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***Discuss the Applications of AI Technologies in Smart News Generation***

XinQi Wei, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR  
Cong Qi, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR

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**Abstract**

With the advancement of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms, the machine-generated news is widely employed in the news media industry. This has brought tremendous opportunities and challenges to the journalism industry as well as the entire society. This paper introduces the current applications of AI technologies in smart news generation. Specifically, we focus on the automation processes of the current text news generation and video news generation by using AI technologies such as machine learning, deep learning, artificial neural network, and natural language processing and generation. It then summarizes the effectiveness of the machine-generated news from the perspectives of timeliness, efficiency, level of objectiveness, reliability and bias avoidance. We conclude the paper by raising up the challenges AI-generated news bring to the news purveyor, to the news readers, and to the news content generation itself. As AI writing is in a progressive era, journalists nowadays need to consider transforming and moving from a functional model of writing simple news stories to more in-depth and creative reporting, and be able to co-exist harmoniously with AI news bots. This paper provides researchers and practitioners from the field of news media with solid technological foundations to understand the current smart news generation mechanisms, and opens the door for further exploration and discussion of machine-generated news in many other fields of news media industry. Further empirical studies on the effectiveness of AI generated news across multiple scenarios and countries are suggested to verify our research results.

Keywords: Machine-Generated News, AI, Machine Learning, Fake News, News Media

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## **Introduction**

There has been notable advancement in the development and implementation of intelligent news media in recent years. Prominent digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), have significantly enhanced the automation, timeliness, and overall volume of news production. The field of intelligent news media involves IT applications, such as natural language processing (NLP), natural language generation (NLG), deep learning, data processing, artificial neural networks (ANN), computer vision, and others (Williamson, 2019). These technologies could be used for news generation purposes, as well as for the identification of fraudulent news, particularly in light of the substantial volume of misleading data generated by social media platforms. (Ozboy and Alatas, 2020).

In addition to automatically generated news articles, to cater to the demands of modern news consumers, certain platforms have evolved to incorporate multiple advanced technologies enabling the generation of concise and intelligent news videos. These technology platforms are usually called AI content generators (Dey, 2022), or Machine-Generated Content (MGC) platforms (Textbroker, 2019). The emergence of these new forms of news has captured the attention of the journalism industry, bringing forth unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the news media sector.

This paper endeavors to offer a concise overview of the current applications of smart news media employing AI technologies. Subsequently, it will undertake an evaluation and comprehensive discussion of the effectiveness of AI-enabled news from diverse perspectives. At last, potential future research directions will be discussed.

## **AI Applications in News Media**

### ***Brief Review***

News-writing bots have gained extensive usage in the news media, with media outlets worldwide progressively introducing their own news-writing bots since 2001. Notably, in 2015, Xinhua News Agency unveiled the Kuaibixiaoxin robot, and Tencent Finance launched its robot reporter called “Dreamwriter”. In 2016, Today’s Headlines incorporated the use of the “Xiaomingbot”. These writing robots have significantly aided media platforms in augmenting their output during the Rio Olympics. In the US, there are also similar writing bots, such as “Heliograf” from the Washington Post, which won the BIGGIES prize in 2018 (WashPost, 2018); Examples of such applications include “Wordsmith” from the Associated Press and “Heliograf” from the Washington Post. Furthermore, besides the text-based news writing bots, some certain video news content generation platforms like Media Brain·MAGIC are garnering significant attention from users, despite the system not being fully matured. In short, these applications can be distinguished into two categories: text-based and video-based, and a representative application of each will be presented next.

### ***Text-Based News: Xiaomingbot***

Xiaomingbot, developed by ByteDance and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, is a multilingual and multimodal intelligent newsbot with four key capabilities. These include automatic news generation, multilingual translation, news reading, and animated visual presentation. Utilizing text generation algorithms, Xiaomingbot can generate news content from data, and it employs machine translation algorithms to translate the text into multiple languages. The system

produces a visual avatar to read the news, with facial expression and lip motion synchronized with automatically generated voice (Xu, et al., 2020). The animated image of Xiaomingbot shows up in figure 1. The architecture of Xiaomingbot is displayed in figure 2, (Xu, et al., 2020). It demonstrated the capabilities and components of Xiaomingbot, which include text, voice, and animation.



Figure 1: Xiaomingbot animated

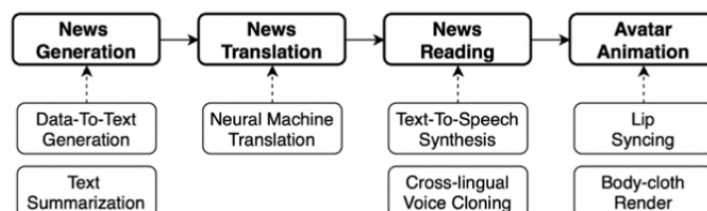


Figure 2: Xiaomingbot’s system architecture

In 2020, the AI lab department in ByteDance company upgraded its capacity, and introduced a 3D version of Xiaomingbot. Also, the firm repositioned Xiaomingbot as a 3D multilingual AI news reporter in 2020.

**Video News Production Platform: Media brain·MAGIC**

“Media Brain” is the first domestic media AI platform developed independently by Xinhua Zhiyun, which integrates cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoTs), big data, AI, and other technologies to provide multiple services for media organizations (China Money AI, 2020). It includes lead discovery, material collection, editing and production, distribution and dissemination, and feedback monitoring, which make the applications and services of AI in news scenarios more intelligent. The mission of the Media Brain platform is to help content producers gather, process, and organize news sources better and faster.

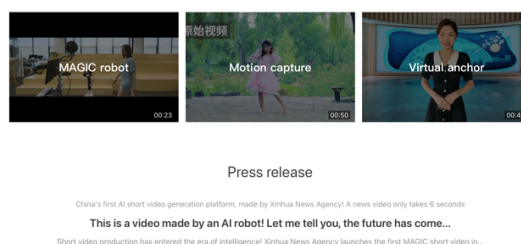


Figure 3: Media brain·MAGIC platform

**AI Technologies in News Generation**

**Machine Learning**

To do fact-checking automatically, we could use machine learning to detect fake news (Khan, 2019). Generally, there are three categories in machine learning: supervised learning, unsupervised learning, and reinforcement learning. In Balaji (2021)’s work, the classification of machine learning algorithms was summarized in Figure 3. In his work, an in-depth study on how to use machine learning to comprehensively analyze social media data via a variety of algorithms was discussed.

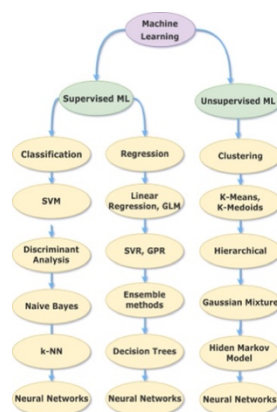


Figure 4: Classification of machine learning algorithms, from Balaji, 2021

In these algorithms, according to Ozbay (2020)'s research, a supervised classification method could be applied to detect fake news via online social media effectively (Ozbay, 2020). To examine the efficiency and predictive capacity of these algorithms, Reis et al. (2019) presented a new set of methods in both theory and practice. The research result revealed that although all sets of features have the ability to recognize fake news, there is still some room for further improvement in the performance of all models for fake news detection.

### ***Deep Learning***

Besides machine learning, deep learning is also widely used in smart news media to do text classification. In the news media, deep learning is mainly used for multi-label news text classification with an aim to help news consumers accurately filter the right news content. Today's machine learning relies highly on advanced deep learning and predictive analytics. Deep learning is especially helpful in handling a larger amount of unstructured data (e.g., pure text) in the era of big data. In sum, deep learning models rely on large and complex datasets to mimic the learning capabilities of the human brain (Chan-Olmsted, 2019; Hassaballah and Awad, 2020) to do text classification.

In recent years, many studies have been done on how to use deep learning methods to do multi-label news classification. For instance, the label-aware attention and semantic dependency (LAA\_SD) modeling based on graph convolutional network (GCN) enhances the combination of text features and label semantics, and thus improves the efficiency of deep learning (Liu, et al., 2022). Another approach uses the FAA-MLSME algorithm and the WTL-Bert model to expand the data based on an attention mechanism (Ding, 2022). The aim of these models is to reduce the proportion of imbalances in multi-label data sets, and improve the learning effect, thus ameliorating the adverse effects of unbalanced data sets in classification. Another autoregressive language model, GPT-3, applied deep learning to study human-like text (Floridi and Chiriatti, 2020). However, there is a short of literature to empirically test the performance of these newly generated deep learning models in reality.

### ***Artificial Neural Network***

Similar with general machine learning, artificial neural network is also useful in fake news detection. As real and fake news spreads online, some investigators have found that fake news spreads faster than real news (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Contrary to conventional thinking, news bots accelerate the entire dissemination process. Therefore, fake news detection is essential for smart journalism.



Zhang (2022) proposed a detecting method based on social context and news articles. By using two existing real-world fake news datasets - BuzzFeed and Fakeddit, the combination of content attributes and users' communication with specific news articles are examined. The results of the study show that the method performs better than existing fake news detection methods. Another application is the classification of a larger amount of news data. According to Ruan and Yang (2022), existing convolutional neural networks could be combined with bi-directional, long and short-term memory neural networks (BiLSTM) to improve existing news text classification models with an accuracy of up to 98.96% (Ruan & Yang, 2022).

### ***Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Natural Language Generation (NLG)***

NLP, especially NLG are useful in automatic news generation. NLP is a set of computer technologies in which machines provide a deep understanding of natural language based on algorithms set up in advance, and it is used to automatically analyze and represent human languages (Chowdhary and Chowdhary, 2020). NLG is a sub-field of NLP. It is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) programming to produce written or spoken narratives from a data set. The algorithms in NLP could enable machines to search for news faster than humans, and to better structure and edit the content of the text (Semenov, 2022).

In recent years, a variety of deep learning models have been applied to natural language processing (NLP) to improve, accelerate, and automate the text analytics functions and NLP features. Moreover, these methods are offering superior solutions to convert unstructured text into valuable data and insights. In news industry, Deep learning + NLP could be used to learn and analyze news sentiments and simulate texts that could be more easily understood by readers (Vicari, 2021). News sentiment will influence public's perception of news events in a certain way. For example, companies want their customers to be influenced by financial news sentiment that affects value trends and makes profits (Brown, 2016). Deep NLP facilitates linguistic representation and detection of fake news on social networks, which ensures the integrity of the message (De Oliveira, et al., 2021).

### **Effectiveness Discussion**

#### ***Timeliness and Productivity***

News timeliness is essential to attract news readers. For news providers and recommendation systems, the number of clicks on a story is important as it shows its popularity, and timeliness is the main driver (Xiong, et al., 2021). Machine-generated news possesses a strong capability in the journalism industry due to its ability to gather and process information in a timely manner. Xiong et al. (2021) proposed a deep news click prediction (DNCP) model to test machine-generated news' timeliness and attractiveness, and empirically proved a high correlation between the timeliness and attractiveness of news via an experiment of over 30,000 articles extracted from Today's Headlines dataset.

In terms of productivity, the efficiency of machine-generated news output has been greatly improved thanks to AI. According to Kang Liu (Chinanews, 2018), director of Tencent's AI program and head of Dreamwriter, their robot reporter "Dreamwriter" takes an average of 0.46 seconds to produce a single article, and up to 2,500 articles per day. The video news generator- MAGIC takes only 6 seconds to produce a video news story. This reaction speed allows the media to react as quickly as possible after receiving information to produce news content for news consumers. During the first 13 days of the Olympic games in 2016, a total

of 457 newsletters and event reports on badminton by Xiaomingbot. More than 30 long-form detailed reports were maintained every day (Zhang et al., 2016). It not only covered all the events from the group stage to the final stage but also posted at a speed simultaneously with the live TV broadcast.

### ***Objectivity***

News, being a mode of communication, endeavors to present factual or reasonably objective information to the broader public (Weaver & Willnat, 2012). In today's era, while individuals are increasingly drawn to personalized and recreational news owing to the inherent attributes of competitiveness, entertainment, and the utility of social activities, it is important to note that objectivity remains a crucial standard for the news media in certain domains. Carlson (2017)'s research suggested that the selection of algorithms for news has long been perceived by the general public as a technical solution to a professional problem, often lacking in objectivity and threatening to overstep the industry's existing framework of practice. Carlson (2017) believed that human's judgment of algorithms is a new challenge because it requires multiple opinions to make judgments about the objectiveness of the news. Specifically, human beings are inherently subjective and are susceptible to changes influenced by their environment. Although algorithms are inherently objective and based on valid data and information support, the overload of information on the web, especially in the social media realm, affects their subjectivity in terms of information sources. For example, the introduction and popularity of politically biased news sources represent a significant historical shift in the media environment, with important unexplored consequences (Kelly, 2019). During the 2016 election, social media facilitated the widespread dissemination of "fake news," fictionalized reports presented as factual news stories (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). These reports lacked objectivity, but their wide dissemination led to the introduction of biased news stories into social opinion, reflecting the importance of detecting fake news.

Alongside the inherent objectivity of algorithms, it has been argued that automatically generated professional news stories themselves possess objectivity (Wu, 2020). According to Wu (2020)'s research, athletic news stories are rated as more objective than other automatically generated news stories. However, some opponents argue that the algorithm is strongly dependent on the data, and if the adopted data set is incorrect or incomplete, the algorithm may produce non-objective results.

### ***Reliability and Bias***

Reliability and bias are also closely related to fake news. In the big data era, fake news has always been at the center of discussion in the media field. Floods of misinformation online have become a norm in the age of big data. While misinformation and disinformation have always been a feature of human society, modern technologies have made it easier and faster for actors with malicious intents to spread disinformation anywhere in the world to reach a wider audience than was possible before (Bergstrom, 2019). For example, in Andreas and Mario (2018)'s study, investigators aim to study readers' attitudes toward AI news by changing the article resource intentionally. The study results state that when the stated source of some news changed, readers always gave higher ratings to the human-written articles. In contrast, when the experiment changed the actual source, which means readers are uncertain of the real author, the subjects found the computer-written articles more credible. The study's results showed that different levels of knowledge about different types of news caused various perceptions, which further led to distinctive biases and reliability perceptions of news

articles. Nevertheless, this study demonstrated that using algorithms to assist news-writing might be able to help readers better understand and perceive the news contents.

Similarly, Marinescu et al. (2022) designed a Turing experiment, which included a study designed to test whether participants could distinguish between AI generated news and human-writing news. Before reading those articles, participants were unaware of the inclusion of AI-generated news and were assumed to have no prior exposure to such news. At the end of the experiment, when participants were asked if they had read the automatically generated news articles, 45% doubted their initial response and admitted that they may not have been aware of the AI-authored articles at the time they read the news (Marinescu et al., 2022). The result shows that when the audience does not know the source of the manuscript, there is not much difference in the degree of judgment of the two articles. This indirectly implies that general audience keep an accepting attitude toward the AI news writing manuscript itself, and do not show distinctive preference for the two types of news.

### **Further Discussions**

Concerns encompass the implications of AI for the journalism profession, the manner in which AI technology is employed, and the level of public confidence in news organizations (Ali & Hassoun, 2019).

#### ***Content Quality Concerns***

Machine-generated news often faces challenges of monotony and shallow content. In today's online news landscape, artificial intelligence heavily relies on algorithms and news templates to automatically generate content, leading to repetitive and monotonous news coverage. Furthermore, since news-generating algorithms do not yet possess the capability to consider social, political, and economic factors, the resulting news articles tend to lack depth compared to manually curated reporting, such as that found in *The Economist*. However, machine-generated news brings a unique advantage with its unparalleled ability to search for data, which greatly contributes to the breadth of news coverage. Additionally, advancements in information retrieval technology hold the promise of enhancing the ability to delve into more comprehensive and in-depth news reporting.

The second issue pertains to the continuous mention of fake news in previous discussions. Despite various pieces of evidence demonstrating the widespread dissemination of online misinformation as a prevailing trend, it is crucial to recognize that distinguishing news from other forms of entertainment requires the reinforcement of retrieval techniques and legal regulations pertaining to fake news. Additionally, it is important to address the ongoing controversy surrounding the evaluation of news objectivity and credibility (Kelly, 2019).

#### ***Challenges to Journalists***

As algorithms become increasingly integrated, the proliferation of machine-generated news stories presents numerous challenges for journalists, compelling them to reflect on and consider how to distinguish their skills. Specifically, while machines excel in generating news, journalists place greater emphasis on possessing in-depth analytical skills, creativity, and the ability to personalize news writing (Van et al., 2012). Consequently, journalists must undergo a transformation, shifting from a functional model of simply reporting news to engaging in more comprehensive and in-depth journalism. According to Carlson (2017),

journalists will experience heightened pressure as the number of articles generated by AI continues to increase. In summary, the role of the “news gatekeeper” remains incomplete in its automation, as the news articles produced by AI may lack depth, necessitating additional review and revision work by journalists with specialized knowledge in specific subject areas.

### ***Trust Issues***

The trust controversy surrounding machine-generated news stems from concerns regarding audience privacy. When news is automatically generated by AI, there is a potential risk of the algorithm capturing the audience’s private information and sharing it with other news consumers. An example of this can be seen in the user privacy permission agreements on the Tencent News mobile app, which explicitly state that the app collects and records users’ device information, browsing habits, and clicks. This data is stored as log files and used for personalized information delivery. The audience may be unaware that the news app has access to their personal information. When audiences become aware of such privacy issues, it can significantly impact their level of trust in AI-generated news. This raises additional concerns that need to be taken into consideration.

### **Conclusion**

This article focuses on the application of AI in the news media industry, initiating a divergent discussion from two representative examples regarding its technological aspects and its output efficiency. The effectiveness of AI technologies utilized in news is discussed from the perspectives of timeliness, objectivity, and reliability. Additionally, potential risks are examined, particularly the significant challenges and opportunities posed to the future prospects of machine-generated news due to the emergence of fake news resulting from information overload and other factors.

Furthermore, the academic community currently lacks empirical data to prove or support the aforementioned discussions on the issues previously mentioned. In terms of the news media industry, the majority of machine-generated news remains confined to news-writing robots and text-based content, with limited academic research on video news. These aspects can serve as further directions for research directions.

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**Contact email:** cong.qi@polyu.edu.hk





## ***Making Decision: Masculine Women in Indonesian Movies***

Ratna Permata Sari, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Indonesia

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### **Abstract**

Gender is understood as a cultural concept that seeks to make a distinction in terms of roles, behavior, mentality, and emotional characteristics between the sexes of men and women. In society, gender tends to implicate feminine traits in women and masculine traits in men. One of the fundamental but significant masculine traits is the courage to make decisions. Courage in decision-making is often associated with local cultural norms. People living in urban areas normalize differences and the courage to express opinions on both men and women. In contrast to communities in suburban/rural areas where decision-making is usually in the hands of parents and or community leaders, while women are only asked to follow directions without any space to express opinions and make their own decisions. The research aims to find out the representation of masculinity of female actors in Indonesian movies i.e. Yuni and Penyalin Cahaya. This study uses the semiotic method of Roland Barthes by observing signs, codes/systems, and culture. This research found differences in the characteristics of Yuni and Suryani's courage in making decisions to express their opinions. Even though Yuni has the courage to refuse marriage proposals, she who lives in the suburbs of Banten cannot openly express her opinion on her life choices. In contrast to Suryani, who lives in Jakarta, she is brave and insists on continuing to fight for the truth of the sexual case that happened to her, even though she is under pressure from outsiders.

Keywords: Masculinity, Women, Movies, Indonesia, Decision

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## Introduction

Being one of the creative industries, the Indonesian film industry is starting to be taken into account in its own country and in the global film scene. One of the latest that grabbed the attention of the public in 2021 is the film "Like Revenge, Longing Must Also Be Paid in Full" which won the highest award at the Locarno International Film Festival. The film successfully won the Golden Leopard, the main prize from the international competition session (Concorso Internazionale) at this festival held in Switzerland (Nariswari, 2021).

With so many Indonesian films produced by Indonesian filmmakers, the diversity of genres, stories, and perspectives raised in films is increasing. In the Indonesian film scene, we recognize the Indonesian Film Festival (FFI), an Indonesian film award event. In the FFI, Garin Nugroho, a veteran filmmaker explained that the organization of the FFI is not just a competition but also builds a film ecosystem and reads a map of the dynamics of Indonesian cinema. When the associations do the judging, they provide notes on the problems, challenges, and current trends of Indonesian films which will produce a summary that will be a big homework for FFI. Garin explained that when selecting films, it is not merely good and bad films, but also fosters diversity, both in age and theme (Fathurrozak, 2021).

To further revive the Indonesian film ecosystem, the diversity of film story themes is needed to continue to revive the industry, from filmmakers as producers as well as stimulate and attract more Indonesian audiences to become loyal viewers of their own country's films. Yuni and Film Penyalin Cahaya are two films that successfully attracted attention during the Indonesian Film Festival in 2021.

Kamila Andini's film Yuni (2021), which is attached to women's issues, shows the issue of patriarchy that is inherent in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. The film also features issues of underage marriage, sex education, and LGBT. Domestically, at the 2021 FFI event, the lead actor Arawinda Kirana successfully brought home the Citra Cup for the "Best Female Lead" category and also the Snow Leopard for "Best Actress" at the 2021 Asian World Film Festival (Larissya, 2021).

Next is the movie Penyalin Cahaya (2021) which tells the struggle of Sur (played by Shenina Cinnamon) who seeks justice for the case of spreading photos of her while drunk. The film Penyalin Cahaya broke the record as the film that won the most Citra trophies in the history of Indonesian cinema, namely up to 12 trophies, which previously also received the most nominations, namely 17 nominations. (Camelia, 2022).

The word masculinity is often associated with the male gender but actually, masculinity is a gendered practice resulting from social construction. According to Thomas Carlye, masculinity is associated with independence, strength, and action orientation, so researchers are interested in analyzing the representation of masculinity of female actors, namely the character Yuni in the film Yuni and the character Sur in the film Penyalin Cahaya, needs to be presented when in an environment full of patriarchal nuances. Based on the description of the background of the problem above, the research question is "How is the representation of masculine women in the films Yuni and Penyalin Cahaya?"

The research conducted in this paper is descriptive research with a qualitative approach and constructivism paradigm. Researchers use semiotics from Roland Barthes who sees the meaning of signs from two stages of signification, namely denotation meaning which is seen

from the signified and signifier of the sign which is real and objective and the second stage is connotation meaning which gets elements of culture and myth. researchers will make observations on signs of masculinity in female characters, namely Yuni in the film Yuni and Sur's character in the film *Penyalin Cahaya*.

### a. Yuni Movie

The first movie that is the object of research in this paper is the movie Yuni.

#### Scene 1. 20.03 – 20.42



Figure 1: Scene 1. 20.03 – 20.42

#### *Denotation*

Sometime earlier, Yuni and her family received a visit from Iman and her parents in order to propose to Yuni. The incident circulated to her neighbors. Yunipun also received information about a scholarship offer to continue her studies from her teacher's mother but on the condition that she was not married. Then, one afternoon, Yuni, accompanied by her friend Sarah, still wearing her white and gray uniform, went to the person who had previously proposed to her named Iman at her work location in a factory area. In the field, Yuni asked the reason why Iman wanted to marry her. Instead of giving an answer to that reason, Iman responded that Yuni was in a hurry to know the reason, which she would find out after marriage. This made Yuni make a statement that she could not marry Iman. Then she immediately left Iman and left the location.

#### *Connotation*

In the scene, Yuni shows courage by going directly to Iman at her work location and making a statement that she cannot marry Iman without prior discussion with her parents. This shows masculinity in the form of Give em Hell which shows courage, and aggression and is able to take risks from the rejection statement.

**Scene 2. 24.53 – 26.18**

Figure 2: Scene 2. 24.53 – 26.18

***Denotation***

During a lesson at school, the martial arts coach offers who will practice dueling. Then Yuni raised his hand directly. Then the silat coach offered to other students, who would be his opponent. Several names of male students were mentioned. Then Agung came forward after his name was called by the Silat Coach. Then they both practiced dueling.

***Connotation***

Although the scene in the scene is not a fighting scene, in this case, Yuni shows courage to practice dueling, even without being appointed. Moreover, it can be seen when she is not afraid when her opponent is a male student. So it shows Give em hell which shows courage which can take risks and be Sturdy Oak Yuni feels she has strength and does not show weakness in facing silat duel training with male students.

**Scene 3. 1.01.09 – 1.03.40**

Figure 3: Scene 3. 1.01.09 – 1.03.40

***Denotation***

After Yuni went directly to Iman to say that she rejected Iman's proposal, after a while Mang Dodik came to the house and said he wanted to propose to Yuni. He had even given some

money in advance for Yuni to buy jewelry. Mang Dodik also said that he would give an additional 25 million if Yuni proved to be a virgin on the first night. When Yuni heard this, and felt sad because she could not voice her opinion to her family. So, Yuni went to Mang Dodik directly at his workplace to return a wad of dowry money wrapped in a brown envelope that had been given at the beginning when proposing and also stated that she could not accept Mang Dodik's proposal. At first, Mang Dodik thought it was because the dowry was not big enough. But Yuni then explained that she was no longer a virgin and hoped that this would not be told to others, especially her family. After listening to Yuni's reasoning, Mang Dodik was initially shocked and hoped that Yuni would pray a lot after this incident.

### ***Connotation***

In the scene, Yuni is able to show courage by going to the person who proposed to her herself to reject her proposal. She realized that there would be consequences that might occur for the rumors circulating that people who reject the proposal for the second time are Pamali and are considered to find it difficult to get a mate in the future. This shows Yuni's masculinity in the form of Give em Hell where it shows courage, and aggression and is able to take risks from the rejection statement, including being talked about in the surrounding community.

### **b. Penyalin Cahaya (Photocopier) Movie**

The second movie that will be the object of research in this paper is the movie Copyist of Light.

#### **Scene 1. (19.15 – 21.22)**



Figure 4: Scene 1. (19.15 – 21.22)

### ***Denotation***

Last night after attending a theater event, Suryani apparently went home unconscious. Which then made her wake up late and attend her scholarship interview. Upon entering the room, there were four male lecturers at the front, two to the right, and one lecturer to Suryani's left. Suryani was still wearing the green kebaya and batik cloth that she had worn the night before. This was also a concern for the lecturers during her scholarship interview. Moreover, Suryani looked surprised when Lecturer 1 showed on the LCD screen that Suryani was taking a selfie with a drink and uploading it on her social media. Moreover, the examiners questioned whether the clothes she was wearing and the ones in the photo were the same. Suryani tried to convince the examiners that she was not aware of taking the photo and uploading it on social media. She also pointed out that she still met the criteria for scholarship acceptance by meeting the IP numbers and class attendance. Due to the long discussion with Suryani and also the interview duration for Suryani's session had run out, the decision to accept the scholarship awaited the results of the discussion from the lecturer examiners.

### ***Connotation***

In this scene, Suryani looks unprepared as she enters the interview room for the scholarship. She herself had been drunk the night after the theater show and woke up in the morning without showering or changing her clothes and went straight to the campus. When she arrived at the campus, it turned out that the interview time for her was almost up. When the examining lecturer showed a photo from Suryani's social media that showed her drunk, she tried to explain that she was not the one who took the photo and uploaded it to social media. At that time, regardless of the truth of the photos, uploads, and drinking behavior the night before, Suryani was seen trying to continue to give reasons that she still deserved the scholarship because academically she still met the requirements or criteria for receiving the scholarship. This shows the courage of Give em Hell where even though Suryani's face looks pale she shows an aura of courage and aggression and is able to take risks even though it might mean that her scholarship will actually be revoked.

### **Scene 2. (33.40 – 35.15)**



Figure 5: Scene 2. (33.40 – 35.15)

### ***Denotation***

After the drunken photo on Suryani's social media that caused her to lose her scholarship, Suryani tried to figure out how she got home at 3 am, then realized that her underwear was

black and upside down and also wanted to find out more about what happened that night. Because she was kicked out of the house by her father, she went to stay overnight at the photocopier where Amin (her childhood friend) worked. Suryanipun took a long cable from the first floor and pulled it up to the second floor where she would steal data from theater friends who would print from Amin's photocopier. Initially, Suryani's idea was opposed by Amin, not only because he thought she was insane for taking other people's data but also because they were unmarried men and women who would live together for several days in one room.

### ***Connotation***

After receiving a letter from her university that Suryani would no longer receive a scholarship for not behaving well, she was kicked out of the house by her father. She continued to feel that there was something wrong with the events of that night. Knowing that Amin's photocopier had a lot of theater kids who often printed, including for visa needs to Japan. So Suryani had the idea to steal the data from the flash disk of the theater children to find out the sequence of events that night. This shows courage (Give em Hell) and also Suryani realizes the consequences of her actions. While she herself was still a junior in the theater group, she was not afraid to face the consequences if she was found out.

### **Scene 3. (35.30 – 38.11)**

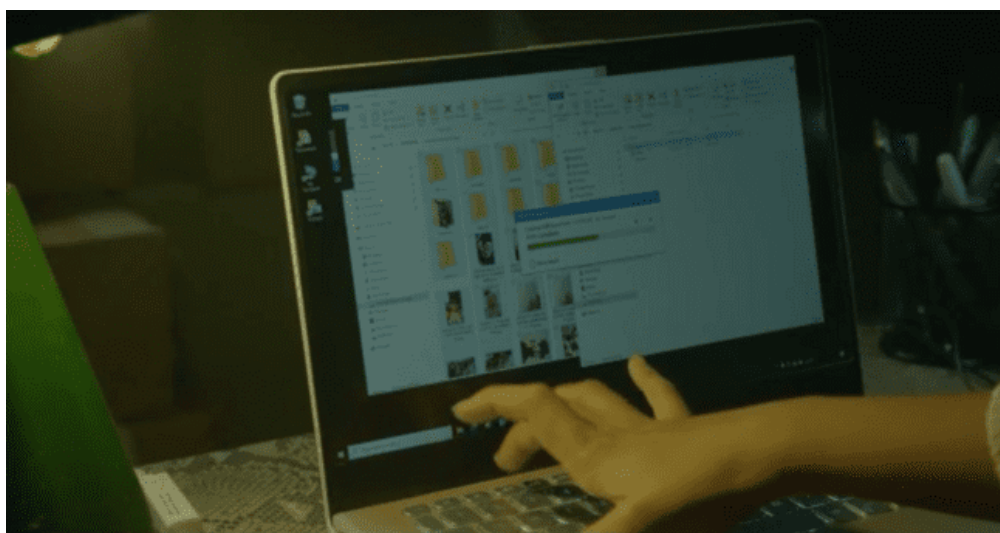


Figure 6: Scene 3. (35.30 – 38.11)

### ***Denotation***

Assisted by Amin, Suryani began her action of secretly taking data from the flash disks of theater members who stopped by Amin's photocopy place. Initially, she tried in student 1, but apparently, the print process was too fast so Suryani had not finished copying the data. So Suryani added a code that when a dangdut song was playing, it meant that Suryani had not finished copying the data, but when a rock song was playing, it meant that she could unplug the flash disk. This finally began to be tried on student 2. When student 2 had finished copying the data, and was about to unplug the pendrive, but Suryani had not finished copying Suryani immediately increased the volume of the dangdut song. Amin also immediately prevented Student 2 from unplugging the flash disk on the pretext that it needed to be cleaned using antivirus first. Once Suryani had finished copying the file and the rock song was playing, Amin allowed student 2 to unplug the flash disk.

### ***Connotation***

The idea to take data secretly from the theater kids who stopped by Amin's photocopy began. Starting from student 1, which turned out to be too fast, she began to use a bolder method by giving codes in the form of dangdut and rock songs. This code shows Suryani's courage in seeking information, even though there is a possibility that other people will start questioning why the wifi is broken. Give em hell's character further shows the courage in taking risks in student 2 when Amin is seen stalling student 2 to pull out his flash disk on the pretext of providing anti-virus.

### **Scene 3. (41.45 – 46.26)**

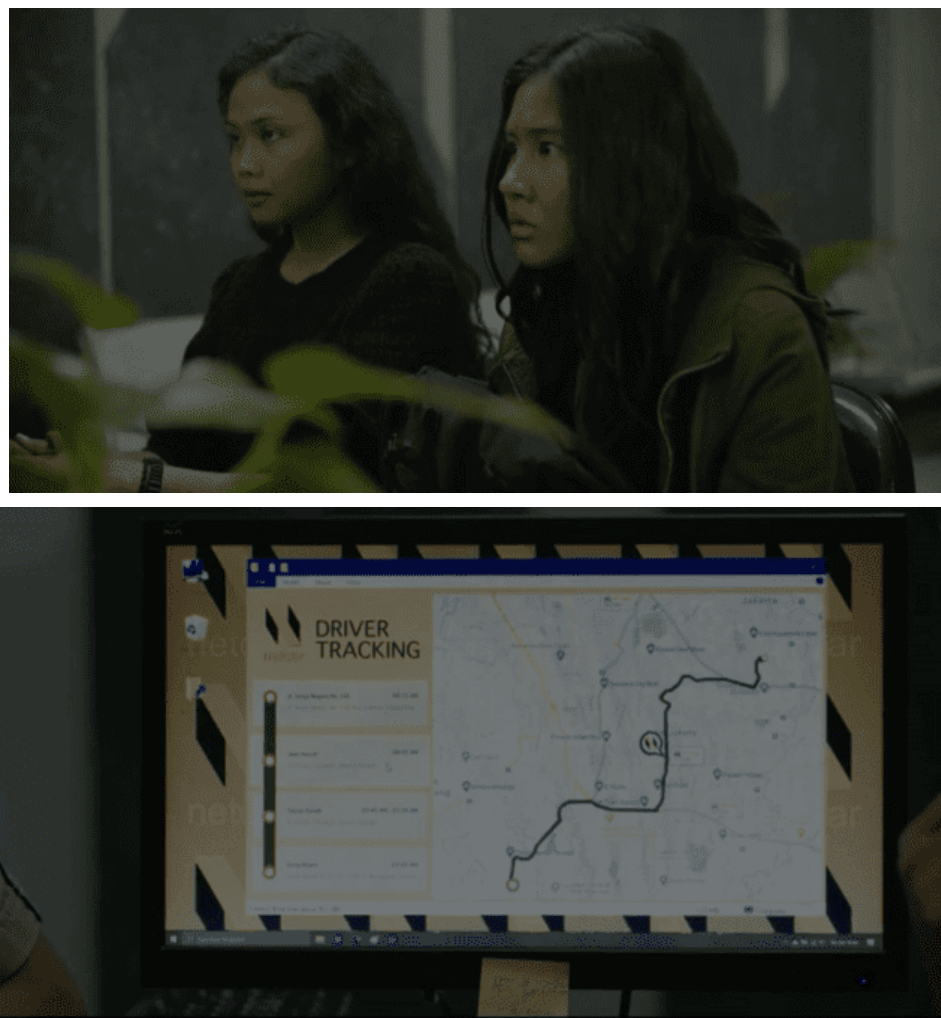


Figure 7: Scene 3. (41.45 – 46.26)

### ***Denotation***

After Suryani had previously heard from Farah about the irregularities in the process of sending Suryani home using Netcar even though the access to Rama's house was not easy, Suryani and Anggun went to the Netcar customer service office to ask about the Netcar driver tracking process that night. While talking to the customer service officer, Anggun explained why the process of delivery duration to the destination was delayed rather long. And it was true, according to the recording of the Netcar driver tracking process that night, the driver stopped for a long time at the Kendil park point. Then the Netcar officer called Mr. Burhanuddin. Shortly after, Mr. Burhanuddin came. He explained that that night because the



tire was leaking, he needed time to change the tire himself. They also went to Mr. Burhanuddin's car directly and saw the flat tire that was replaced at that time.

### ***Connotation***

Suryani needs to find out more about what happened that night until the delivery process that night. Despite inviting Anggun as the person who ordered Netcar that night, Suryani tried to find out more about the tracking driver that night. Give Em Hell, in this case, Suryani also shows courage by continuing to ask and find out even with external parties, in this case, the Netcar office.

### **Scene 4. (01.18.28 – 01.21.23)**



Figure 8: Scene 4. (01.18.28 – 01.21.23)

### ***Denotation***

After Suryani saw Rama's installation design, which she felt was similar to the birthmark on her back, she felt the need to find out information and data about Rama. So she asked Amin to invite Rama to come to Amin's photocopy place so that Suryani could access data from Rama's email. The email data and Rama's password had already been obtained by Suryani from the previous data collection in order to create emails for members of the Matahari Theater. Rama finally went to Amin's photocopy place. When Rama logged into her email, there was a notification on her cell phone to confirm and Rama confirmed it. Then when Suryani entered her email and password, a security alert notification appeared, Rama already looked suspicious and then screenshot his cellphone screen. Suryani began to get nervous because the security alert was not immediately confirmed, even though it sounded like Rama was about to go home, then Suryani turned off the electricity switch and one room on the first and second floors where Amin's photocopies were off.

### ***Connotation***

Unlike before when she took data from other theater students by copying and pasting data from their flashdisks, this time Suryani tried by entering Rama's email. This is of course with the suspicions and allegations that are getting closer to Rama. However, Suryani's boldness this time was not quite successful, because Rama had apparently smelled something odd when he got two security alert notifications on his cell phone for accessing his email.

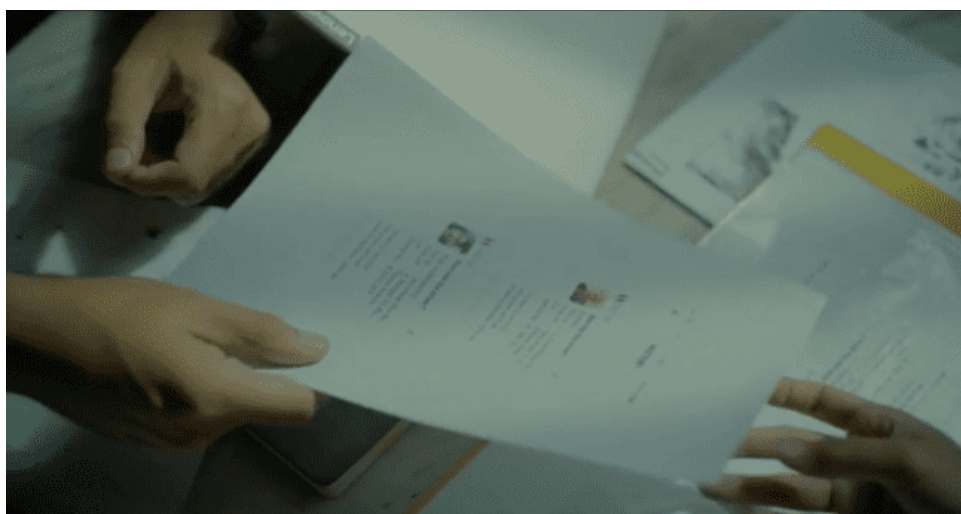
**Scene 5. ( 01.28.43 – 01.30.02)**

Figure 9. Scene 5. ( 01.28.43 – 01.30.02)

***Denotation***

After Suryani got the data about Rama's installation photo, Suryani's back photo and the data file of the location where the photo was taken in Kendil park, Suryani reported it to the Code of Ethics Lecturer at her campus. There she wanted to find out how to report Rama for this. Suryanipun hopes that her identity will be hidden from other parties.

***Connotation***

Armed with a lot of data that she had collected, Suryani conveyed it to the code of ethics of her campus. Previously, Suryani had met with Farah to jointly complain about this, but Farah refused. So it was only Suryani who came to meet with the Code of Ethics lecturer. Suryani's courage is seen in how she collected so much data and also went alone to meet with the lecturer when it was in order to report Rama for alleged indecent acts. Give Em Hell's characteristics show that she is brave but also aggressive to continue believing what she feels is right to report something that is not right.

**Scene 6. ( 01.35.30 – 01.37.00)**



Figure 10: Scene 6. (01.35.30 – 01.37.00)

### ***Denotation***

Like an anticlimax, the file sent by Suryani to the Code of Conduct lecturer that should have been kept confidential was shared with several people. In the end, Suryani, her mother, and Mr. Suryani were summoned by the faculty as well as Rama and his lawyers. In the forum, Suryani seemed not to be given space to speak the truth, and also by her father and the campus Suryani was asked to apologize. Which, afterward, in front of Rama, the legal authorities, recorded by her father and in front of some of her friends, Suryani finally apologized with a pained face for the accusations she had made to Rama Sumarno and the parties related to the allegations. The video was also played on a television in the campus area and was also witnessed by other students.

### ***Connotation***

The apology made by Suryani is not something that shows weakness. What she did was courageous and also showed a person who has strength and has the trait of being a Sturdy Oak. Even though she knew she was right, at that time the situation could not support the truth she believed in. At that time, he realized that there were no colleagues who supported him, his father and the campus continued to try to pressure him to settle in a family manner. Rama and his lawyer also said that an apology was enough, but if it was not done, it would be taken to legal channels. In this situation, Suryani tried to remain strong. She was not seen crying or showing excessive emotion. She tried to act calmly in the situation. In addition, Suryani also shows her No Sissy Stuff trait where she avoids things related to women such as whining or crying.

### **Discussion**

We know that the concept of gender, in this case, the terms masculinity and feminism, is associated with the cultural concepts that prevail in the environment. Masculinity is a construction of maleness for men. Men are not just born with masculine traits naturally, masculinity is shaped by culture. What determines the nature of women and men is culture (Barker). The nature of maleness is different in every culture. Masculinity itself is constructed by culture. The concept of masculinity in Eastern cultures such as in Indonesia is influenced by cultural factors.

The concept of masculinity at that time was often associated, no longer always with someone who was male but also female. In this case, to see that the concept of masculinity in culture seems to be slowly also carried out and practiced by women as well. For example, in the two movies above, namely the movie Yuni and the movie Copyist. Yuni, is a movie that tells the story of a woman named Yuni who actually has the desire to continue her dreams in college but her environment and family urge her to get married immediately. In this case, Yuni shows courage by rejecting the proposal to the man directly. Which, this has the consequence of being talked about and talked about in the neighborhood that Pamali women who reject proposals twice will find it difficult to find a mate. In addition to the context of the insistence on marriage, in the movie, the issue of virginity is also an issue raised, where it was also said by the man who proposed to Yuni that he would add some money if it was proven that during the first night, she was still a virgin.

Masculinity is often associated with the strength and courage to do something. What Yuni did when rejecting the proposal by meeting the men directly showed masculinity. Without thinking too much about the consequences of being talked about by neighbors, Yuni dared to say directly that she could not marry the man. Yuni felt unprepared and uncomfortable marrying someone, especially when she knew she would become a second wife. But what Yuni felt she could not reveal to her family or friends because it seemed to be taboo.

The second movie is titled Copyist of Light. In this film, the story is about a woman named Suryani who feels inappropriate treatment but she needs to find out about what really happened to her on the night of the theater party. Armed with her computer skills, she did many things including illegally accessing the data of her theater friends. She did this because she found it difficult to find out the truth about what she had received. Suryani's courage became an anticlimactic story when she finally had to make a video apology to Rama for her inappropriate accusations. But at that moment, there was a strength where she believed that the data and facts she found were true. And after that incident, finally, some friends came and helped him find out more about what the deeper story was about the incident that night.

Masculinity in the movie Penyalin Cahaya is seen in how Suryani uses many ways, including illegal ways, to get information and data about what happened to her. When she asks people, she is often underestimated and considered too complicated and fussy. The masculinity seen in this movie does not look like a heroic superhero movie story, but it seems that the perceived masculinity is actually closer to real-life stories. Masculinity that is close to courage is often still filled with fear, but also filled with curiosity, including trying to break down some of the more dominant or powerful parties materially or positionally. Courage in this case is the nature of Give em Hell but often he does it apparently leads to masculinity that can produce strength, namely Be Sturdy Oak and No Sissy Stuff. Despite being under pressure from various parties, Suryani tried to remain strong and unemotional and did not cry.

Films with depictions of female masculinity such as the two films above need to continue to be produced and watched by audiences because the implementation of gender regarding how men and women interact and treat each other can be different from one culture to another. Without the need to homogenize the treatment of men and women, we need to understand that this gendered context also needs to be updated according to the times and how women also need space to move and develop according to what they want, not just what the environment wants the concept of gender.

## Conclusion

There are two movie objects in this research, namely the movie Yuni and the Light Copier Movie. After conducting the corpus selection process in the movie scenes, it resulted in the following conclusions:

The movie Yuni represents masculine women who show courage in this case showing the nature of Give Em Hell where she dares to meet directly with men who have previously proposed to her. In this case, she dared to take risks for what she did. She also shows Be a Sturdy Oak by daring to try a duel with her opponent a male student.

The film Copyist of Light represents a masculine woman who shows her courage, namely the Give em Hell trait where she continues to stick to her principles to find out about what happened on the night of her theater party and what happened to her at that time. Her courage also remained firm when she was in a situation where the file that should have been included in the Code of Ethics Board's investigation was deliberately distributed and Suryani was pressured by her father, the faculty, and Rama and his attorney to settle the matter in a family manner or proceed to court. Finally, Suryani had to make a video apology. However, this is not a weakness but instead shows the strength or nature of being Sturdy Oak because in these conditions he looks strong, looks calm, and does not get carried away by emotions.

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## *The Glocalization Strategy of Contemporary Thai Cinema*

Sopawan Boonnimitra, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand  
Peerachai Kerdsint, Bangkok University, Thailand

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### **Abstract**

Since the success of *Bad Genius* (2017, Nattawut Poonpiriya), the most recent international success story in Thai cinema, Thai content has proven itself as a subject of interest in the global market. Following its success, many Thai filmmakers attempted to follow this formula. They utilized local culture and beliefs in order to attract international audiences. Although this situation is not unique to Thai cinema, being observable elsewhere. This cinematic strategy is part of a wider response to the effects of globalism. It exemplifies what Roland Robertson (1995) says, explaining that the spheres of global and local are not opposites. Instead, the latter is 'essentially included within the global.' Particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, with the subsequent intense transformation of the media industry, a rethinking of these binaries is increasingly useful for our understanding of the current situation. This paper takes a close look at this current trend, in how Thai filmmakers engages with globalization through the following films: *The Medium* (2021, Banjong Pisanthanakul), and *Hunger* (2023, Sitisiri Mongkolsiri). Both were created during the rise of streaming media, particularly Netflix, alongside the cooperation between national and transnational industries.

Keywords: Thai Cinema, Glocalization, Transnational Cinema

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## Introduction

The year 2017 marked an important phase for the development of the Thai film industry. The year saw the release of *Bad Genius* (2017, Nattawut Poonpiriya), grossing over 30 million US dollars internationally, became the most successful film in Thai history. This film is atypical of the romance or horror fare foreign audiences usually associate with Thai cinema. Instead, it centers on a group of high school students who run a test-cheating scheme for financial gain. It is not a standard high school student film, but rather, a heist-style thriller outside the norms of Thai cinema. Moreover, Netflix was first introduced to Thai audiences in 2017. Both events changed the Thai film industry. While the former proved that Thai content could compete as a subject of interest for global consumers, the latter offered a chance for newcomers of Thai cinema to access an international market. Both events propelled a kind of film-making that uses the local contents of culture in order to attract global audiences. This paper takes a closer look at examples of this current trend through the following films: *The Medium* (2021, Banjong Pisanthanakul), and *Hunger* (2023, Sitisiri Mongkolsiri). These were created during the rise in popularity of streaming media, particularly Netflix, as well as the cooperation between national and transnational industries. While the first film was made from the cooperation between Korean and Thai filmmakers, the latter is a Netflix Original. I will argue that these films provide insight into the complex relationship between global and local forces, how their interaction materializes in Thai cinema.

I am aided by Roland Robertson (1995), positing that the spheres of global and local are not opposites. Instead, the latter is 'essentially included within the global' (Robertson, 1995, p. 35). According to Peter Beyer (2022), who studies the works of early scholars on globalization including J.P. Nettl, Roland Robertson, George Modelski, and Wilbert E. Moore, 'the international or global orientation did not supersede the national or local; rather the fundamental idea was that local or national societies were still primary but that they operated, and to a significant degree constituted themselves, in relation to one another in an international or global whole' (p. 3). Robertson (1995) introduces the term 'glocalization' as a much needed concept. The term globalization suggests that locality is overridden completely. At the same time, what is often neglected about the local is that, in varying degrees, it is constructed on a trans-local basis (1995, p.26). Although Robertson's 'glocalization' theory highlight how global corporations employs local marketing strategy, by respecting diversity and cultural differences, Dirlik (2018) notes that this may play into capital interest. He argues that 'to admit different cultures into the realm of capital, only to break them down and to remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption' (p.93). Although the local is not purely a site for the manipulations of capitalist operations; there will always be something left out and unturned that complicates the task. Furthermore for Robertson (1995), 'glocalization' 'may have seriously underestimated the flow of ideas and practices from the so-called Third World to the seemingly dominant societies and regions in the world'(p.38-39). In a way, 'glocalization' can also be used by the local, a metonym for the so-called Third World here, as a strategy for accessing global markets (Robertson, 1995, p. 40). My argument is that the transnational film industry brings to the fore Robertson's idea of 'glocalization'. This is particularly relevant now with the technological transformation of media, as well as the industrial shift towards international collaboration. Through a closer look at the *The Medium* and *Hunger*, I will analyse them as sites where local and global are encountered, revealing the complexity of their relationship. In the following, I will trace the ways glocalization has impacted the film industry, becoming redefined post-pandemic, while lending context for the Thai film industry today.



## Glocalization & Cinema

Throughout the history of cinema, Hollywood has dominated the world in terms of numbers and revenue. It has successfully made national cinema a global phenomenon. While it has become a dominant mode of filmmaking, it has been criticized for its ethnocentrism. The racial other, including but not limited to African, Asian, and Latin American others, are often portrayed as savage, violence, and primitive. There has been many attempts by other countries, according to Bala A. Musa (2022), ‘to seize their own national narratives, as well as their desire to reap economic benefits from developing their film industries and also emancipate themselves from cultural and media imperialism’ (p. 278). This, in turn, has led towards a glocalization of culture and communication. The Post-Second World War period has led to many developments in national cinema or so-called New Wave cinema across the globe, from Europe to Latin America and Africa. This emergence was closely linked to the proliferation of film festivals in European countries. Film festivals, as suggested by SooJeong Ahn (2012), aligned itself with regenerative projects focusing on the national levels in many European countries in Post-Second World War (p.8). The notion of national cinema in film festivals persists today despite the influx of transnational finance and technological and the global circulation of media (Ahn, 2012, p.8).

Film festivals continue to promote categories such as World Cinema, Cinema from the South, Asian Cinema, African Cinema, among many others that specify location. The growing number of film festivals around the world has helped to fit filmmakers into this mold. While these films need to stand on their own artistic merits, it is equally important that they are rooted in their cultural identity. According to Bill Nichols (1994):

Films from nations not previously regarded as prominent film-producing countries receive praise for their ability to transcend local issues and provincial tastes while simultaneously providing a window onto a different culture. We are invited to receive such films as evidence of artistic maturity – the work of directors ready to take their place within an international fraternity of *auteur* – and of a distinctive national culture – work that remains distinct from Hollywood-based norms both in style and theme. (p. 16)

The interplay between the local and the global is thereby at the heart of national cinema since the very beginning. Being part of global film culture allows the promotion of such films through the international stage of film festivals. As Kim Soyoun (1998) suggests ‘the international-scale film festivals in particular thrive on the manifold manifestations of the global and the local and the national and the local’ (p. 176). Filmmakers around the world have targeted the film festival circuit and strategically follow its trends. By diverting from the norm of Hollywood in both style and content, in emphasizing its own cultural identity, each filmmaker attempts to find his or her *auteur* signature.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, Thai cinema has caught the attention of international film festivals through the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and other so-called Thai New Wave directors, including Pen-ake Rattanaruang, Wisit Sassanathieng. Thai filmmakers have found an alternative route beyond the big studios that dominated the Thai film industry at the time. Since then, many filmmakers have gone independent through the film festival path. This means independence in mode of production, via film festival’s funding schemes and co-production, as well as exhibition and distribution. The awareness of cultural identity in line with international tastes, as set by film festival programmers, has been ingrained among

younger generation of filmmakers. However, as in many countries, the success of Thai filmmakers in international film festivals may not directly correlate with the development of national filmmaking. The complex relationship between national cinema and film festival needs to be further unraveled.

In the past five years, the film industry has undergone major changes particularly on the technological front, evidenced by the number of various platforms that have entered the Thai market. The Covid-19 pandemic also played a transformative role. Both have accelerated the popularity of online film viewing in Thailand, with a number of Thai films originating in platforms such as Netflix. Film co-production across borders have also gained momentum in Southeast Asia. Previously, the European film fund often required European partnership, but they have allowed an open option for non-European partnership. Additionally, Korea-Southeast Asia Co-Productions have been on the rise since the late 2010s. Due to the saturated state of their own markets, many major film companies sought alternative channels for growth and market expansion (Seonghoon, 2017). Their strategies can be thought as attempts at 'localization' as Yoon In-ho, head of CJ Entertainment's public relation team realized. He notes that 'Hollywood movies are universal, but in contrast, Korean movies face culture and language barriers' (Seonghoon, 2017). This has resulted in film companies launching remakes of *Miss Granny* across China, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia since 2015.—In recent years, the ample opportunities for collaboration has produced a new breed of Thai films made with different partners for international audiences. The following section will explore how the local is presented to the world using examples of Thai cinema.

### **The Recent Cases of Glocalization in Thai Film Industry**

It is now commonplace for filmmakers around the world to work together, crossing borders, to produce films. This is demonstrated by Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021), made in Columbia, and *The Medium* (2021), being a cooperation between Thai and Korean filmmakers. The latter was produced and written by Na Hong-Jin, a respected and successful Korean filmmaker, and directed by Banjong Pisanthanakun, whose film *Pee Mak* (2014) grossed the highest for national films in Thai history. *The Medium* (2021) is about a shaman's spiritual inheritance in Northeastern Thailand. The film centers, in mockumentary style, on what the diegetic camera sees as the film crew follows the shaman, Nim. Inheriting the spirit of Ba Yen, the shaman seeks to transfer this entity onto her niece Mink, while watching over her transformation. However, something entirely different possesses Mink, something evil that will destroy everything around her.

This film was highly anticipated, being a collaboration between two film directors who made their names through horror films. The film is also co-invested by GDH and Showbox, whose previous investment included *The Host* (Bong Joon Ho, 2006.). It started with Hong-Jin's original story about a shaman's inheritance in Korea; he later asked Pisanthanakun to direct and place into a Thai context. Hong-Jin's intention was to make a film for international audiences that cannot be neatly categorized as either Thai or Korean. For him, Thai horror films have the potential to reach the top of world cinema. In an interview, Hong Jin said 'Thai horror films are much more daring, primitive and tremendously exotic to me. Korean horror films – we have our own style but it seems similar to the Hollywood style and I wanted to differentiate from that' (Noh, 2021). Initially, Hong Jin started the project with Korean's version of shamanism but he found it too similar to his previous film, *The Wailing* (2016), that also focused on shamanistic belief. He instead wanted to locate it in more exotic locations like Thailand or Indonesia. He then asked Pisanthanakun to localize the story and

contextualize it within Thai culture. For Pisanthanakun, Thai horror genre has been on par with horror films from Japan and Korea, particularly with his first film *Shutter* (2004). He believes these three countries have given birth to what he terms ‘vengeful crawling lady in white’, a trope catching international attention, including Hollywood with its numerous adaptations (Supateerawanitt, 2021). Pisanthanakun has definite experience using local cultural beliefs about the spiritual world in order to attract international audiences.



Figure 1: *The Medium* (Banjong Pisanthanakun, 2021) Official Poster

The collaboration between these two filmmakers, demonstrated by how the script was co-created by Hong-Jin, Banjong Pisanthanakun and Chantavit Dhanasevi, long time Pisanthanakun’s collaborator, the element of shamanism has been made trans- local through the resonances and differences of both cultures. The film creates a new aesthetics combining local beliefs of animism, the natural immanence of spirits in humans, trees, or animals, with some of Korean’s original shamanistic ideas that global audiences could understand. This belief is distinctively different from western ideas about the supernatural. Furthermore, this use of animism is similar to Weerasethakul’s use in *Tropical Malady* (2004). It is this exotic belief that attracts international audiences in both films. Both feature transformation, one more animalist as suggested by the Thai version of the title *Sat Pralaat* meaning strange beast, while the other focuses on the devil. Many scholars, including Chelsea Birks and May Adadol Ingawanich, draw on regional historic context. Birks (2021) suggests that ‘the opposition between matriarchal-syncretic animism and patriarchal- monological Buddhism’ provides the appropriate framework in reading Weerasethakul’s film (p. 60). Weerasethakul’s work is similar to *The Medium* in its Northeastern Thai setting as well as sharing belief systems. Both films suggest that the space between animal and human, spirit world and real world, are ambiguous and permeable. This differs from western notions of the spiritual world contained by discrete boundaries. With the spirits and animals in *The Medium* holding grudges against the human world, all hell can truly break loose.

*The Medium* employs the conventions of internationally recognized horror sub-genres of the zombie film, as well as possession movies like *The exorcist* (1973). The zombie genre is popular not only in the West but also in Asian countries as of recently. This is found in many recent films and series from Korea and Japan, including *Zombiverse* (series, 2023), *Zom 100: Bucket List of the Dead* (2023), *Alive* (2020). *The Medium* may specify locality while also translating very well across culture; Mink’s possession and horrifying transformation resonates with demonic possession beliefs in the West. In terms of style, the film’s similarity to *Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007), using documentary style

footage and closed-circuit images, would be familiar for global audiences. Its mockumentary style, which the *Blair Witch Project* (1999) made famous, heightens the potential horror of the *The Medium* lending to its popularity among mainstream viewers. Filming *The Medium* this way was Hong-jin's first idea when he presented it to Pisanthanakun.

As a result, *The Medium* did quite well in both the Korea and Thailand box office during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was the 6<sup>th</sup> highest grossing Korean film of 2021. It also received 'Best of Bucheon' award at 25<sup>th</sup> Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival (BIFAN) in South Korea, that focused on horror, thriller, mystery and fantasy. The film was distributed by French distributor, The Jokers Films, which also released Korean films *Parasite* (Bong Joon Ho, 2019) and *The Handmaiden* (Park Chan-wook, 2016). It was also chosen as original feature for the streaming platform Shudder in the US. This has proven that stories about shamanistic practice in rural Thailand can cross borders. In a way, the success story of *The Medium* is reflected by the character of Shaman Santi, who has been asked to exorcise the dark force from Mink. The viewer sees Santi not only as a revered shaman, through the extravagant ceremonies of different faiths, but also as a representative of mercantile interests. In his opening scene, Nim asks him why he is still involved with these clowns, referring to him putting on an exotic ceremony. He replies that he has to make a living. What he says could suggest that the world today makes faith and capitalism inseparable, no longer diametrically opposed. We can see the process of glocalization attempting to reduce local cultures into exotic merchandise, whether that be in a free market or in this case a global platform.

*Hunger* is an original Netflix production, meaning that it was commissioned, produced and distributed by Netflix. Although what this means in terms of Netflix original or 'original film' is quite misleading. 'Original film' not only encompasses films commissioned or co-produced by Netflix but also includes those that are exclusively distributed by Netflix. *Hunger* has been distributed in over 190 countries. It is about a young talented cook, Aoy, who wants to advance her social status by training under the ruthless chef, Chef Paul. The leading cast features well-known actress Chutimon Chuengcharoensukying, who made her name in *Bad Genius*. It also stars Nopachai Chaiyanam, a veteran actor who appeared in two of Pen-Ake Rattanaurung films, *Nymph* and *Headshot*, previously shown in the international film festival circuit. *Hunger*, at the time of its release, was at number one for new releases.



Figure 2: *Hunger* (Sitisiri Mongkolsiri, 2023)

Netflix has particularly grown in popularity during the pandemic as viewers sought to find home comfort during the 2020 lockdown. In 2021, Netflix had 200 million subscribers, 36

million signing up in 2020 (Morrison, 2023, p. 84). Netflix have used original content to attract global audiences across the globe. They began releasing their own productions in 2015, increasing since then in both quantity and quality. Evidence of the latter is seen in films such as *Okja* (2017), *Roma* (2018) and *The Irishman* (2019), garnering praise in international film festivals and even receiving Oscar nominations. These original films have become integrated into world film culture rooted in various countries across the globe. In 2016, at International Consumer Electronics Show, CEO of Netflix Reed Hasting says that:

We are shooting a sports comedy in Mexico, a crime drama in Italy, a dystopian film about bioengineering in Korea. The possibilities of building connections between cultures and people are endless and important, that's why we're here to talk this morning. We're gonna talk about how the Internet is changing television and how we're at the start of a global revolution.

According to Colin Jon Mark (2021), his speech 'showcases the emergence of Netflix's discourse of "glocalization": producing local, non-English content to distribute globally and instantaneously' (p. 83). This means that, as Mareike Jenner (2018) argues, Netflix was keen to commission content that suited the popular tastes of a growing international audience (p. 139). In 2020, 60 % of Netflix's media content were made in languages other than English. These productions were successful beyond their original countries of origin. This has proven that localized content can appeal to global audiences. However, localized productions never operate as standalone operations. They are supervised and coordinated for achieving global efficiency. Netflix's transnational strategy combines localized adaptation and global standardization (Evens and Donders, 2018, p. 113).

In 2021, Netflix appointed Yongyoot Thongkongtoon, veteran filmmaker from GDH studios, as Director of Content for Thailand. They also appointed Lee Chatametikool, well-known editor and independent filmmaker, as Director of Post-production for Southeast Asia and Taiwan in 2022. The merge between mainstream film industry and independent sector into one conglomerate company has suggestively closed the gap between mainstream and independent film audiences, while focusing on international audiences. *Hunger* was made with global viewers in mind. It is not surprising that one of the film's originators is Soros Sukhum. Being well-known among international film festivals, many of his produced films have been shown in festivals for the last twenty years. He knows what kinds of films attract international audiences. Another important figure is Kongdej Jaturanrasamee, who was credited as writer and producer of the film. He is a long-time collaborator of Soros Sukhum and his films also screened at various film festivals. Both Sukhum and Jaturanrasamee understand how glocalization works, seen in both their filmograp *Tang Wong* (2013), *Snap* (2015), and *Where We Belong* (2019), all having successful runs in the international film festival circuit.

In an interview with the director of *Hunger*, Sitisiri Mongkolsiri, he says he wanted to focus on food in his film because Thailand is known for its cuisine. He said 'when I look at the street, you see people cooking and eating all the time, and this goes on around the clock' (Doton, 2023). It is what most foreigners associate Thailand with. The film is unsurprisingly praised for its stunning visuals, particular with its food scenes. Food has become a feast for the eyes in par with the high value production guaranteed by the Netflix standard. Mongkolsiri chooses to portray both street food as represented by Aoy, taking over her father to cook the family's own Thai stir-fried noodle, *Pad Si-ew*, and fine dining as represented by Chef Paul in comparison. For Mongkolsiri, this comparison portrays Thailand because 'In

one place you might have something very luxurious and a street next to it, you'll see poverty. They're just mixed together in the same area' (Doton, 2023). Although the film might attract global viewers with food, particularly Thai food, its real message is about the universal subject of class division. It is an expectation that international audiences might be expected from when they watch Thai films, a kind of Third World issue they are familiar with. This is a concept originated by Western thought but clearly demonstrated by other world regions, as capitalism universally creates inequality that amplify class divisions. Films like *Parasite* have done the impossible in making a foreign film win the Oscar in 2020, while highlighting a bleak vision of capitalism where rich and poor are worlds apart. Issues of class still strike a chord among oversea viewers as inequality occurs not only in Third World counties, but are deeply rooted in every rich nation of the world. Mongkolsiri believes that this makes his film relatable for different audiences, saying that 'we live in an age of capitalism, even if you don't understand the language, I think everyone can relate to the movie' (Koh, 2023).

In the film, food has become a vehicle for addressing social inequality. Chef Paul, the main protagonist, cooks only for the rich and powerful. They are represented by a retired and powerful General; a group of young 'new money'; and a privileged businessman all trying to get closer to the epicenter of power. The differences between the two worlds can also be explicitly seen through food. While Chef Paul's food is elaborately displayed, at times raw and bloody, Aoy's street food is simple. Not only does the film address social inequality, it also addresses how patriarchy dominates every sector of society, treating women as subordinates. The film threads the universal themes of Third world society as typically expected.

## Conclusion

This paper attempts to demonstrate how glocalization has impacted the Thai film industry and how it has reframed the way local filmmakers engage with global markets. I contextualize this in a time of increasing cooperation and coordination between national and transnational in the past few years.—Through the films *The Medium* (2021) and *Hunger* (2023), I attempt to reveal the complexities of global-local relationships in the process of filmmaking. For Robertson, combining global-local refers to the fact that globalization often involves 'the adaptation of panlocal developments to local circumstances' (Roudometof and Dessi, 2022, p. 6). With big corporations, in this case Showbox and Netflix, glocalization has become a business strategy for expanding their territories and audiences.

The growth of international mega-companies like Korea's Showbox or global media platforms like Netflix, Amazon, or Disney have forced them to become localized. This is in order to compete for fresh and exotic local content to present to the global market. Contrasting with Robertson's glocalization, George Ritzer has coined a new term 'grobalization' to describe this. Ritzer (2007) focuses on the 'imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves in various geographic areas' (p. 15). Ritzer sees 'grobalization' as 'a way of conceptualizing the tendency toward homogenization within the process of globalization, with glocalization representing instead the trend towards heterogenization and hybridity' (Roudometof and Dessi, 2022, p. 7). These two contradictory trends, grobalization and glocalization, are both present in both films. While on one hand, cross cooperation works towards rating and profitability, the local sphere hopes to put forward unique cultural identity while sustaining domestic industry. Although much of what is local may curtail or tailor to

the global. Both films may be different from their local industry in content or visual styles, they nonetheless stay within their superficial exoticism.

The future is uncertain on further collaborations of global-local. With Ritzer's negative view of capitalism, globalization will inevitably move towards globalization. Diversity and difference will be left behind, being represented as an exotic Other, or at its best incorporated by the global. Eventually, it will be transposed into the glocal. As Victor Roudometof and Ugo Dessi (2022) suggest, 'the spread of globalization means that the local disappears; all that is left is the global and that, of course, is insufficient for challenging capitalism' (p. 7). It remains to be seen whether the real-life ending will be as predictable as the ending of these films.

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**Contact email:** [leave2remain0@gmail.com](mailto:leave2remain0@gmail.com)



***Determined, Brave and Loving Her Job:  
A Female War Correspondent in the First World War***

Gabriella Jeki, Károli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church, Hungary

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**Abstract**

In wartime, communication is of most importance, especially when it comes to shaping public opinion. In fact, journalists play an indisputable role in deciding what information, in what form, and with what content reaches the readers. This significance was even more crucial at the turn of the century, during the birth of journalism. Throughout the First World War, the media became the highly acclaimed fourth branch of power, capable of exerting a fundamental influence on the course of historical events. In my presentation, I will follow the journey of a war correspondent who visited 14 countries during the four years of the war. This Hungarian journalist was also a woman, taking on this perilous job in a world where women's social roles were primarily limited to the triad of housewife, wife, and mother. However, Margit Vészi was among the first to go to the frontlines as the only female war correspondent from the Faculty of War Correspondents of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (on the Hungarian side), representing the daily newspaper, *Az Est*. How did she endure the horrors of war? How did she present the events? Whom did she meet at the front, and how did she manage to conduct interviews and gather information? Where did she find the courage to fulfill her duties? Margit Vészi had more than a hundred articles published in the Hungarian-language press, and her reports were also picked up by Italian newspapers, for example. She wrote two volumes of reports about her experiences in the war.

Keywords: Journalism, Media, Correspondent, History, Articles, Communication

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## Introduction

The journalism profession has a long history and has undergone many significant changes. The first practitioners used pamphlets and manuscripts to disseminate information, but industrialisation and advances in newspaper technology allowed cheaper and faster printing, which revolutionised the work of journalists. At the turn of the 20th century, journalists were able to increase their influence by spreading the news faster and reaching a wider readership. In this era, their role increasingly became one of disseminating information, maintaining objectivity, and critically assessing society. However, it is important to note that the journalistic profession has been constantly changed and transformed by new technologies and social changes in the media, facing challenges and opportunities, both now and in the future.<sup>1</sup>

During the First World War, journalists played a major role in covering events and spreading the news. However, content producers faced numerous challenges in a wartime environment, made more difficult by technological limitations and fragmented political, economic, and cultural interests. Journalists encountered censorship, dangerous working environments, physical difficulties, communication barriers, psychological burdens, propaganda, manipulation, language and cultural challenges, difficulties in accessing information. In this paper, I also explore the gatekeeping role of journalists at the turn of the century, who faced unprecedented responsibilities during the outbreak of the First World War. This period coincided with a peak in propaganda and manipulation, and a significant shift in the public's communication arena.

The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries also marked the beginning of another important change: the first women journalists and war correspondents emerged, breaking out of traditional social roles such as wife, mother, and housewife. During this period, women in Europe had limited opportunities to become involved in public life. They were mainly employed as factory workers, and there were 'typically' female professions such as lecturer, nanny, and governess, etc. It seemed impossible for them to have any role in the male-dominated bourgeois labour market. However, a few bold women, resistant to conventions but capable of creating financial independence or security, recognized the potential of literature, drama, visual arts, and later journalism from the second half of the 19th century. Women who aspired to the public sphere also discovered that the press was one of the best and most important platforms for expressing their opinions, presenting and discussing issues affecting society.

In this study, I focus on Margit Vészi, a female war correspondent for *Az Est* newspaper, who served as the on-the-spot war correspondent at the Austro-Hungarian War Correspondents' Corps (known as the *Kriegspresseshauptquartier*<sup>2</sup>) during World War I (1914-1918). As the only Hungarian female war correspondent in this role, Vészi challenged prevailing views of the time and fought for information alongside men on the battlefield. Over the course of the war, she traveled to fourteen countries, wrote more than a hundred articles, and created visual content such as photographs and caricatures. Her professional career and personal biography provide valuable insights, offering a previously unexplored perspective on understanding the challenges faced by women war correspondents of her time. This includes their emotional

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<sup>1</sup> Lippmann, Walter (1920): *Liberty and the News*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

<sup>2</sup> Balla Tibor (2016). Az osztrák–magyar Sajtóhadiszállás szervezete és tevékenysége a Nagy Háborúban. In Bertényi Iván, & Boka László, & Katona Anikó (Eds.): *Propaganda – politika, hétköznapi és magas kultúra, művészet és média a Nagy Háborúban* (pp. 273–286). Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár.

experiences, information-gathering methods, and professional challenges, shedding light on their methods of informing the public.

### **The Role of Journalists: Changes at the Turn-of-the-Century**

Between 1870 and 1910, the population of Hungary increased one and a half times (from 5 million to 7.5 million), while the number of periodical press products continued to rise year by year. Indeed, the growth in the population has brought with it a growing readership, particularly as literacy has increased. This was not by chance: The Hungarian education system in the 19th century adapted to the trends in international educational development: compulsory schooling was introduced for the 6-12 age group, which was later extended to the regular schooling of the 10-14 age group, justified for social and economic reasons.<sup>3</sup> This led to the introduction of compulsory, free, eight-grade primary education at the turn of the century, which in turn led to the development of literacy skills. By 1896, 79 percent of children were attending school, a number that increased to 93 per cent by 1913. This successive process helped to expand the ranks of journalistic readers, and more narrowly, the emergence of journalism as a specific profession and thus the number of journalists.

During the turn of the century, there was an explosion in communications and technical infrastructure, while printing became more widespread. Press products became increasingly diversified, road networks and postal systems were built, settlements developed, and the demand for information grew, significantly contributing to the development of public spirit and the rebirth of the concept of the public sphere. The role of press and of journalists changed and was valorised, and they were given a perhaps unprecedented social responsibility. Newspapers could now reach every corner of the country, thanks to economic and social development mentioned above. Journalists played a crucial role in providing valuable and informative content, facilitating the transformation of individual opinions into public opinion.<sup>4</sup> This shift in journalism was closely linked to historical events, particularly the First World War, leading journalists to assume a significant social responsibility during this period.

The devices that are now taken for granted and are part of everyday life, such as the telephone, the camera, the copier printer, as well as revolutionary modes of transportation like the car and the aeroplane, were a novelty for the public. The rapid development of technology fundamentally transformed the daily lives of individuals and communities, who became increasingly interested in world and national events, happenings. The power of media has always rested in its ability to raise public spirits to national and international levels.<sup>5</sup> During this period, the press emerged as the most influential information tool, shaping public and political opinion and, more specifically, public taste.<sup>6</sup> Journalists played a pivotal role, transitioning from mere editorial storytellers to history-makers, who with enormous responsibility, willingly or unwillingly took on a social role, especially during the First World War.

With the outbreak of the First World War, some of the journalists who had previously worked on editorial staff, perhaps travelling the countryside, were sent to the front lines. A new and

<sup>3</sup> Kelemen Elemér (2002). *Fordulópont a magyar oktatás történetében*. In Kelemen Elemér (Eds.): *Hagyomány és korszerűség. Oktatáspolitikai a 19-20. századi Magyarországon* (pp. 17-70). Budapest: Új Mandátum.

<sup>4</sup> "A nyilvánosság politikai színterei" by Szak Andrea: [http://real.mtak.hu/82574/1/ht2018\\_2\\_120\\_127\\_u.pdf](http://real.mtak.hu/82574/1/ht2018_2_120_127_u.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Róka Jolán (2002): *Kommunikációtan*. Budapest: Századvég Kiadó

<sup>6</sup> Tarde, Gabriel (1906): *Essay in Sociological Theory*. New York: Michael Marks Davis Books.

unprecedented period of change for the profession was about to begin. Their roles have changed rapidly, and they faced many more challenges in their daily lives than before. These journalists, later known as war correspondents, had to clearly distinguish between fact and opinion, find a balance, focus on thoroughness and the principles of objectivity.<sup>7</sup>

### Challenges and Opportunities for Women Journalists

The women journalists who emerged in the second half of the 19th century, at the turn of the century, including Margit Vészi mentioned in the introduction, often had to contend with the social expectations and prejudices of the time, but their diligence and talent (determination and perhaps daring) eventually brought about a major breakthrough not only in the journalistic profession but also in the perception of women. They were soon able to write on subjects that had previously been the exclusive domain of men: first on cultural and artistic issues, then on politics or social problems.<sup>8</sup> In any case, the role and importance of women journalists gradually increased alongside women writers at the turn of the century, greatly increasing the diversity of cultural and press life. The road to this was therefore often fraught with difficulties during this very traumatic period in history.

Women were already reporting on the war in the mid-19th century, albeit in a very restrained and modest style, in keeping with the historical narrative.<sup>9</sup> Among the first to do so were American journalist Jane Cazneau,<sup>10</sup> who covered the Mexican-American conflict in 1846, and Margaret Fuller,<sup>11</sup> who reported from the front lines of the first Italian War of Independence in 1848-49. Although a member of the next generation, Martha Gellhorn,<sup>12</sup> who covered almost every major conflict of the 20th century, from the Spanish Civil War to the Vietnam and Arab-Israeli wars, should also be mentioned.

Although women's war reporting as a relatively accepted profession and concept may only have been around since the late 1930s, by the time of the First World War there were already some brave and determined women who volunteered to report from the front line (or its environs). Very few of them were accredited to press headquarters under the direct command of the army. In addition, the Allied and Central Powers strictly limited the access of

<sup>7</sup> Deuze, Mark (2005): What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, 6., 442–463.

<sup>8</sup> Kérchy Anna (2015). Hebrencs kisleányból kötelességtudó honleány. Nőképváltozások a Magyar Lányok hetilap első világháború alatti lapszámaiban. *Médiakutató*, 2015 Summer. XVI.2, 81-95.

<sup>9</sup> Seul, Stephanie (2019): Women War Reporters. In Ute Daniel, & Peter Gatrell, & Oliver Janz, & Heather Jones, & Jennifer Keene, & Alan Kramer, & Bill Nasson (Eds.), *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin

<sup>10</sup> Jane Cazneau (1807-1878) was a prominent American journalist, editor, and diplomat known for her influential contributions during the 19th century. With a fearless and outspoken demeanor, she became a trailblazer in the world of journalism, covering topics ranging from politics to women's rights. Cazneau's impactful writings and diplomatic endeavors left a lasting legacy, marking her as a significant figure in American history.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) was a pioneering American journalist, critic, and women's rights advocate in the 19th century. An influential transcendentalist thinker, she served as the first female editor of the literary magazine "The Dial" and was known for her insightful essays and literary criticism. Fuller's groundbreaking work, including her book "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," challenged societal norms and contributed significantly to the early feminist movement in the United States. She remains a celebrated figure in American literature and feminist history.

<sup>12</sup> Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998) was a pioneering American journalist and novelist, celebrated for her courageous reporting from major 20th-century conflicts, including the Spanish Civil War and World War II. As one of the first female war correspondents, her powerful narratives and insightful observations made her a respected figure in journalism and literature, leaving a lasting impact on both fields.

journalists to the war zones, yet a significant number of women managed to gain entry to or around the front lines. This is why the life of Margit Vészi is particularly remarkable, as she not only worked as a journalist at the turn of the century, but was one of the first to be accredited by the Austro-Hungarian Press Headquarters<sup>13</sup> as a war correspondent.

### **Margit Vészi: The Pioneering Female War Correspondent**

In order to better understand Margit Vészi's work as a journalist and later as a war correspondent, we first need to know more about her life. She was born on 27 April 1885 in Budapest, the eldest of six children of József Vészi and Franciska Keményfi. Her father – known at the time as the press Caesar – was a major influence on her thinking about journalism and gathering information. At that time, young women like Margit – who rejected the traditional female roles of wife, housewife, and mother – often pursued artistic endeavours and explored various possibilities available to them. As Mátyás Sárközi<sup>14</sup> – Margit Vészi's grandson – recalls, this led József Vészi's daughter to enter the Schola Cantorum Music Academy in Paris and later New York, where she sang in the choir. Taking advantage of her father's influence and connections, Margit travelled with him for example to Switzerland and northern Italy, which would later play an important role in her travels as a war correspondent. In the meantime, she turned to painting, but her pictures were not an unqualified success. She then turned to draw caricatures and also tried her hands to write short stories.



Figure 1: Margit Vészi (credit: Sándor Strelisky, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum)

Margit Vészi married in 1906 (to Ferenc Molnár, a successful writer and journalist at the time) and had a daughter. However, in 1910, a divorce was filed, and she - regaining her independence - returned to work. She painted and drew caricatures, exhibited her work in several places, and sometimes even sold one. Then she became more closely involved in journalism, sending her reports to Károly Lyka's magazine *Művészet* (Art), which covered

<sup>13</sup> At the onset of the First World War on July 28, 1914, the Imperial and Royal War Press Headquarters, known as "Das Kaiserliche und königliche Kriegspressequartier" (KPQ) in German, was established as a division of the Austro-Hungarian Army High Command. The primary role of the KPQ was to oversee and organize all press-related information and propaganda efforts, utilizing the various mass media platforms available during that period.

<sup>14</sup> Mátyás Sárközi (Budapest, 19 July 1937 -) Kossuth Prize-winning Hungarian writer, critic, literary translator, editor. In addition to his newspaper articles and magazines, he also wrote short stories, short stories and novels, and chronicled the lives of his famous ancestors in many of his writings.

cultural events in Berlin.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, she travelled extensively, lived in two places (Berlin and Budapest), and spoke French, Italian, and German. In 1911, by her own admission, she was involved in an 'innocent affair' with Giacomo Puccini when she was covering a theatre performance in Paris (*The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*), leading to a scandal. At the reception that followed, she was seated next to the fifty-four-year-old Puccini, who then began courting the twenty-seven-year-old woman: he invited her to London for the premiere of his new work, to his villa in Torre del Lago, and even to Berlin, where he wrote her countless letters.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, Margit Vészi had started working as a journalist for *Az Est*,<sup>17</sup> which had sent her to Berlin as a correspondent because of her excellent German language skills and her established network of contacts. She was already sending her articles home from there when the First World War broke out. The period was one of great uncertainty and tension, with the press chief regularly summoning correspondents to brief them on the latest news. A solemn ritual took place every day when a paper was taped to the door of the War Office.<sup>18</sup> The list grew as the conflict spread to almost the whole world.



Figure 2: Az Est, 1th Junius 2015. (credit: Árkánium)

<sup>15</sup> Vészi Margit (1912). Negyedik Henrik Reinhardt rendezésében. Nyugat. 22.

<https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00116/03714.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Egy igazi világpolgár by Ayhan Gökhan: <https://kultura.hu/egy-igazi-vilagpolgar/>

<sup>17</sup> "Az Est" was published between 1910 and 1938, owned and edited by Andor Miklós. One of the most successful press organs at the turn of the century, its daily circulation reached half a million copies during the First World War. As a bold, progressive and independent daily, it was independent of any political party, while maintaining a reliable news service and employing foreign correspondents.

<sup>18</sup> Sárközi Máttyás (2019): *Margit*. Budapest: Kortárs Könyvkiadó.



Margit Vészi did not stay long in Berlin, and as soon as she received information, she rushed to the theatre of war – first to Cattaro in Montenegro, today's Cotori Bay. She made interviews, reports and field reports, often from the battlefield, which she published not only in newspaper articles. She reported her own and her interviewees' memories and impressions in two books, *Az Égő Európa* (in English *The Burning Europe*),<sup>19</sup> published in 1915, and *Útközben* (in English *The Road Between*),<sup>20</sup> published in 1918, in which she also conveyed her feelings. In them, she reflected on the terrible, devastating senselessness of war, while trying to help readers come to terms with the trauma.

### Reports From the Front Line: Vészi's Reporting Odyssey

In the year preceding the outbreak of the First World War, *Az Est* newspaper had a daily circulation of 200,000 copies.<sup>21</sup> However, by the middle of the war, it was approaching half a million copies. This figure serves as an excellent benchmark against which to evaluate Margit Vészi's work. The ambitions of the paper, which was published between 1910 and 1938, both in the narrower and broader sense, were developed during the First World War. It is not an exaggeration to say that it became one of the most significant press powers of that historic period.<sup>22</sup> The newspaper employed six thousand five hundred people, acquired two more major daily newspapers (*Magyarország* and *Pesti Napló*), and at the time, it owned an entire block of buildings for its editorial staff.<sup>23</sup> The daily had an extensive network of correspondents, including Margit Vészi. As the World War I, war correspondent put it, '*I also photographed many of the horrors of the First World War, including the trenches, the wounded, and the villages blown to ruins.*'



Figure 3: Photo of Margit Vészi from the Italian front. Text on the photo: 'Our war correspondent on the Italian front.' - Lunch at 1800 metres. (credit: dka.oszk.hu)

<sup>19</sup> Vészi Margit (1915): *Az égő Európa*. Budapest, Dick Manó.

<sup>20</sup> Vészi Margit (1918): *Útközben*. Budapest: Singer és Wolfner.

<sup>21</sup> Romsics Ignác (2023): *Magyarország története a XX. században*. Budapest: Helikon Kiadó.

<sup>22</sup> Márkus László (1997): *A magyar sajtó története*. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó.

<sup>23</sup> Dezsényi Béla (1954): *A magyar sajtó 250 éve*. Budapest: Művelt Nép

However, Margit Vészi not only wrote, but also took photographs: her photos were also published in the 1916 war photo exhibition, which predominantly featured trenches and villages that had been destroyed as places of memory. Her articles can also be found in Italian newspapers: the Bologna newspaper *Resto del Carlino*, for example, published a lengthy study of Hungary in 1919, based on the memories of a Hungarian war correspondent.

According to my research, Margit Vészi visited a total of fourteen countries (Albania, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Netherland, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine) between 1914 and 1918 as a war correspondent for the newspaper *Az Est* during the First World War. According to the table I have compiled, Vészi wrote over a hundred articles during this period, including numerous front-page stories and exceptional editorials. She conducted interviews, gathered information at press headquarters, travelled extensively, talked to locals, but also wrote about her impressions and feelings.

She covered a wide range of topics, including the first birthday celebration of King Charles of Romania, the Italian earthquakes of 1914, conditions in neutral Rome, the Tsar's trip to Lemberg, 'mob rule' in Milan, the failure of war loans, the fall and abandonment of Warsaw, the appearance of submarines in the Mediterranean, the occupation of Riga, the 'disintegration' of the Balkans, the battle of Lavarone, the situation in conquered Belgrade, the Dutch-German 'border idyll', epidemics among Italians in Albania, the return of prisoners, and even wartime Munich.

Vészi interviewed notable figures such as the Papal Secretary of State about the war, the President of the Swiss Republic about neutrality, the Bulgarian Ambassador about Ghenadiev's mission, the Figaro military expert about the defence of Kovno, the Bishop of Frakno about peace initiatives, and King Gustav V of Sweden about the war situation. She attended a reception with Pope Benedict XV, participated in the 'spy market' in Lugano, and even convinced a pilot to fly her over the Gulf of Cattaro for an article.

As Margit Vészi wrote in the *Égő Európa*:

Wandering alone on a grey evening in the sandy, crawling, treacherous hovels of Belgrade, where even traitors hide, my thoughts drift back to the story of five quarters of a year – the history of five quarters of a year of which I was a silent, wondering witness. This book, my first book, became a quiet, diary-like commentary. Today, I find myself in Belgrade, on home soil. But on that unforgettable morning, the morning of the first day of the world war, as I pressed my fevered brow against the window of the last scheduled train, I had no idea how far the path I was about to take would wind its way out into burning Europe. Yet, I knew, I felt without words: this train would take me back to the greatest of times, back to the days of the past, with a child's longing in my heart.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Art of Reporting: The Narrative of Margit Vészi**

By her own admission, both in her articles and in her book of reports, she was constantly 'contemplating the terrible, destructive senselessness of war.' She reflects this mood in all her writings, which are both subjective and reportorial in nature, but also imbued with emotion

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<sup>24</sup> Vészi Margit (1915): *Az égő Európa*. Budapest, Dick Manó.

while recreating the mood of the time and place, providing a real-time experience of contemporary events, but not neglecting the specificity of the female narrative. These writings reveal the mind of the war correspondent Margit Vészi, focusing on her attention, her techniques of information gathering, her journalistic attitudes, and both the difficulties and the beauty of her work. They also present the views and dominant ideas of the time, the political and social ideals that guided them. We can read about the soldiers' initial expectations, enthusiasm, and optimism entering into the First World War. We can observe the clear belief in victory held by the Central Powers initially. Moreover, we can gain insights into the emergence of propaganda tools and the way the press managed. Bad language said “she rode the front line where the bullets whizzed by, yet he wrote boring reports”.<sup>25</sup>

It is evident that the multilingual war correspondent skilfully immersed herself in the social and political milieu she was reporting from. Thanks to her, we can meet real people, experience the daily life of the time, sometimes devastating, sometimes more peaceful, follow the historical events of the war, and observe the ever-changing narrative.

Margit Vészi used numerous adjectives, literary descriptions, and dialogues in her reports. However, these literary formulations are often almost entirely interspersed with the sounds of machine guns in action, the devastation caused by shells, the failure of peace negotiations, and the horror of bombing. Her writings capture the prevailing mood of the times, enabling readers to witness the different perspectives on the war expressed by belligerents, politicians, diplomats, soldiers, the wounded, prisoners, and journalists.

## Conclusion

Life stories, such as Margit Vészi's, not only portray individual destinies but also provide a deeper insight into the social, cultural, and political context of a particular era. Through a deeper understanding of the life of Margit Vészi, we can see how individual experiences and historical events are intertwined, and how people become a part of or even victims of them.

Through the story of Margit Vészi, we gain insight into the turn of the century and the First World War, as well as the social changes that influenced her life and destiny. This narrative allows us to come closer to understanding a period whose impact is still felt today. Margit Vészi's life story is not just an individual narrative; it is part of a broader historical mosaic that helps us see the era from a more comprehensive perspective.

As my study shows, the transformation of women's roles and the evolving journalistic profession were closely linked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, studies on women war correspondents are rare, although there were many women, alongside Margaret Vészi, who took it upon themselves to confront and report on the horrors of the First World War near the battlefields.

But who were these women war correspondents who did extensive work in the First World War? I will mention, but not exhaustively, Sofia Casanova from neutral Spain, who reported from the Eastern Front for the Spanish newspaper ABC; and American journalists Nellie Bly, Peggy Hull, Louise Bryant, Bessie Beatty, Rheta Childe Dorr, and Helen Johns Kirtland, who covered events in Russia and sent news back home from the Western Front. On the Allied

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<sup>25</sup> “Molnár Ferenc élvezettel verte, Ady Endre halhatatlanná tette a világgjászó magyar múzsát” by Székely Ilona: <https://168.hu/kultura/veszi-margit-ady-endre-irodalom-utazas-molnar-ferenc-muzsa-172146>

side, Louise Mack reported on the German invasion of Belgium for the British newspapers, while Flavia Steno wrote war stories in Italy for *Il Secolo XIX*. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, much mentioned in my study, was unique in granting official accreditation to women war correspondents. During the First World War, in addition to a total of 271 male journalists, seven women were accredited by the central army propaganda organization, the Imperial and Royal Press Headquarters (*Kriegspressequartier*), which was directly subordinate to the Chief of Staff of all armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and had the statutory responsibility for the management and supply of the entire military press service. Among the female war correspondents, the Austrian Alice Schalek, the German Maria Magda Rumbold, the German Thea von Puttkamer, and the Hungarian Margit Vészi, introduced here, stand out.

Women war correspondents can provide a new, female perspective on the interpretation of historical events, which is not only interesting from a historical but also from an interdisciplinary point of view. They can represent the changing role of women in this challenging period while offering a broader framework for understanding a particular historical era. I believe that it will be worthwhile in the future to further explore the life histories of women who covered the First World War and the diversity of their writings, even from a comparative and transnational perspective.

### **Acknowledgments**

I thank my supervisor, Dr. Peter Bertalan for his strong support. To Dr. Róbert Hermann who always believed in me. To my teachers, mentors, my mother and friends.

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## Resources

- “A nyilvánosság politikai színterei” by Szak Andrea:  
[https://real.mtak.hu/82574/1/ht2018\\_2\\_120\\_127\\_u.pdf](https://real.mtak.hu/82574/1/ht2018_2_120_127_u.pdf)
- “Egy igazi világpolgár” by Ayhan Gökhan: <https://kultura.hu/egy-igazi-vilagpolgar/>

“Molnár Ferenc élvezettel verte, Ady Endre halhatatlanná tette a világhíró magyar múzsát”  
by Székely Ilona: <https://168.hu/kultura/veszi-margit-ady-endre-irodalom-utazas-molnar-ferenc-muzsa-172146>

Vészi Margit (1912). *Negyedik Henrik Reinhardt rendezésében*. Nyugat. 22.  
<https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00116/03714.htm>

***Film Remaking and Practices: “Infernal Affairs” Versus “Double Face”  
– Film Repetition Networks, Contexts and Taxonomy***

Roman Kusaiko, Lingnan University, Hong Kong SAR

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2023  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Scholars usually consider such “repetitions” through the scope of institutional and industrial practices for commercial benefits through previously established and tested titles. Some scholars approached remakes from the contextual perspective, revealing their novelties, thematic value and how remakes attempt to “translate” them. However, with the development of streaming services and further sophistication of the source and remaking titles into more extensive franchises, the borderline between well-defined film “repetition” practices may be elusive. This paper will argue whether the remake of Andrew Lau’s and Alan Mak’s 無間道 / 无间道 [Infernal Affairs] (Lau & Mak, 2002), TV film *Daburu Feisu* [Double Face], consisting of *Daburu Feisu: Gisou Keisatsu-hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition] and *Daburu Feisu: Sennyuu Sosa-hen* [Double Face Undercover Investigation Edition] (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012), affect the contemporary definition of film remakes as a critical and practical category. Together with Martin Scorsese’s *The Departed* (Scorsese, 2006), *Double Face* is not a part of the broader franchise but may be part of another form of “supersystem” (Kinder, 1991). The paper will test whether the Japanese remake contributes to creating such a system as a “repetition network” and identify what kind of film “repetition” qualities it encapsulates. Furthermore, its minor contextual adjustment compared to the source material significantly reshapes to deliver the themes of higher cultural appropriation and relevance. Thus, the paper will explore these contextual qualities and evaluate whether they are enough to build a context-based remaking taxonomy.

Keywords: Film Repetitions, Film Remakes, Double Face, Infernal Affairs, Departed, Film Networks

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## Introduction

Scholarships provided extensive sources of understanding film “repetitions” (Klein & Palmer, 2016) in the form of film remakes, including existing taxonomies, with some authors considering films as sort of texts (Verevis, 2006; Heinze & Krämer, 2015). In this case, remakes are a transition of one textual form to another through semiotic translation, recontextualization (Linell, 1998), cultural appropriation and other methods. Additionally, various authors approached the issues of contextual significance by comparing source films and their remakes (Lim, 2009; Wee, 2014). In general, film “repetitions” in the form of remakes are a complicated category encapsulating various meanings, proving difficulties while building taxonomies.

However, apart from critical and theoretical definitions of remaking, evaluating how franchise building affects its understanding is crucial. A franchise is a legal and industrial category—franchise titles refer to each other and sometimes are connected to the predecessors through transmedia and transtextual storytelling. Japanese horror films *Ju-On* and *Ringu* titles are perfect examples. These original film series crossed their medium boundaries and were adapted into TV series, advertisement campaigns, cosplay shows, video game homage, and adult-related content. Using Marsha Kinder’s definition, they did not create a “supersystem,” because various semiotic repercussions of the mentioned titles were decentralized and had signs of popular culture build-up rather than an industrial attempt to capitalize on the franchise’s popularity. Thus, the mentioned titles created not a vertically integrated system of titles, merchandise and other forms of consumption products but a film “repetition network” of signs, contexts and stories actively borrowing from each other and replicating themselves in various popular non-commercial forms.

In this case, it is relevant to appeal to other film examples of East Asian titles that crossed transnational borders through remakes to test whether they created similar “networks.” One example is *Infernal Affairs*, a Hong Kong police and criminal drama becoming a local success. Later, it was remade in the U.S. as *The Departed* by Martin Scorsese. The remake won various awards, including U.S. Academy Awards. The success brought academic and popular attention to *Infernal Affairs*, which later got a sequel, which from the storytelling standpoint was a prequel, and a triquel. However, later, it was remade in Japan, *Double Face* and South Korea, *New World / 신세계 / Sinsegye* (2013).

Each of these projects did not ignite franchise building. The remakes reframed their predecessor to fit their cultural landscapes. *The Departed* was portrayed as an original project with little reference to the source. *Double Face* was an example of accurate and acute recontextualization and resembled an industrial attempt to pilot a co-production scheme. Finally, none of the projects had any sequelization, cross-references or any form of transtextual storytelling. Thus, there is an issue in identifying whether these titles attempted to create a “supersystem” or “repetition network.”

To shed light on the mentioned issues, the current paper will provide case studies on *Infernal Affairs* as the source material and *Double Face* with additional appeal to the remaking practices of *The Departed*. The case studies will be analyzed from the formal, contextual and critical lenses. Formal qualities will allow us to clarify the form of the chosen film “repetition” based on the existing scholarship. It will be succeeded by the contextual analysis revealing how minor adjustments can significantly alter the target material and appeal to the target audience through the chosen semantics and thematical relevance. Evaluation of the



balance between contextual novelties and fidelity will additionally allow us to answer the question of whether contextually anchored taxonomy is possible to be identified.

It is crucial to note that the issue of “network” building is further complicated by a video game’s release blurring the definition of film “repetition” in the form of remaking or adaptation. For instance, the video game *Sleeping Dogs* (2012) was a part of a different franchise, *True Crimes*, but was spiritually inspired by *Infernal Affairs* and contains familiar semiotic elements. Simultaneously, it severely deviates from the original story, narrative, setting and themes. These obscure references further complicated the film “repetition network” of *Infernal Affairs*. This paper is focused on films and will not refer to the video game case studies because a separate approach is required to unveil how video games influence film “repetition networks.”



Figure 1a: in their promotional materials *Infernal Affairs* tried to emphasize the main leads only pointing out their crucial confrontation.

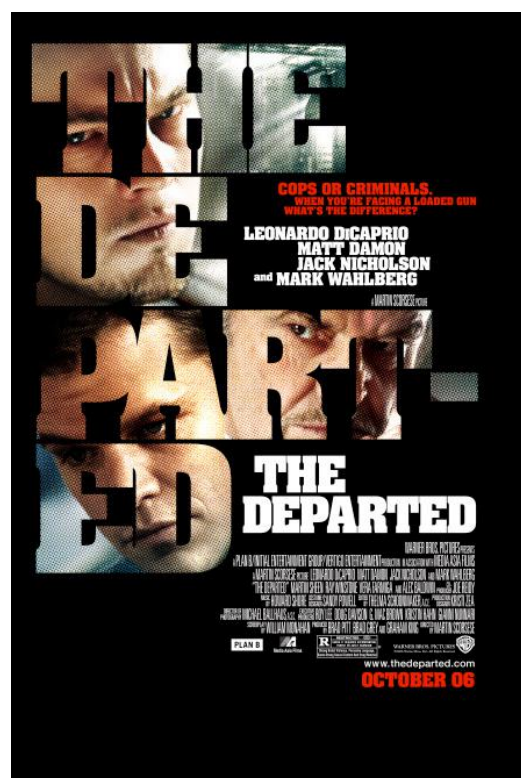


Figure 1b: The poster emphasizes not only the duo of protagonist and antagonist but the local kingpin played by Jack Nicholson.

### *Infernal Affairs* and *The Departed*: Implied Remake

*Infernal Affairs* is a criminal drama about Lau Kin-ming and Chan Wing-yan. The former successfully finished the police academy in Hong Kong to become a “rat” working for the local triad gang boss. The second, presumably expelled, started his longstanding undercover mission as a “mole” in the same triad gang. Several years later, when the police wanted to put an end to the gang’s operations, the final standoff between the police force and criminals started with Kin-ming and Wing-Yan caught in the crossfire.

In the motion picture, Andrew Lau and Alan Mak utilized the familiar Hong Kong genre of police drama. The film’s linear narrative is complicated by the crosscuts between Kin-ming

and Wing-yan, which pinpoints their significance for the overall story, personal struggle and dilemma of the loyalty. Both were shown as dedicated men pursuing freedom from the web of gradually complicating circumstances. Lau and Mak achieved narrative coherence and introduced enough morale and psychological justification for characters' actions. Hence, the antagonist-protagonist paradox projected their struggle upon the audience, who also should have made their moral choice and picked their sympathies. Furthermore, the struggle could be contextually transitioned to the post-reunification dilemma of Hong Kong's new geopolitical realities, restricted political autonomy and "missing sense of belonging" (Li, 2018).

Apart from the sophisticated narrative, *Infernal Affairs* reflected substantial aesthetic value through cinematography depicting signature city landscapes from the hotel rooftops as the only shelter securing one's communication. The wide aspect ratio allowed experimenting with scenery and also create a contrast between the frame space and the high density of Hong Kong urban planning. Finally, the cast comprises the famous local actors, including Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Andy Lau and Cantopop diva Kelly Chen Wai-lam. It is unsurprising that the film achieved immense success in the local market after its release. Critical and popular reception soon secured its cult status, which, in turn, could not escape the attention of the Hollywood production companies who previously turned their industrial gaze upon East Asian creative industries and released *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).

Brad Pitt's Plan B Entertainment used substantial funds to buy the rights for the *Infernal Affairs* remake with the help of Roy Lee, the founder of Vertigo Entertainment, a company specializing in remaking East Asian films (Hayes, 2006). The remake was directed by Martin Scorsese and released in 2006. The story retained its former essence of the police and criminal drama. The framing was familiar with two characters retaining contradicting allegiance, causing their struggle. Nevertheless, to fit the new cultural environment, the events took place in Boston, referring to the local gang's crime operations and the FBI was introduced as the force operating behind the scenes.

Martin Scorsese maintained the frame of the film and recontextualized various details adjusting and simplifying the narrative for the global audience. It was impossible to transform the potential anxiety of the Hong Kong reunification and East Asian loyalty struggle directly. Thus, the remake utilized cinematographic appropriation and cultural adjustments to shift the focus from the identity crisis, allegiance and duty issues to the themes of individualism, characters' competition and the premise that "even the gang leader can be a snitch." For the global audience, keeping track of the events and identifying the real villain was simpler this way. The "happy ending" nature further shifted the initial narrative frame.

From the contextual perspective, the remake creates an expanded narrative background to create sufficient information about what environment "created" the main characters (Li, 2018). The theme of individualism is bound with the theme of resistance to such an environment, leading to the pursuit of personal success and competition between the main characters, which grow beyond their professional duties, including similar love interest. Even the film's climax highlights that "justice" can be achieved even by illegal means without any references to the inescapable guilt. Such contextual adjustments sufficiently alienate the remake from its source material regardless of shared general directions of the narrative and overall story framing through the conflict between a gang "mole" and a police "rat." Consequently, formal similarities create an illusion of fidelity which, upon closer inspection and analysis, together with the longer runtime, may reveal distinct meanings and themes,

making it problematic to draw the taxonomy restricted by the context only without criteria generalization.

Simultaneously, the remake repeated the strategy of hiring prominent Hollywood celebrities, which affected even film promotion materials (IMDbPro, 2002; IMDbPro, 2006) (Fig. 1a and 1b). Unsurprisingly, with its renowned director and cast, *The Departed* won numerous awards, including Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay, and Best Achievement in Directing (IMDbPro, 2006). Nevertheless, upon closer inspection, *The Departed* tried to dodge direct references to *Infernal Affairs*, citing it in the end credits scenes (Scorsese, 2006, 02:27:42). It would be unlikely that the global audience would be able to scrutinize and identify the film being a “remake” through the credits and references to Media Asia Films. Nevertheless, the critics and scholars had. Using Michael Druxman’s terminology (1975, as cited in Hainze & Krämer, 2015), the film is a “direct” remake through its overall narrative frame and end credits links. At the same time, publicly, *The Departed* was promoted as an original project and referred to the source only in the end credits, which are usually skipped by the audience, leaving the film “disguised” remake nature.

Various sources claim that *The Departed* had the potential of starting a franchise similar to the one in Hong Kong. Such events would have inevitably created cross-referential dynamics between the film’s U.S. and Hong Kong branches. For example, Warner Bros. demanded to change the ending because it left little alternative for the franchise building, and when Scorsese refused, Marc Wahlberg and scriptwriter William Monahan proposed a sequel about the last surviving side character (Baker, 2023). The idea of a sequel was circulating earlier in the form of a TV series similar to *Infernal Affairs* (Cabin, 2016). Both projects were put on hold for reasons unknown. Considering the direct involvement of Martin Scorsese, his experience in creating criminal dramas, his direct contribution to the U.S. remake, and its critical and financial recognition, it is hard to imagine the studios would not try to sign him up or at least inquire about these projects. Martin Scorsese would unlikely have taken the lead of a franchise project due to his natural skepticism over franchises (Scorsese, 2019). Nevertheless, the simple film repetition structure between the source film and *The Departed* is insufficient to discuss any form of created “network” but maintains such potential if the TV series is released in the future by Netflix, for example.

By 2023, there is only one TV title related to *Infernal Affairs* – the Japanese TV film *Double Face*, which reflects even more contextual fidelity to the source material, taking its cultural proximity to Hong Kong. Additionally, the narrative and cinematography retain a remarkable resemblance. Thus, the analysis of *Double Face* may reveal additional details and understanding of the nature of the film remaking in other mediums, its contribution to the creation of the film “repetition network,” and taxonomy building.



Fig. 2a. In *Infernal Affairs*, police chief communicates through Morse code (Lau & Mak, 2002, 00:26:22).



Fig. 2b. In the remake, additional tracking movement around the police chief but kept static shot on the hands because identical narrative method of communication between chief and yakuza “mole” was used (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, *Double Face - Giso Keisatsu Hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition], 00:24:47). Moreover, the difference of aspect ratio is dictated by the difference of theatrical and TV format.



Fig. 2c. In *Infernal Affairs*, color palate is cool and green, close-up emphasizes Chan Wing-yan's hands, his cast as potential tool to communicate with the police (Lau & Mak, 2002, 00:23:29).



Fig. 2d. In *Double Face* color palate was changed but the shooting style remained the same (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, *Double Face - Giso Keisatsu Hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition], 00:16:30).

### ***Double Face* and its Direct “Repetition” Identity**

*Double Face* is a TV film, a product of collaboration between two Japanese TV companies, TBS and WOWOW. It was split into two episodes aired by each of them. The course of story events was changed to Japan in the Tokyo area, including Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures with signature Yokohama landscapes. The main narrative frame was retained and adapted for the Japanese social realities: the undercover police officer, Jun, a “mole” in the Yakuza Oda clan, opposed Ryosuke, a model officer and a “rat,” sharing investigation intelligence with the Oda clan leader.

Anchoring storytelling points remained unchanged, but extended runtime allowed the rearrangements and additions. For instance, the introduction of how the main characters started their paths was moved to the second part of the TV film. Jun's meetings with the psychiatrist revealed more details of his dilemma without diving into the vivid love theme. Ryosuke had a separate personal story, with him being ordered to get close to the local politician's daughter. Finally, the ending draws expected infidelity from the source material. These are vivid examples of source film's structure re-enactment and are not limited by them exclusively.



Fig. 3. Unlike the U.S. remake, the main focus of the promotion materials was on two characters (Asianwiki, 2012).

Following formal analysis of the remake, these distinctions may seem to result from the medium change or strictly the reflection of the “cultural narrative” (Li, 2018). However, comparing the cinematography between the source and the TV remake, it becomes evident that the director, Eiichirô Hasumi, consistently followed Lau's and Mak's cinematographic patterns. For example, the scenes of the drug deal and police headquarters reveal almost identical choices of shots but distinctions in the chosen color palate of the source film (Fig. 2a, 2c) and the remake (Fig. 2b, 2d). Rooftop scenes also reveal a strong resemblance between the source and the remake. Poster esthetics, unlike *The Departed*, follow the original film (Fig. 1a and 3). There are even more similarities in how scenes were shot and how the narrative progresses with the predictable adjustments of location, acting, and costume design.

This formal similitude allows the framing of *Double Face* as a remake. Additionally, each episode directly refers to the source film using subtitles at the bottom of the screen at the beginning of each episode (Fig. 4a and 4b). Thus, the production companies do not try to conceal the origin of the remake; in Druxman's definition, it has more “direct” qualities than *The Departed*. The change of exhibition mode adds particular hybridity to the remaking nature. However, it is insignificant in this case: *Double Face* is still a motion picture. The only difference is that it is divided into two narratively connected featured films aired on two separate TV channels. In film databases, two “episodes” are listed and rated separately,

referring to each other through “related” projects (Asianwiki, 2012; IMDbPro, 2012; MyDramaList, 2012).



Fig. 4a. The beginning of *Double Face - Giso Keisatsu Hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition] (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, 00:02:49). The reference is made together with the cast introduction.



Fig. 4b. The beginning of *Double Face - Sennyuu Sosa Hen* [Double Face Undercover Investigation Edition] (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, 00:01:51).

Apart from its formal qualities, the hybridity of the project can be traced through the circumstances of its release. Based on the interviews with the *Double Face* director Eiichiro Hasumi (Kuromame, 2020) and WOWOW producer Yoshitaka Takeda (Kuromame, 2019), WOWOW and TBS maintained an extensive cooperative relationship, including film

production, because previously WOWOW liquidated its production company and lacked qualifications, resources and professionals. The production of the *Double Face* was followed by the 2014 release of the *MOZU* TV series (IMDbPro, 2014), both co-produced by WOWOW and TBS. The projects shared the director and even the main leads, Hidetoshi Nishijima and Teruyuki Kagawa. The two had known each other for over a decade but were cast in the same projects for the first time (Yuki, 2012). This cooperation also went beyond TBS and WOWOW films.

Hence, *Double Face* is not just a stand-alone remake but can be considered a pilot project as part of an industrial attempt to establish long-term cooperation in producing TV dramas. It is possible to imply that the real goal of *Double Face*'s release was to test whether TBS and WOWOW can organize a large-scale production through a smaller one with a relatively constant team. Given the direct remaking nature and its hybrid exhibition mode, its presumably industrially-driven role rather than the commercial desire of franchise building, limited references and homage to any other projects apart from the source material, it is unlikely it creates a film "repetition network."

Additional proof that *Double Face* implied contextual fidelity with minimum alterations is proved through the interviews. Eiichiro Hasumi claimed that during the pre-production stage, the team tried to "reconstruct" the script and adjust the parts that looked "broken" for the Japanese audience (Kuromame, 2020). Further contextual analysis reveals that the script underwent meticulous recontextualization through minor thematic adjustments, including subordination, family and socio-political order (Shen & Yin, 2021). After slight refocusing, the TV film reflected significant relevance for the Japanese cultural environment. For example, the source film took place in Hong Kong, a city of cultural proximity to Japan, especially regarding the Confucius value of filial piety. A delicate balance between police-triad opposition and "yin-yang equilibrium" was preserved (Davis & Yeh, 2008). However, the notions of "unity" in the police force and triad clan were tangible but secondary after the theme of self-identification. In *Double Face*, just due to the change of the location, the theme of being part of a social unit became prevalent. The theme is manifested through scenes with the Oda clan leader. The remake added depth to his character through the multitude of scenes, where he appeals to Jun and Ryosuke as his "sons" and the clan as a "family" (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, *Double Face - Sennyuu Sosa Hen* [Double Face Undercover Investigation Edition], 00:04:48, 00:06:03; 00:08:10; 00:58:22). The complexity of his explanations, vision and belief system partially elevate him from a status of criminal and implied additional empathy.

The references to the "family" are not intended for Oda's character only. It reflects the Japanese concept of 家 / *ie* [family], which some scholars and critics consider a Japanese social foundation (Kuwayama, 2001) and used for Japanese films' contextual analysis (Wee, 2014), or a canon of the yakuza-related films (Kubota, 2020). *Ie* is not restricted to the household but is scaled higher from the community level to the corporations and state. Following this logic, the police force and yakuza clan are "family" units with their leaders and codes of behavior implying vertically integrated human connections. In the case of yakuza, their reciprocity lies within unwritten rules given their Edo period genesis (Minami, 1954).

Furthermore, comparisons between the clan and police "families" link the latter to the state, which failed to provide the young generation with a suitable place in society and pushed them to the yakuza. The clan compensates for the lack of state care and secures the future of the



youth. Thus, yakuza fills the niche, taking over the overlooked or deliberately neglected individuals and economic operations. Consequently, Oda's claims and desire to obtain more influence on politicians reveal that the yakuza's status tends to expand at the state's expense. Through this lens, the main characters' dilemma is further complicated by the choice between two "families" and two "fathers," Oda or police chief Onodera.

Consequently, such a choice requires fulfilling duties or 義理 / *giri* [duty principle]. Duty is the principal element of conduct between the master and subordinate – fulfilment of one's duty benefits the group, "family," and honors it. *Giri* is usually put into opposition with 人情 / *ninjo* [feelings]. A popular theme in Japan, including animation (Greenberg, 2012), depicts the character struggling between his feelings and affection and duty with the designated group. However, *giri* and *ninjo* do not necessarily contradict one another. In the case of *Double Face*, the characters are in the principal crisis of identifying which group is their "family" and whether they should follow duty or feelings. If the person fails to honor *giri*, *ie* is being neglected, endangering social balance.

This contextual dilemma is familiar to the local audience from the genre and ideological perspectives. However, the adjustments are made through extended characters' lines, additional characters, and, in the case of Ryosuke's character, – a re-imagining of his background, marital status and choices up to the end of the film. The changes may seem minor, but given the already culturally suitable source material's narrative and contextual frame, they are sufficient to deliver enough clarity and familiarity for the local audience to comprehend implied meanings. Together with *The Departed*, the case of *Double Face* raises similar questions of how to evaluate these "slight" adjustments to build contextually-based taxonomy. The answer stays the same – it is unlikely to draw such a taxonomy, or contextual meanings should be generalized and deliberately evaluated.

## Conclusion

The formal analysis allowed distinguishing *Double Face* as a direct remake of *Infernal Affairs*, which fully utilized the capabilities offered by the source film through its mise-en-scene, narrative frame and contextual themes. It has a few elements of hybridity through the medium change and production intentions, making it instead a one-time project, even one of the "pilots," aiming to extend and facilitate cooperation between WOWOW and TBS.

Contextual analysis revealed its principal qualities by utilizing existing themes from the source film and slightly recontextualizing them to fulfill the target audience's expectations. The nature of these adjustments, the mixture of fidelity and minor appropriations, allowed us to define the multifaceted meanings, taking a new cultural landscape. Altogether, it is hardly possible to use *Double Face* as an example of drawing contextually anchored taxonomy.

Finally, the paper illustrated that the Japanese remake does not create any film "repetition networks," as it happened with 呪怨 / *Ju-On* [Grudge] (Kusaiko, 2023), because it only recycles *Infernal Affairs*. There are no signs of franchise-building and transmedia storytelling from the source film and *The Departed*. The production companies focused on the separate original title *MOZU* and other projects.

Regardless of the outcomes, the case studies and comparative analysis of the source material and remakes allow scholars to better understand film "repetitions" and remaking practices in film and TV mediums better.

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**Contact email:** romankusaiko@ln.hk

***The Development and Challenges of Multi-Channel Network in China's Influencer Marketing Industry***

Xunyu Wang, Komazawa University, Japan

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**Abstract**

Influencer marketing is a rapidly growing industry in China, where multi-channel network (MCN) enterprises play a vital role in managing and monetizing influencers. This paper explores the development and challenges of MCN enterprises in China's influencer marketing industry, using a qualitative research approach (focus group discussions) based on interviews with Chinese influencers, employees of MCNs, and employees of video platforms. The paper finds that MCNs in China face various challenges, such as fierce competition, low-quality content, and ethical dilemmas. However, the paper also acknowledges that MCNs provide some technical and human resources support for influencers' content creation and facilitate better matching between advertisers and content creators. At last, this paper suggests that MCNs need to adopt more innovative and sustainable practices to cope with the changing market and social demands. Moreover, to better manage the influencer marketing industry in China, a more comprehensive regulatory system needs to be established, which requires not only the guarantee of the rights of the public authorities but also the self-monitoring of the user community.

Keywords: Influencer, Social Media, China's Influencer Marketing, Multi-Channel Network

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## Introduction

In recent years, with the development of social media and the popularization of portable multimedia devices, people's daily life has changed dramatically, and correspondingly, traditional mass media has gradually withdrawn from people's field of vision and replaced by user content sharing and AI algorithms based on the formation of commercial advertising model.

Take the world-famous video-sharing platform YouTube as an example, since it was acquired by Google more than ten years ago, its mode of operation has also undergone great changes, the early operation concept of YouTube relied on the rapid development of the global Internet, to achieve the content sharing and information exchange between users around the world, but with the evolution of the Internet business model and more and more capital joining the traditional Internet advertising model has been unable to meet the market demand, both advertisers and Internet users, are seeking a more effective business model. However, with the evolution of the Internet business model and the entry of more and more capital, the traditional Internet advertising model has been unable to meet the needs of the market, and both advertisers and Internet users, are seeking a more effective business model.

Research has shown that with the evolution of the Internet business model and the influx of capital, there is a need for a more effective business model in the advertising industry to meet the needs of both advertisers and Internet users<sup>1</sup>. One study examined the case of BuzzFeed as a platform for the public good, highlighting the importance of data-driven business model innovation in journalism<sup>2</sup>. Another study explored the development of business models for Internet portals and investigated different revenue streams. These research findings suggest the importance of adopting innovative business models to adapt to the changing market demands and provide more effective solutions in the digital advertising industry. In summary, the research highlights the need for innovative business models in the advertising industry, as traditional models may no longer be able to meet market demands.

As YouTube has become a mainstream media from a non-mainstream media, its commercialization model has also pointed out a direction for the whole Internet industry. In YouTube, behind every operation of the user, there is a complete set of business operation systems. Users open the site, click on the video they want to watch, and then finally to the user to share their comments on this simple process, behind the dozens of data analytics companies, advertising agencies, and marketing companies participate in it, which unintentionally also produces a huge economic value.

Although research in recent years has focused on understanding the operating logic of the influencer economy and the behavior of internet consumers. For example, one study examined the impact of internet celebrities' characteristics on consumers' impulsive buying behavior in the big data economy. The study used a multiple linear regression model to empirically test the relationship. Another study explored how Internet marketing can contribute to the competitiveness of modern companies in the digitalized economy. These studies highlight the importance of understanding the influencer economy and utilizing

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<sup>1</sup> Santos, M., F., D., L., Zhou, R. (2018) Data-Driven Business Model Innovation in Journalism: A Case Study of BuzzFeed as a Platform of Public Good

<sup>2</sup> Ortelbach, B. (2021) The Development of Business Models for Internet Portals: An Explorative Investigation of Revenue Streams

internet marketing strategies to thrive in the digital era.<sup>3,4</sup> There is a lack of research on another aspect of influencer marketing, namely the analysis of influencer marketing from the perspective of industry structure, business organization development, and media norms.

### What is MCN?

A significant but understudied aspect of this story is the emergence of multichannel networks, otherwise known as MCNs, or more colloquially, YouTube networks. MCNs are intermediary firms that operate in and around YouTube's advertising infrastructure (Ramon,2016). Simply put, MCNs (known as multichannel networks, which for the sake of simplicity will be shortened to MCNs in this paper) are third-party organizations that manage influencers and provide them with help and advice on their professional activities. From the history of the development of MCNs, its predecessor was in 2007 YouTube put forward the YouTube partner program, in this program, YouTube will be from the video broadcast advertising revenue of 65% to the video creators, to encourage them to actively create more videos to expand the amount of content on the site. As the number of video creators continued to grow, several famous video creators at the time began to establish the original MCN organizations, such as maker studios, an MCN organization co-founded in 2010 with famous YouTuber PewDiePie and others (which was acquired by Disney in 2014 to form Disney Digital Network, to be disbanded and reorganized in 2019). In 2014, YouTube formalized the concept of MCNs:

Multi-Channel Networks ('MCNs' or 'networks') are third-party service providers that affiliate with multiple YouTube channels to offer services that may include audience development, content programming, creator collaborations, digital rights management, monetization, and/or sales. (Google,2023)

Meanwhile, MCN as a business model of YouTube platform, was introduced to China in 2014 and has been rapidly developed. In 2016, the term MCN rapidly gained popularity, and YouTube's MCN model was rapidly replicated in the Chinese market. Short video MCN is to unite several vertical fields and influential professional content producers on the Internet, and it is an organization that uses its resources to provide professional services and management, such as content production management, content operation, fan management, and commercial cash.<sup>5</sup>

According to research data from research firm iimedia Research, the number of MCN institutions is expected to exceed 40,000 in 2022 and 60,000 in 2025. in 2022, shopping is the main type of payment for Short video/live broadcast users in China, accounting for 84.1%, 49.8% of users spend 5%-10% of their disposable income on the platform each month, up from 2021. With the increasingly fierce competition in the MCN industry, MCN institutions

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<sup>3</sup> La, X., W., Gao, Y., Zhao, H., Li, Y. (2021) The influence of the characteristics of Internet celebrities on consumers' impulsive buying behavior in the big data economy: Empirical test based on multiple linear regression model *2021 2nd International Conference on Big Data Economy and Information Management (BDEIM)*, 14-19

<sup>4</sup> Semenova, E., Tokmakova, E., Dorofeev, O., Trubin, A., E., Zakharov, A., V. (2023) Internet Marketing as a Technology for Achieving the Competitiveness of a Modern Company in the Conditions of Digitalization of the Economy *Journal of Modern Competition*

<sup>5</sup> Analysys. cn. (2017) *China Short Video MCN Industry Development White Paper 2017*  
<https://www.analysys.cn/article/detail/1001185>

need to improve the talent training mechanism to promote the sustainable development of enterprises.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that MCN as a new business model, has not only achieved success in Europe and the United States but also gained rapid development in China, where the media environment is completely different. MCN as one of the important concepts influencing marketing, should not be limited to the YouTube platform but should be studied in a broader scope. According to the research data on China's MCN business model, the study of China's MCN business model should be centered on the following issues: As a new business model, how has MCN achieved results in China and what advantages has it brought to Chinese influencers? What are the challenges MCNs face in China's new media environment, and how can we prevent and control the problems that MCNs bring? This paper analyzes MCN as a new and evolving business model in China and assesses its impact on Chinese influencers and managers, as well as the challenges it poses to social institutions.

### Literature Review

For the search for correlative literature, the literature was searched separately by language of description in the Chinese literature database: CNKI, Japanese literature database: CINI, J-STAGE, and English literature database: SCI (Science Citation Index).

As a result of organizing the extracted literature, several research directions have been found about influencer marketing and word-of-mouth marketing, depending on the respective research perspectives and research methods. It was also found that the English-language literature and the Japanese and Chinese-language literature have their characteristics and research tendencies.

Therefore, to systematically organize the literature discussed up to now, this paper presents the following seven main research directions (**Table 1**):

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<sup>6</sup> IiMedia. (2022.7) *China MCN Industry Development Research Report 2022-2023*  
<https://www.iimedia.cn/c400/87027.html>



**Table 1.** *Direction about literature review*

Main research direction	clarification
1, Consumer behavior	The way in which consumers choose how to use their incomes <sup>7</sup> .
2, Social media influencers' characteristics/behavior	Individual characteristics that influencers (key opinion leaders) have and characteristics of the information they shared
3, User generated content (word of mouth)	Media content that is produced by users of that medium rather than by media professionals <sup>8</sup> .
4, Sponsorship activity	An arrangement whereby all or part of the funding of a media product or production is provided by a commercial company as a form of advertising <sup>9</sup> .
5, Advertising effectiveness	Whether, and to what extent, advertisements or advertising campaigns achieve their marketing goals <sup>10</sup> .
6, Industrial structure	Composition mechanism of correlated industries in influencer marketing. This concept is to be combined with 'industrial structure'. State-level
7, Industrial regulation	administrative ordinances, laws, and self-regulations concerning the economic structure of the whole society.

The following two research trends can be drawn from the research on consumer behavior: Content created by professional influencers is often not recognized as a form of advertising, but rather interpreted as general consumer content creation. One of the key motivations for the various actions taken by consumers to bring influencers to their attention is the 'normal' attributes of influencers. It is not that they are in the same position as the de facto average consumer, but the subjective view of the average consumer (Alice et al,2018). Moreover, in the interaction between influencers and consumers, the relationship of trust between the two becomes an important factor in influencing consumer behavior. influencers are deemed more trustworthy than celebrities, and people feel more similar to influencers and identify more with them than celebrities (Alexander et al,2019).

In terms of influencer characteristics, there is a clear difference between the content created by influencers and the evaluations published by consumers. Influencers (market mavens /when compared to non-mavens) have more followers to post more often, have fewer readable posts, use more uppercase letters, use fewer distinct words, and use hashtags more often (Paul et al,2021). Moreover, influencers are not only differentiated from ordinary

<sup>7</sup> Consumer behaviour. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 11 Nov. 2023, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095634200>

<sup>8</sup> User-generated content. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 11 Nov. 2023, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803114939679>

<sup>9</sup> Sponsorship. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 11 Nov. 2023, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100524715>

<sup>10</sup> Advertising effectiveness. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 11 Nov. 2023, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095352962>

consumers in terms of specific creative content, but their attributes also have a great influence on the consumer decisions of ordinary consumers, which is reflected in various aspects such as trust relationships, personal charisma, and professional skills (Marijke et al,2017; Chung et al,2019; Chen et al,2021).

Turning back to the analysis of the MCN organization, we can find that Much of the controversy around MCNs stems from their structural position as middlemen, removed from the creative work of video production yet profiting from the attention and traffic generated by such videos(Lobato, R, 2016). That is, while MCN organizations rely on influencer marketing for their profits, they do not work as influencers and are a third-party industry, which makes MCNs subject to several common legal regulatory regimes. However, the problem of regulation does not only plague Europe and the United States as the birthplace of MCN but also applies to China. In Europe and the United States, organizations and platforms similar to MCN, such as eBay and Airbnb, not only rely on the state and other public authorities but also need to be a kind of regulation from the bottom to the top: the communities and user groups that they serve. It is this combination of bottom-up and top-down methods, and between state regulation, co-regulation, and self-regulation, that characterizes the situation of digital intermediaries (Lobato and Thomas, 2015: 116–138).

Therefore, this paper not only explores what role MCNs play in influencer marketing in China but also discusses what kind of regulatory system should be established regarding the development of MCNs in China. The emergence of MCNs has indeed brought great changes to the influencer marketing industry, but relatively, the chaotic state of the industry has also brought new challenges to China's influencer marketing industry. Through interviews with relevant industry practitioners and platforms, this article summarizes the special advantages and regulatory issues brought by MCNs in China's influencer marketing industry at this stage.

## **Methodology**

This paper utilizes the research methodology of Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which is a signature qualitative research methodology. FGD is a research method developed by Robert Merton of Columbia University as a method of evaluating radio wartime morale and campaigns after World War II (Vaughn et al., 1996). In the 1950s, because of its ease and efficiency, it became widely used in the marketing and advertising industries to quickly obtain consumers' impressions and reactions to new products (Yoshimi, 2000). Since the 1980s, FGD has also been used in a wide range of academic fields, such as sociology, psychology, education, and demography, as a qualitative research method to complement quantitative research methods, and its methods have diversified by its objectives. It is also often used in applied fields such as project evaluation and analysis (Morgan, 1993).

FGD is "a discussion in which a small number of subjects from a well-defined population is brought together to have a focused discussion on a pre-selected topic of research interest." (Knodel et al., 1990), based on this definition, this study set up relevant discussion subjects around influencer marketing and MCNs in China and implemented a total of four focus group discussions through the online video conferencing software "Zoom", the details of which will be explained in the Data Collection section.

## Data Collection

The focus group discussions implemented in this study were based on the template used as a basis for the survey implementation methodology for focus group discussions in the 1996 publication *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology* (Vaughn et al. 1996). On this basis, this study made several adjustments to the actual implementation of the focus group interviews based on the specific nature of the respondents associated with influencer marketing and MCNs. Taking into account the occupational specificities of the influencers and their actual physical location, the visit utilized the methodology of online meeting discussions rather than real meetings. The moderator of the meeting used recording software to record the speeches and expressions of the respondents participating in the discussion, but some of the influencers refused to use the camera to participate in the discussion because of their privacy, so this survey focuses on analyzing the content of the speeches and the tone of voice of the discussants.

A pre-prepared guideline was sent to the targets the day before the focus group discussion. The guideline contained the following information: purpose of the research, targets of the research, content of the discussion, process of the discussion, and notes (**Table 2**).

**Table 2.** *Focus group interview study on influencer marketing Guidelines*

purpose of the research	targets of the research	content of the discussion	process of the discussion
The State of the Influencer Marketing Industry in China	Influencers (both active and former, From video platforms Bilibili and TikTok)	Personally relevant: work experience, work environment, work content, software used, organizations worked with, etc.	1. Introductions: greeting by the moderator and explanation according to the guideline(5min)
Comparison with influencer marketing in other countries			2. Warm-up: confirmation of software operation and call quality, discussant introductions(5min)
Structure of MCNs business model	Employees working at MCN	Related to MCNs: Perception of MCNs, Evaluation, Comparison of MCNs across countries, etc.	3. Confirmation of terminology: check with the discussants on the terminology to be used. (5min)
Advantages of MCNs			4. Brief discussion: discussion of some frequently asked questions(15min)
			5. Core discussion: discussion of highly specialized and complex issues(30min)
Normative systems related to MCNs	Employees of video-sharing platforms (TikTok)	Relevance to industry regulation: current problems with MCNs, perception of existing regulation, opinions	6. Summarize: The moderator summarizes the content of the discussion and confirms it with the discussants. (10min)
			7. Conclusion: clarification of issues such as the use of personal information, and thanks to the discussants. (5min)

The three focus group discussions implemented in this study were conducted in September 2022 (influencers), October 2022 (Employees of MCNs), and November 2022 (Employees of video-sharing platforms).

## Results

After the completion of the three focus group discussions, the audio files, which totaled about four hours, were converted into about 30,000 words of text using a conference audio transcription tool. Taking into account the actual tone of the discussants and the atmosphere of the discussions, the content of the three focus group discussions was organized in three directions: influencer marketing, evaluation of MCNs, and industry regulation (also including MCNs). In the following section, the results will be presented by selecting valuable discussions from these three directions.

### *Influencer Marketing*

In discussing the specific activities of influencers, one influencer felt that it was very difficult for influencers in China to carry out activities such as content creation independently and that influencers needed financial and technical support:

Personal characteristics and the capital behind them are crucial requirements for anyone who wants to work as an influencer. Without both, it is very difficult for influencers to stay active for long. I have been an influencer for two years now and most of my influencer friends who started at the same time have left the business. (game streamer)

However, another influencer gave his opinion on this issue, arguing that it was not sufficient to rely on external support for financial and technical support:

Investors are always cautious. In the influencer industry, when manufacturers, video creators, and streamers are all seen to be making money, it is fundamental that investors step into the industry for the first time. (video creator)

Another video creator said that a long-term presence on video-sharing platforms requires the creation of new content, which can only be achieved by constantly improving one's competence:

Influencers need to be able to read the operational trends of the platform, for example, in the case of Bilibili Video, which used to be developed around anime-related content, but is now incorporating a wider range of content, and influencers who can adapt and change with this can achieve better development. (video creator)

Finally, video-sharing platforms offer some very different perspectives on influencer marketing, arguing that the personal power and influence of the influencer are not a necessary element for influencer marketing today:

To reduce costs, it is often seen that manufacturers themselves create content instead of using influencers. (Employees of video-sharing platforms)

For the influencer industry today, it is more common to scout influencers who already have a certain number of followers than to cultivate influencers from scratch, because it is more efficient to monetize them. (Employee of video-sharing platforms)

### ***Evaluation of MCNs***

In the discussion of MCNs, one MCN staff member illustrated the existence of some form of partnership between MCNs and platforms:

A cooperation relationship exists between the platform and the MCNs, whereby the platform regularly and irregularly gives tasks to the MCNs, and the MCNs that complete the task receive a certain amount of resources (e.g. funds, or attention and ranking on the platform). (Employee of MCNs)

The staff of the video-sharing platform also confirmed this view:

There are no three-party agreements (contracts for third parties) between MCNs, advertisers, and platforms; a common pattern is to enter into two contracts, i.e. an advertiser signs a contract with MCNs and another with a platform at the same time. (Employee of video-sharing platforms)

As for the value and definition of MCNs, the attitudes of MCN employees and influencers are opposed:

For MCNs, the most important role is influencer recruitment (scouting), while other functions include management, PR, content stream monitoring, and management of social media accounts. (Employee of MCNs)

It is not enough to guarantee the monetization part; MCNs are mainly there to improve the creative content of creators, and the monetization part is only a small part of the role of MCNs. Originally, MCNs were supposed to be organizations that create value through influencers who belong to them, but the current MCNs are not fulfilling that role. (video creator)

This also proves that China's influencer marketing industry is facing some problems, and this problem is due to the uneven level of professionalism of MCNs, which affects the stability of the whole industry.

### ***Industry Regulation***

When it comes to influencer marketing industry norms in China, the majority of influencers are negative, and some say they are not comfortable expressing their views, perhaps due to the relatively tough media environment in China.

According to one of the influencers, the influencer industry in China is in a state of disarray, not only at work but also in the daily lives of influencers:

To be honest, the influencer industry in China is still in disarray. Due to the peculiarities of their work, streamers often find that not only their work but also their life rhythms are disrupted. (game streamer)

Another part of the MCN staff criticized the current chaos of influencer marketing in China from the perspective of the professionalism of the practitioners:

In terms of the live-streaming industry as a whole, the employee standards for influencers are extremely low, as anyone can live-stream without special skills, and there is a large difference in the qualifications and expertise of the employees in this industry. (Employee of MCNs)

When the topic came to the specifics of the disorganization of the industry, one influencer became very agitated, stating some of the things she had personally experienced:

Many influencers are deceived by MCNs. Many young people who are influencer activities are high school students, university students, and young people who have just entered the workforce. It is easy to believe what people say and those who are scouting for them are those who are getting better at using language. For example, if they say something like "we are a listed company" and everyone hears "listed company", they will believe that it is recognized by the state, so surely there will be no problem. (video creator)

In addition to the information listed above, the focus group discussion also yielded a lot of valuable information such as the actual operational structure of MCNs, the content of cooperation between platforms and MCNs, and how public authorities standardize and manage the influencer marketing industry, which due to the length of this paper, will not be listed in detail here, but rather is organized in a table (**Table 3**).

**Table 3.** *Key findings from the Focus Group discussion*

Discussion	Influencers	Employees of MCNs	Employees of platform
Cognition, evaluation of MCNs	Recognition of the existence of MCNs Partially positive evaluation	Different marketing directions exist inside MCNs	Recognize the need to work with MCNs Some of the problems with MCNs
Recognize the current state of the influencer marketing industry in China	China's influencer marketing industry has many problems Such as low professional skills of practitioners, unfair competition, etc.	Different content platforms exist with different marketing directions of MCNs	MCNs can help new content creators earn money fast However, MCNs are not a fundamental factor in determining an influencer's ability
Comparing MCNs in China and overseas	China's MCNs draw on overseas development experience	Overseas MCNs' many business models to learn	China's MCNs and overseas MCNs have completely different development directions
Reasons to join MCNs	Monetize Reduced workload	Work with other MCNs to generate more money	MCNs can manage influencers instead of themselves
Industry regulation	Need more regulation	Not only to regulate MCNs but also to regulate platforms	Government regulation is increasing

## Conclusion

This study examines the current state of development and issues related to China's influencer marketing industry and MCNs through three separate focus group discussions with different audiences. By surveying Chinese influencers (game streamers, video creators), employees of MCNs, and employees of video-sharing platforms, this study analyzes how MCNs play a role in influencer marketing in China from three different perspectives.

MCNs, on the one hand, act as a training ground for the new generation of influencers, and they can create a better development environment for influencers who have just entered the professional world from both the economic and technological perspectives, as well as shorten the cycle from content creation to revenue generation. The addition of MCNs has also made China's influencer marketing industry more complex, with more and more companies and employees joining the industry, and creating more and more job opportunities.

On the other hand, the emergence of MCNs has also brought many challenges to China's influencer marketing industry. The entry of a large number of unregulated, low-ethics MCNs has deteriorated China's influencer marketing environment, which has not only jeopardized the financial interests of influencers but also, on another level, affected the physical health of Chinese influencers. While the entry of a large number of MCNs has improved the quality of



content creation by influencers, its standardization requirements have also reduced content creation activities based on individual artistic creation and life sharing to a commercialized mode of operation, losing its original and most important characteristics.

To deal with this crisis, it is particularly important to strengthen both public authorities and user groups. Because influencer marketing is a business model formed by Internet users sharing content, the top-down regulatory model often fails to produce a good inhibition of unregulated behavior in the industry, which requires a bottom-up regulatory model, that is, a self-regulatory model based on user groups to further monitor influencer marketing.

However, this study also has some limitations, MCNs as a new type of business model, and opacity has also become its most important feature, although this study used the focus group discussion method to obtain part of the internal information of MCNs, its internal capacity is not enough to fully explain the whole Chinese influencer marketing market, and it is necessary to collect data in a wider range.

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**Contact emails:** 3711202x@komazawa-u.ac.jp  
wxy050321@gmail.com



***#gradschoolproblems: Understanding Communicative Aspects of Memes on  
PhD Students' Shared Experiences***

Debopriya Roy, Tezpur University, India

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**Abstract**

This paper primarily discusses the challenges faced by PhD students as they face limited communication space for expressing and sharing their issues within the higher education system. The rigorous demands of PhD programs, coupled with external stressors, contribute to mental health issues and feelings of isolation. Memes have emerged as a significant mode of discourse in contemporary digital culture, providing insights into the unique struggles of PhD students through the niche of PhD memes. The study particularly focuses on the 'Phd\_meme\_page,' an Instagram page created to infuse humor into the PhD experience. This page fosters a sense of shared identity among followers, creating a community that collectively navigates and finds amusement in common challenges they face every day. Through an analysis of 200 meme posts and interviews with followers, the paper aims to decode the intertextuality of these humorous expressions, linking them to the lived experiences of PhD students. The research sheds light on how the social media discourse, facilitated by these memes, brings visibility to certain aspects of their daily struggles and emphasizes the relatability shared among individuals undergoing the demanding journey of a PhD program. This study also identifies that this discourse of relatable humour does not include issues related to gender, caste, and disability.

Keywords: Meme, Digital Culture, Youth, Students, PhD Student, PhD struggles

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## Introduction

*“Here to release some stress, to share some laughs and to support my peers... Looking forward to be called ‘et al’.”*

– The bio of the Instagram page ‘PhD Meme Page’ (Phd\_meme\_page, n.d.)

PhD students worldwide find a shrinking space for expressing their opinions and sharing concerns, underscoring a need for improvement in communication channels within the higher education system. The unique challenges of a PhD program, demanding unwavering dedication, tenacity, and hard work, and often accompanied by external problems, contribute to mental health issues, identity crises, and feelings of loneliness among these students. In contemporary times, memes have emerged as a significant medium as an alternative space for communication, providing insights into the challenges faced by PhD students. This paper delves into the realm of PhD memes, specifically examining an Instagram page dedicated to PhD memes, known as the 'Phd\_meme\_page.' Created by a researcher, as evident from the description, the page aims to infuse humor into the experience of PhD students. This endeavor fosters the development of a shared identity among its followers, cultivating a sense of community that collectively comprehends the challenges and finds amusement by treating experiences with humor. Through a combination of analysing the memes and conducting interviews with followers, the paper aims to decode the intertextuality of these memes, relating them to the lived experiences of students. By doing so, it seeks to shed light on how aspects of their lived experiences become visible through the social media discourse provided by these memes.

## Context

Richard Dawkins coined the term "meme" in his book *The Selfish Gene* in 1976 to describe the spreading of ideas through the act of copying or imitation from one person to another (Shifman, 2014). Years after the ‘meme’ transformed into a cultural artifact. The advent of digital media ushered in a new era that shaped the entire landscape of digital cultural practices, revolving around creating and sharing memes and opening up new ways of communication. Considering Internet memes as a form of socially constructed public discourse to represent a variety of voices and perspectives, Shifman (2014) defines them as a collection of digital items with shared characteristics that are widely circulated, imitated, and sometimes transformed by numerous Internet users. He explains an Internet meme as a “(unit) of popular culture that (is) circulated, imitated, and transformed by Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience” (ibid.). Internet memes can also be understood as a cultural medium in which shared norms and values are constructed. This involves re-creating a particular text to imbue it with fresh meanings (Shifman, 2014). These memes are a discursive unit of the contemporary digital culture (Wiggins, 2019). On social media platforms, this bottom-up mode of communication diverges from conventional concepts of content creators and their audiences. Instead, it exemplifies a new realm of participatory culture that plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of popular culture in the twenty-first century (Shifman, 2014; Wiggins, 2019).

Within the realm of participatory media environments, such as social media platforms, memes hold significant implications for the development of one's identity and the shaping of public discourse (Huntington, 2013). These memes represent the process of constructing identity in online spaces, where an in-group's identity is defined by what it is and, equally importantly, by what it is not. In essence, the in-group identity distinguishes itself from the

out-group by highlighting its differences and the absence of certain qualities found in the out-group's identity. (Wiggins, 2019). This particular meme subgenre of PhD memes does this by crafting humor designed exclusively for insiders, with the punchline reserved for those equipped with essential inter-textual knowledge (Miltner, 2014). This, in effect, contributes to the ongoing creation and resonance of collective identity which is constructed through the act of exclusion and inclusion (Gross, 1998; Gal, Shifman, & Kampf, 2015). Here, the audience's daily engagement in posts, comments, and reactions sustains social engagement (Marichal, 2013). These niche memes should not be reduced to digital trends embraced by PhD students. They can generate counter-discourses (Davis, Glantz, & Novak, 2015) and serve as a medium through which groups communicate amongst themselves.

In the Indian higher education system, communication traditionally follows a top-down approach. Within this context, PhD students find themselves in a unique position, grappling with the challenge of defining their identity, and balancing between being students and emerging academics. Their collective identity is shaped by shared experiences and distinguished by the differences that set them apart from those outside this group. Niche PhD memes play a significant role in fostering connections among PhD students, facilitating a sense of bonding among them. Here, students are not primarily seeking information to solve their problems; rather, they come together to share and lighten the burden of their shared challenges. These meme discussions also draw the interest of the general public to the scholars' concerns which is often overlooked by mainstream media discussion.

## **Research Method**

This study employs a qualitative content analysis, examining 200 meme posts obtained from the Instagram account 'phd\_meme\_page' till May 2023. With over a hundred thousand followers this page creates relatable posts tailored for PhD students. The memes, primarily in image or short video formats, creatively utilize templates from Western and popular Hindi films and TV shows, occasionally integrating elements from Indian news and political scenarios. Alongside its predominantly humorous content, the page sometimes features motivational posts. Notably, the identity of the creator remains ambiguous, except for the information that she is pursuing research.

This research work does not aspire to understand the creator's motivations for crafting these memes or their impact on the creator's fame or social capital. Instead, the paper aims to explore how these niche memes represent the PhD experience, contribute to the formation of collective student identities, and identify the key characteristics of these identities by recognizing the core themes within the meme discourse. The thematic content of the memes revolves around the challenges faced by PhD students, and deciphering the intertextuality necessitates an understanding of their relatability to student experiences. Moreover, the study aims to grasp the limitations these memes may have in representing issues related to marginalized identities.

To achieve these objectives, the study primarily identifies and analyses prominent themes appearing in the memes. This approach is complemented by semi-structured interviews with PhD students who are followers of this meme account on Instagram. The themes discussed in the following sections resonate strongly with the challenges encountered by the interviewed PhD students, as evidenced by their interactions, as well as PhD students in general. The identity of the ten students interviewed will remain confidential.

## Relatable Self-Depreciation: Procrastination, Lack of Productivity, and Self-Doubt

PhD students often find themselves navigating a myriad of challenges. The weight of academic expectations becomes overwhelming, seeping into every corner of their lives (Woolston, 2022). Failing to handle this stress, many students encounter issues with productivity and struggle to maintain their schedules. Additionally, they have to contend with imposter syndrome and writer's block, which often come with advanced degrees.

These timeless challenges now intersect with a contemporary issue: digital addiction. In an interview, the participant details that spending hours scrolling through social media exacerbates their stress levels. One interviewee says, "I often find myself stressed by the workload and resort to social media. Before I know it, hours have passed, and I haven't accomplished anything. Guilt sets in, and stress intensifies." The first meme (Fig 1) here addresses these, focusing on those within the scientific domain who face the enduring struggle of balancing experiments and writing. This is ironically portrayed through iconic scenes from the Hindi film 'Three Idiots.' Here, the researchers, failing to juggle effectively, end up indulging in web series thereby wasting time. Furthermore, the interviewee reflects on how the environment in his laboratory and his colleagues' achievements lead him to question his self-worth. The perpetual uncertainties and cutthroat atmosphere within Ph.D. programs often plant seeds of self-doubt. The second meme here (Fig 2) is about the issue of rampant imposter syndrome among PhD students.

The third meme (Fig 3) is targeted at procrastination, another prominent struggle that the PhD students face. The fourth (Fig 4) discusses the decline in motivation throughout the PhD journey. This sentiment resonates in the interviews as well. A participant expressed, "I had high hopes and expectations. Upon entering the Ph.D. program, I experienced a significant reality check. Now, I consider it just as a degree."

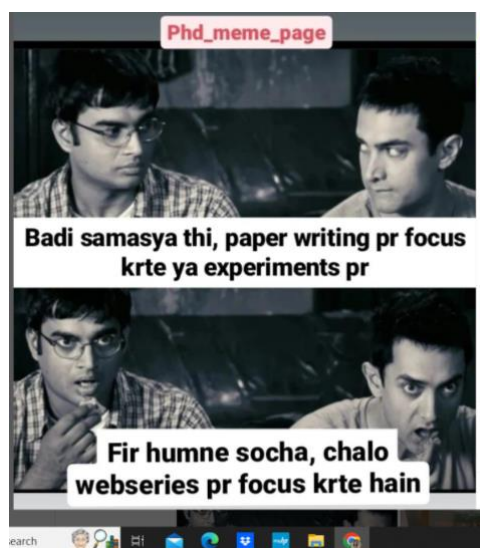


Fig 1: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on balancing writing with experiments





Fig 2: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on imposter syndrome



Fig 3: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on procrastination



Fig 4: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on decreased motivation

Handling these concerns adopts a self-deprecating humor, expressing a shared understanding and generating a good-natured chuckle. The students' firsthand experiences make them

insiders to this humor. The popularity of these memes among PhD students reflects an appreciation for the sarcastic approach.

### Relationship With Supervisor

PhD advisors typically serve multiple roles: they act as educators, mentors offering emotional support and guidance, and patrons providing the launching pad for a student's career. The significance of a PhD mentor in a doctoral candidate's path is substantial. Participants in this study recounted prioritising a better mentor over a prestigious institution while taking their PhD admission. However, the effectiveness of this relationship can be compromised due to the power dynamics prevalent in academia. The unspoken grievances within the PhD student-advisor relationship are subjects awaiting empirical studies and a structured framework for examination. In India, instances of PhD students facing toxic relationships with their advisors gain public attention when tragic outcomes like suicide or sexual harassment incidents occur (Misra, 2023; Chandrababu, 2023). The substantial power imbalance often restricts students from expressing their concerns, confining such discussions to spaces such as peer groups or other closed communicative spaces. The students interviewed for this paper shared their mixed personal experiences and those of their peers in handling diverse issues with supervisors, highlighting the issues stemming from power imbalances.

This particular meme page focuses on various aspects of unethical behavior exhibited by supervisors, including but not limited to inadequate guidance, lack of support for financial issues, and delays in paperwork. One of the memes highlights the shock students feel upon seeing their supervisor as the chief guest at a mental health awareness program, which satirically underscores the immense mental strain experienced by students. In another short video, it is shown students feel apprehensive about openly discussing their supervisors with colleagues, concerned that their peers might betray their trust. Memes under this theme do not always focus on the problems; sometimes, they humorously depict how supervisors react to student's work, bringing back self-deprecating humor.

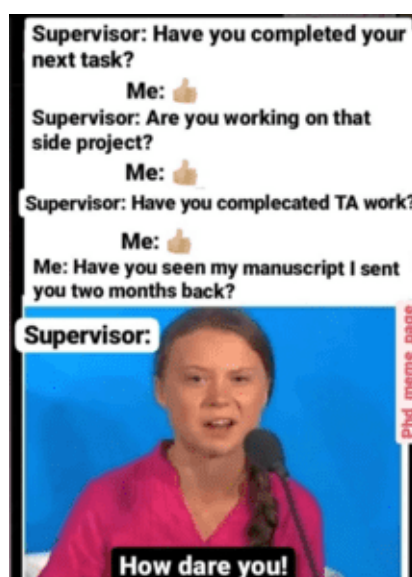


Fig 5: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on issues with Supervisor



Fig 6: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on issues with Supervisor



Fig 7: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on issues with Supervisor



Fig 8: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on issues with Supervisor

The first three memes (Fig 5,6, and 7) here illustrate the experiences of students with an unsupportive supervisor, while the last meme (Fig 8) addresses how students negotiate deadlines. During the interviews, issues such as exploitation (including sexual exploitation), and obligatory behavior came up. Interestingly, the meme posts do not touch upon issues related to discrimination and exploitation. Respondents acknowledged this trend and expressed that they don't expect memes to address such serious topics. One respondent commented, "Yes, memes have established a space for discussion, but they cannot afford to be critical. Memes are not supposed to solve problems you know."

### **Struggling With Finances: Satirizing the Burdens of Low Payment**

The memes are seemingly crafted for an Indian audience, employing templates from Indian films and TV serials. To grasp intertextuality here, one must have a deep understanding of those templates and also must be well aware of the financial challenges faced by PhD students. While the page occasionally touches on various fellowship systems, the primary focus remains on the relatable aspect of the underpayment in PhD courses.

PhD students in India experience varying stipends based on their institution and funding sources. Those enrolled in private universities often receive less funding than their counterparts in public universities. According to an interviewee, fellowship amounts are generally considered reasonable to low given the required expertise. Students in central universities, for instance, receive a mere monthly stipend of 8,000 Indian rupees (approximately USD 96). Among the respondents, the highest payments were received by those holding Junior/Senior Research Fellowships starting at approximately USD 372, or those engaged in research at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, where students receive a comparable sum. This year, there was an increase of approximately USD 72 for JRF and USD 84 for SRFs (after the interviews were taken), while students in central universities' institutional fellowship did not experience any raise. Notably, securing funding from public agencies often requires qualifying through national-level exams like CSIR-NET, UGC-NET, or GATE. Those who do not succeed in these exams but are recruited through some other grants at times receive stipends of nearly half for similar work (Joseph, 2021).

Numerous student protests in India highlight the gravity of the issue (Padma, 2015; "Research Scholars Finally Get Stipend Hike After Weeks of Protests Across India," 2019; "Research Pays Better Abroad, need 60% Hike in Fellowship,' Say Protesting PhD Scholars," 2023). PhD students, typically at an age with various financial responsibilities, sometimes opt to pursue their studies abroad due to these difficulties (Purakayastha, 2022). In line with reports, the students' interaction highlighted a distinct frustration regarding finances, particularly due to occasional delays in payments, inadequate raises, and insufficient funding to cover other academic expenses, etc. Some, upon introspection, regret not considering pursuing research overseas.

The memes cleverly convey the message of low payment in the PhD by comparing it to a job that pays less than the minimum wage or expressing frustration about delayed payments. The content on funding also resorts to relatable humor on the happiness experienced by students upon finally receiving funding after a prolonged period. The discourse at large focused on the challenges of low funding in academia and its implications.



Fig 9: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on low payment in PhD

### **Struggling to Strike a Balance: The Psychological Toll of Managing Life and PhD**

In 2020, the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reported a harrowing statistic: a student took their own life every 42 minutes in India, resulting in over 34 student suicides daily (Sarveswar & Thomas, 2022). This data is not specific to PhD students only. Still, the academic journey, laden with research demands and teaching commitments, transforms into a delicate juggling act, leaving scant room for respite. The persistent doubt regarding one's capabilities poses a continuous threat to confidence, impeding academic progress. Pursuing a PhD transcends mere intellectual endeavors; it is an emotional and psychological challenge that rigorously tests resilience and determination. Adding to this complexity, students grapple with uncertainty, workplace issues, financial hardships, and various other stressors.

A study conducted in Kerala reveals the alarming extent of this crisis, with nearly 68% of PhD students experiencing some form of depressive disorder, according to Nair (2021). The severity of this condition is particularly pronounced among non-science students, with 84% displaying signs of depression compared to 62% in science disciplines. This issue is not unique to India; it is a global phenomenon (Sekhar, 2019; Murguía Burton & Cao, 2022). The severity is notably pronounced in the Indian context.

Despite the global and national scale of the problem, the issue of mental health in PhD students often garners attention only in the aftermath of tragic events, such as suicides. Unfortunately, public discussions seldom translate into concrete actions to safeguard the well-being of these students. Contributing factors to this distressing scenario include issues with academic guidance, instances of discrimination, and overwhelming mental stress (Chaudhuri, 2022; Deeksha, 2023; Aswani, 2023; Gokhale, 2023). Addressing these multifaceted challenges is crucial not only for the academic community but also for society at large.

## Anxiety Exists

### Grad students:



Fig 10: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on the mental health of PhD Students

The meme posts on this talked about anxiety, lack of social life, etc. The interviewed students consistently emphasized the gravity of the various mental health challenges they face. They also pointed out the lack of available avenues for seeking help. As their social life and circles reduced, the sense of loneliness among them intensified. Although some of their supervisors and Institutions showed little effective concern for these struggles, some shared hopeful experiences. The students further expressed that while memes may not directly help them survive the situation, the content fosters a sense that they are not alone. This relatability is a key factor in why they engage with this genre of content.

### Understanding the Limitations of Relatability in PhD Memes

In the digital age, memes have emerged as a powerful medium for expressing shared experiences and fostering a sense of community (Wiggins, 2020). A closer look at memes portraying the challenges faced by PhD students, especially in India, reveals a complex interplay between humor, identity, and representation. The humor embedded in these memes does not necessarily provide solutions to their struggles; instead, it creates a space where PhD students connect over relatable challenges. This phenomenon echoes the idea put forth by Wiggins (2020) that social media tools offer a platform for individuals to express and perceive support, fostering a reification of identity. Relatability also appears from the act of participating in the culture by sharing or reposting the meme and having the same feeling after seeing the meme (Kanai, 2017). The experiences of the PhD students serve as the text that further aids in decoding the humor.

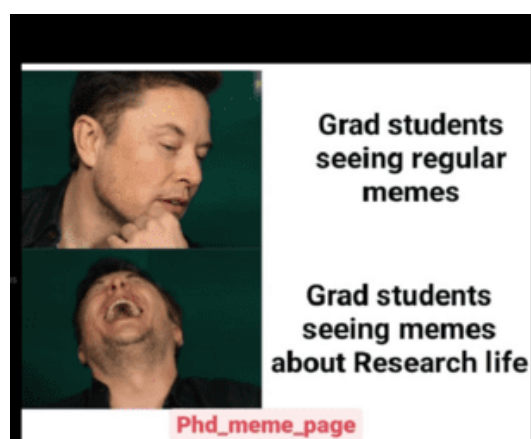


Fig 11: Screenshot Image of an Instagram post with content on the relatability of PhD memes

These memes effectively capture the universal struggles of heightened stress and lack of motivation. Insider humor gains prominence through content focused on rejections, how PhD students find joy in various situations, the slow progress of a PhD, delayed reviews, poking fun at various academic aspects like citations, 'et al' and more. The creation of identity here also occurs by distinguishing them from others who do not understand the intertextuality of these memes.

A deeper analysis reveals a nuanced perspective on identity representation within these meme discourses. They also expose a glaring gap in addressing issues pertinent to marginalized identities. Despite their popularity, the memes predominantly focus on generic PhD student experiences, sidelining critical issues faced by women or queer people dealing with gendered challenges, casteism, issues faced by disabled students, exploitation, sexual harassment etc. This exclusion raises questions about the inclusivity of these spaces and whether they inadvertently exclude those struggling with intersectional challenges.

An interviewee highlighted this exclusion, stating, "The memes would not speak of caste. Then the discussion will be regarding whether we need reservations or not, and the fun will be gone." Another interviewee questioned the creators' intentions, stating, "The meme makers are not calling for a change, you know? They are just making fun of PhD life." He added, "We do not expect change from these, for that, we all have to be united and voice our opinions seriously". This acknowledgement implies that the satirical nature of these memes while making struggles visible, might be intentionally limited in scope. The humor acts as a buffer against engaging with more complex and challenging issues, reinforcing the notion that memes despite their visibility, may not be catalysts for substantive change. Another respondent states "If the memes start becoming political they (creators) will be in trouble, they might lose followers as well because it would not be relatable to everyone". However, concluding these calls for inquiry into the creator's perspective and requires a separate investigation that exceeds the confines of this paper.

This selective representation is not unique to PhD student memes; it mirrors a broader trend in internet visual culture. As Nakamura (2008) points out, unequal representation persists in digital spaces, with certain voices, often those of privileged individuals gaining more visibility. The memes, despite their potential to challenge authority and critique power dynamics, unintentionally or deliberately contribute to this unequal representation by focusing on certain specific aspects of the PhD student experience.

## **Conclusion**

The 'PhD meme page' catalyzes fostering a sense of community, offering a space where humor acts as a unifying force, bonding students through shared challenges and collective understanding. By decoding the intertextuality of these memes and relating them to the daily realities of PhD students, this paper revealed how meme discourses contribute to visibility and relatability of shared experiences. It also underscores the pressing need for improved communication channels within higher education systems. While PhD student memes play a vital role in building a sense of community and articulating shared challenges, their limited representation raises concerns about inclusivity and perpetuates unequal visibility. The study acknowledges its constraints in analyzing just a single page among many and recognizes the absence of the meme creator's perspective. Moreover, it advocates for deeper investigation into alternative communication avenues for students while emphasizing the importance of

recognizing and understanding the diverse experiences of PhD students in the wider academic realm.

*Note:* The images featured are sourced from the public Instagram page titled Phd\_meme\_page (@phd\_meme\_page) and are utilized solely for educational and research purposes, under fair use exceptions within copyright regulations.



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***Portrayal of Women on OTT:  
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Content Released From 2017-2022***

Aastha Tiwari, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India

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**Abstract**

The arrival of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms like Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, Netflix, and Sony Liv has brought an evolution to the entertainment industry. It has made a century-old film industry reach the pockets of audiences through digital distribution technology. It stands among the most popular and influential mass media as it has made audiences habitual of binge-watching. The content presented in both films and web series depicting numerous realistic situations through different characters in their storylines has been a prominent reason for promoting cross-cultural exchange in social values. Women characters have been too significant since the dawn of cinema that their presence cannot be overlooked now on the OTT. Thus, it becomes crucial to understand how various films and web series released on OTT platforms depict them in different storylines. The study analyzes the portrayal of women characters in select Hindi films and web series released on the mentioned OTT platforms through a critical discourse analysis method of the qualitative research approach. The selected period for the study is 2017 to 2022. The study tries to ascertain how women characters are placed in different social and cultural settings in OTT-based content. It aims to examine the significance of their roles in the storylines of the films and web series on OTT platforms released during the last five years. The study also attempts to determine how various (social, personal, and romantic) relationships of women characters have been treated and represented in them.

Keywords: OTT, Women, Portrayal, Films, Web Series

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## Introduction

India has a population of approximately 1.42 billion, and women in India have always been considered “Aadhi-Aabaadi”, i.e. half of the population (denoting that they are equivalent to the other gender in the country). They are treated as Goddesses and have always been a holy symbol as per numerous Indian mythological stories and folk tales, but their position and treatment in society remain an issue of discussion.

Indian cinema is known for depicting realities of society, weaved in numerous emotions filmed in different storylines. Women characters have always been central elements in the storylines of numerous films. The significance of women in cinema can be traced back to its advent in India when male actors used to dress up like women and portray their characters. But later their presence came into the limelight both onscreen and off-screen. Women characters have always addressed numerous social issues. Thus, their significance in the entertainment industry cannot be overlooked, which makes it crucial to study their portrayal on the big screen.

The industry saw rapid growth in the last 100 years in the context of both content and technology. “Over-the-top” (OTT) platforms are a prominent example of digital distribution technology, which has become a technological revolution in the entertainment industry. Initially, India saw the launch of OTT services in 2008 with BIGFlix by Reliance Entertainment. Later, platforms like SonyLiv, Hotstar, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Eros Now, and Jio Cinema etc; also came into existence. These OTT platforms have grown so fast that they made the entertainment industry easily accessible to audiences and available on their computer and smartphone screens. According to the report of Business Today, India has more than 119 million active OTT subscribers *S. Vidya (2023)*. These Over-The-Top services (OTT) broadcast numerous Television programs, films, web series, live shows and many more belonging to different genres and languages. It has attracted audiences and also made many of them habitual of binge-watching OTT-based content.

The study analyzes the portrayal of women in select films and web series as OTT content. They have played a significant role in the cross-cultural exchange of social values, traditions and lifestyles through films, and web series across the globe faster than ever. Their storylines and characters have always had an impact on audiences. The study considers the Hindi language-based OTT content as it is the most popular language in the entertainment industry. According to a report, Hindi language films have earned a revenue of 36.4 million with their 91 films in 2023 till now *Sacnilk Tech (2023)*, which is the highest among all other language-based film industries in India.

The study tries to analyze the women characters from select films and web series from chosen OTT platforms namely, Amazon Prime Video, Disney + Hotstar, Netflix, and Sony LIV. The films and web series selected for the study are from 2017 to 2022. One film and one web series are selected from each mentioned OTT platform. These are: **Karwaan (2018)** and **Panchayat – Season 2 (2022)** from Amazon Prime Video, **Khuda Hafiz (2020)** and **Karm Yuddh (2022)** from Disney+ Hotstar, **Pagglait (2021)** and **Kota Factory – Season 2 (2021)** from Netflix, and **Salute (2022)** and **Gullak – Season 3 (2022)** from Sony LIV. The study examines the settings, positions, relationships, and significance of women characters placed in select OTT content.

## Literature Review

*Rashmi & Sood (2021)*, cite OTT as an unconventional form of communication. The research discovers that web series belonging to the crime genre showcase a huge amount of violence, sexual abuse, and offensive language toward women characters in their storylines. The research also finds that cinema has portrayed women in stereotypical and idealized characters.

*Medhi (2022)*, states the emergence of OTT platforms in India has brought a shift in the media consumption habits of Indian audiences. The study also discovers that web series on OTT platforms showcase Indian women in a different social status in contrast to dramatic saas-bahu sagas in mainstream film and television content.

*Sharma (2021)* discusses gender representation and hate speech in OTT-based content. The research discovers that web series frequently feature abusive language and showcase gender discrimination in numerous scenes.

*Saha & Prasad (2021)*, state the arrival of OTT as a new evolution in the media and entertainment sector. The study discovered that the growth of internet penetration has turned out to be one of the most prominent reasons for the increased binge-watching habits of audiences.

*Agarwal & Das (2022)* in their survey, examine how audiences perceive the evolving representation of women in mainstream media. The study finds that the content on OTT platforms is redefining women in Indian society.

## Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are:

- To study the role and the settings in which the women characters are placed in select OTT content.
- To identify the positions in which women characters appear in select OTT content.
- To analyze the importance of the role of women characters in select OTT content.
- To examine the personal, social & romantic relations of women characters featured in select OTT content.

## Research Questions

Based on these research objectives, the research questions of the study are:

- How women characters have been portrayed in different social settings?
- Do women characters hold a significant role in the storyline of the select OTT content?
- How positions of women characters have been treated in select OTT content?
- How personal, social, and romantic relations of women characters have been treated in select OTT content?

## Methodology

The study analyzes the women characters in select OTT-based content (films and web series) through critical discourse analysis, a qualitative research method. In the context of women on OTT, CDA identifies the patterns and trends of their portrayal on-screen.

- Language isn't limited to words and grammar. According to Norman Fairclough, it is a crucial part of our social practices *Study Smarter, (n.d.)*.
- The language delivered to audiences through mass media messages (generated by images, texts, films, music, etc) can have connotative and denotative meanings. Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis critically analyzes written, spoken or visual language and decodes it in the context of knowledge, ideology, power, culture and society *Scott, (2023)*.
- Critical Discourse Analysis helps researchers to analyze the forms and the content of the message, how the message communicates the ideas and beliefs, and the institutional or organizational factors which affect the message (*Wimmer & Dominick*).

## Data Analysis & Discussion

### Amazon Prime Video: Karwaan (2018): Mithila Palkar as Tanya

Akarsh Khurana directed the film *Karwaan*, which was released on Amazon Prime Video in 2018. Mithila Palkar portrays a university-going student Tanya. She is portrayed as an independent girl who stays away from her home in a university hostel in Ooty. The film begins with the weird exchange of dead bodies of her grandmother and Avinash's (Dulquer Salman) father, who died in a bus accident. Along with her frank and bold image, she is portrayed as emotionally weak after her grandmother's demise. Meanwhile, the male lead character Avinash begins a journey to Kochi with Shauqat (Irrfan Khan) to receive his father's dead body and give her grandmother's dead body at her mother's home. Both of them pick up Tanya on their way to Kochi. The character holds an open-minded personality and argues with Avinash over the sexual choices of women. She is portrayed as younger among them but motivates Avinash to follow his passion for photography. She faces numerous questions from Shauqat and becomes part of an argument for wearing short dresses, asking to drive a car and smoking, but later they reunite at the climax of the film. Her on-screen presence makes the story an amalgamation of tragedy and comedy. The character holds a significant place in the story as it's her grandmother's dead body that gets exchanged with the dead body of Avinash's father. The director has filmed their journey as “*Karwaan*” of a lifetime, in which Tanya comes out as a strong and understanding person. This journey changes her careless attitude towards life.

### Amazon Prime Video: Panchayat – Season (2022): Neena Gupta as Manju Devi

Deepak Kumar Mishra directed *Panchayat – Season 2* web series in continuation to its first season, which was released on Amazon Prime Video in 2022. The series portrays Neena Gupta as Manju Devi, the gram pradhan of Phullera village in Uttar Pradesh, like the earlier season. On one hand, where Season 1 of the series portrays her character as a rubber-stamp gram pradhan, Season 2 breaks this stereotype where she participates more actively in village politics compared to the previous season. It becomes evident when uneducated Manju Devi tries to learn the national anthem for the flag-hoisting ceremony at Panchayat Bhawan.



Unlike the other scenes, the character here drapes a silk saree with broad borders, which makes her look confident, powerful and responsible. She fails to learn the national anthem correctly but tries to sing it in front of the District Magistrate who came to the village for inspection so that she can safeguard her identity and pride. She attempts to win the sand deal at convenient rates without having any business experience with the help of her husband Brij Bhushan Dubey (Raghubir Yadav) and Panchayat secretary Abhishek (Jitendra Kumar). Later, she boldly stops a photo-opportunist MLA from joining the funeral ceremony of the martyr and drives him away. Her social relations bring more screen time and political competition for her. Bhushan (Durgesh Kumar) and Kranti Devi (Sunita Rajwar) keep pointing out the flaws in the governance of Manju Devi which provides numerous comic scenes to this series. Her personal and romantic relations do not hold significant screen time in the series. The character secures a crucial place in the storyline but shares limited screen time compared to male characters.

### **Disney+ Hotstar: Khuda Hafiz (2020): Shivaleeka Oberoi as Nargis Rajput Chaudhary**

Farukh Kabir directed Khuda Hafiz in 2020 which was released on Disney+ Hotstar. The film portrays Shivaleeka Oberoi as Nargis Rajput Chaudhary, a Lucknow-based HR professional and wife to software engineer Sameer Chaudhary (Vidyut Jammwal). The film begins with an arranged marriage proposal for Nargis and Sameer which becomes a foundation for their love story. The character holds a feminist personality who decently takes the side of working women and talks about their importance in the workplace and household to her would-be husband. She also shares a few on-screen romantic scenes with him. The storyline does not focus much on her social relationships, but her personal and romantic relationship grows stronger in the film. The director has not given her character a longer screen time, but he has set an example of rotating the story around her character even without presenting her much on-screen. In continuation of the scenes of their newly married life, they lose their job during the global recession and start applying for new jobs in foreign countries. The main story begins when she gets trafficked to the Arab country Noman while going to start her new job in that country. Her feminist personality doesn't make her bold and strong enough that she can help herself in running away from the clutches of the kidnappers. The film moves forward showing Sameer's search for Nargis, where he reaches Noman and tries all possible legal and illegal ways to find his wife. His efforts give him success after which both of them fly back to India. Her jolly nature since the beginning of the film fades out to the dull victim personality after she gets rescued.

### **Disney+ Hotstar: Karm Yuddh (2022): Paoli Dam as Indrani Roy**

Ravi Adhikari directed Karm Yuddh, which was released on Disney+ Hotstar in 2022. The web series portrays Paoli Dam in the character of Indrani Roy. The series is based on the landscape of Bengal, which allows her character to speak Bengali sometimes along with Hindi. She appears as a passionate businesswoman who desires to lead her family business named Roy Industries and is ready to do anything for the same. In this reflection, bold and strong-headed Indrani does many foul practices to safeguard her position in the family business. It becomes evident when her truth is revealed to audiences that she tried to kill her husband Vardhan Roy (Rajesh Khattar), who doesn't want her to be part of his family business. She bribes board members to vote in her favor. Despite her fair and unfair practices, her character faces numerous challenges to survive in their family business. This becomes evident when the male characters of the story who are not willing to accept the leadership of a woman make strategies against her. Later in the series, all of them become successful in

sending her behind bars for attempting to kill her husband. Besides this, she is also a stepmother to Abhimanyu (Ankit Bisht) but loves him like her own child but never receives the same in return. She gets physical with the boy younger than her in the weak and lonely moment. The series shows how men in professional spaces do not like a woman leading them. Her character is crucial for the storyline because she remains the centre of politics in the series.

### **Netflix: Pagglait (2021): Sanya Malhotra as Sandhya Giri**

Umesh Bisht directed the film Pagglait, which was released on the OTT platform Netflix in 2021. The film portrays Sanya Malhotra as Sandhya Giri, a widow of Aastik who had zero emotional connection with her and never had proper communication. The film portrays that she had to follow all post-cremation rituals for her husband without her desire. In this reflection, the story presents her as a woman who does not feel like crying after her husband's death which makes all the family members and relatives anxious. Instead, she feels like eating junk food and secretly goes out with her friend to have Gol-Gappe. The character feels disheartened and cheated after learning about the extramarital affair of her dead husband. She desires to meet his lover and office colleague Akanksha (Sayani Gupta). After meeting her, she wants to know more about her husband. The film beautifully portrays the mental and emotional tussle between these two women, as the one who is a wife desires that she would have been loved by her man. Contrary to this the one who is his lover feels disheartened for not being his wife. Sandhya feels attracted to Akanksha's personality as her husband used to love her but blames her for being a second woman in his life. Despite this, the family feels shocked that their late son has made Sandhya a nominee of their life insurance policy which benefits her with fifty lakh rupees. Later her in-laws ask her to marry her brother-in-law so that the money remains in the family, but she leaves the insurance money for her father-in-law and takes a life-changing step for herself. She runs away from home leaving a note for her family that she will find a new job, restart her life and will take care of her in-laws after her husband's demise. The film seems relatable to the women who deal with similar situations and are forced by in-laws to marry without their desire.

### **Netflix: Kota Factory – Season 2 (2021): Revathi Pillai as Vartika Ratawal**

Raghav Subbu directed the web series Kota Factory – Season 2 which was released on Netflix in 2021, like its first season in 2019. The series portrays Revathi Pillai as Vartika Ratawal, who is a senior secondary student and is preparing for the IIT-JEE exams in Kota, Rajasthan. As the story screens the student's life, she appears as a teenager who develops feelings for her classmate Vaibhav (Mayur More) while studying together for board exams. The character cannot be considered too significant for the storyline as it is only highlighted to show the teenager's love life and shares less screen time in comparison to other characters in the web series. The character portrays a girl who faces study pressure and decides to step back from giving routine preparatory exams. She stands more as Vaibhav's girlfriend and emotional support than as a student preparing for a competitive examination.

### **Sony LIV: Salute (2022): Diana Penty as Dia**

Rosshan Andrews directed the film Salute, released on Sony LIV in 2022. The film portrays Diana Penty as Dia, who appears as a law scholar based in Maharashtra. She is portrayed in a live-in relationship with sub-inspector Arvind Karunakaran (Dulquer Salman), the male lead character of the story. The film portrays her as a supporting character for the male lead

despite a lead female actor in the film. She motivates him to reunite with his family. She supports him in investigating a closed case in search of truth despite knowing about the punishment which will be announced after the final decision. The character does not hold a significant place in the storyline and comes on-screen only four to five times (for a few minutes) in the film. Thus her presence can be considered negligible and does not change any angle in the storyline.

### **Sony LIV: Gullak – Season 3 (2022): Geetanjali Kulkarni as Shanti Mishra**

Palash Vasvani directed the web series Gullak – Season 3, released on the OTT platform Sony LIV in 2022, in continuation to its previous two seasons in 2019 and 2021. The series portrays Geetanjali Kulkarni as a middle-class homemaker Shanti Mishra. Her life revolves around cooking food in the kitchen, saving money and worshipping God; to resolve their family issues. Her taunts at her boys showcase their mother-son bond which fills the scenes with humour and creates room for comedy in the web series. Her character portrays a middle-class woman struggling over things of daily needs, groceries and talking over serious life issues. Her feminine urge to be liked by someone comes out when she happily recalls her school-time crush in front of Furtili (Ketki Kulkarni). She also opposes her husband's decision and convinces him to reject the forced marriage proposal for Furtili. She is not portrayed in a romantic relationship with her husband but shares a strong understanding with him that she knows about his every single habit. In this context, she argues, challenges him, that he will not take the family on vacation like he did last time after receiving LTA from his office. Her love and care for him also become evident when he suffers from a heart attack. Her social relations with her neighbours are supportive, but one among those characters tries to interfere in every happy or sad moment of their life. But these social relations bring huge comic space to the story. The character holds a crucial place in the storyline as her realistic portrayal represents numerous middle-class homemakers and the lives of the other three male characters also revolve around her.

### **Conclusion**

The study has found that select women characters are placed into different social settings as per the requirement of the different storylines, such as a village in Uttar Pradesh and its politics, family business politics in Bengal, coaching centres in Rajasthan and study pressure on students, lawyer supporting her partner in Maharashtra etc. But the select OTT content shares their struggle for their acceptance and powers in their life and storyline. These select characters are presented in different positions, such as school students preparing for competitive exams, gram pradhan, young adults, businesswomen, homemakers, etc. Some of the stories prominently highlight their professions or positions in the storylines. The study has found that most of these women characters are doing well in their romantic relationships, but few of them struggle in their relationships with their partners. The select films and web series portray only a few women characters in their social relationships which on the one hand fulfil the comic requirements of the story, but on the other hand, turn up as a reason for the struggle of lead women characters. These select films and web series significantly highlight that the Hindi-language-based film industry is significantly making the stories of strong women and their struggles, but contrary to this there are several films and web series which present them as supporting characters and their presence on-screen as almost negligible or is not equivalent to other characters. Many of these characters hold strong positions in the storylines and seem relatable to the realistic situations in society.

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***State-Run Feminism in China: Who Has Been Empowered?  
A Critical Discourse Analysis on Women of the Year (2017-2021) in China Women's News***

Congcong Chen, The London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom

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**Abstract**

Being a country with profound patriarchal traditions, the media environment remains conservative on feminism and gender-related issues in China, despite prevalent feminist movements worldwide. This sphere is increasingly scrutinized when Xi took power, who has displayed a strongman leadership to further centralize the overall dominance. Nevertheless, there is still space to negotiate women's rights and gender-related issues. One example is China Women's News (CWN), the official publication of All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) - the one and only state-sponsored organisation on women's affairs. It is particularly discovered that there is a special column on CWN called *Women of the Year*, which presents 10 most outstanding female figures annually as role models who have made extraordinary achievements and demonstrated women's empowerment. However, considering the institutional association between CWN and the nation-state, there might be implicit ideological connotations underneath the high-profile acknowledgements, given the social reality where most women still suffer from systematic discrimination and under/misrepresentation. This study conducts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) on the media discourse of *Women of the Year*, deciphering its ideological implications through the examination of texts as a site where women, media and state interplay with each other. This study also invites more research on the challenges women are confronted with in media representations and in the reality, to contribute to broader social justice.

Keywords: Media Representation, State feminism, China Women's News

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## Introduction

On 2022.04.12, The Communist Youth League (*Gong Qing Tuan Zhongyang*), a youth movement organization affiliated to the China Communist Party (hereafter CCP), released a post on its social media Weibo, attacking ‘extreme feminism’ as a ‘rampant and toxic tumour’ which provokes gender antagonism. This post has triggered explosive denouncement from the public, interrogating their right to encroach the discursive domain of women.



**Figure 1: The Communist Youth League attacking ‘extreme feminism’ on Weibo<sup>1</sup>**

China has been a country with prevailing patriarchal traditions over its long history, and the public space for discussing women’s rights is overtly asymmetrical. Official parties such as above are squashing such discussions among citizens, while taking a proactive role in dominating relevant topics.

However, the authority also seeks to incorporate gender equality and pro-women values into national propaganda as a way of securing leadership. The complicated ideological formation is well practiced by the government-run organisation All-China Women’s Federation (hereafter ACWF), and their official media China Women’s News (hereafter CWN). One notable example is a column called *Women of the Year*, where 10 women are selected annually for their extraordinary achievements in various fields as role models. On one side, these selected women have reified women’s empowerment. On the other, they are also endorsements of the nation-state’s interests and the party’s policies.

Departing from the representational duality, the research conducts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) on CWN’s *Women of the Year* column (2017-2021), inspecting how the official media represent these commendable models, and what ideological overtones are embedded in association with broader social backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup> Source : <https://www.weibo.com/3937348351/Lo9zyhPn5>

## Literature Review

### 1. Discursive Power of Media and the Chinese Context

It has been thoroughly studied that media, as a primary channel of information flow, plays a crucial role in delivering discourses by creating a representation of the world; and such discursive power is constructivist rather than textual, not only seeks to mirror certain parts of social reality, but also to reconsolidate or reshape them (Chouliaraki, 2008; Hall, 2016; Fairclough, 2003; Bryman, 2012).

Discursive power is usually imbalanced, which grounds the mechanism of ideology, as made familiar by Althusser (1971) to describe how power relations are reproduced via discursive systems. On one side, media discourse serves for presenting, naturalizing and making the public accept existing dominant social ideologies and hierarchical relations via 'systems of representation' (Fowler, 1991; Hodge & Kress, 1993). On the other side, media itself can supply powerful lexical and syntactic structures that can formulate and convey its own logic and ideologies, which is desired by other social powers such as political parties (Meng, 2018).

Notably, ideology is firstly conceptualized as a means of 'state apparatus' (Althusser, 1971), to which China is an exceptional testimony. The authoritarian nature of Chinese media is 'the organ of central state' whose function is to reflect CCP's doctrine, signal political power, and shape the public's value system in accordance with nationalist ideology (Chomsky, 1997; Sun & Chen, 2015; Meng, 2018; Jaros & Pan, 2018).

Fuch (2015) has characterized Chinese media as a three-fold linear, top-down structure to dominate discursive power. Media system is controlled across individual, institutional and societal levels, where the identity of participants and the ways of representations are heavily censored and monitored. The production and circulation of media contents are dominated by political and economic elites (Jaros & Pan, 2018), which leaves little scope for contest from the general public (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), especially in sensitive topics such as feminist appeals.

### 2. Women and the State: State Feminism Under Patriarchal Capitalism

The profound patriarchal system of China can be dated back to feudal times, as the dominant Confucianism advocates a benevolent patrilineal hierarchical order. Women are regulated to obey all male roles around them - father, husband and son (Barlow, 2004; Dillon, 2021), excluded from public sphere but constrained in domestic space carrying housework (Meng & Huang, 2017).

However, when global women movement burgeoned in the 19th and 20th century, there was also an influx of feminist awareness in the traditionally patriarchal society. Nevertheless, it has been penetrated by scholars such as Barlow (2004) and Wang (2005, 2010) that Chinese female movements have never been an independent practice but affiliated to segmented nationalist grounds since the very beginning - reformist, revolutionist, and the CCP, all patronizing women in exchange of their support to take over the country (Barlow, 2004; Hong Fincher, 2018).

This is even more manifest after the establishment of PRC in 1949 and the CCP seized power, since when an officially recognised **state feminism** came into being. Unlike western liberal feminism which strives for women's individual rights and autonomy (Fraser, 1997), state feminism 'portrays a paradoxical image of a state patriarch championing women's liberation' (Wang 2005, p. 519), which entails different expectations of women at different times, with a consistent requirement of their contribution to the country.

At socialist construction times, women were officially granted equal rights as men, with Chairman Mao famously declaring 'women hold up half the sky' (Barlow, 2004; Wang, 2010). However, basic rights such as entering labour force did not mean self-fulfilment but the responsibility to shoulder necessary agricultural and industrial production for nation's development as 'mandatory labour cisterns', while at the same time be 'a good socialist wife' (Davin, 1979; Tsai 1996; Zuo, 2013).

Then after the Opening and Reform in 1978, the relationship between women and the state has new interpretations. On one hand, market economy reform has opened new opportunities for women. The class of professional women began to grow in size and influence (Dillon, 2021). On the other hand, the state's priority of economic development and the global neoliberalization have further disfranchised women (Wallis et al., 2018), where women are confronted with a dual oppression of patriarchal capitalism – implicit discrimination in workplace, as well as the burden of traditional domestic roles (Eisenstein 1984; Ueno, 1989; Meng & Huang, 2017).

Since Xi's strongman leadership, the Party has been centralizing power and 'no aspect of Chinese society, economy, culture or politics should escape from being guided, controlled and sometimes repressed by the CCP (Lai, 2016; Zeng, 2016; Brødsgaard, 2018; Gore, 2021). Pro-status quo nationalism is emphasised, which entails sustaining social stability, and make people faithful to their already powerful country, with the ultimate ambition to legitimize CCP's authority (Linehan, 2018).

The shrinking political environment also triggered more conservative gender relations. Recently, Chinese propaganda has revived the family rhetoric as an approach to secure authority and found social stability. Women's status suffers severe backlash such as being urged to return to domestic areas as virtuous, obedient roles.

### **3. All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and China Women's News (CWN): Institutionalized State Feminists**

State feminism and its peculiar ethos are usually articulated with a specific government-run organisation as a remarkable symbol- All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), which was established in March 1949 under the leadership of CCP. As the only state-sponsored organisation on women's issues, ACWF provides invaluable resources to investigate the relationship between women and the state.

On one hand, the organisation commits to 'steadfastly protecting the rights and interests of the mass women'. They have indeed carried out commendable achievements to improve gender awareness and support women, such as providing educational and vocational training, engaging women in social production (Longwe, 1991; Wang, 2005). On the other, the organisation firmly adheres to party's lead and propagates a positive image of the CCP (Howell, 1996, 2004; Wang, 2005). As self-proclaimed, ACWF should 'Listen to the Party's



words and follow the Party's lead' (Wang, 2010), 'being a good daughter of the party' (Zhou, 2019). This submission has been intensively reinforced under Xi's era, as they must 'follow the wise guidance of Xi' (Sintomer & Zhou 2019). As Wang (2005) pointed out, it seems to be the party-state, through ACWF, that defines women's rights and interests.

ACWF also launched its official publication on 3 October 1984, CWN (*Zhongguo Funv Bao*), which is essentially controlled by both the Propaganda Ministry of the Central Party Committee and the State Press and Publication Administration (SPPA). The official media provide key material to interpret the Party and state's ideological inclinations on gender issues. As concluded from a systematic content analysis by Chen (2006), CWN follows dual-representational route of ACWF, advocating women's rights and gender equality while broadcasting nation-state propaganda. For example, it usually ascribes women's liberation to the Party's leadership and follows the Party's prominent principle of positive propaganda, while hedging systematic gender discriminations.

## Research Design

Illuminated by the social function of media in China, the relationship between women and the state, as well as the unique positioning of ACWF and CWN, this study discovered a special column on CWN - Women of the Year, across 2017-2021, the second term of Xi's governance when a series of transformations take place across all aspects of China. While women are confronted with repressive space in general, these women receive rather high-profile acknowledgement. Their representations could uncover enormous social values and ideologies resided in the intricate relations between state interest and women's appeals.

The research question will then be: what ideology is indicated through the propaganda discourse of these women of the year? It can be further narrowed down into 1) Who are Women of the Year? 2) How do the official media of CWN construct the discourse of Women of the Year? 3) What power relations and ideologies are conveyed through the representations of Women of the Year? Afterwards, the theoretical cornerstones might also become handle to instigate actions for more social justice.

With the intention to deconstruct media discourses and their ideological propensities, this research employs qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) on its targeted material. CDA provides a three-fold approach for such kind of analysis, 'not only interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex' (Wodak & Meyer. 2001). It firstly investigates the textual microstructure which relates how discourse is enacted, naturalized, and rationalized through linguistic and semiotic elements such as vocabulary, sentence patterns, rhetoric, and genres to 'lexicalize' the world (Van Dijk, 1988; Fairclough, 2003, p.218). Secondly, it looks at the interlevel, structural practices to see how different discourses, genres and styles draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize each other and articulated together (Fairclough, 2003, p.18). Finally, it analyses societal 'superstructures' (Hall, 2016), where various power relations are contesting within discourses to shape our understanding of reality, texture our personal and social identity, and affect existing social dominance order (Fairclough 1995; Dijk, 1996; Wodak & Meyer, 2008: 11).

The theoretical and practical delineation make CDA congruous with this study. By examining how representations on these female role models are composed, and then how the passages resonate one another, a multivalent ideology repertoire related to broader social backgrounds can be sketched and inspire future research.

## Results and Interpretation

### Overview



Figure 2: Women of the Year (2021), China Women’s News<sup>2</sup>

Women of the Year (2017 - 2021) is to celebrate women who have made extraordinary achievements in their specific areas. These women are represented under the discursive strategy of ‘focalization’ (Fairclough, 1995), who are hailed as symbols of women’s empowerment in a feverish tone: ‘They have changed the world, warmed the world, ignited the world; make us moved by them, proud of them, praise for them!’ (CWN, 2019).

The corpus consists of 5 articles (1 per year), 10 figures each. Their identity, profession and age can vary a lot: there are youth award-winning athletes, middle-aged administrative officers and senior scientists, portraying a multiplicity of outstanding Chinese women with different specialities. Meanwhile, considering CWN as an official media affiliated to CCP and the central government, they are also carriages of mainstream ideologies alongside pro-women values.

<sup>2</sup> Source : [http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/html/2022-01/01/nw.D110000zgnfb\\_20220101\\_1-4.htm](http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/html/2022-01/01/nw.D110000zgnfb_20220101_1-4.htm)

## 1. Progressive Feminist Sensibility

### Educated and Professional

According to the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report Data<sup>3</sup>, women's status in China is rising from 107th to 102nd, still lagging among 146 countries worldwide. The statistics elicit another ironic fact that China ranks as low as 123rd in secondary education enrolment rate, while comes first in tertiary education – i.e., girls reach a seemingly 'equal' terminal from a very asymmetrical beginning with their own efforts.

Taking this societal background into account, one of the most conspicuous progresses reflected on 'Women of the Year' is advocating education and career development for women and girls.

Women are now highly praised for their academic or professional achievement, reversing the entrenched feudal notion of 'ignorance is the best virtue of women'. It also reveals a rectification of traditional patriarchal bias that women should remain in domestic areas, while encouraging them to enter all sectors of public sphere has been accommodated in the mainstream ideology.

Specifically, there are senior political figures, such as Carrie Lam (2017), the first female Chief Executive of Hong Kong since the handover; successful entrepreneurs such as Yang Lijuan (2018), the COO of Haidilao; outstanding scientists, who have received national (Su Donglin & Wu Huiming, 2019) and international (Zhang Miman, 2018) awards especially in STEM subjects, breaking the stereotype that women are inferior in this area. To exemplify, when introducing Ye Shuhua (2021), 'Mother of Beijing Time' and the first female director of an astronomical observatory encouraging women to break the glass ceiling', the texts particularly quote Ye's own speech:

*She talked about the power of women in astronomy, citing examples of outstanding women in politics and science, as well as the work done by the astronomy community to promote gender equality. She believes that gender equality does not mean making women stronger than men, but rather equal access to opportunities. (Appendix 1)*

Similar quotes include the world-renowned AI expert Li Feifei's (2021) words on gender equality:

*Diversity in AI is an extremely important issue, and there is a need to bring women into AI as well as other technical fields still dominated by men. (Appendix 5)*

By referring to their own speeches, which is a common contextual discursive practice, the texts intend to extract an idea that women can also make outstanding professionals of any discipline, no less intelligent or capable than men.

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<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum (2022), <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022>

## The Alternative Beauty

Among various social expectations of women, beauty has been an ongoing obsession. This is especially magnified by the neoliberal logic where merchants collude with mass media such as commercial magazines to objectify women in the name of self-pleasure. However, CWN sees through the pitfall. In the representations of Women of the Year, they often use the word ‘most beautiful’, but with alternative meanings and provide a disruptive interpretation sphere.

For example, they have praised the ‘most beautiful volunteer’ Du Chengcheng (2018) who tells movies for the blind, ‘most beautiful Hunan women’ Zhou Xiufang (2018) who has contributed greatly to poverty alleviation. In recommending Yang Xiukai (2017), a dedicated rural cadre, CWN calls her ‘black rich beauty’. In the case of weightlifting gold-medallist Li Wenwen (2021), CWN features her ‘proudly proclaimed every fat girl has her own dream’, challenging the traditional, beauty ideal of white skin and slim figure.

Rediscovering a more inclusive definition of beauty accounts for an integral part of women’s emancipation, which would liberate them from appearance anxiety. The discourses on CWN and their chosen ‘models’ declare that women can also be considered as beautiful by self-fulfilment, dedicated spirit and impressive contribution, rather than how they look.

## Empowering Women for Broader Emancipation

A universal feminist appeal is not merely concerned about women, but about enabling more disempowered groups to revolt against their subaltern status resulted from oppression and exploitation (Longwe, 1991). This is also expounded by applauding women who have not only strived for their own right but made contributions to the general social public.

This is especially instantiated by Zhang Guimei (2020), the ‘lightning principal’ who has lit up the dreams for numerous village girls.

*Many years ago, witnessing the tragedy of poor girls dropping out of school time and again, Zhang Guimei had a dream in her heart to run a free high school, so that mountain girls can receive education. Being misunderstood, even satirized, ridiculed, Zhang Guimei never gave up, but finally turned the impossible dream in the eyes of others into reality. (Appendix 4)*

Another example is Su Mingjuan (2017). She is a beneficiary of Project Hope, a public welfare campaign to support education for children in poverty. After growing up, she becomes an active advocator and practitioner for charity activities in education and poverty alleviation:

*Su has set a positive example and made greater contributions, summoning more people to pay attention to Project Hope and devote themselves to public welfare. (Appendix 1)*

These discourses ameliorate a limitation of the Western over-emphasis on individual rights, which is even worsened under the neoliberal logic. Rather, CWN associates female empowerment with a more poignant goal which should generate sustainable effects on a broader society.

## 2. Nation-State Connotations

Aside from conveying some universally acknowledged feminist values, these discourses also imply nationalism and pro-state ideologies in subtle or explicit ways. Over the 5 years, the kernel of CCP's propaganda is 'China dream', with optimism and enthusiasm about its future of 'great rejuvenation' (Ferdinand, 2016). Women of the Year also become epitome of these ideological maneuvers.

### The Ubiquitous Party-State

Published by ACWF under the leadership of CCP, the Party is eulogised almost everywhere in Women of the Year. An emblematic case is Qu Duyi (2021), introduced under the title '100-year-old Lady Standing Firmly with the Party', canonizing her faith in the party as supremacy. Going through the main text, it would be realized that Ms Qu has also been an outstanding journalist, translator and diplomat. However, these professional achievements are overshadowed by her association with the Party:

*Qu, daughter of early Party leader Qu Qubai [...] Qu and her mother were detained in prison for four and a half years, during which she persevered her communist beliefs, and sworn to join the Party... Qu once said, "When I joined the Party, I knew I had to fight for communism for the rest of my life. (Appendix 5)*

Another representative figure is Meng Wanzhou (2021), CFO of China's telecommunication giant Huawei. Ms. Meng faced detention and criminal charge by the US and Canada. She and Huawei are acknowledged by Chinese government as national symbols in the US-China conflict over digital technology (Dillon, 2021):

*During more than 1,000 days of illegal detention in a foreign country, Meng was elegant, decent and smiling every time she appeared in public, because she firmly believed that the great CCP, the powerful motherland of China and more than 1.4 billion Chinese people would always be backing her firmly.[...] Returning homeland, she said with a moving tongue: "Where there is a five-star red flag, there is a lighthouse of faith, and if faith had a colour, it must be Chinese red!" (Appendix 5)*

Meng is always shaped as an innocent citizen of 'political persecution against Chinese citizens', 'unreasonably detained for 1,028 days without violating any Canadian law', implying that the US is to blame for the US-China dispute, and using terms such as 'female warrior' with 'strong backbone and unyielding faith' to describe her affiliation to China which aims at generating greater nationalism among the general public.

### Endorsement of Economic Policies

Since marketization reform, one of the most significant measurements of success in China becomes wealth. Economic indicators are also means to secure the dominance of CCP. However, what decides the legitimacy is not economic performance per se, but the public perceptions of it -as they are shaped and mediated by ideological contestation. This is why discursive power matters which bridges economic performance and political legitimacy (Holbig, 2018).

Hereafter, economic status also becomes a trendy yardstick when commending *Women of the Year*. However, it is also not economic performance alone that makes them excel, but with a significant prerequisite to demonstrate cohesion with the country's economic policy. For example, the success story of Yang Lijuan (2018), CEO of Haidilao, is a symbol of how the reform and opening policy enables many people with opportunities. Key elements such as her oversea experiences in Singapore and the US are emphasized to have 'broadened the possibilities of life and self-fulfilment' (Appendix 2).

In the contemporary era when the country is invigorating innovation and high-tech industry, economic models are also those who have presented excellent works under new policies, with a shifting focus on younger generation who is regarded to have more innovative potential.

Veya (2020), known as 'Queen of E-commerce', whose achievement in live-streaming shopping business is narrated under the theme of the state's prioritized mission 'poverty alleviation':

*Encouraged by the party-state, she has been engaged in live broadcast to spread public welfare since 2018, helping with poverty alleviation through e-commerce, driving the sales of agricultural products in poor areas to nearly 30 million.*  
(Appendix 4)

The association is also explicit in highlighting her position in the government-run organisation National Youth Federation, and mentioning her won the National Dedication Award for Poverty Alleviation at the National Poverty Alleviation Award Commendation Conference.

The highlight here is Xi's important exposition of poverty alleviation, which has now been a crux of Chinese Dream and a proof of China's wisdom, and as such the guide to direct practices across all social spheres (Wang, et. al., 2019). As analysed above, this is also frequently incorporated in discourse admiring female power.

## **Representing China on Global Stage**

Another tactile characteristic of Xi's China is a more assertive international strategy. He is introducing a 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,' shifting from keeping a low profile to a more active, robust and ambitious style (Sørensen, 2015; Ferdinand, 2016), aspired to exert leadership in a new global order (Klimeš & Marinelli, 2018).

In political practice, he on one hand has worked to prevent the influx of foreign ideas and influences via strengthened media censorship, and on the other spared mighty efforts on discursive strategies such as encouraging citizens to 'tell Chinese story well' on the international stage to augment Chinese soft power, especially in a seemingly depoliticized gesture from ethno-cultural identity (Sørensen, 2015).

Women of the Year also selected influential 'Chinese storytellers', among which YouTuber Li Ziqi (2019) is a representative. The texts feature her global fame and the identity as an officially-recognized ambassador of China's soft power from the façade of 'cultural exportation':

*Her videos capture the idyllic life and the charm of traditional Chinese culture. The farming girl wearing rough Chinese clothes can simply master everything with traditional Chinese skills...People around the world are beginning to understand and appreciate the 'interesting and beautiful' traditional Chinese culture, praise the diligence and intelligence of Chinese people as well as this country...She 'hasn't praised a word for China, but told the Chinese story quite well'. (Appendix 3)*

These paragraphs mention many traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as clothing and food, the 'common, shared repertoire of concepts' (Hall, 2016) reflect the normative lineage of contemporary Chinese politics that imbues propaganda messages with cultural symbols (Brady 2012; Link, 2015) to establish a positive national image.

Another frequently mentioned group is award-winning athletes in international competitions. In the tribute of women athlete delegation in the Tokyo Olympics (2021), it writes:

*In the summer of 2021, Chinese female athletes have left unforgettable memories in Tokyo. Inside the battle field, they demonstrate the spirit of courage, persistence and diligence; outside the battle field, they become cute and frank, calm and confident [...] They illustrate a diverse image of China's new-generation female athletes to the world. (Appendix 5)*

Sports also play an instrumental part in building Chinese image and comprehensive power. Xi has also made a series of important speech about how sports provide significant spiritual power to unite Chinese people and achieve national rejuvenation of Chinese Dream (Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

### **3. Discursive Strategy: Expanding Overlaps and Mitigating Conflicts**

Summarizing from above, it is manifest that the official media of CWN, under the leadership of the party-state, is impulsively accommodating women's empowerment into the discursive package of nation-state interests. This discursive strategy can be further unwidened by reiterating some previously mentioned cases: celebration of female athletes, while mainly to show national strength, is also acknowledging their striving spirit. This is also a liberation from traditional gender norms in China which do not support girls in 'aggressive' sport because they are supposed to be gentle (Mu & Peng, 2019).

It is also the case of outstanding scientists, but the other way round. Encouraging women to break the glass ceilings in the scientific and technology sphere also replies to China's ambition to be a world leader in this area. This is why women like Li Feifei are gaining exponential exposure, whose research areas are advanced sectors such as AI and IoT. They are seen as vital to ensure future competitiveness against the backdrop of a new industrial revolution (Kania, 2019).

On the other side of these hyper-visible Women of the Year, we should also not neglect those who are oblivious. There are no feminist activists, no sexual minority such as LGBTQ+ communities who are also indispensable in feminism appeals and gender equality in Chinese mainstream media according to the party's instruction. It suggests that feminist values are exclusive to those acknowledged by the party-state for their fidelity to the country, while those questioning the regime could face the allegation to be 'extreme feminists' under the discursive dictatorship.

## Conclusion

By applying the threefold practice of CDA to the honoured group of Women of the Year on the official-backed media CWN, the system to 'translate' discourse on women into that of nation-state interests can be clearly identified (Fairclough, 1995), unfolding a multilateral landscape of women's status, gender order, mainstream ideology, as well as social norms and values.

On the textual level, these articles take on an overall positive, complimentary tone, downplaying concrete individual life of these women but highlighting abstract national values; the distinction between factual and evaluative statements is blurred (Fairclough, 1995). Women's self-fulfilment is subtly inserted in parallel with nation-state interests.

From the interdiscursive dimension, many Women of the Year are awarded after receiving recognitions from other official parties, as reflected on relevant quotes and reported speeches which resonate one another to consolidate certain ideological assumptions (Fairclough, 2003). Deliberate selection of women from different backgrounds is also observational evidence of politicising everyday life (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999), where diverse stories jointly validate the mutual ideological legitimacy.

This study particularly spotlights the societal facet to see how everyday discursive practices balance and intersect with juxtaposed power relations in China. On one hand, there exists a social consensus on some progressive feminist appeals, such as encouraging women to receive education and enter the public sphere. On the other hand, the 'speaker' of CWN, or ACWF, suggests a superiority of nation-state interest which all inscriptions of womanhood must subordinate to. This contradiction becomes more acute under Xi, the iron leader strengthening patriarchal underpinnings of his authoritarianism (Hong Fincher, 2018). CWN and ACWF can only propose a compromised state feminism led by the party-state, curtailing any individual pursuit that is considered treacherous of official agenda (Barlow 2004), which is significantly insufficient for broader emancipation goals.

## Discussion

Despite the heuristic attempt, this study also leaves considerable space for future improvement out of its indigenous deficiency. For example, it inevitably carries 'preexisting' biases (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p.262) based on the analyst's individual stance, which needs complementary perspectives. Extensive researches can also look for other representational semiosis, such as visual images that embed social cultural implications (Rose, 1996; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

It should also be reminded that, social researchers should bear the rudimentary mission of inspiring real-world social justice. In this case, it is recognised that women have enjoyed vast improvement in terms of social status, opportunities in life and work today (Dillon, 2021). However, there is still a long way to go, as the envision of state feminists such as ACWF is inadequate to realize the goal of general emancipation: women should not only be circumscribed national subjects, and a greater number of marginal groups rather than these elites should not be made invisible. Future research could then encourage advances towards a more universal arena.



## Appendix

CWN, Women of the Year,

1. 2017  
[http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/02/c\\_1122198080.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/02/c_1122198080.htm)
2. 2018  
<http://news.cnhubei.com/xw/gn/201901/t4208999.shtml>
3. 2019  
[https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_5466856](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_5466856)
4. 2020  
[https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao\\_10633813](https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_10633813)
5. 2021  
[http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/html/2022-01/01/nw.D110000zgfnb\\_20220101\\_1-4.htm](http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/html/2022-01/01/nw.D110000zgfnb_20220101_1-4.htm)

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### **Website Resources**

China's State Council, <http://www.gov.cn/>

All-China Women's Federation, <https://www.women.org.cn/>

World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/>

## ***A Multidisciplinary and Collaborative Approach: From the Academy to the Community***

Carla Cadete, Lusófona University, Portugal

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### **Abstract**

This article describes a co-creation practice between bachelor students from different courses for the community. An annual event organised by the 3rd-year undergraduate students from the Audiovisual Multimedia Communication at Porto Lusófona University since 2018. The yearly edition of the event *Multiplex – Cycle of Moving Images* in a collaboration between the Lusófona University of Porto and a local theatre – *Teatro Municipal do Porto/Rivoli*, with the presence of a national or international guest filmmaker. After Agnés Varda, Victor Erice, Manoel de Oliveira, Nan Goldin and others, in 2023 Sarah Driver. The films created by the finalist students will be presented in the first moment, followed by an interactive discussion with the audience in attendance. In the second moment, the guest gives a Masterclass followed by a retrospective cycle of his work organised in partnership with *Teatro Municipal Rivoli* and, for the first time this year, in *Cinema Batalha*, a newly renovated cinema in Porto. A collaborative practice in which undergraduate Communication Design students from the same university annually create the entire graphic image of the event. The project, supported by the City Hall, aims to promote culture and make it accessible to the entire community at no cost. This initiative provides a unique opportunity to equip students from different fields with the necessary skills to succeed in their future careers. Additionally, students from both degree programs can holistically apply their acquired knowledge. This an excellent example of a successful co-creation initiative that benefits higher education students and the local community.

Keywords: Multiplex, Cinema, Culture, Co-creation, Collaborative Practice, Academy, Lusófona University, Porto Community

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## **Introduction**

Multiplex is an annual project organised by the Audiovisual Communication and Multimedia program at Lusófona University. Since 2018, the course leader has initiated a collaboration with the Communication Design program to create the logo and event design. This collaboration was well-received as it offered a valuable opportunity for students from both courses. Every year the audiovisual course could benefit from a graphic design image of his event coordinated by a Design professor. Also, it could have a range of solutions to select the best one. In contrast, Design students had the chance to see their proposals selected and implemented. The project is part of the second-year bachelor in Communication Design II subject. It is carried out by small groups of students, typically in pairs, who collaborate on generating ideas. The final selection of the logo and design was made jointly by the Design Professor and the event organizer, who also is the course leader of the Audiovisual and Multimedia Communication bachelor program.

A multidisciplinary and collaborative approach through a powerful way to bridge the gap between the academy and the community. By bringing together different disciplines and stakeholders, this approach can lead to innovative solutions and positive impact.

The academy catalyses knowledge and expertise in such an approach, bringing together students, educators and professionals from various fields. The focus is on addressing real-world challenges and engaging with the community to understand their needs and aspirations.

Through collaboration, diverse perspectives are brought to the table, enabling the exploration of complex issues from different angles. This interdisciplinary exchange fosters creativity, critical thinking, and the generation of new ideas that can address multifaceted problems effectively. The collaborative approach extends beyond the academic realm and involves active engagement with the community. This can take the form of partnerships with local organisations, businesses, government entities, and community members. By working together, the academy and the community can co-create relevant, sustainable, and beneficial solutions for all stakeholders.

Such collaborations provide valuable opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-life settings. They gain practical experience, better understand the community's needs, and contribute to positive change. Furthermore, this approach transfers knowledge and expertise between academia and the community, fostering mutual learning and capacity building.

In summary, a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach that involves the active participation of the academy and the community can lead to innovative solutions, positive impact, and the cultivation of a strong partnership. It promotes a dynamic exchange of ideas, fosters practical learning experiences for students, and offers a better quality design product to Theatre and the community.

## **Literature Review**

Education professionals face complex daily problems that cannot efficiently address by single and disconnected approaches (Costa et al. 2019). Nonetheless, overcoming barriers and building bridges between diverse knowledge areas are effective approaches to intervene in complex problems (Bernini & Woods 2014).

Studies indicate that active learning strategies are crucial in higher education. Active learning methods can boost student performance and enhance academic achievement (Ruiz-Primo et al. 2011; Freeman et al. 2014). In addition, it is clear which student's understanding of the role that higher education institutions play in propelling the development of the fundamental skills future professionals are required to master once in the job market, even though the individual role is also perceived to be quite important. Many students would describe active learning strategies as engaging, often defined with words like participation, motivation, energy, action, direction, and connection (Cleveland, 2011; Russell, Ainley, and Frydenberg, 2005). As states Ginting (2021, p.215), one of the most important determinants of successful learning is student involvement, "Student engagement, in general, refers to active participation in a variety of academic and co-curricular or school-related activities, as well as a commitment to achieving learning objectives."

Nowadays, individuals face numerous challenges, especially in the competitive job market. Equipping students with the necessary skills ensures they are well-prepared to tackle these challenges effectively. In the first cycle of studies in Communication Design, our focus is on providing comprehensive training that enables students to respond to the diverse areas in which Communication Design operates today.

According to Goodyear, "Teaching can be understood as any activity which is undertaken with the intention of helping somebody learn. Teaching is not restricted to giving instruction. It also involves creating situations that are conducive to learning." (2015, p.30). Collaboration practices in an educational context open new avenues for learning and furthering a multiplicity of aims within the academy. Some of the advantages of collaborative working: (i) a greater resource than just the individual upon which to draw, (ii) several, rather than only one, potential 'leads' to maintain the momentum of your project and to refresh the initiative with new ideas and energies; (iii) Cross-fertilization of ideas and enthusiasm, (iv) the satisfaction of realizing a significant project that would have been unthinkable, and less enjoyable, without the support of others (Walsh & Kahn, 2010).

Adopting a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach that incorporates real-world projects into the curriculum is crucial to adequately prepare students for the job market. Lusófona University acknowledges the significance of maximizing the potential of all courses to enrich students' knowledge and equip them with the necessary skills for the professional world. Particularly in the design field, creating new project briefs that involve authentic scenarios is of utmost importance. These projects enable students to gain practical experience and apply their skills in real-world situations. By tackling genuine design challenges, students enhance their problem-solving abilities, learn to work within constraints and develop a profound understanding of the design process.

Universities must review their programmes to equip students with innovative skills by integrating learning across disciplines and co-working with other courses and stakeholders, "Learning and innovation skills are increasingly being recognised as the distinguishing factors that separate students who are prepared for the complex life and work environments of the 21st century from those who are not" (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007).

To further enhance their capabilities, we prioritize the development of transversal skills. These skills enable students to apply their knowledge and expertise across different disciplines and contexts. By fostering interdisciplinary projects, we encourage students to explore connections between various areas of knowledge and apply their design skills in

diverse contexts. Participatory projects play a crucial role in our curriculum. We believe in the importance of collaboration and cooperation with stakeholders, which allow students to gain real-world experience and understand the practical applications of their work. By engaging in teamwork models and working closely with industry professionals, students develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the field of Communication Design. Furthermore, we encourage students to participate in international competitions. These competitions provide a platform for students to showcase their talents on a global scale, gain exposure, and receive recognition for their work. Participation in such competitions builds confidence and enables students to benchmark their skills against their peers worldwide, fostering a spirit of excellence and continuous improvement.

In alignment with these ideas, some universities have been developing some interdisciplinary design courses to improve students' abilities to operate across disciplines, and therefore contribute to them being better prepared for the job market (Harrison et al. 2007).

For all that has been pointed out, our first cycle of studies in Communication Design focuses on comprehensive training, equipping students with the ability to respond effectively to the multifaceted nature of Communication Design today. By emphasising transversal skills, interdisciplinary projects, participatory approaches, teamwork models, and international competitions, we ensure that our students are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter professionally.

### **Collaborative Practice and Value**

In our Communication Design Bachelor program, we encourage collaboration and multidisciplinary practices between different courses and also through guest lectures, workshops, and studio tours. These additional opportunities enhance our curriculum and contribute to our student's success. At our university, we aim to use the unique resources and expertise of each course and field of study by encouraging student collaboration. By working together, we can achieve more comprehensive and successful projects. The co-creation practice described in the article, where bachelor students from different courses collaborate on an annual event called Multiplex - Cycle of Moving Images, exemplifies a successful initiative that benefits the students and the local community.

The collaborative practice of Multiplex - Cycle of Moving Images offers numerous benefits and valuable experiences for design students, including:

- **Real-world project experience:** Participating in Multiplex allows design students to work on a tangible project with real outcomes. They can apply their design skills in a practical setting and see the impact of their work.
- **Interdisciplinary collaboration:** Collaborating with students from other courses, such as Audiovisual Multimedia Communication, exposes design students to different perspectives and approaches. This interdisciplinary collaboration fosters creativity and allows them to see how their design work fits into a broader event organisation and promotion context.
- **Networking opportunities:** Working closely with students from other fields and professionals from the theatre and guest filmmakers enables design students to expand their professional network. Connecting with industry professionals can lead to future job opportunities, internships, or collaborations.
- **Client interaction and feedback:** Design students can interact directly with the theatre and event organizers, gaining insights into client needs and preferences. This

experience is valuable in understanding how to communicate effectively with clients, manage feedback, and make design decisions based on client requirements.

- Portfolio enhancement: Creating the graphic image for Multiplex provides design students with a valuable portfolio piece. Being associated with a reputable event like Multiplex and showcasing their work in a real-world context can impress potential employers and clients in the future.
- Exposure to event management: Involvement in Multiplex exposes design students to event management and organization processes. They can understand how design plays a role in creating a cohesive event identity and promoting it effectively, giving them a well-rounded perspective on their profession.
- Teamwork and leadership skills: Collaborating with other students and working on a complex project like Multiplex helps design students develop teamwork and leadership skills. They learn how to contribute effectively to a team, communicate ideas, and take on leadership roles when necessary.
- Community impact: Being part of an initiative that benefits the local community and promotes culture can be personally rewarding for design students. Contributing their skills to a meaningful project like Multiplex allows them to see the positive impact of design in a broader social context.
- The participation of Erasmus students in Multiplex can serve as motivation for students, as they have the opportunity to work on actual projects. Furthermore, having their work chosen and showcased in the city's theatre is a testament to their impressive graphic work, boosting their confidence and motivation. Participating in Multiplex offers valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth as a future designer.
- Participating in Multiplex offers design students valuable personal and professional growth opportunities as future designers. It enhances their skills, expands their networks, and provides practical experiences to benefit them in their design careers.

## Methodology

The Multiplex project has evolved, changing venues and expanding its reach. From 2018 to 2021, the movies were showcased at Cinema Rivoli, followed by Teatro São João in 2022. Since 2023, the event has found a new home at Batalha Centro de Cinema.

In the first year of the partnership, in 2018, the Design course class created the Multiplex logo, which has remained unchanged. The logo was designed by Pedro Barros, an undergraduate student, and features the Kust typography. To keep it fresh, the logo can be updated with a new colour symbol each year, adding a touch of variety (Figure 1).

For the 14th edition of Multiplex, scheduled from May 30 to June 2, 2023, design students were required to work in pairs and develop a proposal for the event's poster. The poster specifications call for a size of 227x180cm. The team chosen to create the poster proposal will also be responsible for producing other graphic materials, such as a Facebook Cover (1200x628 px), a theatre screen version (16:9) with and without programming, an Instagram post (1200x628px), as well as posters of various sizes and uses for the interior and exterior of the Batalha Centro de Cinema.

The creative process for this project followed the *Design Thinking* methodology, consisting of four stages: problem definition, ideation and prototype, prototype testing, and implementation/problem solution (Lupton & Philipps, 2011).



Figure 1 – The Multiplex logo was designed in 2018 by Pedro Barros, who was an undergraduate Design student at that time. It is interesting to note that the logo symbol changes its color every year, which helps in establishing its unique identity.

**Problem Definition:** Participants (students, n=14) from the 2nd year of the Communication Design undergraduate program, was divided into small work groups of two students. Each pair were tasked with analysing all the Multiplex design projects selected since 2019. The objective of this phase was to ensure visual consistency with the event's graphic image.

In this phase, the students focused on studying the films and the artistic journey and work process of the guest director, Sara Driver. This stage played a crucial role in informing and shaping the subsequent phases of the project. The students immersed themselves in the films created by Sara Driver, thoroughly analyzing her artistic style, themes, and techniques.

By studying Sara Driver's body of work, the students gained valuable insights and inspiration for their creative process. They carefully observed and analyzed the guest director's visual language, narrative elements, and aesthetic choices. This deep understanding of Sara Driver's work was a foundation for developing the graphic choices that best align with her artistic vision. The students aimed to create graphic materials that effectively capture and reflect the essence of Sara Driver's films and artistic approach. They paid close attention to the visual motifs, colourer work's visual motifs, colour palettes, typography, and overall atmosphere present in her works. This research and analysis allowed them to make informed design decisions that successfully adapt their graphic choices to complement the guest artist's work.

By incorporating Sara Driver's artistic journey and work process into their design, the students aimed to create a cohesive and immersive experience for the audience. The graphic materials developed would align with the themes and aesthetics of Sara Driver's films, enhancing the overall impact and resonance of the Multiplex event.

This phase served as a crucial foundation for the subsequent phases, guiding the students' design choices and ensuring a cohesive and harmonious integration of Sara Driver's artistic vision into the project.

**Ideation and Prototype:** In this phase, students were required to study and evaluate the works of the guest filmmaker Sara Driver. This analysis served as a crucial foundation for making informed decisions regarding various design elements for the Multiplex event, including the selection of images, colours, typography, and overall graphic composition of the poster.

By closely examining Sara Driver's works, students deeply understood her artistic style, themes, and techniques. This knowledge allowed them to identify the visual and conceptual elements representative of Sara Driver's filmmaking approach.



After this study, students were instructed to create a mind map and mood board. These visual tools helped them organize their ideas and inspiration while exploring different design directions. The mind map allowed students to brainstorm and connect concepts related to Sara Driver's works, identifying key themes, motifs, and ideas that could be incorporated into the design process. The mood board, on the other hand, served as a visual collage that captured the desired aesthetic and atmosphere of the project, featuring relevant imagery, colour palettes, and typography examples.

In addition to the mind map and mood board, students were prompted to identify keywords to guide their design process. These keywords acted as design principles and anchors, ensuring that the resulting graphic materials would effectively communicate the essence of Sara Driver's works. Students harnessed their creativity by engaging in ideation and prototyping activities and using the insights gained from studying Sara Driver's films that inspiration into concrete design choices. This process helped them generate multiple design concepts and experiment with various visual elements, allowing for an iterative exploration of ideas.

The mind maps, mood boards, and identified keywords facilitated the development of well-informed and visually impactful graphic materials aligned with the guest filmmaker's artistic vision and guided their design process.

**Prototype Testing:** During the prototype testing phase, students diverged to converge, emphasizing hands-on exploration and experimentation with various materials and techniques. This approach aimed to foster creativity, encourage innovative solutions, and expand the range of possibilities for the final design choice.

To begin with, students embraced a divergent mindset, exploring a wide range of ideas and solutions. They actively sought out different materials, tools, and techniques to experiment with, pushing the boundaries of their creativity. This phase allowed them to avoid conventional thinking and explore unconventional design approaches (Figures 2 and 3).

By engaging in hands-on exploration, students gained a deeper understanding of the materials and techniques they were working with. They tested different combinations, manipulated materials, and experimented with various methods to discover new and unique possibilities. This process enabled them to uncover innovative solutions that may have yet to emerge through digital means alone.

Throughout the prototype testing phase, students continuously iterated and refined their ideas. They presented their prototypes to their peers, instructors, and potentially other stakeholders, seeking feedback and critiques. This convergent approach allowed them to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each potential solution and incorporate feedback into their design process.

By carefully analysing and considering the feedback received, students made informed decisions about which ideas to pursue and how to refine their prototypes. This iterative process ensured that their projects progressed focused and deliberately, gradually converging towards the final design choice.

The prototype testing phase embraced a divergent-to-convergent approach, encouraging students to explore various materials and techniques to generate innovative ideas. Through hands-on experimentation and iterative refinement, students maximised their creative

potential and arrived at a final design choice informed by a comprehensive exploration of possibilities.

By manually exploring different techniques and creative processes, students were able to gain a deeper understanding of their ideas and how they could be realised in physical form. This approach allowed them to consider alternative methods and materials that they might not have otherwise explored if they had solely relied on digital tools.



Figures 2 and 3 – In the prototype testing phase, students diverged to converge, emphasising hands-on exploration and experimentation with different materials and techniques. João Pedro Martins and Gonçalo Iuri student's. Multiplex 2022.

Students presented their prototypes to their peers, instructors, and other stakeholders throughout this design phase. They communicated the advantages and disadvantages of each potential solution, incorporating feedback and critiques into their design process. This convergent approach helped them evaluate and refine their ideas by considering different perspectives and insights. Furthermore, students were expected to analyze and consider all feedback received carefully. They understood the importance of using feedback as a valuable resource for progress and improvement. By critically assessing the feedback, they could identify areas where their prototypes needed refinement or adjustment, leading to iterative development.

Overall, this prototype testing phase encouraged students to engage in a hands-on, exploratory process. It promoted a holistic approach to design by incorporating physical experimentation, critical analysis of potential solutions, and active incorporation of feedback. This methodology aimed to enhance the students' projects' creativity, innovation, and ultimate success.

Stage 4 – During the implementation phase, student groups prepared a 10-minute presentation to showcase their projects, focusing on developing and finalising their solutions. The presentation was delivered to the entire group, allowing each group to explain their creative process and justify the steps they took in their design journey.

The final assessment criteria encompassed several key aspects to ensure a comprehensive and iterative creative process:

- **Creativity:** The designs were evaluated based on originality, innovative thinking, and the ability to offer unique solutions to the given problem. Students were encouraged to think creatively and bring fresh perspectives to their projects.

- **Relevance:** The projects were assessed for addressing the problem or challenge. It was important for the solutions to be directly applicable and aligned with the initial problem statement, ensuring that the proposed designs were relevant.
- **Impact:** The potential impact of the designs was considered. This criterion examined how the solutions could create positive change or solve the identified problem effectively. Students were encouraged to think about their designs' broader implications and outcomes.
- **Hierarchy:** The organisation and structure of the designs were evaluated. Students were expected to demonstrate a clear hierarchy of information and visual elements, ensuring that the most important aspects were appropriately emphasised and communicated.
- **Legibility:** The clarity and readability of the designs were assessed. This criterion focused on how well the information was presented and understood by the intended audience. Students were expected to communicate their ideas clearly, ensuring the design elements and information were easily comprehensible.

Students' work was guided and supported throughout the implementation phase to facilitate their progress. The evaluation process served as a means to provide feedback and guidance, helping students refine their designs, iterate on their ideas, and make improvements based on the received input.

Students engaged in a comprehensive and iterative creative process by adhering to these assessment criteria. The evaluations helped them better understand their designs and encouraged continuous improvement throughout the implementation phase.

Overall, the implementation phase aimed to showcase and assess the students' final solutions while providing guidance and feedback to foster a comprehensive and iterative approach to the creative process. The assessment criteria ensured that the designs were evaluated based on their creativity, relevance, impact, hierarchy, and legibility, ultimately leading to development of well-considered and impactful projects.

Once the proposals are finalised, they are forwarded to the Director of Audiovisual and Multimedia, who is also responsible for the Multiplex event. The top-performing pair of students then worked on the remaining graphic elements, supervised by the Communication Design professor (Figures 4, 5 and 6).

The involvement in Multiplex exposes students to event management and organization processes and helps them develop teamwork and leadership skills. Finally, contributing to a meaningful project like Multiplex can be rewarding and contribute to a student's personal and professional growth (Figures 7, 8 and 9).



Figures 4 and 5 – Prototype testing phase, students diverged to converge, emphasising hands-on exploration and experimentation with different materials and techniques. João Pedro Martins and Gonçalo Iuri student’s. Multiplex 2022



Figure 6 – Batalha Cinema Center website. Erasmus students Gabriela Osóbka and Ivan Večerek, design authors of the Multiplex 2023.



Figures 7 and 8 – On May 30, 2023, at the Batalha Cinema Center, Sara Driver and João Sousa Cardoso, Director of Audiovisual and Multimedia (left photo). Erasmus students, Gabriela Osóbka and Ivan Večerek, design authors of the event with Sara Driver.



Figure 9 – Multiplex 2023, at the Batalha Cinema Center, Erasmus students Gabriela Osóbka and Ivan Večerek, design authors of the event with their poster.

## Conclusions

This article highlights a co-creation practice that involves bachelor students from two different courses, intending to benefit higher education students and the community and provides a range of evidence of the value of co-creation projects in higher education. Named Multiplex - Cycle of Moving Images, this annual event has been organized in Lusófona University since 2019 by 3rd-year undergraduate students from the Audiovisual Multimedia Communication program at Porto Lusófona University.

In the Multiplex event, the responsibility for creating the graphic image is assigned to the Design course students. This co-creation project brings multiple benefits to the Design students and the students of other courses involved, such as Audiovisual and Multimedia Communication. Furthermore, this collaboration adds significant value to the event itself.

A collaborative and interdisciplinary environment is fostered by involving students from different courses in creating the graphic image. This co-creation process allows students to leverage their diverse skills, perspectives, and expertise, resulting in a more comprehensive and innovative graphic image for the event.

This project allows the Design course students to apply their design knowledge and skills in a real-world context. It allows them to showcase their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and ability to communicate visually. Collaborating with students from other courses also enables them to gain insights into different disciplines, broadening their horizons and fostering a multidisciplinary approach to design.

Additionally, the collaboration between the Design course students and students from other courses brings fresh perspectives and ideas. It encourages cross-pollination of ideas, allowing for the integration of different viewpoints and expertise. This synergy between disciplines often leads to more innovative and impactful outcomes.

Moreover, this co-creation project adds value to the Multiplex event itself. By involving students from various courses, the event benefits from a holistic approach to design, incorporating different dimensions of visual communication and multimedia elements. The graphic image created by the collaborative effort reflects a more comprehensive understanding of the event's goals, themes, and target audience.

Overall, the collaboration between Design course students and students from other courses in creating the graphic image for the Multiplex event brings multiple benefits. It fosters a collaborative and interdisciplinary environment, provides valuable learning experiences for all students involved, and enhances the overall quality and impact of the event.

In conclusion, the co-creation practice of Multiplex - Cycle of Moving Images is an outstanding example of a successful initiative that benefits higher education students, the theatre, and the local community. This collaboration between the university, the theatre, and the City Hall creates a significant impact by promoting culture, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and providing practical learning opportunities.

This collaborative practice can offer design students many benefits and valuable experiences. By working on Multiplex, students can practice their design skills and see their work's real-world impact. Collaborating with students from other fields, such as Audiovisual Multimedia Communication, provides fresh perspectives and encourages creativity. Erasmus students can also benefit from participating in Multiplex by gaining experience and showcasing their work in a real-world context, which can boost their confidence and motivation. Participating in Multiplex is a valuable experience for design students and can help them grow personally and professionally. Additionally, working closely with professionals in the theatre industry can lead to future job opportunities, internships, or collaborations. Students can also gain insight into client needs and preferences, which is crucial for effective communication and decision-making in the design profession. Creating the graphic image for Multiplex is a great addition to any design student's portfolio, and being associated with a reputable event like Multiplex

can impress potential employers and clients. Furthermore, involvement in Multiplex exposes students to event management and organization processes and helps them develop teamwork and leadership skills. Finally, contributing to a meaningful project like Multiplex can be rewarding and contribute to a student's personal and professional growth.

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***Insights Into the History of Independent Documentary Filmmaking in India:  
Changing Narratives***

Namitha KS, University of Hyderabad, India

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**Abstract**

My paper will outline the development of independent documentary filmmaking in India. The Films Division (FD) and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting adapted to the new genre of documentary filmmaking in the 1980s, and the first wave of activist documentaries was driven by a number of activist filmmakers who began to use "cinema as a pulpit" and leaned towards subjective arguments in their documentaries. Indian documentary filmmaking has a long history associated with social movements that have sought to draw attention to issues that need attention, to give voice to the marginalized. In a time of change and agitation, documentary film served as a means for filmmakers to express their point of view. During this time, documentaries were made that dealt mainly with the social, political, and economic problems of the nation and addressed them with passion and compassion. I intend to discuss the major documentaries that conveyed the idea of 'independent documentary filmmaking' in India during this period 1970s to 2000 by using discourse analysis. I will also discuss which are these documentaries and documentary makers which explored the idea of independent documentaries. The transition from traditional technology to video and to digital will also be discussed. I intend to provide different points of view on documentary filmmaking in India.

Keywords: Independent Documentary Filmmaking, Activist Filmmakers, Technological Shift

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## **Introduction (mid 1970s - till 2000)**

The 1970s marked a significant chapter in the history of Indian documentary practice. The time period had witnessed social, political and economic resurgence and the filmmakers turned their camera towards it as a powerful medium to advocate change. Prominent filmmakers such as Anand Patwardhan, Deepa Dhanraj, Tapan Bose, Suhasini Mulay used documentaries as a tool of activism to create awareness among the audiences about the issues that were happening in the country. The activist filmmakers used documentaries as a pulpit to challenge the dominant discourse to create awareness among the people by propagating the idea of harmony, equality and social justice. And later in the 1990s and 2000s, the digital revolution incorporated several developments into documentary filmmaking and distribution. In this chapter, I will discuss the major documentaries that conveyed the idea of independent documentary filmmaking using discourse analysis and how the video turn of the documentaries enabled new narratives in India.

In April 1948, the Indian Government established the Films Division, which was tasked with producing and disseminating information films and newsreels." Accordingly, the Films Division distributed documentaries and newsreels through its own distribution system. The Films Division produced around 97 films which were dubbed in various regional languages during the time period, 1949-50. There are a number of important documentaries that emerged from the film division, such as 'Through the eyes of a painter' by MF Hussain (1967), 'The house that Ananda built' (1968) by Fali Bilimoria, 'I am Twenty' (1976) and 'Love in Action' (1976) by SNS Sastry.

Documentary films are financed, produced and distributed in India by the Government through the Films Division and regulated by Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The Films Division was responsible for the production of the documentaries and CBFC was the regulatory body who was responsible for the censoring of the documentaries. Camillie Deprez, in her book, *The Films Division of India 1948-64* criticized the practice of the Films division. She stated "The Film Enquiry Committee stated that the 1951 report points out that the documentaries produced were often faced criticism by the Film professionals and the audiences as the documentaries made were being mere travelogs considered imperious and apprehensive to force the clear conclusion" (Deprez, 2013, p.158). She further claims that, despite fresh approaches by filmmakers, such as Jean Bhowmargy, P. V. Pathy, A. Bhaskar Rao, James Beveridge, and Paul Zils, the Films Division films began to resemble one another. The government and the press criticized the Films division for failing in their social responsibilities. When they were producing 150 newsreels and documentaries every year, quantity took precedence over quality. This was a period of expansion as well for the Film Division. Deprez further claims that "the film directors and the audiences were greatly disenchanted by the initiatives by Nehru and his ability to bring the transformation in unity, progress in economy and social change. The policies initiated faced a substantial challenges by the social, political and economic disruption, border tension between China and Pakistan, Hindu extremism, enduring casteism, marxist and tribal movements, communal affiliations, set back in agricultural industry and hardship set off by the Indian rupee crisis" (Deprez, 2013, p.159).

Since the late 1960's- more significantly during 1970's and 80's have seen the development and production of more social reality documentaries developed within and outside the Films Division which actually confronted the monopoly status of the Films Division. But it created the opportunities for the independent and activist filmmakers to develop their own style and

concepts into their documentaries. In the 60's and 70's a new generation of filmmakers such as S. N. S. Sastry, K. S. Chari, S. Sukhdev, T. A. Abraham and Pramod Pati started making documentaries on social inequalities and experimental films. Filmmakers started working on experimental movies but were not accepted by everyone. Indian documentary films reached their creative peak during the 1960s and were eventually replaced by longer films lasting longer than 10-20 minutes. During the 1960s and 1970s, a following generation of documentary filmmakers (often in association with the Films Division) contributed to the creation of more socially and politically engaged documentaries.

### **The Birth of Independent Documentary Filmmaking in India**

Sweta Kishore opines that the independent filmmakers think the government's influence on the documentary could be used as a tool for the propaganda and paternalism and the filmmakers sought independence from it. The filmmakers made a deliberate choice to establish the documentary filmmaking practice outside the Film Division.

She stated “opting to establish their work outside of Films Division, Prominent filmmaker like Patwardhan claimed independence in the documentary filmmaking and later in the 1980s, filmmakers such as Tapan Bose, Manjira Dutta, Deepa Dhanraj, Suhasini Mulay, Seba Dewan, Rahul Roy, Vasudha Joshi, Ranjan Palit, K.P.Sasi and others claimed independence in industry from the itineraries of state propaganda and paternalism that plagued state documentary.

The term independent came to be authorized in subsequent years as a category of privately produced, politically conscious documentary films, financed and distributed through means alternate to the network of the state production, exhibition, financing and distribution” (Kishore, 2018, p. 13).

Vikrant Dadawala states, “Through the 1970s, both the FD and independent documentary filmmakers struggled with what Gunner Myrdal called the ‘paramount dilemma of the soft state’, a cruel and circular sociological impasse in which the narrow social basis of the Nehruvian elite meant that it lacked both the power and the motivation to take on the risks associated with dismantling rigid social institutions in the hinterland. Both pro- and anti-government filmmakers converged towards a kind of pessimistic activist documentary that helplessly railed against the modernizing state’s inability to reform society. There was a resemblances between the documentaries that were made such as Films Division’s film ‘Framework of Famine and After the Silence (1977)’ by S. Sukhdev, and independent documentaries like *Hungry Autumn (1974)* by Gautam Ghose and *An Indian Story (1982)* by Tapan Bose” (Dadawala, 2022, p. 9).

The social and ideological challenges faced by the Indian documentary filmmakers in the 1970s led to a shift towards the new critical style of filmmaking during the era which contributed to the evolution of documentary forms in India. Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar state that “From the late 70s onwards, there emerged a new kind of ‘independent’ documentary, produced outside the space of Film Division, that powerfully challenged the presiding dialogue of nationhood, bringing forward the voices of the oppressed and marginalized” (Jayasankar & Monteiro, 2015, p. 17).

Prior to this period in India, documentary filmmaking was largely dominated by Government institutions such as the Film Division, who was responsible for making the documentaries

that line up with the concept of nation building and the institution used the documentaries as a tool of propaganda. The dominant discourse of nationhood provided a discourse that is an idealized version of India which has overlooked the voices from the marginalized and subaltern. The independent documentaries aimed to shed light on the subjects and narratives that have been overlooked by the government. The independent documentaries provided an alternative narrative of the caste, class, political struggle, religious diversity and genre. The independent documentaries highlighted the topics that used to be a taboo in mainstream media and filmmakers used an immersive approach and let the subjects narrate the story without the portrayal of propaganda. The filmmakers who shifted from the Film Division faced many challenges like censorship, editing, funding, distribution, however, the commitment towards bringing the oppressed voices towards the public by challenging the mainstream made them persist in their work. The departure from the conventional narratives of documentary filmmaking the documentary makers could critique the prevailing social and political movements, grassroots movements and marginalized counters.

Jag Mohan asserts that, “these films of the activists, who use the cinema as if it is a pulpit to criticize atrocities, and abomination deserves recognition and acknowledgement if the meaning of the word documentary is to be held in high esteem and not to be diminished” (Mohan,1990, p. 137). He emphasizes that the activist documentaries uphold its core value by providing the legitimate and factual content that could condemn the injustice and advocate for a social change, therefore the activist documentaries and documentary filmmakers are to be appreciated and recognised. Bhaskar Sarkar and Nicole Wolf state that “the scope and range of documentary practices in South Asia appear to have been widening steadily since the 1980s, presenting fresh challenges and opportunities. The proliferation of more affordable and accessible technologies such as video and digital, has played a significant role in this growth” (Sarkar & Wolf,2012, p.2). The progress in video and digital technology uplifted and emancipated the documentary filmmakers to embrace the technical aspects and sail across the obstacles that are related to distribution, funding and ethical considerations. The technological advancement made it easier for the activist documentary makers to reach the audiences presenting their narratives.

The shift of film to video technology accelerated in India in the 1980s and 1990s and the technological transitions brought significant changes in the documentary genre. After the advent of video technology, the documentary making became cost effective which allowed for a cheaper and more accessible production of the documentary. The video technology revolutionized documentary making in terms of cost, accessibility, flexibility and creative freedom of the documentary makers. The documentaries made by the government were very heavily censored before reaching the audiences. The advent of video technology created possibilities for the independent individuals to create their own work with artistic freedom by democratizing the medium.

Until the advent of video technology in the 1980s, distribution was the biggest obstacle for filmmakers because it was heavily controlled by the state. Before the arrival of video technology there were documentaries which were made on political and social issues but its production was not consistent and there was no distribution as it was heavily censored by the censor board. Only after the arrival of video technology, the situation changed drastically. It was due to the technological changes that Independent voices were able to emerge. Filmmaking was really expensive after independence so the filmmakers were heavily dependent on government sponsorship. According to Sweta Kishore, “independence seemed an ambiguous notion in the shifting counters of media production where filmmakers regularly

approached state and civil society institutions for financial support and for exhibition platforms. Historically and colloquially the practice of independent documentary filmmaking is entrenched in terms of social advocacy, activism and public communication rather than being seen as a cultural or artistic expression, collaborated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seems to reinforce the documentary form within alternately served pedagogical and practical purposes in the Indian context” (Kishore,2018, p.8).

Singhal and Rogers stated “the advent of the video technology created ways for the independent documentary filmmakers to engage in various media practices and created an avenue for the alternate production and distribution across India.” (Singhal & Rogers, 1989). “The accessibility and mass reproduction of the video cassettes granted the independent documentary filmmakers to work beyond the state control and regulations. In the contemporary history of documentary practice, the video turn documentary practice marked a legendary and revolutionary moment. The expansion of video technology diminished the Elitist upper-class tradition of independent documentary filmmaking and changed it into a middle-class phenomenon. Various individuals and organizations started using the medium of video technology, building on the already extant tradition of independent and socially and politically committed documentary film practices” (Battaglia, 2018, p. 75). The new video turn documentaries could bring aesthetically and visually pleasing treatment to the films and made the documentary narrative more engaging. Documentary filmmakers partnered with several NGOs and Collectives by using media to promote community development. CENDIT (Center for Development and Instructional Technology) played a significant role in promoting media aiming to create awareness among the societies . CENDIT expanded its production by providing aspiring filmmakers such as Gargi Sen and Ranjan De resulting in forming an organization called Magic Lantern, which further contributed to the development of independent documentary filmmaking in India. The influence of CENDIT extended to other organizations such as SEWA, Abhivyakthi, Drishti Media and student collectives such as Alcom (Alternative Communication) and Mediastorm contributed to the proliferation of independent documentary practice in India.

### **Notable Documentaries and Filmmakers**

By discussing the pioneering filmmakers and their documentaries that conveyed the idea of independent documentaries that showcased the unfiltered and raw narratives could depict the significance era duly. The prominent filmmakers of the independent era used cinema as a pulpit and tried to bring personal arguments and perceptions to the documentaries. The documentaries which were made during this period contributed a lot to the development of the independent documentary practice in India. Documentary filmmakers like Patwardhan, Tapan Bose, Suhasini Mulay who were interested in passionately exploring the social, political and economic issues that were afflicting the nation by using the medium of documentary. The period became revolutionary because of various movements such as environmental activism, women’s right movement, caste etc and they could bring the ground reality of the country and try to give a voice to the marginalized. The arrival of compact cameras and portable audio equipment made the documentary makers venture and operate in remote working conditions and challenge the established dominance of the Films Division in the genre of documentary making. The documentary makers experimented in their form rather than going for conventional ways of making documentaries by the Films division. The documentary makers moved away from traditional and didactic form of documentary making and try to engage the audience in thought provoking thoughts. The documentaries made during this era had a pressing social impact and raised issues of awareness, sparked debates

and pushed the boundaries of the genre of documentary. Filmmakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds came together and brought a unique perspective to the genre.

Several activist filmmakers emerged in India, each of the documentary makers focusing on different issues. A landmark in independent documentary film history, *Kranti ki Trangein (Waves of Revolution [1975])* by Anand Padwardhan was the first independent documentary product of that era. Jayaprakash Narayan's (JP) notion of Total Revolution is explored in the documentary through showcasing momentous rallies, testimony from ordinary people and JP's own testimony. The documentary serves as a powerful tool and compelling record of the critical period of Indian history, documenting and showcasing the courage of ordinary people of the country and powerful leadership of JP. The documentary throws light on the determination of the common people to resist the corrupt government. The documentary underscores the holistic approach in the movement calling attention to tackling the social, political, economic, educational and cultural problems the country was facing. Patwardhan brought the discussion of economic disparity, exploitation of laborers, unity and equality in the villages by breaking the caste inequalities, challenging the system of dowry and by transforming the religious practices. *Waves of Revolution* inaugurated the first independent documentary movement in India. Originally shot on Super 8, the documentary was projected onto a screen and reshot on 16mm. The sound was recorded on a consumer cassette recorder. Patwardhan's next film *Zameer ke Bandhi (Prisoners of Conscience [1977])* which was made right after the emergency period explores the testimonies of the brutal torture faced by the prisoners who were jailed during this period. The work of Patwardhan benchmarked what independent documentaries would be like in the 1980s and 1990s in the Indian context. The documentary examines the truth of political imprisonment and state repression during the emergency period in post-independent India. The documentary sheds light on the stark contrast between the age of freedom and prosperity and how this period is just an extension of poverty for many. The documentary focuses on the emergency period and the struggle and the torture had been endured by the political prisoners under the emergency rule of Indira Gandhi. The documentary features various testimonials and brutal treatments they endured during the imprisonment. The film also featured extrajudicial killings happened in the form of firing, raping and inhuman treatments of the people in various parts of the country. The documentary also emphasizes on how emergencies bring the taste of the medicine that poor have always known to the middle class people. The documentary illustrates the importance of civil liberties and raises concerns about the lack of accountability for those who were involved in the torture and murder of the people during the emergency period in India.

Patwardhan's *Bombay our city (Hamara Shahar [1985])* explores the injustice and challenges faced by the millions of slum dwellers in Bombay (Mumbai) and the documentary tries to be mindful of the factors which are accountable for these conditions. The documentary carefully captures the various facets of their livelihood and the challenges they face like demolition of their huts, police brutality, water logging, lack of education, lack of work, displacement and the basic facilities. The film exposes the frustration of the slum dwellers due to fake promises given by the government during election campaigns and lack of protection from the authorities and how their rights had been taken away because of the poor background. 'Bombay our city' portrays how slum dwellers display resilience and come together despite threats from municipal and police authorities to resist further demolitions. Throughout the documentary there is a focus on the alarming conditions of the people who live in the slum and the struggles of the roadside vendors, confiscation of their carts and the corruption of the police by taking bribes. The documentary emphasizes the solidarity and equality among the people of slum dwellers irrespective of their caste and creed. It is an eye

opening documentary that exposes the corruption of the government as well as the struggles of the slum dwellers in Bandra, Bombay. *The Narmada Diary (1995)* by Simantini Dhuru and Anand Patwardhan is a counter narrative to the notion of development. The documentary critically looks at socio-environmental impacts on the environment and the tribes living around the Narmada river and the efforts by Narmada Bachao Andolan to resist the dam construction. The filmmaker introduces the protest and point of views of notable activists like Medha Patkar and Baba Ampte, a veteran Gandhian. The protest scrutinizes the exploitation and deceptive nature masquerading as development and the unkept promises of the government in terms of rehabilitation and compensation for the land. The film highlights the issue of increased height of the dam and the impact it has on the communities residing in the area along with the persistence and resilience of the people to fight for their ancestral land as well as preserving their culture.

*Father, Son and the Holy War (1995)* is another documentary by Patwardhan which explored the idea of independence in practice. Throughout the documentary, the potential reasons behind the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 are discussed, which still remains a controversial issue today in India. The second part documentary looks at the concept of masculinity and its part in igniting sexual violence.

*Bhopal: Beyond genocide (1985)* directed by Tapan Kumar Bose and Suhasini Mulay, tells the story of the aftermath of the Bhopal gas tragedy which occurred on 3rd December 1984. The documentary was made in memory of the people who were killed by Union Carbide corporation, a U.S based company in Bhopal and in defense of those who survived and continue to struggle against the multinational. The documentary highlights that even after a year of the world's biggest industrial disaster, the Methyl Isocyanide (MIC) has become an evident nightmare for the people and left them with death, terror and panic. It exposed the corporate negligence of government inaction and advocated for accountability and justice for the victims through the documentary narration. The documentary critiques the lack of medical assistance to the victims and how they had to depend on mobile medical units. The profit motives of the pharmaceuticals in these adverse situations are also highlighted by the directors. The documentary gives us an extensive account of how union carbide entered India advocating high yield technology and crop varieties to the farmers in the 1960s. The directors reveal the unsafe practices at the Bhopal plant and how the management disregards the safety options. The documentary heavily criticized the government's inaction in providing adequate relief and support for the victims of the tragedy and failing to hold the management accountable for the disaster which took the lives of 2500 people and left thousands of kids and adults suffering from the aftermath of the gas explosion. The police brutality on those who helped the victims is also underscored. The documentary concludes by emphasizing on to hold the people responsible for the tragedy and not to dehumanize the society in the name of progress. Tapan Bose also created significant documentaries such as *An Indian story (1981)*, *From Behind the Barricade (1993)*.

The first feminist film collective in India, Yugantar, was founded in 1980 by Dheepa Dhanraj, Abha Bhaiya, Meera Rao, and Navroze Contractor. The collective made endeavors to build a platform for Women's struggles against oppression. Aiming to address issues facing marginalized women workers and domestic workers, the initiative tried to reach out to them. *Something like a war (1991)* is a documentary by Deepa Dhanraj, which provides a critical examination of family planning and population control policies undertaken by the government. The documentary begins by addressing the need of population control and is presented in a way to save the country from population explosion. The documentary employs

how a laparoscopic sterilization procedure is done through the perspective of a gynecologist. The director, Deepa Dhanraj emphasized the issues of child marriage, gender discrimination, societal taboos and restrictions associated with menstruation. Deepa Dhanraj put emphasis on women's rights, pleasure and the autonomy of women over their motherhood. The documentary also critically looks at the health risks associated with the women contraceptive methods imposed by the government and critiques the government family planning initiatives that does not care about the aftermath of the procedures. Target based approach by the government officials to reach the sterilization targets which also results in resorting to unethical practices had been heavily criticized in something like a war. The documentary highlighted the forced vasectomy on men and its repercussions on the electoral consequences for the government and how it resulted in shifting the practice on women has been underlined. It emphasizes how planning has harmed the poor instead of helping them to overcome poverty. The documentary calls on unethical practices surrounding these initiatives. *What happened to this city (1986)*, *The legacy of Malthus (1994)* are some of the other notable works from Deepa Dhanraj.

Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar made a documentary on the Warli tribe called *Ahankar: Kahankar (storymaker: storytaker) in 1995* by bringing together a selection of various stories, paintings and writings about the Warli tribe. These stories and paintings are central to the history of the Warli community and throughout the history various external forces including various nationalities such as the Portuguese, the Marathas, the British, the native settlers, they all tried obliterating the wisdom of the Warli tribal community. The documentary represents two key roles: Ahankar (story taker, the one who passes on the stories) and Kahankar (story maker, the one who creates the stories). The documentary brings our attention to the significance of preserving the indigenous culture and the stories, paintings are some of the important aspects that keep their heritage alive. The documentary portrays the struggles the community had to endure at the hands of those who are in power and their resilience. On the further side of the immediate context, Anjali and Jayasankar also point out the various struggles the community faces such as marginalization, economic struggles, education, infant mortality rate etc.

*One Hundred years of drought (1992)*, *Identity: the construction of selfhood (1994)*, *YCP (1997)* are some of the other notable works from Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar.

Stalin K's '*Lesser Humans*' (1998) highlights the deep rooted and dehumanizing practice of manual scavenging. The documentary opens with distressing visuals of humans collecting feces by bare hands, devoid of any protective gear driven by the necessity for their livelihoods. The documentary highlights the deep rooted casteism in the country and how the caste based division of the labor assign the lower caste communities to do the menial jobs, cleaning and scavenging including the human waste. The 'Bhangis' who have been traditionally involved in this labor have been looked down upon and have been stigmatized by the upper castes. The documentary highlights the caste based discrimination and how people have been subjected to scavenging and reinforcing the marginalized status. The documentary states that over thirty two thousand manual scavengers are employed with the local government bodies and many employed at private homes. The workers who work in private don't get money, instead receive 100 kg of rice per year for one meal of leftover food or beg for a meal from the respective employers. The documentary underscores the violation of constitutional rights such as the right to life with human dignity and laws that prohibit forced labor. The director criticizes the untouchability practices, lack of food and education, and skewed government policies. The documentary ends with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's



perspective on untouchability “The only visible impact of the repeated attempts to eradicate manual scavenging is the denial of its existence. This inhumanity is faced only by a particular section of people. “Untouchability will vanish only when caste themselves unlearn their way of life which is sanctioned by religion. To change this way of life is to change their religion- Ambedkar.”

*'Kali Kem Mari?/ Why Did Kali Die?' (1992), A Bundleful of Fear/ Ek Poltlun Beek Nu' (1992), 'These Forests are Ours/ Jungle Amaru Tantra Tamaru' (1994)* are some of the major contributions to the independent documentaries by Stalin K.

## **Conclusion**

The independent documentary filmmaking in India went through a journey of remarkable transformation with the aim of social transformation since the 1980s with the shift in advent of video technologies. The paper explored the significant documentaries which contributed to the independent documentary filmmaking in India during the period 1970-2000. Activist filmmakers such as Anand Patwardhan, Tapan Bose, Suhasini Mulay, Deepa Dhanraj, Anjali Monteiro, KP Jayashankar, Stalin K heavily contributed to the independent documentary filmmaking in India and found cinema as a pulpit to challenge the authorities and ongoing social, political, and economic issues. In order to democratize documentary filmmaking in India, the technological shift from film to video played a significant role by bringing a new narrative, reaching more audiences and allowing a greater creative freedom. It's important to recognise and acknowledge the contribution of the documentary filmmakers as we discuss the insights into the history of independent documentary filmmaking in India.

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*Motivations of Mothers on Using Facebook in Postpartum Depression  
and Its Influence on Their Knowledge and Attitude*

Camille Rose Carl R. Mendoza, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines  
Rose Anne B. Dungca, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines

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**Abstract**

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a chronic mental condition that affects mothers of all ages, races, and social classes. One of the ways that receive social support for this condition is by using social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook. Facebook serves as a valuable platform to address their needs. Thus, this research aims to identify the respondents' socio-demographic profile, their frequency of Facebook use, their motivations to use Facebook, and their knowledge and attitude regarding PPD. The correlation among variables was also determined. A survey was conducted in January 2023 among 252 mothers in the Philippines. Data was analyzed using the Frequency Distribution Table, mean, and Pearson Chi-square. Results show that most of the respondents are from ages 28-37 years old, are married, and have one to three children. They are high school graduates and are earning below \$180 or 10,000 pesos a month. The respondents use Facebook for entertainment, personal utility, information seeking, convenience, and altruism regarding PPD. Moreover, they seem knowledgeable about the risk factors and symptoms of PPD. The respondents also appear to have a positive attitude toward the vulnerability, treatment, diagnosis, causes, and effects of PPD. The Facebook use of the respondents is significantly related to their knowledge and attitude on PPD. My findings recommend that government agencies should intensify communication campaigns to increase PPD awareness.

Keywords: Postpartum Depression, Health Communication, Social Media

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## Introduction

Postpartum depression is a chronic mental condition that affects mothers of all ages, races, and social classes worldwide (Santos, 2019). It occurs as being a new mother is the most challenging stage in parenthood as it can change women's psychological, social, and physiological aspects and increase their weaknesses in developing mental illness (Shitu et al., 2019). Depression or anxiety during and after pregnancy is also caused by a history of depression, stressful recent life events, and a lack of social support (Ayoub et al., 2020).

The World Health Organization, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, indicates that there is a need to enhance maternal and infant health and well-being. This can be done by providing postnatal care strategies through a human rights-based strategy that strengthens the standard of care for mothers and newborns (World Health Organization, 2022). With this, the Philippines' Department of Health (DOH) implemented a program to ensure Filipino women have complete access to health services to make their pregnancies and deliveries safer. It intends to implement a sustainable and affordable strategy for providing healthcare that guarantees disadvantaged women access to good, high-quality maternal and newborn health services. In this case, one of the platforms for raising awareness and delivering these services is through social media (DOH, 2018).

Social media positively impacts mothers experiencing postpartum depression and gives them emotional, informational, and appraisal support (Stringfellow, 2016). One of the new mothers' ways to receive social support for their physical and mental stress is by using social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook. In this sense, Facebook is a valuable platform to keep their social connection during postpartum depression, make new identities, and look for knowledge and assurance to justify their decision to raise a child (Das, 2017). In addition, there are Facebook pages that help mothers with postpartum depression worldwide. These Facebook pages provide peer support and reliable information for mothers with postpartum depression. Also, these online support groups can provide education and training opportunities that are open to all (Postpartum Support International, 2022).

The role of social media in the health communication practice of mothers with postpartum depression is notable. As such, the researchers aimed to know the motivations of mothers for using Facebook regarding postpartum depression and its influence on their knowledge and attitude. The theoretical assumptions of the Uses and Gratifications Theory served as a guide in the research. In this case, this research aims to understand people's motivations for selecting media and gratifications acquired (Kasirye, 2022). Moreover, it is recognized that media consumers are active participants in their media choices, and they choose based on their personal needs and objectives (Nicdao, 2019; Vinney, 2019). As such, media can be used as tension release for escapism (Kasirye, 2022).

The results of this research can contribute to the literature on media effects on health issues and become the basis for policy recommendations in addressing postpartum depression.

## Methodology

The researchers utilized the quantitative approach in this study. Quantitative research focuses on studying and quantifying variables to achieve results. It includes using numerical and statistical techniques to assess data to answer questions (Apuke, 2017). In addition, inferential statistical analysis was used in this study. According to Calvello (2020), inferential

statistical analysis is the process that will be used to get at the conclusions. It enables users to draw conclusions or predict trends about a larger population based on the examined samples. Basically, it uses information from a sample to draw conclusions about a wider population or group. Specifically, to test the hypothesis and the size of the sample population, correlation analysis was employed. It is used to determine the extent to which two factors depend on one another. In essence, this study determines whether there is a significant or low correlation between two variables (Cherry, 2023).

The study was conducted among 232 mothers residing in Mabalacat City which is a local government unit in the Philippines. This study has no specific age range, and mothers of all ages are qualified as respondents whether they have given birth recently or not. In addition, mothers are chosen in this study to be respondents because they are more prone to postpartum depression than men (Saha & Das, 2017). Stratified random sampling was employed in the selection of the respondents. An informed consent form was employed to ensure adherence to ethical standards.

A survey questionnaire that is duly validated and tested was used as the research instrument. The questionnaire contained statements and questions that captured the respondents' socio-demographic profiles, frequency and motivations of Facebook use on postpartum depression, and their knowledge and attitude toward postpartum depression. The researchers used statistical methods such as the Frequency Distribution Table (FDT), mean (average), and Chi-square Test for data analysis.

## Results

Table 1. *Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
18-27	75	29.8
28-37	83	32.9
38-47	23	9.1
48-57	54	21.4
58-67	16	6.4
68-77	1	0.4
<b>Civil Status</b>		
Single	60	24
Married	152	60
Widowed	40	16
<b>Number of Children</b>		
1-3	178	70.6
4-6	65	25.8
7-9	9	3.6
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
Elementary Undergraduate	3	3
Elementary Graduate	1.2	1.2
High School Undergraduate	12	12
High School Graduate	4.8	4.8
College Undergraduate	65	65
College Graduate	49	19.4
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Below 10, 000 pesos	164	65
11, 000 - 20, 999	58	23
21, 000 - 30, 999	30	12

Table 1 presents the respondents in terms of their socio-demographic profile. The majority or 32.9% of the mothers are from ages 28- 37 years old. For the civil status, 60% of the mothers are married. Moreover, 70.6% of mothers have one to three children. In terms of educational attainment, 29.5% of the respondents are high school graduates, For the monthly income, 65% are earning below 10,000 pesos a month.

Table 2. *Frequency of Facebook Utilization of the Respondents regarding PPD*

Sources of Information	Frequency	Percentage
At least once a day	59	23
At least once a week	33	13
A few times a month	33	13
Once a month or less	32	13
Never	95	38

As shown in Table 2, 38% of the respondents have never used Facebook for postpartum depression related concerns. Still, the remaining 62% have utilized it in varying frequencies. To discuss, the 38% of the respondents who have never utilized Facebook on PPD matters could possibly be due to disinterestedness of using the social media platform for PPD or their lack of motives to use Facebook for PPD concerns. These results can be linked to the study of De Choudhury et al. (2014) which stated that mothers do not utilize Facebook in their postpartum period due to its association with negative experiences.

Still, the remaining 62% have utilized it in varying frequencies. Specifically, some (23%) of the respondents are using Facebook at least once a day in relevance with postpartum depression. This indicates that mothers have motives that must be satisfied by using Facebook on a daily basis regarding postpartum depression. Similarly, in the study of Bartholomew et al. (2012) it was established that at nine months postpartum, Facebook use of the majority of mothers is at least once a day. The study also revealed that specific Facebook usage related to sharing images of the child. Mothers who posted images of their children to Facebook stated that the photos were "extremely likely" to "likely" to be acknowledged (i.e., commented on or "liked") by their Facebook friends because it makes them feel happy.

As to the respondents' motivations on using Facebook regarding PPD, they are sometimes using Facebook for entertainment purposes. Entertainment in this case refers to sometimes using Facebook as a form of distraction with a mean of 1.95. They also sometimes watch PPD related videos with a mean of 1.96. Moreover, they sometimes utilize Facebook to look for friends who have experienced PPD with a mean of 1.90. This affirms Archer and Kao's (2018) discussion that mothers use Facebook as their primary social media platform to relax, relieve boredom, stay informed on news, and find information about parenthood.

The next motivation is personal utility. In this instance, personal utility refers to mothers motivation to sometimes use Facebook to join Facebook groups to learn about other's experiences about PPD with a mean of 1.85; to read and know other people's opinions on PPD with a mean of 1.83, and sometimes use Facebook to join conversations (ask and answer questions) about PPD with a mean of 1.89. These results are also similar to the findings in the study of Morris (2014) which stated that mothers used the comment section to discuss the ways they used Facebook for parenting-related goals. These other uses were divided into three major categories as to inquiry, curation, and mommy networking. Moreover, in the research of Gibson and Hanson (2013), it was revealed that mothers utilized

Facebook to ask questions and receive comments from their online social network about infant development and maternal health. In this sense, a benefit from using Facebook is being a platform for support and advice.

The next motivation for Facebook use among mothers is to seek information. Information seeking in this context refers to mothers' sometimes use of Facebook to search for information about PPD with a mean of 1.94. They also sometimes use Facebook to know the latest updates and stories about PPD with a mean of 1.91; and with a mean 1.92, mothers are using Facebook to get free information about PPD sometimes. In connection with the previous results, the respondents' information seeking motivation and behavior can be to know current and updated narratives and trends on PPD. Stringfellow's (2016) research provides additional context that mothers are using social media, specifically Facebook to learn new information about PPD.

Moreover, one of the motivations to use Facebook is convenience. The respondents are sometimes using Facebook because they can get information easily regarding PPD rather than asking people face to face specifically with a mean of 1.97. Also, they sometimes use Facebook because people can answer any time if they have questions with a mean of 1.91. Furthermore, they sometimes use Facebook because the useful information that they need to know about PPD is free with a mean of 1.93. To support the findings, the study of Gibson & Hanson (2013) demonstrates that new mothers considered Facebook as a beneficial platform to retain social connections during the postpartum period, to create an entirely new identity, and to look for the accessible information and assurance needed to justify their decisions and actions in raising a newborn child.

The last motivation to use for the mothers in Facebook is altruism. Altruism refers to helping others who are experiencing PPD on Facebook to which the respondents sometimes with a mean of 1.88. They also sometimes show kindness by motivating those mothers who are experiencing PPD with a mean of 1.86. Also, the mothers sometimes motivate other mothers on Facebook by listening to their experiences on PPD with an exact mean of 1.87. These findings show complementation to the research of Prabhakar et al. (2017) which revealed that mothers are using social media to seek emotional and informational support and they proved the importance of having friends as their support system in postpartum depression.

For the knowledge of the respondents towards PPD, most of the mothers with 71% are knowledgeable about the risk factors of PPD such as civil status, educational attainment, family's monthly income and age, a change in hormone levels and lack of social support. The respondents are also knowledgeable about the symptoms of PPD, such as having trouble concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions with a frequency of 182 (72%). Moreover, most or 85% of the mothers are knowledgeable that PPD is depression that occurs after having a baby or it can occur days or even months after giving birth and can last many weeks or months if left untreated with a frequency of 197 (78%).

These findings affirm the study of Loquero and Galbo (2021) which showed that the respondents' knowledge of PPD, including its risk factors, symptoms, consequences, and therapies, was higher than average. Categorically, the majority of mothers are aware that they can experience PPD during the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> month after delivery. In addition, the study of Tobiloba et al. (2022), demonstrated that mothers are knowledgeable about the risk factors of postpartum depression as respondents are aware that poor support from spouse and family can cause PPD.

Meanwhile, the respondents have a positive attitude to the vulnerability of PPD that mothers can experience in their motherhood. The respondents agreed that mothers can experience PPD after their delivery with a mean of 3.18. They also agreed that it can impact all mothers regardless of their delivery with a mean of 3.03. Moreover, they agreed that it can affect mothers even if they have one or more children with a mean of 3.02. In addition, the results of the survey indicated that the respondents believe in the causes of PPD. Regarding this, they agreed that mothers can have PPD if they are experiencing lack of support with a mean of 2.98 and mothers who are taking care of their child alone with a mean of 2.95.

In line with this, in the Philippines, Cabanes (2019) showed that most high-risk women reported having depression symptoms. Social support is believed to facilitate a women's transition to parenthood and is discovered to be strongly related to maternal role development. Moreover, Tobiloba et al. (2022) revealed that poor family and spouse support can be a risk factor for PPD. Nevertheless, in the study of Branquinho et al. (2019) it is believed that the support of family and friends are not enough to beat postpartum depression.

Meanwhile, the respondents agreed in terms of the effects of the PPD to mothers, such as mothers with PPD have no desire to take care of themselves or for their child with a mean of 3.08 and it can be a cause of death among mothers with a mean of 2.92. This implies the respondents' belief in the gravity of PPD as it can be linked to the inefficiency of doing the responsibilities of parenthood, and ultimately, to mother's death. The mothers genuinely recognize the danger caused by PPD.

This is also seen in the study of Schiller et.al (2015) which revealed that mothers who are more sensitive and attentive to their children are more likely to have children with stable attachment, and thus maternal depressive symptoms can lead to the mother being unresponsive, inconsistent, unavailable, or rejecting care toward the child. As a result, depressed mothers are more likely to have colic infants, to be intrusive and harsh with their children, and to exhibit other poor parenting habits, such as lower rates of infant safety practices.

In determining the relationship between the frequency of utilization on Facebook to their knowledge and attitude to PPD, motivation of the respondents on their Facebook use to their knowledge and attitude Pearson chi-square was used. The result revealed that there is a highly significant relationship between the respondents frequency of utilization on Facebook to their knowledge and attitude of PPD with a p-value of 0.00\*\*. Furthermore, the motivation of the respondents on Facebook use and their knowledge and attitude towards PPD is highly significant with a p-value of 0.00\*\*.

As it was previously discussed that the respondents have varying frequency of Facebook use, it still contributed to them being knowledgeable on PPD. This affirms the principle of the Uses and Gratification Theory that particular media consumers take an active role in the media they choose to consume and instead of only consuming media in a passive manner, they are actively engaged and motivated to search for information they need (Vinny, 2019). Moreover, in the study of Schopee-Sullivan et al. (2016), their research indicated significant differences in the use and experience of Facebook among new young mothers. It is also discovered that higher levels of maternal identity confirmation and societal-oriented parenting perfection were associated with increased Facebook activity. As a result, Facebook serves as another medium for mothers, particularly those seeking greater external validation



for their domestic roles, to affirm that they are carrying out motherhood correctly or normatively.

### **Conclusion**

The study's findings presents the respondents' motivation on using Facebook regarding PPD are for entertainment, personal utility, information seeking, convenience and altruism. In terms of knowledge, the mothers are knowledgeable on the risks, causes, symptoms and effects of PPD. In the same way, they believe on the vulnerability of mothers in experiencing PPD and the need to have clinical and medical diagnosis for treatment. In the same way, they believe in the gravity of PPD as it can lead to death among mothers.

In this case, the researchers recommends for concerned government institutions to intensify their communication techniques and campaigns on social media, specifically in Facebook, regarding PPD since it is identified as a useful tool among mothers.

Furthermore, the researchers recommend the conduct of qualitative research particularly in media use for health communication to contribute in understanding the phenomenon of postpartum depression. The results of this research can be used for policy recommendations and program development.

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**Contact email:** [camillerosecarl\\_mendoza@psau.edu.ph](mailto:camillerosecarl_mendoza@psau.edu.ph)

***Kidnapping and Abduction Online News Reports' Influence on Fear of  
Victimization and Prevention Practices***

Renz Q. Garcia, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines  
Erwin A. Arinas, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines

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**Abstract**

The increase in reports of kidnappings and abductions in the Philippines has been widely circulated on social media. Studies indicate frequent exposure to crime news significantly increases people's fear of crime. Hence, this research investigated the demographics, exposure to online kidnapping and abduction news, degree of fear of victimization, and prevention practices among students at Pampanga State Agricultural University (PSAU), in Magalang, Pampanga, Philippines, to determine if these news reports affect their fear and safety behaviors. The study surveyed 380 college students at PSAU using a quantitative inferential research method. Techniques such as Frequency Distribution Tables, Mean calculations, and Chi-square tests were employed for statistical analysis. Key findings indicated that most respondents were female students aged 20-21, with monthly family incomes below 20,000 pesos. A significant portion of these students frequently encountered online news about kidnappings and abductions, with 11.5% encountering such news often (five to seven days per week) and 43.5% sometimes (one to three days per week). The students displayed a substantial level of fear of becoming kidnapping and abduction victims, with a mean fear score of 3.83. Meanwhile, they adopted preventive measures like cautious information sharing, heightened vigilance, and open communication with family. The results also demonstrated that sex and exposure to online crime news are significantly related to fear of victimization. It recommends that government bodies, educational institutions, media professionals, and parents intensify their roles in educating about responsible crime news consumption and implementing effective prevention strategies to reduce people's fear and potential victimization.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Abduction, Fear of Victimization, Prevention Practices, Online News Reports

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## Introduction

The Internet's emergence has revolutionized how news and information are disseminated, opening up many opportunities in journalism, particularly in creating and distributing news stories for a wide audience across various platforms (Khan & Shnaider, 2021). The Internet has been instrumental in making online news sources accessible through digital devices, playing a crucial role in educating and informing the public about global issues and events (Bennett, 2021). These sources encompass a wide range of journalistic beats, which refer to specific topics or subject areas covered by reporters (Rogers, 2019).

Among these, crime reporting is a highly popular beat in journalism, involving objective, interpretative, and investigative reporting, and is closely linked to public safety (Dane, 2020; National Institute of Mass Communication & Journalism, 2020; Truong, 2021). Public interest is particularly high in crime stories covering a variety of offenses, including kidnappings and abductions, which are deliberate acts punishable by law with significant physical or psychological impacts (Dane, 2020; Victim Support, 2022). Kidnapping, defined in the Philippine Revised Penal Code, involves the illegal taking of a person without consent, while forcible abduction pertains specifically to the abduction of women against their will (Attorneys of the Philippines, 2017; BatasNatin, n.d.).

Globally, numerous cases of missing people are reported, with youth often being the primary victims of abductions, contrary to the common belief that younger children are more frequently targeted (Missouri Child Identification Program, n.d.; World Population Review, 2022). In the Philippines, kidnapping and abduction remain persistent issues across the country, with a significant number of incidents recorded, including those linked to Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs) (Philippine Strategic Associates, 2021; Pinlac, 2022; Sarao, 2022). Despite being illegal, the risk remains high, prompting government agencies to implement various policies and establish units like the Philippine National Police Anti-Kidnapping Group (PNP-AKG) to address the problem (Dalizon, 2022; Gonzales, 2019).

Recently, an increase in online reports of kidnapping and abduction in the Philippines has led to concerns over the proliferation of fake news, prompting the PNP to request the removal of misleading posts to avoid public panic (Caliwan, 2022; Recuenco, 2022). This situation underscores the importance of studying the impact of crime news consumption on public fear of crime and victimization. Research indicates that greater exposure to crime news, especially via social media, can amplify fear among the public (Näsi et al., 2021; Teilerboim and Thielemann, 2013).

Crime news serves as a risk message, raising awareness about criminal events. However, the emotional toll of crimes like abduction, which can have long-lasting psychological effects on victims and their families, necessitates effective risk communication to help the public make informed decisions regarding their safety (Akwash, 2016; Bathiya, 2018; Lampoltshammer, 2014; World Health Organization, 2022). In today's media landscape, understanding how news media communication affects perceptions of safety and crime risk is crucial (Hollis et al., 2017).

The study at Pampanga State Agricultural University in Magalang, Pampanga, Philippines, was designed to determine the influence of online kidnapping and abduction news reports on the fear of victimization and prevention practices among college students. It explored the relationship between demographics, exposure to such news, fear levels, and prevention

strategies. The research is guided by the assumptions of the Cultivation Theory and its adaptation to social media.

## **Research Methods**

The authors utilized a quantitative inferential research method to investigate the influence of online news reports about kidnapping and abduction on the fear of victimization and prevention practices among students at PSAU. This method, which involves numerical data and statistical analysis, was chosen to discern patterns and relationships in the data (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2015;). Inferential statistics were used to make reliable conclusions about the larger population from a sample (Calvello, 2020).

The research was conducted at PSAU, selected for its relevant student demographic, aligning with typical abduction victim profiles (Johnston, 2018). A sample of 380 students was selected using simple and stratified random sampling methods, ensuring a representative and unbiased sample. Slovin's Formula was applied to determine this sample size, based on the university's total student population.

The primary tool for data collection was a survey questionnaire, designed with reference to various pertinent studies and literature (Barthel et al., 2020; Chockalingam & Srinivasan, 2009; McLeod, 2018). This questionnaire comprised four sections covering demographic information, frequency of exposure to kidnapping and abduction news, degree of fear of victimization, and prevention practices.

Data collection procedures involved obtaining the university's student population data and consulting a statistician for appropriate statistical methods. Once designed and validated, the questionnaire was distributed among the selected respondents after ensuring their informed consent and anonymity.

The authors employed frequency distribution tables, mean calculations, and chi-square tests for data analysis. These methods were used to determine the socio-demographic profiles of respondents, their exposure to kidnapping and abduction news reports, their degree of fear, and their prevention practices. The chi-square test, in particular, was utilized to explore relationships between respondents' socio-demographic status, their fear of victimization, frequency of exposure to such news, and their prevention practices.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **I. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

The study's first objective was to determine the socio-demographic profile regarding age, sex, and family monthly income of Pampanga State Agricultural University students. In this case, the results are discussed as follows:

#### ***1.1 Age of the Respondents***

Table 1.1 shows the respondents' ages, ranging from 18 to 25, divided into four age groups: 18-19, 20-21, 22-23, and 24-25. The majority, 50%, are aged 20-21, followed by 32.37% aged 18-19, 15% aged 22-23, and 2.63% aged 24-25.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 19	123	32.37
20 – 21	190	50
22 – 23	57	15
24 – 25	10	2.63
TOTAL	380	100

Table 1.1: Age of the Respondents

### 1.2 Sex of the Respondents

Table 1.2 presents the sex of the respondents. Most of the respondents among 380 PSAU students are female (66.8%), while the rest (33.2%) are male.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	126	33.2
Female	254	66.8
TOTAL	380	100

Table 1.2: Sex of the Respondents

### 1.3 Family's Monthly Income of the Respondents

Table 1.3 displays the monthly family earnings of the surveyed individuals. The data reveals that a significant portion, 55.8%, of them, reported a family income below 20,000 pesos monthly. This indicates that most respondents belong to low-income families, as the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2020) defines households earning between 10,957 to 21,194 pesos monthly as low-income. Additionally, the distribution of other income groups is as follows: 24.5% earn between 21,000 and 30,999 pesos, 9.5% between 31,000 and 40,999 pesos, 5.3% between 41,000 and 50,999 pesos, 2.6% earn over 61,000 pesos, and 2.4% between 51,000 and 60,999 pesos.

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below P20,000	212	55.8
P21,000 – 30,999	93	24.5
P31,000 – 40,999	36	9.5
P41,000 – 50,999	20	5.3
P51,000 – 60,999	9	2.4
P61,000 and above	10	2.6
TOTAL	380	100

Table 1.3: Family's Monthly Income of the Respondents

## II. Frequency of Exposure to Kidnapping and Abduction Online News Reports

The study's second objective was to assess how often respondents encountered online news reports about kidnapping and abduction. Table 2 provides the frequency of exposure to such news among the respondents. According to the data, 43.95% of PSAU students reported "sometimes," indicating that almost half of them encountered kidnapping and abduction-related online news reports one to three times per week. Additionally, 11.5% of students



answered "often," signifying frequent exposure, typically five to seven days a week. These findings highlight that most students have varying levels of exposure to kidnapping and abduction news, likely due to the prevalence of crime news in media (Schildkraut, 2017).

Belfrage (2018) argued that youth's news consumption combines incidental and planned exposure. Many young people encounter news incidentally through their social media feeds, influenced by friends sharing news and news organizations' presence on social media. Some engage in deliberate actions, like installing apps with push notifications and following news-focused accounts on various platforms.

Similarly, many Filipinos frequently encounter news content while browsing social media, with 78% relying on incidental exposure through their Facebook feeds (Mateo, 2022). This exposure may also be linked to the increased incidence and online virality of kidnapping and abduction-related posts in the Philippines (Hunt, 2022; Recuenco, 2022).

However, 40% of respondents indicated "rarely" encountering such news, suggesting minimal exposure. This may be due to some students' lack of interest in current events, affecting the algorithms that shape their news exposure.

It's worth noting that young individuals often prefer lighter news topics, such as sports, entertainment, and culture, impacting the content that algorithms prioritize in their news feeds (Benjamin, 2022). Social media algorithms are crucial in determining what appears in users' feeds, prioritizing content based on relevance rather than publication date (Meyers, 2022). As a result, some youth may have limited exposure to kidnapping and abduction-related news due to their content preferences.

Finally, 5% of respondents reported "never" encountering online news about kidnapping and abduction. This suggests that a small percentage of students have never encountered such news, while most have.

Contrary to this study's findings, most young people are exposed to online news through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Common Sense Media, 2019).

Frequency of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Never	19	5.00
Rarely	152	40.00
Sometimes	167	43.95
Often	40	11.05
TOTAL	380	100

Table 2: Frequency of Exposure to Kidnapping and Abduction Online News Reports

### III. Degree of Fear of Victimization

The study's third objective was to assess respondents' fear of victimization, focusing on their perception of vulnerability to kidnapping and abduction. According to the Warr and Stafford (1983) Model of Fear, fear of victimization is influenced by perceived risk and perceived crime seriousness (Rader, 2017).

The Fear of Crime Scale (FOCS) was employed to measure respondents' fear of crime, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'not at all fearful' to 'extremely fearful' (Elliott, 2022). The FOCS results revealed that PSAU students had a significant level of fear regarding kidnapping and abduction, with a grand mean of 3.83. Although not at the highest level, their fear was considerable, indicating their perception of these crimes as serious and their susceptibility to victimization.

These findings are in line with the perception in Nigeria, where kidnapping and abduction are seen as serious issues, and citizens feel unsafe (Afrobarometer, 2022). Similarly, Filipinos report fear, anxiety, and an increased sense of vulnerability to kidnapping and abduction (Luna, 2022).

The study found a substantial level of fear among respondents concerning kidnapping-for-ransom gangs (mean score of 4.09) and individuals using violence (mean score of 4.13) for kidnapping and abduction. This suggests that students perceived themselves as highly vulnerable to these forms of victimization, driven either by monetary gain or violence. This fear aligns with the perception in the Philippines, where kidnapping for ransom is viewed as a serious issue, with a significant number of reported cases (Pinlac, 2023).

Moreover, the study revealed that respondents substantially feared being kidnapped or abducted while walking alone on the street (mean score of 4.04) or in isolated and dark areas (mean score of 4.35). This indicates that students acknowledged the risks associated with these situations, particularly at night and in secluded places. These findings are consistent with reports from the Philippines, where people express high fear when walking alone at night (Mangahas, 2018). In contrast, a smaller percentage of individuals in Britain fear walking alone at night (Smith, 2021).

Respondents also exhibited a substantial fear of interacting with strangers, as indicated by a mean score of 3.75. This suggests an awareness of the potential vulnerability associated with such interactions, consistent with the perception that stranger-committed kidnapping is highly dangerous (Child Crime Prevention & Safety Center, 2018).

Concerns extended to victimization outside the school's vicinity, with a mean score of 3.79, indicating substantial fear. This reflects students' apprehension about becoming victims once they leave the school area. This fear aligns with data from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which shows that attempted abductions often occur when children are traveling to or from school (Waugh, 2022). In contrast, a lower percentage of U.S. students fear being attacked away from school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021).

Furthermore, respondents expressed a substantial fear of being kidnapped or abducted while using public transportation, with a mean score of 3.71. This suggests that students perceived themselves as highly susceptible to victimization when commuting using public vehicles, even in the presence of witnesses. These concerns are shared by many commuters in the Philippines, who often feel unsafe due to the presence of criminals (Pagkatotohanan, 2022). In contrast, fewer individuals in London express fear while using public transportation (Imperial College London, 2020).

Finally, respondents reported a medium or moderate fear of being kidnapped or abducted within their neighborhood area (mean score of 3.18) and when alone in their households

(mean score of 3.18). Although they had concerns about these situations, their fears were more pronounced in public spaces, as seen in their substantial fear of walking alone on the street, using public transportation, and being outside the school vicinity. These findings contrast with those in Turkey, where women report high levels of fear both inside and outside their homes (Tandogan & Ilhan, 2016).

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
1. In recent times, how fearful are you of becoming a victim of kidnapping and abduction?	4.08	Substantially fearful
2. Recently, how fearful have you been that you will be kidnapped or abducted by someone using violence?	4.13	Substantially fearful
3. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted when you walk alone on the street?	4.04	Substantially fearful
4. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted when you are alone in the house?	3.18	Medium fearful
5. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted while outside the school vicinity area?	3.79	Substantially fearful
6. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted when you talk to a stranger?	3.75	Substantially fearful
7. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted by a kidnapping for ransom gang?	4.09	Substantially fearful
8. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted inside your neighborhood area?	3.18	Medium fearful
9. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted when you walk alone in isolated and dark areas?	4.35	Substantially fearful
10. Recently, how fearful have you been of being kidnapped or abducted when traveling alone using public transportation?	3.71	Substantially fearful
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>Substantially fearful</b>

Remarks:

1.00 – 1.49	Not at all Fearful
1.50 – 2.49	Slightly Fearful
2.50 – 3.49	Medium Fearful
3.50 – 4.49	Substantially Fearful
4.50 – 5.00	Extremely Fearful

Table 3: Degree of Fear of Victimization

#### IV. Prevention Practices

The study's fourth objective aimed to investigate the prevention practices adopted by respondents to safeguard themselves from the risks of kidnapping and abduction. Prevention practices encompass various precautionary measures respondents take to reduce their vulnerability to these crimes. Table 4 presents the prevention practices employed by students to mitigate the risks of kidnapping and abduction. It is important to note that respondents could select multiple options.

The most frequently practiced preventive measure among students, with a frequency of 341, was "Being cautious about sharing personal data on social media." This finding indicates that many students prioritize safeguarding their personal information on social media, understanding the importance of not divulging such details. This practice enhances their privacy and limits strangers, especially criminals, from accessing their personal information, thereby reducing the risk of victimization.

Similar trends have been observed in Canada, where the youth exhibit a heightened awareness of online privacy concerns and actively take precautions to protect their personal data (MediaSmarts, 2023). In contrast, youth in the United States tend to be more liberal in sharing personal information on social media (Madden et al., 2013).

The second most frequently practiced preventive measure, with a frequency of 313, was "Not disclosing information, especially personal details, to others, even online." This result demonstrates responsible behavior among respondents, who exercise caution when sharing personal information, even in online interactions. This practice ensures information privacy and reduces the risk of physical harm, as potential criminals are unaware of an individual's location.

Similar practices are observed among Filipino youth, with a majority avoiding interaction and sharing personal information with online strangers (UNICEF Philippines, 2020). Australian youth are also reluctant to engage with strangers online (Scott, 2017).

The third most practiced preventive measure, with a frequency of 308, was "Ensuring that all doors and windows have functional locks." This outcome reflects students' conscientiousness in securing their homes to deter potential intruders. Properly secured homes reduce the risk of break-ins and victimization.

This practice aligns with findings in New Zealand, where a significant portion of the population prioritizes locking doors and windows for security (Olano, 2020). However, in the United Kingdom and the United States, a considerable portion of the population neglects to lock their doors and windows, posing security risks (DePompa, 2019; Response Source, 2022).

Conversely, several preventive measures were less commonly practiced among the students. For instance, "Assigning security officers within the family" ranked 21st in terms of preventive measures, with only 43 respondents reporting this practice. "Installing CCTVs at home as part of security measures" ranked 18.5th, with 98 respondents employing this measure. These results indicate that most students do not have security personnel or CCTV systems in their homes, which may be attributed to financial constraints, as many respondents come from low-income households. This financial limitation aligns with national statistics in

the Philippines, where a significant portion of the population falls into the low-income category (Zoleta, 2022).

"Changing their daily routine and travel routes" ranked 20th among preventive measures, with only 59 respondents reporting this practice. This suggests that respondents maintain consistent routines and travel routes, contrary to findings that women often avoid public places when faced with threatening situations (Bastomski & Smith, 2017).

Lastly, "Carrying pepper spray or other self-defense objects" ranked 18.5th, with 98 respondents utilizing such items. This finding implies that many students do not carry self-defense tools like pepper spray, which can be useful in emergencies.

Pepper spray is recognized as an effective defensive device, temporarily incapacitating threats and facilitating escape (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022). Similarly, only a minority of female realtors in the United States carry pepper spray (Statista Research Department, 2019).

Prevention Practices	Frequency	Ranking
1. I am careful about revealing data on social media	341	1 <sup>st</sup>
2. I don't reveal my information, especially personal information to other people, even online	313	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3. I ensure that all my doors and windows have locks in working condition	308	3 <sup>th</sup>
4. I stay alert with my surroundings when I'm walking outside the street	297	4 <sup>th</sup>
5. I tell my loved ones my whereabouts	279	5 <sup>th</sup>
6. I avoid engaging in conversation with strangers, even online	250	6 <sup>th</sup>
7. I do not hitch a ride with a person I do not know very well	245	7 <sup>th</sup>
8. I live a simple life and avoid being showy about my personal things on people	241	8 <sup>th</sup>
9. Day or night, I do not walk in dark streets, alleys and unsafe shortcuts	237	9 <sup>th</sup>
10. I get to know my neighbors and all those residing in my street	192	10 <sup>th</sup>
11. I planned my escape actions in case of emergency	184	11 <sup>th</sup>
12. I saved emergency hotlines in my phone	179	12 <sup>th</sup>
13. I learn or practice self-defense moves or techniques	170	13 <sup>th</sup>
14. I research information about safety measures	155	14.5 <sup>th</sup>
15. I planned to report suspicious persons or movements to the barangay or police	155	14.5 <sup>th</sup>
16. I used live location on messenger to share my exact location on my friends and family	144	16 <sup>th</sup>

17. I carry in my bag a whistle or anything that may be used to sound an alarm when in danger	101	17 <sup>th</sup>
18. I carry pepper spray or any object that can be used for self-defense	98	18.5 <sup>th</sup>
19. I installed CCTVs at home as part of the security measure	98	18.5 <sup>th</sup>
20. I changed my day-to-day routine and travel routes	59	20 <sup>th</sup>
21. My family assigned a security officer within the family	43	21 <sup>st</sup>
22. I joined in an organized neighborhood vigilance network	32	22 <sup>nd</sup>

Table 4: Prevention Practices

## V. Relationship of the Respondents' Socio-Demographic Profile to their Degree of Fear of Victimization

The study aimed to explore the link between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, family income) and their fear of victimization, using Chi-Square analysis to assess this relationship.

### 5.1 Age vs. Degree of Fear of Victimization

As shown in Table 5.1, the study found no significant relationship between age and fear of victimization, suggesting that age does not influence this fear. This aligns with Collins (2016), who found no overall age-fear of crime link. However, in specific contexts like disadvantaged neighborhoods in Germany and Australia, age-related fear differences were observed, with both younger and older groups showing similar levels of fear, varying by neighborhood wealth (Köber et al., 2020). Conversely, Mia et al. (2022) found that in Tangail Sadar, Bangladesh, people aged 38-47 had higher crime fears, possibly due to their societal roles and family concerns. This indicates that while age alone may not determine fear of victimization, other factors like social environment can play a role.

Demographic profile	Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Remark
Age	301.61	273	.113	not significantly related

Table 5.1: Age vs Degree of Fear of Victimization

### 5.2 Sex vs. Degree of Fear of Victimization

Table 5.2 shows a significant relationship between sex and fear of victimization, suggesting that women may experience greater fear than men. This is supported by societal stereotypes, as noted by Webster (2016), who states that women are often perceived as more vulnerable from birth, leading to a heightened fear of physical dangers. Mmari et al. (2018) also found in Shanghai that women are seen as more susceptible to crimes like 'rape' and 'kidnapping', reinforcing the belief in their physical weakness. Furthermore, Silva & Guedes (2022) highlighted that women's perception of themselves as defenseless increases their fear of crime. In Thailand, Prechathamwong & Rujiprak (2019) observed a similar trend, with

women more likely to experience fear of crime influenced by factors like perceived social disorganization and satisfaction with police crime prevention measures.

<b>Demographic profile</b>	<b>Chi-Square Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>	<b>Remark</b>
Sex	95.15	39	.000	significantly related

Table 5.2: Sex and Degree of Fear of Victimization

### ***5.3 Family's Monthly Income vs Degree of Fear of Victimization***

Table 5.3 shows no significant link between respondents' family income and their fear of victimization, suggesting income does not impact this fear, and all income groups are equally susceptible. This contrasts with findings in Latin America, where Singer et al. (2020) identified a positive correlation between economic anxiety and crime fear. Similarly, in Europe, Vieno et al. (2013) observed higher fear levels among those feeling socially marginalized and critical of their welfare system. However, Hernández et al. (2020) found that higher socioeconomic status increased fear of crime in Peru due to more resources at risk.

<b>Demographic profile</b>	<b>Chi-Square Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>	<b>Remark</b>
Family's Monthly Income	167.19	195	.926	not significantly related

Table 5.3: Family's Monthly Income and Fear of Victimization

### ***5.4 Frequency of Exposure vs Degree of Fear of Victimization***

Table 5.4 indicates a significant relationship between frequent exposure to online news about kidnapping and abduction and increased fear of victimization. This aligns with Gerbner's Cultivation Theory and Nevzat's assumptions regarding social media, suggesting that media exposure shapes perceptions and fears (Perera, 2021; Vinney, 2019). The study corroborates that regular exposure to such news heightens youths' fear.

Selvi (2021) also found media exposure to violence heightens fear of victimization, with individuals perceiving violence as more prevalent than it is. Similarly, Intravia et al. (2017) noted a strong connection between consuming crime stories and increased crime fear, especially among youth. In Chile, Nási et al. (2021) observed that active media consumption elevates fear of violence, particularly on social media. Chan (2021) further supports this, stating that increased consumption of crime news heightens fear during specific periods. These findings collectively suggest that media exposure significantly influences fear perceptions.

Variables	Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Remark
Frequency of exposure vs Fear of Victimization	168.43	117	.001	significantly related

Table 5.4: Frequency of Exposure vs Degree of Fear of Victimization

### 5.5 Frequency of Exposure vs Prevention Practices

Table 5.5 shows no significant link between exposure to online news reports and adoption of preventive practices among respondents, suggesting other factors influence youths' precautionary measures despite exposure to kidnapping and abduction news. This aligns with the Filipino cultural context where preventive behaviors are ingrained in values and lifestyle, as Borromeo (2021) notes, shaped by historical security challenges.

Contrarily, Obodo et al. (2022) in Nigeria found that visual multimedia exposure boosts security awareness and kidnapping prevention measures. Similarly, Liu et al. (2020) in China observed that mass media exposure, through negative emotions, significantly enhances preventive behaviors. In Bolivia, Zaballos Rivas et al. (2021) reported that high exposure to COVID-19 information on social media correlated with increased risk perception and subsequent adoption of COVID-19 preventive behaviors. These varied findings suggest that cultural factors play a role in preventive practices, but media exposure can also significantly influence behavior in different contexts.

Variables	Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Remark
Frequency of exposure vs Prevention Practices	63.45	66	.566	not significantly related

Table 5.5: Frequency of Exposure vs Prevention Practices

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the predominant demographic among the respondents is females aged 20-21 in a lower-middle-class family. A significant portion often and sometimes encounter online news about kidnapping and abduction, leading to substantial fear among them. While they practice measures such as careful data sharing on social media and ensuring their personal safety, they less often engage in community vigilance or carry self-defense tools. Interestingly, age and family income do not appear to influence their fear levels, but sex does. Moreover, while exposure to abduction and kidnapping news heightens their fear, it does not necessarily affect their preventive actions.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the recommendations include enhanced awareness and education programs focusing on risk assessment and safety strategies, community engagement initiatives like neighborhood watch programs, personal safety workshops covering self-defense and situational awareness, social media safety campaigns, counseling, and support



services to manage the psychological impact of fear. Further research on the following is also recommended:

1. **Gender Analysis:** Explore gender-specific reactions to kidnapping and abduction news and coping mechanisms.
2. **Age Range Expansion:** Include more age groups to study developmental and generational fear and coping variations.
3. **Content Analysis and Media Consumption:** Examine news media content and the impact of different sources and content tones on fear and preventive behaviors.
4. **Behavioral Discrepancy:** Analyze the gap between increased fear and unchanged preventive actions.
5. **Policy and Education Efficacy:** Assess the role of policies and educational programs in fear mitigation and safety enhancement.
6. **Technology and Digital Literacy:** Evaluate the role of digital literacy and safety technologies in fear and preventive behavior modulation.
7. **Longitudinal Insights:** Monitor fear and behavior evolution over time amidst changing media and social landscapes.

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**Contact email:** [renz\\_garcia@psau.edu.ph](mailto:renz_garcia@psau.edu.ph)



***Communicating Online Counseling for Mental Health:  
Awareness and Perceptions of PSAU Students***

Gabriel B. Lorenzo, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines  
Melwissa Gretch B. Bangit, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines

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**Abstract**

The general objective of this paper was to determine how online counseling for mental health is communicated to the Pampanga State Agricultural University (PSAU) students by knowing its influence on their awareness and perceptions. In determining this, 380 college students at PSAU were surveyed online using the quantitative research method. The results of the study showed that the respondents have a high level of awareness and have a positive perception towards online counseling for mental health. It was found in the study that anxiety, academic concerns, and depression are the issues that would lead most of the respondents into seeking online counselling. Most of the respondents agreed that they would consider getting psychological help through online counseling if they were worried or upset for a long period of time because of its accessibility. The respondents also have a positive perception that if online counseling were available at no charge, they would probably consider trying it. The study recommends to the PSAU Guidance and Counseling office to implement their own program in which they can offer free online counseling services to the PSAU students. This would serve as a safe space for PSAU students where they can share their thoughts or concerns that are affecting their mental well-being and interfering with their ability to function properly as individuals and students.

Keywords: Online Counselling, Mental Health, Information Sources

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## **Introduction**

### **Defining Mental Health**

Health is every individual's source of everyday life. It is a positive concept, highlighting the personal and social resources of every individual, including their physical abilities. Furthermore, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 2021).

Focusing on mental health, it refers to an individual's state of well-being, which includes how they think, feel, and act. It can also relate to a person's emotional, social, and psychological well-being (Felman, 2020). However, there is a condition that affects an individual's way of thinking, interpersonal relationships, and day-to-day functioning and it is called mental illness. It affects people of all races, ages, religions, sexes, and genders (Harvard Medical University, 2021). Mental illnesses are also mental health conditions characterized by changes in an individual's emotions, including their way of thinking and/or behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

### **Mental Health and Its Problems**

In connection, different mental health concerns have been identified as a result of this, including depression, generalized anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and a lot more (Harvard Medical University, 2021). Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified depression, a type of mental illness, as a severe public health problem since it is a primary cause of harm and disease for individuals all over the world (University of Southern California, 2020). Anxiety and depression, for example, can become communication problems because they can cause speech impairments during a conversation, such as long pauses, which can impact a person's social skills. Therefore, it has an impact on how a person lives, communicates, and builds relationships with other people (Williamsville Psychiatry, 2022).

With regards to this, globally, the most vulnerable to mental health issues are those aged 15–29. The related deaths, along with the issues of mental health at these ages, are the second highest cause of mortality (World Health Organization, 2020). In addition, there are around 970 million people around the world who have been diagnosed with mental health disorders, and anxiety is the most common mental illness in the world that affects 284 million people. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Psychiatry, mental illnesses are responsible for 14.3 percent of deaths worldwide, or approximately 8 million deaths each year. Because of this, it demonstrates the necessity for more programs and campaigns that will help to overcome the stigma around mental health (World Health Organization, 2020).

### **Mental Health in the Philippine Context**

Focusing in the Philippines, according to Maravilla and Tan (2021), one of the stigmas and beliefs of Filipinos around mental health issues is that mental illnesses are non-existent and something to be ashamed of. To address this issue, country's Department of Health (DOH, 2018) has created and continuously creates different programs and activities that focus on mental health. One of these activities were the creation of free online counselling sessions.

In line with this, according to Bennette (2018), the word counseling is most likely to be associated with face-to-face or in-person counseling. It is where an individual who seeks mental health treatment will undergo therapy in the counselor's office or space. However, counseling for mental health issues could be done not only in-person but also online. Focusing on online counseling, currently, it is one of the avenues used in order to address mental health problems. This is done in order to provide accessible mental health treatment and services to those who need them. Also, it will be easier for mental health advocates to break the stigma that has always been associated with mental health issues (Cherry, 2021).

### **Online Counselling in the Academe**

However, according to Acosta et al. (2014), the literature or studies about online counseling in the Philippines is still somewhat lacking. It could be explained by the fact that not all Filipinos are aware of the availability of online counseling. Thus, an effort should be made to improve the image of online counseling for mental health concerns as the attitudes of the potential clients depend on the availability of quality information for mental health treatments (Musiat et al., 2014). In addition, Filipinos' attitudes and receptions to online counseling may differ depending on their characteristics (Acosta et al., 2014).

In line with this, one of the negative sides of online counseling is that the treatment and access of mental health care mostly occurs in urban areas, in which those who live in rural areas might not have access to mental health services because of its limitations and the absence of mental health practices in their area. Meanwhile, on the positive side, online counseling is convenient because clients can often schedule their own sessions that will be suitable for their own time. In addition, seeking mental health care services online does not require an individual to be clinically diagnosed with mental health issues first because online therapy is an avenue for everyone who wants to start asking for help for their mental well-being from professionals (Cherry, 2021).

Therefore, it is relevant to study how online counseling for mental health is communicated to PSAU students because it could help and benefit the current and future mental health programs, movements, and campaigns. PSAU college students were chosen to be the respondents of this research because, according to Brown (2012), about 12–18% of students in college universities were diagnosed with mental illness. On the other hand, this study may serve as a source of information not only for the PSAU college students but also for all the Filipino students about the existence of online counseling that may help them address their mental health concerns.

### **Methodology**

In this case, the research utilized quantitative research design-descriptive approach. quantitative research methods refer to evaluating and understanding the problem of the study with the use of data collection processes and analyzing the results along with statistical techniques (Apuke, 2017). With this, a descriptive research approach was used in the study. The purpose of the descriptive research approach is to explain and describe the characteristics and issues or problems of the study; this research approach is more appropriate for answering the question *‘what’* rather than answering the questions *—how and -why*. Therefore, this descriptive approach that is often used in different research became relevant in collecting and gathering the data for this study (Nassaji, 2015).

The study was conducted in Pampanga State Agricultural University, a state-owned university with six colleges and is located at the foothills of Mt. Arayat. To determine the number of respondents, Slovin's formula was utilized, in which lead to the studies' 380 respondents. Stratified random sampling was also utilized to identify the specific number of respondents per college.

After getting permission from the university, due to the pandemic, the survey questionnaire was administered online to ensure the safety of the researchers and the respondents. The questionnaire was based from the research's objective and relevant literature. The data collected from the survey was then analyzed using several statistical methods, including the Frequency Distribution Table (FDT), mean (average), and Chi-square Test. These statistical tools allowed the researcher to process and interpret the data to draw meaningful insights and make conclusions about the research objectives and questions.

## Conclusion

*Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents.* It was seen from the results of the study that most of the respondents were 20 to 21 years old. Most of them were female, and the majority of them had a family monthly income of less than 20,000 pesos.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
18-19	47	12.37
20-21	200	52.63
22-23	127	33.42
24-25	6	11.58
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	257	67.63
Female	123	32.37
<b>Family's Monthly Income</b>		
Below 20,000 pesos	237	62.37
21,000 – 30,999 pesos	95	25
31,000 – 40,999 pesos	34	8.95
41,000 – 50,999 pesos	8	2.10
51,000 – 60,999 pesos	1	0.26
61,000 pesos or above	5	1.32

*Sources of and Exposure to Information.* The Internet is the respondents' source of information that they always used, which is where they have been more exposed and helped them acquire information and/or promotions regarding online counseling for mental health, while the least used source, where they have never been exposed to the information and/or promotions of online therapy, is the magazine.

Table 2. *Respondents' sources of information and exposure to online counseling*

Sources of Information	Mean	Descriptive Rating
Television	2.44	Seldom
Radio	1.81	Seldom
Internet	3.64	Always
Social Media	3.58	Always
Newspaper	1.79	Seldom
Magazines	1.72	Never
Books	2.49	Seldom
Seminars/Webinars	2.94	Often
Family	3.18	Often
Friends	3.32	Always
School	3.20	Often
Church	2.99	Often

*Information acquired by the respondents' regarding online counseling.* Regarding the information that the respondents have seen or heard about online counseling for mental health, most of them acquired information about mental health organizations' social media pages and accounts. On the other hand, the least amount of information that they have acquired from their source of information is the cost of online therapy.

Table 3. *Information acquired by the respondents' regarding online counseling*

Statements	Frequency
Online counseling counselors, psychologists, or psychotherapists	170
Online counseling websites	177
Free online counseling services	212
Online counseling advertisements	126
Online counseling benefits	142
Webinars on online counseling	224
Social media pages/accounts of mental health organizations	278
Cost of online therapy/counseling	52
Articles regarding online counseling	152
Mental health crisis hotlines	169

*Awareness of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health.* Regarding the awareness of the PSAU students towards online counseling for mental health, most of the respondents have a high level of awareness towards online therapy since there is only one statement in the third category, which is online counseling limitations, where most of the

respondents got the wrong answers. But then, aside from that, the majority of the respondents got the correct answers for the three categories, which are: online counseling communication tools, online counseling benefits, and online counseling limitations.

Table 4. *Awareness of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health*

Statements	Frequency of Correct Answer	Percentage of Correct Answers
Online counseling is providing mental health services over the Internet.	354	93.16
Online counseling cannot be done through mobile device apps.	287	75.53
Online counseling can be done through online chats.	307	80.79
Online counseling can be done through video conferencing only.	181	47.63
Online counseling can be accessed via computer, laptop, or mobile phone	365	96.05
Online counseling is not easily accessible and available.	219	57.63
Online counseling reduces time wasted in face-to-face counseling.	244	64.21
Privacy/Confidentiality is kept even in online counseling.	337	88.68
Online counseling is an easier method to get counseling for mental health.	318	83.68
Online counseling contributes to solving the problems facing people who need counseling and shy to use the traditional way in face to face counseling.	358	94.21
Accessibility in online counseling is limited to those who have Internet access and electronic devices only.	312	82.11
Everyone can undergo online counseling.	110	28.95
Online counseling lacks human interaction but it doesn't decrease the sense of trust between the client and counselor.	93	27.47
Online counseling lacks in non-verbal cues.	201	52.89
Miscommunication in online counseling is possible.	348	91.58

Remarks

3.26 – 4.00	Always
2.51 – 3.25	Often
1.76 – 2.50	Seldom
1.00 – 1.75	Never

*Perceptions of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health.* With regards to the PSAU students' perceptions about online counseling for mental health, most of the respondents chose anxiety, academic concerns, and depression as issues that they might seek in online therapy. On the other hand, most of the respondents agreed that if they were worried or upset for a long period of time, they would get psychological help through online counseling because of its accessibility. They also have a positive perception that if online

counseling were available at no charge, they would probably consider trying it. Meanwhile, most of the respondents disagreed that online therapy would be their last option to consider if they have problems and need help.

Table 5. *Perceptions of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health*

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Rating
I think if I were to seek counseling services, I would consider trying it online and I would prefer doing it through emails.	2.89	Agree
If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first preference would be to get professional help through online counseling with the use of mobile device apps.	2.96	Agree
I think if I were to seek counseling services, I would consider trying it online and I would prefer doing it through online chats.	2.91	Agree
I think if I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in online counseling through video conferencing.	2.99	Agree
I think if I were worried or upset for a long period of time, I would want to get psychological help through online counseling because of its accessibility.	3.02	Agree
I think if online counseling were available at no charge, I would consider trying it.	3.41	Strongly Agree
I think if I have a friend who has personal problems, I might encourage him or her to consider online counseling because it does not consume much time compared to face-to-face counseling.	3.34	Strongly Agree
I think if I feel anxious, I would want to get psychological help, specifically online counseling because it has more of a sense of privacy compared to face-to-face counseling.	3.07	Agree
I think I would consider trying online counseling because it is an easier way of getting professional help.	3.16	Agree
I believe it could be worthwhile to discuss my personal problems with an online counselor.	3.10	Agree
I think if I were having a personal problem, seeking help through online counseling with an online counselor would be the last option I would consider.	1.92	Disagree
I think I would feel uneasy trying online counseling and discussing emotional problems with an online counselor.	1.79	Disagree
I think if I were to seek counseling services it would be difficult for me to trust and discuss my problem(s) with an online counselor.	1.83	Disagree
I think I would be afraid to discuss stressful events and express myself during digital counseling with an online counselor.	1.81	Disagree
I believe I would be anxious explaining my problems to an online counselor.	1.85	Disagree

Remarks

3.26 – 4.00

Strongly Agree

2.51 – 3.25

Agree

1.76 – 2.50

Disagree

1.00 – 1.75

Strongly Disagree

*Relationship between variables.* Considering the significant relationship between:

1. The study's findings revealed that the respondents' age and sex have no significant relationship with their awareness and perceptions regarding online counseling for mental health. However, it was also found in the findings of the study that the family's monthly income of the respondents has a positive relationship with their awareness but has no significant relationship with their perceptions.
2. The level of exposure to the sources of information of the respondents has no significance to their total level of awareness. However, in the first category, which is online counseling communication tools, this got a negative low significance, which means the level of exposure to the sources of information of PSAU students slightly influences their awareness regarding online therapy. Meanwhile, the level of exposure to the sources of information of the respondents had no influence on their perceptions regarding online counseling for mental health.

Table 6. *Relationship between variables*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
Age Vs Awareness	0.075	Not Significant
Age Vs Perception	0.727	Not Significant
Sex Vs Awareness	0.898	Not Significant
Sex Vs Perception	0.159	Not Significant
Family's Monthly Income vs. Awareness	0.000	Highly Significant
Family's Monthly Income vs. Perception	0.557	Not Significant
Exposure to Information vs. Awareness	0.243	Not Significant
Exposure to Information vs. Perception	0.107	Not Significant

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**Contact email:** gabriel\_lorenzo@psau.edu.ph

## *News Media Quality Rating in Thailand: A Pilot Study*

Sasithon Yuwakosol, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Chanansara Oranop na ayutthaya, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand  
Wasinee Noonpakdee, Thammasart University, Thailand

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### **Abstract**

Changes in the media environment, have posed a challenge to news workers and journalists regarding the quality of news reporting. This media quality rating research aimed to develop the criteria for measuring the quality of Thai news programs. The study consisted of three stages and included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The first stage was gathering words/phrases that identified the quality of news programs; data were collected from open-ended questions with 205 news viewers, focus group discussions with eight news viewers, and in-depth interviews with nine academics and media professionals. The second stage was developing the media quality rating criteria, which were indexes and tools for measuring the quality of news programs. The third stage was testing the developed criteria with four news programs. According to the findings from the first phase, the words/phrases identifying news program quality were divided into three dimensions including format and news content, moderators, and presentation techniques. Those words/phrases were consequently used to create a questionnaire to ask the opinion of 657 news viewers. The results were subsequently analyzed for the key attributes of each dimension. For the second stage, the validity of each item of the developed media quality rating criteria was evaluated by the index of item objective congruence (IOC) procedure. For the third stage, the findings from the media quality rating criteria test with 763 online and offline news viewers showed that the developed criteria were able to measure and indicate the quality of news programs.

Keywords: News Media Quality Rating, Quality Rating Criteria, TV Programs Quality

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## Introduction

Media landscape today with the advancement of digital technology, TV news programs have been offered to the audience through various platforms, both push-program on TV network and pull-program on YouTube or any other OTT ((over-the-top)) platforms. Changing in the media environment, specifically, the platform shift and the growing competition, have posed a challenge to news workers and journalists regarding news report. News producers have to find ways to present their news programs to attract their viewers like, the fastness of reporting, news dramatization.

News media help people stay aware of the happenings around the world but they also have negative impact on individuals and society (Walma van der Molen & Bushman, 2008; Myrick et. al., 2014; Tandoc Jr. et. al., 2021) for example, increase levels of the stress or anxiety, disseminate fake news, violate of children rights, increase conflict in society, etc.

According to the normative theories of media, the theory describes an ideal way for a media system and explains how mass media should or are expected to perform or accomplish (Baran & Davis, 2020). Additionally, another theory that points to the role of media in society is the functionalist theory. The functional theory, or functionalist perspective, is a theory that helps explain the balance of systems by highlighting how each system has its own mechanisms and functions. This is similar to the role of mass media, which has its own set of functions and operations within the larger societal system, such as surveillance of the society, correlation of the part of the society, and entertainment (McQuail, 2020). Therefore, developing the quality of media services to meet ethical and professional standards is crucial for creating balance in society and providing public benefits. The development of quality measurement systems is essential as a tool for assessing the quality of media.

The media quality measurement system in Thailand still has limitations in terms of indicators and tools for measuring media quality. Criteria for evaluating the overall quality of media currently in Thailand have been co-created through the efforts of government agencies, academics, and media professionals. Thai Media Fund (TMF), a government organization that has one objective to promote and support the development of safe and creative media, proposes the criteria consist of six dimensions of content that should be promoted (+6), aside from the existing three dimensions of harmful content that should be restricted (-3), with an intention to promote high-quality media content (Thai Media Fund). In addition, in the Announcement of Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) on guidelines for determining age-appropriate TV content 2013, the six dimensions of content included the content that promoted 1) critical thinking, 2) academic and general knowledge, 3) moral and ethical values, 4) life skill development, 5) acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of diversity in society, and 6) family and interpersonal relationship development (Oranop na Ayutthaya, et. al., 2022). However, these criteria are not yet in the form of standardized metrics for use in evaluating every program.

On the business side, currently, the rating measurement system is mainly dominated by Nielsen. A TV rating system like Nielsen, that was developed by A.C. Nielsen in 1950, measure the popularity of a program, in term of the number and proportion of viewers. This rating system is crucial for the commercial broadcaster to charge more for advertisement slots. However, this TV rating system may not reflect the quality of the program.

In other countries, there are efforts to assess the performance of media organizations. For example, NHK in Japan has established the NHK (Assessment Committee from the Audience Perspective) to evaluate outcomes from the viewers' and listeners' standpoints. The assessment considers expectations, satisfaction, and the value of each content type, incorporating a framework of two main criteria and eight baseline standards to examine the audience's trust. Therefore, audience research is a reflection of the needs and interests of viewers and listeners obtained directly from their viewing and listening experiences. Based on the reasons mentioned, this study would develop a system to evaluate program quality from the perspective of viewers.

This project aimed to propose an alternative method for supporting good TV news programs by assessing the exposure, perception, and opinion of news program viewers, both online and offline. The study started with a pilot trial of the program quality measurement system from news programs. The result from this pilot study will provide precise indicators and guidelines for measuring media quality which is also important for creating a suitable media system.

## **Methodology**

The project was divided into three phases. Phase 1 was gathering and determining news program quality attributes. Phase 2 was developing quality rating criteria, which were indexes and tools for assessing the quality of news programs. Phase 3 was testing the quality rating criteria and reporting the results, including interpreting lessons and creating a quality rating criteria manual.

Both Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study. In phase 1, desk research was used to study previous literature on news quality for developing quality criteria and quality index. In addition, data were collected from open-ended questions with 205 news viewers by using the question - What are the characteristics of quality news? Focus group discussions were held with eight news viewers and in-depth interviews with nine academics and media professionals.

From the characteristics of the news program quality gathered from the first step, in phase 2 the quality rating criteria were developed by organizing the collected data into three dimensions, including format and news content dimension (54 words/phases), moderator dimension: news moderator (38 words/phases) and field reporters (38 words/phases), and presentation technique dimension (11 words/phases). Those words/phrases were consequently used to create a questionnaire for asking the opinion of 657 news viewers nationwide, aged 13 or above. Then, the indexes for evaluating the program quality, which included factors and items, were developed using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) technique for data reduction. The result of creating an initial measurement tool is an assessment form for the quality of programs based on the factors and indexes of high-quality program attributes.

In phase 3, four television news programs were selected as samples for testing the program quality measurement tool. The news programs in this evaluation were selected from those that received high rating (Neilson rating) at the time. Three news programs came from commercial digital TV channels and one news program was public broadcasting TV. The opinion survey with a sample group of 763 online and offline news viewers was conducted to rate the four selected news programs with the quality measurement tool.

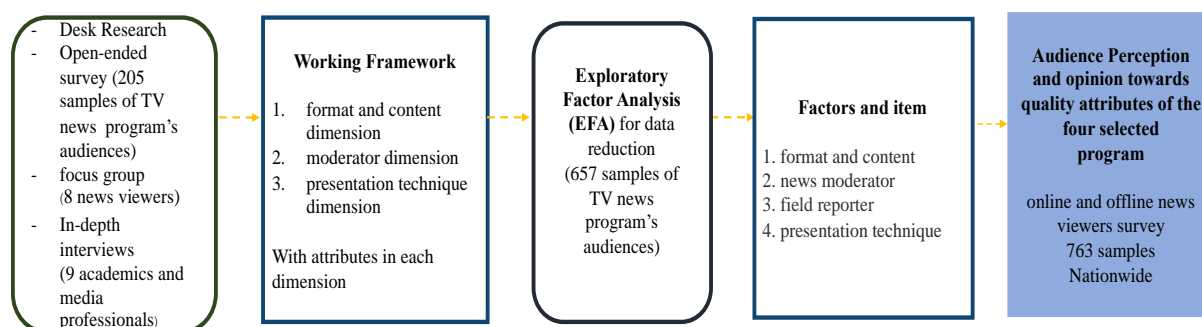


Figure 1: The process of data gathering

## Findings

The objective of this research was to explore and develop indicators and assessment tools for evaluating the quality of television news programs in Thailand. The study began with searching for and collecting words or phrases that expressed the characteristics of quality TV news program to categorize them into separate dimensions, including format and news content dimension, moderator dimension: news moderator and field reporters, and presentation technique dimension. Subsequently, the data was extracted to obtain components within each dimension. This information was then used to create a quality measurement tool for program evaluation by the viewers. This quality assessment survey is a questionnaire that gathered the opinions of viewers regarding the news program, asking them to rate the attributes and items in each dimension with a 5-level Likert scale, including 'Strongly Agree,' 'Agree,' 'Neutral,' 'Disagree,' and 'Strongly Disagree,' respectively. Four news programs were used in the study for trying out the developed media quality rating indexes and tools.

The findings showed that the indexes for measuring the quality of TV news programs comprised three dimensions, and each dimension contained factors and items that were indicators of program quality. Quality rating criteria for news programs were as follows:

1. The format and content dimension, which consisted of four attributes (journalistic standard; respect for legal rights; production of interests, inspiration, and participation; news selection and presentation)
2. The moderator dimension, dividing into news announcers and field reporters, which consisted of four attributes (professional ethics and professional expertise; language use and resourceful communication skill; respect and honor for others; personality)
3. The presentation technique dimension, which consisted of two attributes (technique to make content easy to understand; technique to create novelty and variety of news presentation)

Table 1: Factors and items of Quality TV News program

<b>The format and content dimension</b>	
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Items</b>
1. journalistic standard (e.g. provide complete information, objectivity)	11
2. respect for legal rights (e.g. reporting news without violating the law, protecting the privacy of the news source)	5
3. production of interests, inspiration, and participation (e.g. providing new and interesting content for society, giving informative and beneficial content)	4
4. news selection and presentation (e.g. novelty/oddity, proximity)	7
<b>News moderator dimension</b>	
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Items</b>
1. professional ethics and professional expertise (e.g. unbiased, well-informed)	9
2. language use and resourceful communication skill (e.g. pronounce correctly, energetic)	5
3. respect and honor for others (e.g. respect for those appearing in the news, not discriminatory against others)	2
4. personality (e.g. dress appropriately, good personality)	4
<b>Field reporter dimension</b>	
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Items</b>
1. professional ethics and professional expertise (e.g. listening to diverse opinions from those involved in the situation, well-informed)	8
2. language use and resourceful communication skill (e.g. pronounce correctly, energetic)	5
3. respect and honor for others (e.g. respect to those appearing in the news, not discrimination against others)	3
4. personality (e.g. dress appropriately, good personality)	3
<b>Presentation technique dimension</b>	
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Items</b>
1. technique to make content easy to understand (e.g. use interesting illustrations or graphics, high-quality visuals and audio)	5
2. technique to create novelty and variety of news presentation (e.g. opening up space or providing additional information, quality and of the technical production)	5

The quality scores of the program from the collected data metrics were calculated based on the overall average opinion score of each dimension. The benchmark that was used to verify the media quality is 2.6 mean score. It meant that if the program had an average score of 2.61 or higher, it would be considered to meet the media quality rating criteria. The interpretation of the average opinion score was as follows:

- 1.00 - 1.80 represents a program with very poor quality
- 1.81- 2.60 represents a program with poor quality
- 2.61 - 3.40 represents a program with acceptable quality
- 3.41 - 4.20 represents a program with good quality
- 4.21 - 5.00 represents a program with very good quality

From the results in Table 2, it was evident that all four programs meet the quality criteria with an average score of at least 2.61 in all factors. There was one program that had an overall score at a very good level (4.24), and the rest were at a good level.

Table 2: Quality rating result for TV news program

<b>Program</b>	<b>Dimension</b>	<b>The format and content dimension</b>	<b>News moderator</b>	<b>Field reporter</b>	<b>Presentation technique</b>	<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>A (commercial TV)</b>		4.14	4.34	4.28	4.23	4.24	Pass
<b>B (commercial TV)</b>		4.03	4.13	4.13	4.08	4.08	Pass
<b>C (commercial TV)</b>		4.11	4.22	4.17	4.17	4.16	Pass
<b>D (public broadcast TV)</b>		4.05	4.19	4.18	4.18	4.13	Pass

When considering the results of the quality assessment of the program in each dimension, it was found that Program A had the highest average score in the dimension related to the news moderator, field reporter, presentation technique, and news content respectively. Program B had a highest average score in the dimension of news moderator and field reporter. Meanwhile, Program C and D had the high average scores in terms of program format and content dimension.

The results from the assessment using the quality measurement tool indicated that the tool was capable of classifying the quality of television news programs. The scores obtained could help the individuals involved in news reporting of all four programs to improve their work in each dimension.

### **Conclusion & Suggestion**

After conducting the news program quality assessment, the group discussion was held to gain lessons from using the quality assessment criteria in collaboration with media professionals, media producers, media organizations, media scholars, and regulatory organizations. The development of the measurement tool still needs ongoing improvement and refinement.

The suggestions received from the group of stakeholders, as mentioned above, can be categorized into policy recommendations and recommendations for further study of the media quality rating system in Thailand.

Policy suggestion:

1. The continuous and sustainable development of the media quality rating system should be one of the policy goals to support the quality rating system improvement.



2. There should be cooperation between stakeholders such as private companies that operate audience rating systems and television stations that utilize data from online platforms.
3. Positive reinforcement should be provided to encourage producers of television media as well as media on other platforms to participate in the quality rating system.
4. The quality rating system should become a tool for media producers to rate their work as well as their peer's work; it should also be used as a tool to create recognition and promote media literacy among people.

Suggestions for future development of the media quality rating system:

1. Respective weight score should be given to each dimension of media quality; the most important weight should be given to the content dimension, followed by the moderator dimension and the presentation technique dimension, respectively.
2. There should be two sets of rating indexes, which are the core indexes for measuring the quality of news program in general and the additional indexes for measuring the quality of each specific news program type for example, infotainment news program, and investigative news program.
3. A media quality rating project that utilizes data from audience surveys should take into account the sufficiency of the sample group in representing the actual audience of the media program; data should also be collected from people who know the program but have never watched it and people who used to watch the program but no longer watch it.

The continuity and sustainability in the development of media quality assessment systems, including gaining acceptance from stakeholders in the media industry, requires collaborative coordination with the business sector, government agencies, and media professional associations. Although media quality rating helps promote a good media environment in society, the challenge is to encourage media producers, both television and other platform producers, to participate in the media quality assessment system. Positive motivation, such as providing rewards, reducing licensing fees, or even creating a distinctive image for media that meets the media quality rating criteria, should be considered. Finally, if the news program quality assessment system can be practically utilized, it will serve as a tool for media producers to examine their performance and lead to the improvement of the quality of media that is prevailing in today's society.

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**Contact email:** [sasithony@g.swu.ac.th](mailto:sasithony@g.swu.ac.th)

## ***Health Beliefs of Fathers on Vasectomy as Influenced by Social Media***

Rose Jane D. Romero, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines  
Angelo S. Zapatos, Pampanga State Agricultural University, Philippines

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### **Abstract**

The study generally aimed to determine the health beliefs of fathers on vasectomy as influenced by social media. A survey questionnaire was disseminated to 230 fathers aged 25-45. Pearson Chi-square test was used for the relationship between the respondents' socio-demographic profile versus health beliefs, and psychological factors versus health beliefs of fathers on vasectomy. Findings revealed that most of the fathers are middle-aged, have three to six children, are married, attained higher educational levels, are poor, and are Roman Catholics. The fathers are average users of social media; Facebook is the most often used platform among fathers, and they acquired vasectomy information from social media such as vasectomy as a family planning method, benefits, stigma, and risks. Fathers strongly agreed to all the susceptibility statements; strongly agreed to all the severity statements; disagreed to all the perceived benefits statements; and strongly agreed to all the statements under perceived barriers. A significant relationship was seen between the respondents' monthly income, number of children, civil status, educational attainment with their health beliefs. A significant relationship was also seen between the fathers' frequency of social media utilization and acquired information with their health beliefs. Thus, it is recommended that the locality and health experts increase information dissemination and create and implement strategic communication and advocacies through various communication platforms to improve fathers' knowledge and perceptions about vasectomy as a family planning method.

Keywords: Family Planning, Vasectomy, Health Beliefs, Social Media

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## Introduction

Family planning allows people to have the number of children they want and better control over the period between pregnancies. It is accomplished through the use of various methods of contraception, as well as medical therapy for infertility (World Health Organization, 2019). Contraception, any method capable of preventing pregnancy and treating involuntary infertility, is used to accomplish family planning. The contraceptive effect might be acquired temporarily or permanently (World Health Organization, 2020).

Despite the advances in family planning, the practice remains a global concern, particularly in developing countries (Payne & Erbenius, 2018). The global population is growing at about 1.05 percent per year and the current annual population growth rate is estimated to reach at least 81 million people (Roser et al., 2019). On the other hand, as of 2022 data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022), the Philippine population is close to 113 million. It is one of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as service interruptions on family planning (Commission on Population and Development, 2021). As a result, several countries have made reproductive policies to encourage the use of contraceptives (Schwing, 2000).

Furthermore, women have become more important in family planning services, particularly contraception research and communication campaigns (Dadras et al., 2022). Even though female contraceptives are highly successful in preventing unwanted pregnancy, some women are unable to use them due to health issues or side effects, leaving some couples without viable contraception choices (Amory, 2016). Thus, worldwide health organizations have suggested emphasizing the importance of men's participation in the promotion and use of various forms of contraception (James-Hawkins et al., 2018).

Condoms and vasectomy are the only effective male contraceptive alternatives available. However, they are unacceptable to all men (Amory, 2016). Vasectomy, often known as male sterilization, is a type of birth control that involves occluding or removing a portion of the vas deferens (Nesro et al., 2020). It has also been shown to be a successful, safe, and efficient method of contraception in population control worldwide (Appiah et al., 2018). Although it is safer, simpler, and less expensive than female sterilization, it is one of the world's least-used and least-known methods of contraception (White et al., 2022). Misconceptions, lack of understanding, and acceptability of vasectomy as a family planning technique are all directly associated with men's degree of awareness.

Thus, this study explored the health beliefs of fathers in San Antonio, Arayat, Pampanga, Philippines on vasectomy as influenced by social media using the Health Belief Model as a guiding principle.

## Methods

The research utilized a quantitative research design to learn how vasectomy as a birth control method is conveyed in social media and how it affects father's health beliefs in San Antonio, Arayat, Pampanga, Philippines. It is classified as one of the barangays in Arayat with a high population count. According to McLeod (2017), quantitative research is the collection of data in numerical forms that may be classified or ranked. With this form of data, the researcher can create graphs and tables to analyze the acquired data. Quantitative research uses statistics and data to try to prove a point. The sample size for the study is 230 fathers with an age range of 25 to 45 years old and the data collection period was from December 2022 to January

2023. The researcher crafted the survey questionnaire guided by the study's objectives. The data gathered in the survey were presented using the Frequency Distribution Table (FDT), mean, and analyzed using Pearson Chi-square.

## Result and Discussion

### *Socio Demographics*

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
25-30	66	29
31-37	87	38
38-45	77	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-3	81	35
4-6	134	58
7-9	15	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Civil Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	13	6
Married	109	47
Annulled/Separated	56	24
Common Law	48	21
Widowed	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Elementary Undergraduate	5	2.2
Elementary Graduate	3	1.3
High School Undergraduate	21	9
High School Graduate	95	41.5
College Undergraduate	59	25.5
College Graduate	47	20.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Monthly Income (in Pesos)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
10, 957 and below	127	55
10, 957 to 21, 914	84	36.5
21,914 to 43,828	15	6.5
43, 828 to 76, 666	4	2
76, 7669 to 131, 484	0	0
131, 483 to 219, 140	0	0
219, 140 and above	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Roman Catholic	131	57
<i>Iglesia Ni Cristo</i>	39	17
Born Again Christians	48	21
Seventh-Day Adventist	9	4
Jehovah's Witness	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile

Table 1 presents the respondents' distribution by age, number of children, civil status, educational attainment, monthly income, and religion. Based on the results, most of the father respondents (38%) are from the 31 - 37 years age range, most (58%) have four to six children, most (47%) were married, most (41.5) were high school graduates, most (55%) have a monthly income of 10, 957 and below which is considered as poor, and most (57%) are Roman Catholic.

### ***Social Media Use and Acquired Information***

<b>Frequency of Social Media Utilization</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than one hour	21	9
1 - 3 hours daily	75	33
4 - 9 hours daily	95	41
More than 10 hours daily	39	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Types of Social Media Used</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Facebook	175	76
TikTok	27	12
Twitter	0	0
Instagram	2	1
YouTube	26	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2. Frequency and type of social media

Table 2 presents the respondents' social media utilization and types of social media used. The results revealed that 95 (41%) respondents often use social media for four to nine hours per day, followed by 75 (33%) respondents who use social media for one to three hours a day, 17% (39) use it for more than 10 hours per day, and only 21 (9%) said that they use it for less than an hour each day. According to Baclig (2022), the average amount of time spent online by Filipinos using mobile devices is five hours and 47 minutes. It is higher than the global average of three hours and 43 minutes of mobile internet use spent online. The results of this study are parallel with Baclig's (2022) data since the four to nine hours daily use in this study is within the five hours and 47 minutes average of time spent online by Filipinos. This result indicates that most of the fathers are average users of social media.

Meanwhile, the findings of the study revealed that 76% (175) of the respondents frequently use Facebook, followed by TikTok with a frequency of 27 (12%) and YouTube with a frequency of 26 (11%). Only two (1%) of the respondents used Instagram. In the study by the Pew Research Center (2015), social media use is widespread among parents, with 83% of parents utilizing it on a variety of platforms. According to the findings of their study regarding the most popular social networking sites among parents, it was revealed that Facebook is used by 74% of parents. The results of the Pew Research Center indicated that Facebook is the most often used platform among parents which is congruent to the results of this study where most of the fathers utilized Facebook.

Another variable in this study is the respondents' information acquired from any social media sites regarding vasectomy. It is important to note that the respondents of the survey were allowed to have multiple responses regarding their acquired information from social media. Information about vasectomy as a contraceptive or family planning method, specifically the information "vasectomy is one of the male contraceptives in preventing pregnancy" obtained the highest frequency of 189 (82%). However, most of the respondents did not acquire information that vasectomy is an acceptable and non-controversial method of contraception and that vasectomy is considered a safe and permanent contraceptive method. This result implies that most of the fathers acquired information on vasectomy as a means of preventing pregnancy which is a positive outcome since social media communicates such, but only a few acquired information on social media regarding vasectomy as an acceptable family planning method which could be considered a negative outcome.

Moreover, most (79%) of the fathers, with a frequency of 181, claim that they acquired information from social media on the long-term effect of vasectomy as a family planning method. This is a positive result since it indicates that social media forwards information

regarding vasectomy as having long-term effects on controlling birth. However, the statement “vasectomy is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy” shows that only nine percent (21) of the fathers had seen the particular information on social media. This means that only a few of the fathers had acquired information regarding the advantages or benefits of vasectomy on social media which is a negative outcome.

The next finding reveals the acquired information on the health risks of vasectomy. Sixteen (7%) of the fathers acquired the information “Vasectomy can cause complications like infection and long-term testicle pain”, “Vasectomy does not protect from sexually transmitted infections”, with one (0.40%) and “Vasectomy can cause long-term loss of sexual function after the operation” with 12 (5%) fathers. The results reveal that the majority of respondents did not acquire the particular information regarding the health risks of vasectomy on social media, which is a negative result.

Meanwhile, on the acquired information about stigma caused by vasectomy, information such as “Vasectomy harms a man's physical strength, sex drive, and masculinity” was acquired by 11 (5%), and “Vasectomy loses the dignity of men” were acquired by eight (3%). None of the fathers acquired the information that “Vasectomy is not necessary, women's contraceptives are more accessible and effective”. This is a good indication since stigma is not commonly acquired in social media.

Lastly, the information about vasectomy procedures in social media was acquired by a few of the fathers, specifically, the information “Vasectomy procedure will make two cuts on each side of the scrotum” with a frequency of 51 (22%), “Vasectomy can be reversed” with a frequency of nine (2%) and “Vasectomy is less complicated and less risky surgery” with a frequency of two (0.80%). This result reveals that most of the fathers had not acquired vasectomy procedure information in social media, which is a negative indication.

### *Health Beliefs*

<b>Perceived Susceptibility</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
1. Vasectomy could lessen my sex drive and sexual activities.	1.47	Strongly Agree
2. Vasectomy could lead to long term sexual discomfort.	1.50	Strongly Agree
3. Vasectomy could affect my ejaculation and erection.	1.51	Strongly Agree
4. Vasectomy could create anxiety if the size, shape, or appearance of my sexual organ changes.	1.89	Strongly Agree
5. Vasectomy could change my sexual behavior with my wife.	1.83	Strongly Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Table 3. Perceived Susceptibility



Table 3 presents the respondents' health beliefs on vasectomy in terms of perceived susceptibility. Perceived susceptibility refers to the fathers' belief about the possibility of developing a condition while undergoing vasectomy as a birth control procedure. With a grand mean score of 1.64, the respondents strongly agreed with all the susceptibility statements. This means that the fathers believe that they are susceptible to developing possible conditions if they undergo vasectomy, which is a negative indication because fathers show a negative perception of undergoing vasectomy as a family planning method. In line with this, the study by Menlah et al. (2021) titled "Perceptions and Experiences Regarding Vasectomy Among Vasectomized Men at Lartebiokorshie" revealed that most of the respondents showed opposition to using vasectomy as a method of family control because they view it to be risky, unethical, and not the best form of birth control.

<b>Perceived Severity</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
1. Vasectomy can lead to painful swelling and bleeding of the sexual organ.	1.48	Strongly Agree
2. Vasectomy can lead to different infections in the sexual organs.	1.47	Strongly Agree
3. Vasectomy can lead to hematoma formation or clotted blood in the sexual organ.	1.70	Strongly Agree
4. Vasectomy can cause prostate cancer, a disorder that causes abnormal cells to develop in the prostate tissues in the male sexual organ.	1.36	Strongly Agree
5. Vasectomy can permanently damage the sexual organ.	1.33	Strongly Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>1.47</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Table 4. Perceived Severity

Table 4 presents the respondents' health beliefs on vasectomy in terms of perceived severity or the fathers' belief about the risks of vasectomy as a birth control procedure. The fathers strongly agreed with the statements under perceived severity, with a grand mean score of 1.47. The fathers strongly agreed that the risks of undergoing vasectomy as a birth control procedure are high. This result indicates that fathers believe that if they undergo vasectomy procedures, there will be a chance that they may get complications, which is a negative result because fathers show fear of undergoing vasectomy as a family planning method. This can be related to the respondent's belief about the possibility of developing a condition while undergoing vasectomy as based on the previous result. In relation, the study by Kamran et al. (2019) titled "Assessment of the Practice and Perception Regarding Vasectomy Using Health Belief Model: A Cross-Sectional Survey in Urban Jhang" showed that the negative consequences of vasectomy on sexual function, desire, and organs are poorly perceived by the respondents. The respondents were worried about its side effects, and some of them also had a negative opinion about vasectomy since their spouses had told them that the procedure was dangerous.

<b>Perceived Benefits</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
1. I am confident that vasectomy is a safe, highly effective and painless procedure.	1.80	Disagree
2. Undergoing a vasectomy would reduce my fear of getting my wife pregnant.	1.73	Disagree
3. I can control the number of my children when I undergo vasectomy procedure.	2.02	Disagree
4. I am confident that vasectomy would help my wife to ease the contraceptive burden.	1.84	Disagree
5. I am certain that vasectomy is a less aggressive operation that reduces the risk of bleeding and infection.	1.79	Disagree
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>1.84</b>	<b>Disagree</b>

Table 5. Perceived Benefits

Table 5 presents the respondents' health beliefs on vasectomy in terms of perceived benefits or their views on the positive outcomes of vasectomy as a birth control procedure. The fathers disagreed with all the statements under perceived benefits, with a grand mean of 1.84. It only demonstrates that even if vasectomy can prevent pregnancies, the fathers still believe that vasectomy will not bring them benefits, which is a negative result. In contrast, the study of Bunce et al. (2007) titled "Factors Affecting Vasectomy Acceptability in Tanzania" revealed that the respondents believe in using contraceptives, specifically vasectomy, and the benefit of having a smaller family. The respondents mentioned that using contraceptives meets the fundamental necessities of their children, such as proper food, health care, and education.

<b>Perceived Barriers</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
1. I am afraid that if I undergo a vasectomy procedure it would affect my masculinity.	1.64	Strongly Agree
2. As a son of God, I am certain that undergoing vasectomy is a sin.	1.20	Strongly Agree
3. As a man, it is hard for me to accept that I will be infertile.	1.20	Strongly Agree
4. I am afraid that vasectomy reversal is not always successful.	1.15	Strongly Agree
5. I am worried that my family and friends would laugh at me when I undergo vasectomy.	1.19	Strongly Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>1.27</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Table 6. Perceived Barriers

Table 6 presents the respondents' health beliefs on vasectomy in terms of perceived barriers or their views on challenges or hindrances toward vasectomy as a birth control procedure. The respondents strongly agreed with all the statements under perceived barriers. The result indicates that the fathers from San Antonio, Arayat, Pampanga, Philippines strongly believe that undergoing vasectomy will create challenges, which is a negative indication. The study of Shongwe et al. (2019) titled "Assessing the Acceptability of Vasectomy as a Family Planning Option: A Qualitative Study with Men in the Kingdom of Eswatini" revealed that one of the traditional beliefs is that men should be the family's head. The respondents believed that having a vasectomy would weaken their position as men in their families and society. They viewed vasectomy differently from others because of cultural and societal expectations, such as having numerous children, particularly male heirs who would carry the family name into the future. Eswatini is a nation where culture plays a central role and men stick to firmly held traditional customs and beliefs.

### ***Relationship of Variables***

Based on the findings, the respondents' age did not affect the health beliefs of the fathers. The fathers' number of children has a highly significant relationship (0.001) with their health beliefs in terms of barriers. It can be indicated that fathers who had more children are more likely to recognize the barriers if they undergo vasectomy and they tend to believe that vasectomy procedures would affect them physically and psychologically.

The fathers' civil status has a highly significant relationship with their health beliefs in terms of susceptibility (0.004), severity (0.000), and barriers (0.000). This indicates that married fathers and those who were once married were more likely to believe the possibility of developing conditions in performing their sexual functions and other psychological conditions if they undergo vasectomy, that vasectomy is a risky procedure, and believe in the disadvantage of undergoing vasectomy as a birth control procedure.

Educational attainment also has a highly significant relationship with the fathers' health beliefs in terms of susceptibility (0.003), benefits (0.000), and barriers (0.000). This indicates that the more the fathers attain higher education, the more that they believe that they develop negative conditions in terms of sexual behavior and sexual actions if they undergo vasectomy, and the more that they do not believe in the positive outcome of vasectomy as a birth control procedure, and the more that they believe in the challenges of vasectomy in terms of physical and psychological aspects of their sexual life.

In terms of the fathers' income, it has a highly significant relationship with all the health beliefs (0.000). This indicates that the more the fathers' income is insufficient, they tend to believe that they are more prone to the adverse effects of vasectomy, they believe that vasectomy is a risky surgery, and do not believe that getting a vasectomy would help them in limiting the number of children in the family, and perceive the hindrances of undergoing vasectomy procedures and it could affect them in terms of physical and psychological aspects of their sexual life.

As to the frequency of social media utilization and health beliefs of the fathers, it has a significant relationship in terms of susceptibility (0.040), a highly significant relationship in terms of severity (0.008), benefits (0.000), and barriers (0.000). This shows that fathers who use social media frequently are more likely to perceive the possibility of developing conditions in performing their sexual functions and other psychological conditions if they

undergo vasectomy, are more likely to perceive how serious the complications they may get such as fear and anxiety, the more that they do not believe in the positive outcome of vasectomy, and the more they are likely to believe that vasectomy procedures would affect them physically and psychologically.

Lastly, the fathers' acquired information has a highly significant relationship with their health beliefs (0.000). This indicates that the acquired information of the fathers from social media affected their beliefs in developing adverse conditions in terms of their sexual behavior and sexual actions in using vasectomy, their belief in the severity such as the medical risk of vasectomy, and their belief that undergoing vasectomy will affect them physically and psychologically.

## **Conclusion**

The respondents' frequency of social media utilization influenced their health beliefs in terms of perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, and barriers. Also, the acquired information from the fathers influenced their health beliefs in terms of perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, and barriers. Since it has a significant relationship between the frequency of social media utilization and acquired information under perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, and perceived barriers, it affirms the core assumption of the Health Belief Model which states that a person will behave in favor of their health if they have confidence in their ability to carry out a suggested health action. Meanwhile, for the perceived benefits, it disproves the core assumption of the Health Belief Model that a person will take a prescribed method for their health if they have the belief that by doing so, they will avoid a harmful condition (Rosenstock et. al, 1988).

Vasectomy is still a less used and less researched method of birth control in the Philippines. Men (and their female partners) who do not want children or who have achieved their ideal family size may find a procedure like vasectomy to be an appealing alternative to explore due to its efficacy, permanency, and safety. Thus, this research brings new knowledge associated with vasectomy regarding the use of social media in the father's health beliefs and acquired information. On the other hand, the study did not seek further explanation from the fathers which calls for further in-depth study regarding their health beliefs on vasectomy.

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[angelo\\_zapatos@psau.edu.ph](mailto:angelo_zapatos@psau.edu.ph)

***The Multi-Format Visual Storyteller: Exploring Narrative Perspectives in Contemporary Media and the Intersection of AI and Narrative Creation***

Paninya Paksa, Bangkok University, Thailand

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**Abstract**

The Emergence of digital technology has revolutionized the way narratives are constructed and conveyed across various media formats. The advent of multi-format visual storytelling has expanded the creative possibilities for artists, filmmakers, and content creators. This study aims to investigate the potential of AI in storytelling and visualization by comparing their performance with GPT-4 and Jasper, and also explore the intersection of AI and storytelling in film industry. Because of the rapid advancements in AI technology, content creators are looking for innovative ways to incorporate AI tools in the creative process, enhancing narrative creation and storytelling techniques. The author uses AI to create plot structure with Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet and experiments procedures and methods for writing prompt (Prompt Engineering) to input commands for AI to generate story and visual. The study provides an overview of the role of AI in the film industry and explores its impact on aspects of storytelling, including scriptwriting, character development, visual effects, and audience engagement. The author provides discussions, challenges and considerations Through an analysis of key examples, scholarly investigations, and relevant case studies, this paper aims to demonstrate the potential of AI as a transformative force and a solid assistant in film and media industry while acknowledging its limitations and ethical implications.

Keywords: AI and Screenwriting, AI Art Generated, Narrative Perspectives, Practice-Based Research

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## **I. Introduction**

The rapid evolution of media technologies has opened up new avenues for storytelling. Multi-format visual storytelling refers to the practice of creating narratives that span across different media formats, combining elements such as film, photography, text, audio, and interactive elements. Since, film is one of the media which influence people at large, it can impact people in terms of values, ideas, attitudes, and lifestyles. Film can be entertaining, artistic, animated, historical, including a vehicle to deliver some ideologies or concepts from storytellers to viewers. As a result, film can connect with and dominate the minds of individuals at all ages (Wiwatsinudom, 2002).

Therefore, storytelling is an integral part of human culture, serving as a fundamental means of communication, education, and entertainment. With the advent of digital technology, the nature of storytelling has evolved, giving rise to the concept of multi-format storytelling (Miller, 2008). Visual storytelling has long been a powerful medium for conveying narratives and engaging audiences. Traditional forms such as film, photography, and illustration have captivated viewers for decades. However, recent advancements in digital technologies have revolutionized the landscape of visual storytelling, enabling creators to explore new avenues and experiment with various format approaches. Multi-format storytelling is a relatively new phenomenon, born out of the convergence of media in the digital age. It was first introduced in the early 2000s, with the advent of transmedia storytelling, a term coined by media scholar Henry Jenkins. Jenkins (2006) defined transmedia storytelling as a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience.

Likewise, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in recent years has brought a paradigm shift in various industries, including the film industry. AI, as a technology, has the capability of automating complex tasks, predicting outcomes, and producing high-quality results. The film industry has taken advantage of this technology in various ways, one of which is storytelling. AI has been used to generate stories, create character arcs, act, score and even direct films (Sharp and Goodwin, 2018). In this paper, the author will discuss the impact of AI on storytelling in the film and media industry.

## **II. Research Objectives**

The present study aims to investigate the potential of AI in storytelling and visualization by comparing their performance with GPT-4, Jasper AI which represent the most popular practices in writing performance from academic, business content to media industry. The study also explores the intersection of AI in visual effects, character development, and audience engagement while acknowledging its limitations and ethical issues. In so doing, this paper expects that useful guidelines for implementing AI tools as solid assistants for media creators will be developed.

## **III. Literature Review**

In film and media industry, issues of AI and narrative creation have been moderately explored. For example, Riedl and Young's (2010) pioneered narrative planning algorithms in AI storytelling, focusing on plot coherence. As well as, Goldman (2019) explored AI's role in collaborative screenwriting, assisting writers in plot development and character arcs.. On the other hand, Bode (2020) raised ethical concerns about AI-generated stories, including



originality and bias. In the field of visual generation, Elgammal et al. (2017) demonstrated AI's use in art creation, highlighting its potential to innovate in the field of visual arts. As well as, Johnson et al. (2016) explored style transfer in images using deep learning, showcasing AI's capability to merge and transform visual aesthetics.

Apart from academic papers, Holmberg (2023) revealed the latest cinematic experiment *Another Persona*, an AI-Generated version of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* produced by Göteborg Film Festival in collaboration with SF Studios, Gothenburg Film Studios, and the Ingmar Bergman Foundation, which will screen exclusively at the 2024 Göteborg Film Festival, following by the discussion on acting and technology. The experiment teams use AI technology to replace Liv Ullman's interpretation with Alma Pöysti's new role interpretation of Elisabet Vogler, the mute actress and seeming merges with her nurse.

#### IV. Methodology

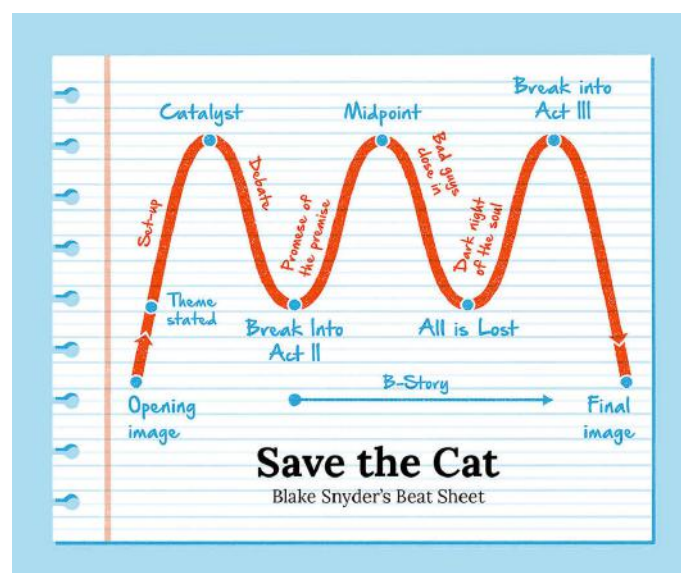
Based on a semi-qualitative, this study has drawn on a literature review and practice based research, which were conducted between August 2023 and October 2023. The author's experiment by refining a text prompt, and instruct GPT-4 to generate, comparing with jasper AI.

Input: Write a lengthy and detailed 500 word response in the style of a Save the Cat scene-by-scene Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet for a drama thriller film using the Log Line, Setting, Comparable Films, Protagonist, Antagonist, and Scenes to Include provided below:

Log Line: A woman running her family's noodle restaurant receives an invitation to join the fine-dining industry under the tutelage of an infamous chef.

Setting: Bangkok

Comparable Films: *Hunger* (2023)



**Figure 1:** Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

**Source:** <https://blog.reedsy.com/guide/story-structure/save-the-cat-beat-sheet/>

## V. Results

The following beat sheets were generated using Jasper and GPT-4.

Title	The Noodle Whisper (Jasper AI) September, 2023	The Noodle Noir (GPT-4) September, 2023
1. Opening Image 1-10	Lin is seen working tirelessly at her family's humble noodle restaurant in the heart of Bangkok, serving customers with a smile despite the heat and chaos. She finds joy in the simplicity of her life.	Early morning in Bangkok, we see Mai's modest noodle restaurant. A few locals chat while enjoying their food, hinting at a tight-knit community.
2. Set Up 1-10	Lin receives an invitation from Chef Ramon to apprentice under him in his upscale restaurant. She's torn between loyalty to her family's business and her personal ambition.	Mai's younger brother, Somchai, mentions how they're "just simple noodle makers" and wonders if they're destined for more. Mai seems content, but a spark of curiosity is evident.
3. Theme Stated (5)	Lin's mother tells her, "Sometimes, to preserve what you love, you must be willing to change it."	Mai manages the daily operations, juggling financial stress and local competition. Yet, she's determined and has a clear passion for the art of noodle-making.
4. Catalyst (12)	Lin decides to take the leap of faith and accept Chef Ramon's offer. She leaves her family's restaurant and steps into the world of fine dining.	A mysterious invitation arrives, offering Mai a chance to apprentice with Chef Rama. Mai is torn—this could be her ticket to success and recognition, but she's also wary of leaving her family's legacy behind.
5. Debate (12-25)	Lin struggles to fit into the high-end culinary world. She faces ridicule for her simple background and feels like an outsider. Chef Ramon is harsh and demanding, often belittling her efforts.	Discussions ensue with family and close friends. Somchai is excited, thinking of the money and prestige. Others warn Mai about Chef Rama's notorious reputation.
6. Break into Act II (25)	After a particularly grueling day, Lin contemplates returning home. But she remembers her mother's words and decides to stick it out, vowing to prove herself.	Mai decides to venture into Chef Rama's world, securing someone trustworthy to run the noodle restaurant in her absence.
7. B Story (30)	Lin befriends another apprentice, Aiden, who helps her navigate the cutthroat industry. A romantic spark develops between them.	On her first day, Mai meets Arun, another apprentice, who becomes her confidant and romantic interest, providing contrast to the intense culinary world.
8. Fun and Games (30-55)	Lin begins to understand the intricacies of fine dining. She experiments with new ingredients and techniques, making some mistakes but also enjoying small victories.	Mai is introduced to the glamorous and cutthroat world of fine dining. She's awed by the precision, artistry, and intensity. She learns, grows, but also realizes how different this world is from her own.

9.Midpoint (55)	Lin creates a dish that impresses Chef Ramon. He acknowledges her talent, boosting her confidence.	Chef Rama unveils his new dish inspired by a traditional noodle dish but with a fine-dining twist. It's a hit, and Mai realizes he might've appropriated her family recipe. Her suspicions grow.
10.Bad Guys Close In (55-75)	Chef Ramon's recognition of Lin breeds jealousy among the other apprentices. They sabotage her work, leading to a major setback. Lin is devastated, doubting her ability to succeed in this world.	Mai feels the weight of Chef Rama's expectations and his manipulative tendencies. She's conflicted between loyalty to her roots and the allure of fine dining. Rivalries with other apprentices intensify.
11.All is Lost (75)	Chef Ramon, believing Lin's mistakes were due to negligence, threatens to expel her from his kitchen. Lin feels all her efforts have been in vain.	During an intense training session, Chef Rama publicly humiliates Mai for a small error, questioning her worthiness. Mai, feeling defeated, contemplates returning home.
12.Dark Night of the Soul (75-85)	Lin contemplates giving up. However, Aiden encourages her to fight back and prove her worth. He reminds her of the passion and determination she has for cooking.	In the quiet hours of the night, Mai revisits her family's noodle restaurant. Here, she finds solace in her roots, understanding the true value of her heritage.
13.Break into Act III (85)	Lin decides to create a fusion dish incorporating her family's noodle recipe into a fine-dining presentation. She presents it to Chef Ramon, who is initially skeptical.	With renewed determination, Mai confronts Chef Rama about stealing her family's recipe. He dismissively admits it, revealing his belief that traditional dishes need "refinement" to be of value.
14.Finale (85-110)	Chef Ramon tries Lin's dish and is impressed by its taste and creativity. He apologizes for misjudging her and acknowledges her talent. Lin earns respect from her peers and gains confidence in her abilities.	A grand food gala is announced. Mai decides to participate, making her family's traditional noodle dish with her own authentic twist. The dish is a hit, garnering more attention than Chef Rama's dish.
15.Final Image (110)	Lin returns to her family's noodle restaurant, bringing with her the lessons she learned from the fine-dining industry. She revamps their menu, infusing traditional recipes with a touch of fine dining. The restaurant thrives, and Lin realizes she has managed to preserve what she loves by changing it.	Back at her family's restaurant, a line of eager food lovers extends down the street, including some familiar faces from the fine dining world. Mai smiles, realizing she's bridged two worlds while staying true to herself.
16.Conclusion	Lin's journey is a testament to resilience, adaptability, and the power of staying true to one's roots, even in the face of adversity.	"Flavors of Ambition" takes audiences on a thrilling journey through the culinary world of Bangkok, where tradition and ambition collide. Mai's transformation from a humble noodle chef to a culinary master is a captivating tale of passion, perseverance, and the pursuit of one's dreams.

**Table 1:** Beat Sheets 15 Sections AI Generated  
Paninya Paksa (2023)

After generating beat sheets, the author uses AI to visualize them as storyboards. For consistency between image generations, the author includes character descriptions such as age, ethnicity as well as art style.

Examples of text prompts:

1. Opening Image: Create a photo-realistic painting of Lin, the cheerful 27-year-old, as she expertly serves patrons at her family's modest noodle shop in Bangkok.
3. Theme stated section: Create a photorealistic oil painting of an Asian mother and her 27-year-old daughter, who is a fried noodle cook. The mother stands looking at the daughter while placing a hand on her shoulder. The daughter is in her kitchen holding a mixing bowl. The painting should capture their relationship and the mother's advice.



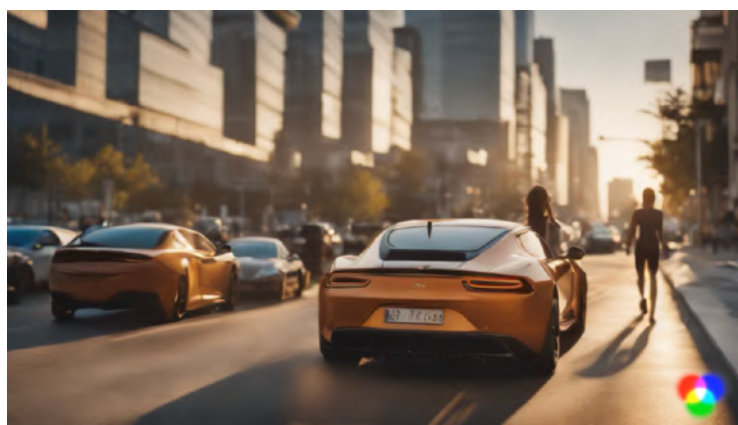
**Figure 2:** AI Art Generated Beat Sheet Section 1-4  
**Source:** Paninya Paksa (2023)

5. Debate: Create a photorealistic portrait of Lin in cooking attire, with the background being a bustling, high-end kitchen. The focus should be on the intensity and determination in Lin's eyes despite the belittling. Use a mix of graphite and charcoal to create a sense of depth and texture in the strings of her apron and the shine of her chef.
8. Fun and Games: Create a photorealistic portrait of Lin, a 27-year-old girl expertly slicing into a beautifully plated dish at a high-end restaurant. The focus of the piece should be on the intricate details of the dish and the concentration on Lin's face as she prepares to savor every bite. The painting should be in oil on canvas and should capture the elegance and refinement of fine dining.



**Figure 3:** AI Art Generated Beat Sheet Section 5-8  
**Source:** Paninya Paksa (2023)

Apart from GPT-4 and Jasper, there is also AI called Gen-2 by Runway which can visualize image from text to video, text + image to video, image to video, stylization, storyboard, mask, render, and customization. It is the new standard for video and visual effects generation. The author approaches to prompt engineering: *Cinematic action, long shot, silhouette of a woman driving a sport car during sunrise in the big city, shallow depth of field, warm lighting, feature film.* And the following were Gen-2 Art generated.



**Figure 4:** AI Generated Video by Gen-2 (Text-based video)  
**Source:** Paninya Paksa (2023)



**Figure 5:** AI Generated Video by Gen-2 (Text-based video)  
**Source:** Paninya Paksa (2023)

## VI. Discussion

Some believe that AI is already beginning to replace writers. A post on Fox Print Editorial suggests that AI is forcing many writers to reconsider their craft and the unique value they bring (Martin, 2023). On the other hand, there are those who argue AI won't replace screenwriters. An article on Medium suggests that while AI can produce something resembling a screenplay when properly prompted, it cannot yet create an engaging, original work (Nachaj, 2023). Similarly, a discussion thread on Reddit argues that despite advances in AI technology, it's unlikely AI will ever fully replace screenwriters. There are also those who see AI as a tool to assist rather than replace writers. In the realm of TV writing, TechCrunch reports that AI is not yet sophisticated enough to replace trained TV writers (Siberling, 2003). Moreover, a Film Courage video interview features actor, writer, filmmaker Blayne Weaver arguing against the idea that AI will replace screenwriters (Film Courage, 2023). Wired reports that while AI isn't currently replacing screenwriters, there is fear in Hollywood that it could happen in the future (Beddingfield, 2023). This sentiment is echoed by NPR, which reports that striking movie and TV writers are worried about being replaced by AI, even though experts say the technology isn't yet capable of writing a good script (Del Barco, 2023). The Society of Audiovisual Authors (SAA) also weighs in, noting that while AI can't replace screenwriters now, the rapidly developing technology makes it crucial for writers to stay informed (Rakza, 2023).

In conclusion, while there are differing opinions, the consensus seems to be that while AI has the potential to assist in the writing process, it is unlikely to replace human writers and screenwriters in the near future due to its current limitations in creativity, authenticity as well as human insight, empathy and cultural awareness (Kundu, 2022).

## VII. Conclusion

There are many AI-based platforms advancement in media industry. Virtual Production and Immersive technology for TV, film, streaming and new media technology will continue to grow faster. Collaboration between humans and AI will be deeper and wider in many aspects. It can still play a valuable role in the future of screenwriting, assisting screenwriters by providing tools for generating ideas, suggesting plot points, analyzing data on audience preferences, and automating certain administrative tasks. While AI can be a helpful tool for screenwriters, it is unlikely to replace them entirely due to the unique creativity, emotional depth, and human understanding that screenwriters bring to their craft. AI is more likely to augment and support the creative process rather than replace it. It has been being used in pre-production process, predicting the success of film and film series, selecting actors, promoting movies and TV program, editing, creating music, and even producing movies. Therefore, AI is powering the future of media and film industry in many exciting ways.

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***Digital Connections: Pandemic Affinities of Single Filipino Women Formed Through the Ikemen Series Games***

Jessa Ericka C. Bien-Munsayac, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

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**Abstract**

The Philippines was the worst place to be during the peak of COVID-19 (Bloomberg News in Business Mirror, 2021): the pandemic surfaced several inadequacies, including meeting basic physiological requirements. As social connection is a fundamental need (Gadai, 2021), individuals suddenly locked up resorted to different means to keep themselves together. At its height, engaging in otome games was not only an effective way to be entertained, it also helped relieve the mental strain for some single Filipino women. Originated in Japan, otome games are story-based dating simulation role-playing games that are targeted towards women (Huan, 2022). Yet apart from the parasocial attachments that the ladies developed for their chosen male leads, they also found themselves bonding together. This endeavor to explore how digital connections are formed among single Filipinas is anchored on the tenets of digital culture and attachment theory. The linkages between these two concepts helped develop an understanding on how online affinities are established and maintained. This descriptive qualitative research is inspired by the thoughts and experiences of the participants who started playing games from the Ikemen Series during the pandemic, and are continually playing today. Findings from the focus group discussions reveal that engaging in otome games helped the ladies keep their sanity, motivated them to be better versions of themselves, connected them with a niche friendship group, and leveled up their standards for future real-life partners.

**Keywords:** Otome Games, Ikemen Series, Digital Culture, Attachment Theory, Parasocial Attachments, Adult Friendships, Single Filipino Women

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## Introduction

The year 2020 started with unpleasant surprises for the Filipinos: the eruption of Taal Volcano that was immediately followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to curtail the number of infections in the country's capital and other provinces, the government minimized mobility by declaring total lockdowns. Several inadequacies surfaced during quarantines, including the struggle to meet basic physiological requirements. As social connection is a fundamental need (Gadai, 2021), individuals suddenly locked up in the confines of their personal spaces resorted to different means to keep themselves together.

At the height of the pandemic, engaging in otome games was not only an effective way to be entertained, it also helped relieve the mental strain for some single Filipinas. Originated in Japan, otome games are story-based dating simulation role-playing games that are targeted towards women (Huan, 2022). The male characters in the games are usually handsome, charming, ideal, successful, and devoted to the female protagonist to such an extent that avid female players consider the game character as their "boyfriend" or "husband" (Liu & Lai, 2022 in Gong & Huang, 2023). A portmanteau of the Japanese words "ikeru" and "menzu," the word "ikemen" literally means cool, good-looking men. The series' official website upholds this description as it furthers that ikemen are kind, romantic, and sexy men who know how to please women. They're also committed, loyal, and true – exactly the ones that women dream of.

With over 17 million downloads worldwide, Ikemen Series titles are one of the most popular free-to-play otome game apps from Japan (What's an Ikemen, n.d.). These are available in Japanese, English, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Korean, and Thai versions.

## The Rise of Female Online Game Player

Games were often seen as entertainment for children and men, but today, mobile games are also top-rated among female players (Gong & Huang, 2023). In the Philippines, the Statista Research Department (2022) notes that 73% of the female population have engaged in online gaming. This shows that ladies are significantly catching up in the gaming industry, and their participation is pushing game developers and publishers to create games that cater to their diverse interests and preferences.

Gong & Huang (2023) say that female players have special psychological and emotional needs when engaging in online games: unlike their counterparts, they may be interested in escapism, relationships, and immersion during gameplay. Thus, they are drawn to otome games as these satisfy their social requirements of interacting with males – without having to actually reach out to one. In their virtual world, the ladies are able to take full ownership of their emotional and romantic relationships (Gong & Huang, 2023): they can take the dominant role, gaze at men, and enjoy engagements with more than one male in-game character.

And with the rapid rise of women's economic and social status as well as the shift in the concept of marriage and socialization, women have gradually realized that they have the right to actively pursue pleasure and control the consumer market and do not need to rely on real-life men for their emotional needs (Chi, 2019 in Gong & Huang, 2023).

## Digital Connections

More than the attachment to their chosen male characters in the otome game, female players also found themselves gravitating towards one another in, after, and outside the game. As digital technology has simplified socialization by enabling us all to communicate with family, friends, and team-workers with ease (Bray, 2022), attachments are more conveniently fashioned or maintained.

This endeavor to explore how single Filipino women form affinities through an otome game is anchored on the tenets of digital cultures and attachment theory: the former asserting that some social formations are produced (exclusively) through engagement with information and communication technologies (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), and the latter affirming that one's attachment style influences online social relationships in correspondence with offline situations (Sager, 2019). Putting the principles of these two ideologies together could establish how online connections are made and kept.

Thus, it aims to unravel the pertinent information through the following questions:

- a. What are the single women's motivations for playing the Ikemen Series games?
- b. How are parasocial attachments developed for the male romanceable characters in the Ikemen Series?
- c. How are friendships formed and sustained through the Ikemen Series games?
- d. What are the participants' attachment style as deduced from their responses to the questions on friendships and romantic relationships?

## Review of Related Literature

### Digital Culture

Understanding digital culture entails knowledgeability about what culture is. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines culture in two ways: first, as an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations, and second, as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. The conceptual difference between the two definitions, Foresta (1995) claims, is that the former deals with knowledge and how it is transmitted, whereas the second refers to community-agreed values and norms that govern people's behavior and relationships (Uzelac, 2010).

Both definitions are important when conceptualizing what digital culture is. An expression of norms, values, and expected ways of doing things due to ever-increasing computerization and digitalization of society (Sadiku, et. al., 2017), digital culture traces its roots to the coining of the term "cyberspace." First used by novelist William Gibson in the 1980s in his cyberpunk book called *Neuromancer*, the term was then used to refer to an online world detached from physical geography, which had infinite potential. Today, digital culture is a concept that describes how technology and the internet are shaping the way that we interact as humans. It's the way that we behave, think and communicate within society. It is the product of the endless persuasive technology around us and the result of disruptive technological innovation (Bray, 2022).

Moreover, digital cultures are social formations produced exclusively through engagement with information and communication technologies (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Technology has

become so enmeshed within the enduring structures of our society that the online sphere is no longer a realm separate from the offline ‘real world,’ but fully integrated into offline life (Miller, 2020). Poepsel (2018) advocates that digital culture aptly refers to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of people interacting on digital networks that may recreate tangible-world cultures or create new strains of cultural thought and practice native to digital networks.

Bollmer (2018) adds that people’s practices, gestures, and bodies adjust based on the interactions with digital media, especially as new technologies vanish from our conscious awareness – therefore necessitating the theorizing and critical evaluation of digital culture so as to modify old habits and practices, produce new ones, and attempt to understand and continually make sense of the world we live in.

### **Attachment Theory**

The way people develop affinities with animate beings and inanimate objects have much to do with their relationship to their primary attachment figure when they were children.

Attachment theory is one of the leading approaches to studying interpersonal relationships, as it explains why parental relationships have such a powerful impact on the personality of children (Jones, 2015). Developed by British psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby in the 1950s, this theory grew out of his observations of children who were separated from their parents in wartime England. In 1969, Canadian developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth partnered with Bowlby to enrich the theory. She developed the Strange Situation Procedure, which paved the way for the identification of attachment styles: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent/resistant (Yassin, 2020). Further extensions to the theory would add a fourth category, the disorganized, fearful-avoidant type (Main & Solomon, 1990, in Cherry, 2022).

Attachment theory advocates that one’s relationship with their parents during childhood has an overarching influence on their social, intimate relationships and even relationships at work in the future. Children form a close bond with their primary attachment figure, typically the mother – but it could also be the person who most consistently provides care and responds to their distress signals. In other cultures and socioeconomic groups, limited resources and daily survival needs require distributing caregiving responsibilities across a network of relatives, including aunts, uncles, grandparents, and siblings (Kerr, 2013, Kelly 2015).

Hazan & Shaver (1994) explain that in unfamiliar settings, children are more reassured by the presence of their primary figure than by others – thus, the primary attachment typically takes the top spot of the hierarchy in case of multiple attachments. The experiences a person has with the one who they depend on for comfort and security forms the foundation of one’s model of the world as a place in which comfort and security can be reliably counted on or not (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). In adulthood, a partner may assume the position of primary attachment figure.

Attachment theory also recognizes the existence of a multiplicity of needs that require multiple social relationships, and that some needs are best satisfied through social relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). It was also pointed out that the most important dimensions underlying attachment are a person’s perceptions of the self (i.e., their ability to, and comfort with, forming close relationships) and perceptions of another’s availability and

willingness to be involved. They further note that attachment style is also predictive of how people view others.

Attachment styles develop early in life and often remain stable over time (The Attachment Project, 2023). By adulthood, attachment representations would be well-developed and less adaptive to change (Schrafe, 2017). Strong secure attachment bonds, once formed, are not easily displaced (Yap, et. al., 2019).

### **The Most Common Attachment Type**

The secure attachment style is the most common type of attachment in western society, with around 66% of the US population being securely attached (The Attachment Project, 2023). Children who were made to feel safe, seen, known, reassured, and valued usually grow up with secure attachment styles. Secure children do not show blind trust or absolute obedience (Granqvist, 2021). Instead, they are flexible and strategic, moving between positions of default trust versus autonomy depending on the credibility of the caregiver's particular statements and cues about the world. Moreover, they can be particularly vocal when they find a contrasting position of theirs to be legitimate, presumably because their sense of security breeds autonomy.

Adults with a secure attachment style tend to have it easier when it comes to social contacts, bonding, and intimate relationships. They are aware of their emotions and emotional needs and are able to both experience and express those (The Attachment Project, 2023). When a person has a positive view of himself, of others, and of his childhood, then it is very likely that he has a secure attachment style. However, Kerr (2013) is quick to indicate that secure attachment is not 'better' than insecure attachment styles, as the latter is just a different way to maximize success in other particular situations.

### **Forming Affinities**

Sager (2019) notes that attachment style influences online social relationships in correspondence with offline situations. As communication technologies have greatly reduced the costs of maintaining relationships (Manago & McKenzie, 2022), the digital media have afforded the establishment of virtual playgrounds intimate relations (Sadowski, 2016).

***Parasocial Attachment*** A parasocial relationship is a one-sided relationship that a media user engages in with a media persona (Vinney, 2022). Such relationships can be formed with celebrities, live-action fictional characters, social media influencers, animated characters, and any other figure that are encountered through the various media channels. It being one-sided and non-reciprocal, a key detail is that these personalities don't know who you are (Lawler, 2023).

Vinney (2022) explains that parasocial relationships start when someone meets and gets acquainted with a media persona. This initial parasocial interaction might involve seeing the character on a TV show or movie, following them on social media, or even interacting with them online or in real life. If the persona makes an impression that causes the individual to think about them beyond the interaction, parasocial interactions can lead to a parasocial relationship. In turn, parasocial relationships can be strengthened by further parasocial interactions, sometimes leading to parasocial attachment.

Parasocial attachment is a term coined by media psychologist Gayle Stever (2017), extending parasocial concepts and basing this on Bowlby's attachment theory. Parasocial attachment happens when a media persona becomes an individual's source of comfort, security, and safe haven. And while it may seem odd for others that actual people engage in parasocial engagements, Vinney (2022) notes that these connections are potentially advantageous as it gives an increased sense of belonging, reduces the feeling of loneliness, and fosters stronger social connections with like-minded folks. She furthers that most people know that their relationships with media figures are not real, but this knowledge doesn't prevent them from reacting as if they were.

**Adult Friendship** Adult friendship is conceptualized as a voluntary, reciprocal, informal, restriction-free, and usually long-lasting close relationship between two unique partners (Wrzus et al., 2017; Fehr and Harasymchuk, 2018 in Pezirkianidis, et. al., 2023).

Friendships were facilitated by the internet during the peak of the pandemic. Users leveraged on the internet's capabilities to maintain and extend social relationships that were formed offline, and then created new ones with other online individuals (Rice et al., 2007 in Griggs, et. al., 2019). In their study on adult friendship and well-being, Pezirkianidis, et. al., (2023) referenced Mendelson & Aboud's (1999) six functional components that determined an adult friendship's quality: stimulating companionship, help or social support, emotional security, reliable alliance, self-validation, and intimacy, pertaining to self-disclosures.

Antheunis, et. al. (2012) distinguished three types of friendships in their study of the quality of the bond among social networking site users. These are a) online friendships, which are developed online and remain solely online; b) mixed-mode friendships (Walther & Parks, 2002), which are developed online but have extended to other offline settings; and c) offline friendships, which are developed offline and have extended to online settings. They also found that proximity does not matter for any friendship type when all members make use of social networking sites.

## **Methodology**

This descriptive, qualitative study is inspired by experiences of single Filipino women who started playing otome games from the Ikemen Series during the pandemic and are continually playing these today. The respondents were selected via purposive snowballing sampling, since the researcher knew a small population of individuals who were later asked to identify others that should participate in the study (Crossman, 2019). It is worth noting that the researcher is kin to some of the study's informants – her observation of the latter's fondness and attachment to the characters of the Ikemen Series has actually inspired this research. As someone who has tried the game herself, she attests that Ikemen's allure of suave men and interesting plot lines can indeed suck players into its rabbit hole.

Data gathering procedure was done in two parts: first, a semi-structured survey questionnaire was created via Google Forms and sent to the confirmed participants. This proved instrumental in drawing preliminary information on demographics and game usage, which, in turn, were used to build the focus group discussion (FGD) questions.

The FGDs were scheduled at a time most convenient to all the participants. In the interest of safety and as a precautionary measure amidst the renewed spike of COVID-19 cases in the country, the two sessions were conducted over Google Meet. The participants were given the

online meeting link ahead of the session so they can join the discussion over video call. They were also reminded that the proceedings are recorded, and assured that the information they share will be kept confidential. As indicated and agreed to in the consent form, the data may be kept until December 2026 – when the researcher would have hopefully completed her doctorate degree. Both sessions were finished within the scheduled one-hour duration, and digital tokens of appreciation were sent to the participants soon after the second session was wrapped up.

## **Results, Discussion, and Analysis**

The results of this study are based on the narratives of four single Filipino women, aged 27 to 29, who have been playing otome games from the Ikemen Series since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite having different professions – an architect, an executive secretary, an IT control and assurance analyst, and a writing consultant – all four see themselves continually playing the game for as long as they can as this is “already part of my daily routine.”

### **Motivations, Advantages, and Disadvantages**

Lockdowns marked the pandemic in the Philippines. As people didn’t have a choice but to limit their mobility and interactions with others, those who didn’t have other social outlets turned to TV and movie characters and online social media to satisfy the need for connection (Vinney, 2022). After learning about the Ikemen Series through social media ads, the app store, or close relations, the ladies engaged with the game as interactions through virtual worlds became a better option (Gong & Huang, 2023) at that time.

It was “something they looked forward to” and “a motivation for living.” Amid the mental stress that being in a pandemic brought upon many, the ladies felt that the irreplaceable happiness provided by the Ikemen Series games was a distraction from the troubles of real life. Altuwairiqi, et. al. (2019), in their study on social media attachments, recognize this archetype as the escapist one: utilizing platforms in the digital media to serve as a temporary refuge from difficult circumstances, problems, and stress. As one of the participants put it, “saving sanity talaga siya.” (*It really is saving sanity.*)

Glued to their gadgets for at least two hours a day, the ladies admitted to overlooking the games’ dating simulator feature as they were in it for “the characters and their interesting story lines.” They particularly appreciate how the tales, especially those that are based on historical events, were written: the Ikemen Series artfully combines a well-developed story and some “R-18 contents.”

All the respondents admit that Ikemen takes up a lot of space in their consciousness. “Kagaya ng (habang) nagta-trabaho ako, (pero) utak ko nasa Ike series lang as in. Nahahati talaga ‘yung attention.” (*For example, my mind wanders to the Ike series even when I’m working. My attention is really divided.*) Apart from the time, energy, and concentration that they devote to the game, the participants are well-aware of the monetary investments that come with their continued engagement with the Ikemen Series. Everyone agrees that they tend to “spend a lot” especially during special events, and can get even more stressed or frustrated if they don’t get the rewards they want in the end, despite all the effort.



Figure 1: Sample in-game rewards that the players spend time, money, and effort on

Despite all these troubles, none of them are willing to let their Ikemen guys go. “Kasi mahal eh, syempre okay lang (*Because we love them, so it’s okay*),” one participant articulated, much to everyone’s amusement. “Kasi masaya po, kaya okay lang...happy stress siya (*It’s a happy kind of stress, so it’s okay.*)” Furthermore, they agree that everything they do for their characters abide by the Ikemen Series’ themes, All for Love and Fight for Love. “Literal na gagawin namin ‘yun (*We will literally do that*),” an informant confirmed.

### All for Ikemen

As in the series’ definition of ikemen in their official website, there is no shortage of good-looking male characters in all of their titles. All the participants confirm and agree that it’s true. They claim, however, that more than their favorite leading men’s looks, it’s the personality that truly wins them over. “Lahat sila gwapo naman talaga eh, nasa taste mo na lang kung ano ‘yung babagay sayo (*They’re all very good-looking, si it’s up to your taste who would suit you best*),” one of them said. “Hindi mo kasi siya mafa-finalize talaga, unless malaman mo yung story or personality (*You can’t really finalize unless you know the story or their personality*),” another added.

Once their eyes are set on their favorite guy, the ladies admit they go all out for their “boyfriends.” The CBR Staff (2022) indicates that one of the harsh truths about most otome games is that these are money pits, urging players to spend real money to buy gifts for their love interests, buy more time to talk to them, or even reach certain endings or unlock specific characters. Vinney (2022) seconds this and notes that parasocial attachments can indeed influence one’s purchasing behavior – as what these empowered, earning single women do.

With “adult money that lets them buy the childhood stuff” they aspired for, they can spend on in-game items, various game merchandise, and plane tickets to see their ikemen’s voice actors abroad. Heedless of the spending and the astonished reactions they get from non-players when these learn about the lengths they traverse for their games and guys, the ladies believe that “every single cent spent is super worth it.”





Figure 2: Apart from in-game items, Ikemen Series players also spend on commissioned art, game merchandises, and fan gatherings that celebrate their ikemens' special days.

One respondent emphasizes that at the end of the day, all these spendings are for themselves anyway. “Investment ko (ito) for my mental health, kasi iba ‘yung motivation na nabigay niya. ‘Pag nakikita mo siya gumagaan ‘yung buong mundo mo talaga. Ayun, kaya hindi ko pinanghihinayangan gumastos. *(This is my investment for my mental health, because it brings a different kind of motivation. My world feels lighter whenever I see him, so I don’t regret spending.)*”

### Setting Standards

Three or so years into the games and the participants are so hooked, they don’t see themselves quitting any time soon. Lured by the plot and captivated by their eye candies, the way the ladies maneuver their lives to accommodate Ikemen implies how this fascination is successful at triggering their happy hormones. Moreover, even their choices seem to have already aligned with their avatar and their virtual beaus. “Minsan yung reaction din noong main character pareho lang din ng reaction mo *(Sometimes, the main character’s reaction is the same as yours),*” they shared. This validation of becoming closer to the in-game characters brings them giddiness and a sense of fulfillment – “mas lalo kaming kinikilig! *(We get more thrilled!)*”

Swooning over their ikemen is not all there is for these ladies, as they claim that engaging with the game also pushes them to “strive to be a better person.” This drive to have better standards extends to their expectations from their potential future partners. “Nakatulong siyang mag-build and mag-strengthen ng standards towards sa partner na hinahanap mo, kasi you won’t take anything less na *(It helps build and strengthen the standards you’ll have for a potential partner, because you won’t take anything less anymore),*” one informant stressed. This perspective was shared by the rest as they firmly stated that these two-dimensional men are like patterns for real-life partners that they feel they deserve. “Makakakuha ka ng specific

na gusto mo; parang ‘pag hindi mo nakita ‘yung qualities na ‘yun in reality – sorry, it’s a no. (*You’ll get something you specifically like; if you don’t find those qualities in reality – [then] sorry, it’s a no.*)”

CBR Staff (2022) assert that otome game players are prone to setting standards that are too high for real-life relationships, because the games give players a warped view of how relationships should be. But standards are standards, and the ladies are not intent on adjusting these even if no one comes along in real life. “Kung hindi si Arthur, kung hindi si Mitsuhide, ‘yung someone like them...hindi na. Why will I settle for someone na hindi ganun? (*If that someone is not Arthur, if it’s not Mitsuhide, then no, thanks. Why will I settle for someone not like them?*)” Arthur and Mitsuhide are this informant’s virtual beaux, and in the pre-FGD survey, she stated that these men won her over because they’re funny, kind, mischievous, perpetually hopeful, and are seemingly “good for nothing guys but they are the ones taking on the dark side of life for their loved ones to live on the light.”

Interestingly, these women are not afraid to be single all their lives. While other females their age would be worried about their biological clocks, they know in themselves that they could not settle for less. “Hindi ko naman ibibigay ‘yung love na kaya kong ibigay sa taong palagay ko hindi naman deserving. Aangkinin ko na lang. (*I won’t give the love I can give to a person who does not deserve it. I’d rather keep it to myself.*)”

“It’s not the end of the world” if nobody comes along as they have their family, friends, and other diversions where they can channel their energies to. “If all I give my full life is love based on my characters or these characters, then for me I have nothing to lose,” one informant said.

### **Instant Connections**

Digital technology has simplified socialization by enabling us all to communicate with family, friends and team-workers with ease (Bray, 2022). Making friends has become simpler as online technology allows millions of people worldwide to communicate effortlessly (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2019), and barriers posed by geographical distances are being eliminated.

For Ikemen Series players, bonding was inevitably done online. As Lieberman & Schroeder (2019) stressed, the internet is instrumental in affording online interactions when offline interaction is impossible or scarce. For the participants, reacting to posts about their favorite guys and then gushing over the same character paved the way to their closeness with other players. Vinney (2022) reiterates that parasocial attachments facilitate stronger social connections as friends can fangirl over the same guy without jealousy. They even bring this bond over a similar interest to a higher level through the creation of online and in-person fans clubs, which are continually made possible by the internet (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2019).

Coming together with like-minded individuals who understand otome games and appreciate the same attractive characters is a sure way to win friends and eventually be welcomed to your own circle of ladies. Players get introduced to each other through a friend of a friend, and finding a common interest was not a challenge. “Naging close kami kasi bonded agad by the same interest...kaya siguro mabilis ‘yung friendship. (*We became close because we were bonded by the same interest...so being friends was swift.*)”

The camaraderie built between the participants is almost effortless as their in-game connection naturally transcends to their “real-life” moments. Their connectedness is ensured through frequent chats and conversations through networking apps such as Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, Instagram, or WhatsApp. They have become so attached that when a huge fire broke out in one of the ladies’ neighborhood, her fellow Ikemen girl immediately called for firefighters. “Ganun ako ka-thankful for this friendship kasi hindi lang talaga sila naging friends – they’re family (*I am so thankful for this friendship because they’re not only friends – they’re family.*),” the participant from the fire incident disclosed.



Figure 3: The Ikemen ladies enjoy their mixed-mode friendship as they meet in person for fan gatherings or cosplay conventions.

The internet has provided opportunities for developing new offline relationships (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2019) – relationships that have begun online but persist in the actual, face-to-face encounters. For the Ikemen Series players, their online interactions led to strengthened personal connections. And with pandemic restrictions easing up, attending cosplay conventions and fan gatherings or catching flights to meet voice actors abroad have become regular themes in the real lives of the ladies’ Ikemen Series adventures.

### Everybody Happy

The participants’ responses to questions on parasocial attachments vis-a-vis their future real-life romantic engagements and the friendships they’ve formed through the otome games point to their secure attachment styles. The Attachment Project (2023) states that people who have developed this type of attachment are self-contented, social, warm, and easy to connect to, as exemplified in the ladies’ narrations of their experiences. As skilled communicators who are able to engage in a variety of topics for both relational partners and relative strangers (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), it does not take rocket science to discern how they’re able to build deep, meaningful, and long-lasting relationships.

The Ikemen Series ladies proved this as they strategize with their fellow players and fuel each others' obsessions. They even go out of their way to help out other relatively low-ranking players by giving them a boost in the game. The participants clearly enjoy the Ikemen titles, their parasocial relationships with their online beaux, and their mixed-mode friendship with their cliques – and they want to extend this experience to other women outside their circle.

## **Conclusions**

The participants affirm that more than the aesthetics, the Ikemen Series has heavily influenced their lives starting with the mental health support it provided during the pandemic. While engaging in the games demand emotional, monetary, and psychological investments, the ladies did not mind doing so as they believed this is part of their self-care. Not only did this game allow them to “know themselves better,” it was also instrumental in establishing personal standards on real-life romantic relationships. It led to them winning actual friends – fellow ladies in their niche, with whom they are able to share life events and cherish parasocial attachments with. Due to the investments they've made and the benefits they reap from the Ikemen Series, the participants confirm that they don't see themselves stopping these virtual engagements and will continue playing the games as long as they could – or until the game developers shut the servers down.

While the findings in this study are robust enough to inform inquiries on single Filipino women's pandemic affinities through the otome games, it would be advantageous to involve more participants who could provide insights about their experiences of the game. This could lead to more varied findings on single females attachment styles, and their attitudes toward the games.

Next, a study that focuses on the feminist lens could unravel and provide better understanding on the other aspects of womanhood covered in the game. The mention of a gender in the study title itself begs for that angle, but as this research is focused on the affinities they formed during the pandemic, that part was only covered in passing.

Lastly, as discussions on culture and relationships are prone to magnanimous scopes, related studies could delve into cultural attachment (Yap, et. al., 2019), the theory of love (Sternberg, 1986 in Myers, 2023) and the concept of intimacy (Timmerman, 1991). It would also be interesting to conduct a mixed-method research on the same topic.

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## *When Cyber Libel Restrains Press Freedom: The Case of Maria Ressa*

Rainielle Kyle M. Guison, University of the Philippines Los Baños, Philippines  
Aileen F. Macalintal, University of the Philippines Los Baños, Philippines

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### **Abstract**

Local and international journalism organizations continuously call for the decriminalization of libel, monitor harassment and impunity toward media practitioners, and push for the free speech of media organizations and their journalists. In the Philippines, threats to journalism can hardly disappear when tyrants are elected into government: freedoms of expression and of the press are continuously challenged by defamation laws, bias allegations, and franchise issues. A widely known instance of press intimidation through cyber libel is the series of cases filed against Nobel laureate Maria Ressa. Libel has long been a criminal offense in the country, but it was only in 2012 that cyber libel was signed into law. Since the approval of the cyber libel law, a total of 3,809 cases have been handled by the National Prosecution Service. In order to restore press freedom in the country, a collective effort and understanding of the Philippine media landscape are needed. Using critical theory frameworks, along with four theories of the press, the paper analyzes the complexities and contradictions of marginalization and resistance in the Philippine journalism landscape, particularly surrounding the cyber libel case against Rappler founder Maria Ressa. The paper looks at journalists and the press as a marginalized group dominated by authoritarian governments and critiques the domination in structures that produce privilege for some and oppression for others.

Keywords: Maria Ressa, Cyber Libel, Rappler, Press Freedom, Online News

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## Introduction

When a country suffers from the atrocities of a dictatorship, it becomes crucial for the citizens to remember why they should never experience it again. The suppression of democratic institutions and restriction of civil liberties lead to the abridgment of human rights which inevitably results in the many horrors of the dictatorship. With this, democracy has long been regarded as the type of government that highlights the “power of the people.” Democracy values the participation of the people and one way this manifests itself is through freedom of speech.

According to Nielsen et al. (2016), a well-functioning democracy needs free and diverse news media which can keep people informed, hold powerful actors to account, and enable public discussion of public affairs. When the Philippine government was reestablished after the Martial Law period, the 1987 Constitution allowed the protection of the right to free speech through Article III of the Bill of Rights Section 4, stating that, “no law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.” This is anchored on Article 19 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

This has been a starting point in defending press freedom in the country. However, over the past decades, the Philippines is still reported by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as one of the world’s deadliest countries for journalists. According to their World Press Freedom Index in 2023, the Philippines ranked 132nd of 180 countries with a global score of 46.21. Since 1986, the Center for Media Freedom & Responsibility (CMFR) has recorded 234 Filipino journalists and/or media worker killings by 2018, with 156 killed in the line of duty.

Apart from intimidation and violence, journalists are also faced with threats of imprisonment and criminalization from criminal libel or defamation laws. These have long challenged journalists in their reportage, frightening them into self-censorship, as conviction is punishable by fines and imprisonment.

A well-known journalist who faced a libel issue is Maria Angelita Ressa, the co-founder and CEO of Rappler which is one of the country's leading digital media companies. In 2017, she faced a cyber libel complaint along with the story’s researcher-writer Reynaldo Santos Jr. The complaint was made by businessman Wilfredo Keng over a story published in May 2012 about his alleged links to then-Chief Justice Renato Corona. This has become controversial because the story was published four months before the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 was enacted. This meant that the law was used to retroactively pose a liability to Ressa and the article. Since then, she has headlined numerous news articles in different media channels including Rappler and Inquirer.net. This issue later on led to the rise of calls for decriminalizing libel laws.

The threat to journalism in the Philippines rises and falls each year, but media censorship was most apparent in the 1970s during the Marcos regime. However, press issues in the recent years since Duterte’s presidency have become similar to how journalists were silenced under the Martial Law period. A prime example of this is the rise of cyber libel cases filed against prominent journalists such as Rappler’s CEO Maria Ressa. Therefore, this study is guided by

the question, “How is Maria Ressa’s cyber libel case reported in the online news of Rappler and Inquirer.net?” Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the themes in the coverage of Maria Ressa’s cyber libel case?
2. What press freedom issues recurred from the identified themes?
3. How are the themes relevant to the Filipino press?

To better understand the news articles published by Rappler and Inquirer.net, this study employed the use of a critical lens.

### ***Critical Theory***

McKinnon (2009) discussed that contemporary critical theory is not a unified theory. Instead, it is a loose set of theoretical frameworks that works together to critique domination and aim for social change.

Critical theory offers analytical frameworks that can examine the complexities and contradictions of marginalization and resistance in a society. It is crucial to highlight that critical theory is not a theory in and of itself but rather a collection of complimentary theoretical frameworks that look at social structures where domination exists, so one can create opportunities for the liberation of individuals, meanings, and values (McKinnon, 2009).

Journalists and the press will be studied as a marginalized group dominated by the government. One of the key terms discussed in critical theory is the critique of domination wherein structures are understood to produce privilege for some and oppression for others. Consequently, this concept will be used to identify shades of inequality and structures of domination in the online news articles.

### ***Four Theories of the Press***

The four theories of the press, as presented by Siebert et al. (1963), include the authoritarian theory, libertarian theory, social responsibility theory, and Soviet theory.

The authoritarian theory establishes superiority over the ruling government. Here, the press and other media respect authority, constantly being subservient to existing power, while taking note not to offend the dominant moral, political, and economic ideals. Journalists cannot exercise much freedom and independence because their reports have to be submitted for advance censorship.

Meanwhile, the libertarian or free press theory is a contrast to the authoritarian theory. This view presents that an individual should be allowed to publish whatever they deem worthy. Additionally, this allows and encourages criticism of government policies. In this theory, journalists have full autonomy within their media organization.

The social responsibility theory covers a free but responsible press. While journalists have the right to criticize the government, they still have certain basic responsibilities to keep society stable. This theory is an extension of the libertarian theory wherein the press understands that it has a responsibility to society in carrying out its essential functions.

Lastly, the Soviet or communist media theory describes a context where the press and the state come together as one. Their press is self-regulatory concerning their message content. With this, they ensure the success and continuance of the Soviet socialist system to further promote their objectives.

### ***Media Sovereignty and Watchdog Theory of Journalism***

Theories of media sovereignty tackle the degree of autonomy and independence of the media, considering the possible obstacles to a free press such as “government interference, commercial requirements, antiterrorism legislation, and the demands of foreign policy” (Thomas, 2009, p. 643).

Meanwhile, one of the roles of the press is to serve as a watchdog of the government. According to McQuail (1994, as cited in Franklin, et. al, 2005), this theory extends rights to freedom of expression, religion, and assembly. The press also embodies the traditional idea of a Fourth Estate which has the role of investigating wrongdoings and defending truth and democracy.

These theories will help deepen the discussion on the roles of journalists, particularly Maria Ressa, and how Reynaldo Santos Jr.’s article published in 2012 led to their conviction of cyber libel in 2020.

### ***Silencing and Muted Group Theory***

According to Bruneau (2009), the concept of silencing is about the restriction of speech and expression restriction of ourselves and/or others. Similarly, the muted group theory encompasses this when dominant groups devalue, suppress, or mute the ideas and words of subordinate groups. Examples include the silencing of minority groups such as women, but this occurs in all sociocultural groups.

Since these theories are relevant to free speech, this study will relate issues of press freedom through these concepts. This may also open discussions on the ramifications of cyber libel and other forms of attacks on journalists.

The theories discussed in this section focus on the state and roles of journalists and the press which can allow the emergence of more prominent themes during data analysis. The Four Theories of the Press establishes a foundation on how media companies operate, considering the level of involvement of the government. Media Sovereignty and the Watchdog Theory of Journalism are helpful in understanding the roles of the press which can build views regarding the cyber libel case. Finally, Silencing and Muted Group Theory can guide the understanding of the actors involved in the articles to be analyzed. By having these theoretical underpinnings, the study can strengthen its base and form cohesive and more accurate results.

## **Conclusion**

### **Themes Surrounding Maria Ressa's Cyber Libel Case**

#### ***Journalism as a Dangerous Profession***

Maria Ressa's cyber libel case touched on several topics and one of those is the dangers of being a journalist in the Philippines. Reporters Without Borders reports the Philippines as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, and this can be proven by the several accounts of harassed journalists in the country. Maria Ressa's cyber libel case is just one account, yet the analysis of this study still surfaced the forms of harassment that journalists in the Philippines experience.

#### ***Harassment and Violation of Rights***

Harassment of journalists in the Philippines takes many forms but one of the most common manifestations of this is being arrested or jailed. Some of the online news portray that Ressa and Rappler are continuously being targeted by the government due to their critical reportage. This suggests that journalists who criticize the government are punished and that the Filipino press is not treated fairly.

In particular, this study depicts harassment and violation of rights with Ressa being arrested twice and having to post bail eight times (ABS-CBN News, 2019). According to a tweet made by Ressa in 2019, Rappler faced 11 legal cases and complaints filed by the DOJ in 14 months. More specifically, her arrest inside Rappler's headquarters can be compared with being disrespected in one's own home. Ressa also was reported to have had to stay the night at National Bureau of Investigation because the local court refused to process her bail (Buan, 2019).

In the news articles, there is an evident depiction of authorities vilifying the media which can be detrimental to the trustworthiness of the organization. Word choices in the articles also imply the possibility of a more dangerous and toxic environment where journalists are more vulnerable to attacks. The news articles also mentioned several times the "weaponization of the law" which may imply that a sort of manipulation is happening within the government to conspire against journalists. This is especially relevant in the use of the cybercrime law to pin down Ressa under a cyber libel complaint. Apart from Rappler, other alternative and critical news organizations have been targeted through a series of amplified cyberattacks. In essence, these descriptions do not just indicate the harassment of journalists, but also the attack on press freedom and the right to information and expression.

#### ***Silencing and Threatening Dissenters***

This subtheme discusses another form of attack to press freedom wherein showing disagreement toward the government causes danger. The online news analyzed depicts the government and those in power as sensitive to critics. With this, they use their power to silence or "muzzle" journalists to prevent news that will damage their reputation.

One scenario described in Rappler's articles was a police officer who said "be silent or you're next" to Ressa's colleague. Another example of this is the media giant ABS-CBN shutdown under the former president Duterte's administration. Following this event which happened in

March 2020, arguments were raised that Ressa's arrest is part of the Duterte administration's broader campaign to harass and silence its critics, and on a greater scale, to obliterate democratic institutions such as a free press.

This is better visualized in a documentary about Ressa, *A Thousand Cuts*, wherein the audience follows how her life and freedom were put at risk by being an outspoken critic of former President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs. The PBS Frontline documentary, with runtime of one hour and 39 minutes, premiered on January 25, 2023 at the Sundance Film Festival and was made available on March 13, 2021 on YouTube. As of November 14, 2023, the documentary has 1,314,607 views on the video streaming site. The phrase “a thousand cuts” was used as a metaphor by one of Ressa’s celebrity supporters mentioning that her arrest meant that death happened. Ressa also described their cases as a cautionary tale to the Filipinos. “We are meant to make you afraid,” she said, which sends a message that there are powerful people who want to threaten the greater public. This, in turn, leaves a chilling effect on other journalists.

## **Roles of a Journalist**

### ***Critic of the Government***

The watchdog theory of journalism suggests that one of the roles of the press is to serve as a watchdog of the government, specifically, to investigate the wrongdoings and flaws of the government. The online news analyzed in the study showed how Rappler depicted Ressa’s role of holding powerful people accountable and exposing corrupt practices in the government. As such, Rappler was tagged several times in the articles as a critical media organization.

### ***Protector of Rights***

The traditional idea of a Fourth Estate suggests that journalists are also defenders of democracy. Ressa as an independent Filipina journalist was depicted in one of the articles as someone who will never allow press freedom to be suppressed. If journalists perform their other roles well, it is highly likely that they will also be able to protect the citizens’ rights. Since press freedom was also mentioned in the articles as a prerogative to democracy, it is essential for journalists to first ensure that they are protecting other rights such as the freedom to express and the right to know.

### ***Bringer of Truth***

The last role identified in the analysis was the bringer of truth. During this time at the height of the spread of disinformation and misinformation, the public needs a reliable source of information. This role is fulfilled by journalists such as Ressa who is portrayed in the online news as a purveyor of truth or truth-teller. In one of Inquirer.net’s articles, Senator Francis Pangilinan described Maria Ressa as a “beacon of speaking truth to power.”

On the other hand, it is also the role of journalists to correct any form of error. While it makes more sense to correct substantial pieces of information such as context, it is also a journalistic practice to update articles if there are grammatical or typographical errors found after publication. In this study, Rappler’s typographical correction reflects their diligence in their

journalistic practices. However, this meant the republication of the article which Keng used as grounds for the validity of his cyber libel complaint.

## **Government Control**

### ***Selective Justice***

Selective justice is a threat to the rule of law because it does not serve justice. Instead, it sponsors injustice and weakens the country's justice system (Shaheed, 2021). In turn, the public loses trust in the government because of the unfair treatment that they have shown toward its citizens. This is exhibited in the news articles when comparisons were made regarding the government's unfair treatment of its critics and politicians guilty of other crimes. This suggests that Ressa received unfair treatment, especially considering that the Duterte administration was averse to criticism.

In other articles, certain metaphors such as “fishing expedition,” and word choices such as “twisted” and “connive” were used, which depict the case as a politically motivated attack to pin down Rappler, especially with the media organization facing 11 other investigations and cases. An *Inquirer.net* article also mentioned a politician's description of Duterte's “penchant to selective justice” suggesting that an event like this has happened before. Meanwhile, Ressa's lawyer, Amal Clooney, called the cyber libel issue a government-backed case and called for “sanctions for governments violating the right to a free press.”

### ***Unchecked Power of Bureaucracy***

Bureaucracy is a system of government that has multi-leveled systems and processes which are meant to keep uniformity and better management. However, this also effectively makes the decision-making processes slow (Scot, 2022). On the other hand, there is the existence of bureaucracy with oppression. According to Bendix (1945, p. 195), it should not be taken lightly because “the extension of governmental functions has frequently curbed and sometimes obliterated the freedom of the individual.”

In Rappler's and *Inquirer's* articles, bureaucracy was depicted as the reason Ressa had to spend the night at the National Bureau of Investigation—the Pasay court judge refused to process Ressa's bail because the arrest was made after 5pm which is the end of office hours. However, the court could have processed the bail because according to Rappler, it had the authority to release Ressa. This depicts the court as an entity with power. Another depiction was the National Bureau of Investigation's power to restrict Rappler's journalist's live stream of Ressa's arrest at the media organization's headquarters. Meanwhile, other articles described the development of the case as “suspicious” and “coincidental.”

### ***Corruption***

According to Gonzales (2021), government corruption starts when elected officials are exposed to self-serving opportunities brought by their position's power. This is in contrast to their supposed role which is to cater to their constituents' needs. As a result, their incompetence breeds corruption.

Corruption in the articles was depicted as nepotism through Duterte's appointment of Keng's daughter into a government position, powerful people bending the law, and the government's

capability of illegal or immoral actions. Certain words were also used to describe the Philippine government, such as “flawed,” “unfair,” and “corrupt.” Some emotions attached to this include disgust, shame, and despair.

Wilfredo Keng’s illegal links are also discussed in this section due to his alleged involvement with ex-Chief Justice Renato Corona. Some of the online news depicted Keng as a controversial businessman who was the owner of a luxury car that Corona reportedly used during his court proceedings. He was also mentioned to be under surveillance by the government due to his alleged involvement in illegal/criminal operations such as human trafficking and drug smuggling.

### ***Aversion to Criticism***

Finally, the government’s incompetence is exhibited in its aversion to criticism. An Inquirer.net article described the government being led by a man proven averse to criticism and dissent and is willing to go to ridiculous lengths to forcibly silence critical media. This is supported by another Inquirer.net article which mentions that the government punitively punishes legitimate dissent.

### **Press Freedom Issues Discussed in the Online News**

#### ***Libel as a Public Concern***

Ressa’s conviction in June 2020 raised concerns about the major implications of cyber libel, describing a metaphor from the analysis which describes the cybercrime law as part of a “rising drumbeat of legal assaults against journalists.” However, Rappler’s case is not just a media concern, rather it is a public concern because of its threat to freedom of speech. The articles repeatedly described the dangers of the cybercrime law to internet users even if they are not journalists because everyone on the internet will be subjected to the law.

#### ***Press Issues During the Marcos and Duterte Administration***

Maria Ressa’s conviction is similar to the events that happened during the Marcos regime. This is supported by a statement from the FOCAP where they mentioned the Filipinos’ independence since the “dark Martial Law days.” To contextualize, Martial Law was a time in history when the media experienced an intense attack on press freedom; journalists had been reported missing, and they were documented to have been either tortured or killed. De Jesus (2007) described this period as an institutionalization of Marcos’ control over the press. She narrated how leading journalists were picked up and detained and how the government controlled the press with the help of coercive force from the military. It was also this time when crony press and envelopmental journalism came to be, which both exhibited how journalism was controlled by the government, either through bribing with money or using close personal connections with those in power. De Jesus described the press in the country as a “mere mouthpiece for government officials.” Similarly, Ressa’s arrest mirrored the familiar style of Marcos’ dictatorship, where critics were silenced.

On the other hand, Duterte seemed to have been following Marcos’ steps with his drug war, as per depictions in the news articles: a dictator, oppressor, leader who abuses his power, a silencer of truth to avoid dissent, a misogynist, an authoritarian against a free press, a tyrant who has no accountability, and a destroyer of democracy.



It can also be noted that Duterte has threatened other media organizations in the past. An instance of this was in April 2017 when he threatened to block the renewal of ABS-CBN television's franchise once it expired in 2020. The threat was made following his accusation of estafa of the network for supposedly not providing him the airtime he had paid for during the 2016 election campaign period. This was followed by a statement from the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) that warned Duterte against his threat to personally block ABS-CBN's renewal. According to the statement, Duterte had criticized the media before, but it was the first time that he "openly threatened to shut down a media organization by using alleged offenses that have nothing to do with journalism." Consequently, NUJP concluded that these actions blatantly dangle the powers of the presidency and of the state, signaling Duterte's willingness to use his powers to stifle freedom of the press and of expression (Sabillo, 2017). The union also mentioned that Duterte was "clearly not joking," and soon after in May 2020, ABS-CBN was ordered to cease its operations by the National Telecommunications Commission under threat of prosecution (Martial Law Museum, 2020).

### ***Fight for Media Rights***

Another press freedom issue that surfaced from the online news is the fight for media rights classified into two categories: advocacy and activism.

Advocacy is speaking out against injustice while supporting social causes. In Rappler's and Inquirer.net's articles, advocacy for media rights is strengthened by the concept of press freedom as a pillar of democracy and human rights. Without a free press, the citizens cannot be aware of the current events. This makes them unable to participate in their communities as well-informed individuals, ultimately hindering a balanced democracy (Tsalamani, 2021). This scenario was described in a Rappler article using the word "crippled" suggesting that without democracy, there could be a threat to the citizens' rights and freedoms.

Apart from the abovementioned concepts, the articles also showed various forms of advocacy support given by different people. Several advocacy calls appeared in the articles such as "Defend Press Freedom" and Rappler's mantra "Hold the Line," along with some catch phrases such as "end harassment" and "repeal repressive law." Additionally, the explicit show of support through statements, posts, and tweets came from the Vice President of the Philippines, business groups, influential politicians and groups, human rights and youth groups, showbiz personalities, and even from common Filipino citizens.

Svirsky (2010) defined "activism" as a concept that stirs both thought and action, that when done successfully, the system is disrupted and pushed into a "far-from-equilibrium state," leading to a revolutionary passage. Activism is one of the triggers of evolution and re-creation within the system. This is exhibited in the online news articles in certain word choices such as "continuing the fight" and "speak out" which both refer to the fight for freedom of speech which is suppressed in Ressa's cyber libel case. These examples show what must be done to disrupt the system and create change. Two Rappler articles also highlighted the role of the youth in defending human rights, producing a visual imagery of youth groups holding protests, and a scenario of uniting and calling out the authorities. This is also supported by idioms such as "make their voices be heard" and "stand one's ground."

Other articles that depict activism for media rights include urging people to show dissent towards those in power and encouraging Filipinos to join the call for media rights because those who hold power can greatly influence the decision on Maria Ressa's case.

### **Relevance to the Filipino Press**

The results of this study may be relevant and beneficial to the journalistic community in understanding how media organizations report about a renowned journalist, Maria Ressa, and her cyber libel case. This also opens the opportunity to identify press freedom issues that appear in online news articles.

Moreover, calls for decriminalization of defamation laws have been pushed for in the fight to attain press freedom. Even before cyber libel became a crime under the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, journalists and media advocacy groups such as the CMFR and the NUJP have called for the decriminalization of libel for decades, wherein they have asked Congress to amend the provisions on libel of the 82-year-old Revised Penal Code. In 2023, defamation is still a crime, and media advocacy groups still heed the same calls. In December 2022, Senator Risa Hontiveros filed a bill that seeks to decriminalize libel which came after the cyber libel conviction of Baguio City journalist and Rappler contributor Frank Cimatu (Bolledo, 2022). In relation to this, this study may also open discussions and future studies on the opportunity for other changes in policies that may address problems related to cyber libel.

On the other hand, the research study may also contribute to the discipline and practice of Development Communication as it highlights the importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in advocating for and attaining development in marginalized sectors. SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions may guide the study in promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws for journalists for sustainable development.

Lastly, this study can be a guiding tool for future researchers interested in knowing the themes surrounding the news reports about Maria Ressa's cyber libel case, as well as other libel and cyber libel cases in general.

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**Contact emails:** [rmguison@up.edu.ph](mailto:rmguison@up.edu.ph)  
[Aileen.Macalintal.2@city.ac.uk](mailto:Aileen.Macalintal.2@city.ac.uk)

***The Participatory Media Production Process Using Design Thinking Approach to Promote Community Tourism in Thai Phuan Community, Thailand***

Athip Techapongsatorn, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
R-titaya Supsinwiwat, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Pattaranun Waitayasin, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Apichet Kambhu Na Ayudhaya, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Padcha Ithijarakul, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Phummiphat Tansuwannarat, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Prisana Kumpusiri, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

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**Abstract**

This research uses a design thinking approach to examine Thai Phuan tourism promotion media production. It is employed Qualitative research methodology by using in-depth interviews. The sample has been divided into two groups: 1) Thai Phuan community members, and 2) media production experts or academics in communication. The sample has been selected by criterion sampling. After gathering information from the interview, it will be used to make a script and produced as a documentary to promote tourism. The study involved identifying community issues through representatives from the Thai Phuan community in the area by using a design thinking approach and summarizing the data into a dataset for tourism promotion. Subsequently, media production was conducted based on the collected data and implementation. The study found that design thinking and the participatory process of the community will be implemented in every state of the collaborative process. The study identified various forms of community participation, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, and functional participation. The significant involvement of community is in the Pre-Production which provides the information to be used as content for production of tourism promotion media and Production that the community will participate as actors and tourism activities. The research team will be filmed and edited according to the script. The community will be giving feedback and information check. After that, the community can use documentaries for tourism promotion. This approach allowed the community to have the most comprehensive knowledge and content understanding, enabling them to effectively accommodate tourists.

Keywords: Media Production, Design Thinking, Community Tourism

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## Introduction

The Thai Phuan are an ethnic group that migrated from the Laos to settle in Thailand. They are an interesting ethnic group. They have a unique culture, dress, traditions, and language. This community wants to use their cultural capital to create a community cultural tourist attraction. While traditional forms of cultural communication may not be consistent with changes in the present. They need to adapt themselves to communicate their appropriate cultural identity with the social context. Thailand is a country that stands out in terms of tourism, while the government promotes community, tourist and Thai Phuan community are ready for cultural and community tourism. This community has their own museums that collected history information of the community. However, there is a lack of tourism promotion.

Cultural capital, lifestyle, and tourism activities in Thai Phuan have the potential to generate increased income. One key component of promoting tourism is public relations. Effective tourism public relations require well-managed internal and external communication. Involving local communities in tourism management and public relations activities enhances the authenticity of the content and contributes to a more successful outcome. The process involves decision-making, exchanging opinions, sharing perspectives, and actively participating in various activities, ultimately facilitating effective communication and tourism promotion.

According to Kusuma Phuseit (2010), community involvement is crucial in planning and executing public relations in tourism. Engaging the local population in decision-making, feedback, opinion exchange, and hands-on activities can significantly enhance the effectiveness of tourism public relations. The information gathered from individuals with an understanding of the local context, societal conditions, and the community's way of life helps identify general issues and strengths of the tourist destination. Proper planning of public relations ensures accurate and impactful communication. (Phuseit, 2010).

The researcher observes that community participation leads to the creation of media aligned with the specific needs and characteristics of the community. This collaborative approach results in well-rounded work that resonates with the target audience. The study also recognizes various forms of media, such as print, television, personal communication, and online media. However, the most effective medium, particularly for engaging diverse target groups and creating a lasting impression, is television. Television combines visuals and audio, providing a comprehensive communication platform. This multimedia approach utilizes films for realistic moving images, radio for spoken content and sound effects, and print for detailed textual information. Television, being a composite medium, effectively translates complex stories into compelling narratives and enhances the community's participation in tourism activities.

## Conceptual Framework

This research focused on Thai Phuan community that has cultural capital and community tourism. Which relevance with tourism communication areas, tourism promotion strategy areas and media production area and the conceptual idea will be including problems, methodology and theory. The first thing is problems the Thai Phuan community has cultural capacity for community tourism but there is a lack of tourism marketing communication and also outsource production cannot provide the story from inside of the community, or they

cannot produce the deep information for tourism promotion. The second thing is theory this research used design thinking theory to implement in the media production process which has emphasize, define, ideate, prototype and test. Finally, is methodology, this research employed qualitative research methodology by using in-depth interview and participatory approach.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is qualitative research with in-depth interview on the keys factor persons as the sampling. The sample of this resource has been divided into two groups. The first group is Thai Phuan community members, including community leader, digital center officer in community, Thai Phuan people who inherited the performance, Thai Phuan people who invented the unique Thai Phuan cloth pattern and Thai Phuan people who have knowledge of local food. On the other hand, the second group is media production experts or academician in communication area, including media production lecturer, head of corporate communication department in the university, news announcer, head of communication in company, actor and master of ceremonies.

After that, design thinking process has been approached on the media making process which is planning stage, pre-production stage, production stage and post-production stage.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that design thinking and the participatory process of the community will be implemented in every state of the media production. The community has no media production skills and understanding of tourism promotion. But they have the deep information that we can't find anywhere. The significance in production process of community tourism promotion is the planning with empathize.

The data collection process comprises four stages: 1) Planning, 2) Pre-Production, 3) Production, and 4) Post-Production. Design Thinking is applied to the participatory media production process, and it serves as a framework to address issues related to media production. This approach stimulates knowledge sharing and collaborative learning, fostering collective engagement in the production of media content to promote Thai Phuan community tourism in Nakhon Nayok Province. Community involvement is integrated into every stage of the process, including Participation by Consultation, Participation for Material Incentives, and Functional Participation, as identified through a study of community participation in the process.

The level of community participation varies depending on the objectives and plans for community tourism and what needs to be presented during specific timeframes. Additionally, it differs based on the support received from both the public and private sectors, such as funding from the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society for the establishment of a digital community center on the Klong side to support community tourism information. Nevertheless, decision-making remains primarily within the community, and there is ongoing development by the community in line with the research conducted by Eaknarun Bangthamai, Sirithorn Boonprasert, and Narapat Saengwong Na Ayutthaya (2015). Their study, "Development of Participatory Learning Media with Ancient Archaeological Sources in Nong Ratchawat District, Suphanburi Province, to Promote Creative Learning," found that the community received budgetary support from the government, which influenced decision-making in certain aspects to align with the objectives of budget utilization. However, other

forms of participation or processes, such as determining the desired development format and sharing the benefits, remained under the purview of the community (Bangthamai, Boonprasert, & Saengwong Na Ayutthaya, 2015).

The research findings also revealed that the production process necessitates community involvement at every stage, starting from the planning phase, which requires the most accurate data for the scriptwriting, to the pre-production phase, which encompasses aspects such as locations and various activities that reflect the Thai Phuan community's identity. Furthermore, this involvement extends to the production phase, where both local residents and Thai Phuan community members actively participate in various activities. Lastly, community members engage in the evaluation phase, providing feedback and insights, which can be divided into four parts.

1) **Planning:** After conducting on-site research, the research team found that the community's content had several focal points to present. As a result, the initial plan to create a single documentary was revised, and a new plan was developed. The new plan involved producing three video clips, each covering different content and storytelling approaches, to address the diverse target audience segments that the community wanted to reach. In this planning phase, the researcher engages in the process of gathering information or problem identification (Empathize). During this stage, it was observed that there were two main components of preparation: content elements and the community's participation components. This stage holds particular importance in the working process to ensure the acquisition of data to be used in media production. Data collection is organized into groups, and community members actively participate in the work. This aligns with the research conducted by Hareuthai Panyarvuttrakul (2022), which explored "Local Wisdom Dissemination through Youth Participation in the Community of Bang Lamphu." The study found that media production for the community involved a preparation phase focused on creating participation, identifying individuals in the local area to participate in media production, and dividing the production process into three video clips. Each team is composed of both faculty members and students working collaboratively, and adjustments are made to the on-site production process.

2) **Pre-Production:** Following the initial data collection phase for understanding the area, the next step involves conducting on-site visits to gather information in real locations. This preparatory stage precedes the planning of scriptwriting and shooting arrangements. Summarily, there will be a total of four communities to be presented, including the Klong-side community, Tha Daeng community, Koh Wai community, and Ban Mai community. To summarize, there will be the production of three video clips:

1. Thai Phuan Heritage Museum and its history, presented in a documentary format.
2. Community Tourism in the Thai Phuan community, presented as a short clip.
3. A tourism program presented in a short film format, narrating the story.

The chosen study area for this project is the Pak Phli District in Nakhon Nayok Province. The collaborative efforts of faculty members, students, and the community work together to ensure the smooth execution of the project. In this pre-production phase, the alignment with the working concept is the preparatory process before on-site shooting. This process involves summarizing content and themes from dramatic components, which are then transformed into video media to promote tourism. These components encompass the storyline, characters, ideas, language, music, and imagery, as outlined in the six components of tourism promotion by Nopamas Waewhong (2015).



3) Production: In the production phase of the filmmaking process, collaborative efforts between faculty members, students, and the community are employed. This involves the utilization of actors and storytellers from within the community to foster continuity and convey the narratives of the Thai Phuan community from one generation to the next. The involvement of community members in the filming process facilitates the exchange of experiences and promotes collaborative work between educational institutions and the community. This aligns with the research “Local Wisdom Dissemination through Youth Participation in the Community of Bang Lamphu” emphasizing community participation in the filmmaking process. The inclusion of community members in these processes leads to collaborative work, mutual learning experiences, and enables the youth in each community to acquire knowledge about their cultural heritage. The participatory communication process during media production contributes to the development of skills among the youth, ultimately leading to community development (Panyarvuttrakul, 2022).

4) Post-Production: This final phase involves community engagement and evaluation after the completion of filming and editing. Once the editing process is completed, the community actively participates in reviewing the work, providing feedback, and suggesting improvements. The collaborative evaluation process ensures the accuracy of the content before dissemination. This step promotes interpersonal communication within the community, fostering stronger community bonds. This aligns with research on The Participation in the Management of Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study of Tham Rong Sub-District Ban Lat District Phetchaburi Province. The study indicates an increased understanding and knowledge among community members regarding the benefits of community involvement. Consistent and regular communication contributes to the strengthened resilience of the community (Charoensheep, 2017).

### **Acknowledgements**

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**Contact email:** [athip@g.swu.ac.th](mailto:athip@g.swu.ac.th)

*A Content Analysis of Online Streaming's Popular Korean Drama Series in Thailand:  
Alcohol Imagery and Scene*

Patarakamon Pakkachairoj, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Sirath Pakdeeronachit, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Porawan Pattayanon, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

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**Abstract**

Exposure to alcohol-related imagery in the media is linked to increased regular use and initiation of alcohol consumption among youth and young adults. This association is particularly evident on online streaming platforms, where portrayals of alcohol are often unrestricted. This study aims to conduct a content analysis of alcohol-related imagery and scenes in five popular Korean drama series broadcast on online streaming platforms from 2012 to 2022. The content was coded at 1-minute intervals for the presence of alcohol. Images of alcohol were categorized into three groups: (1) Actual Use, representing explicit consumption of alcohol by actors or actresses; (2) Implied Use, indicating the presence of alcohol in the hands of characters; and (3) Other Alcohol References, encompassing any alcohol-related objects. Additionally, the alcohol imagery was classified according to the types of alcohol featured, the camera shot distance, and the depicted locations. The results showed that 17.37% of the intervals contained some form of alcohol content. Of these, Other Alcohol References accounted for 9.60%, Implied Use for 4.49%, and Actual Use for 3.18%. Soju and beer were the most frequently seen types of alcohol, at 15.85% and 14.90%, respectively. The medium shot was the predominant camera shot for alcohol scenes (67.10%), and restaurants were the most common locations depicted (44.96%).

Keywords: Alcohol, Content Analysis, Online Streaming

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## Introduction

Alcohol consumption is a significant public health concern and a leading cause of mortality worldwide, an issue highlighted by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Public Health globally, and particularly in Thailand. According to a report on the smoking and alcohol consumption behavior of the Thai population in 2017 (Social Statistics Bureau, National Statistical Office, 2018), among individuals aged 15 and above, approximately 15.9 million people engaged in alcohol consumption, with 6.98 million regular drinkers and 8.91 million occasional drinkers. In 2019, liver cancer, which is often linked to alcohol abuse, resulted in approximately 16,288 deaths within the Thai population—a figure projected to rise (Ministry of Public Health (Thailand), 2019) Furthermore, alcohol-related accidents, particularly those involving driving, are a serious concern. Annually, Thailand witnesses over 10,000 deaths from accidents during festival periods involving alcohol, with the New Year festival seeing a spike in fatalities—almost 1.5 times the daily average (Matichon Online, 2560).

Peer pressure, influencing 38.9% of Thai individuals to begin drinking, has been identified as the primary factor for initiating alcohol consumption. This susceptibility may stem from behavioral influence within peer groups or the emulation of behaviors portrayed in media. Extensive evidence suggests that exposure to alcohol-related imagery in entertainment media, especially in films or television dramas, correlates with the initiation and regular consumption of alcohol among youths and young adults. (Hanewinkel et al., 2014; Hanewinkel et al., 2012; Kaewpramkusol et al., 2019; Koordeman et al., 2014) Contemporary formats, channels, and consumption behaviors of entertainment media have increasingly gravitated towards online streaming platforms (Over-the-Top, OTT). These platforms offer viewers the autonomy to select films, genres, or viewing times, as well as the flexibility to indulge in repeated viewings as per their preferences. Consequently, there is an increased opportunity for viewers to access and engage with a vast array of content, including alcohol-related imagery and scenes, more readily and frequently than through traditional channels. The ease of access to alcohol-portraying content has the potential to influence and shape behaviors and attitudes significantly.

In Thailand, South Korean entertainment media holds a dominant position. Flixpatrol (2022) noted that 6 out of 10 dramas on Netflix in Thailand were Korean series. The wave of Korean culture and entertainment, such as films, K-pop (Korean music), and Korean drama series, has seen a surge in popularity in Thailand over the past two decades. Since the 2000s, Korean dramas have influenced and shaped Thai preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural aspects, including fashion, makeup, food, and alcohol consumption patterns.

This study aims to conduct a content analysis of alcohol-related imagery and scenes in the five Korean drama series most popular among Thais on online streaming platforms. The analysis will categorize the types of alcohol presented, assess the distance of the alcohol scenes (camera shot), and identify the locations or settings in which alcohol appears.

## Methods

The sample for this study comprises the five most popular Korean drama series, as voted by the Thai Korean Drama Series community on Facebook. These series were broadcast between 2012 and 2022 and each consists of at least 16 to 20 episodes. They were all accessible on online streaming platforms. Alcohol-related content was analyzed in the

selected series using the 1-minute interval coding method, similar to the approach used in previous studies by Barker et al. (2018) and Lyons et al. (2013). The series were divided into 1-minute intervals, then analyzed and counted the occurrences of alcohol-related content within each interval. Each instance of such content was recorded as a single "alcohol interval." If alcohol-related content recurred within the same category, it was still counted as one alcohol interval. However, if different categories of alcohol-related content appeared within the same interval, they were counted as separate alcohol intervals—two or three, depending on the number of categories presented. The following categories were used for analysis:

**Any alcohol content:** Any depiction of alcohol on screen

- (1) Actual use: Characters are seen consuming or drinking alcohol.
- (2) Implied use: Alcohol is held by the characters.
- (3) Other alcohol reference: Alcohol-related objects or materials such as bottles, glasses, or beer pumps.

**Alcohol types:** The types of alcohol that characters use in a scene.

**Alcohol scenes:** The settings or locations where alcohol-related content is depicted.

**Alcohol camera shots:** The camera shot lengths used to portray alcohol-related content.

- (1) Close-up Shot: Focuses on the subject or object at close range to show greater detail.
- (2) Medium Shot: Captures characters from head to mid-body, offering a view of the characters' surroundings and contextual emotions.
- (3) Long Shot: Displays detailed scenes in a wide perspective, capturing characters, locations, and the surrounding atmosphere.

## Results

The total duration of 5 Korean drama series was 111 hours and 24 minutes. Using a 1-minute interval, there were a total of 6,684 intervals, with 1,161 intervals containing any alcohol-related content, representing 17.37% of the total intervals. The most common type of alcohol-related content was 'Other alcohol reference,' accounting for 9.60% of the total, often used as props in the scenes. This was followed by 'Implied use' at 4.49% and 'Actual use' at 3.28%.

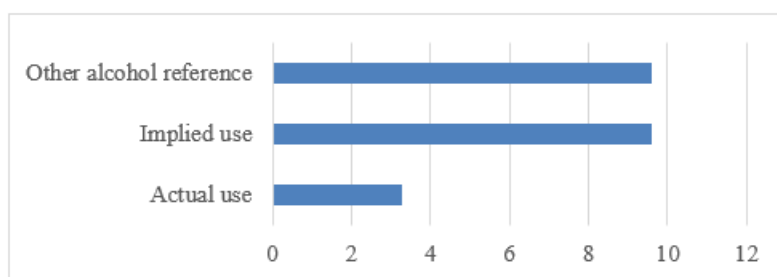


Figure 1: Any alcohol contents

## Alcohol Types

Soju, a well-known Korean alcoholic beverage, was the most frequently occurring alcohol type, appearing in 15.85% of the total alcohol intervals, followed by beer at 14.90%, wine/champagne at 7.24%, unknown types at 3.36%, spirits at 2.50%, fermented fruit/herbal

wine at 2.24%, so-maek (Soju mixed with beer) at 0.60%. cocktails at 0.43%, and makgeoli (Korean rice wine) at 0.17%, respectively.

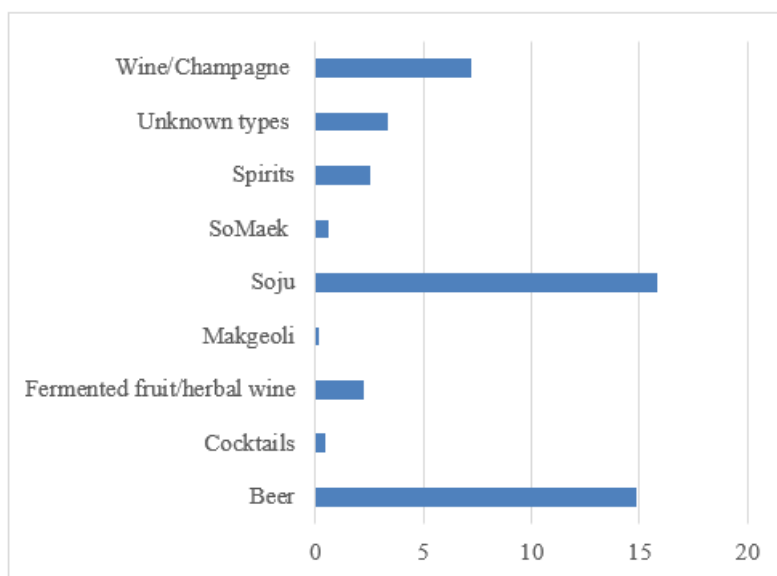


Figure 2: Alcohol types

### Camera Shots

The medium shot was the most frequently used camera shot for portraying alcohol-related content, representing 67.10% of all alcohol intervals, followed by the long shot at 40.40%, and the close-up shot at 9.47%.

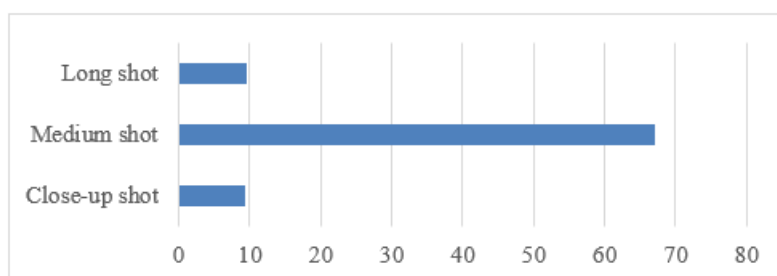


Figure 3: Alcohol camera shots

### Alcohol Scenes

Restaurants were the most common setting for alcohol-related content, observed in 44.96% of all alcohol intervals, followed by residences/homes at 40.31%. pubs/bars and funeral venues each accounted for 2.41%, public spaces or tourist destinations for 1.98%, community centers for 1.98%, hotels for 1.71%, and military camps for 1.21%. hospitals were depicted in 0.95% of intervals, rooftops in 0.60%, abandoned houses and wedding venues each in 0.43%, trains in 0.34%, and convenience stores in 0.17%.

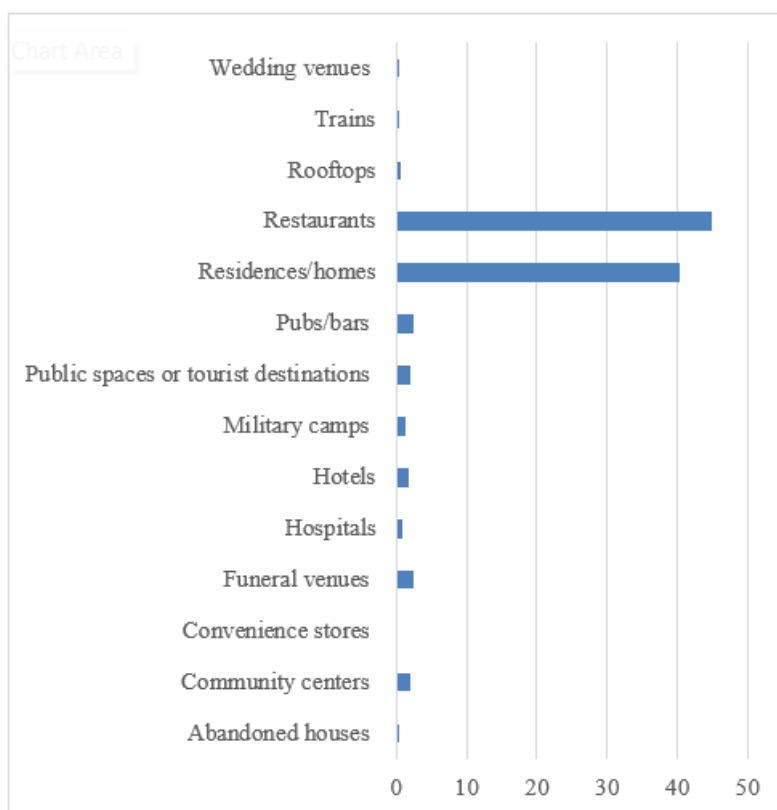


Figure 4: Alcohol Scenes

## Discussion

This study found that images or scenes related to alcohol are prominently featured in all the samples, appearing in nearly every episode (100% of all five Korean drama series in the sample contained alcohol-related content). The total percentage of alcohol-related intervals was 17.37%. This finding is consistent with previous studies analyzing alcohol content in entertainment media across various countries. For example, research in the United Kingdom on alcohol imagery in popular television content, including films on online streaming platforms (Lyons et al., 2013), found that alcohol imagery accounted for up to 12% of popular television programs and advertisements. Utilizing the same analysis method, a subsequent study in 2018 observed that alcohol imagery constituted 14% (Barker et al., 2018). Moreover, a study focused on alcohol imagery in films streamed online in the United Kingdom using a 5-minute interval analysis method reported a prevalence of 41.7% (Alfayad et al., 2022). These studies collectively indicate a consistent upward trend in the prevalence of alcohol imagery, suggesting that viewers may be exposed to an excessive amount of alcohol-related content, particularly on online streaming platforms where access to entertainment media with any alcohol-related content is convenient.

Various types of alcohol portrayals were found in the samples. The most frequent alcohol content was related to Soju, followed by beer. These two types of alcohol appeared significantly more often compared to others. This could be because beer is a globally recognized beverage and may also be attributed to the historical prevalence of Soju consumption in Korean culture, as well as the global promotion of Soju through product placement in Korean drama series. According to The Spirits Business (2022), Soju, produced by Jinro, a South Korean alcohol brand, was the world's most popular alcoholic beverage from 2019 to 2022. This corresponds with research by (Mungsong, 2022), which found that

Korean drama series viewers in Bangkok, Thailand, were receptive to alcohol advertisements integrated into Korean drama series, whether broadcast on traditional television or via online streaming platforms and were inclined to purchase and consume Soju more frequently after watching.

The majority of alcohol-related content was observed in medium shots, which often depict characters drinking or consuming alcohol at dining tables, accounting for 67.10%. These medium shots typically frame characters from head to mid-body, allowing a view of their surroundings and contextual emotions. They also reveal alcohol-related details more clearly than long shots and close-ups and have been commonly used in the film industry for an extended period. The selection of camera shots in any entertainment media depends on the producer's intent, whether to convey content, information, or emotions to the audience. Moreover, medium shots facilitate subtle product placement, allowing for creative concepts where actors or actresses naturally use products, providing context without overwhelming viewers, unlike aggressive sales tactics. This approach provides a glimpse of the broader setting while maintaining sufficient detail visibility of the product, avoiding overt conspicuousness. Mungsong (2022) reported that viewers recall details of beverage products, such as color, packaging, and brand, and show a propensity to purchase these products.

The scenes where alcohol imagery is most frequently encountered are in restaurants, at 44.96%, and homes, at 40.31%. This is consistent with the findings of (Noppadol Inchan, 2012), who noted that Korean drama series often portray indoor scenes more than outdoor ones, depicting everyday life activities such as eating and sleeping. Characters are commonly shown drinking at restaurants or home with friends, colleagues, neighbors, and family members. These depictions reflect the drinking behaviors and culture in Korea, aligning with the research by Ko and Sohn (2018), which cites socializing as a primary motive for alcohol consumption in Korea, often involving friends or colleagues during dinner gatherings. Similarly, Thais tend to consume alcohol more at their own homes or friend's homes as reported by (Polathep Vichitkunakorn & Aship Tanaree, 2021). Cultural ceremonies, such as funerals and weddings, also feature scenes with alcohol illustrating its significant role in Korean religious rituals, past and present, as highlighted by Robert Koehler (2014). Furthermore, hospital scenes in dramas like 'Reply 1988' and 'Descendants of the Sun' inappropriately depict alcohol consumption involving characters such as patients, visitors, and medical staff, which are considered inappropriate and should not be depicted on screen.

## **Conclusion**

This study, along with previous research, has found that alcohol imagery and alcohol-related content are prevalent and commonly found in entertainment media across various countries (Adams et al., 2014; Alfayad et al., 2022; Barker et al., 2018; Barrientos-Gutierrez et al., 2015; Chapoton et al., 2020; Cukier et al., 2018; Graham & Adams, 2013; Hanewinkel et al., 2014; Hanewinkel et al., 2012; Kaewpramkusol et al., 2019; Keller-Hamilton et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2013). This prevalence may reflect the influence of the cultural drinking norms conveyed through entertainment media from those nations and the absence of stringent regulations regarding the display of alcohol imagery. For example, in Thailand, laws and regulations that prohibit alcohol imagery and alcohol advertising in media are enforced in traditional mass media, such as television and radio, but not on online streaming platforms. This legal gap could inadvertently facilitate the integration of alcohol product placement and advertising within drama series.



From a media effects perspective, long-term viewers of Korean dramas may be more inclined to increase their alcohol consumption due to their prolonged exposure to such content. This exposure could lead to the cultivation of habits and behaviors associated with alcohol use, as proposed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross (Gerbner G. et al., 1986), who suggest that prolonged exposure to media content can shape an individual's perceptions and beliefs about reality. Specifically in Korean drama series, the consistent portrayal of alcohol consumption may create the perception that drinking is a normal and even essential part of daily life. As a result, viewers might become prone to imitating the drinking behaviors exhibited by characters, with alcohol consumption potentially acting as a model for viewers to emulate, as discussed by (Bandura, 1977).

Despite the adverse health effects of alcohol consumption, policymakers, public health ministries worldwide, and other relevant organizations in each country have been striving to curb the depiction of alcohol in entertainment media, especially on online streaming platforms. These platforms aggregate a vast array of media from various countries and, with their growing number and the likelihood of more emerging in the future, regulating alcohol-related imagery has become increasingly complex and challenging. Policymakers, government bodies, and stakeholders must collaborate in crafting regulations that form effective frameworks for controlling the presentation of alcohol-related content in entertainment media. Parents and educators also have a crucial role in fostering a protective environment and modeling behaviors that promote media literacy and responsible consumption. Given the media's impact on young audiences, it is essential to educate them about the risks and consequences of alcohol consumption and to promote self-awareness and self-control. Implementing media literacy programs is essential, as these programs teach individuals to critically evaluate media content, including scenes depicting alcohol, drugs, or violence.

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***Navigating Indonesian Media Independence:  
An Analysis of Kompas.com's Framing of the Government's Physical Distancing Policy***

Diana Anggraeni, Universitas Pancasila, Indonesia

Naila Qonita, Universitas Pancasila, Indonesia

Nabila, Universitas Pancasila, Indonesia

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**Abstract**

Government power and control of the media are two things that always go together. The government must continually exert control over the media to retain its hegemony. As a control node, the concept of laws and regulations arises. This event makes the media a supporter and agent of the government's interests. This paper aims to evaluate how Kompas.com, one of Indonesia's mainstream online media, frames the government's social restriction policy in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. From March 2020 to December 2021, 237 news articles titled Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) were examined. This study employs a quantitative approach. Entman's framing analysis properties were used as coding categories while working on interpretation-focused coding and critical discourse principles to build the narrative. An ANOVA analysis was applied to assess the degree of public confidence in the news reports provided by Kompas.com. The options used by Kompas.com to preserve public trust in government and the media include the employment of positive tones and enhancing the tendency of trust in the government through moral and treatment framing. The ANOVA result's p-value is 0.0395, less than alpha 0.05, which shows the significance of this study with  $R^2$  0.9997. The present study accepts the present study hypothesis and rejects the null hypothesis with a significance F value of 3.1737.

**Keywords:** Indonesian Online Media Framing, COVID-19, Entman Framing Analysis, Critical Discourse, Large-Scale Social Restrictions

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has captured the attention of governments worldwide. Many individuals have urged governments not only to improve their readiness and responsiveness but also to address the threat of the coronavirus, frequently overlooking other possible risks (Boin, McConnell, & Hart, 2021). Researchers from diverse disciplines endeavor to comprehend how governments formulate policies and execute actions in response to this mega-crisis. These actions encompass highlighting the role of social presence in various communication contexts to generate public attention (Munandar & Basuki, 2021), informing citizens about fears and concerns related to social restrictions and healthcare management (Mohamad & Zaini, 2021), as well as addressing vaccine-related issues (Yousaf et al., 2022).

The role of the media in communicating government policies and actions can influence people's well-being and anxiety during a pandemic. The media has significantly heightened public awareness of the necessary precautions amidst Covid. Moreover, media plays a vital role, particularly in a democratic nation like Indonesia. It represents freedom of expression (Bahri & Widhyharto, 2021) and contributes to the country's advancement. Thus, the text presented in the media, such as news discourse, can serve as sensitive indicators for endorsing specific government policies and actions.

According to Indonesia's Press Law, Number 40 of 1999, one of the responsibilities of the national press is to fulfil the public's right to information. The press is crucial in disseminating accurate and inaccurate information to the public. The 2020 National Press Freedom Index (IKP) survey yielded a score of 75.27, categorizing public's right to information as "fairly free" (Persada, February 13, 2022). However, press freedom remains a significant concern in various Indonesian regions, particularly concerning physical, political, social, economic, and legal forms of violence (Junius Fernando, Pujiyono, Rozah, & Rochaeti, 2022).

Kompas.com is the most popular online news portal, followed by CNN Indonesia, Detik.com, Kumparan, and Tirto.id, serving as the public's primary choice for accessing accurate information. The findings indicate that most viewers, comprising 89% of 63 million Indonesian digital natives, favour Kompas.com as a mainstream online media source due to its reliability and ease of access.

Media's significance in conveying government actions during the pandemic is vital, notably in democratic nations like Indonesia, where it contributes to both expression freedom and societal progress. Furthermore, the popularity of news platforms like Kompas.com among Indonesian digital natives underscores the importance of reliable media sources for accurate information dissemination. Hence, there is an exigency for further investigations aimed at analyzing how Kompas.com frames public attention in relation to the Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy and the government's implementation, employing Entman's framing analysis approach within Indonesia. This study explores how Kompas.com, a prominent mainstream online media platform in Indonesia, frames the government's policy regarding social restrictions amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The research investigates the relationships between various variables through cross-tabulation analysis and ANOVA. The Research Questions are as follows:

- RQ 1. Who is Kompas.com's news source in framing the policy?
- RQ 2. What is the general tone of Kompas.com's news towards implementing a Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy toward the government?
- RQ 3. How do Entman's framing analysis properties configure Kompas.com's news about implementing the Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy?
- RQ 4. To what extent does Kompas.com's framing deal with public trust?

Therefore, this study delves into the Kompas.com news sources used in framing the policy, the overall tone of Kompas.com's news concerning the government's implementation of the Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy, and the influence of Entman's framing analysis properties on Kompas.com's coverage of the policy's implementation. The outcomes of this study have implications for the government's communication and management of social restriction policies aimed at the Indonesian populace, mainly through the framing of widely-viewed and youth-preferred mainstream online media in Indonesia.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Government as Professional and Political Craft***

Covid-19 is viewed as a creeping crisis, a pandemic that spans time and is a crisis that cuts across borders, geography, jurisdictions, and sectoral boundaries (Boin & Rhinard, 2008). Furthermore, this pandemic is a crisis of solidarity in which the majority of people not directly threatened by the disease are asked or forced to make sacrifices to suppress the virus. This phenomenon is a rare combination that creates a unique challenge (Filipe, 2021).

The presence of a threat forces the government to bet. The Covid-19 threat's high degree of uncertainty, impact, and exact duration make it difficult for governments to respond effectively. Government as a professional craft, managing crises by setting up scenarios, contingency planning, mobilizing response capacity, making difficult decisions, coordinating efforts of different agencies and jurisdictions, shifting response to recovery, and ensuring that crisis experiences have moral values. Whereas the government, as a political craft, beautifully frames the nature and causes of threats, social distribution, risk, and threat across groups, seizes opportunities to be the centre of attention, shift policy agendas, claim credit, or navigate the blame game, and push for, or block, systemic reform (Fortuna, 2022).

### ***Government and Media***

The ruling government always exerts control over the media to maintain hegemony. As a control node, the concept of regulation and legislation was developed. As a result, the media must defend, support, and carry out the government's interests (Li, Shi, & Zhou, 2021; Yu & Chi, 2021). As a result, the concept of media ideology must be capable of and obligated to encourage and support the existing regime to strengthen its political power for economic, political, social, and cultural development through a media system. The media system encompasses various activities related to media ownership, media control, media relations with the public and government, and freedom and responsibility in broadcasting societal opinions and facts (Multisilta, 2009).

The government's political system requires the media to operate and influence the development and growth of the media in a country. Based on historical records from Sukarno's presidency, a widely held belief is that the media is obligated to support and defend

political manifestos that have become the direction of government programs (Anom, 2016). This philosophy occasionally underpins the political paradigm of Indonesian media.

### ***Kompas.com as Indonesia's Mainstream Online Media***

Up to 63 million Indonesians are under 25 (20-35). As many as 89% are digital natives or members of Generation Y (18-23 years old) and Generation Z (24-32 years old). According to her survey results, Karen Kusnadi, Analytics Manager at Maverick Indonesia, reports that up to 85% of the Y and Z generations consume daily news via their smartphones. As a result, online news portals are the most popular source of information for generations Y and Z. Aside from communication, 84% of them use social media, 43% use messaging apps, 16% watch television, 6% listen to the radio, and only about 5% read print media (Kasih, December 15, 2020).

Kusnadi and Hikmawan (2020) reported that the most popular online media portals among Indonesia's young people (18 to 35 years old) are Kompas.com, CNN Indonesia, Detik.com, Kumparan, and Tirto. Meanwhile, this generation is primarily interested in entertainment and arts (63%), lifestyle (62%), social politics (53%), technology (49%), travel (44%), economy and business (43%), and health (40%) (Kusnadi & Hikmawan, 2020).

### ***Media and Framing***

Carnibella and Wells (2022) reported that media coverage of public policies during the Covid-19 pandemic had a dominant influence on workers' perceptions of government policies. These findings were based on a study of six Italian daily newspapers with the highest circulation regarding framing analysis of government public policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyu and Takikawa (Lyu & Takikawa, 2022) investigated how media framing influences the emergence of anti-Chinese sentiment through a case study of Japanese people's reactions to online news during the Covid-19 pandemic. Several digital footprints were collected on a large scale, and the news was categorized by theme to determine the degree of Japanese anti-China sentiment towards China. The findings show that the news media portrays a negative image of China, and the coverage related to political and international relations issues increases as the prevalence of Covid-19 in Japan increases. Empirical evidence suggests that the framing used by the media can provide a discursive context that escalates the Covid-19 issue into a broader expression of anti-Chinese sentiment for the public.

Furthermore, Mukherjee et al. (Mukherjee, Maity, & Chatterjee, 2021) demonstrated that media framing in reporting during the Covid-19 pandemic affects society's perspective and attitude about Covid-19 and various themes mentioned in the media during the pandemic through an online poll. Along with news regarding the illness's spread, the press also conveys experiences that help specific ideas stick in people's minds. This finding demonstrates a link between the community's perspective and mental health and the amplified media framing. Several data from social media in China, specifically Weibo in the range of December 2019 to April 2020, were collected and grouped into 12 categories to determine the extent of the social representation of Covid-19 from clinical and epidemiological perspectives among users. The findings show the most substantial relationship between news framing and the views of users, the public, government officials, and organizations' representatives as reported by Chen et al. (Chen et al., 2022).



## Methods

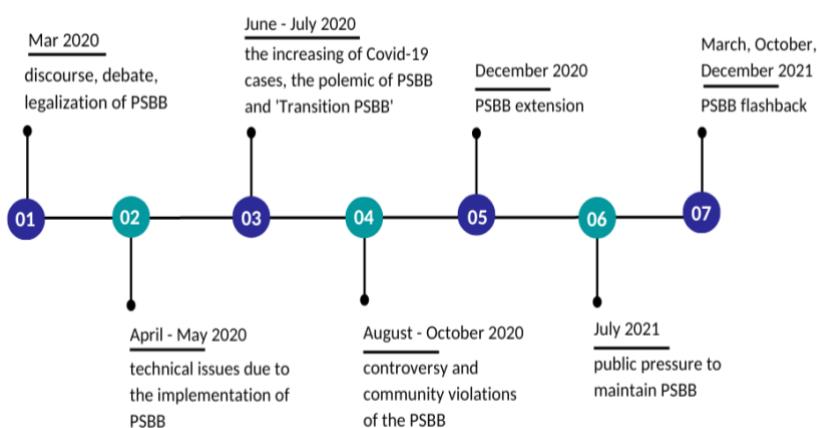
### *Design*

This study employed a quantitative approach to evaluate data using non-arbitrary procedures. Entman's framing analysis properties were adopted to analyze the gathered data, as suggested by previous researchers (Anggraeni, 2018; Leliana, Herry, Suratriadi, & Enrieco, 2018; Nisbet, Hart, Myers, & Ellithorpe, 2013). The data were classified using interpretation-focused coding with critical discourse principles to analyze all relevant data on Large-Scale Social Restrictions reports, as suggested by previous researchers (Jamil & Doktoralina, 2016; Luo, 2019).

### *Data Selection*

Two hundred thirty-seven news stories under the theme of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) from March 2020 to December 2021 were analyzed from Kompas.com, an online national newspaper. This period was chosen since the PSBB draft, which entailed discussion and debate, began in March 2020, and the regulation was formally adopted on March 31, 2020. The PSBB was implemented at the central and regional levels from April 2020 to August 2020. The PSBB policy was then scrutinized, evaluated, and technically changed with a new, stricter approach named "Tightening PSBB" in September 2020 after completing a transitional period. Thus, the new strategy continued until March 2021 when a promising sign of a successful conclusion was discovered. The PSBB policy course for the entire year was outlined in the report from Kompas.com published in March, October, and December 2021, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Kompas.com's PSBB Timeline**



Although the selected period for data collection was for a year, news from the beginning of 2021 still needed to be examined. This condition was due to its lack of relation to the PSBB topic. The second Covid-19 wave struck Indonesia once more, along with increased cases at the beginning of 2021. As a result, the PPKM (Implementation of Community Policy Restrictions) took center stage in the media due to local events that occurred throughout the New Year's, Christmas, and Eid al-Fitr holidays. As a result, the first half of 2021 was not included in the written materials for this study's analysis.

## ***Variables***

### **News Source.**

Frames are how news sources frame issues, enabling journalists, writers, editors, and news organizations' internal news-generating process. The frame depicts the primary character in a news story's logic, philosophy, and genre (Moernaut, Mast, & Temmerman, 2019). This study examines the portion of news dealing with Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) policy on Kompas.com that comes from the Indonesian Government (Government) and various non-governmental organizations (NGO), Experts, and the Community. By examining the frequency of statements cited by Kompas.com, the most important news sources are found, and their sources are codified.

### **News Tone.**

The problems, tones, and framing that news media use when a crisis occurs are crucial in shaping public opinion and actions (Bassyouny, Abdelfattah, & Tao, 2022; Löffler, Norden, & Rieber, 2021). Moreover, some governmental, political, economic, and financial concerns are impacted by the tone of news coverage. Previous studies demonstrated that news tone impacted stock and CDS traders' views (Liebmann, Orlov, & Neumann, 2016), financial reputation (Barakat, Ashby, Fenn, & Bryce, 2019), voter preferences and expectations about political alliances (Eberl & Plescia, 2018). It also affected emotions retrieved from macroeconomic news to explain and anticipate future behavior (Consoli, Pezzoli, & Tosetti, 2021).

This study applied the following five-point Likert scale values as used by Nijkraake, Gosselt, and Gutteling to evaluate tones from severely negative to very positive: -2, -1, 0, +1, and +2. News articles were manually read and classified to figure out the tones of each article as positive, neutral, or negative, as done by some previous researchers (Cameron Wild et al., 2019; Li et al., 2021; Lucey & Ren, 2021; Nijkraake, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2015).

### ***Robert Entman's Framing Analysis***

The media's framing involves constructing reality by making a central message. Framing analysis is used to examine how the media interprets and frames events. It can be used in communication to dissect ways or ideologies, to examine the selection and prominence of issues, to link facts in the news to make it more meaningful, engaging, meaningful, or easier to remember and to lead audience interpretation according to the media's perspective. Robert Entman's functional framing properties analyze news text by promoting problems' definitions, causes of diagnosis, moral judgment, and treatment recommendations (Clinton, 2022; Launa, 2020; Leliana et al., 2018).

The 'Define Problems' stage focuses on how journalists interpret events when a problem arises. Diagnosing causes is a stage of analysis used to determine an event's primary actor or cause. Making moral judgments is a framing element used to justify argumentation on a defined problem presented by the media. At the Treatment recommendation stage, the media selects a solution to the problem. The solution is determined by how the event is perceived. Besides, what or who becomes the cause of the issue (Jaya & Syam, 2019).

### ***Population: Corpus of News***

This research focuses on news articles that reported the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) policy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, which began in March 2020 and ended in December 2021. The data collection process is done manually following time-based reporting on Kompas.com. The object of analysis in this study is 236 news stories as reported on Kompas.com under the keyword: "*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB) Covid 2019*".

### ***Cross Tabulation***

The frequency distribution of the variables was cross-tabulated in a matrix format. The simple relationship between two existing variables is investigated using this cross-tabulation technique, which also aids in identifying their interactions and generates a wealth of information (Vágó, 2011).

This study used cross-tabulation as an additional analysis to show a simple relationship between the variables (Adiprasetyo & Larasati, 2021). The relationship between these factors will be considered in the analysis and discussion of the findings. This study presents three cross-tabulations: between the number of news and the moral judgment provided by the media, between news sources and the tone that often appears, and between news sources and the selected issues.

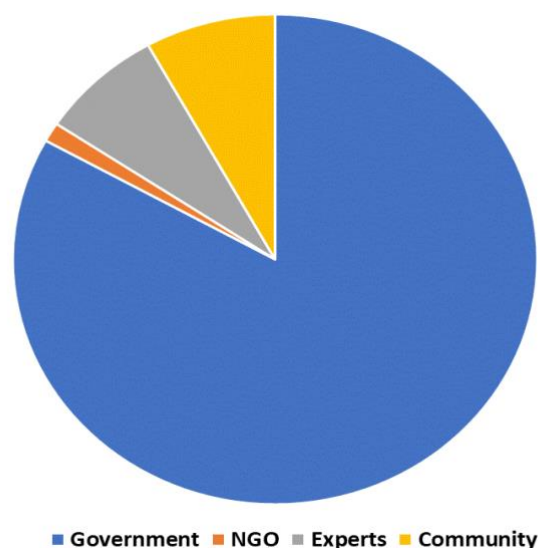
### ***ANOVA and Regression Analysis***

This study employed an ANOVA analysis to assess the degree of public confidence in the news reports provided by Kompas.com. News sources from the Government, NGOs, experts and the community serve as the data category values for the variables utilized as input parameters in this research. The regression analysis was performed to determine the significance of the analyzed news sources that affect the level of trust in Kompas.com news.

## **Results**

### ***News Sources***

According to data collected on the PSBB policy from March 2020 to December 2021, the government is the primary news source. There were 196 (83.05%) news sources from the government among the 237 news texts examined, along with 3 (1.27%) news sources from NGOs, 18 (7.62%) news sources from specialists, and 19 (8.05%) news sources from communities as depicted in Fig 2. A wide range of issues exposing the PSBB policy from technological and procedural standpoints led to the government's control over news sources. The issues identified by journalists from 236 news reports concerned the application of PSBB, its rules, the application of PSBB in specific regions, the civil emergency policy, social aid, and transportation issues. Kompas.com brought PSBB schema to shape the government as controller, manager, and policy executor. The analysis of news, which recognizes the government as the main provider of information regarding Covid-19, aligns with the outcomes of prior research (Heychael & Rizky, 2020) in which the political structure of the government mandates the media's functioning and its impact on the progress and advancement of media within a nation.

**Figure 2. News Sources on Kompas.com's Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy**

Several NGOs, experts, and the community support government plans, while others doubt the government's ability to implement PSBB policies effectively. NGOs serve as news sources to frame PSBB discussions on human rights violations, scepticism about the PSBB's ability to stop the spread of Covid-19, and procedural issues at Soekarno-Hatta Airport during PSBB implementation. Experts from various fields, such as law studies, journalists, researchers, academics, public health experts, epidemiologists, and doctors, were news sources to frame PSBB implementation from the perspective of legal force and social impacts. Some call on the government to adopt PSBB, while others question its efficacy.

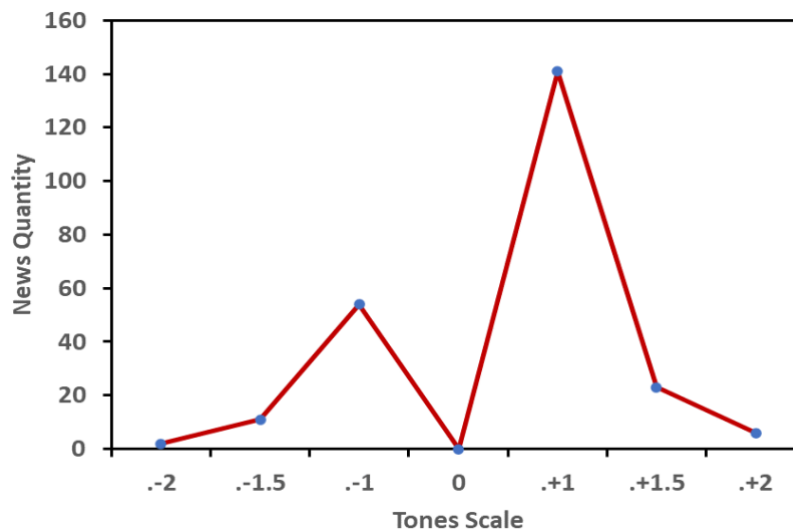
### ***Tones Used by News Sources as Responses to Large-Scale Sosial Restriction Policy***

Figure 3 depicts the tone scale, mainly used for a particular amount of news. The news on Kompas.com often brought positive tones. In defining the Large-Scale Sosial Restriction (PSBB) issue, the news presented by Kompas.com embraced several facts and governmental rules. Most of the news was neutral, descriptive, and informative, ensuring the readers become positive after reading the text. According to the tone rating scale from the most negative to the most positive (from -2 to 2), there were 6 news items with very positive tones (+2), 23 news had positive tones (+1.5), and the majority, 140 news, had somewhat neutral and moderately positive tone (+1). However, non-governmental news sources, including NGOs, experts, and the community, tended to use a negative tone. There were 54 news items with a moderately negative tone (-1), 11 news items with a negative tone (-1.5), and only 2 news items with a very negative tone (-2).

Figure 4 demonstrates a trend of tones toward the four categories of news source; government, NGO, experts, and community, and the amount of news on each source from the cross-tabulation. The typical news coverage was quite positive value (+1) when the government became the news source on 120 news stories (50.84%), and some positive tones (+1.5) with 17 news (7.20%). However, Figure 4.3 also shows that the government also employs highly negative tones (-2) on 3 news stories (1.27%), negative tone (-1.5) on 7 news stories (2.96%), and entirely negative tones (-1) on 39 news stories (16.52%). The PSBB was implemented in several ways, according to April 2020 reports. When the government threatens to withdraw business licenses or shut down enterprises due to violations of the PSBB, negative tones (-1.5) are utilized. Concerns and polemics from internal parties within

the government regarding the implementation of PSBB, which all levels of society cannot fully implement, were also reported using negative tones. When the government imposed steep fines and jail sentences on communities that disobeyed PSBB laws, a particularly negative tone (-2) is utilized.

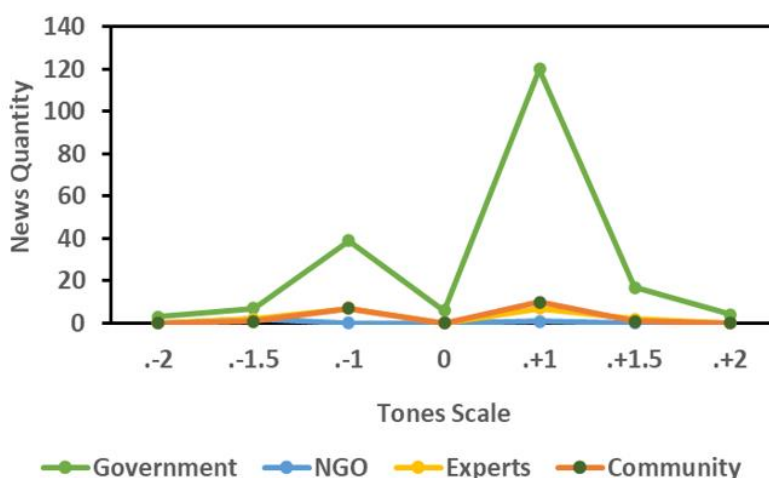
**Figure 3. Most Dominant Tone on Kompas.com’s News**



Kompas.com also used neutral tones (0) to report regulations in terms of information and technical aspects. There were 6 news stories using neutral tones that contributed insignificantly to the overall pattern. The media's use of a neutral tone when highlighting government management issues was similar to a study conducted by Valentini and Rometi in the Italian press (Valentini & Rometi, 2011).

Two of the three news stories from NGOs in April 2020 used negative tones (-1) to criticize the government for the PSBB's inadequacy in response to the Covid-19 outbreak and its failure to provide enough community outreach. People assisted one another and supported the needs of their neighbours. However, one piece of news informed PSBB and its technicalities with a positive tone (+1).

**Figure 4. Tones of Kompas.com’s news on PSBB Policy Towards News Source**



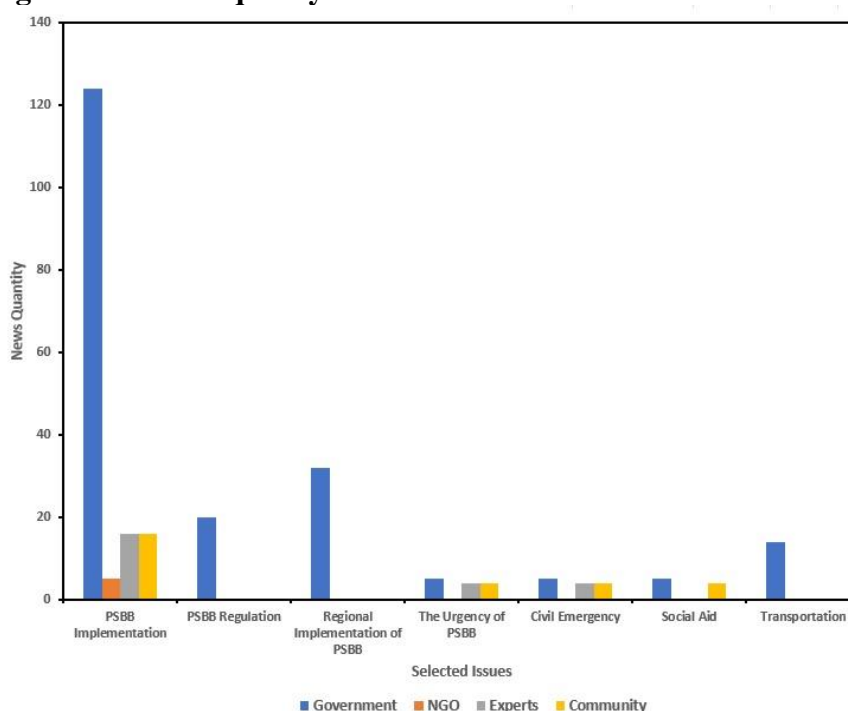
### Framing Analysis

#### Problem Definition.

In this study, all 236 news articles were collected under the theme of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), with the following selected issues; PSBB Implementation, PSBB Regulation, The Urgency of PSBB, Civil Emergency, Social Aid, and Transportation. Figure 5 indicates the regularity of news sources on specific issues.

According to Figure 5, the majority of the selected issues are dominated by the government, which is also the primary source in 124 stories about PSBB implementation, 20 stories about PSBB regulation, 32 stories about regional PSBB implementation, and 2 stories about the urgency of PSBB, civil emergency, social assistance, and transportation. Only 3 reports on the PSBB Implementation include the contribution from NGOs. Experts contribute to 16 reports on PSBB Implementation and one on The Urgency of PSBB and Civil Emergency. The community reacts to 16 news on PSBB Implementation, and only appears once in the following news; The Urgency of PSBB, Civil Emergency, and Social Aid.

**Figure 5. The Frequency of News Sources towards Selected Issues**



#### Diagnose Cause.

Three categories—viruses, governments, and communities—are used to describe the causes of the issues emphasized in the news. The coronavirus was the primary factor in 29 news reports, the government was the primary factor in 97 news stories, and the community was the primary factor in 110 news stories (Table 4.1). PSBB policies firmly focused on the community. Therefore, most of the causes of the issues were the community. Polemics colored all news stories from March 2020 to December 2021 regarding the implementation of the PSBB by the government to the community, community violations, and technical obstacles encountered in the community regarding the implementation of PSBB rules.

**Table 1. Main Cause of News Stories**

Diagnose Cause	Numbers
Coronavirus	29
Government	98
Community	110
Total	237

### **Moral Judgement.**

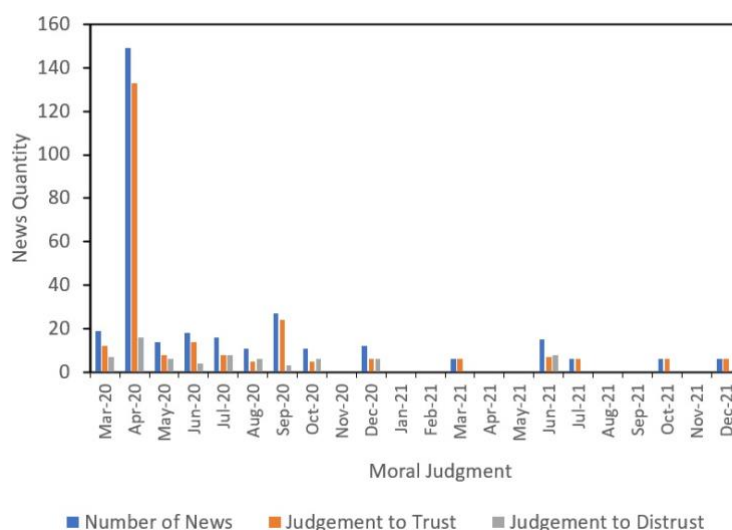
Kompas.com constructs a more favorable impression of government policy in most PSBB news stories. The frequency of encouraging trust in the government was more in quantity than delivering distrust. The data is analyzed using the principles of critical discourse analysis to understand the text as media framing to trust or distrust the government, as suggested by previous researchers (Jamil & Doktoralina, 2016; Loisa, Susanto, Junaidi, & Loekman, 2019). Table 4.2 indicates how supporting lines become the evidence to interpret trust and distrust of a particular news title and news source. Supporting lines and other lines in the text were analyzed thoroughly to the language function and how meaning is created in a particular social context.

As the government's response to the enormous expansion of the covid epidemic that had invaded Indonesia since January 2020, PSBB was launched in March 2020. According to the Jakarta Health Office, there were about 500 verified cases and nearly 1200 suspects in Jakarta by March 2020 (KumparanSains, April 22, 2020). Nineteen news articles discussed the government's intention to introduce PSBB in March 2020. Afterward, April 2020 was the most significant news volume (149 stories) due to President Jokowi's approval of the PSBB policy on March 31, 2020. During April 2020, tensions around the implementation, application, and technical rules of PSBB dominated kompas.com's news.

Because they were out of the scope of the PSBB, news data from November 2020, January–February 2021, April–May 2021, August–Sept 2021, and November 2021 were not used as the population in this study. In addition to PSBB, the PPKM policy (Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities) dominated Kompas.com's news coverage throughout the months, as mentioned above. However, PPKM is more restricted to the Java-Bali region's borders alone and excludes the data examined in this study. From June 2021 to December 2021, kompas.com compared PPKM implementation to PSBB and gave a flashback of PSBB implementation.

Figure 6 depicts the relationship between trust and distrust judgment of the government based on the quantity of news each month. It demonstrates how "judgment to trust" takes the lead in every monthly report. However, "judgment to mistrust" always appears insignificant in every monthly report. As found from the selected data, the media leads the public to trust the government in almost all news issues, including the regulation of PSBB, its regional implementation, its urgency, civic emergencies, social aid, and transportation. There were also insignificant numbers of news stories leading to distrust judgment from NGOs, experts, and the government itself.

**Figure 6. Moral Judgement Towards News Quantity**



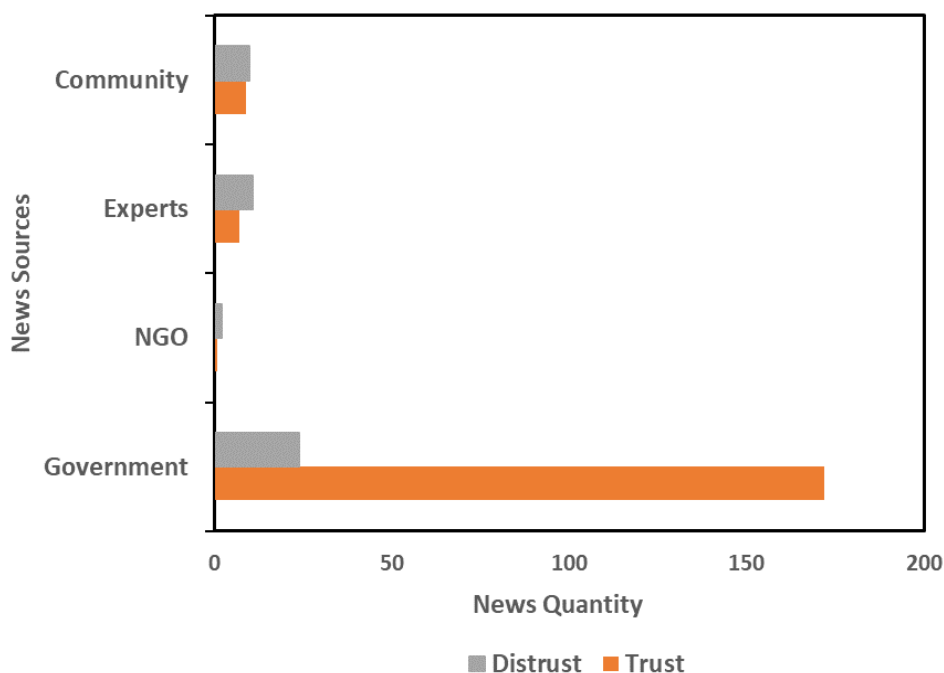
**Table 2. Example of Trust and Distrust Interpretation**

News Title (Translated)	Source	Moral Judgement by Media	
		Supporting Lines (translated)	Meaning
Have the Right to Limit People Entering and Exiting an Area (April 1, 2020)	Government	The official <u>implementation</u> of the PSBB (will be done) <u>with</u> other <u>considerations</u> such as; epidemiological, threat magnitude, and effectiveness, ....	PSBB is being treated fairly by the government, and the regulation has been carefully thought out and is not arbitrary. It leads to trust in the government.
Are Large-Scale Social Restrictions to Prevent Corona Outbreak, Effective? (April 3, 2020)	Expert	An expert in Constitutional Law, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, said that <u>PSBB</u> has the potential to <u>fail</u> because there are things that the regional <u>government cannot operate</u> in the process.	The government needs to be more capable of implementing the PSBB. It leads to not trusting the government.

Figure 7 shows the frequency of trust and distrust judgment of the government based on news sources. As the controller, manager, and policy executor, the government is the primary source of news (87.75%) that leads to the judgment of trust. However, only a minor fraction (12.24%) gives the impression of ‘judgment to distrust.’ Despite having a relatively low frequency, news sources from NGOs highlight more significant judgments of distrust (66.6%) toward government policy than judgments of trust (33.3%). News from experts and the community appear to follow a similar pattern. Instead of leading to a ‘judgment to trust the government, 18 news sources from experts lead to the opposite conclusion; judgment to trust is 38.88%, and judgment to distrust is 61.11%. It is consistent with the 19 news sources from the community, which reflect a ‘judgment to distrust’ (52.63%) rather than a ‘judgment to trust’ (47.36%).



**Figure 7. Frequency of Judgement to Trust and Judgement to Distrust Towards News Sources**



**Treatment Recommendation.**

The treatment recommendation stage reflects how the media selects a solution to a problem. The news issues under the Large-Scale Social Restrictions theme include the regulation of PSBB, its regional implementation, its urgency, civic emergencies, social aid, and transportation. The media typically establishes a mindset of trust or skepticism toward the government when framing treatment and recommendations. In order to contextualize the treatment and recommendations frame, in this study, the categories of ‘judgment to trust’ and ‘judgment to distrust’ are still employed in the data coding procedure. The pattern of trust and distrust based on news sources is similar to Figure 7.

**Figure 8. Frequency of Trust and Distrust on Treatment Framing Towards Selected Issues**

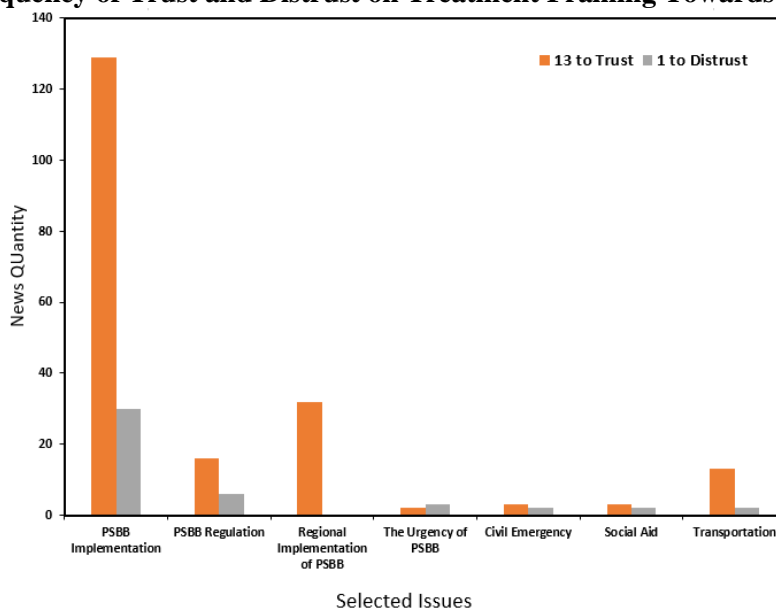


Figure 8 demonstrates the frequency of trust and distrust of the government on some selected issues. When the issues are about PSBB implementation, PSBB regulation, Regional Implementation of PSBB, Civil Emergency, and Transportation, a tendency to trust the government as the selected solution is higher. There is a lower tendency to trust the government when discussing the urgency of PSBB. Interestingly, when the government raised the issue of PSBB Implementation, it had a higher judgment to trust, as shown in Figure 7. However, there is a greater tendency to judgment to distrust The Urgency of the PSBB issue, which the government, experts, and the community raise. Generally, reports on Kompas.com were dominated by the government as news sources with a higher judgment of trust than the judgment of distrust.

### ***ANOVA and Regression Output***

ANOVA results based on the group factors examined in this study are summarised in Table 3. Governments, NGOs, specialists, and communities with values make up the variable groupings. The findings of the frequent Kompas.com news stories that demonstrate the trust in treatment framing toward PSBB concerns are listed in Table 3, along with the quantity, average, and variance from the ANOVA analysis. According to the data, news from government sources is more significant than other sources. The news source from the government significantly raises the trust value, as seen in table 3. This ANOVA statistics summary agrees with the trust finding in Figure 8.

**Table 3. ANOVA summary**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Variance</b>
Government	8	392	49	5173.714286
NGO	8	6	0.75	1.928571429
Experts	8	36	4.5	60
Community	8	38	4.75	54.78571429

**Table 4. ANOVA Output**

<b>Source of Variation</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>F crit</b>
Between Groups	12593	3	4197.6667	3.1737	0.0395	2.9466
Within Groups	37033	28	1322.6071			
Total	49626	31				

The results of the ANOVA are shown in table 4, where the square sum of the within-group ANOVA is 37033, and the square sum of the inter-group ANOVA is 12593. With degrees of freedom of 3 and 28, these two metrics describe the correlation of variation in the trust framing population.

**Table 5. Regression Summary Output**

Parameters	Coefficients	Std. Error	t Stat	p-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	0.0799	0.7674	0.1042	0.9235	-2.3623866	2.522295
Government	0.9792	0.0418	23.4735	0.0001	0.846501	1.112031
NGO	-1.9169	5.5153	-0.3476	0.7511	-19.469229	15.6352
Experts	1.8312	1.3565	1.3500	0.2698	-2.485602	6.148145
Community	-1.1298	0.8077	-1.3989	0.2562	-3.7002747	1.440480
R <sup>2</sup>	0.9997					
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.9995					

According to table 5's findings, there is a strong correlation between the variables and the response. The coefficient of determination value of 0.9997 confirms this phenomenon. The adjusted R-value of 0.9995 and the coefficient of determination value of 0.9997 are in good agreement. According to statistics from this study, news framing by Kompas.com could increase public trust in each topic discussed by 99%, with a 95% confidence level. The accuracy and precaution with which the Kompas.com staff frames news for the general public accounts for the high value of the coefficient of determination. This observation is consistent with the coefficient of determination findings from earlier studies (Jegan, 2020).

The ANOVA output in this investigation fits well with the hypothesis that Kompas.com reporting comes from the Government, NGOs, experts, and the community that Kompas.com reporting can influence public trust in the various types of news issues conveyed. The significance level of F 3.1737 serves as proof of this. By verifying the critical F value of 2.9466, the F value of 3.1737 has met the acceptance criteria requirements for the significance level of a few variables in the parameters examined. The outcome of the ANOVA has a p-value of 0.0395, which is less than alpha 0.05. Thus, Ho was rejected by the statistical analysis of this study. The crucial F value for this parameter is 2.9466, which is less than the F value of 3.1737. With a 95% confidence level, this statistical analysis is reliable enough to support the current study's hypothesis (El Tecele et al., 2022; Neumann, 2009).

Table 5 shows the regression analysis for each parameter variable for news sources from Kompas.com. The significant values for the p-values of the sources for the degree of public trust coming from the Government, NGOs, experts, and the community, respectively, are 0.0001693, 0.7511156, 0.2698298, and 0.2562892.

This phenomenon demonstrates the statistically significant effect that government-affiliated news sources have on Kompas.com's framing of the news it conveys to the public audience. Consequently, the findings of this statistical analysis agree with the empirical data, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis and accept the present research hypothesis (Lovell, 2020). However, there is a discrepancy based on news sources from NGOs, specialists, and the general public, where the p-value is higher than alpha 0.05 (Hoffman, 2019). As a result, this phenomenon could be explained by the fact that news sources from NGOs, specialists, and the community cannot significantly have a trusted effect on how Kompas.com frames the news for the public. The statistical findings are consistent with the factual analysis depicted in Figure 7.

## Discussion

Indonesia's Minister of Health Regulation, Number 9, 2020 mentions that PSBB, or Large Scale Social Restrictions, is a residential activities restriction in a suspected COVID-19 region (RI, 2020). The restriction is set up to stop any potential outbreaks. At the beginning of PSBB Implementation, several debates, objections, and bewilderment among Indonesians covered the media. The government established the PSBB policy, so for any reports on PSBB policies, the government is the one 'holding the ball.' Information is dominated and under government control. The outcomes of earlier studies (Heychael & Rizky, 2020; Loisa et al., 2019) follow the news analysis that identifies the government as the primary news source on COVID-19.

Kompas.com shifted negative perceptions towards PSBB by employing more positive tones and a greater tendency to trust the government. A survey by the Indonesian Political Indicator in September 2020 was recognised to boost public trust in Jokowi's leadership (Farisa, 2020). The theme of PSBB is the Government theme, where the government is the controller, manager, and policy executor, as well as the primary source of news. Kompas.com shapes the government as a professional craft that manages the Covid-19 crisis by setting up scenarios, contingency planning, mobilising response capacity, making difficult decisions, coordinating efforts of different agencies and jurisdictions, shifting response to recovery, and ensuring that crisis experiences have moral values (Boin et al., 2021).

Kompas.com shifted negative perceptions towards PSBB by employing more positive tones and a greater tendency to trust the government. It is noted that the Indonesian government's tendency to present positive narratives while promoting the Covid-19 policy is a narrative designed to promote tranquility (Alnizar & Manshur, 2022). A survey by the Indonesian Political Indicator in September 2020 was recognized to boost public trust in Jokowi's leadership. The theme of PSBB is the Government theme, where the government is the controller, manager, and policy executor, as well as the primary source of news.

Compared to the numerous other studies on framing analysis, this study adds a coding technique for meaning keywords based on the principles of critical discourse analysis. It makes significant coding volumes of data quicker while maintaining accuracy in its calculations. (Launa, 2020; Leliana et al., 2018). This study employed meaningful keywords to support Entman's framing properties instead of applying words frequency (Rahmadan & Setiawati, 2021), structural grouping (Nurindra, 2021) and interpreting general discourse (Jamil & Doktoralina, 2016) or just applying Entman's properties (Alrizki & Aslinda, 2022; Wibhisono, 2020).

Kompas.com, as an Indonesian mainstream online media of the young generation's first choice, has to defend, support, and carry out the government's interests (Guo, Yu, & Faff, 2021; Yu & Chi, 2021) in a preferable way. According to an online study by Edelman performed between October 19 and November 2019, among other nations like Thailand, Singapore, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, and China, Indonesia has the highest levels of public trust in its government. Compared to the other four nations—Thailand, India, China, and the United States—Indonesia likewise has a high level of media trust (Edelman.com, 2020). This condition indicates that Indonesia owned significant trust in both the government and the media prior to the PSBB implementation. Deciding to be a party that upholds public trust in the Government, Kompas.com disseminated positive news and framed moral judgment and treatment to support the government. Kompas.com's coverage is not about

influencing public judgment but the government but maintaining public trust in a preferable way as Indonesia's first online.

## Conclusion

Briefly noted as a historical paradigm since Sukarno's presidency, Indonesian media tend to promote government projects. Because public trust in government and media was already there, Kompas.com coverage provided more positive news to frame Large-Scale Social Restrictions. To conclude, this study finds the following points;

- 1) The government is the primary news source, with 196 news stories (83.05%) out of 236 collected news articles in this study. Since PSBB is a governmental product, the government appears to dominate and control news coverage about PSBB.
- 2) PSBB implementation based on Kompas.com's coverage generally brought positive tones. The typical news coverage was quite positive (+1) on 120 news stories (50.84%) related to the technical and procedural regulation of PSBB. However, some insignificant news utilized negative tones (-1.5) to report threats of business licenses withdrawing or shutting down enterprises and negative tones (-2) to inform steep fines and jail sentences due to violations of the PSBB by the community.
- 3) All 236 news stories were gathered under the heading of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), with the following topics: PSBB Implementation, PSBB Regulation, Regional PSBB Implementation, The Urgency of PSBB, Civil Emergency, Social Aid, and Transportation. As the controller, manager, and implementer of policy, the government is the primary source of news (87.75%) that influences 'judgment of trust'. A tendency to trust the government as a news source is stronger when the topics are related to PSBB implementation, PSBB regulation, Regional Implementation of PSBB, Civil Emergency, and Transportation. However, there is a lower tendency to trust the government when experts and the community discuss the urgency of PSBB as the news source.
- 4) The p-value for the ANOVA result is 0.0395, below alpha 0.05. With a significance F value of 3.1737 over the critical F value of 2.9466, thus the present study supports the present study hypothesis and rejects the null hypothesis. Kompas.com's framing reporting has a substantial effect of a confidence level of 99%, as validated by the coefficient of determination 0.9997.

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**Contact email:** [dianaanggraeni@univpancasila.ac.id](mailto:dianaanggraeni@univpancasila.ac.id)

***Media Exposure and Health Behaviors of Menopausal Woman  
in Ranong Province, Thailand***

A-rich Muksong, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Srirath Pakdeeronachit, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Apirapee Tancharoenwong, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

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**Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between media exposure and health behaviors among menopausal women in Ranong Province, south of Thailand. The primary objectives of the research involve analyzing the association between media exposure and health behavior among 375 menopausal female patients who sought medical assistance at Ranong Hospital, Thailand in 2022. The results indicate significant positive correlations ( $p < 0.01$ ) between education, income, knowledge about menopause, and attitude toward health. Specifically, the patients' level of education and knowledge about menopause displayed a low correlation ( $r = .228$  and  $r = .222$ , respectively), while income and health attitude exhibited a moderate correlation ( $r = .583$  and  $r = .454$ , respectively). Conversely, marital status, recognition of barriers to disease control, and online media behavior demonstrated negative correlations with health behavior. Moreover, recognizing the risk and severity of diseases, as well as understanding the benefits of disease control, exhibited no correlation with health behaviors. Consequently, the research suggests that despite menopausal women dedicating a significant amount of time to consuming health-related media, this exposure does not necessarily translate into improved health behavior. Therefore, there is a need for increased dissemination of knowledge to ensure that menopausal women can effectively care for their health. Additionally, enhancing health media literacy skills is crucial to enable menopausal women to discern accurate information from misinformation.

Keywords: Health Behavior, Health Media Exposure, Thailand

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## Introduction

At present, there is a discernible rise in the population of menopausal women. Statistical data reveals a consistent increase in this demographic over time. In 2000, the percentage stood at 7.49%, escalating to 10.53% in 2010, and further rising to 12.19% by 2020. The Office of Reproductive Health, Thailand (2020) reports that the average life expectancy of Thai women is 75 years. This implies that menopausal women might spend approximately 25 years, or one-third of their lifespan, navigating through the menopausal phase.

When entering menopausal period, a woman's body stops ovulation and experiences a reduction in the production of female hormones (such as estrogen and progesterone). This decrease affects the functionality of various bodily systems in menopausal women. Consequently, the body undergoes a state of decline, leading to the onset of health issues. Individuals may begin to suffer from several chronic diseases (Thai Health Foundation, 2021). Additionally, the access of Thai people to the healthcare system was not comprehensive, resulting in menopausal women not experiencing a high quality of life before reaching old age.

Interestingly, an increasing number of women are seeking support through social media as they go through menopause (PatientMetRx, 2023). This raises the question: Does the use of media by menopausal women influence their health behavior?

Therefore, the objective of this research is to study the media exposure and health behavior of menopausal women as well as investigate the relationship between health behaviors and media exposure among menopausal women in Ranong, Thailand.

## Review of Literature

Health communication refers to the operation of two-way communication between the message receiver and the sender, which opens opportunities for the public to access health information easily and widely (Gochman, 1988). It involves the collaborative organization of knowledge and the exchange of learning within communities. It encompasses mutual communication that believes in people being both message senders and receivers, ready to accept others' opinions and willingly exchange their knowledge and experiences with others. This aligns with Article 47(9) of the draft National Health Act of 2007, which states that knowledge and health information are fundamental factors of the national health system. It mandates the creation and dissemination of health knowledge to enable the public to access accurate information easily (Thailand Health Act, B.E. 2020).

"Health communication" is a concept that blends "communication" and "health." Therefore, health communication refers to the exchange of communication that believes in people being both message senders and receivers, ready to accept others' opinions and willing to exchange their knowledge and experiences with others (Pajaree Thanasonburi, 2008). The aim of health communication is to transform the social environment to promote healthy behaviors, create awareness, change attitudes, and motivate the application of knowledge into practice (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2010). In this process, both dissemination and communication are crucial. Health communication applies the two-way communication process to health communication because it is perceived as more effective and sustainable.

The goal of health communication is to enable self-reliance and mutual support among the population to the fullest extent possible. A crucial focal point is the utmost importance of credibility and accuracy of health content, as well as the channels for communicating and accessing health information. Given that health is a critical matter, erroneous information may lead to loss of life. Therefore, these channels must be easily accessible and widely available to the public. According to Pravat Vasi (2008) the concept of information systems and health communication is what makes individuals and different parts of society universally informed and able to communicate effectively. This is especially vital for the healthcare system since communication is a fundamental component in its development. A robust healthcare system starts with a solid foundation, and that foundation begins with self-reliance (Pravat Vasi, 2008).

Siriwan Wiboonchan (2002) conducted a study on the relationship between information-seeking behavior and self-care for menopausal women. The study found that the majority of older women held attitudes that were moderately suitable regarding their aging status. They had an understanding of how to conduct themselves upon entering this phase of life and exhibited a reasonably adequate level of self-care. Moreover, the study revealed that most older women displayed highly appropriate behaviors in self-care practices for their health.

Iriyaporn Udata and Arichai Arrakudom (2017) conducted a study on the online health communication strategies through the Facebook media of Phayathai Hospital. The study found that the online health communication strategies through Phayathai Hospital's Facebook content aimed to provide knowledge to everyone, both the targeted and non-targeted groups. The scope of presenting online health communication strategies aimed to raise awareness of the importance of health communication, which was previously perceived as distant. When Thailand faced epidemic situations or emergencies, people experienced distress when aiding others in urgent situations and various other incidents. Consequently, the targeted groups were unable to perform correctly by themselves. However, basic medical knowledge and understanding of health through online communication via Facebook reduced panic and allowed for a more composed approach to self-care or aiding others promptly.

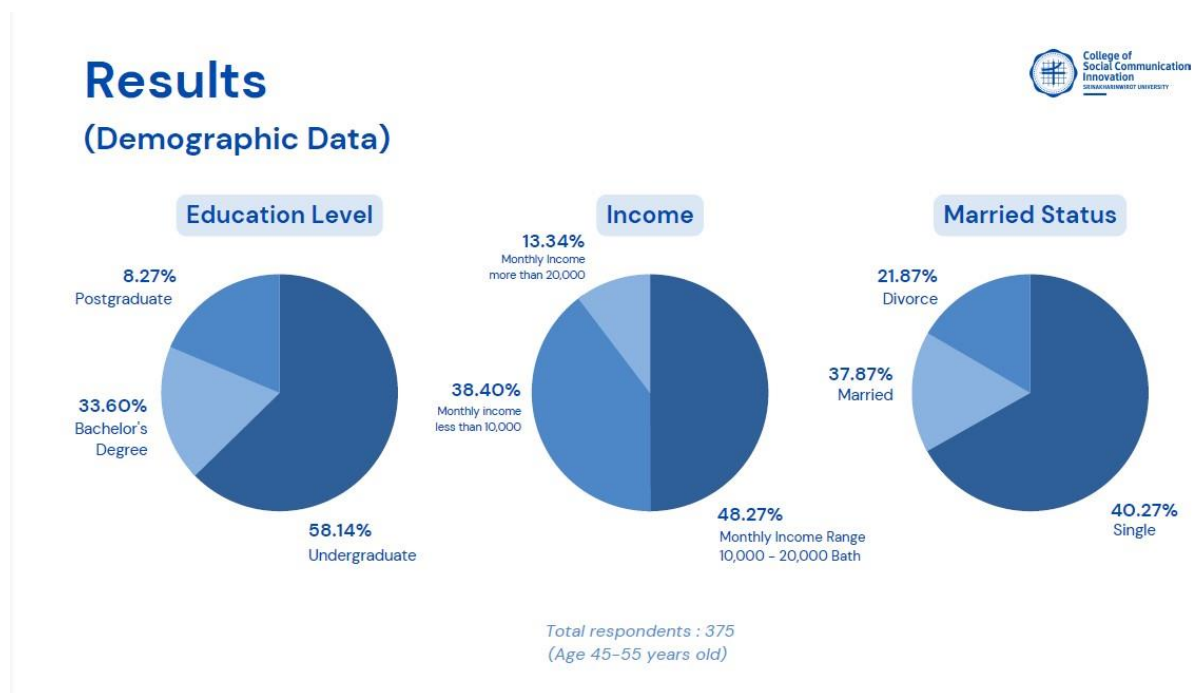
## **Methodology**

Samples were selected by purposive and random sampling methods from the menopausal population in Ranong Province, Thailand. The sample size was 375 menopausal females. The research tool was a questionnaire created by the researcher.

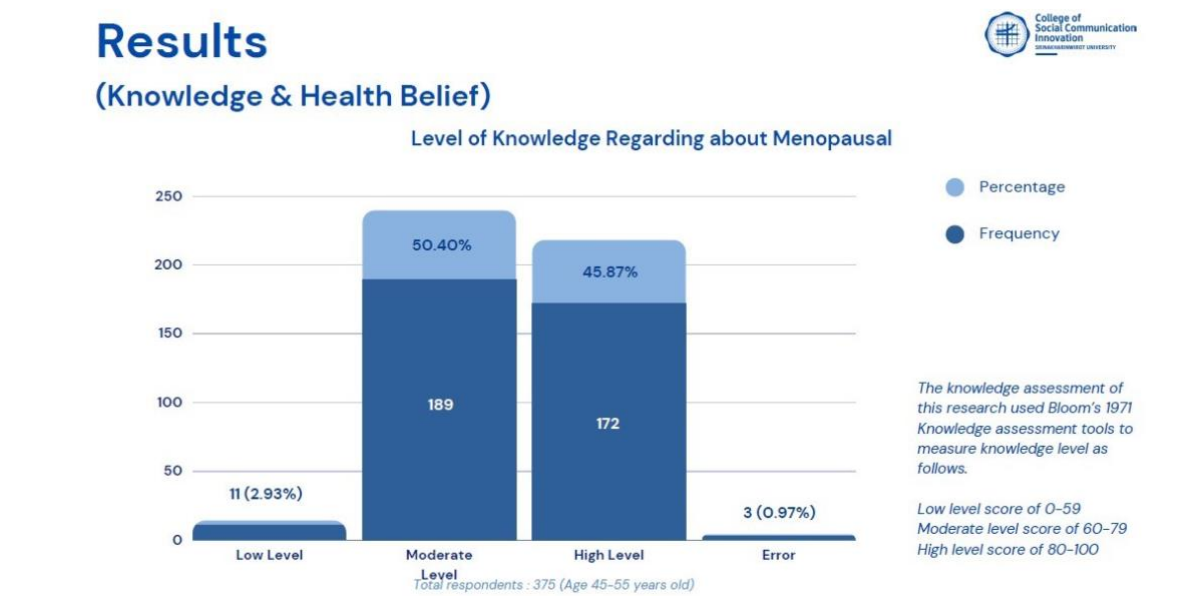
## ***Data Analysis***

Demographic data was described with descriptive Statistics such as frequency distribution and percentage. The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to analyze the relationship between media exposure and health behavior.

Results



Picture 1. Demographic data.



Picture 2. Relationship between knowledge & health belief.

The results show that the majority of the respondents 58.14 % hold a high school certificate, while 33.60 % hold a bachelor's degree, and 23.47 % hold a vocational certificate. In terms of their monthly incomes, 48.27 % have had a monthly income of 10,001 - 20,000 Baht, followed by 38.40 % who earn less than 10,000 Baht as shown in picture 1.

Picture 2 showed that knowledge and Health Belief among menopausal women was found to be at a low level of 2.93%, at a moderate level, 50.40%, at a high level, 45.87%.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D), Health Consciousness, Health Belief, Media Exposure, and Health Behavior of Menopausal Woman

Variable	WAI	S.D.	Level
Health Consciousness	3.08	0.56	Moderate
Perceived Susceptibility	4.39	0.57	High
Perceived Severity	4.27	0.61	High
Perceived Benefit	4.29	0.56	High
Perceived Barrier	3.27	0.22	Moderate
Online Media Exposer	3.77	0.77	High
Offline Media Exposer	2.62	0.57	Moderate
Menopausal Woman Health Behavior	2.98	0.47	Moderate

Table 2. Relation Between variable to health behavior of menopausal woman

Variable	Health Behavior of Menopausal Woman		
	R	Level of Relation	P-Value
Education level	0.28	Low	0.01
Married Status	0.271	Negative	0.01
Income	0.583	Moderate	0.01
Level of Knowledge about Menopausal Health Consciousness	0.222	Low	0.01
Health Consciousness	0.454	Moderate	0.01
Perception of Risk of Disease Incidence	0.288	No Relation	0.053
Perception to Severity of Disease	0.772	No Relation	0.15
Benefit of Diseases Controlled Perception	0.309	No relation	0.053
Disease Protection Obstacle	0.106	Negative	0.041
Online Media Use	0.329	Negative	0.01
Offline Media use	0.170	No relation	0.01

The education level and level of knowledge about menopausal health consciousness had a significant statically low relationship to the health behavior of menopausal women, ( $p=0.01$ ). Monthly income and health consciousness were significantly related to the health behavior of their women too, ( $p=0.01$ ). There was significant no relation between perception to risk of disease, perception to severity of disease, benefit of disease controlled perception, and offline media use to health behavior. Marriage status, disease protection obstacle, and online media use was significantly and negatively related to health behavior.

## Conclusion

Half of menopausal women was perceived during the menopausal period. Almost all of the menopausal sample used online media at a high level and used offline media at a moderate level. The education level, level of knowledge about menopausal health consciousness, and health consciousness were statistically related to the health behavior of menopausal woman.

The research suggests that despite menopausal women dedicating a significant amount of time to consuming health-related media, this exposure does not necessarily translate into improved health behavior. Therefore, there is a need for increased dissemination of

knowledge to ensure that menopausal women can effectively care for their health. Additionally, enhancing health media literacy skills is crucial to enable menopausal women to discern accurate information from misinformation.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## ***How Brandon Teena Is Portrayed in “Boys Don’t Cry”***

Miho Morii, Otsuma Women’s University, Japan

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### **Abstract**

A transgender person is a person whose sexual identity does not match the sexuality assigned at birth. Brandon Teena in *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), directed by Kimberly Peirce and starring Hilary Swank, is a transgender male who was born female but identifies as male. However, when this film was released in 1999, transgenderism was not yet widely recognized around the world. In the pamphlet of the film in Japanese, Peirce herself describes Brandon as a woman who pretended to be a man. Therefore, Brandon is a woman in the film, and the relationship with her girlfriend Lana seems to be portrayed as a lesbian relationship. However, actual Brandon identified himself as a man, and he loved Lana as a man. Furthermore, Brandon is raped by his friends John and Tom, but this scene in the film seems to be depicted with the perception of a woman being raped by men, rather than a man being raped by men. Therefore, while this film is very important in that it brought the perception of transgenderism to the public's attention, it is problematic in how it portrays transgenderism. By considering the relationship between Brandon and Lana and the meaning of the rape of Brandon by John and Tom, I will prove that *Boys Don't Cry* does not portray the true nature of Brandon Teena, despite the acclaim it received when it was released, and that the film itself misunderstands those who struggle with gender identity issues such as Brandon's.

Keywords: *Boys Don’t Cry*, Brandon Teena, Transgender, Lesbian, Rape

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## Introduction

A transgender person is a person whose gender identity does not match the sexuality assigned at birth. Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), directed by Kimberly Peirce and starring Hilary Swank, is a transgender man who was born female but identifies as a man. However, when this film was released in 1999, transgenderism was not yet widely recognized around the world. In her comments in the Japanese pamphlet of the film, Peirce herself describes Brandon Teena as "a typical homosexual type who leaves home in search of love and a place that accepts her" and as "a woman who pretended to be a man" (p. 16). Thus, in the film, Brandon Teena is persistently a woman, and therefore his relationship with his girlfriend Lana is portrayed as if it were a lesbian relationship. In reality, however, Brandon Teena identified himself as a man, and he loved Lana as a man. Furthermore, Brandon is raped by his friends John and Tom, but this scene in the film seems to be depicted with the perception of a woman being raped by men, rather than a man being raped by men. Therefore, while this film is very important in that it brought to the public's attention the existence of people like Brandon, who suffer from the discrepancy between sex at birth and self-identified sex, but it is problematic in how it depicts Brandon as a transgender person.

In this paper, by investigating why the relationship between Brandon and Lana is portrayed as a lesbian relationship rather than a relationship between a transgender man and a woman and by considering the implications of John and Tom's rape and murder of Brandon, I will prove that *Boys Don't Cry* does not portray the true nature of Brandon Teena despite the reaction and acclaim it received at the time of its release, and that the film itself misunderstands people like Brandon who are struggling with gender identity.

## Brandon Teena Portrayed as a Lesbian

In *Boys Don't Cry*, Brandon completely changes his clothes and hairstyle to male in his hometown of Lincoln, goes to Falls City, where no one knows him, and is accepted as a man by the local young people, Lana, Candice, John, and Tom. And at this point, Brandon's relationship with Lana is portrayed as a male-female relationship. In their first make love scene, Lana accepts Brandon as a man. After Brandon escapes from John and Tom, he hides in the barn of Candace's house, where Lana arrives, and Brandon and Lana make love again. Their make love at this point is not between a man and a woman but between two women who love each other.

Judith Halberstam (2007) also points out their relationship as follows:

... Peirce suddenly and catastrophically divests her character of his transgender gaze and converts it to a lesbian and therefore female gaze. In a strange scene, which follows the brutal rape of Brandon by John and Tom, Lana comes to Brandon as he lies sleeping in a shed outside Candace's house. In many ways the encounter that follows seems to extend the violence enacted upon Brandon's body by John and Tom, since Brandon now interacts with Lana *as if he were a woman*. Lana, contrary to her previous commitment to his masculinity, seems to see him as female, calling him 'pretty' and asking him what he was like as a girl. (p. 280)

In this scene, Brandon is a woman who has been raped and hurt, and Lana comforts her through make love. This is not a relationship between a man and a woman, but a lesbian relationship between two women. Thus, in the film, Brandon Teena appears to be portrayed

as a lesbian woman, not a trans man. Why is this? Here, I will explore the reasons by focusing on the newspaper article that inspired director Kimberly Peirce to make this film and Peirce's own lesbian identity and consider how these factors influence the way Brandon is portrayed.

Regarding the impetus for Kimberly Peirce to make *Boys Don't Cry*, Norran Vincent writes in a 1999 article in *The Village Voice*, "The film's director, Kimberly Peirce, first encountered the [Brandon Teena's] story, as broken by Donna Minkowitz, in The 'Village Voice' of April 19, 1994, and was inspired to turn it into a movie." Furthermore, Minkowitz admits in an article she wrote in 2018 that her 1994 article was the catalyst for Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* production. "*Boys Don't Cry* director Kimberly Peirce told me in a recent interview that my article had been the major inspiration for her film about Brandon's life and murder: 'Your article was on fire. I read it and I fell in love with Brandon. It made me love his vulnerability, his daring, his innocence, the way that he gave pleasure sexually. I was in love with this person who had shaped himself.'"

However, in her article, Minkowitz admits that she was wrong in her 1994 article that led Peirce to decide to make the film:

For years, I have wanted to apologize for what I now understand, with some shame, was the article's implicit anti-trans framing. Without spelling it out, the article cast Brandon as a lesbian who hated "her" body because of prior experiences of childhood sexual abuse and rape ...

At the time, I was extremely ignorant about trans people. Like many other cis queer people at the time, I didn't know ... that being trans had nothing to do with whether you were straight or gay ...

Even in New York City, someone like me, a journalist who considered myself very involved in queer radical politics, could be massively ignorant about what it meant to be transgender.

In this article, Minkowitz, herself a lesbian, admits that she did not know who transgender people were in 1994. In other words, this is proof by Minkowitz, a newspaper reporter, of the lack of transgender awareness at the time Brandon's case occurred. Thus, for Peirce, who was inspired by the article Minkowitz wrote about Brandon as a lesbian, the perception was that Brandon was a lesbian from the beginning.

However, Minkowitz also writes the following as told to her by Brandon's acquaintances. "One of Brandon's acquaintances had told me he'd said he was 'disgusted by lesbians,' and several friends said Brandon had said, 'I can't be with a woman as a woman. That's gross.'" Thus, despite the testimony that Brandon had denied being a lesbian to those around him, Minkowitz considered Brandon to be a lesbian. Her "ignorance," in other words, was that she was unaware of the concept of transgenderism itself, and to Minkowitz, the fact that Brandon loved Lana, who was physically a woman, meant that Brandon was a lesbian like herself. The reason that the relationship between Brandon and Lana in the film appears to be a lesbian relationship is that Peirce was deluded by Minkowitz's view of Brandon without questioning it.

Furthermore, another possible reason why their relationship has been portrayed as lesbian is that Peirce herself is a lesbian. Michael Musto, in an article about his interview with Peirce, writes of Peirce: “She’s an out lesbian ...” In an interview by Stephanie Fairington, Peirce is introduced as “I know a lot of queer people, including myself ...” Furthermore, in an interview by David Reddish, Peirce describes her time as a graduate student at Columbia University as follows: “I, at that point, was realizing I was a queer. I never really used the word ‘lesbian,’ but I was falling in love with women and sleeping with them. I’m on the trans scale somewhere.” In another interview by James Kleinmann, she says, “I’m a trans butch. I’m a female-bodied person who loves being female-bodied, but I’m also a male.” Thus, Peirce identifies herself as a woman who loves women, or a lesbian. Jack Halberstam (1998) says about the distinction between trans men and lesbians. “So while it is true that transgender and transsexual men have been wrongly folded into lesbian history, it is also true that the distinctions between some transsexual identities and some lesbian identities may at times become quite blurry” (p. 150). As Halberstam states, Peirce may have misinterpreted transgenderism as a form of lesbianism.

However, there is a fundamental difference between Brandon, a trans man who identified as a man and loved women as a man, and Peirce, who identified as a woman and loved women as a woman. Peirce may not have been familiar with the concept of transgenderism at the time of making the film, just as Minkowitz may have considered Brandon a lesbian. Peirce may have overemphasized the “love of women” aspect of the film and portrayed Brandon as a lesbian.

Peirce, in an interview with Reddish, describes Brandon's gender identity as follows:

I lean towards a female-bodied person that lived as a man. I called him “he” always. I lean towards the transperson interpretation of Brandon. But we don’t know for sure. What we do know, if you’ve seen the autopsy pictures, is that Brandon was a female-bodied person who, as far as I know, [n]ever had a hormone, never had sexual surgery, and Brandon did not gravitate towards the queer community. He overtly said “I’m not a dyke.”

This interview was conducted in 2019, and unlike in 1999 when Peirce created *Boys Don't Cry*, the concept of transgenderism was already commonplace. It is precisely because the concept of transgenderism has become commonplace that Peirce was able to acknowledge Brandon's view of himself as a transperson.

Brandon Teena was a trans man. However, it was difficult to accurately portray a trans man at the time the film was made, when the concept of transgenderism was not prevalent. Both Peirce, who produced the film, and Minkowitz, who wrote the article to which Peirce referred, were ignorant of transgenderism at the time, and both are lesbians. There is no doubt that the historical context of the film's production and the fact that the filmmakers were lesbians greatly influenced Brandon's portrayal.

### **The Meaning of Rape and Murder Against Brandon**

It is naturally shocking for a trans man to be raped by men, but is it the same as when a woman is raped by men? By examining the way to depict the scene where Brandon is raped and murdered by John and Tom, I will consider the problems with the way Brandon is portrayed in this film.

Shon Faye (2021), a trans woman herself, describes the rape of trans men by men:

While, globally, the vast majority of trans people murdered are trans women, vicious violence is also unleashed on trans men. In South Africa, to cite just one example, trans men have—like butch lesbians—been subjected to so-called ‘corrective’ rape: a use of rape as punishment for gender deviance intended to force them ‘back’ into being (heterosexual) women. (p. 255)

In this film, too, John and Tom consider Brandon to be a lesbian, or a woman, and as Faye states, by raping Brandon, who is physically a woman, they are punishing Brandon, who calls himself a trans man, to make him realize that he is a woman. In addition, the rape is not only a punishment for Brandon, but also a way to make him realize his female identity. Furthermore, when it is learned that Brandon has complained to the police about the rape, John and Tom head to Candace's house to kill Brandon, but when Lana gets into the car with them, John tells her, “We're just takin' care of a couple of dykes. Are you one of 'em?” From this statement, it can be understood that John is trying to punish Brandon, a lesbian, not only by “raping,” but also by “killing.” Halberstam (2007), in describing the murders of Brandon and Candace by John and Tom after the rape, says, “The murders, in the end, are shown to be the result of a kind of homosexual panic” (p. 282). Thus, the film can be interpreted to portray the rape and murder of Brandon as a hate crime that occurred because Brandon is a lesbian (dyke).

However, regarding the actual Brandon murder, Minkowitz states: “While so far, the record seems to buttress that [Tom] Nissen and [John] Lotter went to that Humboldt farmhouse [the scene of the murders] explicitly to silence Brandon—his mother says, ‘Teena said [after the rape] that these guys told her to keep her mouth shut or they’d permanently shut it for her’ ...” If this view is correct, then Brandon's murder was not a hate crime, but retaliation by John and Tom for Brandon's reporting the rape to the police. Peirce seems to be trying to give Brandon's death a loftier meaning of hate crime in this film, but in fact it could be a more vulgar crime by John and Tom to eliminate the victim in order to cover their own crimes. By portraying Brandon as a female victim of a hate crime, Peirce turns Brandon's story into a heroic legend. In exchange for this moving narrative, Peirce fails to explore Brandon's true nature as a trans man.

In addition, Masae Torai, a trans man who actually underwent sex reassignment surgery and changed from female to male, describes in the Japanese pamphlet of *Boys Don't Cry* how he would feel if someone like Brandon, who identifies as male, was raped by men.

I also want to say that if you have gender identity disorder, being raped will never shake your gender identity as a man. I myself had an internal examination for ovarian disease, and it's like, whatever they do to my temporary body. I know that in the movie they [John and Tom] raped Brandon with the intention of reminding him that he is a woman, but it doesn't work. I want to say that strongly. (p. 13)

How much Brandon was actually hurt by the rape is not for anyone other than himself to guess and say. As Faye says, the rapist may feel that he is punishing Brandon, but for the raped Brandon, rather than being shocked by the rape itself, as Torai says, he was shocked by the violence and betrayal from John and Tom, who had accepted him as a man and a friend.

In fact, Brandon reported the rape to the police, but was extremely shocked when the sheriff dug into his past sexual experiences and sexual orientation, which were not directly related to the rape. Aphrodite Jones, in her book *All She Wanted* (1996) about this incident, describes this time as “[Brandon] Teena told them [the sheriff and the deputy] she was experiencing a sexual identity crisis, but when asked about it, she couldn't explain what that meant” (p. 226). In the interview by Anya Jaremko-Greenwold, Peirce says of the rape scene, “That rape scene—I always knew it was going to be intercut with the sheriff. I had a sense that the sheriff had raped Brandon too, by making Brandon reveal *how* he was raped.” Certainly, the interrogation by the sheriff must have been a very painful experience for Brandon. The problem here, however, is that Peirce lacks the perspective that Brandon was a trans man; Peirce portrays Brandon as a woman who was raped by men. As Torai states, even after the rape, Brandon's gender identity as a man should not have wavered. That is why Brandon actually described his sexuality to the sheriffs as “a sexual identity crisis.” However, how many people at that time could understand the meaning of “a sexual identity crisis”? By portraying Brandon as a woman in the rape scene, Peirce abandons the idea of facing “a sexual identity crisis,” which Brandon actually said out of desperation.

As have been discussed, Peirce's depiction of the rape and murder of Brandon by John and Tom can be interpreted as a sympathetic tragedy that happened to a woman who self-identifies as a man, rather than as an investigation into the nature of Brandon as a trans man.

## Conclusion

Although Brandon Teena did not undergo gender transition surgery or hormone therapy, it is clear that he was a trans man whose gender assigned at birth (female) did not match his self-identified gender (male). However, while Brandon in Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* is portrayed as a trans male in some parts, his relationship with Lana and the way the rape is depicted can be interpreted as a female in those parts. The fact that Brandon and Lana's make love looks like a female-on-female one and that Brandon appears to be raped as a woman can be attributed to the fact that Peirce is a lesbian and that the reporter who wrote the newspaper article Peirce based the film on considered Brandon a lesbian. Certainly, the concept of transgenderism may not have been common in the 1990s, when the film was made, but it is undeniable that the nature of Brandon was distorted by the assumptions of those reporting the case and producing the film.

Peirce admits in the interview by Fairyrngton that Brandon was not a lesbian, but speculates, based on Brandon's diary, that Brandon may have also been interested in being a woman.

In all research of Brandon Teena, from interviews with people who had met him and loved him, to reading his journal entries and listening to tapes of him, I concluded that he did not seem to make moves to present as queer or to identify as a lesbian. He did make moves to live as a straight guy in a relatively straight world, dating women and being buddies with the guys .... However, I read in his diary that he wondered what it would be like to be a girl. That led me to believe that while he wanted to be a straight man, he also had a curiosity about his female bodiedness.

Peirce, who found a queer side to herself, may have seen herself in Brandon, and it is Peirce's empathy for Brandon that gave birth to Brandon as a lesbian rather than a trans man.



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## *Form of a Successful Y Series*

Chawinroj Likitcharoensakul, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Porawan Pattayanon, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand  
Chatchai Ekpanyaskul, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

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### **Abstract**

The research in the topic of “Form of a Successful Y Series” is a qualitative research with the objective of studying and analyzing successful television series in the Boy’s Love genre (known in Thai as “Y Series ”). The methodology involves the textual analysis of 7 key qualities of the shows studied, including Plot, Character, Themes, Setting, Iconography, Audience Appeal, and Ideology. The five Boy’s Love series selected for the study were chosen from a collection of popular Thai Boy’s Love series broadcast between 2017 and 2022. Through the analysis, the study determines that successful Y series have the following key characteristics:

1. Plot – the plot centering on the love story between two men, filled with obstacles but eventually concluding with a happy ending.
2. Character – the lead characters are opposite types of each other.
3. Themes – the popular theme is romance with obstacles initially but with a happy ending.
4. Setting – almost entirely taking place in a university setting.
5. Iconography – using symbolism to emphasize the theme of love and romance.
6. Audience appeal – appeal to the audience using intensely emotional scenes such as fighting scenes to convey the drama of the story.
7. Ideology – emphasizes same-sex relationships and highlighting the social issues regarding sexual equality and family relationships.

Additionally, data gathered through in-depth interviews using open-ended questions with creators and researchers finds that there are six factors that determine the success of a Y series. These are the quality of the source material, the quality of the plot, the casting, production value, investment, and marketing.

Keywords : Series, Y Series, Successful

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## Introduction

Thailand embraces freedom of expression when it comes to gender and sexual identities. This openness has paved the way for the thriving television drama genre known as Boy's Love (referred to as "Y Series" in Thailand), narrating love stories between male protagonists. Thailand has emerged as a global hub for the production and export of Boy's Love dramas, evident in the continuous creation of related media and the increasing viewership on various streaming platforms, including WeTV, VIU, iQiYi, AIS Play, and Youtube.

The popularity of these Y Series has captured the attention of marketers who now seize the opportunity for product placements and ads within these dramas. Some platforms even invest funds in exchange for exclusive broadcasting rights, aiming to attract a larger fan base. New production companies are also entering the scene, capitalizing on the trend's success.

Y Series have a broad appeal, particularly among the audience known as "Y Girls," avid fans of these dramas. The lead actors in Y Series often exhibit strong chemistry, attractiveness, and talent, drawing a dedicated fan following that spans their entire careers. The genre continually evolves, focusing on enhancing the quality and diversity of each show's story and script while preserving the core concept of delivering uplifting narratives. These successful stories typically feature optimistic and straightforward plots with happy endings, leaving a positive impact on viewers and Y Series fans.

Beyond the show's quality, producers maintain fan engagement through post-show fanservice activities, including special events featuring "sweet moments" with fans. These activities foster a sense of connection with the audience, sparking waves of support on social media, particularly in "shipping" actors both in and out of their roles. The enthusiastic fandom support often propels the show to trend on Twitter, further boosting its viewership.

Boys' Love series has experienced significant success both domestically and internationally. The realistic and plausible portrayal of stories in these series, along with well-crafted narratives, has garnered widespread attention from viewers. The genre has shown continuous growth, receiving positive feedback and generating substantial revenue in the entertainment industry. Therefore, the researcher aims to study the patterns of successful Boys' Love series, intending to extract valuable insights for educational purposes and provide beneficial information for producers and developers in Thailand's Boys' Love series industry.

## Methods

The study on "Form of a Successfully Series" employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing textual analysis as the framework for examining the patterns of successful Boy's Love Series. Textual analysis was applied to components, including plot, characters, themes, setting, iconography, audience appeal, and ideology, in the 5 selected successful Boy's Love Series that aired between 2017-2022. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted using purposive sampling to target producers, directors, and scholars in the field related to successful "Series Y," and 6 experts were selected for interviews. The research tool included open-ended questions covering factors affecting series popularity, distinctions from traditional romance, societal impact, production strategies, and suggestions for genre improvement.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the analysis on "Form of a Successful Y Series" yield the following discussion.

### **1.) Plot Impact on Successful Y Series**

This study indicates that the narrative structure of Y series may not significantly differ from general series. Y series often focus on portraying the love lives of teenagers during their school years, with a predominant emphasis on sports and music. Given that the majority of Y series fans are young, series producers face the challenge of creating plots that are strong, intriguing, and captivating to maintain viewer interest. Developing unique and non-repetitive storylines is considered a significant challenge for content creators. Currently, many scriptwriters in the industry are exploring diverse plots, such as intense drama, modern action scenes, and even period dramas, to continuously offer fresh and innovative content. Crafting the plot or script of Y series requires experimenting with new roles for main characters and leading the story from the beginning with a well-structured plot that sequences events logically. The challenge lies in introducing new roles to the characters while maintaining a compelling plot that engages viewers from the beginning, through the middle, and up to the end. The creation of Y series plots should involve experimenting with new roles, avoiding stretching the storyline excessively, and ensuring alignment with narrative theories, as suggested by Kaewthep (2010), emphasizing the importance of a clear narrative standpoint controlled by the storyteller to create meaningful content that significantly influences the audience's perspective.

### **2.) Character Impact on Successful Y Series**

This study found that the selection of actors to portray roles in Y series significantly influences their popularity among viewers. Producers and directors invest considerable time in casting actors for each series. The casting decisions for Y series often draw inspiration from the characters in the novels to make viewers feel connected to the characters. The actors play a crucial role in the creative process, starting with extensive workshops and rehearsals to dissolve behaviors and ensure that the actors embody their characters to the fullest.

Success in Y series is often associated with the selection of lead actors who not only have a good appearance but also share great on-screen chemistry. The representation of popular characters from well-loved novels in the series tends to resonate with the preferences of viewers, especially the female audience, leading to successful and well-received series. The popularity of the main actors is instrumental in creating a trend or couple that garners widespread attention. This popularity not only benefits the series in terms of viewership but also translates into marketable opportunities for the actors and producers, with lucrative financial returns.

This aligns with the perspective of Maneewattana (2018), who emphasizes that for actors to embody their roles effectively, they must think like their characters, seeing everything through the character's perspective rather than their own. This requires an understanding of how the character would behave and express themselves, incorporating the qualities of a skilled actor, thorough preparation, and problem-solving skills during the performance.

### **3.) Theme Impact on Successful Y Series**

This study indicates that a well-developed theme plays a crucial role in the success of Y series. Sometimes, the theme doesn't need explicit narration but is conveyed to the audience through the unfolding of the storyline. Generally, Y series themes emphasize the essence of love and the relationships of the characters. The narrative often begins with friendships or conflicts among characters, navigating through various events in the plot. Ultimately, these relationships evolve, surpassing the boundaries of friendship, brotherhood, or siblinghood, culminating in the central focus on love. This love represents the primary objective of the series, aligning with the concept proposed by Vivatsinudom (2003) that the theme is the core idea that binds the various elements of a single storyline. The presentation of the theme does not always require explicit articulation, allowing viewers to engage their imagination and intellect, enhancing their overall viewing experience.

### **4.) Setting Impact on Successful Y Series**

This study found that the setting where the characters' events unfold in Y series, plays a crucial role in enhancing the series' overall appeal. Various locations within the storyline act as crucial points for character development, requiring a sense of authenticity without appearing overly dramatized. This perspective aligns with the findings of Kitwisala (2010), who emphasized the role of setting as a narrative tool, portraying fictional events against the setting of a specific place. In the context of Y series, frequent scenes set in educational institutions are notable. This choice is significant as the majority of character relationships often develop during the formative years of adolescence.

### **5.) Iconography Impact on Successful Y Series**

Researcher has found that the use of symbols to convey gender roles and characters' emotional states significantly influences the success of Y series. In some Y series, the focus is on the theme of love without explicitly addressing the sexual aspect. These series portray that Thai society is becoming more accepting of sexual diversity, considering it normal for everyone to coexist. The inclusion of love stories between men or women in Y series is seen as an effort by producers to elevate the audience's awareness and understanding of the existence of diverse sexual orientations. This aligns with the research conducted by Somyad (2018), emphasizing the presentation of same-sex love in current Y series as a depiction of reality, showcasing society's acceptance of such relationships. The use of symbols in these series serves to immerse and make viewers aware of the existence of a diverse range of sexual orientations, aligning with the research conducted by Somyard (2018). It points out that the presentation of male-male love in the current Y series involves simulating reality in a way that society accepts same-sex love. The use of symbols aims to purchase gender roles and the emotional states of characters, highlighting that the portrayal of male-male love is not psychologically abnormal.

### **6.) Audience Appeal Impact on Successful Y Series**

Through this study, it has been observed that the use of music as a medium for evoking emotions significantly accelerates the audience's connection with the characters and the storyline in Y series. Employing music is recognized as a crucial element that contributes to the success of Y series, captivating the audience's interest more rapidly. The strategic use of songs serves as a mainstay for some narratives or is integrated to establish connections with

other elements of the story without compromising the series' integrity. Researchers align with the notion that the success of a series depends on its ability to evoke the audience's emotions, and music is a powerful tool in achieving this. It is noted that whether a series achieves success is contingent upon its ability to resonate with the emotions of the audience, given that viewership remains the most reliable metric for evaluating success. Therefore, the production of theme songs for a series is considered a key instrument in captivating the audience's emotions. This perspective is reinforced by the findings of Saejiw and Premsrirat (2017), who highlight the significance of storytelling through theme songs, considering them a form of artistic communication that conveys the values and emotions of people during a specific period, making it a universal medium accessible to listeners everywhere.

## **7.) Ideology Impact on Successful Y Series**

This study found that the ideology presented in the Y series consistently drives societal change in thinking. This extends to increased acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and challenges traditional family structures, including the rearing of children by same-sex parents. Observably, contemporary audiences are more open-minded and accepting of Y series, encompassing both younger and older demographics. Moreover, this trend has gained international popularity, aligning with the research perspective of Kritchanat (2022), which suggests that Y series contribute to fostering acceptance and creating a new set of ideologies. These narratives have shifted societal norms, transforming the portrayal of love from a traditional heterosexual perspective to a more inclusive and egalitarian ideology, representing a move towards an “inclusive ideology.”

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the researcher has found that there are many factors that lead to a successful and popular production of a “Y Series.”

First of all, the strategic casting of lead actors, emphasizing their chemistry and interpersonal dynamics, serves as a powerful way to attract more viewers. The enjoyment derived from the on-screen relationships enhances viewer engagement and connection. Furthermore, the narrative plot's entertainment value and intrigue play a crucial role. A compelling strategy involves incorporating climax scenes into promotional trailers and teasers and the use of music to enhance audience interest and engagement with each episode. Moreover, certain production companies, such as GMM, Studio Wabisabi, and Wandee Work, enjoy a high level of trust from fans. These brands are synonymous with delivering top-quality "Y Series" productions, and fanclub members eagerly anticipate each new release from these esteemed companies.

Adapting popular Boy's Love genre novels from online and social media platforms into series stands as another key contributor to success. Utilizing social media trends and viral reaction clips emerges as an efficient approach to rapidly spreading awareness of a "Y Series. Additionally, post-series engagement strategies, including fan meetings, special events, and collaborations with brands, contribute to sustained marketing efforts, ensuring the series remains relevant in the public consciousness.

The significance of high production value emerges as a crucial factor, presenting a substantial opportunity for growth and success within the industry. Lastly, developing the content of Y series to align with shifting trends, consumer behavior, and technological advancements

emerges as a driving force behind the success of the Thai Boy's Love drama industry. This transformation positions it as a source of soft power and economic opportunity for the country.

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**Contact email:** [famechawin1998@gmail.com](mailto:famechawin1998@gmail.com)

*Presentation Sequences and Styles of Educational Bite-Sized Content  
by The Indonesian TikTokers*

Jandy Luik, Petra Christian University, Indonesia  
Dwi Setiawan, Petra Christian University, Indonesia  
Ronald H. Sitindjak, Petra Christian University, Indonesia

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**Abstract**

This research delves into the presentation sequences and styles adopted by Indonesian TikTokers in the creation of educational content on the TikTok platform. Employing a qualitative content analysis methodology, we analyse 140 TikTok videos from prominent Indonesian creators, categorising the content into themes and identifying prevalent presentation styles and sequences. Our findings shed light on the dynamic nature of educational content on TikTok, emphasising the platform's fast-paced environment. We explore linguistic features, multimodality, and the implications of these elements on the effectiveness of educational content. This paper aims to contribute to the evolving landscape of digital education by providing insights into TikTok's unique role in knowledge dissemination.

Keywords: TikTok, Educational Content, Presentation Styles, Presentation Sequences, Digital Education, Social Media, Online Learning, Linguistic Features, Content Creation

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## Introduction

TikTok's rapid evolution from an entertainment-focused platform to a multifaceted global phenomenon has garnered widespread attention. Its impact, highlighted by Wang's 2020 study, showcased the platform's captivating content, seamlessly blending entertainment with enjoyment. In the current digital landscape, where information sharing is undergoing rapid transformations, TikTok has emerged as a powerful tool for educational content creators. What initially started as a space for light-hearted fun has gradually become a subject of scholarly inquiry, with academics exploring its formal intricacies, such as (Schellewald, 2021), and camera angles (Wang, 2020).

This preliminary study zeroes in on Indonesian TikTok creators, aiming to understand their formal strategies in delivering educational content. By doing so, we contribute to the broader discussion on the convergence of social media and education (Drew, 2017; Gerbaudo, Gaspar, & Gonçalves Lins, 2021; Kumar & Gruzd, 2019; Van Den Beemt, Thurlings, & Willems, 2020). Recognising TikTok's global impact and unique features, we delve into the presentation styles, sequences, and linguistic aspects employed by Indonesian TikTok creators.

Our research team, encompassing diverse backgrounds in communication science, language and literature, and visual design, acknowledges the need for collaborative efforts in deciphering the multifaceted nature of educational content on TikTok.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to address two key questions:

1. What are the prevalent presentation sequences and styles used by Indonesian TikTok creators in their educational content?
2. What are the implications of the rapid delivery of educational content on TikTok?

## Method

To answer these questions, we employed an inductive qualitative content analysis approach. We analysed 140 TikTok videos, including the ten most recent uploads from prominent Indonesian TikTok creators specialising in educational content. Our dataset was categorised into seven themes, with health and beauty emerging as the dominant category. We propose that this dominance may be attributed to the visually engaging nature of content in this category. Conversely, sports and exercise, typically presented in longer formats on platforms like YouTube, appear as the least represented theme in our dataset.

## Findings and Discussion

In the following sections, we will present our key findings, covering the diverse presentation styles, sequences, and linguistic features we encountered in the Indonesian TikTokers' educational content.

### ***Presentation Styles***

Indonesian TikTok creators employ various styles to make educational content captivating and engaging. This section explores three primary presentation styles, each enhancing the interactive learning experience:

1. **Responding to Audience Inquiries**

Indonesian TikTok creators actively engage with their audience by directly addressing viewer questions. This style turns educational content into a personalised exchange. For example, in one video, a TikToker responds to a simple inquiry about sitting elegantly, demonstrating a commitment to audience interaction, and providing concise, informative responses.

2. **Posing Own Questions**

Another effective style involves creators prompting critical thinking among viewers by posing thought-provoking questions. For instance, one TikToker asks his viewers about the fundamental differences between obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and perfectionist personality. Then, he offers his opinions and invites how viewers to share theirs in comments section, fostering engagement and prompting self-reflection. This method encourages audience participation, making the educational experience more interactive.

3. **Providing Data Expositions**

From our data, TikTokers employ data exposition as their presentation style. Interestingly, they embrace the challenge of elucidating complex data and technical concepts through TikTok videos. For instance, a TikToker utilises graphical data presentation to explain the world market, combining information with entertainment to engage the audience more effectively. Rendering understandable information from intricate data is a key characteristic of this presentation style.

Collectively, these presentation styles contribute to the interactive and engaging nature of educational content on TikTok, catering to diverse learning preferences. By responding to viewer inquiries, posing thought-provoking questions, and delivering in-depth data expositions, TikTok creators go beyond traditional educational methods. The participatory nature of these styles underscores the platform's unique capacity to offer an engaging educational experience. The intentional choice of these presentation styles also reflects the adaptability and creativity of Indonesian TikTok content creators in delivering educational content that captures and sustains viewer attention.

### ***Presentation Sequences***

In addition to the presentation styles, the diverse presentation sequences employed by Indonesian TikTokers showcase further their adaptability and creativity in delivering educational content on this dynamic platform. Below is the explanation of the three primary presentation sequences found in our study:

1. **Linear Sequences**

TikTok creators in Indonesia frequently choose a step-by-step approach, by sharing information in a narrative that unfolds gradually, building on each point. This linear sequence is evident when creators explain concepts or tell stories chronologically, with

each piece of information contributing to the overall understanding. For example, a TikToker details how an emerging Indonesian video platform secured investment from an angel investor, ensuring a coherent and logical flow of information.

## 2. Circular Sequences

Another intriguing presentation style involves the use of circular narratives, where the beginning mirrors the ending of the video. This method adds continuity and aesthetic appeal to the content. For instance, one TikToker showcases a special effect technique, starting with the result, guiding the audience through the process, and returning to the result at the end. The circular sequence creates a sense of completeness to the educational narrative.

## 3. *In Medias Res*

*In medias res* refers to a literary technique where a story begins in the middle of the plot rather than at the chronological beginning. Several Indonesian TikTokers choose this approach, bringing the audience directly into the core of a topic or question. For instance, a TikToker starts a video with the final piece of DIY swimming goggles, goes through the creation process step by step, and concludes with instructions on how to wear them underwater. This technique creates immediate engagement by initiating the educational video with a focal point.

These presentation sequences not only enhance the narrative skills of educational content on TikTok but also showcase the adaptability of Indonesian TikTok content creators. Their deliberate choice of linear, circular, or *in medias res* sequences demonstrates their ability to craft compelling stories within the unique constraints of the TikTok platform.

## ***Fast-Paced Delivery***

Our study sheds light on a notable aspect of TikTok's educational scene, that is the rapid pace at which Indonesian TikTok creators deliver content. Our analysis reveals an average speaking rate exceeding 200 words per minute, significantly surpassing the natural speech rate falling between 100-150 words per minute (Anumanchipalli, Chartier, & Chang, 2019). This accelerated delivery aligns with TikTok's culture of brevity, immediacy, and engaging storytelling within short timeframes. The observed fast-paced delivery challenges traditional educational approaches that often show a more measured and deliberate presentation style. This might raise important questions about its impact on information retention and comprehension. There is a potential trade-off concerning the depth to which viewers can absorb and understand the educational content presented. As we will discuss in the subsequent section, multimodality helps address the issue of comprehension to some extent.

Despite potential challenges, the swift delivery of educational content on TikTok ensures heightened viewer engagement. TikTok's user base is accustomed to rapid information consumption, and creators' ability to capture and sustain attention within this short timeframe indicates the platform's effectiveness as an educational tool. Furthermore, the rapid delivery carries linguistic and textual implications. Creators must navigate the challenge of delivering information coherently within tight time constraints. This demands strategic choices in language use, emphasizing key points, and maintaining a balance between speed and clarity. The linguistic adaptation to this accelerated format is an integral aspect of creators' skill set.

### ***Linguistic Features and Multimodality***

Our analysis further uncovers the strategic use of linguistic/textual features by Indonesian TikTok content creators. These features include code mixing, contractions, reduced contextual information, and multimodality.

#### **1. Code Mixing**

Indonesian TikTok creators use code mixing (see Muysken, 2000) by integrating English into Bahasa Indonesia content. This intentional choice adds dynamism to the educational narrative. For instance, a TikTok video showcasing a tip to look confident while listening might include the English phrase “Karena *closed body language* [italic added] kaya gini akan mencerminkan ketidaknyamanan”, which translate to English as “Because closed body language like this will reflect discomfort”. This inclusion serves multiple purposes, signalling a global linguistic flavour and expressing sentiments in a language often seen as concise. The preference for English might be influenced by its perceived brevity compared to Indonesian.

#### **2. Contractions**

Creators use many contractions, like “gak” instead of “tidak,” adapting to TikTok’s time constraints. This strategy aligns with the platform's preference for concise communication and enhances video engagement. In a 60-second video, creators use contractions to maintain a short and engaging dialogue, ensuring informative and captivating content.

#### **3. Reduced Contextual Information**

The platform’s focus on quick, engaging content leads creators to provide minimal background information in most videos. For example, in an unboxing video expressing enthusiasm about a new gadget, the creator omits detailed specifications or purchase details. This deliberate reduction aligns with TikTok’s format, where brevity is prioritised over extensive explanations. This approach might raise questions about the depth of information conveyed. While creators maintain viewer interest through concise content, the trade-off may sacrifice comprehensive context. Yet, the intentional decision to focus on immediate, visually engaging elements without extensive background information reflects creators' adaptation to TikTok’s unique communicative demands.

#### **4. Multimodality**

Indonesian TikTok content creators embrace multimodality (Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, & Charalamos, 2014; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin & Mayr, 2012) by incorporating diverse elements to enrich the learning experience. This integration goes beyond spoken words, recognising the importance of engaging multiple senses to convey educational information. Visual components, like images, graphics, and video clips, form a fundamental part of this approach. Creators leverage TikTok’s visual appeal by integrating these elements into their educational content, making the material more tangible and relatable. Text overlays provide supplemental information, reinforcing crucial details. The combination of verbal and written information caters to diverse learning preferences.

Music serves as an additional dimension in the multimodal repertoire of Indonesian TikTok creators. Incorporating music not only adds aesthetic appeal but also contributes to the overall mood and tone of the presented information. It can evoke emotions, enhance engagement, and create a more immersive learning environment. Special effects

represent a creative use of technology to enhance the visual and auditory aspects of educational content. The appropriate application of special effects ensures they complement the educational narrative without overshadowing the core message.

The overarching goal of this multimodal approach is to cater to diverse learning styles within the TikTok audience. Recognising that individuals absorb information differently, Indonesian TikTok creators intentionally incorporate visual, auditory, and textual elements. This ensures a more inclusive educational experience, allowing viewers to engage with the content in a manner that suits their learning preferences. By embracing multimodality, Indonesian TikTok content creators enhance both the comprehension and retention of educational content. This approach acknowledges the diversity of learners and seeks to make educational content accessible and impactful. The intentional use of multimodality in TikTok educational content reinforces the evolving nature of digital education, departing from traditional, text-centric approaches. This shift aligns with the contemporary understanding of how individuals engage with and assimilate information in the digital age.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, TikTok plays a transformative role in education in Indonesia, showcasing the potential of digital learning. Indonesian TikTok creators skilfully use diverse presentation styles, creating an engaging learning environment. The quick-paced delivery challenges traditional education, highlighting the need for dynamic and concise material in today's interconnected world. The observed linguistic features reveal creators' strategic adaptation to TikTok's format, ensuring effective communication within its constraints. The multimodal approach enhances the learning experience, catering to various preferences. As TikTok evolves as an educational platform, these findings lay the groundwork for further research into effective teaching strategies in dynamic social media environments.

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**Contact email:** dewey@petra.ac.id



***Empathy in Action: Fostering Digital Empathy Through Intergenerational Activities  
Among Online Users***

Chanansara Oranop na ayutthaya, National Institute of Development Administration,  
Thailand

Araya Sookhom, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand

Kanisorn Rasrichai, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand

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**Abstract**

With the widespread adoption of online media technology, all generations have become active online users in the digital world. However, each generation's unique experiences and perspectives can create challenges in intergenerational online communication due to a lack of digital empathy - the cognitive, emotional, and social skills to be sensitive and supportive of others' feelings, needs, and concerns online. To address this issue, the study designed video clips and the 'empathy gym' activity based on digital empathy and intergenerational communication concepts. The objective is to promote digital empathy among online users and bridge intergenerational divides in communication. Twenty-eight participants from each generation, who watched video clips promoting digital empathy, joined the empathy gym. The gym included activities like the "Wall of Lives" to train social empathy and "Perspective-taking activities" to develop interpersonal empathy. After the activity, a focus group collected data, revealing that participants gained perspective-taking from different generations and understood their differences better. They recognized the importance of media campaigns to promote digital empathy and knowledge among all generations for effective communication. This shows that embedding social and interpersonal empathy in online media users through this activity enhances their digital empathy awareness. However, participants were uncertain about consistently communicating with digital empathy in online media spaces, especially when discussing sensitive political issues in Thailand's context, given its history of divergent political opinions. Further studies are required to put digital empathy into practice in real-life communication.

Keywords: Digital Empathy, Empathy, Intergenerational Communication, Online Communication

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## Introduction

In the contemporary era, every age group has seamlessly transitioned into a community of netizens, shaping a world where digital communication platforms serve as the primary conduit for interaction. Despite the universality of this digital experience, each age group brings forth a distinct set of experiences, personality traits, values, and worldviews that have organically evolved.

This diversity in backgrounds inevitably manifests in varied communication styles among generations within the digital space. The emergence of intergenerational communication issues has given rise to toxic communication patterns, amplifying the challenges faced by individuals from different age groups. The review of previous inter-generational communication studies, such as the work by Sivricova and Moiseeva (2018), reflects an intensification of communication challenges between different age groups. This escalation is attributed to a lack of mutual understanding and misperceptions about the lifestyles of each age group, driven by perceptions influenced by stereotypical characteristics of different age groups.

This phenomenon is evident in Thai society, as discovered by Tienthai et al. (2021), where communication expressing the viewpoints and opinions of each age group tends to show distinct ideological separations. Older generations often perceive younger ones as self-centered, uncooperative, intolerant, and lacking various skills. Conversely, the digital-native generation questions the necessity of possessing such knowledge and skills in the current context. These findings underscore the pressing need to bridge these intergenerational communication gaps and highlight the importance of fostering mutual understanding and empathy to overcome stereotypes and enhance effective communication across age groups.

These contrasting perspectives contribute to a cycle of miscommunication that is exacerbated by the digital environment, where nuances in non-verbal communication are often lost or misinterpreted. Moreover, the very nature of digital communication acts as a catalyst for these issues, creating a unique set of hurdles that demand careful examination. The immediacy and brevity of messages in digital spaces can lead to misunderstandings, and the absence of face-to-face interaction may hinder the development of empathy. The speed at which information travels in the digital realm also contributes to the rapid escalation of conflicts, making it challenging to defuse tensions and foster constructive dialogue.

Amidst this complex landscape, the paper also delves into the specific context of online communication in Thailand, shedding light on the toxic communication that arises due to conflicts in political opinions among various age groups. The intersection of generational differences and political divergence presents a particularly volatile combination. Misaligned political views can amplify pre-existing intergenerational misunderstandings, resulting in toxic discourse that further divides society. This phenomenon is not unique to Thailand but serves as an illustrative example of how the interplay between generational disparities and socio-political factors can significantly impact the nature of online communication.

One approach to addressing this communication challenge is through social education and campaigns. By fostering a culture of awareness and understanding, individuals can be equipped with the tools necessary to navigate the intricacies of digital communication. Initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy play a crucial role in empowering individuals to decipher the nuances of online interactions, thus minimizing the potential for

miscommunication. Furthermore, these campaigns can promote values such as solidarity, tolerance for differences, and acceptance of diversity, fostering an environment where individuals are more open to engaging with perspectives that differ from their own. Digital empathy, an essential component of this educational effort, encourages individuals to consider the emotions and intentions behind online messages, even in the absence of face-to-face interaction. Emphasizing these values through education and campaigns contributes to the cultivation of a more inclusive and empathetic digital community, ultimately mitigating the toxic communication patterns that often arise from generational differences and misunderstandings.

Our study aimed to comprehensively address the challenges posed by intergenerational communication in the digital age. The primary objective of our research was to devise effective strategies to mitigate toxic communication patterns among different age groups. To achieve this, we focused on the development and implementation of communication campaigns specifically tailored to the digital landscape. These campaigns were designed not only to raise awareness about the nuances of intergenerational communication but also to experiment with novel approaches that could foster understanding and empathy among online users. Through a combination of theoretical frameworks and practical experimentation, we sought to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on improving communication dynamics in the digital realm.

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in the concept of empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings and experiences of others. (Segal et al., 2017) However, the definition and conceptualization of empathy vary across psychological, neuroscientific, and social science perspectives. Batson (2011, as cited in Segal et al., 2017) identified a commonality in the meaning of empathy across these disciplines. Empathy is characterized as a process in which one person discerns the internal state of another and can be stimulated to respond with detailed and sensitive care. This intricate understanding of empathy is further categorized into two dimensions: interpersonal empathy and social empathy.

Interpersonal empathy encompasses a range of cognitive, emotional, and social skills crucial for effective communication with others (Segal et al., 2017; Friesem, 2016). In the context of this study, these skills include:

- 1) Perspective-Taking: The skill of being open and receptive to the viewpoints of others, understanding their perspectives without solely interpreting them through our own lens.
- 2) Self-Other Awareness: The ability to be mindful of one's own thoughts, engage in self-reflection, and cultivate a compassionate mindset in communication.
- 3) Emotion Regulation: The capability to anticipate the emotions and feelings of others, showcasing the skill to empathetically perceive and understand their emotional states.
- 4) Imaginative Empathy: The capacity to place oneself imaginatively in hypothetical roles or situations, nurturing an understanding and compassion for others, thereby facilitating connection in social relationships.
- 5) Empathetic Connection: The skill of empathizing, extending understanding and compassion towards others, consequently building social relationships grounded in mutual understanding and support.

Social empathy is a trait that enables individuals to understand others who may be different from us or have experiences and identities distinct from our own. (Segal et al., 2017) In the

context of this study, social empathy is a quality that aids individuals in understanding others who may be different from us or have experiences and identities distinct from our own. It encompasses the recognition of differences in thought patterns, lifestyles, and technological inclinations among various age groups in society. Additionally, it involves an understanding of the historical and societal context within the experiences of each age group.

Developing interpersonal empathy on a person-to-person level is foundational. When integrated with social empathy, it becomes a crucial avenue for promoting societal understanding and improving relationships between groups within the community. This integration serves to enhance social bonds, thereby reducing prejudice and fostering a more inclusive perception of diverse groups within society.

For the concept of digital empathy, which refers to the ability to empathize in the context of digital communication, Friese, Y. (2016) defines it as a set of cognitive, emotional, and social skills. This includes the process through which communicators utilize digital technology to analyze, evaluate, reflect, envision the future, predict, feel, empathize, participate, and role-play during communication. Moreover, digital empathy is also identified as a crucial skill in digital citizenship. According to the DQ Institute (n.d.), digital empathy is defined as "the ability to be aware of, be sensitive to, and be supportive of one's own and other's feelings, needs, and concerns online." It encompasses understanding and encouraging the emotions of oneself and others in the digital realm, as well as recognizing and addressing the emotional aspects and worries that arise from online interactions.

Therefore, this research is centered on digital empathy as a personal competency among users of online media in different age groups. The emphasis is on the necessity to promote digital empathy to cultivate digital citizenship. Additionally, the study investigates its role in facilitating communication among diverse groups within each age bracket in the online space. Consequently, it is crucial to integrate both interpersonal empathy and social empathy into the exploration and promotion of digital empathy.

This research adopts an action research methodology in alignment with the design thinking approach. The design thinking process encompasses empathizing, defining problems, ideating solutions, prototyping, and testing the prototypes. The results presented in this article exclusively derive from the prototyping and testing phases of the research process. The study has crafted prototypes in the form of video clips and an 'empathy gym' activity, grounded in the principles of digital empathy and intergenerational communication. These prototypes are specifically designed to foster digital empathy among online users and address intergenerational communication challenges, particularly within the context of political conflicts among generations in Thailand.

## **Key Findings**

### **1. Prototyping & Test**

#### **1.1 Online: VDO Clips**

The prototypes of the study include five video clips, including one 5-minute clip and four shorter clips reflecting the thoughts of each generation within a 2-minute timeframe. The key message conveyed is that "*The existence of Digital Empathy among individuals of different*

*generations can alleviate communication challenges, leading to a decrease in instances of violence and conflict in various online communication spaces."*

In the video clips, a storytelling strategy is employed in the form of a social experiment. Representatives from each generation, namely Baby Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z, each participated in online conversations. The experiment unfolded in three phases:

Phase 1: All participants assumed roles in the conversation without showing mutual respect. The outcome was more discordant and less informative discussions than initially.

Phase 2: All participants assumed roles in the conversation with mutual respect. The result was an idealized conversation that seemed too perfect to be realistic.

Phase 3: Participants were mixed, with two individuals assuming roles that involved showing respect and empathy and the other two not showing respect and empathy.

The outcome demonstrated that those who did not initially show respect became more heated, but when they received respect from the other side, they became more willing to change their perspectives, showing respect and attempting to listen and understand the other side.

In the final stage, participants were asked to reflect on their feelings regarding the importance or benefits arising from online communication with digital empathy at both the personal and societal levels.

The strategy for disseminating the short video clips involves sharing them through Facebook and TikTok on Toolmorrow's platforms, recognized for its creative and social communication content, and for reaching the target audiences. (<https://www.facebook.com/toolmorrow> and <https://www.tiktok.com/@toolmorrowtiktok>) The video clips were launched over one month from June 1 to June 30, 2023. The total view count for all clips on FB posts and FB Reels combined is 829,103 views, while the viewing count on TikTok is 153,128 times.

## **1.2 Onsite: Empathy Gym**

Twenty-eight participants from each generation, who had viewed video clips promoting digital empathy, voluntarily participated in the Empathy Gym. The Empathy Gym activity included two activities: 1) the Wall of Lives, designed to enhance social empathy, and 2) the Perspective-taking activity, aimed at fostering interpersonal empathy.

First, the Wall of Lives displayed images and information depicting pivotal political, economic, societal, media, and technology events corresponding to each generation's era. Then, the participants were urged to explore the wall and choose events they deemed most influential and transformative in shaping thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. They were motivated to select events with the greatest impact on them individually. Following this, participants were divided into generational groups, where they actively shared their personal experiences and insights. Throughout these discussions, they were prompted to take brief notes, reflecting on *"how they had enhanced their understanding of each generation more effectively."*



Figure 1: Wall of Lives displayed images and information depicting pivotal political, economic, societal, media, and technology events corresponding to each generation's era

In the Perspective-Taking activity, participants drew lots to determine the generation they would represent. Subsequently, they were tasked with immersing themselves in the perspective of that generation and considering how they might think or feel about the same set of video clips. These reflections were recorded on the right-hand side of a sheet of paper. Following this, participants engaged in discussions with those from different generations to assess *“whether their assumptions about the thoughts and feelings of that generation aligned with the actual experiences and viewpoints of individuals from that generation”*. They explored both commonalities and differences between their assumptions and the reality of the generation they were representing.



Figure 2: the participants from different age groups discussing the Perspective-taking activity

## 2. Reflection: Results From the Focus Group Discussion

After testing the prototypes, as mentioned earlier, focus groups were conducted with the participants upon the conclusion of the activities. The findings from these focus groups revealed that:



- 1) The participants expressed their experiences and perspectives, thoughts, and feelings towards people in their respective age ranges, based on experiences in different periods, covering aspects of economics, politics, society, and communication technology.
- 2) The participants became aware of differences between age groups in terms of thought patterns, lifestyles, and technological trends, as well as the understanding of historical and social contexts within the experiences of each age group. It was found that after watching the advocacy clips and participating in the Empathy Gym activities, which focused on perspective-taking and imaginative empathy, there was an enhanced understanding that the actions and expressions of each generation stem from their thoughts and feelings, shaped by experiences they have heard and witnessed. This understanding emerged from various age periods, and perspectives towards other generations were found to change or evolve.

These excerpts illustrate how the thoughts of each generation reflect the enhancement of interpersonal and social empathy, as observed in the focus group discussions.

	<i>I used to think</i>	<i>Now I think</i>
Gen BabyBoomer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>originally viewed as 'the new generation,' were often thought to lack experience and perceived as having misguided and hasty teenage thinking.</i></li> <li>• <i>We have accumulated more experience, and it's beneficial for other generations to lend us their ears.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>my perspective has evolved to understand that not everyone from that generation fits that mold. It's more about individuality</i></li> <li>• <i>I now believe that people of every age possess unique insights and perspectives that should be heard and learned from together."</i></li> </ul>
Gen X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>once seen by the BB generation as boring, inclined to complain, talking endlessly without a point, and seemingly detached, was often labeled as old-fashioned in their thinking.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>My perspective has shifted to understanding that Generation X's speech or complaints often stem from their caring and compassionate nature. They are considerate and understanding.</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Generation Z was that they were carefree, impulsive, not very open to understanding differences, self-centered, stubborn, and sometimes unreasonable.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Now, I see Generation Z as a generation that thinks independently, with their unique thought processes that may differ from our own. They exhibit mature thinking, self-sufficiency, reason, and an understanding of change.</i></li> </ul>

	<i>I used to think</i>	<i>Now I think</i>
Gen Y	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Initially, there was an understanding that people of the same age group should think alike.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Now realize that being part of a generation doesn't always dictate uniform thinking and behavior. People within the same generation can have diverse perspectives and ways of thinking, influenced by various other factors like their environment, education, family, and individual outlook.</i></li> </ul>
Gen Z	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>I used to think that older adults, being traditional, spoke in a way that was hard to relate to, often speaking without consideration, which made children and young adults feel uncomfortable about conversing. I believed that older adults couldn't understand the younger generation because their experiences, society, and economics were different.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Although some things still bother me when I hear them from older adults, I understand them better. I've come to see that adults of all ages make more of an effort to understand children and young people. They are more compassionate than I had thought. I've also come to believe that when adults act like children, they become more understanding of us.</i></li> </ul>

Table 1: examples of the thoughts of each generation reflected in the focus group discussion

## Conclusion

In conclusion, our research underscores the significance of cultivating digital empathy across online users of all generations. The 'empathy gym' and video clips have demonstrated their potential to enhance perspective-taking skills and increase awareness of digital empathy. Participants acquired insights into different generations, fostering a better understanding of their differences. Moreover, they acknowledged the crucial role of media campaigns in promoting digital empathy and knowledge across all generations for more effective communication. This emphasizes that integrating social and interpersonal empathy into online media users through such activities elevates their awareness of digital empathy.

However, challenges persist. While these activities and video clips have generated awareness, they have struggled to instill confidence in developing digital empathy skills among individuals in each generation for practical application in using online media. Online communication diverges from face-to-face interactions, allowing communicators to shield themselves, leading to a tendency for more impulsive responses. This is particularly evident when individuals delve into emotionally charged topics, such as politics, which may diminish their analytical thinking ability and self-regulation in online communication. This challenge is amplified when discussing sensitive political issues in the context of Thailand, given its history of divergent political opinions.

In response to identified challenges, implementing digital empathy in real-life communication requires additional investigation. Given persistent hurdles, more studies are necessary to seamlessly integrate digital empathy into everyday scenarios. These studies should focus on developing targeted strategies, especially in politically charged online

environments. Understanding the nuanced dynamics of online communication, particularly in emotionally charged subjects like politics, is crucial for formulating approaches that enhance users' digital empathy skills. Deeper exploration of these strategies can provide practical insights, extending beyond awareness creation. This comprehensive approach is essential for equipping individuals across generations with the confidence and skills needed to navigate online platforms with empathy, fostering healthier and more constructive digital interactions.

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**Contact email:** oranop.sara@gmail.com

***Media Freelancers and Platforms:  
How Beginner and Experienced Media Freelancers Perceive Online Platforms***

Jandy Luik, Petra Christian University, Indonesia  
Dwi Setiawan, Petra Christian University, Indonesia  
Ronald H.I. Sitindjak, Petra Christian University, Indonesia

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**Abstract**

The article presents the perspectives of media freelancers on digital platforms. This article is based on a qualitative study comprising 20 participants (10 beginners and 10 experienced media freelancers). Our findings indicate that the degree of flexibility is often overstated, as many freelance media workers on online platforms are compelled to adhere to tight deadlines, client demands, and offered prices. Regarding the issue of precarity, our study participants, particularly the beginners, understand the challenges they encounter serve as necessary steppingstones towards more established positions. The experienced freelancers are adept at navigating the challenges and threats that arise when working with online platforms. This collective knowledge leads us to reassess the extreme positions of either uncritically celebrating flexibility or outrightly rejecting the casualisation of work.

Keywords: Media Freelancers, Freelancing Platforms, Flexibility, Casualisation of Work, Remote Working

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## Introduction

Our paper explores the viewpoints of beginner and experienced media freelancers regarding online platforms, in particular freelancing platforms. Conceptually, this paper considers three recent developments regarding the informal nature of freelance work, which are flexibility and precarity, informality of media freelancers, and limited ‘shelf-life’.

Flexibility and precarity are two topics that are often discussed in relation to freelancers. For example, on the one hand, previous studies on the informal nature of freelance work have established the notion of flexibility (Edstrom & Ladendorf, 2012; Massey & Elmore, 2011). Flexibility is a situation where freelancers have the freedom to determine their work location and working hours concerning their own situations (Holton, 2016; Massey & Elmore, 2011; Mathisen, 2017). Additionally, freelancers also have flexibility in working with various clients (Johal & Anastasi, 2015; Popiel, 2017). On the other hand, earlier studies also emphasise precarity (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). This is a situation where freelancers, including media freelancers, face challenges in terms of irregular working hours and job security (Salamon, 2016; Wreyford, 2015). Freelancers find themselves in a situation where they must work within tight deadlines, and the absence of permanent employment contracts means they must move from one job to another to make ends meet. Furthermore, a recent study conducted by Wallis et al. (2020) on Media Production graduates from a UK university revealed that media careers are associated with a limited ‘shelf-life’ and that younger individuals are favoured in the industry.

Moreover, informal nature is also perceived by media freelancers in terms of its dimensions and ways to navigate the nature. In our own study (2022), we delve deeper into the dimensions of informality among gig workers and identify four primary dimensions that are of paramount concern to gig workers: the personal, professional, technological, and social dimensions. Firstly, the personal dimension revolves around the motivations of freelancers and their perceived long-term engagement in the informal aspects of working as media freelancers. Subsequently, the professional dimension encompasses freelancers’ perceived characteristics associated with informal work, including career development and the future of the profession. Thirdly, the technological dimension pertains to participants’ viewpoints on recent technological advancements that support the informal nature of working as media freelancers. Lastly, the social dimension explores the connection between the informal nature of media freelancers and social aspects, such as disclosure to the public as a freelancer, constructing a public image, and the availability of other infrastructure for freelancers’ interactions. We have also contributed to the discussion on informality by presenting three points of discussion: motivations for engaging in freelance work, managing uncertainty through creativity and self-management, and the social-technological infrastructure (Luik & Aritonang, 2022).

## Research Questions

Building on the majority of previous studies that did not solely focus on the relationship between media freelancers and the presence of digital platforms, we are keen to develop a deeper understanding of the perspectives of both novice and experienced freelancers. Consequently, this article will explore the varied viewpoints of media freelancers on digital platforms, specifically by addressing two key questions:

1. How do beginner and experienced media freelancers perceive online platforms?
2. How do their perspectives contribute to the discourse on flexibility and the casualisation of work?

## Method

Regarding the methodology, our study utilised a qualitative approach, conducting two focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 20 participants. This group was evenly split between 10 beginner media freelancers and 10 experienced media freelancers, ensuring a comprehensive perspective on the industry.

## Findings and Discussion

Emerging media freelancers, often embarking on their journey through digital platforms, regard these platforms as valuable avenues for career development, accumulating work experience, building portfolios, and generating income (Table 1). For many newcomers, the platform provides an opportunity to autonomously sustain themselves without depending on a partner or parents. The prevailing belief among these freelancers is one of resourcefulness, perceiving freelancing as a means to have income while working from home. It is notable that not everyone possesses established connections in their field of work, and the platform functions as an equalising space. Concerning long-term plans, the participants state that freelancing is perceived as a steppingstone while awaiting improved opportunities. This phase is utilised for acquiring experience, upskilling, and earning. Moreover, some novices contemplate the continuation of freelancing as a viable option, while others express aspirations of eventually establishing their own business, diverging from the prospect of indefinite employment under others. This dual perspective reflects the diverse motivations and ambitions within the cohort of beginner media freelancers.

**Table 1. How the beginner and experienced media freelancers perceive online platforms.**

	<b>Beginner media freelancers</b>	<b>Experienced media freelancers</b>
Motivations for joining	The platform can provide opportunities for career development, gaining work experience, building a portfolio, and earning money.	Platforms offer flexibility in terms of time and location, opportunities to earn a larger income, and the chance to pursue one's dreams or idealism.
Social factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not relying on a partner or parents,</li> <li>● Having the mindset of "Since I'm at home anyway, I can increase my income,"</li> <li>● Not everyone has connections in their work.</li> </ul>	<p>After several years, their social status has improved significantly from initially receiving comments like,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "What kind of job is that, just sitting in front of a laptop?"</li> <li>○ and dealing with the stigma that "men should work in an office"</li> <li>or</li> <li>○ being labelled negatively for "working from home."</li> </ul>

For a long-term plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “To fill the time while waiting for a better opportunity, freelancing is used as a steppingstone, gaining experience, upskilling, and getting paid.”</li> <li>● “Perhaps one may continue freelancing.”</li> <li>● “They desire to start their own business and do not want to work for others indefinitely.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “I took a daring step to establish a small agency, and I don’t want to be solely dependent on platforms.”</li> <li>● “I aim to build a strong brand for my own studio, with its unique characteristics, and so on.”</li> <li>● “In the long term, careful planning is necessary because we consider these freelancers to be the main source of our family’s income.”</li> </ul>
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Experienced media freelancers discover that platforms provide a beneficial mix of flexibility regarding time and location, presenting opportunities to increase their income while pursuing personal dreams or idealism (Table 1). Over few years, their social status has markedly improved, overcoming initial comments such as “What kind of job is that, just sitting in front of a laptop?” and challenging stigmas like the belief that “men should work in an office” or facing negative labels for “working from home.” Looking towards the long term, these freelancers have diverse plans. Some have taken daring steps to establish small agencies, aiming to avoid sole dependence on platforms. Others aspire to construct a strong brand for their own studios with unique characteristics. Emphasis is placed on long-term planning, recognising that these freelancers constitute the primary source of income for their families. This finding illustrates the varied and strategic approaches experienced media freelancers adopt in shaping their careers in relation to platform-based work.

Nevertheless, our research challenges the common notion that freelance work on online platforms offers unlimited flexibility. Many media freelancers are constrained by tight deadlines, client demands, and the prices offered by these platforms. The supposed flexibility of freelance work is often perceived as an unmitigated advantage. However, our research reveals that freelancers on online platforms frequently struggle with tight deadlines and demanding clients. These constraints can limit their autonomy and flexibility, as they must follow client specifications and meet project deadlines. Additionally, many freelancers encounter pricing structures set by the platforms that may not always align with their expectations, potentially compromising their financial freedom. In other words, as stated in a previous study, even though they appreciate the opportunity to manage their work hours, the majority of workers found themselves obliged to work demanding, non-traditional hours to fulfil client requests (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2018). It is essential to recognise that while flexibility is a defining feature of freelance work, it is not without its limitations.

Interestingly, both groups agree on the positive roles online platforms play. They support the remote working culture, contribute to social mobility, and legitimise freelance work as real jobs or employment. Our research affirms the significance of online platforms in modern work culture. These platforms have facilitated the growth of the remote working culture, enabling individuals to work from diverse locations and collaborate across geographical boundaries. They have also provided greater access to job opportunities, contributing to social mobility by allowing freelancers to secure work independently of their location, background, or industry connections. Moreover, online platforms have legitimised freelance work, shifting the perception of freelancers from those who perform casual tasks to professionals who are engaged in meaningful employment (Luik & Aritonang, 2021). A platform, serving as an intermediary between the seller/worker and buyer/client in creative work, significantly influences their views on the platform as a viable source of work, and ultimately, this shapes the degree to which photographers choose to participate or resist



(McDonald, Williams, & Mayes, 2021). In other words, these platforms have a substantial impact on shaping contemporary labour dynamics and inclusivity.

### **Conclusion**

Our findings imply a re-evaluation of extreme stances concerning the endorsement or dismissal of work flexibility and casualisation. Those who endorse flexibility may implicitly desire greater stability, while those who reject casualisation appreciate the advantages of varied projects and an improved work-life balance. The dichotomy of either celebrating or rejecting work flexibility and casualisation is often overly simplistic. Our research uncovers that those seemingly endorsing flexibility may secretly yearn for increased work stability. Although attracted to flexible work arrangements, they may still yearn for the security that traditional employment can offer. Conversely, those rejecting casualisation might do so while subtly enjoying the benefits of freelance work on online platforms, including diverse projects and an enhanced work-life balance. This nuance implies that the discussion surrounding the gig economy and freelance work needs to consider the intricate and varied motivations and experiences of those involved.

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**Contact email:** [jandyluik@petra.ac.id](mailto:jandyluik@petra.ac.id)



*Connotation Evolution and Communication Characteristics of Network Language  
Using the 5W Communication Model: An Analysis of "X Socialites"*

Liang Yutao, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR  
Yan Zhongyi, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

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**Abstract**

"Online socialite" has become a popular internet buzzword in China in recent years. Originally referring to female internet celebrities who purchased luxury goods through group buying and then pretended to be "socialites" in high-end places to attract attention, a series of "X socialites" emerged on the internet, such as "Buddha socialites" (beautiful and sexy ladies in a Buddha temple), which caused controversy and discussion. This study examines the connotation evolution and communication characteristics of the internet buzzword "X socialites" from the perspectives of linguistics and communication, based on the 5W model of communication. Content analysis and focus group discussions were employed as research methods for this study. The study finds that the evolution of the term "socialite" reflects the changing evaluation standards and cognitive changes towards women in different periods of Chinese society. The emphasis has shifted from the focus on inner spiritual qualities in the past to the pursuit of external material possessions today. The internet term "X socialites" not only retains the core concept of "socialites" as a "beautiful woman" but also introduces negative connotations, such as creating fake personas and engaging in behaviors that violate public values in order to attract followers for financial gains. It is noteworthy that, whether in traditional society or the internet age, the commercial pursuit and consumption of female beauty behind different images are the focus of public criticism that cannot be ignored.

Keywords: Network Language, 5W Communication Model, X Socialites

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## 1. Introduction

As network communication penetrates into people's lives, all kinds of network languages have been created, which have been widely concerned and consumed by people. Internet language has been rooted in a dense and multidimensional network practice. From the semantic point of view, internet slang was a new application of daily language in the network environment, in which caused derivation of partial or overall variation. In terms of form, it involved with creative, vivid, and easily-spread characteristics with the function of reflecting the public opinion and mentality in the society (Liu, 2008; Hu et al., 2014). So, the study of Internet language has always been a more popular topic. Many studies analyzed the word formation and language characteristics of popular network languages and traced the causes of popularity from sociolinguistic perspective in recent years. For example, He and He (2003) mentioned the characteristic words of Chinese internet language resulted of the "word-phrase deformation", i.e., the linguistic modal effects through imitating. Other scholars explored the mechanism and social functions of Internet buzzwords, focusing on their impact on language, culture, and people, such as the pattern of communication (Wang, 2019).

"X Socialites (X 媛; X-Yuan)" was one of the fresh Internet terms that have emerged in the past two years. The term originated from October 2020 when some female online influencers did joint orders to purchase luxury goods in a very good deal, and then pretended to be "celebrities" in high-class places to attract attention (Zhang, 2021). Subsequently, a series of "X Socialites (Yuan; 媛)", such as "Buddhist-Socialites", "Tea-Socialites", "Frisbee-Socialites", "Sick-Socialites", have emerged on the Internet. The term "X Socialites Universe", which means that everything could be called as "X Socialites", has aroused heated discussions and controversies. It was interesting to note that in the Chinese context, the character "Yuan (Socialites; 媛)", which corresponds to female socialites, has long been recognized by the public as a word that refers to beauty and goodness, containing praises and wishes. However, the shades of meaning of the word "X Socialites" in news commentaries and netizens' discussions has been mostly critical and derogatory, showing that the changed use of "Socialites (媛; Yuan)" in the Chinese Internet environment has created strangeness in the content of the meaning. Therefore, one of the main purposes of this paper was to explore the history of meaning deviation from the traditional semantics and shifted current connotation in the online world. On this basis, starting from the five aspects of the 5W communication model, this study took "X Socialites" as an example to explore the semantic flow process and mechanism of network terms through textual analysis, and further clarified the usage pattern and communication effect through focus groups.

## 2. Method

Lasswell's 5W communication model was proposed by American scholar Harold Lasswell in 1948, which divided the communication process into five parts: the communicator (who), the message (say what), the channel (in which channel), the audience (to whom), and the effects (with what effects) (Lasswel, 1984).

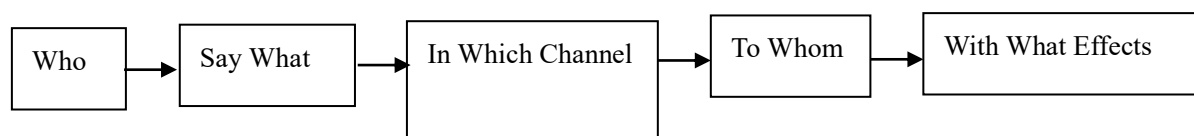


Figure 1: Illustration of Lasswell's 5W communication model (Peng, 2015).

This model clearly sorts out the composition of the elements in the communication process and help to analyze each part in detail. Placing complex linguistic phenomena or communication issues in the overall communication process, a relatively objective and accurate depiction of certain issues could be reproduced through five components. Although the model was proposed earlier and is considered to be imperfect, as a model that clearly delineates the five elements of communication, it points out a clear research area for communication research (Peng, 2015).

The fact that "X Socialites", as one of the hotspot events that caused a great controversy on the Internet in 2020, but still spreading and has been heated discussed to this day shows that the five elements of the event, namely the communicator, the message, the channel, the audience, and the influence (the 5Ws), are all worthy of study, and that the elements are interlocked with each other, which gives the whole process of communication a continuous vitality. However, most of the existing studies on "X Socialites" have analyzed a single element or a few of them independently, focusing on information and influence, while paying less efforts to the communicator, the channel, and the audience. On the other hand, other models of communication behavior change also focus on the effect of communication and neglect information and the front-end of the communication process to a certain extent, which also cannot cover all the research objects of the "X Socialites" phenomenon. Therefore, the 5W communication model is an ideal theoretical framework to study the phenomenon of "X Socialites" online terminology in a comprehensive way. Based on this model, this article hopes to make an effective academic portrayal of the phenomenon of "X Socialites" pronouns in the Internet comprehensively and prompted following research questions by text analysis and focus group (4 groups of total 15 members, included students and professors from different majors):

- (1) Who uses or promotes the transmission of "X Socialites " on the Internet:
- (2) What is the meaning of "X Socialites" on the Internet;
- (3) Who are the audiences of "X Socialites";
- (4) What is the audience's attitude towards "X Socialites"?

### **3. Who Used or Promotes the Transmission of “X Socialites” on the Internet**

The use of "X-socialites" on the Internet is presented in the form of "picture + text", that is, the presentation of a certain image accompanied by a combination of words and the discussions in the comment section with different emotions. This paper will categorize the users according to whether they present relevant images or not, and then analyze the different roles played by people with different attitudes towards both the word and phenomenon.

#### **3.1. The “Party” Presents Relevant Image**

Female internet celebrities are the earliest and most important users and promoters of this buzzword. Since 2016, the development of short videos and webcasting has given rise to the netizen economy, and promoted the development of marketing modes such as live broadcasting and e-commerce + KOL. So if they want to be out of the ordinary and gain a firm foothold in the huge group of netizens, putting on their own "persona" might be a consideration, just as respondent C (male) said,

*The pressure of competition on this track is too great if you only have beautiful appearance. Nowadays, for most streamer, being pretty is a plus rather than a*

*determinant, and viewers are often attracted to streamers who have a certain personal talent or ability and look pretty at the same time.*

Many of them combine beauty with economic conditions, niche cultural connotations and even positive personality traits. For example, "Sick Socialites" expresses their positive and optimistic attitude towards life even when sick, "Frisbee Socialites" conveys self-discipline, a healthy lifestyle and an outgoing personality, and "Divorce Socialites" show their independence and self-reliance.

On the other hand, the influence of Internet celebrities makes them become lifestyle leaders, and the image presented is therefore supported, imitated and reproduced by many other female internet users. These Internet celebrities and their supporters, in addition to being called "X Socialites", many of them also use this word to call themselves. When researchers asked women why they claimed to be, most respondents believed that they were just following suit, as respondent B (male) thought that even if they know the controversy of the word, they still do not mind using it to package themselves, so as to show their own beauty.

Therefore, since the objects involved in the "X Socialites" controversy in the early days were more or less related to business behavior, the subject of "X Socialites" can be defined as "A group of beautiful women who create false personas online and make a profit by violating public values or thinking paradigms."

### **3.2. Commenters Without Image Presentation**

However, there are people who do not present an image, but participate in and promote the use of "X Socialites" by posting comments, and they can be identifiers and critics based on specific behaviors.

Identifiers refer to the group of people who identify the images of women on the Internet according to the common characteristics of "X Socialites" then recognize whether they are "X Socialites" or not. While the action of Critics is more aggressive than identifiers as they not only identify the image of X Socialites, they also criticize the "right-wrong" values of that image in order to rectify the undesirable trend of the Internet.

For individuals, there were gender differences in their critical intentions. Our respondent thought that women, especially independent women, blame "X Socialites" because they do not want such a "derogatory" to break the long-established social recognition of women's independence, while men tend to think that in the eyes of men, "X Socialites" are erotic as it reflects a recognition of women's advantages in appearance and body shape.

Media's criticism emphasizes the traditional ethical concepts "Gentleness, kindness, respect, frugality, humility" (Wen Liang Gong Jian Rang), and "Benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, and faith" (Ren Yi Li Zhi Xin) in order to play the role of manner guide. "X Socialites" use false personas to attract attention is contrary to the virtue of honesty and trustworthiness, and the extravagance of consumerism it induces is opposite to the requirements of simplicity and frugality, let alone her inappropriate attire and behavior on serious public occasions is not in line with the norms of propriety. Taking "Buddhist Socialites" as an example, "Their photographs in monasteries in revealing clothes and indecent behavior, which is not in line with the purpose of Buddhism to lead people to goodness, contrary to the clean and solemn atmosphere of monasteries, the nature of



Buddhist monks who have few desires, and contrary to the pursuit of believers who come to the monasteries to purify their soul." said as the principal of the Buddhist Association of China.

#### 4. The Meaning and Creation of X Socialites in Ancient and Modern Context

The traditional use of the word "Yuan" before the internet context served as a term to show affection and courtesy to a lady. In ancient book *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, the classic explaining characters in Chinese, "Yuan" is described as "a beauty", with a quote from *Classic of Poetry (Shi Jing)*: "She is so fair and bright/In rich attire snow-white/O'er her fine undershirt/She wears close-fitting skirt/Her eyes are bright and clear/Her face will fascinate/Alas! Fair as she might appear/She is a raped beauty of state (*Bang zhi yuan ye*)." In this ode, "Yuan" is used to describe the exceedingly gorgeous of Duchess Xuan Jiang of Wei. Likewise, *Er Ya* states that "the beautiful woman called Yuan, and beautiful man called Yan". "Yuan" was first used in Ming "*Secret History of the the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties (Liang Jin Mi Shi)*" in conjunction with *ming* (famous) as *Mingyuan* (socialite) to call women with both distinguished family and beautiful appearance.

However, language is fluid as it reflects social and cultural changes. The shades of meaning of Mingyuan (Socialite) is still mainly positive in the public's perception, while in fact, it has been changing in different cultural contexts since before the Internet era, due to the changes of women's social roles and status in the development of the times. During Ming and Qing, any woman with talent and virtue could be called a socialite. As the requirement of hierarchy was broken, the word Mingyuan was gradually linked to the erotic industry, beginning to refer to the women who was extravagant, lustful and roaming around social occasions.

In *Hai zou ye you lu*, Wang Tao (1828– 1897) counted several kinds of brothels when travelling Shanghai, "Mingyuan", which could be seen as courtesan here, was one of them. Unexpectedly, they were different from the prostitutes in *Qinglou* (brothel) as they did not need to sing or strum to make a living, inversely, they enjoyed luxury life with maid serving them to dress and make up. The article shows that in Qing there was a history to build up personal image, or we can say it persona of women born into the upper ten as a gimmick, in order to attract customers, though these Mingyuan were still a part of the prostitution industry in essence.

A very critical image of Mingyuan was recorded in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when 1920s a female socialite election was called, which was in fact to satisfy the erotic needs of male urban commoners. Contestants are quite a mixed bag, making those who were really born from polite society, sensible and well-educated retreated from the title of "Mingyuan". There was a similar case reported by Ta Kung Pao (Hong Kong) in 1948 that some female socialites were unaware of the suffering of the poor people's life that even their pets lived a life of luxury, which had again, made the image of the Mingyuan in the eyes of the public strongly questioned.

Similarly, the image of Mingyuan (or socialites) in nowadays internet context is a continuation of its traditional one, while it refers to women who are vain and money-grubbing, and who market themselves by creating false personas, which, thanks to the wide dissemination of buzzword, further strengthened the pejorative meaning of the word "Mingyuan". That is to say, "Mingyuan" in the Internet context is actually a "reproduction" of its original image and "appropriation" of some features of the word's meaning in traditional

context, which ultimately provides an apt description with opposite emotional feeling, and that is the cleverness of internet language production and development.

#### 4.1. The Meaning and Type of “X Socialites” in the Internet Environment

Through the analysis of a series of "X-Socialites" image and related texts, "X-Socialites" was defined as the generalization of the image of a group of women based on hot issues, referring to a group of women who present their crafted and beautiful appearance in specific scenes, while in fact whose dress and behavior have deviated from the traditional assumptions or logic of the public about the image of the characters who belong to the scenes. This was also evidenced in the focus group interviews, where interviewees added further examples of their behavior and purpose, pointing out they actually have an axe to grind and the disavowal of the portrait and the scene.

*Respondent A (male): Some women do things they are not well versed in or even don't know about, just attempt to package themselves as professional.*

*Respondent B (male), Respondent J (female): Their behaviors are not in line with the traditional concepts, which makes audiences dislike or feel inappropriate. For example, the image of being in a hospital should be weak/plain/sick.*

*Respondent C (Male), Respondent K (Female): As for Frisbee-Socialites, they only use the sport as a tool to take good pictures of themselves, rather than actually enjoying the sport or promoting it.*

From commercial behavior's point of view, the initial stage of "X-Socialites" represented by "Socialites" or Mingyuan could be understood as commercial entities such as internet celebrities, micro-businesses achieve their operational purposes by packaging themselves as traditional socialites, which emphasizing high-class life and beauty. With the emergence of Buddhist-Socialites, Tea-Socialites and Frisbee-Socialites, "X-Socialites" at this stage could be further subdivided into two categories: "displaying type" and "proximity type" according to the degree of their association with the "Socialites", with each of them embodying different commercial marketing strategies.

The image of "displaying type" is highly related to that of "Socialites", which reminds people of leisure and luxurious lifestyle by emphasizing the symbols of luxury goods, clothes that create contrast and distance from the life of commoners. Examples of these types are Buddhist-Socialites and Tea-Socialites showing an image that they do not need to run around to make ends meet like general public but enjoy Zen and tea culture everyday, and Vegetable-Socialites dressing out of place to purchase vegetables with brand-name package. However, the fact that their behaviors and purposes are contrary to the values and behavioral patterns rooted in traditional culture and public thinking is the reason why they are criticized. For example, the Buddha Hall is supposed to represent the attitude of forgetting worldly trifles and living in an unadorned lifestyle, where Buddhist-Socialites appear to have no material desires while in fact expanding their business territory. Similarly, Vegetable-Socialites' food-wasting behavior obviously deviates greatly from the basic civic consciousness of saving food and respecting other's labor.

There is a clear downward trend of class in the marketing scenes of "proximity type", as the personas of these internet celebrities are more closely related to ordinary life compared to their superior counterpart, while the only but notable common is that there is weird contrast between their appearance, behavior and the occasions they belong to, as it is different from the public's mindset. Frisbee-Socialites, Sick-Socialites and Divorced-Socialites are examples. They usually present in sports fields, hospitals, kindergartens, and anime exhibitions and attempt to cause psychological interactions with other people. Take Sick-Socialites as a case, the typical patient in the hospital scene is supposed to be weak and emaciated, while Sick-Socialites, especially those who pretend to be sick present a lively, energetic and optimistic image by makeup, arousing sympathy and praise of others, so as to attract fans and achieve their marketing aim. As we can see, from traditional socialites to two phrases of "X Socialites", the core element of the word is always beautiful look and figure--the original meaning of the word, while the social status attributes are further diminished until they are integrated into the daily lives of the public, finally form the "X Socialites Universe" in which every aspect of a woman could be considered a "X Socialite".

## 5. Who is the Followers of " X Socialites ": Targeted Consumers and Fans

The question defined the followers as the fans of "X Socialites ". Although they exercise the function of spreading the message to a certain extent, they are different from the critics discussed in RQ1. Followers or fans were the direct target of communication and have a more neutral or even positive attitude towards "X Socialites ". Most of them were young people, mainly young women. "X Socialites " played different roles in attracting fans of different gender.

### 5.1. The Reference Group for Women

For female followers, "X Socialites " played the role of a reference group, with compounded influence. The following reasons for becoming a fan may exist simultaneously.

First of all, some of the female audience aspired to the rich life and luxury symbols presented by "X Socialites ". They have the same values as "X Socialites " and do not feel that their practices are unethical, which are women influenced by consumerism and want to produce similar attractive photos, eye-catching content, or use it as a means of self-promoting. In this case, the influence of the reference group of "X Socialites" is the expression of value, in which this group of audience feels that the information provided by "X Socialites" will help them to show their ideal selves to others.

Secondly, another group of female fans, such as Respondent F (female), *"use the Internet as a window to look up and hope that they can live a carefree life like 'X Socialites' where they can make tea and arrange flowers (rather than work hard)"*. They do not think that the content is false, and their recognition was based on the influence of information provided by "X Socialites", which is simply obtained messages from people who feel like upper class women.

In addition to this, there were some female followers who try to realize their own attractiveness by learning and imitating the contents presented by "X Socialites", which belonged to a kind of impression management for ordinary people. In this case, the main impact of "X Socialites" is to fulfill Utility Needs, i.e., the information provided by "X Socialites" can help this group of audience to achieve the goal of becoming more attractive.

Respondent O (male) said,

*I think there is an internal image management that ordinary people have to manage on social media .... There are some girls who are vain and they want to imitate these so-called 'Yuan' because they are not experienced enough to know that it is fake and they feel that this is the kind of life they want to live. She thinks that this is the kind of life she wants to live.*

Respondent G (female) felt that this kind of image management was a result of external aesthetic trends:

*In recent years, the Internet environment has become more and more demanding on women, who need to be well-built, tall and have fair skin. In fact, women have been affected by the internalization of this concept and feel that they have to imitate and follow the practices of the 'X Yuan' in order to prove that they are an attractive woman.*

## 5.2. Consumer Goods for Men

Although some young men were also the fans of "X Socialites" and were attracted by the uniqueness of the image, unlike regarding "X Socialites" as a reference group, men tend to treat "X Socialites" as consumer products. They consumed the image of "X Socialites" presented on the Internet. The contrast between the occasions and behaviors of "X Socialites" may make men feel erotic towards this group. Therefore, some male thought that "X Socialites" were suspected of self-objectification.

*Respondent M (Male): (Men) Just consume Yuan herself.*

## 6. The Audience's Attitude toward "X Yuan": The Communication Effect

The attitude consists of three dimensions: cognition, affect, and behavior (Khalil et al., 2022). In the behavioral dimension, this study focused on the changes in the respondents' real-life language habits as a result of the influence of "X Socialites". As an Internet buzzword, "X Socialites" has affected the development of traditional language mainly in terms of semantics and real-life language usage. Respondents' acceptance of the changed meanings varied.

The popularity of "X Socialites (X 媛: X-Yuan)" has changed the semantics of "Yuan" and "Mingyuan (名媛)" from positive to negative. Netizens have added the negative connotation of "show-off", which has changed the original meaning of the term. The current controversy over "X Yuan" shows that as a highly generalized title understood and used by different people in various language contexts, the specific meaning and critical implication of "X Yuan" may be different. In this case, users need to judge whether the application of the term is appropriate or not based on the specific situation. Most of the respondents thought that the term "X Yuan" is appropriate when the improper intention of the subjects is obvious, the occasion is immoral, the behavior affects others, or even infringes on the reasonable rights of others. Labeling or using mental shortcuts to jump to conclusions is not appropriate because it may cause harm to the innocent.

*Respondent A (Male): Labeling others for being in a particular situation without understanding what she is putting out, which may be a disservice to those who truly love or are committed to the culture.*

In everyday contexts, respondents separated Internet buzzword "X Yuan " from "Mingyuan (名媛)" on the basis of keeping the traditional meaning. Several respondents used the term "X Yuan" to describe people who, by online definition, sharing the negative behaviors.

*Respondent F (Female): I think I have used it once. I once went to play frisbee, a girl wearing a very short skirt ran off in the middle of the game to take pictures, posing in a variety of ways without participating in the team's activities. Just felt like she was taking pictures and left afterward. That was the word I used when I told my friends about this.*

However, most young people would be more cautious in using "Yuan" and "Mingyuan (名媛)", or even avoid using it to prevent misunderstanding.

*Respondent D (Female): I won't use "Yuan" to my friends anymore because everyone knows that it is a pejorative term. .... It is a way of giggle and flirt without any limits or boundaries.*

### **6.1. Moral Controversy Induced from X Yuan**

The phenomenon of "X Yuan" has aroused ethical debates as it involved topics such as marketing promotion, consumption of sexualized women symbols, and occasion choosing for attention. Some argued that this is a normal phenomenon and that the behavior of the "X Yuan" group is a manifestation of their free choice and exercise of personal rights. Another point of view was that the behavior of the group should be criticized, pondering the extent of such behavior.

### **6.2. Situational Controversy, Sexualized Female Image and Effectiveness**

Some respondents considered it unethical to use inappropriate forms of marketing on serious occasions, especially in Buddhist temples and hospitals.

In addition, establishing persona through sexualized female symbols may undermine women's strengths in other areas besides sex and appearance, reinforcing the male gaze and hindering the progress of gender equality. This kind of marketing model may cause some women to develop the value of relying on improving their appearance to raise their social status, cling the men instead of improving qualities such as knowledge level to enhance competitiveness. This process will put women in a disadvantaged position and deepen the prejudice against women in society.

*Respondent A (Male): The main impact is that it hinders the progress of gender equality. It will deepen the prejudice against women and lead to a situation where one part of the women appeals for the independence and equality, while another part of the still relies on the promoting themselves by emphasizing of their appearance to accumulate money.*

Finally, as a marketing tactic, "X Yuan "'s the sustainability of profitability was questionable as it may have a negative impact on the industries involved. Meanwhile, since this kind of female-bait marketing and the corresponding curiosity psychology follow a peripheral route, it may be difficult to attract consumers with high consumption capacity and high information processing involvement. Besides, it may even have a negative impact on the environment of cyber celebrity, mainly reflected in the pressure by labeling and stigmatize on innocent groups, which is suspected of disrupting the market.

*Respondent O (M):... attracts consumers with not very high consumption power and thresholds, and does not attract professionals with a higher level of participation.*

## 7. Conclusion

Through textual analysis and focus group interviews, this study found that the propagation agents of "X Socialites" included female Internet celebrities who make profit by designed public persona, followers with imitate behaviors, as well as the identifier and judge performed by media and netizens. There were two types of groups that promote the practice dissemination of "X Socialites": 1) the agents who portrayed related images and 2) the commentators without presentation of images. Among them, female Internet celebrities were the earliest and most significant users and promoters of this online terminology, who described themselves just as they are called, relating to certain personas creation to distinguish themselves in a competitive influencer market and attract attention. For commentators, there were two stages: identification and judgement. The first stage was to identify women's images online based on the common characteristics of "X Socialites", while the second stage was to make further value judgement on the basis of the former.

Secondly, the semantic changes of "Yuan (媛; Socialites)" and its derivatives occurred in the Internet context, but there was a history of positive and negative transformation before they were adopted as popular Internet terms. Besides, during the development of "X Socialites" as an Internet buzzword which related to marketing due to persona benefits, the two sub-categories of "X Socialites", "displaying type" and "proximity type", corresponded to different marketing and communication strategies based on the difference in the degree of association with the traditional meaning of "Yuan". Compared with the traditional meaning, this online term maintained the core concept of "beauty", but introduced a derogatory meaning of gaining profits through traffic by establishing false personas and behaving against the public's values or schema to make profit.

Finally, most of the respondents thought that the term "X Socialites" will be appropriate when the image or behavior of the subject meets the definition of "X Socialites". But it may cause harm when the identification is made by mental shortcuts and labelling. At the same time, "X Socialites" has changed the respondents' daily language habits and led to debates on the efficiency of the involved marketing strategy and balance issues between morality and profitability.

On the one hand, the appearance of "X Socialites" was closely related to the Internet celebrity economy which involved to marketing promotion and consumption of sexualized female symbols. On the other hand, this study discovered a phenomenon that deserves attention, that is, the influence of commercial activities on linguistic connotations and their use. This issue has been complicated in the face of the platforms with different patterns of presentation, capitalization intervention, changes in users' information access habits, and rising attention on

gender inequality under the new media era. These agenda often lead to ethical controversies and affect netizens' real-life language usage habits, so it is necessary for each part in the practice to behave with propriety and strike a balance between social ethics and commercial profitability.

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**Contact email:** [yanzy09@connect.hku.hk](mailto:yanzy09@connect.hku.hk)







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