a higher degree of forced exposure can increase users' awareness of advertisements, several scholars are concerned that users' reactance toward intrusiveness can diminish their positive attitudes toward ads and behavioral intentions (Cho et al., 2001; Clee & Wicklund, 1980; Ha & McCann, 2008; Li et al., 2002; Stayman & Aaker, 1988). Notably, empirical studies confirm that internet users dislike invasive ads that interrupt their flow of media content consumption and goal-related activities (Bailey et al., 2001; Cho et al., 2001; Ha, 1996; McCoy et al., 2008).

One assuring theory that provides insight into how users respond to intrusive ad interruption on live-streaming platforms is the concept of psychological reactance. According to the psychological reactance theory (PRT), reactance or adverse reaction stems mainly from individuals' needs to preserve their autonomy in making their own decisions without being compelled by an external force (Brehm, 1966, Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Conceptually, scholars describe psychological reactance as the motivational counterforce to a threat to autonomy, and cognitive and emotional components are measured to understand how individuals respond to persuasive messages (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Dillard & Shen, 2005). Prior research has discovered that when confronted with a threat to one's freedom, people exhibit a high level of reactance, including negative cognitions and anger. Particularly, in responding to reactance-inducing advertising messages, individuals experience unpleasant emotional states, such as anger, and develop counterarguments or critical thoughts (Lang, 2006). Furthermore, such

psychological reactance results in a wide range of outcomes, including changes in attention, attitudes, and behavioral changes (Kim et al., 2017; Quick & Stephenson, 2008; Ying et al., 2009). For instance, individuals tend to express their intention to maintain their initial attitudes (i.e., resistance) or change their perspectives in ways that contradict the intended goals of persuasive messages (i.e., persuasive boomerang) in order to rebuild a threatened autonomy (Kim et al., 2017; Quick & Stephenson, 2008).

Regarding online advertising effectiveness, several scholars underscore the role of reactance in explaining ad avoidance tendency in various ad formats, such as pop-ups (Edwards et al., 2002), personalized ads (Baek & Morimoto, 2012), and Facebook ads (Youn & Kim, 2019). *Ad avoidance*, in general, refers to media users' intended activities to reduce their exposure to ad content (Speck & Elliott, 1997). To better understand various advertising-avoidant activities, scholars have developed a conceptual model of ad avoidance that incorporates cognitive, affective, and behavioral avoidance (Fransen et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2010; Li et al., 2002; Youn & Kim, 2019). In ad avoidance research, cognitive avoidance represents consumers' mental effort to ignore advertisements, behavioral avoidance refers to consumers' intended behaviors or activities to avoid advertisements, and affective avoidance refers to consumers' affective response to advertisements (Cho & Cheon, 2004). In the context of online advertising, scholars pay much attention to cognitive and behavioral avoidance because these avoidant activities are more apparent and definite avoidant activities than affective avoidance (Cho & Cheon, 2004; Fransen et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2010; Li et al., 2002; McCoy et al., 2008; Rains, 2013; Youn & Kim, 2019). For instance, Youn and Kim (2019) find that Facebook users perceive Facebook newsfeed advertising as obtrusive due to the limited flexibility to utilize Facebook. As a result, perceived intrusiveness triggers anger and negative cognitions about advertisements, leading to cognitive and behavioral ad avoidance. Particularly, Youn and Kim's (2009) study examines cognitive ad avoidance with consumers' ignorance and inattention to advertising and measures behavioral avoidance with consumers' actions to block or conceal ads.

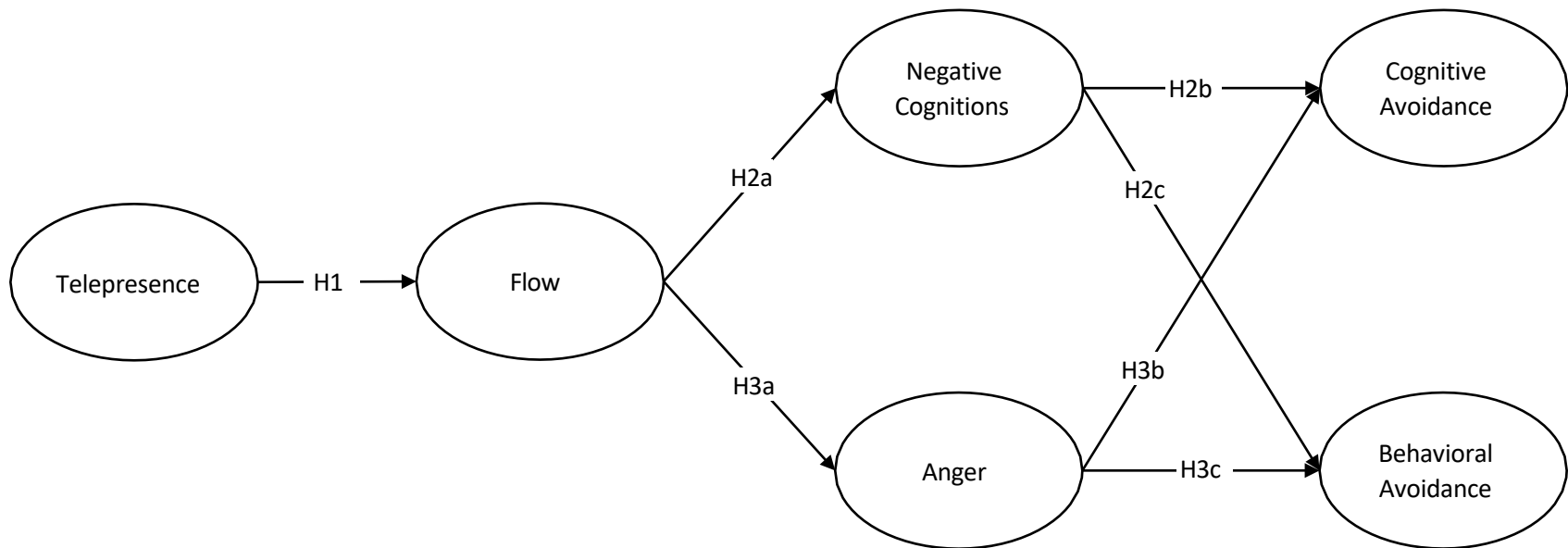
This study is rooted in this line of research in that the researchers use reactance as a mediator to explain how different types of ad avoidance can occur on a live-streaming platform. While individual variables in this research have been explored to some extent, this study takes a novel approach by integrating these variables into a comprehensive framework that has yet to be explored in the existing literature theoretically. On Twitch, in-stream video advertisements are more invasive as they completely obstruct users' ability to watch live broadcasts by overflowing the stream window. Considering users' active engagement and the format of ad interruption on Twitch, the researchers predict that in-stream video advertising interruptions have the potential to prevent users from accessing real-time streaming, interacting with streamers, and participating in the streams. Since Twitch users have no control over these ad interruptions, it is expected that ad intrusiveness can diminish their flow experiences and amplify their psychological aversion to disruptive ad interference (Duff & Faber, 2011). Empirical evidence indicates that such ad intrusiveness can heighten users' negative feelings and

unfavorable evaluations of ads, leading to behavioral consequences such as ad avoidance (Li et al., 2002; Morimoto & Macias, 2009; Youn & Kim, 2019). For instance, Li et al. (2002) discover that ad intrusiveness is a pivotal factor contributing to viewers' annoyance, potentially reducing viewers' time spent watching advertisements and strengthening their behavioral intentions to close pop-up ads. In a similar vein, research on social media advertising suggests that invasive advertising can yield unintended consequences, including negative attitudes toward ads and reduced behavioral intention to share ads (Li et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2011; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013). Overall, these findings support the expectation that when users encounter in-stream video advertising interruptions during their flow experiences, they are likely to experience negative emotions (i.e., anger) and discount the quality of advertising (i.e., negative cognition), ultimately engaging in ad avoidance activities to enhance their overall user experience on Twitch (Cho & Cheon, 2004; McCoy et al., 2008; Youn & Kim, 2019). Given that this research's central aim is to investigate the intricate interplay and causal relationships, the researchers therefore develop the following hypotheses to examine how each reactant sub-component connects to reactance outcomes differently, in conjunction with Youn and Kim's (2019) study (see Figure 1).

**H2:** Twitch users' perceptions of flow will positively affect their perceptions of (a) negative cognitions, which will positively influence (b) cognitive ad avoidance and (c) behavioral ad avoidance.

**H3:** Twitch users' perceptions of flow will positively affect their (a) feelings of anger, which will positively influence (b) cognitive ad avoidance and (c) behavioral ad avoidance.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Ad Avoidance on Twitch



## Method

Using Qualtrics, a web-based survey was administered to investigate the proposed model of ad avoidance on Twitch (see Figure 1). Two hundred and ninety-seven participants were Twitch users from the US who were recruited through the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. The participants' ages vary from 18 to 68 ( $M = 30.91$ ,  $SD = 7.26$ ), with 67% male and 33% female. The average daily Twitch use time for participants was 84.65 minutes.

After clicking the study link on the MTurk, participants were directed to the consent form in accordance with the Institutional Review Board's approved protocols. Those who agreed to participate completed an online questionnaire designed to gather participants' demographic information and gauge their perceptions of telepresence, flow, reactance, cognitive and behavioral avoidance. After completing the survey, participants received \$0.40 for participation. Approximately, it took 10 minutes for each participant to complete the full procedure.

## Measures

Most measure items were adopted from prior studies and revised to fit the context of Twitch and in-stream video ads. The following variables were measured: (a) perceived telepresence, (b) flow, (c) reactance, which included cognitive evaluations and anger, and (d) cognitive and behavioral ad avoidance.

### *Telepresence*

Telepresence was assessed using seven items adopted from Hernandez's study (2011) on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* (e.g. 'I forgot about my immediate surroundings when I watch content on Twitch,'  $\alpha = .93$ ).

### *Flow*

The extent to which each participant experienced flow was measured using a scale developed by Chen and Lin (2018). The 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) consisted of four items (e.g. "When watching the content on Twitch, I do not realize how time passes,"  $\alpha = .77$ ).

### *Reactance*

Psychological reactance was measured with two components, negative cognitions, and anger. To assess users' negative cognitions of the in-stream video advertisements, participants were asked to make a judgment on three items (e.g., "Seeing the in-stream video ads on Twitch was reasonable"), where 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much* (reverse coded later for analyses,  $\alpha = .86$ ). These items were adopted and modified from prior studies (Gardner & Leshner, 2016; Youn & Kim,



2019). Anger was also measured using four items (e.g. “The in-stream video ads on Twitch make me feel annoyed”), where 0 = *none of this feeling* and 7 = *a great deal of this feeling* (Seo & Dillard, 2019;  $\alpha = .91$ ).

### **Ad Avoidance**

Ad avoidance was estimated with cognitive and behavioral ad avoidance. For cognitive ad avoidance, three items were adopted and modified from Youn and Kim’s study (2019) to gauge the concept, users’ tendency to ignore advertising, which ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* (e.g., “I ignore the in-streaming video ads on Twitch,”  $\alpha = .83$ ). Behavioral ad avoidance was measured using three items (e.g., “I go the extra mile to stay away from the ads on Twitch,”  $\alpha = .81$ ), particularly users’ effect to skip the advertising. Items were measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* (Youn & Kim, 2019).

## **Results**

### **Measurement Model**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the validity of the measures with AMOS 25. The analysis contained the items to assess telepresence, flow, negative cognitions, anger, cognitive ad avoidance, and behavioral ad avoidance. In the initial test, the result showed a poor model fit:  $\chi^2$  (237) = 809.68,  $p < .001$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .090, 90% confidence intervals (CIs) = .084 - .097,  $p$  of close fit (PCLOSE) = .00, adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) = .75, comparative fit index (CFI) = .88, and Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = .86. Modification indices suggested three correlations of error terms for the latent construct of telepresence. Two correlations of error terms for anger were also suggested to be correlated. After correlating these five pairs of correlation, the modified model fit was improved to an acceptable level:  $\chi^2$  (232) = 671.80,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = .080, 90% CIs = .073 - .087, PCLOSE = .00, AGFI = .79, CFI = .91, and TLI = .89. Although correlating error terms may weaken the validity of the measures because the correlations were only allowed within the same latent constructs, and all items would be collapsed into a single parcel for the following analyses, the correlations should not raise concerns about the integrity of the model.

### **Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing**

To test H1, H2, and H3 in Figure 1, structural equation modeling (SEM) was carried out. First, all variables were generated as single parcels by collapsing items for each latent construct. Then, the error variance of each variable was estimated by multiplying its variance and the value of one minus item alpha reliability (i.e.,  $[1 - \alpha] \times \sigma^2$ ; Bollen, 1989). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations

among the measured variables.

**Table 1.** Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Measured Variables

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Telepresence	4.22	1.52					
2. Flow	4.63	1.22	.69***				
3. Negative Cognitions	3.94	1.50	.31***	.26***			
4. Anger	4.35	1.69	.13*	.18**	-.33***		
5. Cognitive Avoidance	5.08	1.42	.01	.12*	-.19**	.48***	
6. Behavioral Avoidance	4.51	1.58	.24***	.25***	-.17**	.60***	.36***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

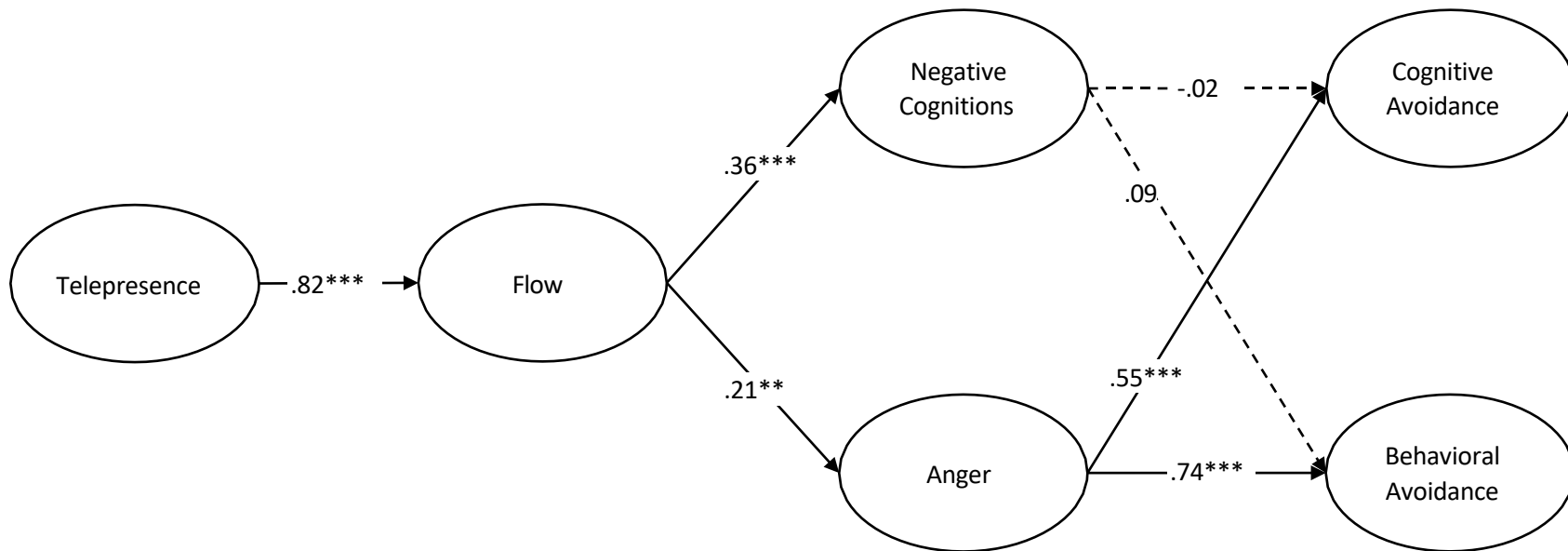
The model was evaluated in terms of model fit and significance of the path coefficients.

The initial test showed a poor model fit:  $\chi^2(8) = 78.33, p < .001$ , RMSEA = .172, 90% CIs = .139 - .208, PCLOSE = .00, AGFI = .81, CFI = .86, and TLI = .74. The modification indices suggested a correlation of disturbances between negative cognitions and anger. The correlation improved model fit:  $\chi^2(7) = 20.72, p < .01$ , RMSEA = .081, 90% CIs = .042 - .123, PCLOSE = .09, AGFI = .93, CFI = .97, and TLI = .94. The correlation may raise an issue with the model. However, given that cognition and emotion are greatly intermingled with each other (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991), and a similar correlation between cognition and emotion has been seen in other studies (e.g., Seo & Dillard, 2019), the correlation should not cause concerns regarding the validity of the model. Figure 2 presents the obtained model of ad avoidance on Twitch with standardized path coefficients. The results are discussed next to the suggested hypotheses.

### ***H1: The Effect of Telepresence on Flow***

H1 expected that a higher perception of telepresence would enhance users' flow experience on Twitch. In other words, the degree to which Twitch users sensed telepresence would result in a more intense Twitch flow experience. Consistent with the prediction, the standardized path coefficient ( $\beta = .82, p < .001$ ) of the obtained model in Figure 2 supports the causal relationship between telepresence and flow. Thus, H1 was fully supported.

Figure 2. Obtained Model of Ad Avoidance on Twitch



Note: Path coefficients are standardized weights. Disturbances are correlated between Negative Cognitions and Anger. Dotted lines are nonsignificant paths.

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

***H2: The Effect of Flow on (a) Negative Cognitions that Affect (b) Cognitive ad Avoidance and (c) Behavioral Ad Avoidance***

H2 predicted that when Twitch users were in a higher flow, they would have (a) more negative cognitions of ad exposure, leading to (b) less attention to ads and (c) an effort to prevent ads. As shown in Figure 2, the path from flow to negative cognitions (H2a) was significant ( $\beta = .36, p < .001$ ), whereas the paths from negative cognitions to cognitive ad avoidance (H2b,  $\beta = -.02$ ) and behavioral ad avoidance (H2c,  $\beta = .09$ ) were not significant. Thus, H2 was partially supported.

***H3: The Effect of Flow on (a) Anger that Affects (b) Cognitive Ad Avoidance and (c) Behavioral Ad Avoidance***

H3 predicted that when users were in an intense state of flow, they would express (a) strong anger, which would lead to (b) more eagerness to ignore ads and (c) behavioral avoidance of ads. The obtained model in Figure 2 shows that the more flow users experience, the stronger the affective reactance they experience (H3a,  $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, users' anger increased cognitive ad avoidance (H3b,  $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ) as well as behavioral ad avoidance (H3c,  $\beta = .74, p < .001$ ). Therefore, H3 was completely supported.

## **Discussion**

This study explores 1) whether the interactive environment with media richness on Twitch contributes to users' telepresence and flow status and 2) how users' unique flow experience on Twitch influences their acceptance of in-stream video advertising. First, this study's findings show that users benefit from a highly dynamic interface and rich live-streaming content on Twitch. Previous research on Twitch has shown that co-viewing of live streaming media content and real-time conversation with the streamers and other users significantly impact users' feelings of presence, which may improve their motivations to use Twitch and their flow experiences (Bründl et al., 2017). In conjunction with prior research findings, this study found that Twitch users' telepresence positively correlated to their flow experience. Given that a flow experience positively influences users' attitudes toward the media platform, scholars emphasize the significance of proper website structure and design features in building users' positive feelings (Chen & Lin, 2018; Hernandez, 2011; Wu, 2009). Specifically, Wu (2009) argues that social media platforms should care about users' mental states of flow as an increase in flow can lead to an affinity for the platform and foster more positive attitudes among users. In this point, this study's examination of how users' flow experience is interrelated with their reactance toward ad interruptions contributes new insights to the existing body of knowledge concerning advertising potential within the realm of live-streaming media platforms.

Theoretically, this research highlights a critical insight: in a context where users are already fully immersed, a high level of advertising intrusiveness has the

potential to trigger reactance and ad avoidance, possibly undermining users' favorable attitudes toward the media platform. One reason why Twitch users may not easily tolerate in-stream video advertising interruptions is a loss of control. Flow experience hinges on the crucial factor of control, as it is essential in eliciting a state of flow during a flow encounter. When users have full control and autonomy over their activities and shape their environment within a media platform, they are more likely to appreciate and immerse themselves in the content presented (Johnson & Wiles, 2003; Hernandez, 2011). This happens because the ability to make choices and tailor their experience to personal preferences fosters a sense of ownership and alignment with the content. However, Twitch users often encounter restrictions when confronted with forceful in-stream video advertising interruptions during their self-selected media content consumption. This transition from full control to imposed content can be unpleasant and break a flow state.

Therefore, this rationale helps us understand the significance of maintaining a balance between user control and ad intrusiveness, illuminating the importance of aligning these elements for a seamless and enjoyable user experience on Twitch.

From a broad standpoint, this research finding aligns with the notion that the media platform can provide the context for advertisements (Voorveld et al., 2018). To put it another way, the distinctive experience offered by a specific media platform or the unique interaction the platform enables can profoundly influence how users perceive and embrace embedded advertisements. In the case of Twitch, the significant engagement is real-time interactivity. The Twitch platform encourages users to engage in their activities with its highly interactive features actively, and users develop a sense of control over the platform, allowing them to curate their content exposure. As a result, when the ads disrupt users' flow experience and their goal-oriented activities, users may perceive these interruptions as intrusive and react negatively due to the increased cognitive load, as they need to filter out irrelevant information (Bailey et al., 2001; Cho et al., 2001; Ha, 1996; McCoy et al., 2008). When selecting a media platform for an advertising campaign, the researchers therefore recommend that advertisers thoroughly assess the media platform's features and determine if their advertising messages and formats harmonize with its inherent characteristics. This well-alignment between the media platform and advertising can generate a positive carry-over effect, strengthening the reception of ads posted on the platform and improving users' willingness to accept the ads.

Another main contribution of this project is its examination of how each reactant sub-component interrelates with different ad avoidance activities. One attention-grabbing finding is that anger in reactance leads to strong cognitive and behavioral ad avoidance, whereas negative cognitions in reactance do not appear to have a significant impact on both. This finding supports the premise of PRT that a distinct component of reactance can trigger users' active or passive ways of regaining their independence (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). In the context of Facebook, Youn and Kim (2019) hypothesize that when users perceive newsfeed advertising as intrusive, they feel annoyed (i.e., anger); consequently, they pay less attention to the ads (i.e., cognitive avoidance; passive means) and intend to block the ads (i.e., behavioral avoidance; active means). In a similar vein, when users consider

newsfeed advertising intrusive, they deem forced exposure to advertising as unreasonable (i.e., negative cognitions); as a result, they take comparable cognitive and behavioral avoidant actions to reestablish their independence. The main conclusion from Youn and Kim's study is that anger is a powerful motivator for reactive users to engage in strong avoidant activities. This study's results are consistent with prior research findings that anger responds more sensitively to a threat to freedom than negative cognitions and elicits users' solid intention to regain control over the environment (Kim et al., 2017; Rains, 2013; Youn & Kim, 2019). In the context of reactance, anger often triumphs over negative cognitions in response to advertising features that elicit a persuasive boomerang effect rather than resistance (Kim et al., 2017). Given that in-stream video ads appear in the exact location as the live streams that users want to watch and block them from their goal-oriented goals, it seems plausible to conclude that anger is a driving factor for users to engage in ad-avoidant activities on Twitch. In a similar line, Duff and Faber (2011) demonstrate that consumers who engage in goal-oriented activities experience more intense irritation when they respond to ads that seem similar to media content and are located near the content.

Since ad avoidance implies a breakdown in communication between advertisers and consumers, it is often seen as the most challenging hurdle for advertisers (Fransen et al., 2015; Youn & Kim, 2019). Previous research has discovered that ad placement, ad interruption timing, and the extent of consumer control over ad exposure can significantly influence users' experiences with ad intrusiveness and the degree of forced exposure to advertisements (Ha & McCann, 2008; Li et al., 2002; Ritter & Cho, 2009; Stayman & Aaker, 1988). The advertising intrusiveness is widely acknowledged as a significant factor that triggers negative feelings, which in turn leads to ad avoidance (Edwards et al., 2002; Li et al., 2002). Concerning the role of anger in ad avoidance, Lang (2006) argued that users who have experienced anger have a high ad avoidance tendency in future ad exposure situations in order to prevent experiencing anger again. From a practical perspective, the researchers suggest that a live-stream platform should consider providing an option to close advertising at certain times or to use alternative formats that do not entirely disrupt the live stream (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011; McCoy et al., 2008). This approach can help reduce users' annoyance and minimize their tendency to avoid ads actively. When users perceive that they can control advertising exposure, the mere presence of this controlling option can even reduce users' perceptions of intrusiveness and negative attitudes toward the ads (Rejón-Guardia & Martínez-López, 2014; Youn & Kim, 2019). Furthermore, offering relevant information that fits users' momentary interests or entertaining information on the ads (Lin & Kim, 2016; Zhu & Chang, 2016) or providing the option to select personally relevant ad content through ad customization features can soften consumers' reactance toward ad intrusiveness (Kim, 2018). To improve users' immersive experience on Twitch, offering various controllable features and allocating ads that fit a specific stream of users' interests are essential.

Finally, an important question that this research does not explicitly address is the non-significant relationship between negative cognitions and ad avoidance. One possible reason for this can be attributed to users' particular mindset towards

Twitch. A unique aspect of Twitch's in-stream video ads is the prominent banner explicitly informing that watching these ads would contribute to supporting the streamer. According to Twitch's industry research, users tend to favor supporting the streamers they like; consequently, they do not mind encountering sponsored ads on Twitch that benefit their favorite streamers. For instance, a survey shows that around 80% of Twitch users are receptive to brand sponsorship for specific streamers and view these sponsorships as beneficial to the business (Clang, 2018). Furthermore, when Twitch users engage in social interaction, exchange real-time information, and enjoy entertainment, they often feel emotional connections with the Twitch platform and specific live-stream communities. This emotional attachment motivates them to support their favorite streamers financially, ensuring they can continue their live streams (Carter & Hoy, 2024; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Wulf et al., 2021; Yoganathan et al., 2021). In this point, users may perceive the presence of in-stream video advertising as a reasonable or fair trade-off; hence, negative cognitions might not directly lead to ad avoidance. However, advertisers need to approach this possibility cautiously, because users' perceptions of sponsored advertisements may not be consistent across all scenarios, and their willingness to embrace ads could be influenced by factors beyond the contextual aspect.

Considering the nature of sponsorship ads on Twitch, it is important to highlight that these ads often come bundled with numerous compelling messages. Consequently, the abundance of information in advertising can add a cognitive burden on users, requiring them to invest mental effort in filtering through content they deem irrelevant to their interests. To address this challenge, the researchers recommend that web operators consider limiting the number of ads to stay within a "tolerance threshold" (Lin & Kim, 2016; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013). When users are exposed to excessive information or compelled to exert substantial mental effort to filter out ad content, it can result in a negative user experience and foster a negative perception of the platform. Of late, Twitch announced branded content guidelines for on-platform sponsorships, including paid product placement, endorsements, and any forms of sponsored advertisement. From now on, advertisers are required to use Twitch's branded content disclosure tool to ensure that content meets the platform's formatting requirements to improve how advertisements and promotions are displayed on the platform (Twitch Ads, 2023). Furthermore, the Twitch platform offers advertisers a range of choices, including brand integrations, brand partnerships, and sponsorship stream display ads that do not distract users' attention away from their goal-directed status (Twitch Ads, 2023). This strategic shift reflects the potential disruption and annoyance frequent sponsorship ads can cause viewers and the intention to foster a more viewer-centric environment. Future research can investigate how these advertising strategies and the number of ad interruptions interact with users' flow experiences, ultimately resulting in the acceptance of both brands and advertisements.

### **Study Limitations**

While the current study adds to our understanding of advertising avoidance on Twitch, several limitations restrict this study. First, the researchers used the Amazon MTurk sample, in which people choose research projects voluntarily. To reduce the sampling bias, future studies can empirically test the relationship between variables using larger representative samples (e.g., surveying real Twitch users during a live stream) to confidently generalize the findings. In the context of Twitch, the researchers also examined the role of flow on reactance without measuring users' perceived ad intrusiveness. This measurement parsimony stems from the researchers' judgment that the format of in-stream advertising contains sufficient characteristics to limit users' exposure to the content. Given that various circumstances (e.g., poor ad execution and ad clutter) can create users' perceived intrusiveness (Smith, 2011), measuring perceived intrusiveness can help clarify the main factors shaping users' psychological reactance. Furthermore, the researchers only looked at the influence of in-stream video ads on psychological reactance. Prior reactance research discovered that an individual's difference (e.g., trait resistance), message features (e.g., message framing, loss vs. gain), and advertising formats might be interrelated with a psychological reactance (Dillard & Shen, 2005; Quick & Stephenson, 2008). Therefore, it would be noteworthy to examine how individual differences or message features moderate the effect of flow on reactance, as well as what advertising formats are influential in a particular condition.

### **Conclusion**

Twitch represents a significant transformation in live TV, showing the future of interactive and immersive content consumption. This shift is evident that Twitch users on live-streaming platforms exhibit high engagement with media content and live interactions with the community, although the engagement in ad content could not be consistently as strong.

Therefore, the challenge lies in seamlessly integrating ads on this platform and ensuring that the positive user experience extends to the ads displayed on Twitch. It is widely recognized that when a media platform aligns with the preferences of its users, it not only enhances its perceived value but also strengthens user intention to revisit the platform (Liang et al., 2009). Therefore, this study's findings suggest the importance of carefully balancing advertising exposure and the immersive user experience on live-streaming media platforms. Notably, by tailoring advertising strategies to match the platform's primary user engagements, advertisers can enhance both the platform's value and the reception of the advertisement. With this understanding in hand, advertisers can make informed decisions about advertising formats and execution styles, fostering a profound and optimal user experience. This strategic approach holds the key to unlocking the full advertising potential of dynamic live-streaming platforms, guiding a new era of advertising in the live TV landscape.



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## **The Development of Vietnam's Public Relations Industry**

*By Tuong-Minh Ly-Le\**

**Purpose** – Being a relatively new industry in Vietnam, records on the emergence of public relations practices in Vietnam are limited. The current study will focus on key milestones in the evolution of the public relations industry in Vietnam, major cultural and economic factors that shape current practices, and the ways in which these factors will influence the industry's future growth. **Design/methodology/ approach** – This paper adopted library research and expert interview as its methodologies. **Findings** – Public relations in Vietnam is diverse and influenced by both Western practices and the local culture. As more companies are considering the use of public relations, and more students and journalists seek to join the field, the industry is emerging rapidly, promising changes and development in the field. However, public relations practice in Vietnam is still marketing-oriented, one-way, and may not be effective in reputation management. Public relations firms in Vietnam need a common standard that is based on the standards of global and local public relations. **Practical implications** – The research adds to the limited scholarly research on the development of the public relations industry in Vietnam by providing useful information about the industry's background, growth, and the future directions.

*Keywords:* PR industry, public relations, public relations practice, Vietnam

### **Introduction**

The public relations (PR) industry has been established for a long time, but in Vietnam, it is still a relatively new industry. It is because of the development of the economy and society, in which the role of the market economy must be taken into account. It is the market economy that has created fierce competition in the economic field, promoting competition in other areas of social life, which becomes the basis for the formation and development of the public relations industry (Tran, 2014).

Today, public relations is one of the most interested professions in Vietnam. According to the popular recruitment site Careerlink, while other industries post jobs with an average salary, they can find suitable candidates within a few days, public relations job postings with a double salary usually find it difficult to recruit for months (Glints, 2022). The high demand from businesses leads to a surge in applications to the public relations undergraduate programs, with more than 100,000 students (about the seating capacity of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum) applying and more than 6,500 admitted in 2021 (Glints, 2022).

Despite being a fast-growing and increasingly influencing industry to the economy and society in Vietnam, academic research or media articles on the

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\*Dean, School of Media and Applied Arts, University of Management and Technology, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

formation and development of the industry are relatively limited. When the author learned about studies on this topic on Google Scholars, most of the late research on this industry is oriented towards domestic and foreign applications or case studies, while the studies on the industry development, practices, and trends are few, mostly published before 2015. Therefore, the author aims to provide academia and public relations practitioners with a more thorough understanding of the public relations industry in Vietnam. Specifically, the study looks at the milestones in the development of the public relations industry, cultural and economic factors driving current practice, and future directions of the industry. In addressing these objectives, this study tries to fill the gaps in academic research and render practical insight into the evolving field of public relations in Vietnam.

### **Methodology**

This research employs library research and expert interview as its methodology. Library research (also known as secondary data analysis) involves gathering factual information or expert opinion relevant to a research question from reliable sources in order to conduct further research (George, 2008). Both academic literature and media articles were reviewed to identify the development and practices of the public relations industry. A mix of academic and non-scholarly sources provides a variety of perspectives from both researchers and experts.

The research also includes a series of semi-structured expert interviews to better understand how the industry is doing and where it is going. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility in exploring complex topics while maintaining a focus on predefined themes. The interview questions were developed based on a review of the relevant literature and aimed to address the study's research questions. Meuser and Nagel (2009) described expert interviews as qualitative interviews based on thematic guidelines. These guidelines focus on professional knowledge, generally characterized as specific knowledge in specific areas. Unlike the general interview participants, the interviewed experts have deep knowledge of the research subjects. The purpose of expert interviews is to obtain additional unknown or authoritative information, authoritative opinions, and a serious and professional assessment of the research topic (Libakova & Sertakova, 2015). This type of survey is intended to obtain reliable data due to the high competence of the respondents (Dorussen et al., 2005).

The selection criteria for the interview experts are as follows. There is no preference over sex.

- The participant has practiced public relations in an agency or an in-house department within an organization in Vietnam.
- The participant is a senior public relations practitioner, with the job title of supervisor, manager, or director.
- The participant has had at least five years of experience in public relations practice.

The expert interviews were conducted with twelve participants: six were male and six were female; seven worked in agencies while five worked in-house; and the participants had varying ranges of experience. Eight participants had five to eight years, and four had nine or more years. This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the key milestones in the development of the public relations industry in Vietnam?

RQ2: How have cultural and economic factors shaped current public relations practices in Vietnam?

RQ3: What are the challenges and opportunities for the future growth of the public relations industry in Vietnam?

## **Literature Review**

### **An Overview of Vietnam's Public Relations Industry**

Earlier research by Mak (2009) noted the weaknesses of the public relations industry in the country. According to her, public relations in Vietnam is a relatively new practice and is mostly unexplored by both academic scholars and industry practitioners. The main reason for its late interest is that the business environment only recently perceived a need for public relations. In the late 1990s, economic growth was boosted by the government's Renovation ("Doi Moi" in Vietnamese) policy through which more than 30,000 businesses were created, including both private and foreign-owned organizations (James & Merchant, 2013). Later, in 2007, Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and revised most of its trade and investment laws, widely opening its doors to welcome foreign investors Vietnam financial and trade policy handbook (*Vietnam Financial and Trade Policy Handbook*, 2007). Since then, the country has seen brisk economic development and increasing international business opportunities (Mak, 2009), and public relations has risen as an asset to keep organizations on a competitive edge.

Before the 2010s, public relations largely remained a new concept. At that time, major companies started to realize that they needed to establish better relationships with customers through the media or events. Since then, the demand for public relations professionals has increased, resulting in the rise of many public relations agencies and internal public relations departments on both national and international levels (Hang, 2010; Sison & Sarabia-Panol, 2018; Glints, 2022).

Tables 1 and 2 were adapted from Barnes Reports (2022), which showed that public relations agencies in Vietnam witnessed a rising trend in sales in the recent two consecutive years. There is an upward growth in the sector, except for the decrease in sales between 2019 and 2020, which could be due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. However, the industry quickly regained its momentum in the year after. This data prove that public relations is growing in demand in Vietnam.

Table 1. Industry Establishments, Sales, and Employment Trends

	Year					Percent change year-to-year			
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22
Establishments	8,091	8,221	8,000	8,111	8,179	1.6%	-2.7%	1.4%	0.8%
Sales (\$ millions)	206	219	214	231	247	5.9%	-2.1%	7.8%	6.9%
Employment	26,868	27,301	25,567	26,936	26,974	1.6%	-2.7%	1.4%	0.1%
Sales (Dongs billions)	4,769	5,051	4,945	5,330	5,700	5.9%	-2.1%	7.8%	6.9%

Table 2. Industry Ratios

(Industry averages)	Year					Percent change year-to-year			
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22
Sales (\$M) per establishment	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	4.2%	0.6%	6.3%	6.1%
Sales (\$) per employment	7,680	8,006	8,054	8,563	9,144	4.2%	0.6%	6.3%	6.8%
Dongs (B) per establishment	0.59	0.61	0.62	0.66	0.70	4.2%	0.6%	6.3%	6.1%
Dongs per employment	177,502	185,016	186,135	197,893	211,332	4.2%	0.6%	6.3%	6.8%

### Diverse Backgrounds and Practices

Public relations in Vietnam is diverse and influenced by Western practices and the local culture (Van, 2013; Domm, 2015; Sison & Sarabia-Panol, 2018; Ly-Le, 2020). According to Ly-Le (2020), Vietnamese public relations practitioners have three main educational backgrounds: domestic programs, overseas programs, and local journalism programs. These programs helped develop the public relations guidelines and approaches used in most Vietnamese practices. In Vietnam, there were not many universities that offer public relations programs. The growing need for public relations professionals has recently caught the attention of local colleges, which have started offering public relations courses, but the options are still limited. Furthermore, public relations coursework in Vietnam focuses more on theory, while paying less attention to case studies and real-world projects. As a result of these limited in-country study options, as Van (2013) assessed, about half of Vietnamese public relations professionals have studied abroad and are influenced by Western practices. The other half of public relations practitioners are from a journalism background. Since the local public relations practices engage in a high level of media relations and copywriting, journalism-trained practitioners can leverage their strengths without any formal public relations background. This diverse background explains the many ways public relations work is done in Vietnam.

Public relations in Vietnam usually focuses on marketing purposes (Van, 2013), media relations and short-term public relations campaigns (Hang, 2010; Doan & Bilowol, 2014), even though the Vietnamese public relations industry now sees an opportunity to evolve with growing demand for reputation management support. It is only when a crisis occurs that public relations practitioners pay more attention to reputation management (Van, 2013; 2014).

A previous study on Vietnamese public relations by Van (2014) provides background information for understanding the importance of this current study. Van evaluated the practice of public relations in Vietnam according to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) theory of public relations to establish whether and how the theory, which was developed in the West, was applicable in Vietnam. Van (2014) posited that the theory might not hold in Vietnam because the culture conducts private and business



relationships quite differently from the West. In Vietnam, relationships carry a much greater influence (Tran, 2004).

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), public relations may be practiced in four different ways, which are: (1) press agency or publicity, (2) public information, (3) two-way asymmetrical, and (4) two-way symmetrical. Under the first model, practitioners aim to persuade or manipulate their stakeholders according to the desires of the organization. Practitioners aim to emphasize an organization's positive features and minimize any that are negative even to the point of misleading stakeholders. Under the second model, practitioners also disseminate positive information, but the information tends to be truthful and factual. Under this model, organizations are neither aiming to manipulate nor to be untruthful. Under the third model, which is two-way asymmetrical, practitioners conduct research on stakeholder attitudes to determine how best to communicate with them. The practitioners do not try to change how their organization is acting. Finally, under the fourth model, which is two-way asymmetrical, practitioners research and communicate with stakeholders to better understand them, solve their problems, and build trust. When an organization follows this model, it learns from its stakeholders and changes its behavior instead of trying to manipulate and control them (Grunig, 2006). However, critics of this fourth model say that it represents the ideal for public relations but that public relations cannot always be practiced this way because stakeholders often present too many viewpoints (Wakefield, 2008). To move toward the ideal of two-way symmetrical, or the more realistic mixed-motive model which joins two-way asymmetrical with two-way symmetrical, Grunig and Hunt (1984) said that an organization moves from the first model of "complete truth not essential" to the second model of "truth important," to the third model of "scientific persuasion" (p. 22). Under the mixed-motive model, practitioners try to help their organizations achieve their goals while also looking after stakeholders.

Through interviews with 29 public relations practitioners working in-house and in agencies, Van (2014) found that Vietnamese public relations practitioners follow Grunig and Hunt's (1984) first and second models which involve one-way communication, but do not follow the other two models which involve research on and communication with stakeholders. Public relations in Vietnam, therefore, tends to be one way and organizations do not communicate interactively with stakeholders.

### **Lack of Standardizations and Regulations**

An important aspect of public relations in Vietnam is its lack of focus on stakeholder and reputation management. Public relations in Vietnam is usually confused with marketing or advertising, and its role in the entire crisis management process including reputation management and crisis response receives little attention (Hang, 2010; Van, 2013). Many organizations do not have a separate department for public relations or communications, and public relations activities are usually covered by the marketing department (Van, 2013).

Even though reputation is one of the main concerns for individuals and businesses alike, Mak (2009) found that polishing a corporate reputation is done not only to meet the expectations of Vietnamese stakeholders but also to fulfill a strong

desire from the management for appreciation, approval and respect. Further, unlike in Western culture, Vietnamese people and organizations believe it is impossible or nearly impossible to repair reputation once it is tarnished (Higuchi, 1997). Therefore, in this country, a positive reputation is regarded as a quality of utmost importance, one that every person and organization must have.

According to Vietnam Report (2015), an annual report on the reputation ranking of Vietnamese businesses, organizations now pay more attention to their reputation than ever. In general, they commit more time and effort to reputation management in front of the media and public stakeholders, and carefully plan for any potential reputational risks. However, reputation and business ethics are somewhat tricky in Vietnam. Do et al. (2007) conducted a series of case studies on multiple state-owned, foreign-owned, and joint venture organizations in which they observed unique and conflicting characteristics of business ethics in Vietnam. These scholars found that while reputation and ethics are keys to success for business, bribery is widely associated with doing business. Media have produced reports on the topic, and the public has criticized the practice, but the situation has not changed for many years (Do et al., 2007). Therefore, it is challenging for public relations practitioners to find a balance between maintaining good practice and upholding corporate reputation.

As stated, even though reputation is a main concern of Vietnamese businesses, it is not a main concern in Vietnamese public relations practice. To explore the perceptions of public relations in Vietnam, Doan and Bilowol (2014) conducted 12 interviews with senior public relations practitioners based in Ho Chi Minh and Ha Noi, the two commercial hubs of the country. The study found that public relations in Vietnam predominantly centers on media relations and product public relations, that public relations campaigns are restricted to short-term efforts instead of building long-term relationships, and that public relations practitioners have mixed views about ethics in which some uphold ethical practice while others are more goal-oriented without much ethical concern. Van's (2013) research yielded similar results. She found that public relations practice in Vietnam focuses primarily on marketing, with half of her respondents considering public relations as equivalent to promoting products.

On the other hand, the practice of public relations in Vietnam still lacks regulation, although it has been more than 30 years since the Renovation economic reforms, which marks the beginning of public relations in Vietnam (Mak, 2009). Van's (2013) research found that Vietnamese public relations practice is under-developed. As media tips and gifts are always expected to conduct relationships, and information about a government-owned business is turned away, creativity may be limited, and the public relations industry may be misunderstood as corrupt and unreliable.

Nguyen Quoc Bao, CEO of Awareness I.D., a prominent Vietnamese member of the ASEAN Public Relations Network, mentioned during a 2014 interview that the Vietnamese public relations industry lacks regulation; thus, every agency enacts its own public relations definition (Linh Lan, 2014). According to Nguyen, public relations firms in Vietnam need to codify a common standard that is based on the standards of global and local public relations. They also need to set specific regulations for the industry and boost local public relations practice to the next professional level (Linh Lan, 2014).

As there is no recent academic study on the standards, regulations, and upcoming trends of public relations in Vietnam, this research would check in with the field experts to understand the current practice and predicted future of the industry.

### **Expert's Insights: How the Industry is Doing and Moving Forward**

#### **Dialogue with Stakeholders is Still Not Preferred**

In the interview, the participants were asked if their organizations think it is important to engage in dialogue with stakeholders, especially during sensitive times like crises. Five participants mentioned that while dialogues are important, their organizations want to limit engaging in dialogues, and even do not want to dialogue at all during crises, either offline or on social media.

“Having dialogues is a chance for the media to pick up the story and they can spin the story in an unwanted way for us. Thus, we choose not to engage in any dialogues.”

– Participant T, an agency practitioner with eight years of experience.

“Having dialogues with stakeholders in crisis is theoretically important, but in fact, no one actually listens to the dialogue... For example, when a customer buys a dairy product and the product is damaged, instead of going directly to report to us, they refuse to do that. In addition, they demand a higher price. And this is a very common problem because they are using personal information to put pressure on the business. They do not want to go back to a conventional dialogue, but want to escalate the issue to another level. People usually want to have higher benefits than what they have suffered.”

– Participant V, an in-house practitioner with eight years of experience.

On the other hand, seven other participants said that their organizations might engage in a dialogue with stakeholders, but the conversation should be offline, not on social media.

“Dialoging is extremely important. However, engaging with the stakeholders on social media will expose ourselves, both strengths and flaws, to the public. The information is not kept among the involved parties anymore. The government may interfere. The [traditional] media can jump to find new angles of the story and report it in an unwanted way. Therefore, if a piece of information is intended for the public, we can put it on social media. If not, we prefer to take the conversation offline.”

– Participant U, an agency practitioner with 20 years of experience.

To conclude, from the interview results, while some Vietnamese organizations can engage in a dialogue with stakeholders, most of them do not want to do it on social media.

### **Public Relations in Vietnam is Mostly Promotion, but is Gradually Changing**

The researcher aimed to explore whether public relations in Vietnam is still aligned with promotional and marketing goals, instead of reputation and reputation management. All participants who were asked (if they agree with this alignment) said yes.

“Public relations in Vietnam targets mainly consumers. [Organizations] always ask if a piece of news or article is good for branding and promotion, if it displays the product brand clearly enough, and if it could increase brand awareness or sales. Nowadays, readers are smarter and often ignore articles that are too promotional. These articles are not trusted anymore.”

– Participant Q, an agency practitioner with five years of experience.

The findings are also in agreement with Van's (2014) assessment that Vietnamese public relations place a strong emphasis on media relations and short-term promotional campaigns. The strong focus on marketing objectives often crowds out long-term reputation management strategies, which Grunig (2006) argued are crucial to the practice of effective public relations.

All these participants also added that this promotional objective of public relations also promotes the “paid” nature of public relations and media in Vietnam. As a result, communication effort is easier, and somewhat less trustworthy to stakeholders.

“In other countries, there is no public relations concept to pay money [in exchange for positive coverage]. For example, our partner in Taiwan was surprised and did not understand why we gave information to the newspapers in Vietnam but still had to pay... In other countries, the issues that are supported by the press are usually free of charge, while in Vietnam, everything is paid for. However, the good side is that everything monetized is actually easy to manage. For example, when crises occur, [organizations] can impact [the press] to deliver more positive news. However, stakeholders have understood this practice and placed less trust in news that supports organizations [during crises].”

– Participant S, an in-house practitioner with ten years of experience.

The practice of monetized media relationships reinforces the concerns of Doan and Bilowol (2014) regarding ethical challenges in Vietnamese public relations since such practice of paying for coverage could undermine stakeholder trust in such coverage. Three participants revealed that there was some progress, with some organizations gradually learning to appreciate reputation management alongside promotional goals.

Among them, three participants expressed that public relations in Vietnam is changing for the better. Organizations now pay more attention to reputation management and crisis communication.

“[Organizations always] try to justify and promote themselves, but the most important thing is to maintain their reputation. Organizations now understand the importance of [reputation management and public relations]. They've learned that when handling a crisis, reputation matters as much as a product. They've trained the spokesperson to speak in the position of the company, to protect the reputation, not using a brand manager to speak for the product [anymore].”

– Participant R, an agency practitioner with ten years of experience.

In general, from interview results, Vietnamese public relations practitioners believed that the current practice is mostly promotion, but it is gradually improving.

### **Overcoming Challenges and Setting New Standards**

All participants agreed that there is a serious lack of quality public relations practitioners in Vietnam, as domestic public relations educational programs lack training in practical applications of public relations knowledge.

“Currently, there are only eight universities/institutions that offer public relations programs to their students. There is also a lack of a common code of conduct in the local community to address service standards and ethical issues. To overcome these weaknesses, some organizations send staff abroad to improve public relations knowledge, which also helps bring Western practices to local public relations firms.” – Participant A, an agency practitioner with ten years of experience.

Despite the challenges, public relations practitioners in Vietnam are coming together to set new standards and leverage local practices. Local boutique agencies are joining the international public relations associations to adopt international standards.

“In recent years, Vietnam Public Relations Network was established to gather talented public relations professionals to discuss best practices and share knowledge. The prestigious Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) also launched its Vietnam chapter in 2021. There are also national awards hosted to celebrate outstanding performances in the public relations industry, such as the National PR & Communications Awards 2020 hosted by PR Newswire, or the Vietnam Public Relations and Communications Excellence Awards 2021 hosted by Vietnam Public Relations Network. These events show that the local public relations community is becoming more structured.” – Participant H, an agency practitioner with five years of experience.

Local universities are upgrading their curriculum to offer a well-rounded education program and equip future public relations practitioners with the required skill sets and knowledge.

“Changes are being made from the very basic foundation – education. With such effort, it is expected to innovate Vietnam’s public relations industry in the upcoming five or ten years.” – Participant A, an agency practitioner with ten years of experience.

### **Discussion**

As found through all the interviews, most organizations still do not want to engage in dialogues with their stakeholders, which aligned with Van’s (2013) findings. This result indicates that these organizations are still acting within the model of public relations that Grunig and Hunt (1984) described as press agency or

publicity. To review, Grunig and Hunt described four models of public relations practice, which are (1) press agency or publicity, (2) public information, (3) two-way asymmetrical, and (4) two-way symmetrical. Under the first model, practitioners aim to persuade or manipulate their stakeholders according to the desires of the organization. Practitioners aim to emphasize an organization's positive features and minimize any that are negative.

As found in this current study, the statements of many interview participants indicated that organizations commonly use social media channels following the model of press agency, which is also how they use traditional media. Besides the preference for one-way communication, according to the reviewed literature (e.g., Van, 2013), organizations also pay for positive coverage of themselves in traditional media. In a Vietnamese context, these payments may be thought of as gifts that practitioners and organizations give to cultivate positive interpersonal relationships with journalists who work for top-tier publications. These gifts guarantee journalists' attendance at organizations' press conferences and the publishing of organizations' stories in traditional media that many stakeholders find credible. Therefore, the public relations model followed by most Vietnamese organizations and the media does not follow the same expectations of open and truthful reporting found in the West.

Several reasons explain why many Vietnamese organizations follow the press agency model in which they work to control what the media says about them. The need for control follows Vietnamese organizational norms of avoiding uncertainty or taking no risks and playing it safe. Although Vietnam as a country has a relatively low score on the Hofstede cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance (30 out of 100) (*Country Comparison – Hofstede Insights*, n.d.), the goal of avoiding uncertainty or removing risk from any crisis communication was noticed throughout the interviews. The practice of public relations as press agency in Vietnam is also reflected in the country's high power-distance score (70 out of 100) (*Country Comparison – Hofstede Insights*, n.d.). Organizations would perceive themselves as having a higher position in society than their customers and would therefore not think that they need to respond to them.

## Conclusion

To conclude, public relations in Vietnam is diverse and influenced by both Western practices and the local culture. As more companies are considering the use of public relations, and more students and journalists seek to join the field, the industry is emerging rapidly, promising changes and development in the field. However, public relations practice in Vietnam is still marketing-oriented, one-way, and may not be effective in reputation management. Public relations firms in Vietnam need to codify a common standard that is based on the standards of global and local public relations. They also need to set specific regulations for the industry and boost local public relations practice to the next professional level. If marketing is a sprint, then public relations is a marathon. The public relations industry in Vietnam has made noticeable progress, but there is still a long way to go.

This research contributes to the field by filling an important gap in

understanding the historical evolution and contemporary practice of public relations in Vietnam. It provides a foundation for future academic study and practical application within the emerging market.

However, the limitation of the study includes the sample size for expert interviews. Though well-balanced, it is relatively small and may not be representative of all the diverse views in the public relations industry. Qualitative methods could also be complemented with quantitative approaches to allow for the validation of findings and the expansion of the scope of analysis.

Future research could explore the industry behavior in the Vietnamese context concerning ethics and global standards. These could provide wider contexts within which to locate an understanding of public relations in Vietnam and its regional relevance.

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## **Relationship between Media and Public Memory Agenda: Memory-Setting Case Study of Georgia**

*By Salome Mamasakhlisi\* & Mariam Gersamia<sup>‡</sup>*

Media coverage is known to have a significant impact on how important issues are perceived by the general public. There is a scarcity of understanding regarding the specific role of media institutions in creating mnemonic narratives that permeate state rhetoric and contribute to the formulation of collective memory within post-Soviet Georgian society. This is the first attempt to analyze the salience of past events in Georgian television coverage compared with the events deemed significant by the public. Using the framework of agenda-setting theory, a “memory-setting” research design is employed to examine the relationship between the “media memory agenda” and the “public memory agenda.” The findings reveal a statistically significant relationship between the two agendas during the week of Georgia’s Independence Day, a period of increased television coverage surrounding historical and cultural events. The resilience of the public memory agenda becomes apparent whereby additional insights into individual perspectives within the broader collective memory are deemed necessary. Participants’ comments highlight the diverse ways in which the public engages with and interprets media representations of the past. The study provides a fresh perspective on the role of mass media in the formation of collective memory while recognizing the boundaries of its influence.

*Keywords:* media agenda, collective memory, memory-setting

### **Introduction**

Information about historical events is disseminated through diverse avenues of communication. Commemorative or dismissive efforts can impact the remembrance of these events, selectively emphasizing certain facets while marginalizing or disregarding others. Competing national narratives continue to circulate, yet certain historical accounts inevitably occupy a central position in shaping national symbolism, identity, and political beliefs and practices. With the rise of cross-national comparative research, the importance of understanding the formation and influence of collective memory within a particular nation has gained significant scholarly attention. The present case of Georgia is particularly interesting as a post-Soviet country that witnessed a profound re-evaluation of its historical narrative and continues to establish a clear divergence from the Soviet era, image and identity (Chikovani & Matsaberidze, 2023; Mchedlidze, 1999). Being deeply saturated in the everyday livelihoods of citizens, media disseminates information and continuously shapes public perceptions, narratives and mediated discourses of the past (Hepp,

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\*Fellow, Media Voice, Georgia.

<sup>‡</sup>Professor, Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia.

2013; Hoskins, 2014). Key historical events have been given public meaning through television, film, social media, and the press, in addition to scholarly and government-sponsored interpretations (Zelizer, 1992). In Georgia, the media's influence on the ongoing political value formation and development in Georgian society is presumed to be substantial (Atchaidze, 2024; Gersamia & Toradze, 2022).

Contributing to the “systematic exploration of collective pasts narrated by the media, through the media, and about the media” (Neiger et al., 2011, p. 1), the study explores the relationship between past events that receive extensive media coverage and those deemed significant by individuals in the country's recent history through a mixed-methods approach combining content analysis and survey methodology. The significant part of individual memories in shaping collective memory – a prominent topic of discussion among scholars – forms a central component of this research.

### Literature Review

Despite the term “collective memory” being originally devised by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 2), Maurice Halbwachs stays widely regarded as the pioneering figure in collective memory research. In his book *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Halbwachs, 1925), Maurice Halbwachs asserted that memory operates within a collaborative context where shared beliefs and collective experiences shape individual memories rather than vice versa. Nora (1978, p. 401) further elaborated on collective memory as “what remains of the past in the groups' experiences, or rather what these groups do with the past” and introduced the notion of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) referring to symbolic places, objects, or practices that serve as repositories of collective memory. Contemporary research into shared memories of a population has largely focused on concepts like national identity, patriotism and commemoration (Gluck, 2007; Hirst & Manier, 2008; Kim, 2016; Kurze & Lamont, 2019). Reflecting a time period referred to as a “memory boom” (Blight, 2009), there has been a significant increase in research focusing on large-scale collective memory (Brown et al., 2009; Favier & Granet-Abisset, 2000; Muzzolini et al., 2020; Schuman & Rodgers, 2004; Schuman & Scott, 1989).

An extensive review of existing literature reveals three main conceptualizations of collective memory. Collective memory as (1) *a shared body of knowledge* refers to large groups retaining collective understandings of significant past events and figures despite the lack of direct involvement or personal acquaintance. Americans, for example, have a remarkably consistent, shared knowledge on current and past presidents; when asked to list presidents of the United States, college students exhibited many of the same rules as remembering word lists and other types of semantic information, with striking primacy and recency effects along with a regular forgetting function (Roediger & DeSoto, 2014). Schacter et al. (2009) discuss the mental mechanisms involved in establishing and preserving collective memory, emphasizing the role of social interaction, communication, and cultural context. Shared history when conveyed through a public narrative fosters collective memory as (2) *an attribute of a social group* characterized with a sense of unity and

preserved identity (Bar-Tal, 2014; Wertsch, 2002). Researchers comparing the recall of the Civil War, World War II, and the Iraq War among different age groups found that both younger and older adults remembered largely similar collections of important wartime events, although their interpretations and emotional responses differed (Zaromb et al., 2014). Earlier studies report on collective memory reflecting a single viewpoint shaped by the unique values, narratives, and biases of the particular social group (Wertsch, 2002). Constructed and interpreted by the collective, collective memory often deviates from objective facts (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Southgate, 2005). For example, a comparative analysis of Latvian and Belarusian youth revealed how differing historical narratives shape collective memory, with the former rejecting the idea of collaboration with Nazi occupiers during World War II, while the latter were more inclined to acknowledge such collaboration due to their authoritarian upbringing (Krawatzek, 2022). Subject to continuous reshaping and reinterpretation, collective memory can be defined as (3) *an ever-changing perception of the past* with the potential to be at the root of national or international disputes. The persistent disagreement between Turkey and Armenia over the commemoration of the Armenian genocide of 1915 illustrates such conflicting narratives of past events (Üngör, 2014). Similarly, the Enola Gay display at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in 1995 ignited controversy, reflecting differing perspectives of heroic triumph versus devastating tragedy on the portrayal and interpretation of the atomic bombings on Japan (Zolberg, 1998). Being constructive by nature, collective memory is largely contingent on societal commemorative efforts. Americans, for example, hold an idealized view of their nation's history, emphasizing positive events such as the Revolutionary War or the Declaration of Independence while overlooking negative ones (e.g., slavery; Ionescu et al., 2023; Yamashiro et al., 2022). Societal efforts, including the construction of monuments, memorials, and educational curricula, shape the transmission and preservation of collective memories, while their absence contributes to gradual collective neglect (Stone & Hirst, 2014).

Understanding the formation and evolution of collective memory within a society requires an in-depth examination of the media's role as a significant mnemonic agent. The pervasive influence of media communication, a process known as *mediatization*, facilitates a state of constant connectivity in which collective memories are fostered (Edy, 2006; Hepp, 2013; Hoskins, 2014). Media can place selective emphasis on “glorious” moments from the past while downplaying guilt-ridden ones (e.g., Torbakov, 2011); celebrate national heroes while demonizing villains (e.g., Gugushvili et al., 2017). Benefiting from widespread accessibility (Edy, 1999), skillful utilization of narrative structures (Kitch, 2005), and compelling audio-visual techniques (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014), media contributes to the “renewal of memory ... that inevitably involves obsolescence, displacement, and discarding” (Hoskins, 2007, p. 33).

An intriguing inquiry arises concerning the impact of media representations on the commemoration of overlooked historical figures in the collective body of knowledge. Despite his relative obscurity in American collective memory, Alexander Hamilton, the first United States Secretary of the Treasury and one of the American founding fathers, experienced a resurgence and enduring prominence

following the success of Lin-Manuel Miranda's acclaimed Broadway production, "Hamilton" (Miranda, 2016). This cultural phenomenon revitalized public memory surrounding Hamilton through effective storytelling and narrative techniques eliciting emotional engagement with American history (Schrader, 2019). Historical portrayals in television programs such as *Vikings* (Hardwick & Lister, 2019) and *The Crown* (Pearson, 2020) have been found to develop stronger connections to historical events among viewers. Memories attain social significance when disseminated through media channels, framing media as a conduit linking personal and collective remembrance (Erll, 2011; Erll & Rigney, 2009).

Promoting particular political or social agendas, media can shape collective memory of different social groups; when participants from 11 countries were asked to rank the ten most significant events of World War II, a set of core events were widely agreed upon, however, the list provided by Russian participants displayed the least overlap with those of other countries, prompting concerns over the disproportionate influence of the "American version" of the war on global perceptions (Abel et al., 2019). Zandberg et al. (2012) identifies a phenomenon termed *reversed memory*, wherein present events serve as a lens through which past events are given relevance. In this respect, modern media outlets hold considerable sway in shaping past perceptions (Huyssen, 2000), although the impact on viewers is often more nuanced and indirect.

Established narratives of the past are often challenged through persuasive messaging in different forms of media. The ongoing initiative of *New York Times Magazine* "The 1619 Project," launched in August 2019 to mark the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery, exemplifies this take (Silverstein, 2019). The project aims to redefine the narrative of American history by placing central focus on the impacts of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). As the project sparked vigorous debate, its reception illustrates the media's power to shape public perceptions of historical events. Social interactions characterized by public silence on specific events or topics may contribute to the erosion of collective memory over time (Stone et al., 2012). Consequently, media organizations and institutions play a crucial role in preserving these memories.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Living in a highly mediated society, people acquire most of their knowledge about public events beyond their immediate experience and understanding through media narratives (Kitch, 2008; Zelizer, 2008). Collective memories undergo fading, fragmentation, and condensation into a few key images, sounds, symbols, catchphrases, and other mnemonic devices perpetually present in media, capable of eliciting recollection. The current study aims to connect social representations of collective memory observed in television media and individual recollections of the past as potentially mutually influencing one another, providing insightful information about media's influence on how societies remember their past. Citizens of former Soviet Union member states have been found to display hybrid memories,

combining Soviet nostalgia with pride in independence (Bakke et al., 2023; Hosaka, 2019). In Georgia, the narrative centres around triumph over adversity and endurance of Georgian culture to withstand external influences (Batiashvili, 2012). The literature also highlights the significance of trauma in Georgian collective memory formation (Chubinishvili, 2009; Jones, 1997). Focusing on a specific aspect of media memory, namely the frequency of references to past events, the study examines the Georgian television media landscape and its potential influence on collective memory.

### **Applying Agenda-Setting to the Study of Collective Memory**

Agenda-setting theory poses the notion that the media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). McCombs and Shaw (1972), in their ground-breaking Chapel Hill study conducted during the 1968 presidential elections in the United States, discovered a noteworthy correlation between public perception of key election issues and media coverage. Following their seminal study, agenda-setting research gained prominence; the concept of *salience transfer* whereby media emphasis on certain issues impacts their perceived importance by the public (i.e., the public agenda) became a significant topic of interest (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 2005; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2021).

The process termed *memory-setting* involves examining the accumulation of collective memories and media representations of the past (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2014). Mere mentions of past events in media serve as cues for broader narratives of the shared past, shaping both what is remembered and the characteristics of those recollections (Zelizer, 1992). Not limited to American contexts, agenda-setting has been studied globally, including in Spain (Lopez- Escobar et al., 1998), Japan (Takeshita, 1993; Takeshita & Mikami, 1995), Latin America (Zunino & Aruguete, 2024), Israel (Sheafer & Weimann, 2005), and Germany (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990). Even totalitarian states that lack open political and media systems demonstrate strong correlations between media coverage and public opinion (Kazun, 2017; McCombs et al., 2014). Studying mainstream media coverage is particularly relevant for agenda-setting in terms of their wide audience reach and established credibility (Ferree, 2003). Differential attention given to issues by the media carries significant implications for social movements (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Myers, 2000; Vliegenthart et al., 2005), policymaking (Edwards & Wood, 1999), and the public sphere (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Schoenfeld et al., 1979), while television news media serve as a platform for discussions on scientific, legal, cultural, and economic matters (e.g., Best, 2010). Television news media, in particular, serve as a primary platform for discussions on scientific, legal, cultural, and economic matters (e.g., Best, 2010). Agenda-setting theory is particularly pertinent in post-Soviet contexts like Georgia, where historical narratives are crucial for national identity (re)formation. The theory provides a structured approach to understanding how these narratives are propagated through media channels.

## Hypotheses and Research Questions

The present study represents a unique attempt to analyze the role of Georgian television news media outlets as mnemonic agents that influence the construction and maintenance of collective memory. Relying on the general concept of agenda-setting theory, media influence is expected to manifest in a correlation between past events salient in the media (media memory agenda) and those considered most important by the public (public memory agenda).

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There will be a strong correlation between the media memory agenda (a ranking of past events mentioned in the media) and the public memory agenda (a ranking of past events deemed important by individuals).

Media coverage of historical events, especially during periods of national commemoration (e.g., Georgian Independence Day), elevates the salience of these events in the public's collective memory. By focusing on specific events, media outlets effectively prioritize them in the public agenda, making them more likely to be remembered and deemed significant by the audience (McCombs, 2005). To investigate the frequency of past events in the media and their temporal variations, media content is gathered and analysed at two specific time points. The first interval is a time of routine (T<sub>1</sub>) with no scheduled commemorative events according to the national calendar. The second time interval (T<sub>2</sub>) coincides with Georgian Independence Day (May 26), annually being a period of increased historical media coverage due to media's participation in national commemoration activities. Increased frequency of historical references in the media memory agenda is expected to strengthen the association with the public memory agenda:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There will be a stronger correlation between the media memory agenda and the public memory agenda at T<sub>2</sub>, compared to T<sub>1</sub>.

The correlational design does not exclude the possibility that factors outside of media influence contribute to the observed effect. Further analysis aims to uncover potential confounding variables, while additional examination of participant comments expands beyond naming past events to provide further insight:

**RQ1:** Which individual-level factors exhibit the highest predictive ability in determining the identification of past events that received the most media attention?

**RQ2:** What aspects or characteristics of past events do individuals recall when discussing their collective memories?

## Methods

The study carefully adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between media memory agenda and public memory agenda in Georgia. The research design, adapted from the “memory-setting” study by Kligler-Vilenchik

et al. (2014), involves two primary components: media content analysis and public surveys.

### **Content Analysis**

Carried out at two specific time points, the content analysis incorporates a structured media-monitoring procedure:

**1 May 2023 – 7 May 2023:** the time of routine ( $T_1$ ) with no commemoration efforts expected in media as per the national calendar. The interval is chosen to reflect the normal, day-to-day functioning of media outlets sans focus on historical remembrance.

**22 May 2023 – 28 May 2023:** the specific time interval ( $T_2$ ) with increased commemoration efforts expected in media in relation to Georgian Independence Day on 26 May 2023.

The following Georgian television media outlets were selected for content analysis based on the qualitative population-wide research conducted by organisations like CRRC-Georgia, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute during the research period: Broadcasting Company “Rustavi 2”; Broadcasting Company “Mtavari”; Broadcasting Company “Formula”; Broadcasting Company “TV Pirveli”; Broadcasting Company “Imedi”; Public Broadcasting “Pirveli Arkhi”.

Media memory agenda is operationalized via quantitative recording of references made to past events during prime-time broadcasts (8:00–11:00 p.m.). The coding scheme is constructed in advance, based on a close examination of the Georgian national calendar and archival recordings of major demonstrations, political events, and wars in the country. The final list, as displayed in Table 1, contains 17 events. Each mention or reference identified in the content serves as the unit of analysis, being tallied separately. 1771 references emerge across 137 hours of television programming in the complete coding corpus.

### **Survey**

Two surveys are disseminated to independent samples during  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  to operationalize the public memory agenda.  $T_1$  survey is administered between 8-10 May 2023, gathering 155 respondents.  $T_2$  survey is administered between 29-31 May 2023, gathering 147 respondents. Both surveys, designed using Google Forms, are distributed through online and social media communication channels (e.g., Facebook, Messenger, Email).

### **Variables**

*Most important past event.* The public memory agenda is operationalized through a single open-ended question that allowed a maximum of two answers to be submitted: “Of all the past events that occurred in Georgia over the past 100 years, please name which one(s) seems to you as most important.” Responses are coded

using the predefined list of events employed in the content analysis. The dependent variable in subsequent analysis is the act of naming the most salient past event in the media, coded as binary; a value of 1 indicates selection of one of the three events identified as overwhelmingly significant in the media through content analysis, while a value of 0 represents the selection of any other event.

*Participation in past events.* Respondents are also asked: “Did you participate in your named past event?” The answer categories include: “Yes, I participated”; “I did not participate but watched the event on television”; and “No, I did not participate.” The variable is coded as a binary: a value of 1 representing participation, while a value of 0 indicating no participation or watching the event on television.

*Amount of television exposure.* The third question, “On average, how many hours per day did you spend watching television media in the past week?”, specifies the timeframe ( $T_1$  and  $T_2$ ) and the following answer categories: (1) “Less than an hour or none”; (2) “Between 1 and 2 hours”; (3) “Over 2 hours but less than 4 hours”; (4) “4 hours or more” ( $M = 1.48$ ;  $SD = 0.89$ ).

*Broadcasting Company preference.* The question, “Which broadcasting company do you watch most frequently?”, include 7 answer categories: Rustavi 2 (1); Mtavari (2); Formula (3); TV Pirveli (4); Imedi (5); Public Broadcasting (6); and Other (7). The participants could give two possible answers ( $M_1 = 3.81$ ;  $SD_1 = 2.38$ ;  $M_2 = 5.86$ ;  $SD_2 = 1.54$ ).

*Amount of television exposure related to Georgia’s Independence.* Measured only in  $T_2$ , the question, “Out of the television content you watched this week, how much was related to Georgia’s Declaration of Independence? For example, Independence Day celebrations, programs and documentaries about events in Georgian history, and celebratory entertainment shows?”, elicit answers ranging from (1) “none of the content was related to Georgia’s Declaration of Independence” up to (5) “all of the contents were related to Georgia’s Declaration of Independence” ( $M = 3.03$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ ).

*Participation in public celebrations of Georgia’s Independence Day.* Measured only in  $T_2$ , the survey poses the following question: “Did you participate in public celebrations of Georgian Independence Day this year (e.g., attend a public ceremony, celebrations at a public venue, etc.)?” 37.7% report participating in public celebrations of Georgian Independence Day, 18.5% report watching the celebrations on television, and 43.8% did not participate. For coding purposes, a value of 1 represents participation, and a value of 0 indicates no participation or watching the event on television.

*Demographic variables.* Gender (male coded as 0, female coded as 1), age (in years) and place of birth (Tbilisi coded as 0, outside of Tbilisi coded as 1).

*Additional comments.* Both surveys end with an optional open-ended question, “What (if anything) do you remember about the past events you named? (e.g., specific symbols, public figures, famous footage, images, videos, etc.)”. The question allows participants to elaborate on their collective memories of past events.



### ***Administration***

- T<sub>1</sub> survey is administered 8-10 May 2023, gathering 155 respondents.
- T<sub>2</sub> survey is administered 29-31 May 2023, gathering 147 respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***Quantitative Analysis***

The frequency of past events mentioned in the media and their temporal variations are subject to quantitative analysis using Pearson's correlation to assess the relationship between the media memory agenda and the public memory agenda. Multiple linear regression is conducted to identify individual-level factors predicting the identification of past events most salient in the media.

#### ***Qualitative Analysis***

Responses to the open-ended survey question are subject to qualitative analysis to identify common themes and specific aspects of events prominent in participants' collective memory.

## **Results**

### **Media and Public Memory Agendas at T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub>**

Between 1 May 2023 and 7 May 2023 (T<sub>1</sub>), a total of 70 hours of media footage including prime-time news programs, segments and talk shows airing between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. are analyzed. Between 22 May 2023 and 28 May 2023 (T<sub>2</sub>), an additional 67 hours of media footage is analyzed, resulting in a cumulative total of 137 hours for the content analysis. Among the six broadcasting companies, only "Mtavari" (19.5 hours), "TV Pirveli" (35 hours) and "Formula" (31.5 hours) utilize their entire prime-time slots, featuring not only the primary news coverage but political talk shows with guest speakers discussing the covered events. Meanwhile, "Imedi", "Rustavi 2" and "Public Broadcasting" dedicate their prime-time slots solely to news coverage, averaging 17 hours of airtime (see Table 2). Broadcasting companies that allocate more time to prime-time news coverage expectedly tend to mention a greater number of past events (Pearson's  $r = .874$ ,  $p < .05$ ). While all six companies extensively cover Georgian Independence Day celebrations throughout T<sub>2</sub>, only "Imedi" and "Public Broadcasting" air live footage of the Independence Day Concert on 26 May 2023. Both survey and content analysis data post-coding are displayed on Table 1.

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentages of Past Events as per the Survey and Content Analysis by Each Time Point (T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub>)

Event	Survey		Content Analysis	
	T <sub>1</sub> , n (%)	T <sub>2</sub> , n (%)	T <sub>1</sub> , n (%)	T <sub>2</sub> , n (%)
Georgia's Declaration of Independence	29 (9.80%)	72 (24.49%)	15 (2.54%)	550 (46.57%)
9 April Tragedy 1989	54 (18.24%)	36 (12.24%)	6 (1.02%)	10 (0.85%)
9 April 1991 Restoration of Independence	52 (17.57%)	24 (8.16%)	0 (0.00%)	39 (3.30%)
14 April (Georgian Language Day)	8 (2.70%)	2 (0.68%)	1 (0.17%)	1 (0.08%)
Collapse of USSR	8 (2.70%)	13 (4.42%)	18 (3.05%)	18 (1.52%)
Presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia	1 (0.34%)	1 (0.34%)	20 (3.39%)	8 (0.68%)
Georgian Civil War	7 (2.36%)	3 (1.02%)	10 (1.69%)	29 (2.46%)
War in Abkhazia	20 (6.76%)	18 (6.12%)	19 (3.22%)	83 (7.03%)
2003 Rose Revolution	29 (9.80%)	35 (11.90%)	8 (1.36%)	8 (0.68%)
2007 Anti-Government Protests	2 (0.68%)	1 (0.34%)	4 (0.68%)	4 (0.34%)
2008 Russia-Georgia War	49 (16.55%)	44 (14.97%)	75 (12.71%)	122 (10.33%)
2012 Parliamentary Elections	3 (1.01%)	5 (1.70%)	52 (8.81%)	27 (2.29%)
2013 Anti-Homophobia Rally	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (2.03%)	2 (0.17%)
20 June 2019 Gavrilov's Night	8 (2.70%)	10 (3.40%)	14 (2.37%)	21 (1.78%)
5 July 2021 Assault on Journalists	1 (0.34%)	3 (1.02%)	35 (5.93%)	9 (0.76%)
2022 Russia-Ukraine War	7 (2.36%)	11 (3.74%)	166 (28.14%)	164 (13.89%)
7-9 March 2023 Russian Law Protests	18 (6.08%)	16 (5.44%)	135 (22.88%)	86 (7.28%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>1181</b>

T<sub>1</sub> survey gathers 155 responses (69.7% female; 29% male; 1.3% NA) with a mean age of 36 years and 67.7% of respondents being born in Tbilisi. T<sub>1</sub> survey has 147 responses (63.9% female; 35.4% male; 0.7% NA) with a mean age of 29 years and 76.2% of respondents being born in Tbilisi. Only 40% of responses in the initial survey correspond with historically significant events most salient in the media during the time of routine (T<sub>1</sub>), with the majority of respondents (67.1%) not having participated in their named event. During the subsequent timeframe (T<sub>2</sub>), the proportion increases to 71.4% while participation rates remain (19.7%). When asked specifically about Georgia's Independence Day celebrations on 26 May, 43.8% report attendance, 18.5% report watching the event on television and 37.7% report abstaining from the event altogether. 71.9% of respondents' reports watching television news for less than 1 hour, 14.6% – between 1 and 2 hours, 7% – between 2 and 4 hours, and 6.6% – exceeding 4 hours of television news consumption in the week preceding survey administration.

Table 2. Frequency of Past Events and Hours of Media Content per Broadcasting Company and Time Interval

Broadcasting Company	n of hours	n (%) of past events	
		T <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>2</sub>
Rustavi 2	17	59 (10%)	233 (20%)
Mtavari	19.5	92 (15%)	162 (14%)
Formula	31.5	145 (25%)	231 (19%)
TV Pirveli	35	160 (27%)	215 (18%)
Imedi	16	76 (13%)	191 (16%)
Public Broadcasting	18	58 (10%)	149 (13%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>590 (100%)</b>	<b>1181 (100%)</b>

Both surveys reveal the 9 April Tragedy and the 2008 Russia-Georgia War to be in the top three most cited past events. Such enduring significance may be pointing to the general resilience of the public memory agenda across time. There is a striking consistency between the public memory agendas at the T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub> time points; despite distinct samples and varied media coverage, a significant correlation is revealed (Pearson's  $r = .734$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There appears to be a general consensus on the most significant historical events among the Georgian-speaking population. Expectedly, mentions of past events doubles between surveys, with 590 past events being mentioned during T<sub>1</sub> compared to 1181 past events being mentioned during T<sub>2</sub> – a statistically significant increase of 100.17% ( $\chi^2(1) = 197$ ,  $10 p < .001$ ).

### Agenda-Setting Function of Georgian Media

Pearson's correlation reveals that at a time of routine (T<sub>1</sub>), no significant correlation is found (Pearson's  $r = -.076$ ,  $p = .771$ ), while during the week of Georgia's Independence Day (T<sub>2</sub>), a strong correlation emerges between the public memory agenda and the media memory agenda (Pearson's  $r = .759$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

These findings affirm the validity of the study hypotheses, indicating a correlation between the two agendas (H<sub>1</sub>), albeit evident only during a period of heightened media coverage (T<sub>2</sub>), and not found at the time of routine (T<sub>1</sub>). The agenda-setting function of the media, thus, becomes apparent during periods with increased references to past events for commemorative purposes, as opposed to media's day-to-day reporting of current events.

### Individual-Level Factors

The regression model for T<sub>1</sub> is statistically significant ( $R^2 = .093$ ,  $F(5, 149) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .012$ ); not the case for T<sub>2</sub> ( $R^2 = .015$ ,  $F(7, 139) = .427$ ,  $p = .947$ ). In Model 1, significant predictors of agreement with the media memory agenda include age ( $\beta = -.001$ ,  $p < .001$ ), gender ( $\beta = .124$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and participation in the named event(s) ( $\beta = .145$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, demographics alone accounted for only 0.009% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Correlation analyses among individual-level factors at T<sub>1</sub> reveal that age positively correlates with participation (Pearson's  $r = .388$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and television exposure (Pearson's  $r = .242$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and negatively correlates with naming a

media-salient event (Pearson's  $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In other words, the older people are, the more television news content they consume, the less likely they are to name past events most salient in the media as most important, and the more likely they are to have participated in their named events. Gender very weakly correlates with naming a media-salient event (Pearson's  $r = .116$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating more mentions of media-salient events by women than men. Television news consumption also displays a weak correlation with participation (Pearson's  $r = .177$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Results of the two regression models ( $T_1$  and  $T_2$ ), are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3. Variables Affecting the Propensity to Name at Least One of the Three Most Salient Past Events on the Media Memory Agenda (Multiple Linear Regression Models on Two Samples)*

	Model 1 ( $T_1$ ) $p = .012$	Model 2 ( $T_2$ ) $p = .947$
Variables	$\beta$ (SE)	$\beta$ (SE)
Age	-.011** (.003)	-.001 (.004)
Gender	.124* (.081)	-.077 (.079)
Place of birth	.087 (.083)	-.027 (.091)
Television exposure	-.015 (.044)	.024 (.047)
Participation in named event(s)	.145** (.090)	-.084 (.101)
Exposure to Independence Day coverage		-.004 (.037)
Participation in Independence Day celebrations		.029 (.082)
Intercept (Constant)	.426* (.211)	.900** (.230)
<i>df</i>	5	7
$R^2$	.093	.015
	$N = 155$	$N = 147$

SE: standard error; *df*: degrees of freedom.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

### Qualitative Analysis

With only 42 individuals opting not to respond to the open survey question, 260 responses subject to analysis reveal two prominent themes.

The first theme to emerge pertains to the emotionally intense nature of collective memories. Often focusing on vivid and sometimes gruesome details, many participants highlight the tragedy surrounding wars, loss of territories, protests, rallies and demonstrations that escalated into violence against Georgian citizens. Their recollections of war, specifically, often emphasize the bloodshed and suffering endured by the victims (e.g., "I remember when the Russians came in and brutally beat people with polished shovels"). When recalling the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, references are made to the famous shot of a young man crying over his deceased brother, the Renny Harlin film "5 Days of War", and Zaza Kolelishvili's film "the War and the Wedding". Considering the war occurred 15 years ago, participation rates were accompanied with direct personal experiences (e.g., "a Russian bobsledder flew over my head"; "I remember the tanks passing in front of my house"). The Georgian flag is a prominent symbol throughout participants' recollections, cited 48 times across the surveys. The symbol of "tulips" representing the 9 April Tragedy and the symbol of "roses" representing the Rose Revolution receive 10 and 11 mentions, respectively.

The second theme posits a strong association to national identity, whereby collective memories evoke a deep sense of patriotism that unites Georgian citizens. Recollections reflect the spirit of unity and resilience, emphasizing the significance of past events in fostering a sense of community and cohesion. Particularly notable is the 24 references made to the iconic image of Nana Makharadze holding a black flag in remembrance of the victims of the 9 April 1989 massacre. Young people and students are praised for their patriotic spirit and readiness to fight for their country, mentioned on fifteen occasions in the context of more recent national protests and demonstrations. A sense of pride is expressed towards people who risked their lives to defend their national identity (e.g., “the unity and strength of the Georgian people were clearly visible”; “the unity of the Georgian nation, the love of the homeland, faith and the feeling of respect and love between people is what I remember”; “people gathering in the hope of a bright future and having their lives sacrificed for this future”).

Participants acknowledge relying on media channels to construct a comprehensive collective narrative about Georgia’s recent history. During periods of intensified commemorative efforts by the media, such as the week of Georgia’s Independence Day, individuals experience a resurgence, for during their day-to-day routine, past events are typically not at the forefront of their thoughts. Additional in-depth qualitative interviews are advised for further investigation.

## **Discussion**

Georgian media holds significant influence as a prominent institution, despite its uneven distribution (Georgia’s Reforms Associates, 2022). Public opinion polls and surveys consistently reveal Georgian viewership to be divided across six primary television channels – the same broadcasting companies monitored for the content analysis (International Republican Institute, 2023; National Democratic Institute, 2017). The country’s information landscape is widely regarded as pluralistic, with television serving as the main source of information, followed by social media (CRRC-Georgia, n.d.; Keshelashvili et al., 2021). However, most recent Caucasus Barometer (2024), draws on a decade of data to reveal a significant shift in information consumption patterns among Georgian citizens. Television, although still the primary source of information, has seen a substantial decline in usage, decreasing from 88% to 49%. In contrast, the use of the internet, including social media, has risen markedly, increasing from 2% to 40%. Viewership and engagement with television views are also in line with declining levels of trust in Georgian media (e.g., International Republican Institute, 2023). Independent media outlets are struggling to gain mainstream traction, leaving politicized and polarized television channels dominant in the Georgian information space (Mikashavidze, 2018).

Low levels of mass media consumption appear in the current sample, yet the agenda-setting effect is still observed. The media memory agenda and the public memory agenda correlate in T<sub>2</sub> – a period of heightened commemorative media efforts and historical media coverage. This aligns with the agenda-setting theory,

which posits that the media not only tells the public what to think about but also frames how these issues are perceived (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This empirical evidence reinforces the relevance of using agenda-setting theory as a framework for analyzing the media's role in shaping collective memory. Findings confirm transfer of issue salience; media coverage increases public awareness and attention to particular events over others (Kearns et al., 2019). Georgia's Independence Day being a highly mediatized event serves as an indicator of its importance in Georgian society (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2021). Ongoing media coverage for one to eight weeks allows a topic to maintain relevance (Coleman et al., 2008). Future studies can, therefore, employ longer media-monitoring efforts in order to investigate the prevalence of perceived importance of past events and how prolonged media attention may be influencing the formation and maintenance of collective memories. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that the possibility of cross-media effects, particularly from digital platforms, cannot be entirely ruled out as a potential confounding factor. This limitation further highlights the need for future research incorporating a broader analysis of multi-platform content dissemination.

Robust consistency between the public memory agendas at T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub> is also revealed, underscoring the resilience of collective memory among the Georgian-speaking population. Schudson's (1992) arguments regarding the "resistance of the past" (p. 205) are echoed by these findings whereby there is a general consensus on the most significant historical events stored in collective memory and facilitated through the mediatization process (Hepp, 2013). Media attention expands to the broader historical context with past events like the Russia-Georgia War being discussed on air in the week of Georgian Independence Day; the role of mass media in memory renewal is, thus, evident (Hoskins, 2007).

Individual-level regressions reveal age, gender, and participation in named events are the only significant predictors for the propensity to agree with the media memory agenda. Weimann and Brosius (1994) suggest the pivotal role individuals play in shaping the public agenda, with gender and age being key predictors of issue salience. Participation in historical events has been hypothesized to serve as a commemorative agent alternative to the media, and much memory scholarship focused on this perspective (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2010). This finding suggests that while media can shape collective memory, the extent of its influence varies among individuals based on their personal experiences and media consumption habits. The study's application of the "memory-setting" framework in a non-Western context adds to the growing body of literature that explores the global applicability of media effects theories.

While these findings offer initial backing for the influence of media on collective memory, they do not definitively establish a causal relationship between media exposure and audience perceptions. Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2014) propose alternative explanations: self-selection and reverse causality. Individuals already interested in Georgia's Independence Day are more inclined to actively seek out media coverage (self-selection) while changes in the media memory agenda from T<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>2</sub> could be attributed to shifts in the public memory agenda, rather than vice versa (reverse causality). In future studies, examining media memory in controlled settings through an experimental design may help substantiate the causal claims.

Qualitative analysis unveils the emotionally intense nature of collective memories and their close ties with national identity and patriotism. An essential element of remembering past events have been found to involve an affective component and vivid visual representations (Lambert et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2003). The strong association of collective memory with national identity and patriotism has also been countlessly explored in previous research (Nora, 1984; Torbakov, 2011). Collective memories of historical events reinforce national identity – a notion that has been addressed in studies conducted in Spain (Aguilar & Humlebaek, 2002), Belgium (Hirst & Fineberg, 2012), Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia (Roudometof, 2002), and other European countries. Current findings expand the body of research to Georgian cultural context.

Finally, the study underscores the significance of individual perspectives in collective memory research (Kansteiner, 2002, 2010; Olick, 1999; Ricoeur, 2004). Individuals retain agency, which is evidenced by events, like the 9 April Tragedy, holding a significant place in the public memory agenda despite receiving limited media coverage or commemoration efforts. Halbwachs' (1952/1992) proposed framework attributing limited agency to individuals in shaping collective memory is supported by this study. By acknowledging the interplay between collective and individual memory, a more comprehensive understanding of collective memory formation can be achieved.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides significant insights into the relationship between media memory agenda and public memory agenda in Georgia. By thoroughly addressing its hypotheses and research questions, the study confirms the agenda-setting effect of media on collective memory, revealed during a period of intensified media coverage in the Georgian historical and cultural context. The concept of “memory-setting”, grounded in agenda-setting theory, offers a valuable framework for analyzing the role of media in collective memory formation. The study highlights that while media is a potent force in shaping public perceptions of historical events, its influence is not absolute and is mediated by individual experiences and communal narratives.

This research affirms the significant yet nuanced role of media in shaping collective memory, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to studying media influence on public perceptions of history. As Georgia continues to navigate its post-Soviet identity, the media will undoubtedly remain a crucial player in the ongoing construction and reconstruction of collective memory.

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## **Conceptualising the Mass Media as ‘The Social Scientific Oracle’**

*By Obiorah I. Edogor\**

This study is a qualitative content analysis of three Nigerian news magazines, examined using the library (desk) research method, to ascertain the mass media’s penchant for predictions. The study analysed the selected contents of *Tell*, *TheNews*, and *NewsWatch* magazines that reveal some salient categories of predictions in the Nigerian media. Through the data analysis that supports some reviewed literature, the researcher observed that journalists have repositioned the media institution as an authority that makes forecasts for the audience. This prompted the researcher’s conceptualisation of the media as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle,’ as the finding aligns with the putative conventional norm of conferring a nomenclatural status to the media due to what they do in their society of operation. The researcher dissected the oracle in the Greek cosmology and the term in the African worldview and recommended that the media be conceived as the ‘Oracle’ in the Africans’ conception of it.

*Keywords:* journalism, journalists, mass media, oracle, prediction, reportage

### **Introduction**

Mass media scholars often study the media as a social institution in human society and brand the institution based on media systems’ offerings to the people. Similarly, members of the public in some societies brand the media based on the quality of the cumulative services they render to society where they operate. This indicates the audience’s strength as a group that influences the media as an institution that renders indispensable services to them. The media confer status to individuals (Okunna and Omenugha, 2013), in a similar vein, they have gotten different nomenclatures depending on the services they offer to their audience. Among all social institutions, the media have the most overarching reach on the public regardless of their classes or socio-economic status; and they could reach and be reached virtually anywhere and anytime for the services they offer to humanity and posterity.

Arguably, no other institution under human operation can compete with the media in terms of affordability, availability, responsiveness, and reachability. Other institutions need the people and the people could need them only when certain unavoidable issues arise. So, some institutions have ‘selective importance’ or services limited to a certain class or number of people. This distinguishes the media from schools, law courts, families, and religious entities as social institutions. Thus, the services of the media have made them indispensable to human beings and other social institutions. The helpfulness of the press to every human being or institution is not concealed as the submission below provides:

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\*Lecturer, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria.

It is impossible for most people today to imagine a morning without the radio or television news or newspapers. The day begins for most of the people with the news. The reporter's voice is the first voice we hear every day and possibly the last one we hear before retiring to bed at night. The reporter has become part of our daily public and private lives. His power lies in the public's dependence on him (Agbese, 2008, p. 15).

Therefore, the media are the closest institution to people especially nowadays the digital media have empowered more people to engage in media content production and consumption. A former President of the United States of America (USA), Thomas Jefferson, better accentuated the relevance of the media, when he preferred the press without the government, to the government without the press. Jefferson's view underscores the sublime importance of the media to people who rely on them for educational and informational functions (Okunna and Omenugha, 2013).

Meanwhile, the media have possibly expanded the scope of their importance to the people with their claim of predictive roles as seen in the submission of Olaosebikan (2006, p. 24), referenced in Edogor et al. (2023a, p. 179) who observes that "the media apart from their duty of educating, informing and entertaining the public, is (sic) capable of making accurate predictions." Also, Onanuga (2006, p. 19) referenced in Edogor et al. (2023a) argues that "apart from what is referred to as reporting history in a hurry...the media...accurately predict events." The above notion which some media scholars (Huxford, 2003; Loo, 2013; Neiger, 2007; Edogor, 2018) have critically studied, prompted this current researcher to conceptualise the mass media as the 'Social Scientific Oracle.'

### **Statement of the Problem**

The mass media systems as social institutions in societies have been variously nomenclated based on the functions they perform for their audience. For instance, the institution is christened the 'watchdog' because they watch over the activities of the ruling class. "If the press sets itself up against political (and economic) leadership, it is being adversarial. If as part of its adversarial behaviour, it maintains a steady watch on the leadership, it is being a watchdog," (Ndolo, 2011, p. 11). Similarly, in Nigeria, when the media fail to discharge their social responsibilities, they are called the lame dog, while they are referred to as the mad dog when they display rascality in reportage.

Similarly, in the USA, when the media fail to act as a watchdog but report as a stooge to the government, they are called lapdogs, (Benjamin, 2014). Also, due to the media's complimentary roles to the three arms of the government and their ability to galvanise and mould public opinion in a democracy, they are "sometimes referred to as the fourth branch of government, complementing the executive, judicial and legislative branches" (Baran, 2010, p. 29). Through this placement of the media among the governmental hierarchy, they are sometimes called 'the Fourth Estate of the Realm.'

Similarly, social media have given the media audience who have the new media savvy the unreserved powers to participate in some roles that were hitherto reserved for journalists. Owing to that, social media and their users are branded 'the Fifth Estate of the Realm,' because they now form another societal force that influences governments, non-governmental bodies, groups, and powerful individuals to yield to

the yearning(s) of the people (Edogor, 2024). When it was hypothesised that the media had an overwhelming influence on people, Baran (2010, p. 363) refers to the institution as “an efficacious drug or a killing force.” The underlying idea of that view later mutated into one of the defunct popular mass media theories – the hypodermic needle theory.

About the above view, Baran (2010, pp. 362–363) observes that “the fundamental assumption of this thinking (that the media are inescapably influential) is sometimes expressed in the hypodermic needle theory or the magic bullet theory.” Also, the media have been credited with the ability to programme matters of public interest. Sequel to that, public analysts and scholars branded the institution as agenda-setters, this idea transformed into the agenda-setting theory. According to Loo (2013) “to a limited extent, journalists were the traditional sources that readers consult for an explanation... and guidance on what will or can happen given the current checks on reality. Essentially, they were the source of ‘wise,’ authoritative accounts of the interplay between shifting social, economic, and political forces.”

Also, Loo (2013) explains that mass media’s playing as the oracle has to do with the “calling of journalists to be their readers’ eyes and ears, to be ‘out there’ to Observe, Reflect and Report, Analyse, Contextualise, Learn, and ultimately, Enlighten their readers.” Those submissions captured the various nomenclatures of the mass media based on their offerings as social institutions. However, no study has nomenclated the mass media specifically on their ability to survey, dissect, and predict what would happen. This is the gap in journalism and media studies literature that, this study will fill. The target to fill up the observed vacuum was the objective that prompted this study.

### **Why the Concept of the Media as ‘The Social Scientific Oracle?’**

The media have been involved in journalistic reporting that predicts future events, unlike their traditional roles of reporting past issues. Contemporary journalism provides the audience the confidence to get useful information about what may happen in the future, like some other social science disciplines that predict some phenomena. Some media scholars (Huxford, 2003; Neiger, 2007; Edogor, 2018; Diakopoulos, 2022) have given attention to this development – media prediction of future events. Though such a trend, was not hitherto among the pronounced traditional functions of the mass media; it is steadily becoming a norm for journalists now. Such posture in reportage could be why some scholars opine that “the media are not mere chroniclers of only what has taken place, but active providers of information to guide the audiences on impending matters,” (Edogor et al., 2023b).

As providers of information that guide the audience on impending issues, the media could help people to project, and navigate into the future for useful personal and group decisions. The foregoing is fathomable in the work of a Senior Editor of *The Economist magazine*, Frances Cairncross, who authored a book on prediction. Through the book entitled, *The Death of Distance*, Cairncross made predictions about how electronic communication gadgets would change the direction of economic activities in some parts of the world. Leonard (1997) cited in *Amazon.com Review*

(2001) revealed that Cairncross predicted the speed of communication as the most important economic force that would shape the upcoming century and address the transmutations sweeping across the communications process. The source also notes that:

Cairncross predicts that it won't be long before people organize globally based on language and three basic time shifts – one for the Americas, one for Europe, and one for East Asia and Australia. Much work that can be done on a computer can be done from anywhere. Workers can code software in one part of the world and pass it to a company hundreds of miles away that will assemble the code for marketing. And with workers able to earn a living from anywhere, countries may find themselves competing for citizens as people relocate for reasons ranging from lower taxes to nicer weather. Cairncross discusses about 30 major changes likely to result from these trends, including greater self-policing of businesses, an unavoidable loss of personal privacy, and a diminishing need for countries to want emigration.

The cited journalist's effort revealed the ability of mass media practitioners to predict some future technological developments. The author's effort gives a clue to the possibility of using journalism to make reports that would capture future matters, unlike historians who largely dwell on past events fully. In addition, George Elliot Morris, an American journalist is also reputed for his predictive media reportage. He was the author of the popular book, *Strength in Numbers: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them*. In Nigeria, some media practitioners like Simon Kolawole, Dele Momodu, Nduka Uzuakpundu, and Azubuike Ishiekwene, among others, have variously authored predictive media reportage (oracular reporting).

The journalistic works of the afore-mentioned Nigerian journalists and others epitomize oracular reporting in political and socio-economic matters. Predicting social phenomena is a common trend in the realm of social sciences. A political scientist, Friedman has written books premised on predicting critical political matters. In one of his books, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*, he predicted the political, technological, and socio-economic phenomena that would shape the globe in a century. Also, he chronicled the major countries whose policies would significantly alter various developments of the world and the factors that would affect some extant strong nations. Friedman (2009, p. 10) applied 'geopolitics,' and according to him, 'geopolitics is not simply a pretentious way of saying 'international relations.' It is a method for thinking about the world and forecasting what will happen down the road.'

Similarly, David Orrell is another scholar whose interest focuses on prediction. This is evident in his book, *The Future of Everything*, which presented predictions on different aspects of intertwined human endeavours. Orrell gives a picture of how the book captures prediction as follows:

*The Future of Everything* is about scientific prediction in the areas of weather, health, and wealth—how we foresee storms or fair weather, sickness or health, booms or crashes. It might seem that forecasts of the atmosphere have little to do with the prediction of diseases or the economy, but in fact, these three areas are closely linked. For one thing, they often affect each other, so prediction is an intrinsically holistic business. As shown above, a storm's impact depends on the conditions on the ground and can have huge economic consequences (Orrell, 2007, p. 9).



Orrell revealed that before his discourse on predictions, there were other attempts at forecasts about human health, the economy, and climatic conditions. “Since Galton’s time, a huge scientific effort has been devoted to looking into our future weather, health, and wealth, now using mathematical models,” (Orrell, 2007, p. 10). Another social scientist, Dixon wrote a book entitled, *The Future of Almost Everything*, which concentrates on predictions too and why people, should be more conscious of what the future entails.

With the aforementioned works, it could be gleaned that prediction is common in social sciences. A discipline like journalism more or less deals with the mechanics of human behaviour, so journalists could study situations, individuals, and project what they may do based on facts. The evolving fad in journalism where the media predict trends, events, actions, inactions, etc. further portrays the scientific inclination of the profession. Folarin (2002, p. 18) admits the scientific nuance of mass communication or journalism, while noting that the field has “taken a lot of its content and methods from the social sciences, especially social and behavioural psychology as well as sociology. It touches on anthropology at several of its edges, while even political science and economics are not completely alien to the mass communication fare.” Therefore, the prediction vogue reveals more that journalism belongs to social sciences.

### **Why Prediction in Contemporary Media?**

There are natural and human-made phenomena that feature in the media news, especially the negative or unexpected thing(s) that make people uneasy nowadays. The *Awake!* Magazine (2017, p. 4) says “if you are apprehensive or scared out-right by the barrage of bad news, you are not alone. In 2014, Barack Obama, the then President of the USA, suggested that because of all the bad things reported in the press, many conclude “that the world is spinning...fast and nobody is able to control it.”” When people are oblivious to unexpected incidents, it exposes them to negative consequences as they lack the knowledge of precautionary measures to mitigate any adversity.

However, people with hindsight would be focused on steps to take for advancement, especially in the moments of adversity. Thus, arguably, good journalistic skills now should include the ability to dissect circumstances and forecast what may happen and why it may happen. The skills also entail the aptitude to explain to the audience, what made it not happen if it failed to happen as foretold (Edogor, 2018). All that has made the mass media substantially become the social scientific oracle and play the roles well for the audience in this century replete with uncertainties.

The media industry has attained significant growth in human communication enterprise. That height is envisaged to imbue the journalists and the present mass media with the capacity to predict trends. The famous MacBride Commission (1981, p. 31) alluded that, in noting that, “communication...is now sufficiently well advanced for it to be possible to forecast trends...as well as to identify likely risks and stumbling-blocks.” This view is an ideological principle evolving in contemporary journalism. It is a perspective emphasising another novel dimension of professionalism in media

practice. Journalists are social scientists who apply reportorial skills to dissect social events and make forecasts through the media.

Social scientists should be curious and think beyond today concerning the future of their societies. This corroborates the views of Lasswell (1941) referenced in Neiger (2007, p. 309) observing that, “when we act rationally, we consider alternative versions of the future that are so often buried in the realm of hunch. In the practice of social science, as of any skill in society, we are bound to be affected in some degree by our perceptions of future development.” There are claims that journalism captures certain future developments in human society owing to the gamut of present uncertainties in the world.

As professional information managers, journalists scout every part of society and can pontificate on possible future events from the facts assembled from different sources. This position differentiates journalists’ reportage as professionals from the reporting by lay reporters – the non-professionals. MacBride Commission (1981, p. 229) underscored that point noting that, “surely it is perfectly normal that professionalism should exist in communication no less than in any other domain.” The commission’s emphasis on the need for trends and their likely consequences to be identified is a mandate that the journalists should embrace to alert their audience, about the possible effects of an imminent phenomenon. Also, Edogor et al. (2023a, p. 186) argue that the “nature of the audience of nowadays has made media practitioners to move beyond mere chronicling of epochal matters to forecasting or predicting social trends for the audience.”

### **The Media as the Oracle, is the Sacredness of Facts Sacrificed?**

The mass media’s role of forecasting what may happen could conflict, with the objectivity often expounded in journalism practice and studies. In journalism, the sacrosanctity of facts with verification of information is valued immensely. However, the journalists’ propensity to report what may transpire brings critical questions about the preservation of the principle of keeping facts sacred. Over the years, journalists and journalism scholars held the idea that ‘comments are free, but facts are sacred.’ The import of this notion is that journalists expectedly propagate facts in their reportage of events.

The forgoing views and the media’s position in reporting future matters could be seen in the view that “yet its objectivist stance notwithstanding, the press has long seen its task to be not merely a window on the world but also something akin to a crystal ball into the future, offering a prophetic, if tenuous, blueprint of what is to come,” (Huxford, 2003, p. 2). To Edogor (2018, p. 23) “the ‘oracular’ idea of the mass media espouses the application of science in journalism to make reliable forecasts for the audience. When the media capture and relay what has happened, the institution is a mere relater of events.”

The journalistic task of beaming searchlight to navigate the hazy future, and project what might happen, accords the media, the status of ‘the Social Scientific Oracle,’ (Edogor, 2018). This informs this argument “the charge that journalism constructs rather than simply reports becomes most acute with the issue of prediction

in news-work. This task must inevitably draw journalism beyond the “simple” reporting of facts - itself a constructive process,” (Huxford 2003, p. 3). Edogor (2018) revealed that beyond reporting what has happened, news stories, cartoons, side-bars, personal opinion articles, columns, cartoons, and other contents of the Nigerian media forecast what may happen.

Such a revelation about media contents brings a reminiscence of the Africans’ belief in the oracles wielding powers for predictions. It could be deduced that some contemporary Nigerian journalists offer reportage with the semblance of the Africans’ socio-cultural ideology of looking into the future through the oracles. That ideology in the Nigerian media reportage would sustain the Africans’ tradition of prediction on certain issues. Negedu (2014, p. 81) argues that “classical philosophy largely favours the African system with its emphasis on the preservation of tradition.”

The principle of predicting future events was originally not embedded in the fundamentals of journalism practice or studies. Journalism involves assembling and disseminating information and facts about what has happened. Generally, facts are highly regarded in journalism. This belief emanates from the statement popularly attributed to the *Guardian* Editor, CP Scott (1921), whose observation has it that “comment is free, but facts are sacred...Fundamentally it implies honesty, cleanness, courage, fairness, a sense of duty to the reader and the community,” (Rogers, 2013). But if the media stand as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle’ that predicts, their predictive stance should not undermine journalism’s respect for the sanctity of facts.

According to Loo (2013) playing on the ORACLE acrostic, one sees the inherent calling of journalists to be their readers’ eyes and ears, to be ‘out there’ to Observe, Reflect and Report, Analyse, Contextualise, Learn, and ultimately, Enlighten their readers about how certain future issues would transpire. Loo (2013) further argues that ‘fundamental to the ‘oracle’ concept of journalism is the synthesis of facts in context, transforming hard data into meaningful knowledge.’ This calls for journalists as social detectives to anchor media predictions on facts from thorough investigations on any issue.

Thus, the media’s ideological operation as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle’ does not provide, the institution with the impetus to pontificate through the barrels of unfounded sentiments. Also, it does not arrogate to them the power to double-speak like the oracle at Delphi. This is to avoid losing their gloss as people’s main source of information on future societal matters. Journalists should take cognizance of the fact that there are a plethora of other alternative sources from which the populace could get information. These alternative information sources pose challenges to contemporary journalism, as such journalists should continue to prove their mettle as the professional information purveyors.

Arguably, before now the human race relies on the media and the practitioners, as the major sources of their daily information. As a routine, human beings cast their dependence on the mass media for reliable information applied in making worthwhile decisions including but not limited to economic and socio-political matters. Agbese (2008) avers that it is impossible for most people today to imagine a morning or any day without the mass media and their services. The journalist also argues that many people begin and or end their days with news from the media. Based on this perspective, people’s extent of dependence on the media could be seen.

Nonetheless, the media audience nowadays is more enlightened and expects more useful information from the media more other than what non-journalists offer. Bloggers and social media influencers provide the audience with headline news also called trending news, but deep-rooted facts are expected from the media. So, journalists should discharge their 'oracular roles' with deep regard to facts – pieces of information established to be true and presented as having objective reality, (American Press Institute and Merriam Webster) referenced in American Psychological Association (APA, 2024). This has been the operational principle of journalism practice across the world.

### **The Oracle in African and Greek Contexts**

The idea of the oracle in scholarly discourses is more prominent in ancient Greece as Orrell (2007, p. 18) explains 'the oracle played an enormously important role in the Greek culture.' He notes that in Greece, people consult the oracle when faced with anxiety or uncertainty in decisions about critical issues such as their likely fortunes in war, business, illness, marriage, etc. However, Heraclitus, cited by Orrell (2007, p. 18) avers that 'the Pythia never gave a straight answer, but only hinted at the truth. King Croesus of Lydia famously asked the Pythia if he should invade Persian territory. The oracle told him that if he did, a mighty empire would be destroyed. He took this as a green light, but unfortunately, the empire she was referring to was his own.' The double-speak attribute of the oracle in ancient Greece puts the Greeks' conception of the oracle at variance with the Africans. Croesus's experience with the Oracle at Delphi portrays it as an author of ambiguity, uncertainty, obscurity, distortion, and confusion in its prediction.

Against such a backdrop, in Africa, oracles are seen as authoritative sources of information that speak without any iota of equivocation. In the African sense, the oracle is portrayed as the master of certainty and clarity. This manifests in two literary works of Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Achebe reported that 'the elders consulted their oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan...' (Achebe, 1958, p. 111). In *Arrow of God* "...as many oracles prophesied, the white man had come to take over the land and rule..." (Achebe, 1964, p. 42).

The strange or white man being referred to was the colonial team. The oracle predicted that the colonialists would bring strange government and religion that would be inimical to the aboriginal African system of governance and religious worship. In *Things Fall Apart*, another assertion that conveys the reliability of the oracles is seen as follows: "A great evil has come upon their land as the Oracle had warned," (Achebe, 1958, p. 112). This Africans' notion of the oracle cited above is why this paper in corroboration of Edogor's (2018) idea of the mass media institution as the 'oracle' conceptualises the media as 'the Social Scientific Oracle.' It is contrary to the Greeks' sense of 'Oracle,' which connotes an author of confusion and uncertainty.

## Methodology

The library or desk research method which entails the use of secondary data to investigate research objective(s) or problem(s) (Ohaja, 2003) was used in this study where the contents of selected Nigerian news magazines were analysed. The method allows researchers to use avalanche of literature from libraries and other relevant sources for a study. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher also, adopted the constant comparative technique (frequently called grounded theory) enunciated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and afterward advanced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as referenced in Wimmer and Dominick (2014, p. 123). The four steps in the constant comparative technique suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2014) were applied in the textual analysis as follows:

- (1) Comparative assigning of incidents to categories.
- (2) Elaborating and refining of categories.
- (3) Searching for relationships and themes among the categories.
- (4) Simplifying and integrating data into a coherent theoretical structure.

The researcher applied qualitative textual analysis to examine three Nigerian news magazines namely: *Tell*, *TheNews*, and *Newswatch*, which were purposively selected as the population of the study. They were chosen because (Edogor, 2018) observed that they make more predictive reporting. The two themes defined after data collection as the categories are:

- (1) Predictions by Retrospection.
- (2) Predictions by Hunch.

### Predictions by Hunch

The data generated revealed situations where Nigerian journalists predicted some things through hunch and the instances, include: *TheNews* Magazine issue of December 25, 2006, that concluded the magazine's doom prediction on the 2007 presidential bid of Nigeria's former military President, Ibrahim Babangida. The publication with this title, 'Babangida: End of a Dream,' concluded the magazine's serialized predictive reportage that foreshadowed disaster for Babangida's presidential ambition in 2007. The same publication with the prediction that Babangida wouldn't rule Nigeria again; also predicted that Umaru Yar'Adua (the then Katsina State Governor), would succeed the then President Obasanjo. This was evident in one of the titles 'Paving way for Yar'Adua' in the same issue of *TheNews* magazine on December 25, 2006. The magazine's prediction on Yar'Adua came when many people in Nigeria barely heard about him, unlike Donald Duke and Peter Odili who were candidates publicized to succeed President Obasanjo. One of the reporters, specifically Omoarelojie (2006, p. 35) captured the scenario noting that, 'in its edition of 12 June 2006, *TheNews* had given an insight into why Yar'Adua may emerge as

Obasanjo's successor in 2007,' and not Donald Duke or Peter Odili as public analysts averred.

Similarly, the *Newswatch* magazine of June 19, 2006, used a cartoon entitled 'Search for the next president,' to predict the action of President Obasanjo. The magazine published a cartoon where President Obasanjo was wearing a microscope-like eye-glass with a cap bearing PDP and a statement attributed to him says, 'Gawd, this thick forest in the South-south is blocking my view, should I face the North?' *Newswatch* by Emenike (2006, p. 6). The cartoon predicted the former president's likely change in selection of his successor from South-south Nigeria, to Northern Nigeria. The prediction later came to pass.

Also, in a piece entitled 'Obasanjo's next move,' the *Tell* magazine, on June 5, 2006, equally predicted President Obasanjo's decision in choosing a successor. The magazine's prediction conveyed in their reporter's words explaining that President Obasanjo 'yet to recover from the defeat of his third-term ambition ... may have set in motion a plan that would see him install a trusted ally,' Aiyetan (2006, p. 19). The president eventually did what the magazine predicted – he chose a successor and supported him to win.

### Predictions by Retrospection

The incidents identified under this prediction category include the predictive media stories that emerged through retrospection or introspection, and some of the instances from the magazines are presented below. In 2010, *Tell* magazine used the story entitled, 'Ibori: The road to jail,' to predict that the former governor of Delta State, James Ibori would be jailed. In the story, one of the *Tell* reporters scrutinised the processes through which the London Courts incarcerated three acquaintances of the former governor of Delta State, Nigeria. After an examination of the circumstances the magazine predicted that 'the prosecution and imprisonment of the three associates of Ibori in the UK now means that Ibori himself might be going to jail not long from now, as soon as his extradition to the UK is completed,' (Adewuyi, 2010, p. 44). The former governor was later imprisoned as predicted.

Besides, *TheNews* of December 3, 2006, used a story entitled 'We saw through him,' to elaborate their predictions about the actions of Professor Maurice Iwu, the then Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The magazine variously predicted that Iwu was unreliable, thus, he wouldn't conduct transparent elections. The prediction was against what Prof Iwu was preaching with his team. *TheNews* reporter, Adegbamigbe (2007) offered insight into their forecast on the character of Prof Iwu, and generally what it takes to forecast political matters. 'To be able to foretell the future in the area of politics, one does not need to be a peripatetic gypsy, a stargazer, or a necromancer. The power of prophecy, on many occasions, depends on the ability to use the past to judge the present and say accurately what would happen in the future,' (Adegbamigbe, 2007, p. 22). The reporter noted that that was exactly, what happened when *TheNews* magazine in different editions predicted that Professor Iwu would rig Nigeria's 2007 elections.

Also, the *Newswatch* magazine of September 7, 2009, with a story entitled: 'It's a bubble,' predicted that dismissed chief executive officers of some commercial banks by the leadership of the Central Bank of Nigeria over corruption-related allegations would go unpunished. Dan Agbese, a columnist in the *Newswatch* argued that such cases in the past were treated with kid gloves, so the dismissal of the bank managing directors won't be different. According to Agbese, 'President Umaru Yar'Adua dismissed two ministers in January 2008 for helping themselves to a Christmas bonus they did not earn. They were charged in court with some directors of the ministry. What happened next? It was a bubble,' (Agbese, 2009, p. 5). With the impunity trend, the columnist predicted that the bank chief executive officers arrested and detained would go scot-free. He avers 'let me tell you. This is a bubble. And it too shall pass away. The celebrated arrests, the stuff of press sensationalism, amount to a noisy nonsense..., ' (Agbese, 2009, p. 5).

### **The Relationships among the Categories**

The relationships among the categories identified in the data could be seen in their connection with the sources of knowledge. For instance, by close examination, the media prediction through hunch is related to the source of knowledge called 'emotion/intuition.' In using hunch for forecasts, journalists make use of intuition. This is defined as, 'the process by which insights or bits of knowledge emerge into consciousness from the subconscious or as the direct apprehension of knowledge which is not the result of conscious reasoning or immediate sense perception,' (Dolhenty, 2014). Another category: prediction by retrospection, relates with the source of knowledge – appeal to the sense of perception, for its explanation, a scholar argues, 'you know certain things because you can see and perceive them yourself.' So, journalists predict through retrospection by using their perception of a past incident to predict what may happen in the future.

### **Integration of the Data into a Coherent Theoretical Structure**

The data analysed provide a hint to journalists' knowledge of virtually everything including, future developments the audience is often oblivious of. This view resonates with the 'Omniscience theory' in journalism and media studies as propounded by Edogor (2018) and refined by Edogor et al. (2023a). The import is that through their skills and surveying of society, journalists know certain things that would happen that members of the public are utterly oblivious to. Such efforts accredited to journalists differentiate them from historians and delineate journalism from history which is a discipline, with a total focus on examining past events and trends. The foregoing provides the impetus for this researcher to conceptualise the media as 'the social scientific oracle.'

## Research Result

The notion of the mass media as the oracle entails that they have to be social and secular institutions that will enlighten the audience about the future using verifiable evidence or facts. For people to continue depending on mass media information, journalists should ensure that the media are seen as the oracle in the African ideology, as explained in the literature review. Also, the dictionary meaning of 'Oracle' puts it more in the Africans' perspective. For instance, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* sees the word 'Oracle' as "a person of great authority or wisdom whose opinions or judgements are regarded with great respect." It describes 'Oracle' further as, "one who is considered or professes to be infallible." Also, it recognises the term as, "something as a scientific instrument on which one can rely for guidance or direction."

With those definitions above, conceptualising the mass media as the 'Oracle' in the African notion is not a misnomer. The mass media are authorities and are expected to be the authority that would deliver reliable information at all moments. The import is that journalists should use reliable data in their predictions to avoid undermining the audience's dependence on the mass media. A Nigerian philosopher, Agbakoba (2005), in a lecture note, explains the reason traditional Africans of Igbo extraction consult the oracles or go for soothsaying (Igba Afa). According to him, the word 'Igba' is an Igbo verb meaning 'running to,' and 'Afa' is an Igbo noun meaning 'authority.'

The belief in the system as the authority that provides information could be gleaned from a popular Anambra State griot or crooner, 'Ozoemena Ayaka Nsugbe.' In a music, the crooner described how Mr Chinwuba, a soothsayer expert used 'Igba Afa' to tell the exact number of items hidden in a calabash. So, Africans believe that every true soothsayer is an authority that can provide authentic information. This 'Igba Afa' is part of the extramundane communication in Africa which entails 'fortune-telling or soothsaying, as it used to be called,' (Christianity.com Editorial Staff, 2020) referenced in Asemah et al. (2021, pp. 157–158). So, soothsayers as the oracles reportedly have superior knowledge and relevant information from "supernatural beings – ancestors, spirits, gods, the Supreme Being..." (Asemah et al., 2021).

Similarly, the Yoruba-speaking people of South-Western Nigeria have the practice of 'Ifa divination' that somehow indicates the kind of oracle which the media are conceptualised to be. According to (UNESCO, n.d.) the Ifa divination system which applies "an extensive corpus of texts and mathematical formulas, is practiced among Yoruba communities and by the African diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean. The word Ifa refers to the mystical figure Ifa or Orunmila, regarded by the Yoruba as the deity of wisdom and intellectual development." The clearer picture of the belief that Africans perceive the people who provide authentic information as 'the authority' or reliable source could be seen in the description that, "in Yoruba land, the divination system is orally transmitted by Ifa priests to apprentices," (Asemah et al., 2021). The priests in African cosmology, are people with authority often received as hereditary power, bestowed on someone who offers reliable information or knowledge to people. This is also akin to the attributes ascribed to the priests in the Judaeo-Christian religion.



## Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher conceptualised the mass media as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle,’ and this stance is antithetical to some media audiences’ vulturous belief about the institution. Some people believe that the mass media are like vultures that always await to see crises or bloody violence taking place to afford them the opportunity to report. This paper’s conceptualisation providing a reverse sobriquet for the media was derived from the observed predictions in the three news magazines analysed herein. The paper conceptualises the mass media as the ‘Oracle,’ that forecasts or predicts future developments or events to help the audience to eschew some costly dangers. Unlike the traditional Greeks, the traditional Africans believe the ‘Oracle’ is a dependable source of information and knowledge. Accordingly, this paper recommends that the mass media should be the oracle in the context of the African worldview that captures the idea of true authority. The implication is that the mass media are to remain dependable sources of reliable information to the audience even in their prediction of any phenomenon. Therefore, journalists should forecast trends using verifiable and reliable data, for the media to be accepted and valued in the status of ‘the Oracle’ in the actual African notion.

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