

# The 15th Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film (MediAsia2024)

The 2024 IAFOR Autumn Conference Series in Kyoto

October 15–19, 2024 | Kyoto, Japan & Online

OFFICIAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

ISSN: 2186-5906

Organised by The International Academic Forum (IAFOR) in partnership with the IAFOR Research Centre at the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP) at Osaka University, Japan, and IAFOR's Global Partners







“To Open Minds, To Educate Intelligence, To Inform Decisions”

The International Academic Forum provides new perspectives to the thought-leaders and decision-makers of today and tomorrow by offering constructive environments for dialogue and interchange at the intersections of nation, culture, and discipline. Headquartered in Nagoya, Japan, and registered as a Non-Profit Organization (一般社団法人), IAFOR is an independent think tank committed to the deeper understanding of contemporary geo-political transformation, particularly in the Asia Pacific Region.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERCULTURAL

INTERDISCIPLINARY

**iafor**







# International Academic Board

Dr Joseph Haldane, IAFOR and Osaka University, Japan, & University College London, United Kingdom  
Professor Jun Arima, President, IAFOR & University of Tokyo, Japan  
Professor Anne Boddington, Executive Vice-President and Provost, IAFOR & Middlesex University, United Kingdom  
Professor Barbara Lockee, Virginia Tech, United States  
Professor Donald E. Hall, Binghamton University, United States  
Dr James W. McNally, University of Michigan, United States & NACDA Program on Aging  
Professor Grant Black, Chuo University, Japan  
Professor Dexter Da Silva, Keisen University, Japan  
Professor Baden Offord, Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University, Australia & Cultural Studies Association of Australasia  
Professor Frank S. Ravitch, Michigan State University College of Law, United States  
Professor William Baber, Kyoto University, Japan  
Dr Virgil Hawkins, Osaka University, Japan

## KAMC & MediAsia 2024 Conference Programme Committee

Dr Nasya Bahfen, La Trobe University, Australia  
Dr Thomas G. Endres, University of Northern Colorado, United States  
Dr Joseph Haldane, IAFOR and Osaka University, Japan, & University College London, United Kingdom  
Professor Bradley J. Hamm, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, United States  
Dr Virgil Hawkins, Osaka University, Japan  
Professor Timothy W. Pollock, Osaka Kyoiku University / Osaka Metropolitan University, Japan  
Professor Padma Rani, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India  
Dr Paul Spicer, Hokkaido University, Japan





The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024

Official Conference Proceedings

ISSN: 2186-5906



© The International Academic Forum 2024  
The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)  
Sakae 1-16-26-201  
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi  
Japan 460-0008  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)





## Table of Contents

<i>The Educational Significance of Variety Shows on Young People's Career Choices: The Case of the Chinese Variety Show 'Let's Farm'</i> Jiayi Liu	pp. 1 - 17
<i>Journalists and Machines: Applying the Technology Adaptation Model to Understand AI Use in TV Journalism</i> Rossalyn Asmarantika Veronika Veronika Yeary Setianto	pp. 19 - 25
<i>Implementation of Language Proficiency Assessments for the Training of Community Interpreters</i> Akiko Sato	pp. 27 - 34
<i>What Journalists Ask When Channels Are Blocked: A Topic Modeling of Requests on Education via Brazil's Freedom of Information Act Under Bolsonaro's Administration</i> Cristian Edel Weiss	pp. 35 - 60
<i>Your Justice Is Different From My Justice: Quantifying Mental State Variation of Identical Words Through a Case Study of Korean Newspaper Corpora</i> Hana Jee	pp. 61 - 72
<i>Understanding the Role of Personal Motivations in Social Media Use and Choices for Interpersonal Communication</i> Karabo Sitto-Kaunda	pp. 73 - 84
<i>Revolutionizing Newsgathering: The Impact of Digital Media and New Technologies</i> Nurhadiyahati	pp. 85 - 91
<i>Childism and Maternal Dysfunction in Tatsushi Ōmori's "Mother" (2020)</i> Gamze Hakverdi	pp. 93 - 99
<i>Communication Campaign of Social Marketing to Reduce Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs): The Case of Diabetes Mellitus at BaanTakhun Hospital in Southern Thailand</i> Siripan Krasaesan	pp. 101 - 110
<i>"Shanghai in the Night": A Study of Urban Memory on Ballroom Dance Culture in Republican-Era Shanghai Cinema (1920s-1940s)</i> Qiyun Tan Yiqiao Sun	pp. 111 - 124
<i>Cultural Symbolism in Vietnamese Horror Films</i> Liem Bui Quoc	pp. 125 - 137

- Unpredictable Box Office Performance of Franchise Blockbusters: The Fading “Magical” Appeal of the “Fantastic Beasts” Series in Mainland China*  
Ruixuan Wu pp. 139 - 154
- The Integration of Cross-Cultural Communication in Performing Arts: A Short Video Making Project*  
Peishi Weng  
Yijie Ou pp. 155 - 161
- The Reflection of Society in Udom Taephanich’s Stand-Up Comedy*  
Panurit Sarasombat pp. 163 - 173
- Exploring the Dynamics of Violence and Power in School in Thai Teen Series “Girl From Nowhere”*  
Thanapol Chaowanich  
Preeda Akkarachantachot pp. 175 - 186
- Co-creating Media Innovation for Social Value: The Thai Media Lab Model*  
Sakulsri Srisaracam pp. 187 - 196
- Toward Automating the Classification of Films’ Narrative Structures*  
Nuttanai Lertpreechapakdee  
Tatri Taiphapoon  
Sukree Sinthupinyo pp. 197 - 207
- Unraveling Themes of Feminism and Postmodernity in “And Just Like That...”*  
Noble Po-kan Lo  
Bryan Ka-ho To pp. 209 - 220
- Performing Microcelebrity: Analysing Kairos, Modes, and Practices in the Era of Breaking of World Record in Ghana*  
Ephraim Danquah pp. 221 - 234
- Mental Health Consultation Through Telemedicine, Does it Work? A Case Study of Psychologists and Patients in Online Consultation*  
Stefanie Lunardy  
Helga Liliani Cakra Dewi pp. 235 - 241
- The Overlooked Cases of Female Hikikomori: Visual Representation in Manga*  
Madeeha Nawaz pp. 243 - 257
- Comparative Analysis of the Political Message Strategies and Transmedia Storytelling Techniques in the 2022 Philippine Presidential Elections*  
Rayns Keneth Ampon  
Jessada Salathong pp. 259 - 271

- Women's Voices: An Analysis of Arab Women's Poetry and Its Role in Empowerment*  
Aisha Ali Alkhulaifi pp. 273 - 284
- Bright on the Grey Sea: Reconsider Film Poetry Through a Chinese Lens*  
Chen Chen pp. 285 - 290
- Broadcast Media Diversity as an 'Enabling Environment' for Sustainable Media Democratization: A Media Ecology Perspective*  
Maulin Ni'am  
Astrid Herawati Basala pp. 291 - 307
- In Birth Control We Trust: Analyzing Modern Contraception Behavior and Parasocial Relationships With Health Personalities Online*  
Nicole Claire A. Desierto pp. 309 - 331
- It's Time to Podcast: Hype or Here to Stay? A Pre- and Post-pandemic Trend Study*  
Matthias Werner  
Carsten Rennhak pp. 333 - 346
- Indonesian Online Media Coverage Regarding the Thorium-Powered Nuclear Power Plant: Media Conglomeration Practices for Reporting Nuclear Issues to the Public*  
Muhammad Yunus Zulkifli pp. 347 - 358
- Photography and Visual Diary: Participatory Visual Research for Creating Educational Toys That Enhance Social Skills in Children With Disabilities*  
Lia Herna pp. 359 - 367
- Empowering Indonesian Ceramicists Through Participatory Design: Co-designing a Mobile App*  
Rani Aryani Widjono pp. 369 - 378
- Ephemeral Content as an Instrument to Convey Identitary Values in Masstige Fashion Brands' Communication*  
Sigita Kamašauskė pp. 379 - 389
- Stealth Advertising Awareness, Knowledge, and Perceived Ethicality in TV Patrol and 24 Oras News Programs Among Select Communication Students*  
Jessa Ericka Bien-Munsayac  
Reyjane Calicdan-Del Campo pp. 391 - 404
- The Adoption of Artificial Intelligence Into Journalism Practice: Perspectives From the Ghanaian Media Industry*  
Samuel Adefioye pp. 405 - 419





*The Educational Significance of Variety Shows on Young People's Career Choices:  
The Case of the Chinese Variety Show 'Let's Farm'*

Jiaxi Liu, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

"Let's farm" is a reality show launched by the Chinese video platform iQIYI. The program invites ten young people lacking agricultural knowledge to undergo a six-month closed farming experience in the countryside of Hangzhou, China. It documents their arduous journey from zero to establishing their own agricultural company in a documentary style. After the show aired, it changed the attitudes of thousands of young Chinese who previously refused to farm in their hometowns. These youths actively engaged in grain production, mitigating the risk of a dwindling agricultural workforce in China to some extent. This study employs a combination of textual analysis and social learning theory to explore comments on "Let's farm" across Chinese social platforms, focusing on viewers' motivations for watching the content and the knowledge and attitude changes they experience. The author uses words cloud, sentiment analysis and sentiment analysis to organize the data, extract meanings, and select theoretical approaches to derive practical conclusions. By analyzing 2,000 comments related to "Let's farm," the research examines how variety shows can influence youth attitudes toward specific professions and the effectiveness of conveying educational content through entertainment in an informal educational environment. This study not only provides a new perspective on the role of variety shows in modern education but also offers references for designing educationally rich media content in the future. Through the optimization and innovation of such programs, scientific knowledge and vocational education can be more effectively promoted among the younger generation.

Keywords: Agricultural Education, Social Learning Theory, Entertainment Media, Career Attitudes, Rural Revitalization

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

*Let's Farm* is a popular reality show in China that features ten young participants who immerse themselves in the authentic lifestyle of the countryside, undertaking daily farm work in the fields (Asia News Network, 2023). This program goes beyond typical entertainment by providing viewers with a close look at rural life and the challenges of agricultural labor. The participants' experiences resonate with many viewers, particularly those who may not have been exposed to the realities of farm life (Yang, 2015; Lundy et al., 2011). Since its debut, *Let's Farm* has sparked significant attention, especially among younger audiences. The show has generated lively discussions across various Chinese social media platforms, such as Weibo, Little Red Book, and TikTok. These platforms provide spaces for young viewers to share their thoughts on the program, discuss its content, and reflect on how it relates to their own career choices and views on agriculture (Singhal & Rogers, 2014; Global Times, 2022).

Analyzing *Let's Farm* offers valuable insights into how entertainment content can be strategically leveraged to influence young people's career attitudes and promote agricultural education.

## Literature Review

### *The Importance of Agriculture in China*

As the world's largest producer of staple crops such as rice, wheat, and a wide variety of vegetables, China plays a critical role in ensuring both domestic food security and the stability of global agricultural markets (FAO, 2021). With a population of over 1.4 billion people, the country's agricultural output is crucial for meeting high domestic food demand. Additionally, China's agricultural exports significantly impact global food supply chains, influencing food prices and availability worldwide (FAO, 2021; Zhang, 2023).

Currently, China is undergoing rapid urbanization, which has led to substantial shifts in demographic and occupational structures (Liu & Li, 2017). This urbanization process is characterized by a large migration of rural populations to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities and living conditions (Liu & Li, 2017). Consequently, the agricultural workforce is declining, with rural laborers transitioning to non-agricultural sectors. This shift has created a considerable gap in agricultural labor, threatening the sustainability of rural agricultural communities and potentially impacting China's agricultural productivity in the long term (Fan & Rue, 2020).

Statistical data highlights the magnitude of this transition: the proportion of agricultural workers in China dropped from 70.5% in 1978 to 22.9% in 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021; Zhang, 2023). This decline is indicative of the broader global trend of rural depopulation and agricultural labor shortage, which can be attributed to the allure of urban jobs and a widespread perception of agriculture as a low-status, low-income profession. Furthermore, the aging population within rural areas exacerbates the challenge, as fewer young people are willing to pursue careers in farming (Ruibo & Linna, 2013).

In response to these challenges, the Chinese government has introduced policies aimed at revitalizing rural areas and modernizing agriculture through initiatives like the Rural Revitalization Strategy. This strategy focuses on improving rural infrastructure, enhancing agricultural education, and encouraging young people to engage in farming and related fields



(Liu & Li, 2017). Media platforms and entertainment programs have emerged as effective tools in this campaign by raising awareness about agriculture's importance and educating the public on its modern practices.

### ***Significance of Agricultural Education and Entertainment in China***

Social media has become crucial in promoting agricultural content, particularly to urban youth who often lack exposure to rural life (Olajide & Oresanya, 2016). Through relatable stories and engaging formats, media helps shift perceptions, presenting agriculture as a more attractive and respected career choice (Wang et al., 2024). Media and entertainment platforms play a powerful role in this effort, making agricultural education more engaging and accessible to wider audiences (Zhang, 2023). By blending educational information with captivating content, these platforms demystify agricultural work and highlight it as a viable and fulfilling career path.

Furthermore, social media platforms such as Weibo, Little Red Book, and TikTok allow audiences to discuss these shows, share experiences, and even exchange agricultural knowledge, creating a community that supports rural revitalization (Olajide & Oresanya, 2016). These platforms enable user-generated content, which not only amplifies the educational messages but also allows for real-time feedback and interaction, making agricultural education more interactive (Lundy et al., 2007). By making agriculture more visible and accessible through digital platforms, these shows and social media channels play a crucial role in altering the perception of agriculture from a traditional, low-status job to a field ripe with innovation, sustainability, and economic potential (Liu & Wang, 2019; Burdsall, 2023; Wei et al., 2024).

### ***Social Learning Theory***

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Bandura (1978), emphasizes that learning occurs through the observation and imitation of others within a social context. This theory posits that individuals can acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors by watching the actions of role models and noting the consequences that follow. Unlike traditional learning theories that focus solely on direct experience and reinforcement, Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of vicarious reinforcement—learning through the observation of rewards and punishments that others receive. This observational learning process helps individuals internalize behaviors and develop new attitudes without firsthand experience (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 2014).

A key component of Social Learning Theory is the concept of *observational learning*, which involves four main stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1978). For learning to occur, an individual must first pay attention to the behavior of a model, retain that information, and be capable of reproducing the observed behavior. Motivation, often influenced by observed consequences such as rewards or social recognition, plays a crucial role in determining whether the learned behavior will be enacted. This theory also underscores the impact of media and communication in shaping behavior, as people can learn from observing behaviors in media content and incorporating these lessons into their own actions and beliefs (Bandura, 2001).

## Research Questions

Given the challenges facing China's agricultural sector and the need to engage younger generations in rural development, it is essential to examine how media can contribute to reshaping perceptions of agriculture. To understand the impact of this show on young viewers' attitudes toward agriculture, we must address several key questions:

1. How does "Let's Farm" deliver agricultural education through entertainment?
2. What are young viewers' attitudes and feedback toward the agricultural content in "Let's Farm"?
3. How does exposure to agriculture in the program influence young people's agricultural knowledge and career choices?

## Methodology

### *Data Collection*

This study collected a total of 1,809 posts from the social media platform Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu), where users frequently share their thoughts and experiences. The posts were selected based on specific tags related to the show *Let's Farm*, covering a timeframe from the beginning of the first season in February 2023 to the end of the second season in July 2024. The data collection focused on posts written in Chinese to ensure cultural and contextual relevance. The selection criteria required that each post included at least one of the following tags: "Let's Farm Rural & Revitalization," "Let's Farm & Employment," "Let's Farm & Fans Farming," "Let's Farm & Agricultural Enrollment," "Let's Farm & University," "Let's Farm & Major," "Let's Farm & Agriculture," "Let's Farm & Knowledge," and "Let's Farm & Education." These tags were chosen to capture diverse aspects of viewer engagement with the show, from career interests in agriculture to educational insights gained from the program.

### *Text Analysis*

To analyze the content of these posts, the author adopted words cloud and sentiment analysis techniques. Word clouds helped identify the most frequently mentioned terms, highlighting key themes and terms that resonated with the audience (Heimerl et al., 2014). Sentiment analysis provided insights into the emotional tone of the posts, allowing to assess the general positivity or negativity of viewers' responses to the agricultural content in *Let's Farm* (Wankhade et al., 2022). This combination of techniques helped to reveal patterns in the audience's responses and gauge their emotional engagement with the show.

### *Thematic Analysis*

Further, the author conducted a thematic analysis to categorize the main topics discussed by the viewers. The analysis identified six key themes: agricultural promotion, agricultural knowledge, personal involvement, emotional value, mental influence, and professional attitude. "Agricultural promotion" covered posts emphasizing the importance and awareness of rural issues and farming. "Agricultural knowledge" included insights and information that viewers reported learning from the show. "Personal involvement" reflected the viewers' inclination to apply what they learned or engage more deeply with agriculture. "Emotional value" encompassed posts that expressed empathy, inspiration, or a personal connection with the show's themes. "Mental influence" captured aspects related to resilience and perseverance, as portrayed in *Let's Farm*. Lastly, "professional attitude" focused on shifts in

perception regarding agriculture as a viable career. This thematic analysis provided a comprehensive view of how *Let's Farm* influenced audience perceptions and attitudes toward agriculture.

## Results

### *Basic Information About Audiences*

The primary audience of *Let's Farm* consists of young people, with 80% of viewers under the age of 30. Notably, nearly half of this demographic is under 23 years old, a group often still in school (Liu, 2024). As a result, their values and life goals are more susceptible to influence from media content, making them an ideal target for educational programming that aims to shift perceptions and attitudes. Additionally, the audience is mainly concentrated in second-tier cities and higher in China, where viewers generally have limited knowledge about agriculture due to their urban lifestyles (Orsini et al., 2013). This combination of youthfulness and urban background suggests that *Let's Farm* has the potential to impact viewers significantly by introducing them to agricultural knowledge and promoting rural career paths.

### *Words Cloud*

The word cloud generated from viewer discussions highlights several recurring themes in *Let's Farm* that emphasize both the significance of agriculture and the program's impact on young audiences. Words like "land," "hard work," and "power" underscore the inherent challenges and value of farming. These terms reflect the physical and emotional demands of agricultural work, suggesting that the show effectively conveys the realities of life on the farm, which may be unfamiliar to many urban viewers.

Additionally, terms such as "rural revitalization" and "countryside" point to the show's broader mission of promoting agricultural development and empowering rural communities. By showcasing the transformation and potential of rural areas, *Let's Farm* aligns with national initiatives aimed at reviving rural economies and encouraging sustainable development. This focus not only educates viewers about the importance of agriculture but also instills a sense of pride and respect for rural life.

Moreover, phrases like "new farmers," "young people," and "the future" highlight the show's role in inspiring younger generations to consider farming as a viable and meaningful career path. By presenting agriculture as an opportunity for personal growth and social impact, *Let's Farm* appeals to young people's aspirations and encourages them to view agriculture as more than just a traditional occupation, but as a field with potential for innovation and future growth.





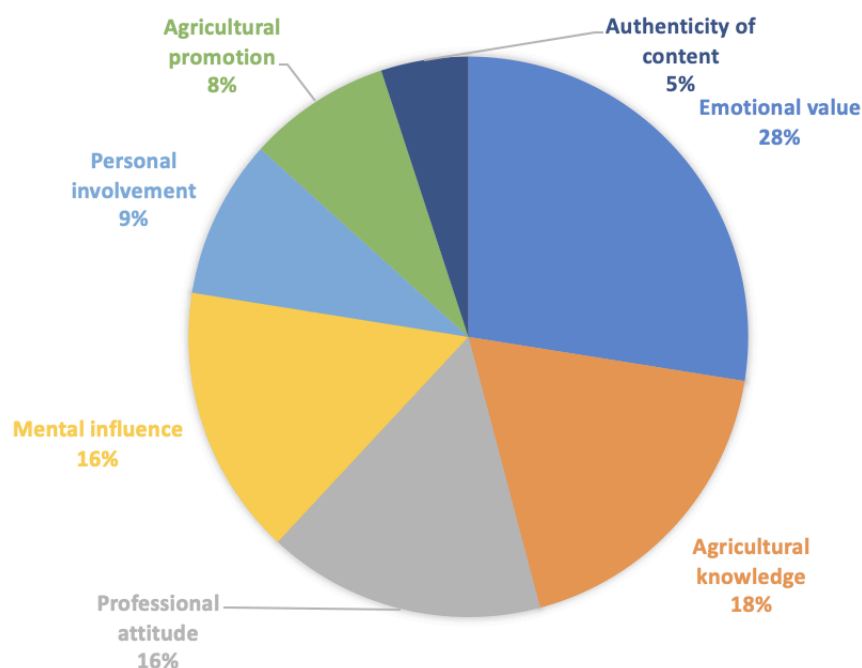


Figure 3: Percentage of Each Theme

Next, based on the user notes, the author conduct a detailed analysis of each theme.

### ***Agricultural Knowledge.***

The show *Let's Farm* serves as an effective educational tool by presenting modern agricultural practices and technologies to its audience. Through engaging storytelling and real-life depictions, the program provides viewers with insights into the current agricultural landscape in China, going beyond traditional farming activities. It introduces the advanced technologies that are shaping the future of agriculture in the country, showcasing machinery, scientific approaches, and innovative methods used in the field (Aker, 2011).

*It shows us the current agricultural situation in into various fields, and shows us the current China in a serious and interesting way, goes deep technologies that China will use in agriculture...*

One viewer's comment highlights how the show presents China's agricultural situation "in a serious and interesting way" and explores diverse aspects of the field, from production processes to modern techniques. This educational aspect of the show is valuable in breaking down misconceptions about farming, especially for urban residents who may have limited understanding of agricultural science and technology. By observing these practices on screen, viewers can gain a deeper appreciation and knowledge of agriculture, reinforcing the role of media in promoting agricultural education and awareness.

### ***Agricultural Promotion.***

*Let's Farm* serves as an important platform for promoting agricultural awareness by acting as a "window" into rural life and agricultural issues. Through relatable and engaging stories, the show highlights three key rural challenges that are of great concern in China, drawing attention to the importance of agriculture in national development. By depicting these issues

in a compelling way, *Let's Farm* raises awareness among viewers, particularly younger audiences who may not have direct exposure to agricultural life.

*"Let's Farm" provides a "window" for many agricultural media to promote agriculture. The three rural issues have always been a matter of great concern to the country. Ten participants attract more young people to pay attention to agriculture, devote themselves to agriculture, and influence agriculture, such as the recent sale of tulips.*

Additionally, the participants in the show serve as relatable role models for viewers. As they learn and apply various farming techniques, they transfer agricultural knowledge to the audience, demonstrating the practical aspects of farming and rural development. This relatable depiction of young individuals actively engaging with agriculture not only educates viewers but also inspires them to consider agriculture as a meaningful career path. By showcasing the dedication and hard work of these young participants, *Let's Farm* influences viewers' attitudes, encouraging them to see agriculture as a vital and impactful field.

### ***Emotional Value.***

*Let's Farm* provides viewers with emotional support by reflecting the participants' challenges and growth, creating a sense of empathy and connection. For many viewers, watching the participants endure difficult situations and gradually achieve progress mirrors their own struggles. This shared experience offers comfort and healing, as viewers feel less alone in their anxieties and gain reassurance through the characters' journeys.

*I am anxious and uncomfortable, but I am healed again and again by my electronic pigeons. I am the best and the greatest. Everything may not go as planned, but it will get better slowly. Just follow the wind and do what you think is right...*

One viewer described feeling “anxious and uncomfortable” but found solace in seeing the participants overcome their difficulties. This narrative of facing hardships and persevering despite setbacks resonates deeply, helping viewers manage their own anxieties. By promoting optimism and emotional resilience, *Let's Farm* not only entertains but also inspires viewers to confront their own challenges with patience and hope, making it a source of emotional strength for the audience.

### ***Mental Influence.***

*Let's Farm* showcases the resilience and perseverance of its young participants, inspiring viewers to develop mental strength and a determined attitude. The participants on the show start from a place of uncertainty, working on a piece of wasteland without knowing if their efforts will yield meaningful results. Despite facing harsh conditions—from extreme cold to scorching heat—and repetitive daily tasks, they persist for an entire year. This steadfastness in the face of adversity serves as a powerful example to viewers, demonstrating the importance of sticking to a goal even when challenges arise.

*Ten youngsters started from a piece of wasteland and a shabby house doing the same thing every day, doing something they don't know if it is meaningful, and persisted for a whole year! ... As they said, "Don't think, thinking is all problems, do it, doing is the*



*answer." So when we are internally consumed, please start to act. The natural cycle is one year, so please stick to it, at least one year, waiting for our sunny day.*

One viewer reflected on this, noting that watching the participants overcome slim odds and persevere day after day helped them to confront their own self-doubt and inner anxieties. The show conveys a message of "action over contemplation," as expressed by a participant's advice, "Don't think, thinking is all problems, do it, doing is the answer." This perspective encourages viewers to act rather than overthink, illustrating that progress is achieved through hands-on effort rather than passive rumination. By highlighting this approach, *Let's Farm* imparts valuable lessons about resilience, showing that meaningful accomplishments often come from persistence and action.

### ***Career Attitude.***

*Let's Farm* plays a crucial role in reshaping the perception of agricultural careers by challenging the traditional view of farming as a low-status occupation. Through the show's portrayal, farming is framed as a meaningful profession that is essential to societal development. By highlighting the hard work and dedication of farmers, the program encourages viewers to see agriculture as a respected and valuable career path.

*I hope we can continue to move forward and tell everyone that farming is not a special profession that is looked down upon. We should return to agriculture and attach importance to agricultural development...*

The show also emphasizes the importance of agriculture by showcasing the challenges and achievements associated with farming. This narrative helps viewers understand agriculture's critical role in national food security and economic stability, encouraging them to recognize its significance. By promoting agricultural development and calling for more attention to farming, *Let's Farm* sends a message that agriculture should be valued and not "looked down upon," as one viewer commented.

### ***Personal Involvement.***

*Let's Farm* has had a profound impact on its audience, particularly inspiring young viewers to consider careers in agriculture. The show's influence goes beyond mere entertainment, as it has motivated individuals to make significant life choices related to the agricultural field. One example is a student who, after watching the program, decided to pursue a degree in agricultural machinery at an agricultural university. Despite his excellent academic performance, which could have led him to more traditionally "promising" careers, the show convinced him of the value of dedicating himself to agriculture.

*When the teachers and students of the Agricultural University came to communicate, the freshman who chose "Macho Man" said in the chat behind that the program "Let's Farm" made him make a firm choice, and gave him a reason to convince his parents to agree that he, who had good grades, gave up the so-called promising industry and devoted himself to agriculture, and finally applied for the agricultural machinery related major of the Agricultural University.*

This decision was not only a personal choice but also required him to persuade his family to support his career change, reflecting the strong impact *Let's Farm* had on his commitment to

agriculture. This real-life influence demonstrates how the show has encouraged young people to actively engage with and invest in agricultural studies and careers, making agriculture a respected and aspirational field in their eyes. By promoting personal involvement, *Let's Farm* plays a crucial role in shaping the career paths of young audiences, fostering a new generation committed to the growth and innovation of agriculture.

**Discussion**

***Analysis of Theoretical Framework***

Applying Social Learning Theory to the reality show *Let's Farm*, young viewers observe participants engaging in challenging agricultural work, learning both the skills and perseverance involved. Through witnessing the participants' struggles and achievements, viewers are encouraged to form positive attitudes toward agriculture. The show provides relatable role models, allowing viewers to experience the challenges and rewards of farming indirectly, fostering a deeper respect for agricultural careers. This aligns with Bandura's assertion that "media can be a powerful tool for transmitting values and knowledge" (Bandura, 2001), as *Let's Farm* uses observational learning to reshape young viewers' perceptions of farming, shifting agriculture from a traditionally undervalued career to one that is seen as meaningful and impactful (Papa et al., 2000; Singhal et al., 2004).

The accompanying diagram visually illustrates how these key elements of *Let's Farm* affect viewers' perceptions and behaviors regarding agriculture within the context of Social Learning Theory. These interconnected components contribute to forming mental and career-related attitudes, which ultimately influence viewers' mindsets and foster potential participation in agricultural endeavors.

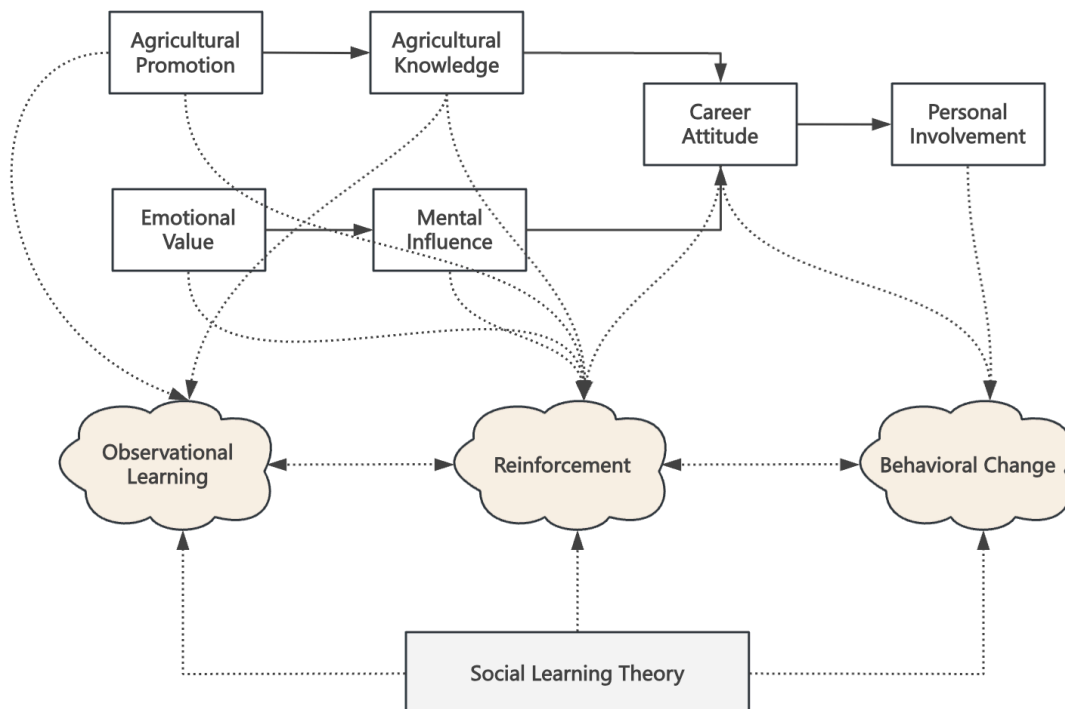


Figure 4: Theoretical Framework of *Let's Farm's* Agricultural Education

### ***Influence of Key Elements on Viewers' Attitudes.***

Agricultural Knowledge and Agricultural Promotion form the informational foundation, imparting viewers with essential facts about agriculture and elevating its significance as a respected and valuable field. In parallel, Emotional Value and Mental Influence create an affective connection, engaging viewers on a personal level. Together, these elements foster positive attitudes toward agriculture by connecting both intellectual understanding and emotional resonance, which is essential for shaping viewers' Mental and Career Attitude.

### ***Career Attitude as a Catalyst for Personal Involvement.***

A positive Career Attitude, influenced by the elements above, has the potential to inspire viewers to take active steps toward involvement in agriculture. This motivational shift transforms viewers from passive recipients of information to individuals actively considering or engaging in agricultural activities. In this way, Career Attitude serves as a catalyst, bridging the gap between knowledge and direct personal involvement, thereby strengthening their commitment to agriculture.

### ***Role of Observational Learning and Reinforcement.***

*Observational Learning* plays a critical role in this process, as viewers acquire agricultural knowledge and values by observing the successes and challenges depicted in *Let's Farm*. The practical demonstrations and personal stories within the show reinforce viewers' understanding and appreciation for agricultural work. The concept of *Reinforcement* is further applied as viewers witness the positive outcomes of dedication and resilience in farming, solidifying these newly acquired attitudes and beliefs. This reinforcement strengthens viewers' confidence and satisfaction in their evolving perspectives on agriculture.

### ***Behavioral Change and the Cyclical Nature of Social Learning.***

This process of observational learning and reinforcement can result in tangible behavioral change. As viewers consistently observe and absorb the show's agricultural themes, their attitudes evolve, potentially leading to career interest or action in agriculture (Bandura, 1978). The cyclical nature of Social Learning Theory underscores that repeated exposure to such content continually reinforces agricultural values and concepts, embedding these attitudes more deeply over time. This cyclical process allows viewers to internalize and sustain a positive perspective on agriculture, which can translate into long-term interest or career considerations in the agricultural field.

### ***Influence on Social Learning Theory***

To better understand the multifaceted influence of *Let's Farm* on audience learning and attitude formation, it is essential to examine how the show's elements extend the principles of Social Learning Theory.

### ***Emotional Engagement as a Catalyst for Learning.***

The variety show enhances viewers' emotional engagement through its narrative structure, fostering empathy toward the participants and thereby intensifying the learning experience. By illustrating the resilience and progress of young individuals confronting agricultural

challenges, the show enables viewers to not only learn about farming practices but also internalize the value of persistence in the face of adversity. This study highlights the critical role of emotional engagement in facilitating learning and behavior change, suggesting that emotions significantly enhance the learning process within the framework of Social Learning Theory. This dimension of emotional engagement enriches the theory, extending its application to include the emotional connection as a powerful driver of educational outcomes.

### ***The Influence of Media on Societal Attitude.***

In addition to altering viewers' perceptions of agriculture, *Let's Farm* contributes to elevating the societal status of agricultural work. By emphasizing the value of agriculture and celebrating the accomplishments of agricultural workers, the program fosters a shift in viewers' recognition of agriculture as a meaningful and respected profession. This study demonstrates that Social Learning Theory encompasses not only behavioral imitation but also the formation and transformation of societal attitudes through media. Such findings indicate that media has significant potential in shaping societal views, highlighting an important extension of the theory whereby media can catalyze broader attitudinal changes within society.

### ***Attitudinal Shifts as a Foundation for Educational Impact.***

This study further underscores that viewers experience substantial shifts in attitude, which serve as a crucial foundation for the educational impact of the program. These attitudinal changes, facilitated through emotional engagement and repeated exposure to agricultural values, enable viewers to internalize the principles presented in the show. This transformation in perspective reinforces agricultural knowledge and strengthens the likelihood of subsequent behavioral change. The study thus posits that attitudinal shifts are essential to the educational value of *Let's Farm*, demonstrating that sustained changes in perception can solidify learning outcomes and support the practical application of acquired knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from this study highlight the pivotal role of entertainment media not only in delivering educational content but also in fostering long-term attitudinal and behavioral shifts. These outcomes align with Social Learning Theory, underscoring how media can act as a potent agent of social change. By embedding educational content within emotionally compelling narratives, *Let's Farm* exemplifies how entertainment media can effectively drive shifts in public perception and support broader social objectives, promoting awareness, respect, and engagement in critical fields such as agriculture.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my mother for her unwavering support and encouragement throughout the course of my research. Her belief in my work and constant motivation have been invaluable. I am also deeply appreciative of the fans and community of *Let's Farm*, whose engagement on social media platforms provided rich and insightful material that significantly contributed to the depth and breadth of this study. Additionally, I extend my sincere thanks to MediAsia 2024 for providing a platform to share and discuss my

perspectives on communication, which has greatly enriched my research experience. Lastly, I would like to thank Yaoyuan Zhang, we'll both become best versions of ourselves.

## References

- Aker, J. C. (2011). Dial “A” for agriculture: A review of information and communication technologies for agricultural extension in developing countries. *Agricultural Economics*, 42(6), 631–647. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1574-0862.2011.00545.x>
- Asia News Network. (2023). Farming-themed reality show a hit online. Asia News Network. Retrieved from <https://asianews.network/farming-themed-reality-show-a-hit-online/>
- Bandura, A. (1978). Social learning theory. *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 7(1), 84. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2065952>
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, 3(3), 265–299. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03)
- Bryant, J., & Zillmann, D. (Eds.). (2002). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Burdsall, N. (2023). Social media for farms: A revolutionary agricultural tool. Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Retrieved from <https://globalaffairs.org>
- Fan, S., & Rue, C. (2020). The role of smallholder farms in a changing world. In Springer eBooks (pp. 13–28). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42148-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42148-9_2)
- FAO. (2021). FAOSTAT: China - Country profile. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/351>
- Global Times. (2022, November). Reality TV shows promote traditional opera craze among Chinese youth, inspire enthusiasts. Retrieved from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202211/1280726.shtml>
- Heimerl, F., Lohmann, S., Lange, S., & Ertl, T. (2014). Word Cloud Explorer: Text Analytics Based on Word Clouds. 2014 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1109/hicss.2014.231>
- Liu, J. (2024). Dissemination of agricultural culture in the Chinese TikTok environment: A case study of Let’s Farm. *The Proceedings of the World Conference on Media and Communication*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.33422/worldcmc.v1i1.406>
- Liu, Y., & Li, Y. (2017). Revitalize the world’s countryside. *Nature*, 548(7667), 275–277. <https://doi.org/10.1038/548275a>
- Liu, Y., & Wang, Y. (2019). Rural land engineering and poverty alleviation: Lessons from typical regions in China. *Journal of Geographical Sciences*, 29(5), 643-657.
- Lundy, L. K., Ruth, A. M., & Park, T. D. (2007). Entertainment and Agriculture: An examination of the impact of entertainment media on perceptions of agriculture. *Journal of Applied Communications*, 91(1). <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1257>

- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2021). *China Statistical Yearbook 2021*. Beijing: China Statistics Press. Retrieved from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/>
- Olajide, B. R., & Oresanya, A. A. (2016). Entertainment-Education Strategy utilization for agricultural information dissemination: congruency among researchers, extension agents, and farmers in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Information*, 17(2–3), 151–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496505.2015.1123631>
- Orsini, F., Kahane, R., Nono-Womdim, R., & Gianquinto, G. (2013). Urban agriculture in the developing world: A review. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, 33, 695-720.
- Papa, M. J., Singhal, A., Law, S., Pant, S., Sood, S., Rogers, E. M., & Shefner-Rogers, C. L. (2000). Entertainment-education and social change: An analysis of parasocial interaction, social learning, collective efficacy, and paradoxical communication. *Journal of Communication*, 50(4), 31-55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02862.x>
- Rosenthal, S., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2014). Social learning and cognition. In R. F. Baumeister & K. D. Vohs (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (2nd ed., pp. 128-150). New York: Guilford Press.
- Ruibo, H., & Linna, W. (2013). Challenges and opportunities facing China's urban development in the new era. *China Perspectives*, 2013(2), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.6149>
- Singhal, A., Cody, M. J., Rogers, E. M., & Sabido, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Entertainment-education and social change: History, research, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Singhal, A., & Rogers, E. M. (2014). Entertainment-education media strategies for social change: Promises and problems. *Research Journal of Mass Communication and Media Technology*, 2(1), 54–69. Retrieved from RJMC The BRPI.
- Wang, W., Huang, Z., Fu, Z., Jia, L., Li, Q., & Song, J. (2024). Impact of digital technology adoption on technological innovation in grain production. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 9(3), 100520. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2024.100520>
- Wankhade, M., Rao, A. C. S., & Kulkarni, C. (2022). A survey on sentiment analysis methods, applications, and challenges. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 55(7), 5731–5780. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10462-022-10144-1>
- Wei, Z., Zheng, H., & Zhu, L. (2024). Evaluation index system of rural ecological revitalization in China: A national empirical study. *Land*, 13(8), 1270.
- Yang, L. (2013). Reality talent shows in China: Transnational format, affective engagement, and the Chinese dream. *A companion to reality television*, 516-540.
- Zhang, H. (2023). Ensuring food security requires focusing on five key areas. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Retrieved from [http://www.moa.gov.cn/ztlz/2023yhwj/wjjd\\_29327/202302/t202302276421628.htm](http://www.moa.gov.cn/ztlz/2023yhwj/wjjd_29327/202302/t202302276421628.htm)



**Contact email:** [LIUJ0147@e.ntu.edu.sg](mailto:LIUJ0147@e.ntu.edu.sg)



***Journalists and Machines:  
Applying the Technology Adaptation Model to Understand AI Use in TV Journalism***

Rossalyn Asmarantika, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia

Veronika Veronika, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia

Yeary Setianto, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This study explores the incorporation and interpretation of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in journalism through in-depth interviews with six journalists from three significant Indonesian news television channels: CNN Indonesia, Kompas TV, and TV One. This research seeks to gain insight into the manner in which journalists adjust to and perceive the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into their workflow, using the Technology Adaptation Model (TAM). The results indicate that AI is primarily employed for administrative and basic functions, such as transcribing and initial research, which leads to faster completion times and allows journalists to concentrate on more crucial areas of newsgathering and reporting. Nevertheless, the journalists hold a contradictory viewpoint on AI, seeing it as a "paradoxical tool." Although AI improves productivity in repetitive jobs, it is not as effective in tasks that demand complex human judgement, such as comprehensive reporting and contextual interpretation. Considerable concerns around ethics and job security have arisen, indicating a broader disapproval about the potential displacement of traditional journalistic professions by AI. This study emphasizes the significance of maintaining a balanced approach when incorporating AI into media.

Keywords: AI in Journalism, Technology Acceptance Model, TV Journalism, Indonesian TV Journalist, Qualitative Research

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The incorporation of artificial intelligence in various sectors of industries is becoming more and more common; nevertheless, not all individuals have adjusted to this technological shift. In the sphere of journalism, AI has been utilized to enhance operational efficiencies by streamlining fact-checking processes, assisting in research endeavors, and producing written material (Zalova, 2022; Biswal & Gouda, 2020). This advancement signifies a critical evolution in the methodologies of news acquisition and dissemination.

As news organizations increasingly adopt AI tools, the potential for improved accuracy and faster reporting times raises important questions about the future role of human journalists in a landscape that is rapidly transforming (Marconi, 2020). The challenge lies in finding a balance between leveraging AI's capabilities and preserving the essential human elements of storytelling, ethics, and critical analysis that are vital to quality journalism.

AI, defined as "a branch of computer science focused on simulating human intelligence" (Broussard et al., 2019), is increasingly utilized for tasks ranging from transcription to data analysis. Researchers have described AI in journalism with terms like "automated journalism" (Caswell & Dörr, 2018), "computational journalism" (Cohen et al., 2011), and "robojournalism" (Clerwall, 2014). While these advancements promise increased efficiency and accessibility, they also spark debates about the displacement of human journalists and the ethical implications of AI-generated content (Galily, 2018).

AI technologies in television journalism are often evaluated based on their ability to improve efficiency and accuracy. Research by Opdahl et al., (2023) explored the role of AI in enhancing journalistic trustworthiness, finding that tools like automated fact-checking and transcription software were valued for their utility in streamlining repetitive tasks. However, the perception of usefulness varies depending on the task. Clerwall (2014) found that journalists were more likely to trust AI for routine activities, such as data aggregation, than for creative tasks like story development, which require human judgment and empathy.

## The Rise of Indonesian AI TV Presenter

In April 2023, Sasya and Nadhira were presented to the Indonesian public as two of the inaugural human digital-AI generated television presenters by TV One, a prominent news television network in Indonesia. This month heralded the commencement of the "AI TV Presenters showcasing season." (Alvina, 2004). Initially, TV One's AI presenter was utilized solely for reading news on social media platforms; subsequently, Sasya and Nadhira featured in TV One's afternoon Free to Air news segment titled "Kabar Siang." By August 2023, another Indonesian news television outlet, iNews Media Group, followed suit by introducing their AI TV Presenter, which was proclaimed to be the first AI presenter for Free To Air (FTA) broadcasting. Since then, an increasing number of news television stations in Indonesia have begun to unveil their own AI TV presenters.

The rapid adoption of AI technology in broadcasting reflects a broader trend towards automation in the media industry, raising questions about the future role of human presenters and the impact on viewer engagement (Kim et al., 2022). Numerous studies have indicated that the integration of AI within the domain of journalism has been ongoing for an extended period. Discussions regarding AI and journalism are heavily focused on the use of automation in the news production process, as well as the possibilities of AI technology

(Túñez-López et al., 2020; Moran & Shaikh, 2022; Montaña-Niño, 2023). However, the adoption of AI is not without challenges. Factors such as organizational support, training, and the perceived reliability of AI tools significantly impact how these technologies are integrated into newsroom workflows. Also, the extent of acceptance of such technologies within local newsrooms in Indonesia, particularly among television journalists, remains largely unknown.

However, despite its evident advantages, worries regarding accuracy and dependability emerged as significant concerns. Journalists conveyed unease about the contextual limitations of AI-generated results, especially in assignments that require cultural awareness or subtle understanding. For instance, a reporter from Kompas TV remarked that while drafts produced by AI can act as a foundation, they often necessitate extensive manual revisions to ensure content accuracy and contextual relevance. This dependence on human intervention showcases the careful optimism surrounding AI; it is viewed as a robust assistant but not a substitute for human discernment.

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in journalism, as analyzed through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), provides insights into how TV journalists perceive AI's role in their professional workflows. A central theme that surfaced was the considerable perceived effectiveness of AI in boosting productivity, especially in routine functions like transcription and translation.

## **Findings**

### ***Perceived Usefulness (PU)***

Journalists across the interviews frequently highlighted the value AI tools bring to routine and repetitive tasks. Tools such as transcription services, ChatGPT for content drafting, and research assistance significantly enhance productivity by saving time and effort. For instance, a journalist from Kompas TV explained how transcription AI accelerates the creation of reports by automating voice-to-text processes. Another participant from TVOne noted that using AI tools for research allowed them to uncover detailed insights faster than traditional methods.

Similarly, reporters shared that AI tools reduce the cognitive load associated with brainstorming and drafting. ChatGPT was often used to generate preliminary ideas for news programs or scripts, providing a foundation that could be refined through human judgment. For example, a producer from BTV explained that AI-assisted brainstorming helped in framing topics more creatively and efficiently. These applications demonstrate the high perceived usefulness of AI, particularly in improving task efficiency and freeing up journalists for more analytical and creative responsibilities.

### ***Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)***

While AI tools are recognized for their utility, their ease of use varies depending on the task and the user's technological proficiency. Journalists frequently noted that AI tools like transcription services were relatively easy to use, as many required simple integration with existing newsroom software. For instance, Adobe Premiere's built-in AI transcription tool allowed seamless operation, making it a favored choice for some participants (as mentioned by journalist from Kompas TV).

However, not all AI tools were perceived as straightforward. ChatGPT, while beneficial for content ideation, posed challenges in terms of accuracy and contextual relevance. For example, one journalist expressed frustration with AI's inability to tailor content to the nuanced requirements of different news segments, emphasizing the need for significant human intervention to edit and validate the outputs. This inconsistency in ease of use highlights the importance of user training and tailored tool development to ensure smoother adoption.

### ***External Factors***

External influences such as organizational culture, resources, and technology infrastructure significantly shape AI adoption. Journalists from well-resourced newsrooms reported more frequent and effective use of AI tools. For instance, a reporter from Metro TV described the importance of having access to cutting-edge transcription tools to meet tight deadlines, although limitations in organizational budgets sometimes restricted broader implementation.

Additionally, societal and ethical concerns about AI's impact on journalism emerged as critical external factors. Journalists expressed apprehension about relying on AI-generated content due to its potential to introduce bias and compromise the credibility of news. For instance, one participant discussed the risks of AI perpetuating misinformation and the need for stringent oversight to maintain public trust.

### **Research Limitation**

The constraint of this study lies in the sample size. To establish a more conclusive finding about the employment of artificial intelligence at the individual level among journalists, it is advisable to undertake more meticulous interviews with television journalists hailing from various broadcasting networks. Furthermore, incorporating local television stations would enhance the research.

### **Conclusion**

While journalists acknowledge AI's potential to streamline operations and enhance productivity, challenges related to accuracy, ease of integration, and organizational policies underscore the need for balanced adoption strategies. These insights provide a roadmap for optimizing AI implementation in the media industry while preserving journalistic integrity.

The findings further emphasize the specific applications of AI within journalism. Journalists recognized that AI tools are crucial for data gathering and research, but they insisted that human creativity and analytical skills are irreplaceable in crafting nuanced and impactful narratives. This distinction between AI capabilities and human journalist skills reinforces the notion that AI acts as an auxiliary, rather than a replacement, force in the newsroom.

External factors also significantly influenced the integration of AI technologies. Organizational backing, resource availability, and technological infrastructure were noted as vital factors in how journalists interacted with AI. Altogether, these findings offer a detailed view of AI integration in Indonesian television journalism, accentuating both its transformative prospects and the challenges inherent in its assimilation into professional practices.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research team engaged in this study wishes to extend its sincere gratitude to all journalists who consented to participate in interviews for this research. Furthermore, we would like to convey our appreciation to LPPM Multimedia Nusantara University for their invaluable moral and material support throughout the execution of the research and during the process of attending the 2024 MediaAsia conference.



## References

- Alvina, H. (2004, May 20). tvOne Luncurkan Portal News AI Pertama di Indonesia. VOA Indonesia. <https://www.viva.co.id/digital/digilife/1715669-tvone-luncurkan-portal-news-ai-pertama-di-indonesia>
- Biswal, S. K., & Gouda, N. K. (2020). Artificial Intelligence in Journalism: A Boon or Bane? [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0994-0\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0994-0_10)
- Caswell, D., & Dörr, K. (2018). Automated Journalism 2.0: Event-driven narratives: From simple descriptions to real stories. *Journalism practice*, 12(4), 477-496.
- Clerwall, C. (2014). Enter the Robot Journalist: Users' perceptions of automated content. *Journalism Practice*, 8(5), 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.883116>
- Cohen, S., Hamilton, J. T., & Turner, F. (2011). Computational journalism. *Communications of the ACM*, 54(10), 66-71. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2001269.2001288>
- Evans, C., & Lewis, J. (2018). Analysing Semi-Structured Interviews Using Thematic Analysis: Exploring Voluntary Civic Participation Among Adults. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526439284>
- Galily, Y. (2018). Artificial intelligence and sports journalism: Is it a sweeping change? *Technology in Society*, 54, 47–51. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2018.03.001>
- Kim, J., Xu, K., & Merrill, K. C. (2022). Man vs. machine: Human responses to an AI newscaster and the role of social presence. *Social Science Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2022.2027163>
- Marconi, F. (2020). *Newsmakers: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Journalism*.
- Montaña-Niño, S. X. (2023). Editorial automation: the pursuit of journalistic meaning in automated tools and automated decision-making systems in Australian newsrooms. *Selected Papers of Internet Research*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2022i0.13056>
- Moran, R. E., & Shaikh, S. J. (2022). Robots in the News and Newsrooms: Unpacking Meta-Journalistic Discourse on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Journalism. *Digital Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2085129>
- Opdahl, A. L., Tessem, B., Dang-Nguyen, D.-T., Motta, E., Throndsen, E. O., & Trattner, C. (2023). Trustworthy journalism through AI. *Data and Knowledge Engineering*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.datak.2023.102182>
- Túñez-López, J. M., Toural-Bran, C., & Frazão-Nogueira, A. G. (2020). From Data Journalism to Robotic Journalism: The Automation of News Processing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36315-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36315-4_2)

Zalova, S. M. (2022). Journalism based on artificial intelligent technology.  
<https://doi.org/10.18522/1995-0640-2022-3-184-195>



## ***Implementation of Language Proficiency Assessments for the Training of Community Interpreters***

Akiko Sato, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Japan

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Kyoto University of Foreign Studies is planning to conduct language proficiency measurement tests (aptitude tests) in the fields of medical and infectious diseases, school and education, administration (disaster), and administration (tax) to have students certified according to the ISO 13611:2024 Interpreting – Requirements and guidelines for community interpreters.

The main objectives of this initiative are:

1. To identify the language proficiency requirements for community interpreters in the education, medical, administrative, legal, and tourism sectors. By developing multilingual language proficiency test questions in cooperation with domain experts, the aim is to reflect the comprehensiveness of the assessment and the language requirements for practical community interpreting.
2. Conduct aptitude tests based on the student's primary language and analyze the results. Based on the analysis, educational programs should be considered to improve students' language proficiency.

We aim to help students acquire practical community interpreting knowledge and skills through these efforts. Additionally, the content of the aptitude test has been revised in line with the university's educational curriculum. It consists of two sections assessing vocabulary comprehension, listening comprehension, and vocabulary operation skills. This comprehensive approach ensures that students' language skills are thoroughly evaluated. This comprehensive language proficiency assessment differs from traditional language examinations in that it measures students' overall language proficiency in practical community interpreting situations. In this way, it aims to “visualise” the language proficiency of the examinees.

Keywords: Community Interpreting Program, Aptitude Test, ISO13611:2024

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

In today's globalized world, community interpreters play an increasingly vital role in bridging language barriers across diverse settings, including healthcare, legal environments, and community services (Hale, 2007). The growing demand for qualified interpreters who possess both language proficiency and cultural competence has led to the development of structured initiatives for training certified community interpreters. At Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, a comprehensive program has been established to address these needs through standardized assessments and training programs (Sato, 2023).

### 1. Development of the Community Interpreter Training Program

The Community Interpreter Training Program at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies was initiated in April 2024, responding to the growing need for qualified interpreters in Japan's increasingly multicultural society. The program aligns with the university's founding principle of "PAX MUNDI PER LINGUAS" (World Peace through Languages) and aims to develop interpreters who can contribute effectively to multicultural communication while meeting the requirements of ISO 13611:2024 certification.

The program is designed to enhance both language proficiency and communication skills essential for multicultural society. Pöchhacker (2004, pp. 162-163) emphasizes that community interpreters serve as cultural mediators, a role that requires more than just linguistic competence. This understanding forms the foundation of the program's comprehensive approach to interpreter training.

### 2. Program Structure and Implementation

The Community Interpreter Training Program consists of several key components designed to ensure comprehensive training and assessment. The program requires students to complete two specialized courses totaling four credits: "Special Topics in Community Interpreting I" and "Special Topics in Community Interpreting II." These courses are available to third-year students and above, with different proficiency level requirements for various language combinations.

The curriculum incorporates both theoretical foundations and practical skills development. According to Takeda and Yamada (2017, pp. 2-3), maintaining a balance between theory and practice is crucial in interpreter education. The program addresses this through a combination of classroom instruction and practical experience, with students required to complete at least 30 hours of interpreting practice.

#### 2.1 Curriculum Design

The program's curriculum encompasses various essential elements of community interpreting. Core components include basic interpreting theory, ethical guidelines, and specialized terminology in fields such as healthcare, legal services, and education. Students also learn practical skills such as note-taking techniques, memory enhancement exercises, and summary interpretation methods.

The curriculum particularly emphasizes cultural mediation skills, which Hale (2007, pp. 25-26) identifies as crucial for community interpreters who work across multiple domains.

This includes training in cross-cultural communication, understanding of institutional systems, and management of cultural differences in various professional contexts.

## **2.2 Language Proficiency Requirements**

Students seeking ISO 13611:2024 certification must demonstrate language proficiency at CEFR B2 level or higher in their target language combination. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2 level indicates an "independent user" who can understand complex texts and interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24).

## **2.3 Practical Experience Component**

The program's 30-hour practical experience requirement allows students to develop real-world skills through various activities, including:

- Supervised interpreting practice sessions at the university
- Volunteer interpreting at local international events
- Internships with partner organizations
- Community service interpreting

Rudvin and Tomassini (2008, pp. 245-246) emphasize that practical experience is essential for connecting theoretical knowledge with real-world application. The program's practical component provides students with opportunities to face authentic interpreting challenges while receiving professional guidance.

## **3. Assessment Methods and Implementation**

### **3.1 Aptitude Test Design**

The aptitude test, developed in collaboration with Osaka University, is a comprehensive 90-minute assessment that evaluates multiple competencies. According to Angelelli (2009, pp. 13-15), interpreter assessment should encompass not only language skills but also intercultural communication competence and ethical judgment capability.

The test evaluates:

- Language proficiency in reading, listening, writing, and speaking
- Interpreting skills through consecutive interpretation exercises
- Cultural knowledge and awareness
- Professional ethics understanding
- Memory and note-taking abilities

### **3.2 Test Implementation and Analysis**

Between July 2018 and September 2024, the aptitude test was administered to 856 participants across multiple language pairs, including English-Japanese (786 participants), Russian-Japanese (8 participants), Chinese-Japanese (47 participants), Portuguese-Japanese (12 participants), and Vietnamese-Japanese (3 participants). Starting from 2024, the test is administered biannually using dual-monitor computer laboratories.

Interesting patterns emerged from the test results analysis. Some students without study abroad experience demonstrated CEFR C1 level proficiency, while others with high scores on traditional language tests showed lower performance on the aptitude test. This aligns with Hayashida's (2020, p. 493) observation that community interpreting requires a complex set of skills beyond mere language proficiency.

### **3.3 Unique Features of the Assessment**

A distinctive aspect of the aptitude test is its evaluation of implicit speech interpretation in both directions. This addresses what Pöschhacker (2004, pp. 113-115) identifies as the need to assess not just linguistic equivalence but also the understanding of speaker intention and context.

## **4. External Partnerships and Support Systems**

The program has established significant partnerships to enhance its effectiveness and credibility. A notable collaboration was formed with the Kyoto City International Foundation in April 2023, marking an important step toward establishing the program's credibility as an ISO 13611:2024 certification body. This partnership exemplifies what Ozolins (2010, pp. 19-20) describes as essential institutional support for developing professional community interpreting services.

### **4.1 Partnership Benefits**

The collaboration with the Kyoto City International Foundation provides multiple advantages. The partnership facilitates practical training opportunities through foundation-sponsored events and consultation services. Professional staff members from the foundation contribute to the program through guest lectures and specialized training sessions. The foundation also provides support for the ISO certification process and potential employment opportunities for program graduates.

### **4.2 Inter-university Collaboration**

An agreement with Osaka Tourism University allows students who wish to obtain ISO 13611:2024 certification before March 2028 to process their certification through their institution. This arrangement demonstrates the type of institutional cooperation that Sato, Komori, and Hayashida (2022, pp. 43-50) identify as crucial for improving the quality of community interpreter education.

## **5. Challenges and Future Directions**

### **5.1 Technological Integration**

The rapid advancement of technology presents both challenges and opportunities for community interpreter training. As Cronin (2013, pp. 132-134) predicted, technological progress has significantly transformed the role of interpreters. The program must continuously adapt to incorporate new technologies, including AI-assisted interpretation tools and remote interpreting platforms.



## **5.2 Quality Assurance in Practical Training**

Ensuring the quality of the required 30 hours of practical experience remains a significant challenge. Angelelli (2004, pp. 77-79) emphasizes the complexity of interpreter roles in medical settings, highlighting the need for quality practical training across various domains. The program continues to develop mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating practical experience quality.

## **5.3 Multilingual Expansion**

The program faces increasing demand to expand its language offerings beyond the current combinations. Mizuno and Naito (2015, pp. 28-29) note the growing importance of multilingual community interpreting in Japan. Meeting this demand requires securing qualified instructors and developing appropriate materials for additional language pairs.

## **5.4 Remote Education Development**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for remote education capabilities. As Matsushita (2020) observes, the interpreting industry increasingly requires skills in remote interpreting and online tool utilization. The program is developing specialized content for remote interpreting education and online training methodologies.

## **5.5 Post-certification Support**

The program recognizes the need for continuous professional development after certification. Napier (2011, pp. 59-61) emphasizes the importance of ongoing reflection and improvement in interpreting practice. The program is developing support systems for graduates, including regular skill enhancement opportunities and professional networking events.

## **Conclusion**

The Community Interpreter Training Program at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies represents a significant advancement in interpreter education within Japanese higher education institutions. Through its comprehensive curriculum, rigorous assessment methods, and alignment with international standards, the program provides a model for developing professional community interpreters equipped to serve in an increasingly multicultural society.

The program's emphasis on both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, combined with its innovative assessment methods, addresses what Pöchhacker (2011, pp. 22-24) identifies as the need for mixed-method approaches in interpreter training and evaluation. The implementation of the aptitude test, which evaluates both linguistic and cultural competencies, provides valuable insights into the complex nature of community interpreter qualifications.

Looking forward, the program faces various challenges, including technological adaptation, quality assurance, and expanding language coverage. However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation and improvement in community interpreter education. The program's continued development and adaptation to emerging needs will contribute

significantly to the field of community interpreting and support Japan's evolution toward a more inclusive, multicultural society.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research has been supported by a grant from the International Research Institute for Studies in Languages and Peace, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. The author sincerely thanks all faculty members, staff, and research collaborators who contributed to this study.

## References

- Angelelli, C. V. (2004). *Medical interpreting and cross-cultural communication*. Cambridge University Press.
- Angelelli, C. V. (2009). Using a rubric to assess translation ability: Defining the construct. In C. V. Angelelli & H. E. Jacobson (Eds.), *Testing and assessment in translation and interpreting studies* (pp. 13-47). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cronin, M. (2013). *Translation in the digital age*. Routledge.
- Gillies, A. (2005). *Note-taking for consecutive interpreting: A short course*. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Hale, S. B. (2007). *Community interpreting*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hayashida, M. (2017). Medical interpretation opens the world through 'co-creation' with the global society. *Co-Design*, 1(1), 85-102.
- Hayashida, M. (2019). Questioning the lives of long-term foreign residents from a global perspective. *Osaka Public Health*, 90, 17-19.
- Hayashida, M. (2020). Reconsidering 'health' in the era of globalization. *Public Health*, 84, 492-493.
- Hayashida, M., Sato, A., Yang, L., & Miyoshi, M. (2024). Research report on educational methods and content: Language aptitude tests for 'ISO13611:2014' certification. *Osaka University Academic Repository*, 1-10.
- ISO. (2014). *ISO13611:2014 Interpreting — Guidelines for community interpreting*. International Organization for Standardization.
- ISO. (2024). *ISO13611:2024 Interpreting services — Community interpreting — Requirements and recommendations*. International Organization for Standardization.
- Matsushita, K. (2020). Considering 'remote interpretation' in the age of COVID-19. *HiCareer*.
- Mizuno, M., & Naito, M. (2015). *Community interpreting: Communication in a multicultural society*. Misuzu Shobo.
- Napier, J. (2011). If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a noise? The merits of publishing interpreting research. In B. Nicodemus & L. Swabey (Eds.), *Advances in interpreting research: Inquiry in action* (pp. 121-152). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Ozolins, U. (2010). Factors that determine the provision of public service interpreting: Comparative perspectives on government motivation and language service implementation. *Journal of Specialised Translation*, 14, 194-215.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2004). *Introducing interpreting studies*. Routledge.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2011). *Researching interpreting: Approaches to inquiry*. In B. Nicodemus & L. Swabey (Eds.), *Advances in interpreting research: Inquiry in action* (pp. 5-26). Benjamins Translation Library.
- Rudvin, M., & Tomassini, E. (2008). Migration, ideology and the interpreter-mediator: The role of the language mediator in education and medical settings in Italy. In C. Valero-Garcés & A. Martin (Eds.), *Crossing borders in community interpreting: Definitions and dilemmas* (pp. 245-266). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Sato, A. (2020). Considerations on the MLE program and the international standards of ISO concerning specialization in interpretation and translation services. *Foreign Language Education Frontier*, 3, 160-161.
- Sato, A. (2023). Training community interpreters at higher education institutions and contributions to local communities: From the perspective of ISO international standards 'ISO13611:2014'. *SELL, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies*, 39, 58-67.
- Sato, A. (2024). Multilingual and multicultural initiatives in higher education: Practice and analysis of community interpreter training certified by 'ISO13611:2014'. *SELL, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies*.
- Sato, A., Komori, M., & Hayashida, M. (2022). Considerations on accreditation in higher education institutions and implementation of aptitude tests to measure language proficiency: From the perspective of 'ISO13611:2014 interpreting — Guidelines for community interpreting'. *Osaka Tourism University Research Bulletin*, 22, 43-50.
- Sugisawa, T. (2013). The role of community interpreting in problem-solving and training for professional development. *Tokyo University of Foreign Studies*, 1-30.
- Takeda, K. (2012). A consideration of interpreter training in Japan. *Interpreting and Translation Studies*, 12, 105-117.
- Takeda, K., & Yamada, Y. (2017). Report on the results of scientific research project. Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

***What Journalists Ask When Channels Are Blocked: A Topic Modeling of Requests on Education via Brazil's Freedom of Information Act Under Bolsonaro's Administration***

Cristian Edel Weiss, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Germany

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This research examines how the hostile policy of the extreme right-wing Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2023) towards the critical journalism has affected the access to public information by journalists in education. An exploratory data analysis was performed on the public database of requests of the Brazilian Freedom of Information Act (LAI). The years 2019 and 2020 (first half of the Bolsonaro term) had the highest number of requests, mainly addressed to education. Those findings guided the topic modeling with the Top2Vec technique, performed on the corpus of the 854 requests for information submitted by journalists and addressed to education, to generate clusters of words that synthesized the subjects of the requests. Semi-structured interviews with three journalists, experts in LAI and education, helped to shed additional light on the topics. The results demonstrated that the journalists acted as watchdogs of public administration, questioning fraud in racial quotas in universities, defaults in student financing, and the implementation of military schools. These issues were directly linked to the scandals of ministers of Education and the outcomes suggested that, due to the government's resistance to responding to journalists, LAI remained as valuable resource for them. Although Bolsonaro's term has been marked by lack of transparency in traditional channels (active transparency), no significant evidence was found that passive transparency, within the scope of the LAI and education, has been affected.

Keywords: Freedom of Information, Right to Information, Access to Information, Social Accountability, Watchdog Journalism, Transparency, FOI, LAI, Open Government

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

In a government accused of being non-transparent and aggressive towards critical journalism, to what extent can access to information, within the scope of freedom of information laws<sup>1</sup>, be affected? Moreover, to overcome such limitations, what kind of information do journalists request? I examine the Brazilian federal government's Law on Access to Information (LAI)<sup>2</sup> database, focus on the first two years of Jair Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022) and the requests submitted by journalists to the Ministry of Education. The purpose is to identify what kind of information journalists demand when traditional channels are constrained and what implications Bolsonaro's transparency policy had on open government procedures.

The Brazilian LAI, approved in 2011, is an instrument that allows citizens to request any information from the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The law reached 10 years in 2022, during Bolsonaro's administration, accused by journalists and scholars of being anti-transparent and aggressive towards the critical press (Ozawa et al., 2024; Da Silva et al., 2024; Pinho, 2022; Brembatti, 2022; Hunter & Power, 2019).

Few studies have focused on qualitatively analyzing the large corpus of citizen requests for information around the world (Berliner et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2022). Scarcer are studies on requests made by journalists (Gonçalves et al., 2019) and those focusing on Brazilian law since the Bolsonaro administration (Ferracioli & Marques, 2020). As for exploratory research, I haven't postulated any hypotheses in advance. Due to the claims that Bolsonaro's administration is anti-transparent, I expect that more rejections will be found and that journalists interviewed will have the perception that the implementation of LAI worsened under his Presidency.

I conducted a mixed methods study in three stages: exploratory analysis of the LAI database, topic modeling and semi-structured interviews with journalists. The results demonstrated that part of the information requested by journalists from the Ministry of Education was related to scandals involving departments and ministers. The journalists interviewed also revealed that the law was fundamental for obtaining information when traditional channels are blocked.

Considering the concept of open government and passive and active transparency proposed by Meijer (2013), I argue that although there is evidence that Jair Bolsonaro's government and its education ministers have failed in active transparency processes, there is not enough proof within the scope of the LAI that it has also failed in passive transparency in this area of government. Journalists unable to obtain information related to the scandals in the Ministry of Education through traditional channels turned to the LAI as an essential source of information to cover the issues.

## Factual Context: Bolsonaro's Attitudes Towards Critical Media

Throughout Bolsonaro's administration (2019 - 2022), many questions from journalists have gone unanswered. Deforestation in the Amazon, mining on indigenous lands, diplomatic relations with far-right leaders, disastrous handling of the pandemic, scandals in education and spending by the Presidency of the Republic are some examples (Pinho, 2022; Hunter & Power, 2019; Pontes & Weiss, 2019, Lupion & Weiss, 2019).

---

<sup>1</sup> Commonly referred to as the Freedom of Information, Access to Information or Right to Information laws (Worthy, 2020; Berliner, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> In Portuguese: *Lei de Acesso à Informação* (LAI).

Bolsonaro made use of the 100-year secrecy (provided by the Freedom of Information law for cases involving personal data of no public interest) to enact 413 confidentiality orders, preventing access to the list of visitors and lobbyists to the presidential office, documents about the president's health or disciplinary proceedings against allies (Sobrinho, 2023; Coraccini, 2021).

The president was aggressive towards the critical press, attacking journalists on social media and refusing to give interviews (Pinho, 2022). His attitude was reflected in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2023). Brazil was in 102nd place in 2018, a year before Bolsonaro took office. In 2021, it fell to 111th.

### ***Effects of Bolsonaro's Policy on Education***

Bolsonaro's behavior towards the press was replicated by his subordinates (Hunter & Power, 2019) and Education was one of the most affected fields. Five ministers passed through the ministry in four years. The most controversial one was Abraham Weintraub, part of the so-called ideological wing of the government. On Twitter and in public speeches, Weintraub attacked political opponents and the press. Shortly after taking office, in April 2019, he announced budget cuts for federal universities. When questioned by the press, Weintraub said that "Universities that, instead of trying to improve academic performance, are making a racket, will have their funding cut" (Zero Hora, 2019). That month, Bolsonaro announced a budget cut in humanities courses, such as Philosophy and Sociology, to focus on areas that supposedly generate more return to the taxpayer, such as Medicine, Engineering and Veterinary.

In November 2019, several issues involving the National High School Exam (Enem) emerged, such as leaking images of the tests and the bankruptcy of the printing company. But Weintraub refused to give interviews. He also initiated the implementation of civic-military schools. In one episode, the minister argued that those who study at these schools have a right-wing political alignment (Estadao, 2020).

The minister also tried to interfere in the choice of presidents of 17 federal universities and four federal institutes, who are elected by the academic community, but Congress stopped him (Bergamo, 2019). He also revoked the ordinance that guaranteed reservation of positions (social and ethnic quotas), for black, indigenous and disabled students in master's and doctoral courses at federal universities. That year, several universities also registered irregularities, in which white students defrauded records to occupy higher education places reserved for social and ethnic minorities.

Weintraub was fired in June 2020. Even after his departure, the controversies continued. To be able to enter the United States with the health restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Weintraub used his diplomatic passport as Minister of Education, two days after leaving office (Lis, 2020).

The evangelical pastor Milton Ribeiro replace Weintraub as Minister of Education, with a conservative agenda. In his administration, 37 employees of INEP (Brazilian National Institute of Educational Studies and Investigations) resigned, alleging moral harassment. In February 2022, 33 entities linked to education denounced the disappearance of information from the School Census microdata, released annually by INEP. The government contended

that the data was suppressed to comply with the General Law on Protection of Personal Data, which had entered into force.

Ribeiro was arrested on June 22, 2022, days after he was fired, over allegations of corruption in the Ministry of Education (Reuters, 2022). The Federal Police discovered a clandestine office within the ministry, occupied by pastors who charged bribes to distribute funds to mayors. Ribeiro was replaced by Victor Godoy, who stayed away from controversies.

### ***The Freedom of Information Act***

During the 2000s, discussions on transparent government became more popular in developing countries (Malena, 2004; Ackerman, 2006; Fung, 2013). In Brazil, the first bill of an access to information law was presented in the National Congress in 2003 (Gomes et al., 2022), but the Freedom of Information Act (*Lei de Acesso à Informação - LAI, 2011*) was passed only in November 2011 (Berthier, 2023).

Every citizen may request public information for free from the federal, state or municipal government, legislative and judicial branches. Authorities have up to 20 days to respond, which can be extended to 10 days. If the request is denied, the requester may appeal. Since 2012, more than 1.2 million requests for information have been made (CGU, 2023).

The norm also abolished the eternal secrecy of documents and defines the maximum confidentiality period: 5, 15 or 25 years. The Office of the Comptroller General (CGU) monitors the application of the law, acting as an ombudsman of the federal government. The Public Prosecutor's Office also plays a role in pressuring the government to respond to requests.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### ***Watchdog Journalism as a Player of Social Accountability***

LAI provided support for journalists to exercise their monitoring role through critical and investigative reporting. Literature defines this stance as *watchdog journalism*: when reporters focus on strengthening the accountability of those in power, the free press as the Fourth Estate (Ceva & Mokrosinska, 2022; Hellmueller et al., 2016; Norris, 2014; Hanitzsch, 2011; Feldstein, 2006; Waisbord, 2000; Schultz, 1998).

Since early 2000s, authors suggested civic engagement as a solution to the crisis of states and markets in developing countries, based on the premise that citizens would adopt an active stance to get to know their rights and demand solutions from those in power (Vloeberghs & Bergh, 2024; Fung et al., 2021; Hegre et al., 2020; Grandvoininnet et al., 2015; Gaventa & McGee, 2013; Rodan & Hughes, 2012; Ackerman, 2005; Malena et al., 2004). This popular involvement is described in literature as *social accountability* (Ackerman, 2005; Malena 2004).

Initiatives can be supported or initiated by the state or citizens and have as a characteristic the inversion of orientation: they work from the bottom up, focused on popular demand (Vloeberghs & Bergh, 2024). Far beyond elections and plebiscites, social accountability includes participation in public policymaking, budget monitoring, and citizen assessment of public service. The players are citizens, communities, civil society and the media, resulting in



public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, public interest lawsuits and investigative journalism (Malena et al., 2004; Hegre et al., 2020; Fung et al., 2021). In the Brazilian context, Ferracioli and Marques (2020) argue that journalism is relevant to promote public transparency, and the LAI is currently a fundamental tool to achieve it.

### ***Transparency and Open Government***

Transparency has implications for many disciplines (Alloa, 2018; Alloa & Thomä, 2018; Frank, 2015; Berliner, 2014; Michener & Bersch, 2013; Moser, 2001). The definitions in Political Science encompass the relationship between ruler and ruled, opening the non-visible procedures of an institution to those who are not directly involved (Moser, 2001); making an actor's information available to other actors (Meijer, 2013); or simply "to be open and available for examination and scrutiny" (Schauer, 2011, p. 1343).

Democratic transparency has four principles, according to Fung (2013): availability (within everyone's reach), proportionality (providing information when actions affect citizens), accessibility (understandable language and format) and actionability (individuals can protect themselves or influence organizations). The author also proposes three categories in which contemporary debates are structured, two of them focused on government entities, Information on Demand and Naked Government, and one aimed at the private sector, targeted transparency.

Information on Demand is based on freedom of information laws (Fung, 2013), such as the Brazilian LAI. However, they require civic institutions with a certain degree of maturity to request data, have the analytical capacity to interpret it and make political use of it. The naked government, linked to open government, obliges leaders to act proactively in disseminating data and information.

Meijer (2012) outlines the challenges and progress in open government and describes that the concept encompasses two dimensions: transparency, the vision, and participation, the voice (Figure 1). The transparency branch includes actions of open access to information, whether intentional or even leaked. Participation is the formal or informal actions taken by the government to enable popular engagement in decision-making. The author attests that synergy between transparency and participation is optimal for the open government.

A point for the debate between transparency, open government and the relationship with freedom of information laws is the aspect of intentional access to government information (Figure 1). Meijer et al. (2012) divide this process into two: the passive release of data or documents (freedom of information) or the active release, at the government's own initiative.

The notion of *passive transparency* consists of making government information available (Frank & Oztoprak, 2015; Schauer, 2011) without interpreting it or worrying about whom or for what purpose will be useful. An example is open data, the golden rule being, according to Frank (2015), to make as much available as possible unless there is a reason not to.

*Active transparency*, on the other hand, is a voluntary act of communication by the government to one or more defined audiences (Frank & Oztoprak, 2015), usually with the aim of solving a previously identified problem, selecting the information to be communicated and creating conditions for the public to act on the information received. Holding press

conferences, making data available on the official website or promoting public campaigns are some examples.

Based on these theoretical arguments, my interest in this research is to analyze the impacts of Bolsonaro's administration on active transparency (the relationship with the press to proactively publicize and clarify the government's actions), and passive transparency (through the Freedom of Information Act).

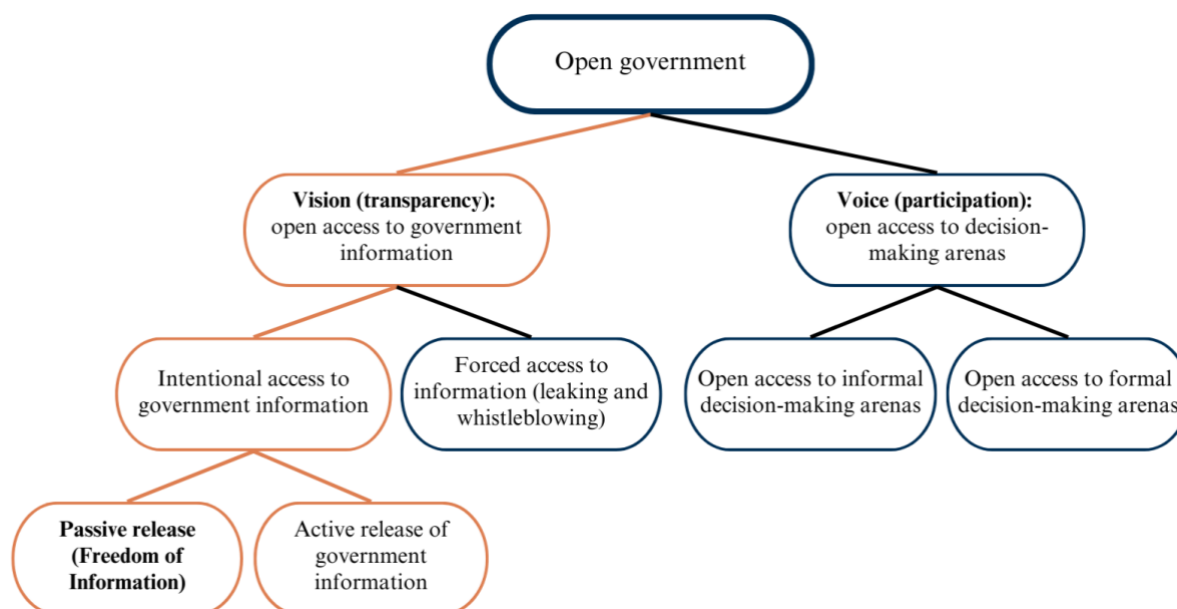


Figure 1: The Links Between Open Government, Transparency and Participation<sup>3</sup>

## Research Design and Methods

This exploratory research aims to understand how the principles of public transparency, specifically the Brazilian Access to Information Act, have been affected in the field of education by a hostile policy towards critical journalism (Ozawa et al., 2024; Pinho, 2022). The following research questions were then proposed:

1. *Is there a topical difference between the declined requests for information through LAI and the requests granted by the government during Bolsonaro's term in specific ministries?*
2. *How does the government's information policy affect watchdog journalism?*
  - a. *To what extent have social accountability and transparency been violated due to the denials of LAI requests?*
  - b. *How did journalists covering topics whose requests for information were rejected overcome this limitation to write their stories?*

I opted for mixed-methods research, quantitative and qualitative (Bryman, 2012). This approach is appropriate due to the purposes of the exploratory research, based on the Brazilian federal government's LAI open database (CGU, 2023), with anonymous public records of all requests for information since 2015. Due to the scarce prior knowledge on this

<sup>3</sup> Note. Adapted from Meijer et al. (2012, p. 14). I highlight in orange lines the dimensions that encompass freedom of information laws in the context of open government.

database, this inductive approach research had no hypotheses in advance, typical of exploratory studies (Sheppard, 2020).

This study is divided into three stages. I performed an exploratory data analysis (Tukey, 1977) and secondary analysis to define the scope of time and field of government to examine in the next stage. From those results, I submitted the textual data to topic modelling to identify the most recurrent themes in the requests made by journalists<sup>4</sup>.

Statistical topic modeling models are useful for summarizing and representing the content of large collections of documents (Mimno et al., 2011), and the subject of each item is not known beforehand (Mattingly, 2022). It is a technique originating from unsupervised machine learning and Natural Language Processing (NLP).

Egger and Yu (2022) clarify that there are several techniques for topic modeling. Among the best known are LDA, NMF, Top2Vec, BERTopic. The authors proposed a framework to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each technique. Based on this framework, I opted for the Top2Vec technique, because it can work on very large dataset sizes, automatically generates the number of topics and contains integrated search functions. According to Angelov (2020), the conversion of textual corpora into vectors allows the model to calculate spatial proximity and find similar words, phrases or documents.

Finally, I carried out semi-structured guided interviews with three out of five journalists contacted, who are experts in both the usage of access to information and coverage of education. The selection of the participants fits what Bryman (2012) classifies as convenience sampling. Seventeen questions address five dimensions of the research topic (Appendix B): the interviewee's experience with education and usage of LAI, the perception of LAI as tool for investigative journalism, the perception regarding transparency during Bolsonaro's administration, and strategies to overcome rejections via LAI.

## Results

### *Exploratory Data Analysis*

Between 2015 and 2022, the LAI database registered 690,393 requests for information. A continuous growth in the number of requests is observed from 2015 to 2020. The peaks were observed in 2019 and 2020 (Table 1).

Table 1: Total Requests for Information per Year

Year	Total
2015	71274
2016	81275
2017	90156
2018	91377
2019	96078
2020	111538
2021	79605
2022	69092

*Note.* Data collected by author on the 14th of May 2023 from the LAI database (CGU, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Python script and notebook with technical notes available at <https://cristianweiss.com/en/2024/11/topic-modeling-to-analyze-freedom-of-information-law-request/>

I tried to verify which areas of government were the most demanded. However, the LAI database brings together 307 government institutions, including ministries, agencies, universities, hospitals and public companies, at different levels of hierarchy. It was necessary to resort to 16 documents, such as laws, decrees, memos, official websites, as of March 2023, to group them within the hierarchy of ministries. With the aggregation, the sum of 307 entities was reduced to 23. Education became the most demanded area, with 25,23 per cent (N=174,075) of requests for information registered between 2015 and 2022 (Table 2).

Table 2: Total Requests by Government Areas From 2015 to 2022

Thematic areas of government	Total	%
Education	174075	25,23
Economy	113381	16,43
Mines and Energy	67786	9,82
Health	61850	8,96
Justice and Security	35506	5,15
Citizenship	31712	4,60
Agriculture	29359	4,26
Infrastructure	27132	3,93
Labor and Social Security	24058	3,49
Presidency	16344	2,37
Environment	16098	2,33
Science and Technology	13855	2,01
Defense	13607	1,97
Central Bank	12591	1,82
Communication	10757	1,56
Cities	10098	1,46
Comptroller General of the Union	8195	1,19
Foreign Relations	6743	0,98
Culture	6049	0,88
Human Rights	5022	0,73
Tourism	2012	0,29
Others	1894	0,27
Regional Development	1844	0,27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>689968</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note.* Data collected by author on the 14th of May 2023 from the LAI database (CGU, 2023).

The next dimension indicates the total number of information requests per year, grouped by type of government decision. I observed that the requests granted also peaked in 2019 and 2020, in total, although proportionally 2020 was the lowest since 2015, due to the high rate of cases considered to be inappropriate requests for information (Table 3).

Table 3: Types of Decision by Year, Total and Proportionally

Decision	Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Fully Granted	Total	52517	58644	67149	67448	68961	69122	54576	50973
	%	73,68	72,16	74,48	73,81	71,78	61,97	68,56	73,78
Denied	Total	4595	4538	5229	6177	7550	7411	5241	4857
	%	6,45	5,58	5,8	6,76	7,86	6,64	6,58	7,03
Partially granted	Total	3628	4909	3653	3906	4724	5024	4698	3988
	%	5,09	6,04	4,05	4,27	4,92	4,5	5,9	5,77
Non-existent Information	Total	2270	2537	2905	3259	4198	3768	3047	2442
	%	3,18	3,12	3,22	3,57	4,37	3,38	3,83	3,53
It's not a proper request	Total	4248	5607	6189	5677	4973	20699	8679	3172
	%	5,96	6,9	6,86	6,21	5,18	18,56	10,9	4,59
Duplicate / Repeated Question	Total	1455	1791	1907	2026	2423	2548	1394	1629
	%	2,04	2,2	2,12	2,22	2,52	2,28	1,75	2,36
Authority not competent	Total	2561	3249	3124	2884	3249	2966	1970	2031
	%	3,59	4	3,47	3,16	3,38	2,66	2,47	2,94
TOTAL	Total	71274	81275	90156	91377	96078	111538	79605	69092
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Note.* Data collected by author on the 14th of May 2023 from the LAI database (CGU, 2023). I opted to narrow down the analysis in 2019 and 2020, by looking at the data of LAI users: 64.3% of the requests (N=107,688) present identification of the requester's profession.

### ***Requests Submitted by Journalists.***

Journalists made 6,348 requests for information in the period, 13.45 per cent were addressed to Education (Table 4), followed by Health (10.8 per cent), Justice and Security (10.16 per cent) and Economy (10.03 per cent). Those areas had a fully granted response rate above 60%. In Education, 5.79% of requests were fully denied.

Table 4: Requests Made by Journalists in Different Areas of Government

Areas	Total Requests		Government decision on requests submitted by journalists							
			Fully Granted		Denied		Partially granted		Other <sup>1</sup>	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Education	854	13.45	643	75.29	49	5.74	74	8.67	61	7.14
Health	691	10.89	573	82.92	49	7.09	34	4.92	27	3.91
Justice and Security	645	10.16	424	65.74	46	7.13	83	12.87	75	11.63
Economy	637	10.03	394	61.85	89	13.97	60	9.42	77	12.09
Presidency	468	7.37	238	50.85	111	23.72	67	14.32	25	5.34
Defense	411	6.47	226	54.99	58	14.11	41	9.98	60	14.6
Mines and Energy	399	6.29	284	71.18	39	9.77	27	6.77	40	10.03
Foreign Relations	336	5.29	96	28.57	169	50.3	16	4.76	42	12.5
Science and Technology	333	5.25	220	66.07	40	12.01	22	6.61	32	9.61
Environment	325	5.12	256	78.77	13	4	18	5.54	33	10.15
Citizenship	189	2.98	91	48.15	16	8.47	56	29.63	22	11.64
Infrastructure	187	2.95	167	89.3	6	3.21	6	3.21	3	1.6
Human Rights	166	2.61	123	74.1	11	6.63	17	10.24	8	4.82
Comptroller General of the Union	150	2.36	103	68.67	11	7.33	16	10.67	16	10.67
Agriculture	137	2.16	97	70.8	16	11.68	12	8.76	9	6.57
Labor and Social Security	99	1.56	57	57.58	16	16.16	12	12.12	10	10.1
Culture	73	1.15	48	65.75	3	4.11	12	16.44	9	12.33
Cities	68	1.07	55	80.88	1	1.47	2	2.94	6	8.82
Tourism	55	0.87	39	70.91	3	5.45	3	5.45	8	14.55
Communication	50	0.79	34	68	3	6	9	18	4	8
Central Bank	46	0.72	32	69.57	1	2.17	7	15.22	3	6.52
Others	18	0.28	17	94.44	1	5.56		0	0	0
Regional Development	11	0.17	11	100		0		0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6348</b>	<b>100</b>								

*Note.* Data collected by author on the 14th of May 2023 from the LAI database (CGU, 2023).

Based on the results, I established the focus of the topic modeling experiment on the requests for information submitted in 2019 and 2020, by journalists, addressed to the Ministry of Education and its subordinate agencies. The selection of education was based on the criterion that this is the field of government most demanded by citizens in general and, specifically, by journalists.

The field of education had 854 requests for information submitted by journalists between 2019 and 2020, of which 75.29 per cent (N=643) were granted by the federal government (Table 4). Among the others, 8.67 per cent (N=74) were partially granted, 5.74 per cent (N=49) were denied, for 4.22 per cent (N=36) the government claimed that there is no information to answer the request, 3.16 per cent (N=27) were denied by the authorities based on the argument that they were duplicated, in 1.87 per cent (N=16) the authority argued that

it was not the competent department to answer the requests, and in 1.05 per cent (N=9) the requests were not properly formulated or did not consist of a clear request for information.

### ***Topic Modeling Outcomes***

I carried out the topic modeling experiment considering all requests for information (N=854) submitted by journalists in the field of education between 2019 and 2020. The model resulted in 18 topics, ordered from Topic 0 to Topic 17. A total of 449 single words and 301 bigrams were highlighted by the model. Each topic has an attribute called “topic\_sizes”, which refers to the number of documents (in this research, individual requests for information) that compose them. By default, Top2Vec orders the topics from highest to lowest, i.e. the one with the highest number of documents to the one with the lowest number.

The results are described in Table 5. The first column received human interpretation labels to qualitatively classify and summarize the subjects most frequently addressed in each topic. The entire table, with word scores, the median scores for each topic and examples of requests found in the original language (Portuguese) are in Appendix A.

The outcomes demonstrated that journalists were concerned about fraud in the racial quota program of public universities; the policy of implementation of military schools across Brazil; cases of possible pesticide poisoning related to a university hospital; students unable to pay their student loan fees; the organization of the National High School Exam (ENEM), as well as the exclusion of specific questions from the exam database due to ideology concerns; budget cuts of federal universities; criteria for the creation of undergraduate medical courses; and the possible misuse of a Brazilian Air Force (FAB) plane by the former Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub. A notable part of those requests is directly related to the scandals registered during the administration of different ministers in the Ministry of Education. The most notables are described below.

Topic 0 (Table 5) received the label “Suspected poisoning”, as 84 of the 99 documents found in this topic refer to a request for information on the number of patients diagnosed with ailments caused by alleged pesticide poisoning in 2019. Journalists request data on cases of patients poisoned by pesticides and ask whether the patients were victims of suicide. A health-related request appears in the corpus of education because it is addressed to university hospitals. The poisoning theme is again highlighted in Topic 15.

Topic 1 was classified as "Military schools" and contains 74 documents about the establishment of this type of school. In document 157 (Appendix A), the professional requests for access to teaching materials such as handouts, books and presentations, which would have been used in training teachers. Topic 8 (Figure 2) also highlights military schools, planned in partnership with the Ministry of Defense, but journalists focused on questioning the Ministry of Education whether reserve or active military personnel will work in these institutions (Appendix C, Excerpt 1).

News articles about the implementation of the military schools published subsequently in the press (Mori, 2019; Alfano, 2020) explicitly mention this data and emphasize that this information could only be obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

Table 5: Topic Modeling Results

Category	Topic Number
Suspected poisoning	0
Military schools	1
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	2
National high school exam	3
Details of the transparency service	4
Student loan and default rates	5
Approval of Medicine course	6
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	7
Military schools	8
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	9
Fraud in private universities	10
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	11
Cuts in the university budget	12
Public tenders for teachers and journalists	13
Former Minister of Education	14
Suspected poisoning	15
Conditions and beds in university hospitals	16
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	17

*Note.* Categorization of results generated by the Top2Vec model on 854 requests submitted by journalists to the Ministry of Education between 2019 and 2020. See Appendix A for the summarized table (with the first 50 words for each topic) and the link for the full table.

Topics 2, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 17 highlights journalists' concern about fraud in the racial quota policy in undergraduate studies at federal universities. Journalists are interested in the results of administrative investigations and punishment of students who defrauded the system. In Topic 17 presents a request in which the journalist submitted questions regarding fraud to quotas in postgraduate studies, a benefit that was suspended by the then minister Abraham Weintraub was controversial.

Topic 3 was labeled as "National high school exam", because requests for information on the questions of the exam predominated. Document 36 of the topic (Appendix A) presents the request submitted by a journalist who would like to have access to the final report of a commission appointed to review the questions. The journalist's interest coincides with reports at the time on the topic, when the then Minister of Education, the conservative Abraham Weintraub had said that the exam would no longer have "ideological questions", suggesting that left-wing themes were commonly the subject of questions in the test (Campos, 2019).



Topic 10 brings a new theme, labeled “Fraud in private universities”. It presents a request for a list with the name of all private higher education institutions that have already been investigated by the ministry for fraud in the accreditation of courses. The request coincides with the time when a report by Agência Pública (Domenici, 2020) uncovered fraud at a private college. According to the publication, even after the disclose of information that robots were used in place of teachers in remote classes, the ministry did not carry out any inspection.



Figure 2: (Top) Topic 8 Generated by Topic Modelling by Top2Vec (covers words about the expansion of military schools in Brazil during the Bolsonaro Government); (Bottom) Translation in English

In Topic 12, journalists demonstrate concern about budget cuts at federal universities. The topic is another one that was controversially addressed by the minister Abraham Weintraub. In document 518 (Appendix A), the journalist asks if there really was a budget reduction, and which areas of the universities will be directly affected.

Topic 14, labeled “Former Minister of Education”, concentrates several requests on random subjects, but one of them deserves attention. The journalist asks whether the story published in the press that former Minister Abraham Weintraub traveled to the United States on a diplomatic passport is confirmed (Lis, 2020). The reporter also requests whether the Brazilian Air Force plane was used for it (Appendix C, Excerpt 2).

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

I interviewed three journalists who are experts both in the use of freedom of information law and in covering education. The three reporters had been using the law for at least five years before Bolsonaro became president and publish in large, national media outlets.

The interviews were conducted in Portuguese on 17 and 24 July 2023. The questions are available in Appendix B. Two journalists, who agreed to have their names disclosed, are referred to by their first and last names: Luiz Fernando Toledo, from São Paulo, a freelance reporter for the UOL portal and Piauí magazine; Paulo Saldaña, from São Paulo, an education

reporter for the newspaper Folha de S.Paulo since 2016. The third interviewee works for a TV station in São Paulo, requested anonymity due to security reasons and is referred to as “interviewee 3”.

The journalists agreed that the LAI is an essential tool for performing watchdog journalism. Despite Bolsonaro’s anti-transparent behavior, they consider that LAI has worked and they have not perceived significant impact on the response to requests compared to previous incumbents. Toledo emphasizes that, in practice, there has been little impact on the operation of the law (Appendix B, Interview 1).

Although traditional channels, such as interviews and contacts via the ministry’s press office or spokespeople, have limited access to information during Bolsonaro’s administration, journalists said that LAI has become the main resource for obtaining substantial information about education. When requests were rejected, journalists adopted new tactics to overcome the limitations. Saldaña built up relationships with public servants, who anonymously helped him to properly formulate requests, to convince and prevent the authorities from rejecting the request and providing data (Appendix B, Interview 2).

If a request is rejected, the journalists try to appeal to the last administrative instance. Toledo also contacts the Public Prosecutor’s Office to put legal pressure on public bodies. Alternatively, the journalists revealed that occasionally their newspapers publish articles to publicly report the ministry’s refusal.

Lastly, the interviewees claimed that the Education Ministry may be privileged because it has a history of making data and documents available. The pro-transparency culture of the ministry’s civil servants may have protected FOI from political intervention.

## **Conclusion**

The results demonstrated that the topics representing the requests submitted by journalists are partially related to the scandals and controversial statements by the ministers of Education in Brazil.

In this sense, the research question 1 focused on identifying a topical difference between granted and rejected requests. It was not possible to clearly determine any relevant differences. More tests are recommended. Analyzing the arguments qualitatively, I observed that the limitations due to the pandemic or the generation of additional data were the most justifications made by the government for rejection.

The research question 2 focused on the Bolsonaro government’s attitudes towards transparency and how it impacts watchdog journalism. The government’s hostile stance towards the critical press, as Pinho (2022) describes, made it difficult to access the most ordinary information. Interviewees revealed that it was difficult to obtain information from the press offices, but responses via LAI occurred normally. It suggests that the law has been little affected by the hostile attitude towards the press. Saldaña revealed in the interview that it is necessary to approach neutral sources within the ministry, such as career civil servants, who are willing to guide reporters to properly ask for information to avoid rejection.

The journalists interviewed presented a consonant discourse that they believe that LAI is a consolidated mechanism, and they have not observed significant impacts on the response

pattern over the years. For them, LAI continues to provide the service they expect. However, they admitted that conventional government channels have worsened relations with the press. Considering the model proposed by Meijer (2012), in which he divides intentional access to information into passive transparency (freedom of information) and active transparency, the active disclosure of government information, I argue that Bolsonaro's administration failed in active transparency strategies in education, but didn't affect passive transparency, in the scope of LAI.

This study has limitations in that it does not claim to be representative, as the convenience sample does not allow for generalizations (Bryman, 2012). Further studies could be conducted based on this research. Journalists covering other fields of government, such as Foreign Affairs or Defense, might have different experiences with the LAI.

### **Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to the anonymous IAFOR reviewers for their constructive comments. I express my deepest appreciation to Professors Dr. Sebastian Pranz and Patricia Bliemeister, from the M.Sc. in Media, Technology and Society at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, for their guidance and motivation. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Muhammad Muhammad and Stefan Eschenwecker, M.A., from the Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Mannheim, for their review and fruitful commentary.

## Appendix A

### Topic Modeling Results

Overall results generated by the *Top2Vec* model on 854 requests for access to information from Brazilian journalists on education between 2019 and 2020.

See the complete table generated by topic modeling, as well as examples of excerpts from submitted requests at the link:

<https://cristianweiss.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Appendix-Weiss-Cristian-Edel.pdf>

**Summarized Topic Modeling Results**

Category	Topic Number	Topic Words
Suspected poisoning	0	["adult" "attempt" "suspect" "statistic" "poison" "fatal" "register" "achieve" "write" "unknown" "release" "substance" "confirm" "child" "severity" "mark" "victim" "suicide" "agrotoxic" "indigenous" "determine" "age" "poisoning" "doctor" "patient" "term" "list" "case" "adult child" "request" "adult case" "suicide attempt" "fatal case" "analyze" "suspected poisoning" "statistics case" "suicide patient" "attempted case" "severity case" "medical patient" "medical case" "indigenous patient" "fatal severity" "child list" "question patient" "confirm suspect" "age victim" "write request" "list case" "get release"]
Military schools	1	["national" "education" "education connect" "elementary education" "minister education" "higher education" "national book" "national school" "municipality" "teaching" "list" "program" "student" "professional academic" "federal" "relationship" "value" "school" "proof" "contract" "elementary school" "civic-military school" "open spreadsheet" "federal reduction" "program incentive" "teaching institution" "higher education" "federal government" "high school" "route school" "open" "federal university" "military" "clear power" "value pay" "power" "exactly value" "value debt" "base" "spreadsheet investigation" "spreadsheet" "give entrant" "give process" "file" "state" "role" "response" "power use" "public" "send open"]
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	2	["mechanism" "brown" "control" "removal" "white" "black" "resolution" "planning" "defraud" "conference" "expulsion" "self-declaration" "assessment" "debate" "reprove" "reserve" "accuse" "register" "procedure" "adopt" "person" "compose" "deny" "sense" "member" "treat" "perform" "vacancy" "approve" "existing" "enter" "occupy" "resource" "commission" "creation" "university" "form conference" "create" "resource approve" "creation existing" "form" "semester" "self-declaration perform" "racial procedure" "denounce register" "sense where" "sense commission" "produce" "vacancy reserve" "person approve"]
National high school exam	3	["exam" "state" "print exam" "grade" "major grade" "medium grade" "technical grade" "candidate grade" "grade candidate" "state grade" "national" "small quantity" "get quantity" "get" "federal reduction" "education" "federal university" "federal government" "municipality" "value" "collect file" "education" "quantity" "list" "contract" "medium get" "federal" "student" "base protocol" "reinforcement available" "base system" "state maranhao" "program" "consider" "indicate quantity" "base" "national book" "enroll" "public" "national school" "power" "indicate" "answer" "ministry cabinet" "school" "value pay" "education connect" "curriculum consider" "exactly value" "elementary education"]
Details of the transparency service	4	["decision" "servant" "regulated" "professional" "ordinance" "manual" "reinforcement" "local" "foresee" "public tender" "body" "service" "ministry" "response" "staff" "available" "file" "public" "position" "use" "name" "operation" "power" "follow" "reinforcement foresee" "specific regulated" "give" "local transparency" "consider" "decision cpr" "reinforcement available" "regulate manual" "numerical manual" "power to use" "rule law" "ministry folder" "follow sequence" "use production" "public tender" "method to use" "rule law" "ordinance official" "professional academic" "citizen service" "name position" "collect file" "send" "regular operation" "public staff" "personal staff"]

Student loan and default rates	5	["contract" "contract sign" "value" "federal" "student" "spreadsheet" "education" "open" "base" "precisely value" "value debt" "value pay" "state" "national" "list" "federal reduction" "municipality" "federal government" "federal university" "collect file" "offer an answer" "public sector" "public consultation" "public private" "evidence" "open spreadsheet" "program" "investigation spreadsheet" "education" "indicate" "course" "process" "public servant" "organ name" "institution" "education institution" "consider" "protocol base" "file" "autarchy organ" "correspond receive" "indicate quantity" "student approval" "system base" "state maranhao" "relacao" "receive" "fraud approval" "school" "categorize course"]
Approval of Medicine course	6	["correspond receive" "institution both" "relationship consolidate" "categorize course" "institution assess" "course completion" "offer response" "provide law" "denunciation receive" "course medicine" "social admission" "institution government" "decision ccpr" "receive" "local transparency" "fraud admission" "use" "reinforcement provide" "operation" "autarchy organ" "course" "indigenous achieve" "basis" "law provide" "archive" "relationship" "response" "regular operation" "ministry" "use production" "send" "follow" "personnel" "depart budget" "organ name" "method use" "name" "public servant" "depart" "clarify depart" "consider" "public network" "power" "public private" "public consultation" "ordinance" "organ" "age victim" "reinforcement" "give"]
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	7	["approval" "result" "apply" "investigate" "establish" "policy" "start" "punishment apply" "investigation result" "investigation" "administrative" "punishment" "investigation process" "process" "administrative process" "result punishment" "involve investigation" "entry" "opening investigation" "investigation establish" "establish" "fraud entry" "start policy" "student approval" "leave" "fraud approval" "investigate fraud" "social admission" "course" "institution" "indicate" "indicate fact" "investigation spreadsheet" "receive" "policy quota" "course completion" "spreadsheet" "government institution" "open" "medicine course" "categorize course" "institution assess" "institution both" "send open" "consolidate relationship" "correspond receive" "student identify" "student mato" "state maranhao" "student interview"]
Military schools	8	["military" "military reserve" "military active" "incentive program" "program" "value debt" "exactly value" "value pay" "curriculum consider" "ordinance official" "list" "civic-military school" "employee servant" "servant performance" "servant training" "school" "federal" "name position" "path school" "citizen service" "position" "registered servant" "agency name" "municipality" "student" "position occupy" "position vacant" "currently position" "position hierarchy" "position assistant" "ministry" "agency autarchy" "agency" "power" "response" "available" "name" "federal government" "public servant" "education" "file" "name give" "value" "federal reduction" "clear power" "professional" "predict" "national" "decision"]
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	9	["initiation policy" "approval" "set up investigate" "involve investigation" "opening investigation" "initiation" "investigate fraud" "policy quota" "investigation set up" "student approval" "investigate" "policy" "investigation result" "result" "set up" "fraud approval" "investigation" "investigation process" "apply" "punishment apply" "provide admission" "give process" "administrative" "name give" "admission" "punishment" "investigation spreadsheet" "send open" "fraud entry" "send categorize" "result punishment" "process" "send remaining" "send clarify" "student bush" "student identify" "social entry" "administrative process" "interview student" "student reside" "leave" "course completion" "course" "categorize course" "agency name" "course medicine" "institution" "open spreadsheet" "indicate" "racial quota"]
Fraud in private universities	10	["enroll" "student enroll" "indicate quantity" "indicate fact" "indicate" "base" "base system" "base protocol" "low quantity" "quantity" "get quantity" "institution" "grade" "student" "grade medium" "gross grade" "mean get" "grade technician" "grade candidate" "course" "state" "candidate grade" "government institution" "state grade" "graduation differentiate" "institution assess" "undergraduate" "post graduate" "undergraduate" "case age" "undergraduate" "get" "institution as much" "follow sequence" "categorize course" "course completion" "course medicine" "consider" "respect graduation" "teaching" "spreadsheet" "education" "test" "curriculum consider" "student reside" "student interview" "student mato" "approval" "follow" "student identify" "student"]
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	11	["investigation" "set up" "admission" "admission fraud" "investigate" "result" "punishment" "social admission" "apply" "investigation result" "administrative" "start" "approval" "process" "policy" "involve investigation" "opening investigation" "receive" "government institution" "institution assess" "institution as much" "result punishment" "course" "report receive" "start" "investigation process" "correspond receive" "punish apply" "creation operation" "course completion" "categorize course" "course medicine" "institution" "fraud approval" "student approval" "clarify depart" "regular operation" "investigation start" "from budget" "administrative process" "send" "relationship consolidate" "start investigate" "investigate fraud" "open" "initiation policy" "indicate fact" "graduation post" "graduation differentiate" "attend graduation"]

Cuts in the university budget	12	["from budget" "clarify from" "competition" "receive" "position hierarchy" "position assistant" "currently position" "correspond receive" "report receive" "vacant position" "from" "name position" "course" "value" "process" "creation operation" "administrative" "open" "institution" "federal" "admission" "punishment" "institution as much" "institution to assess" "social admission" "specific evaluation" "clinical hospital" "university hospital" "use" "fraud admission" "government institution" "establish" "use production" "list" "hospital" "apply" "value to pay" "method to use" "hospital bed" "exact value" "debt value" "operation" "relationship" "citizen service" "base" "municipality" "educational institution" "send" "investigation" "file"]
Public tenders for teachers and journalists	13	["position hierarchy" "currently position" "vacant position" "assistant position" "public tender" "name position" "depart budget" "clarify depart" "citizen service" "available" "law provide" "position" "ministry" "service" "use" "decision ccpr" "reinforcement" "decision" "ordinance" "professional" "position occupy" "operation" "provide law" "location" "hospital" "servant" "manual" "regulated" "hospital clinic" "provide" "university hospital" "response" "hospital bed" "organization" "public" "name" "place transparency" "public tender" "specific regulated" "personnel" "file" "power" "ordinance official" "follow" "existing creation" "reinforcement provide" "give" "consider" "specific evaluation" "method use"]
Former Minister of Education	14	["elementary school" "higher education" "high school" "teaching institution" "appeal in" "appeal approve" "appeal take" "where appeal" "public" "public staff" "commission direction" "direction where" "personal staff" "public tender" "compose" "teaching" "opinion" "consider" "ordinance" "white" "position take" "local" "decision" "state maranhao" "use production" "perform" "defraud" "self-declaration" "vacancy" "mechanism" "debate" "national" "conference" "reserve" "create" "file" "pardo" "specific evaluation" "register" "answer" "value" "procedure" "method use" "professional" "power" "control" "service" "person" "removal" "planning"]
Suspected poisoning	15	["pesticide poisoning" "number poisoning" "pesticide poisoning" "suspected poisoning" "medical patient" "question patient" "send obtain" "average obtain" "add pesticide" "poison pesticide" "pesticide agrototoxic" "obtain quantity" "pesticide case" "medical case" "poisoning" "pesticide" "patient" "poison" "candidate score" "candidate score" "note technician" "indigenous patient" "average score" "gross score" "attempt" "fatal" "suicide" "severity" "mark" "obtain" "release" "medical" "statistic" "adult child" "write" "suspect" "write request" "record" "adult" "unknown" "substance" "determine" "child" "achieve" "mark poison" "poison substance" "mark confirm" "adult case" "confirm" "victim case"]
Conditions and beds in university hospitals	16	["hospital bed" "hospital clinic" "university hospital" "hospital" "assistant position" "hierarchical position" "currently position" "vacant position" "law provide" "law term" "public tender" "from budget" "clarify from" "name position" "existing creation" "citizen service" "provide law" "medical patient" "medical case" "indigenous patient" "list" "medical" "suicide" "substance" "indigenous" "suspect" "confirm" "ask" "unknown" "write" "severity" "relationship" "adult" "interrogate patient" "attempt" "child" "determine" "term" "mark" "achieve" "patient" "municipality" "age" "age victim" "produce creation" "release" "relationship consolidate" "indigenous achieve" "statistics" "base"]
Fraud in racial quotas in universities	17	["from" "admission" "punishment" "establish" "investigate" "administrative" "apply" "policy" "investigation" "start" "process" "admission fraud" "social admission" "result" "approval" "course" "institution" "clarify start" "punish apply" "send open" "spreadsheet investigation" "start budget" "investigation set up" "open" "set up investigate" "institution as much" "institution assess" "institution government" "investigation process" "receive" "investigation result" "involve investigation" "course completion" "opening investigation" "categorize course" "start policy" "method use" "open spreadsheet" "administrative process" "medical course" "use production" "spreadsheet" "correspond receive" "investigate fraud" "result punishment" "pass evaluate" "relationship consolidate" "denunciation receive" "send" "send categorize"]

*Note.* Results (first 50 words for each topic) generated by the Top2Vec model on 854 requests for access to information from Brazilian journalists on education between 2019 and 2020.

## Appendix B

### Base Interview Guide for the Guided Interviews

#### Experience in Education coverage

- How long have you been covering education?

#### Familiarity with the LAI

- How long have you used the LAI?
- Why do you use the LAI?
- What education-related information have you requested to the federal government via LAI?
- What has been the outcome of those requests?
- If those requests were not answered by the government, why were they rejected?
- Did those requests result in published stories?
- Do you identify yourself as a journalist when you submit requests?

#### LAI as a tool for investigation

- How was the repercussion of those stories based on LAI requests?
- Usually who is the final target of those requests: the government or companies are also indirectly investigated via LAI?
- Do you believe that LAI is an instrument for investigative journalism? Do you feel you are doing investigative journalism when you submit a request via LAI?
- Are there cases in which a response via LAI is enough to publish a story?

#### Perceptions on transparency

- Has the LAI always worked? Do you notice any change in the pattern of responses to the requests over time?
- Have you ever suffered any kind of pressure because of a request via LAI?
- Particularly regarding the LAI, do you believe that the Bolsonaro government has been more or less transparent than the previous ones?
- Generally speaking, do you believe that the Bolsonaro government has been a more or less transparent government when compared to previous ones?

#### Overcoming imposed constraints

- When your LAI requests were denied, what did you do to gather information and publish the story?

#### Excerpt Interview 1:

I'm not saying that it was a friendly government, and they did practically nothing to improve the LAI. Actually, they haven't made any improvements to the LAI. They changed the website to another one that had a lot of problems, but now it's more stable. There haven't been any changes that you could say have made progress; on the contrary, it's stood still and in some cases it's gone backwards. But, in general, the LAI was very well conceived, it has many structures behind it. It's not a politician who makes the decision [about disclose or not a requested information]. For example: 'Bolsonaro authorized the release of this data...'

#### Excerpt Interview 2:

There was a series of indications and demonstrations that the funds were going to allies [Bolsonaro's allied mayors] at the FNDE (National Education Development Fund). And we had to show and prove that there were mayors who were qualified to receive [FNDE funds], but were not receiving the funds. A source inside the FNDE commented that there was a way of requesting exactly that [via FOI]. We submitted the specific request. There was a figure that there were R\$400 million [blocked by the ministry to municipalities, in order to favor allies]. [...] So, it was a simple LAI request that provided a great headline and confirmed a situation of privileging payments, of administrative wrongdoing and that has a series of consequences that this information generated, especially in the control agencies. [...] I think that dealing with the LAI has a lot to do with the experience of asking for the right thing. So, very often, a source you talk to will give you the most helpful advice: "look, there's a document X, with such and such a name...". And so we ask for that specific thing.

## Appendix C

Examples of requests for information submitted by journalists to the Ministry of Education between 2019 and 2020, which served as the basis for the model generated by topic modeling.

### Excerpt 1:

Regarding the civic-military schools promised by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Ministry of the Defense, I request: 1 - the number of military personnel who will participate in the program, indicating specifically how many are from the reserve and the specific remuneration of each of them 2 - specification of what positions will be offered to these military personnel in each of the schools. If this has not yet been concretely defined, indicate at least which positions will be available. will they also teach, or will they only work in collaboration with the school community? In which positions? 4 - how many military and military reserve personnel are currently trained to work in the classroom? And what is this training? 5 - the full text of all documents, letters and any other form of communication between the departments of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Defense to articulate the program. Considering that the program has already been announced and has already been implemented for this semester, there is no need to talk about preparatory documents, as the decision has already been made. (Topic 10, document 590, see also Appendix A).

### Excerpt 2:

Dear all, I am a journalist at Jovem Pan and I would like to know when the former minister Abraham Weintraub left Brazil, since, according to press reports, he was still the holder of the Ministry when he entered the United States. Did he use a diplomatic passport? Did he use a Brazilian Air Force plane? When did he enter the United States?. (Topic14, document 254, see also Appendix A).



## References

- Abraji. (2021). *Usa da Lei de Acesso a Informaões por Jornalistas: 4o Relatório de Desempenho*.
- Ackerman, J. M. (2005). *Social accountability in the public sector: A conceptual discussion* (PDF No. 82; Participation and Civic Engagement Paper). World Bank.
- Ackerman, J. M., & Sandoval-Ballesteros, I. E. (2006). The Global Explosion of Freedom of Information Laws. *Administrative Law Review*, 58(1), 85–130.
- Alfano, B. (2020, February 3). *Manual das escolas cívico-militares prevê meninos “bem barbeados” e meninas com adereos discretos*. O Globo.  
<https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/educacao/manual-das-escolas-civico-militares-preve-meninos-bem-barbeados-meninas-com-aderecos-discretos-24226875>
- Alloa, E. (2018). Transparency: A Magic Concept of Modernity. In E. Alloa & D. Thomä (Eds.), *Transparency, Society and Subjectivity: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 21–55). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77161-8\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77161-8_3)
- Alloa, E., & Thomä, D. (Eds.). (2018). *Transparency, Society and Subjectivity*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77161-8>
- Angelov, D. (2020). *Top2Vec: Distributed Representations of Topics* (No. arXiv:2008.09470). arXiv; Cornell University. <http://arxiv.org/abs/2008.09470>
- Bergamo, M. (2019, November 20). *Aliados de Bolsonaro reclamam que Weintraub causa conflitos tentando adotar estilo do presidente*. Folha de S.Paulo.  
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/monicabergamo/2019/11/aliados-de-bolsonaro-reclamam-que-weintraub-causa-conflitos-tentando-adotar-estilo-do-presidente.shtml>
- Berliner, D. (2014). The Political Origins of Transparency. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(2), 479–491. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613001412>
- Berliner, D., Bagozzi, B. E., & Palmer-Rubin, B. (2018). What information do citizens want? Evidence from one million information requests in Mexico. *World Development*, 109, 222–235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.04.016>
- Berthier, F. M. (2023). *Access to Public Documents and Its Restrictions: A Reflection from the Perspectives of Brazil and Sweden*. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2211906X-12030003>
- Brazil. (2013). *Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil: Constitutional text of October 5, 1988, with the alterations introduced by Constitutional Amendments no. 1/92 through 72/2013 and by Revision Constitutional Amendments no. 1/94 through 6/94* (6th ed.). The Federal Senate.  
[https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/bitstream/handle/id/243334/Constitution\\_2013.pdf](https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/bitstream/handle/id/243334/Constitution_2013.pdf)

- Brembatti, K. (2022). *Em 10 anos, Lei de Acesso à Informação muda patamar da transparência no País*. Estadão. <https://www.estadao.com.br/politica/em-10-anos-lei-de-acesso-a-informacao-muda-patamar-da-transparencia-no-pais/>
- Brito, E. N. S., Silva, M. V. P. da, & Pinheiro, D. C. (2023). A Proposta de educação de Jair Bolsonaro e suas comparações com a ditadura militar brasileira. *Devir Educação*, 7(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.30905/rde.v7i1.684>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed). Oxford University Press.
- Campos, L. (2019). *Enem 2019 não terá questões polêmicas e ideológicas, diz Ministro da Educação—Brasil Escola*. Vestibular Brasil Escola. <https://vestibular.brasilecola.uol.com.br/enem/mec-afirma-que-enem-2019-nao-tera-questoes-polemicas-ideologicas/345220.html>
- Ceva, E., & Mokrosinska, D. (2022). Failing Institutions, Whistle-Blowing, and the Role of the News Media. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 39(3), 377–392. <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12476>
- CGU. (2023). *Busca de Pedidos e Respostas: Lei de Acesso à Informação [CSV]*. <https://buscalai.cgu.gov.br/DownloadDados/DownloadDados>
- Coraccini, R. (2021). *Sigilo de 100 anos: Entenda como funciona e o que diz a Lei*. CNN Brasil. <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/sigilo-de-100-anos-entenda-os-criterios-para-tornar-um-documento-secreto/>
- Curtin, D., & Mendes, J. (2011). Transparence et participation: Des principes démocratiques pour l’administration de l’union européenne. *Revue française d’administration publique*, 137138(1), 101–121. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfap.137.0101>
- Da Silva, F. S. P., Katsilis, S., Andrião Francischetto, M., & Barreto Da Fonseca, J. (2024). Fake News in Brazil – Bolsonaro Case Study. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 10(2), 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajmmc.10-2-1>
- Domenici, T. (2020). *Laureate: O raio-x de uma fraude para reconhecer uma graduação no MEC*. Agência Pública. <https://apublica.org/2020/11/laureate-o-raio-x-de-uma-fraude-para-reconhecer-uma-graduacao-no-mec/>
- Egger, R., & Yu, J. (2022). A Topic Modeling Comparison Between LDA, NMF, Top2Vec, and BERTopic to Demystify Twitter Posts. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, 886498. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.886498>
- Estadao. (2020). *Weintraub: “Se você fez escola civico-militar, é de direita.”* Terra. <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/educacao/weintraub-se-voce-fez-escola-civico-militar-e-de-direita,b0ca9668d053a10bb0cdb874d01e7d6egpng5aqb.html>
- Ferracioli, P., & Marques, F. P. J. (2020). O Jornalismo como agente da transparência pública no Brasil: A cobertura noticiosa no caso da Lei de Acesso à Informação. *Observatorio (OBS\*)*, 14(2), 16–37. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsOBS14220201514>

- Ferry, L., Eckersley, P., & Zakaria, Z. (2015). Accountability and Transparency in English Local Government: Moving from ‘Matching Parts’ to ‘Awkward Couple’? *Financial Accountability & Management*, 31(3), 345–361. <https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12060>
- Frank, M. (2015, June 4). *Unless we change the way we think about transparency, open data is unlikely to have a significant political impact at the local level*. Democratic Audit. <https://www.democraticaudit.com/2015/06/04/unless-we-change-the-way-we-think-about-transparency-open-data-is-unlikely-to-have-a-significant-political-impact/>
- Frank, M., & Oztoprak, A. A. (2015). *Concepts of Transparency: Open Data in UK Local Authorities (updated)*. Cedem - Conference for e-Democracy and Open Government, Donau-Universität Krems, Austria. [https://www.academia.edu/12347101/Concepts\\_of\\_Transparency\\_Open\\_Data\\_in\\_UK\\_Local\\_Authorities\\_updated\\_](https://www.academia.edu/12347101/Concepts_of_Transparency_Open_Data_in_UK_Local_Authorities_updated_)
- Fung, A. (2013). Infotopia: Unleashing the Democratic Power of Transparency\*. *Politics & Society*, 41(2), 183–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329213483107>
- Fung, A., Arkedis, J., Creighton, J., Kosack, S., Levy, D., & Tolmie, C. (2021). *Transparency for Development: Project Results and Implications*. Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/37377043>
- Gaventa, J., & McGee, R. (2013). The Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives. *Development Policy Review*, 31(s1), s3–s28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12017>
- Gomes, R. O. M., Paulino, F. O., & Farranha, A. C. (2022). Leis de Acesso à Informação na América Latina: Uma análise comparativa entre o Brasil e a Argentina. *Confluências / Revista Interdisciplinar de Sociologia e Direito*. <https://periodicos.uff.br/confluencias/article/view/47120>
- Gonçalves, F. E., Stacciarini, I. C., & Nascimento, S. (2019). O uso da LAI por jornalistas: Uma análise de requerentes, pedidos e respostas. *Estudos Em Jornalismo e Mídia*, 15(2), 130.
- Grandvoinnet, H. M., Aslam, G., & Raha, S. (2015). *Opening the black box: The contextual drivers of social accountability* (No. 95809; New Frontiers of Social Policy). World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/235561468321545065/Opening-the-black-box-the-contextual-drivers-of-social-accountability>
- Hegre, H., Bernhard, M., & Teorell, J. (2020). Civil Society and the Democratic Peace. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(1), 32–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719850620>
- Hellmueller, L., Mellado, C., Blumell, L., & Huemmer, J. (2016). The Contextualization of the Watchdog and Civic Journalistic Roles: Reevaluating Journalistic Role Performance in U.S. Newspapers. *Palabra Clave*, 19(4), Article 4.

- Hobbs, W. R., & Roberts, M. E. (2018). How Sudden Censorship Can Increase Access to Information. *American Political Science Review*, 112(3), 621–636. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000084>
- Hunter, W., & Power, T. J. (2019). Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 68–82.
- Lei de Acesso à Informação - LAI, No. 12.527, Congresso Nacional. (2011). <https://normas.leg.br/?urn=urn:lex:br:federal:lei:2011-11-18;12527>
- Lis, L. (2020). TCU arquiva caso da viagem de Weintraub, mas pede ao MP para averiguar passaporte diplomático. *GI*. <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2020/09/09/tcu-arquiva-caso-da-viagem-de-weintraub-mas-pede-ao-mp-para-averiguar-passaporte-diplomatico.ghtml>
- Lupion, B., & Weiss, C. E. (2019, August 15). Mineração em terras indígenas: Riscos compensam os ganhos? *Deutsche Welle*. <https://p.dw.com/p/3NtL4>
- Malena, C., Forster, R., Singh, J., & Singh, J. (2004). *Social accountability: An introduction to the concept and emerging practice*. World Bank.
- Meijer, A. (2013). Understanding the Complex Dynamics of Transparency. *Public Administration Review*, 73(3), 429–439.
- Meijer, A. J., Curtin, D., & Hillebrandt, M. (2012). Open government: Connecting vision and voice. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 78(1), 10–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852311429533>
- Michener, G., & Bersch, K. (2013). *Identifying Transparency* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 3290813). Social Science Research Network. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3290813>
- Mimno, D., Wallach, H., Talley, E., Leenders, M., & McCallum, A. (2011). Optimizing semantic coherence in topic models. *Proceedings of the 2011 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, 262–272.
- Mori, L. (2019, October 11). O que o governo ainda precisa explicar sobre o funcionamento das escolas cívico-militares. *BBC News Brasil*. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-49982226>
- Moser, C. (2001). *How open is 'open as possible'? Three different approaches to transparency and openness in regulating access to EU documents*. *IHS Political Science Series: 2001, No. 80* (IHS Political Science Series, p. 36) [Working paper]. IHS Political Science. <http://aei.pitt.edu/237/>
- Nam, T. (2017). What enhances the right to information? A cross-national examination of legal, technological, and administrative influences. *International Social Science Journal*, 67(225–226), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12149>
- Negrine, R. M. (1996). *The Communication of Politics*. SAGE.

- Norris, P. (2014). Watchdog Journalism. In M. Bovens, R. Goodin, & T. Schillemans (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199641253.013.0015>
- Ozawa, J. V. S., Lukito, J., Lee, T., Varma, A., & Alves, R. (2024). Attacks Against Journalists in Brazil: Catalyzing Effects and Resilience During Jair Bolsonaro's Government. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 29(4), 847–868. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612231182618>
- Pinho, A. F. F. (2022). Liberdade de imprensa e o cercadinho do Alvorada: A propaganda política no lugar dos fatos e seus malefícios para a democracia. *Miguel*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.17771/PUCRio.MIGUEL.59441>
- Pontes, N., & Weiss, C. E. (2019, July 5). Acesso público a dados impossibilita manipulação, diz Inpe. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://p.dw.com/p/3Lf9J>
- Reuters. (2022, June 22). Brazil's ex-education minister arrested on corruption charges. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-ex-education-minister-arrested-corruption-charges-2022-06-22/>
- Rodan, G., & Hughes, C. (2012). Ideological Coalitions and the International Promotion of Social Accountability: The Philippines and Cambodia Compared1. *International Studies Quarterly*, 56(2), 367–380. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2011.00709.x>
- RSF. (2023). *2023 World Press Freedom Index – journalism threatened by fake content industry* / RSF. Reporters without Borders. <https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>
- Schauer, F. (2011). Transparency in three dimensions. *University of Illinois Law Review*, 2011(4). <https://www.illinoislawreview.org/wp-content/ilr-content/articles/2011/4/Schauer.pdf>
- Schlegel, R. (2021). IMPACTOS POLÍTICOS DA EDUCAÇÃO: DA APOSTA NO NOVO CIDADÃO À ELEIÇÃO DE BOLSONARO. *Educação & Sociedade*, 42, e240566. <https://doi.org/10.1590/ES.240566>
- Schultz, J. (1998). *Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511597138>
- Sharma, N. K., Sahu, L. K., Khan, M. R., Khare, G. P., Mishra, P., & Agrawal, H. (2022). Indian RTI Act-2005 Analysis by Machine Learning: A Bastar Zone Perspective. *2022 13th International Conference on Computing Communication and Networking Technologies (ICCCNT)*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCCNT54827.2022.9984586>
- Sheppard, V. (2020). *Research Methods for the Social Sciences: An Introduction*. <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/jibcresearchmethods/>
- Sobrinho, W. P. (2023). *Governo Bolsonaro impôs 1.108 sigilos de cem anos, diz Transparência Brasil*. UOL. <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2023/01/16/sigilo-de-100-anos-jair-bolsonaro-recorde.htm>

- Tanscheit, T. (2023). Jair Bolsonaro and the defining attributes of the populist radical right in Brazil. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 22(3), 324–341. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.22133.tan>
- Tukey, J. W. (with Internet Archive). (1977). *Exploratory data analysis*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. [http://archive.org/details/exploratorydataa00tuke\\_0](http://archive.org/details/exploratorydataa00tuke_0)
- Vloeberghs, W., & Bergh, S. I. (2024). Social Accountability in Review: From Conceptual Models to Grounded Practices of Civic Innovation. In W. Vloeberghs & S. I. Bergh (Eds.), *Social Accountability Initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon: Civic Innovation in the Arab World After 2011* (pp. 23–40). Springer Nature Switzerland. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51322-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51322-0_2)
- Waisbord, S. (2000). *Watchdog Journalism in South America: News, Accountability, and Democracy*. Columbia University Press.
- Weinberg, S. (with Internet Archive). (1996). *The reporter's handbook: An investigator's guide to documents and techniques*. New York : St. Martin's Press. <http://archive.org/details/reportershandboo0000wein>
- Worthy, B. (2020). Freedom of information in Europe: Creation, context, and conflict. In *Transparency and Secrecy in European Democracies*. Routledge.
- Zafarullah, H., & Siddiquee, N. A. (2021). Open government and the right to information: Implications for transparency and accountability in Asia. *Public Administration and Development*, 41(4), 157–168. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1944>
- Zero Hora. (2019, April 30). *MEC cortará verba de universidades que fazem “balbúrdia”, diz ministro*. GZH. <https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/educacao/noticia/2019/04/mec-cortara-verba-de-universidades-que-fazem-balburdia-diz-ministro-cjv3s3r1u02cs01ro3dkqrf0a.html>
- Žuffová, M. (2023). Fit for Purpose? Exploring the Role of Freedom of Information Laws and Their Application for Watchdog Journalism. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28(1), 300–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211006702>

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

***Your Justice Is Different From My Justice: Quantifying Mental State Variation of Identical Words Through a Case Study of Korean Newspaper Corpora***

Hana Jee, York St John University, United Kingdom

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This study offers a quantitative investigation of a well-established question in theoretical linguistics: how identical words can carry subtle semantic variations across different contexts. While linguists have long recognized this phenomenon, empirical measurement has been elusive. Using computational linguistic techniques, this research analyzes politically contrasting two Korean newspapers as corpora to demonstrate and quantify how lexical meanings are shaped by surrounding context. Three methods were employed: Latent Semantic Analysis, Topic Modeling, and Sentiment Analysis. The findings provide empirical support for theoretical concepts of fluid word meanings. Both abstract and concrete words exhibited measurable context-dependent semantic shifts, with concrete words showing stronger sentimental biases. This approach to quantifying lexical semantics contributes to the validation of linguistic theories and opens new avenues for exploring language use across various domains. The results have potential implications for cross-cultural communication, language acquisition, and media practices.

Keywords: Lexical Semantics, Context-Dependent Meaning, Quantified Word Meaning, Korean Media

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## 1. Introduction

Modern linguistic theory has shifted away from viewing words as independent units stored in memory, instead conceptualizing them as activated neural networks encompassing sensory memories, experiences, and contextual knowledge (Binder & Desai, 2011; Elman, 2009). Rather than accessing fixed meanings in specific brain regions, words act as conduits to a complex cognitive web that is dynamically retrieved during processing (Taylor, 2006; Sztencel, 2018).

During language processing, the brain employs pragmatic inferences to constrain meaning, with contextual cues activating only the most relevant associations for a given situation (Grice, 1975; Barsalou, 2005). This context-dependent activation suggests that word meanings cannot be identical across individuals, but rather represent shared social agreements with room for variation (Burge, 1979; Horton & Gerrig, 2005).

This phenomenon is illustrated by Putnam's (1974) 'twin earth' thought experiment, which demonstrates how identical words can evoke different mental states based on accumulated experiences. Various theoretical frameworks have attempted to capture this semantic flexibility, including Cruse's (2004) 'facets,' Falkum's (2015) 'ad hoc concepts,' and Carston's (2019) 'polysemy complex.' In legal philosophy, Gallie's (1955) 'essentially contested concepts' similarly addresses terms that admit multiple reasonable interpretations.

This study aims to quantitatively examine these theoretical frameworks by analyzing semantic variations in politically contrasting media outlets. This approach is justified by the following: (1) different societal groups view reality through distinct lenses reflected in news media, (2) political contrasts may highlight lexical fluidity, (3) newspapers contain both abstract and concrete words, and (4) their formal nature facilitates corpus analysis.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Corpus Creation and Target Word Selection

The study analyzed two Korean newspapers representing contrasting political perspectives: *Dong A* (conservative) and *Oh My News* (progressive). Data was collected via web scraping from Politics and Society sections between July and December 2022, yielding approximately 2 million words per corpus category.

Target words were selected based on three criteria: presence in both corpora, frequency above a predetermined threshold, and classification as pivotal vocabulary. The analysis included:

#### 27 Abstract words

권력(political power), 보수(conservatism), 진보(progressivity), 권리(right), 정의(justice), 공정(fairness), 개혁(reformation), 노동(labor), 경쟁(competition), 민주주의(democracy), 복지(welfare), 사랑(love), 사상(ideology), 성장(growth), 안보(security), 연대(solidarity), 윤리(ethics), 의무(obligation), 이념(idea), 인권(human right), 자유(freedom), 책임(responsibility), 평등(equality), 평화(peace), 혁명(revolution), 혁신(innovation), 협력(cooperation)



### 9 Concrete words

일본(Japan), 미국(US), 영국(UK), 북한(North Korea), 대통령(president), 삼성(Samsung), 핵(nuclear), 장애인(the disabled), 친일(pro-Japanese)

For each target word, two separate corpora were created by extracting all sentences containing the word from each news source. This enabled analysis of how each outlet constructs meaning through contextual usage. The analysis employed three text-mining approaches: LDA Topic Modelling, Latent Semantic Analysis, and Sentiment Analysis. The first two methods identified associated terms, while sentiment analysis determined positive/negative portrayals. Figure 1 illustrates the overall process.

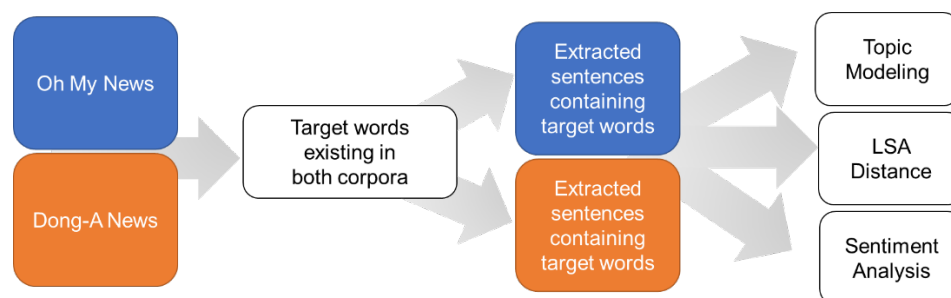


Figure 1: Visual Overview of the Methodology Process

## 2.2. Analysis Techniques

### 2.2.1. Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA)

LSA extracts word meaning by analyzing contextual environments (Landauer, Foltz, & Laham, 1998). Using singular value decomposition (SVD), it reduces dimensionality to simulate human neural networks, effectively detecting latent relationships between words even when they don't directly co-occur. This technique has been validated through various behavioral research, including information retrieval and semantic priming studies. I used genism Word2Vec model (parameters: size=100, window=5, min\_count=1, workers=4) to extract 100 semantically closest words for each target word. Visualization was performed using networkX in Python 3.7. The full script is available from [https://github.com/HanaJee/LSA\\_semantic-distance\\_Korean-corpus](https://github.com/HanaJee/LSA_semantic-distance_Korean-corpus).

### 2.2.2. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) Topic Modelling

LDA Topic Modelling (Blei, Ng, & Jordan, 2003) identifies multiple topics within documents, with each topic comprising words of varying probabilities. While traditionally applied to coherent narratives, this study uniquely used it to analyze sentence collections containing target words, focusing on identifying repetitive media frames. I applied genism Ldamodel (parameters: num\_topics=5) with CoherenceModel for topic coherence evaluation. The full script is available from <https://github.com/HanaJee/LDA-topic-modeling/blob/main/code>.

### 2.2.3. Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis identifies emotional content in text (Liu, 2012) through two main approaches. The lexicon-based method uses established emotion dictionaries (Ding, Liu, &

Yu, 2008), but shows limited accuracy for Korean (Park, 2017) due to the language’s agglutinative nature and high frequency of homonyms (Kang, 2005).

The alternative machine learning approach uses algorithms trained on extensive corpora (Mullen & Collier, 2004), incorporating deep learning techniques (Seo & Kim, 2016). This study employed Tensorflow LSTM (parameters: for compiling, optimizer=‘rmsprop’, loss=‘binary\_crossentropy’, metrics=[‘acc’]; for fitting, epochs=15, batch\_size=60, validation\_split=0.2), trained on Naver movie reviews with 15 epochs (batch\_size=60, validation\_split=0.2), achieving over 90% accuracy. The full script is available from <https://github.com/HanaJee/Sentiment-Analysis>.

### 3. Results

This study investigated whether semantic variation of identical words can be quantified by context and if patterns differ between abstract and concrete words. The analysis revealed quantifiable semantic variations, supporting theories of context-sensitive word meanings (Cruse, 2004; Falkum, 2015; Carston, 2019). Using politically contrasting newspapers highlighted distinct media frames (Goffman, 1974; Gitlin, 2003).

Topic modelling revealed that conservative Dong A frequently emphasizes national security, while progressive Oh My News focuses more on societal communication, reflecting their political leanings (Choi, Hong, & Jho, 2021). The broader topic range in Oh My News likely stems from its citizen journalism format. Figure 2 and 3 exemplify two salient words, ‘peace’ as an abstract word and ‘the U.S’ as a concrete word, which show clear semantic contrast between two media outlets. These show how identical words emphasize certain facets depending on contexts. Table 1 below includes 11 abstract words and 3 concrete words demonstrating clear difference in nuance of identical words.

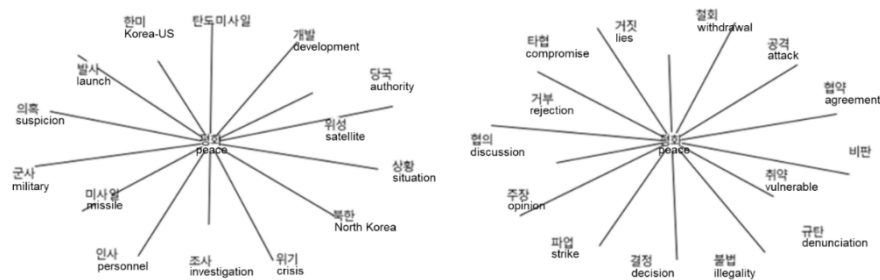


Figure 2: Conservative (Left) and Progressive Definition of ‘Peace’ (Right)

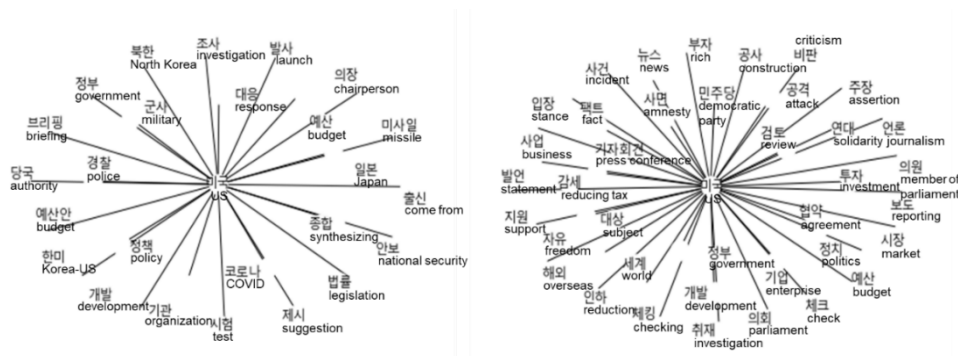


Figure 3: Conservative (Left) and Progressive Definition of ‘U.S.’ (Right)

Table 1. Re-defined Words Based on Each Media Outlet

Abstract words	Conservative (Dong A)	Progressive (Oh My News)
개혁 Reformation	Associated with strengthening national security and government response to threats, by means of increased <b>military</b> spending, US cooperation, and bolstering the <b>police force</b> . Driven by the <b>ruling party</b> and the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, these initiatives are shaped by National Assembly <b>legislation</b> and <b>budgets</b> .	Associated with promoting <b>social justice</b> , <b>civil liberties</b> , and <b>democratic accountability</b> , by means of press conferences, media reports, and fact-finding missions that <b>criticize</b> oppressive government policies. The reforms advocate for cooperation between authorities and measures like pardons for the unjustly imprisoned, despite conservative resistance.
권력 Political power	To maintain national security, particularly regarding the US alliance and North Korea's threats, efforts focus on strengthening <b>law enforcement</b> agencies and revising laws to enhance <b>government protection</b> . This includes empowering the police and the Ministry of the Interior and Safety to respond effectively to security incidents.	Associated with corporate and <b>wealthy influence undermining democratic principles</b> and fair economic policies, issues include <b>business tax rates</b> , corporate regulations, and <b>unethical practices</b> . The role of lawyers, media, and elections is emphasized ensuring accountability and promoting <b>transparency</b> and democratic values.
노동 Labour	Associated with government budget allocation, law enforcement, and national security, the focus is on the ruling party, government ministers, and police managing labour-related matters to <b>maintain stability and order</b> . The <b>President's office</b> and high-ranking <b>police officials</b> play key roles in shaping labour <b>policies</b> and responding to potential <b>disruptions</b> or <b>emergencies</b> .	Associated with <b>economic inequality</b> , corporate power, and <b>workers' rights</b> , the focus is on how cities, media, and government budget and tax policies impact labour conditions and worker <b>welfare</b> . Business tax cuts, labour movement suppression, and corporate influence on labour practices are criticised by press conferences and <b>fact-finding</b> efforts to expose <b>injustices</b> and advocate for workers' rights to <b>strike</b> and <b>protest</b> .
민주주의 Democracy	Associated with government institutions and elected officials representing the people's will, the focus is on <b>government responses</b> and <b>political engagement</b> . The National Assembly, government committees, and the ruling party shape democratic outcomes through discussions and decision-making.	Associated with protecting <b>civil liberties</b> , <b>press freedom</b> , and holding power accountable, the focus is on <b>media truthfulness</b> , political processes like primaries, budgets, and tax policies in promoting democracy. Citizen <b>solidarity</b> , <b>fact-checking</b> , and scrutinizing government claims are emphasized.
성장 Growth, development	Primarily associated with strengthening <b>national security</b> and the US <b>military alliance</b> to counter North Korean threats, the focus is on government, law enforcement, and military leaders' actions in protecting the nation. A strong security environment is seen as crucial for growth, upheld through legislation and <b>state power</b> .	Associated with <b>economic development</b> , <b>social welfare</b> , and political empowerment, the focus is on supporting businesses, <b>investments</b> , and <b>regional</b> projects, and allocating budgets for <b>welfare</b> programs and <b>infrastructure</b> . Growth ties to election outcomes, party strength, and media influence. <b>Media freedom</b> and <b>government support</b> for urban development is stressed to foster economic and social progress.

<p>안보 National security</p>	<p>Primarily focused on <b>military threats</b> from North Korea, particularly its <b>missile activities</b>, the emphasis is on the government's responsibility to gather intelligence and take decisive action with the US and Japan. The role of law enforcement agencies, like the police, is also crucial in maintaining national security.</p>	<p>Security as economic and social, emphasizing <b>stable incomes</b> and <b>living standards</b> in a connected world. Linked to income security, <b>global cooperation</b>, and government responses to challenges, the focus is on State Council discussions and resource mobilization <b>for security beyond military threats</b>.</p>
<p>인권 Human right</p>	<p>Discussed in <b>parliamentary investigations</b>, the focus is on government officials, political dynamics, and human rights, often framed in terms of national security and <b>crisis management</b>. The actions of National Assembly figures, ministers, and the President's office, as well as <b>police promotions</b> and <b>investigations</b>, are key aspects of this discourse.</p>	<p>Associated with <b>protecting vulnerable groups</b> and promoting <b>social and economic justice</b>, advocacy for individual rights and addressing economic inequalities is emphasized. <b>Media reporting</b> on human rights issues is stressed, with accountability demanded from those in power, including calls for the <b>release of prisoners</b> of conscience and unjustly convicted individuals, extending concerns to other countries like Vietnam.</p>
<p>자유 Freedom</p>	<p>Associated with economic policies, foreign relations, and national security, the focus is on fostering <b>economic growth</b> and security through strategic <b>investments</b> and <b>diplomacy</b>. <b>Strong leadership</b>, <b>national interests</b> and values like <b>human rights</b> are prioritized, addressing challenges such as low birth rates and military expansion.</p>	<p>Closely tied to the media and civil society, progressives advocate for <b>press freedom</b> to ensure <b>transparency</b> and accountability. <b>Fact-checking</b> and <b>freedom of expression</b> are emphasized as vital for democracy, prioritizing issues like <b>pardons for political prisoners</b> and measures to address inequalities.</p>
<p>책임 Responsibility</p>	<p>Associated with <b>government responsibility</b> in handling issues, the focus is on investigating and addressing problems with accountability and improvement. Thorough inquiries are emphasized to <b>uncover truth</b> and hold the responsible accountable, expecting <b>proactive government action</b> and transparent communication with the public.</p>	<p>Closely tied to the <b>media</b> and <b>civil society</b>, accountability is emphasized <b>through critical analysis</b> and <b>truth-telling</b>. The media exposes wrongdoing and demands change, highlighting injustices and advocating solutions. <b>Authorities</b> are urged to take responsibility and address public concerns.</p>
<p>평화 Peace</p>	<p>Efforts to reduce tensions and prevent escalation through <b>diplomacy</b> and <b>negotiations</b> are paramount. Amid <b>military tensions</b> and <b>weapons</b> development, concerns and suspicions are raised by <b>North Korea's</b> ballistic missile and satellite activities, posing significant threats to regional peace.</p>	<p>Efforts to resolve <b>conflicts</b> in contentious situations, such as <b>labour disputes</b> or political controversies involving criticism, false claims, and intense actions, are undertaken through <b>dialogue</b> and <b>compromise</b>. Despite challenges and the presence of inflammatory actions, these efforts aim to find <b>common ground</b> and promote resolution.</p>
<p>협력 Cooperation</p>	<p>Associated with government efforts to manage challenges through collaboration, focusing on policies for <b>security</b>, <b>development</b>, and <b>international relations</b>. Informed decision-making and cooperation are emphasized to tackle complex issues, expecting collaboration with stakeholders to promote <b>national interests</b>.</p>	<p><b>Solidarity</b> is emphasized in tackling social, economic, and political issues like <b>inequality</b> and <b>environmental degradation</b>, particularly across government levels and sectors, supported by <b>media accountability</b>. Crucial for positive change and promoting <b>societal well-being</b>.</p>

Concrete words	Conservative (Dong A)	Progressive (Oh My News)
미국 The U.S.	Discussed primarily in terms of <b>national security</b> and <b>military cooperation</b> , the focus is on its role in addressing <b>North Korean threats</b> , emphasizing the importance of the US-Korea <b>alliance</b> for regional stability and <b>defence</b> capabilities. This extends to collaboration on law enforcement, <b>intelligence</b> sharing, and global challenges like the COVID-19 <b>pandemic</b> .	Discussed in <b>economic and international contexts</b> , the focus is on the impact of its <b>investments</b> and policies, with progressives advocating for accountability and <b>social justice</b> . The <b>role of the media</b> in accountability is emphasized, government actions are criticized, and international cooperation on global challenges like <b>climate change</b> and <b>human rights</b> abuses is prioritized.
북한 North Korea	Primarily discussed as a <b>military threat</b> , the focus is on its <b>missile launches</b> and <b>weapons development</b> , prompting a robust response from South Korea and its allies. Intelligence gathering and cooperation with the <b>United States</b> and <b>Japan</b> is stressed, expecting decisive action from the government, including resource allocation and support for defence efforts.	Calls for a more engaging approach to <b>inter-Korean relations</b> often involve criticism of the South Korean government. Emphasizing dialogue and <b>economic cooperation</b> to build trust, concerns about <b>human rights</b> in North Korea are also raised, alongside criticism of government budget priorities and tax policies, with questions about appointments and legislation handled by the <b>media</b> .
일본 Japan	Mentioned in relation to security issues and cooperation with South Korea and the United States, its role in addressing the <b>North Korean threat</b> is emphasized, particularly in <b>intelligence sharing</b> and coordinated responses. Its involvement in domestic politics is also discussed, including policies and actions of the ruling party and government officials, alongside budget allocation and crisis management.	Critiques of its <b>conservative policies</b> focus on concerns about budget priorities and media transparency. Advocacy for <b>marginalized communities</b> and <b>civil liberties</b> is emphasized, with the <b>media</b> playing a vital role in informing the public and advancing causes.

Sentiment analysis revealed distinct patterns between abstract and concrete words. Abstract words showed balanced emotional usage across both outlets (Figure 4), while concrete words demonstrated stronger sentimental bias (Figure 5). Notable examples include conservative Dong A’s negative portrayal of ‘North Korea’ (62% negative) and Oh My News’ negative representation of ‘Japan’ (61% negative), both with over 90% algorithmic confidence.

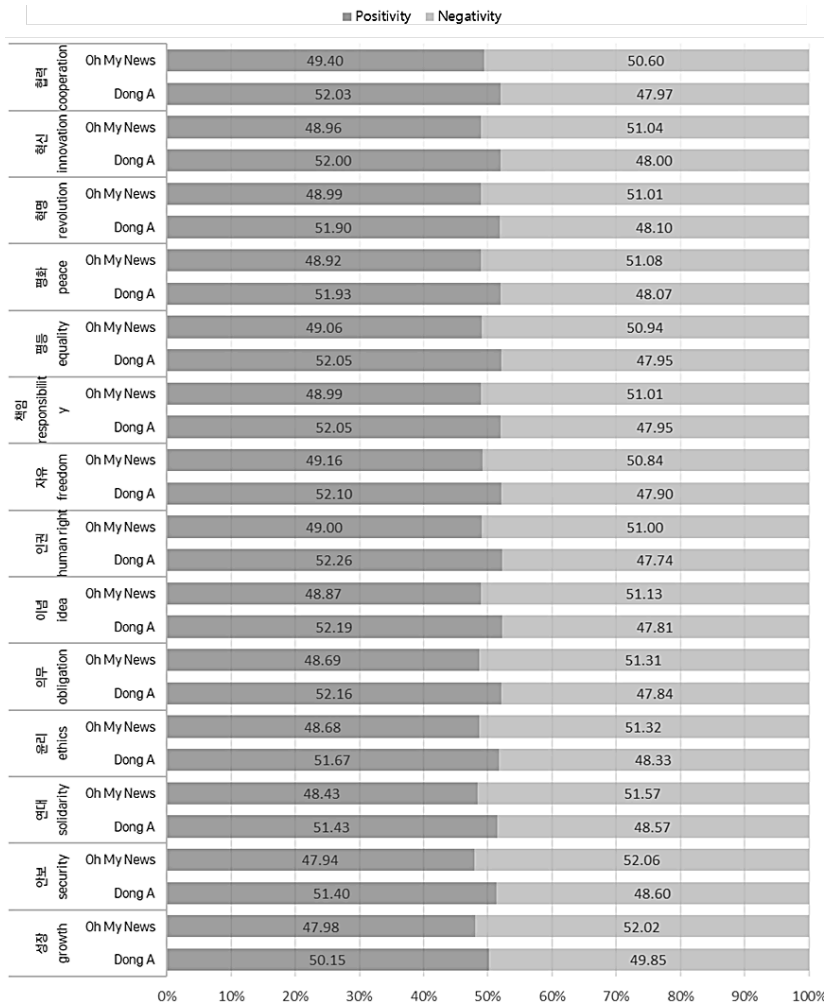


Figure 4: The Percentage (%) of Sentences With Positive and Negative Sentiment for Each Target Abstract Word

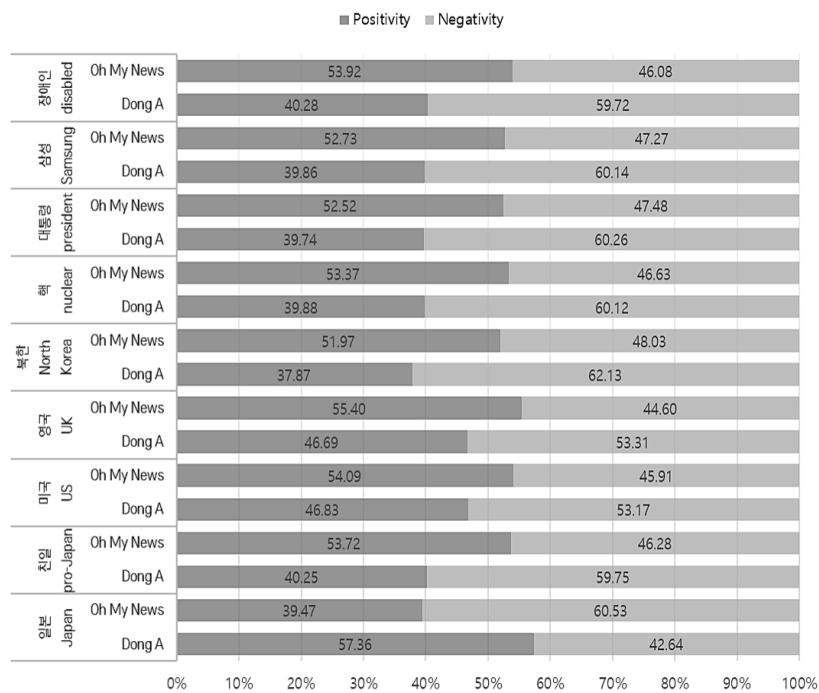


Figure 5: The Percentage (%) of Sentences With Positive and Negative Sentiment for Each Target Concrete Word

In conclusion, each method provided unique insights: LSA revealed context-dependent meaning emphasis, topic modelling confirmed distinct media frames, and sentiment analysis showed different emotional handling of abstract versus concrete words.

#### 4. Discussion

As an important proof of concept, this study is the first of its kind seeking to empirically measure subtle shifts in lexical semantics using computational techniques. Based on the two politically contrasting newspaper outlets, it was confirmed that certain sides of lexical semantics can be emphasized by its contexts around it. A significant number of the target words demonstrated quantifiable differences in meaning between the conservative and progressive newspaper corpora. The fact that the progressive newspaper includes citizen journalists may have influenced the width and depth of topics covered.

The findings carry significance for both theoretical linguistics and practical applications. On the theoretical side, it provides the first quantitative validation of concepts like ‘facet’ (Cruse, 2004), ‘ad hoc concept’ (Falkum, 2015), or ‘polysemy complex’ (Carston, 2019) that capture variability in word meaning, lending credence to proposals about the fluid, context-sensitive nature of semantics. The computational linguistic methods establish an empirical approach to reveal and analyse meaning nuances, enabling expansion to other phrases and constructions.

Unlike abstract words, concrete words exhibit a stronger reliance on the external world and can therefore be experienced without the mediation of language. They are influenced or compromised by other concepts to a lesser degree (Weimer-Hastings & Xu, 2005). The current study showed that both abstract and concrete words can be shaped by their contexts, possibly due to the same method (i.e. parameters) was applied to them. It lends further quantitative validation to the lack of rigid lexical concepts, now expanded across word types.

Practically, the findings imply the possibility of communicating with identical vocabulary that carries different meanings, especially within cross-cultural contexts. As debates intensify amid democratization, global policy issues require shared understanding between disparate worldviews mediated by language. This research prompts more responsible, unifying communication by heightening awareness of how subtly words can polarize and impede vital consensus.

When it comes to learning, the findings imply the profound impact of frequent linguistic context on constructing lexical meanings early in life. The human brain possesses a remarkable capacity for plasticity, allowing it to adapt and change in response to experiences and environmental stimuli (Abbott & Nelson, 2000; Feldman, 2008). When neurons are frequently activated by specific contexts, the synaptic connections between them are strengthened, facilitating the retrieval and processing of associated concepts and ideas (Dabrowska, 2004; Hebb, 1949). Consequently, repeated exposure to biased contexts can profoundly influence the development of lexical meanings, particularly in young individuals whose cognitive structures are still being established (Barsalou, 2005; Gibbs, 2002).

As these biased associations become more robust and easily accessible, they may overshadow alternative semantic possibilities, potentially limiting the individual’s ability to tap into a broader range of semantic resources. This underscores the importance of promoting diverse and balanced linguistic environments to foster the development of flexible and adaptable lexical networks, especially during the formative years of language acquisition.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides the first empirical evidence for measuring subtle semantic variations in word meaning through computational techniques. The findings validate theoretical concepts of semantic flexibility while demonstrating that both abstract and concrete words can be shaped by their contexts. Beyond theoretical implications, this research highlights the critical role of linguistic context in meaning construction, particularly in cross-cultural communication and early language acquisition. This underscores the importance of fostering diverse linguistic environments, especially during formative years, to promote flexible semantic understanding and facilitate more effective cross-cultural dialogue.

Ongoing research directions offer several promising avenues: exploring evidence and strategies on how media manipulate ideas and public attitudes through language use; cross-cultural differences in lexical meanings; and a broader range of qualitative methodologies. Enriched by more robust empirical substantiation, these efforts could collectively foster heightened public awareness, encouraging a more conscientious approach to language use in both perception and expression.



## References

- Abbott, L. F., & Nelson, S. B. (2000). Synaptic plasticity: taming the beast. *Nature neuroscience*, 3(11), 1178-1183.
- Barsalou, L. W. (2005). Continuity of the conceptual system across species. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 9(7), 309-311.
- Binder, J. R., & Desai, R. H. (2011). The neurobiology of semantic memory. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 15(11), 527-536.
- Blei, D. M., Ng, A. Y., & Jordan, M. I. (2003). Latent dirichlet allocation. *Journal of machine Learning research*, 3(Jan), 993-1022.
- Burge, T. (1979). Individualism and the Mental. *Midwest studies in philosophy*, 4, 73-121.
- Carston, R. (2019). *Ad hoc concepts, polysemy and the lexicon*. Cambridge University Press.
- Choi, J. D., Hong, S. M., & Jho, W. S. (2021). Framing Contests over International News: An Analysis of Media Discourse on GSOMIA Termination. *The Korean Association For Information Society*, 22(2), 51-75.
- Cruse, D. A. (2004). Lexical facets and metonymy. *Ilha Do Desterro a Journal of English Language, Literatures in English And Cultural Studies*, (47), 073-096.
- Dabrowska, E. (2004). *Language, mind and brain: Some psychological and neurological constraints on theories of grammar*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Ding, X., Liu, B., & Yu, P. S. (2008, February). A holistic lexicon-based approach to opinion mining.
- Elman, J. L. (2009). On the meaning of words and dinosaur bones: Lexical knowledge without a lexicon. *Cognitive science*, 33(4), 547-582.
- Falkum, I. L. (2015). The how and why of polysemy: A pragmatic account. *Lingua*, 157, 83-99.
- Feldman, J. (2008). *From molecule to metaphor: A neural theory of language*. MIT press.
- Gallie, W. B. (1955, January). Essentially contested concepts. In Proceedings of the Aristotelian society (Vol. 56, pp. 167-198). *Aristotelian Society*, Wiley.
- Gibbs Jr, R. W. (2002). A new look at literal meaning in understanding what is said and implicated. *Journal of pragmatics*, 34(4), 457-486.
- Gitlin, T. (2003). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. Univ of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. *Syntax and Semantics*, 3, 43-58.
- Hebb, D.O. (1949). *The Organization of Behavior*. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Horton, W. S., & Gerrig, R. J. (2005). The impact of memory demands on audience design during language production. *Cognition*, 96(2), 127-142.
- Kang, B. M. (2005). Aspects of the use of homonyms. *Language research* 41 (1), 1-29.
- Landauer, T. K., Foltz, P. W., & Laham, D. (1998). An introduction to latent semantic analysis. *Discourse processes*, 25(2-3), 259-284.
- Liu, B. (2012). Sentiment analysis and opinion mining. *Synthesis lectures on human language technologies*, 5(1), 1-167.
- Mullen, T., & Collier, N. (2004). Sentiment analysis using support vector machines with diverse information sources.
- Park, S. (2017). Sentimental Analysis of SW Education News Data. *Journal of The Korean Association of Information Education*, 21(1), 89-96.
- Putnam, H. (1974). Meaning and reference. *The journal of philosophy*, 70(19), 699-711.
- Seo, S. H., & Kim, J. T. (2016). Research pattern of deep-learning-based sentiment analysis.
- Sztencel, M. (2018). Semantics, Pragmatics and Meaning Revisited.
- Taylor, K. (2006). *Brainwashing: The science of thought control*. Oxford University Press.
- Weimer-Hastings, K., & Xu, X. (2005). Content differences for abstract and concrete concepts. *Cognitive science*, 29(5), 719-736.

## ***Understanding the Role of Personal Motivations in Social Media Use and Choices for Interpersonal Communication***

Karabo Sitto-Kaunda, University of Pretoria, South Africa

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

The public introduction of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and exponential growth of social media as a medium in the last twenty years has been unprecedented, revolutionizing interpersonal interactions between people, marketing communication and driving up internet growth rates. The ongoing changes in preferences, uses and gratifications of SNS need to be examined, especially by communication professionals seeking effective ways to reach digital audiences, concerning the motivations behind people's use and fulfilment of their use, supported by the uses and gratification theory. As part of a study evaluating online interpersonal communication, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted to evaluate their experiences on how they keep in touch with their personal networks i.e., social circles. Participants reported how their primary motivation on which social media to use are reliant on who they seek to communicate with, and how the ongoing rise of new SNSs has fragmented their attention and interests, making them feel less connected in their relationships, leading to reduced content shared. Seemingly the fewer participants SNS users post the lower their sense of connectedness, and the higher the likelihood of SNS use diminishing. There is also an increased rise in the use of more private social media features such as messaging to maintain interpersonal relationships through those platforms. Understanding how to SNS users' online behavior changes as they seek to maintain personal connections and privacy is critical to informing successful communication practice in light of growing budgetary investment in social media advertising in the marketing communication mix.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Interpersonal Communication, Personal Networks, Social Networking Sites, Uses and Gratifications

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Social media networking sites' (SNS) growth since their popularity in the early 2000's has seen mushrooming of platforms that are global, regional and even national, revolutionizing the way people communicate and engage with one another. Social media's growth is directly linked to the acceleration of internet access throughout the globe. The growth of the internet has facilitated exponential growth in communication technology advancements. Poushter (2016) found that 76% of their study's participants across 40 countries that reported being online using the internet were using social networking sites. Advancements in communication technology have altered how people relate to one another, and the level of affection in their relationships (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014). The growth and popularity of social media has resulted in these networking sites being considered mass interpersonal communication. At the heart of SNSs' popularity is people's need to maintain close relationships (Wang, Chen & Jiang, 2024) with their personal networks i.e., friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances known to them.

On the African continent, the rate of internet penetration has lagged behind significantly relative to global rates, with the World Bank (2021) reporting that only 36% of Sub-Saharan Africa population of individuals were using the internet. The main driver of the increase in social media usage through rising internet penetration rates, has been the mobile phone (Poushter, 2021), even in Africa, with smartphone penetration on the rise as they become more affordable. African governments are among those that have also recognized the power of internet-powered social media and have shut down internet access at least 19 times across twelve countries during pivotal moments of political and social unrest (AccessNow, 2023). However, these government actions in attempts to thwart internet access have not dampened the growing appetite for social media usage in developing countries. The internet in South Africa is primarily accessed through mobile, which is expensive, with access concentrated in urban centers (StatsSA, 2018).

In South Africa, the top social media platforms in order according to Cowling (2024) are WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook Messenger. However, there has been a significant shift in the use of different social media globally, with Gartner (2023) reporting that social media use will continue to decline in 2024 in response to misinformation, toxicity of platform users and the proliferation of bots. The main driver of social media growth has been the different manner in which people can remain in touch with members of their personal social networks (Urista, Dong & Day, 2009). The use of communication technologies, of which social media is a subset, is motivated by the purpose of one's communication, the relational ties and the geographic distance between those communicating (Yang, Brown & Braun, 2014). The widespread adoption of communication technologies has enabled close relationships to be maintained over long distances (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Individuals may use digital tools like emoticons to help them personalize their online behaviors as a means to circumvent the lack of nonverbal cues in digital interpersonal communication (Matusitz, 2014). Malinen (2015) points out that over time, individuals' participation on social media inevitably changes.

The influence of social media has grown significantly, since its first public introduction in the mid-2000's. Over a decade ago, marketers were already committing significant budget of billions of dollars towards social media for reaching and communicating with consumers (Whiting & Williams, 2013). It has been recognized and well understood by communication professionals that social media is an integral part to the communication media mix for

effectively reaching desired audiences. Thus, it is important for communication professionals to whom social media forms a significant part of their organizational strategies, to evaluate the personal motivations of individuals' use of social media for carrying out interpersonal communication, to gain fulfilment from SNS. Organizations have increasingly relied on social media as part of their marketing communication mix to reach audiences, with global budgets having been on the rise and social media marketing globally being allocated the second highest advertising spend at 14% (Digital Marketing Community, 2018). South African organizations have followed the global trend, with digital channels, including social media, gaining the largest share of the marketing communication and advertising budget allocation (MyBroadband, 2023). Investment in social media marketing communication in South Africa has been supported by the exponential growth of internet penetration, which Kemp (2024) reported to be at approximately 74.7%, yet of those internet users only around 57% of them as active social media users. The growth in the reliance of social media in the organizational communication mix as a cost-effective way of reaching audiences requires closer examination and understanding of what attracts people to these SNS.

### **The Choice of SNS**

The choice of SNS to use is often driven by personal social motivations of individuals to stay in touch with people they seek to remain close to. Often, people engage in the behavior of platform-swinging, i.e., switching between different social media platforms, with relationship management as one of the gratifications fulfilled by this behavior (Tandoc Jr, Lou & Min, 2019). Uses and gratifications theory outlines how individuals will select media among a range of competing media based on whether that media fulfils their needs and ultimately leads to their gratification of its use, with more gratification being a good predictor of not only the use of media but also recurrence of its use (Whiting & Williams, 2013). At the heart of the uses and gratification theory is the recognition of users/audience agency in selecting the media to use and being self-aware of their media use, as well being able place a value judgement on the media content (Tanta, Mihovilović & Sablić, 2014). Social media uses change over time as SNS transform, such as the introduction of platform policies resulting in less popularity of platforms like Facebook among young audiences (De Ridder, 2017), as well as the preference for images and video driving up popularity for Instagram, Snapchat and recently, TikTok. Uses and gratifications theory is premised on two main assumptions, namely 1) that the consumer of the media is active and self-conscious in contributing to their media choice, and 2) that the media consumer is motivated by social and psychological needs, thus seeking out media that will fulfil their goals (Kujur & Singh, 2020). The uses and gratifications theory is based on five main human needs, namely cognitive needs such as gaining information, affective needs linked to emotional pleasure, personal identity linked to needs of social status, integration and social interaction from relationships with personal networks, and escapism linked to tension release (Tanta et al., 2014).

There are three main categories of reasons for people's technology use in relationships, which include to develop, manage and enhance their relationships (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014). Sustaining relationships across geographic distances has become common due to communication technologies (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Lin & Ledbetter, 2007), such as social media. The strength of the relationships determines the effectiveness of use of communication technologies in those relationships. Relationship tie-strength may be weak or strong, depending on the level of trust, closeness and levels of disclosure (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009). Individuals form and manage online relationships and become part of online networks through their relationships with various people,

managing their relationship tie-strength (Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy & Pitt, 2012). Online interpersonal communication relies heavily on an individual's social ties and behavior, and relationship tie-strength can be weakened by reliance of sustaining relationships primarily online (Cummings, Butler & Kraut, 2002).

The growth in the use of social media for social relationship management has resulted in increased growth in the number SNS available for individuals to choose from. With the rise in the number of options available to individuals, their attention can become divided as they become more selective of the media they choose to use online, either to align with their interests or avoid certain topics, possibly resulting in digital fragmentation (Mahrt, 2020). Users seek gratification with the aim of obtaining it, and if the gratification they seek is not achieved, they may choose to stop using certain media or consuming the content (Tanta et al., 2014). A longitudinal study by Lichy and Racat (2012) found that local SNS are used by individuals simultaneously with global SNS, resulting in convergence of behavior and fragmentation with Gen Y and Gen Z individuals having multiple online identities and belonging to multiple online communities. Thus, online SNS audiences' attention is divided across multiple platforms, possibly leading to reduced activity by network members, because of their relationships, motivations and the gratifications they seek to gain from their online interactions. Understanding the personal motivations for the decisions in the use of different SNS for interpersonal communication may provide communication professionals with insight into the differences in changing preferences for different platforms to ensure more effective online audience engagement.

## **Methodology**

The research approach to the study was qualitative to explore what communication media individuals use, including social media, for their interpersonal communication with their personal networks. A significant number of studies on social media are largely quantitative, focusing on metrics such as community size, volume of communication, and time spent, among others (Cummings, Butler & Kraut, 2002; Basuki, Akbar & Miharja, 2015; Hong, J. C., Hwang, Hsu, Tai & Kuo, 2015; Brailovskaia, Schillack & Margraf, 2020), much more so than the personal choices for remaining connected that inform the interpersonal interactions of individuals. Urista, Dong and Day (2008) conducted focus groups, however focused on specific decision to use specific SNS, namely Facebook and MySpace, among young adults. The research design was exploratory in nature because it sought to understand this phenomenon (Bezuidenhout, Davis & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2021) linked to how individuals make choices about their use of social media for interpersonal communication with people close to them.

The data analyzed for this paper was collected as part of another study, comparing online and offline interpersonal communication of voluntary economic migrants with their personal networks (Sitto, 2019). Voluntary economic migrants were defined as university-educated individuals, living away from their country of origin, who are professionals working in South Africa. The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with eleven (11) voluntary economic migrants living in Cape Town and Johannesburg respectively and twelve (12) members of their personal networks. The eleven participants that formed the core focus of study were identified through purposive snowball sampling, in line with the participant profile specified.

To ensure rigor in the research, this qualitative research employed criteria and standards evaluating the relevance, significance and usefulness (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002) of the research data. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is achieved through the following generally accepted criteria (Shenton, 2004):

- a) Credibility (in preference to internal validity) – was addressed by ensuring that participants were frank during their interviews, and iterative questions were used to confirm and revisit participants’ past responses, in addition to providing a detailed description of the phenomenon the research is studying.
- b) Transferability (in preference to external validity/generalizability) – a detailed contextual description of the research has been provided for ensuring the settings can be compared, as well as a full description of the participants, the methods, and number of interviews conducted to collect the data, to provide a baseline understanding that can be used to compare future research.
- c) Dependability (in preference to reliability) – the credibility will help ensure the dependability of the study, and all the research processes have been reported in detail to enable future repetition of the work, if not to gain similar results.
- d) Confirmability (in preference to objectivity) – to minimize researcher bias, the findings have been considered from the participants’ perspective, which the interview style helped ensure, and documenting the research process by tracing each research step looking at the decisions made throughout and a description of the procedures.

The voluntary economic migrants, were asked about their interpersonal communication patterns in remaining in touch with their transnational personal networks. The nominated network members were each asked about their relationship with the specific voluntary economic migrant, and their patterns of interpersonal communication for remaining in touch. Only the data concerning how communication is conducted between voluntary economic migrants and their network members was considered for this paper.

The main themes developed from the data analysis focus on the motivations for using specific SNS for keeping in touch with personal network members, keeping them updated on the voluntary economic migrant’s personal life, convenience of platform and privacy with respect to the content activity on various platforms. The themes included:

Table 1: The Main Themes Developed From the Data Analysis

Theme	Note
Primary motivation for social media use based on relationships	Relationship tie-strength contribution of social media usage for interpersonal communication.
Growing preference for WhatsApp for multiple uses	Platform can be used for calls, video calls, updates, and group engagements seamlessly.
Reduced SNS attractiveness due to external content	Encroaching of marketing and advertising content from SNS platforms makes the platforms less attractive for use. There is waning activity, reflecting content reduction from personal networks on SNS to engage with.
Growing use of private SNS features for interpersonal communication	Users choosing to engage in private conversation or choose SNS that allows for more direct interpersonal communication features.

## Primary Motivation for Social Media Use Based on Relationships

When participants were asked how they remain in touch with their personal network, some of them referred to calling or emailing directly through multiple other channels in order to remain in touch. Participants mentioned email, Skype (a video calling application), as well as calling. While some of the participants mentioned more expected traditional modes of interpersonal communication, most of them referred to some form of social media. The more ‘traditional’ digital channels of interpersonal communication were used to accommodate those personal network members without SNS accounts, or to supplement social media communication. Their motivations for the use of social media were the ease of use, cost effectiveness and ability to keep up with various people’s milestones, irrespective of tie-strength. The choice in the use of social media was linked to the people the voluntary economic migrants desired to be in touch with, and what media they had access to.

*VEM 7 - I chat to my mom at least two or three times a week on Face Time and sometimes communicate via Facebook. With my broader family it’s normally over Facebook.... Again following them on Facebook and Instagram just to keep in contact, communicate...*

*VEM 7-Network 1 - All her family’s on Facebook so she posts a lot.*

*VEM 2 - So before I used iMessage with most of my family and friends but the people who don’t have an iPhone, you can’t use that, so I’d use Facebook messenger sometimes.*

*VEM 3 - Back home obviously there are means to stay in touch over social media or Facebook; my parents are both on messenger... My relatives are usually on Facebook.*

*VEM 1 - Since I got settled in, I’ve gotten in touch with my old friends at home in Zimbabwe, we speak on WhatsApp.*

Each mention of the SNS used included a mention linked to particular individuals, whether family or friends, with respect to the ease of use in keeping in touch with them. In working to manage their relationships, they reported engaging in behaviors of platform-switching that Tandoc Jr et al. (2019) observed, to choose platforms tailored to different relationships.

## Growing Preference for WhatsApp for Multiple Uses

The participants made mention of WhatsApp with almost all of them citing it as a platform they use to get in touch with their personal network members. The responses outline the usefulness of WhatsApp, not only as means for voice calling or video calling loved ones, but an easy way of also keeping up with people’s lives, whilst having almost no intrusion from the platform, unlike other SNS.

*VEM 1 - WhatsApp wins because nobody can sneak into my thing and suggest a friend and say, “Hey, add this guy.”*

Participants considered WhatsApp as a social media platform, and not simply a messaging platform because of its multiple functions and ability to easily maintain interpersonal contact



with personal networks frequently. Over the last decade, WhatsApp has grown in influence, particularly in South Africa, with its recognition as a social media taking root recognized by its place as the top social media platform in South Africa (Cowling, 2024).

*VEM 2 - not really WhatsApp...Americans joke only people use WhatsApp if you have friends and family overseas.*

*VEM 3 - WhatsApp is huge here... Everyone uses... I never used WhatsApp in my life before I came to South Africa but that's all anyone uses here...They video, everything over WhatsApp.*

*VEM 4 - Overseas it's more things like Skype or WhatsApp calls these days... So, we WhatsApp and calls and voice notes.*

Nearly all participants interviewed mentioned their use of WhatsApp as being convenient and cost-effective. Cost-effectiveness is recognized by communicators as an integral aspect of social media (Digital Marketing Community, 2018; MyBroadband, 2023).

### **Reduced SNS Attractiveness Due to External Content**

The motivation for using SNS primarily to maintain relationships among the participants is a significant one. Among participants, the preferences for specific SNS over others was influenced by their perception of the level of control and autonomy they enjoyed over the content they interact with on the various platforms. Some participants were resistant to the perceived intrusion of other content pushed by the platforms themselves, which they considered as distracting to their main motivation for being online.

*VEM 1 - For me it has morphed into something that is too busy now. It's just clutter. In the beginning, it wasn't clutter, it was interesting. You're not bombarded by these extra things that... Now they're suggesting friends to you and why? I don't get some of these things on the platform.*

Changes in the use of social media take place and Malinen (2015) highlights the change as inevitable over time. Participants report some of the reasons for their change being linked to gratifications not met, through the increased encroachment of platform content, not only their personal networks' content.

*VEM 2 - I got a Snapchat account because I needed it for work and all my American friends were using it and I think I just missed the boat, like just a touch too old for it, but, because some of it is interesting... I'm just bad at the even like Instagram...I like sharing pictures from time to time.*

*VEM 4 - Then you keep tabs on social media to a certain degree in terms of what's happening in people's lives. It's nice to...For that social media is nice to follow people and for them to follow you. The only thing it has become a lot more fragmented now. There was a time where everyone was on Facebook and everyone was updating Facebook that made it a lot easier. Now some people are on Instagram, some people don't update Facebook anymore. The fragmentation of social media channels and who uses what has been less ideal actually to stay in touch that way.*

*VEM 1 - Network 1 - Communication, I would say usually it is Facebook. But lately it has been Instagram.*

*VEM 4 - Network 2 - Ja, on Facebook, but we don't use it very often.*

*VEM 5 - Network 1 - Well, we follow each other on Facebook, we follow each other on Instagram, she actually communicates with me on Instagram and she sends me something she likes.*

*VEM 11 - ...but I feel like the Instagram, like I use Instagram a lot, mostly for the stories section. So, I do that quite a lot and I feel like that's a nice way of not really, I'm not really talking or message to anybody in particular...*

The addition of more SNS seems to be linked to self-reported reduced online activity, resistance to adopt new social media or even abandonment of certain of participants' existing SNS accounts completely for interpersonal communication.

### **Growing Use of Private SNS Features for Interpersonal Communication**

The use of social media for interpersonal communication is becoming more private, as individuals choose to have direct contact with their personal networks. Participants reported frequently using social media platforms for keeping in touch, but specifically the messaging aspects, for direct one-on-one engagement with their desired members. The decision to engage on multiple different platforms is also informed by their desire to maintain certain relationship ties and meet those particular personal network members where they engage most on social media.

*VEM 1 - Network 1 - Communication, I would say usually it is Facebook. But lately it has been Instagram...The reason we chat more on social media is because of our interest in sport. Ja, we get to talk about those topics. Maybe after the game we message each other.*

*VEM 4 - There is a way for social media in there as well in terms of instant messaging and stuff. It is actually still a way because over the years you lose peoples phone numbers because people change phone numbers once in a while which means social media is the only way to get a hold of them.*

*VEM 6 - ...and it's still Facebook, so probably one of the only reasons I don't delete Facebook is that I've got too many friends who are abroad and that's the only way we get to keep in touch.*

*VEM 2 - Other friends are like did you see this; I'm like I don't know. I post pictures from time to time I don't actually look at people's stuff... I refuse, I'm old school.*

*VEM 8 - And that's what something that they always complain about, say hey, you are living in such an amazing country, you don't post pictures and what. I say ja, I don't know, I'm not really into...[posting]*

The reported changes in reduced posting or keeping social media accounts simply to maintain the network by participants supports the observations and predictions by Gartner (2023) of

the continued decline in social media usage of social media. The need for social status and social interaction (Tanta et al., 2014) by using social media tagging fulfils and gratifies those needs by outwardly showing pictures of them with members of their personal network.

## **Conclusion**

Social media's growth and success has been hailed as transformative for communication. The figures of users globally maintaining social media accounts is significant and has drawn the attention of communicators that have increasingly committed more of their marketing budgets towards social media communication. When asked about their interpersonal communication, individuals consider social media to be an integral aspect of them maintaining relationships with their personal networks of friends, family and acquaintances. Some of the reasons social media platforms continue to have growing numbers of users, irrespective of the level of engagement is the link individuals seek to maintain with their personal networks. The main motivation for the use of social media is to facilitate interpersonal communication, as an extension of the offline interpersonal engagements. Individual motivation of social media use are seemingly driven by emotional, social and other needs that individuals seek to gratify in making deliberate choices about the platforms they choose. The global rate of social media activity is declining, yet it seems the motivations for interpersonal contact have driven the growth of more closed social media like WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger in places like South Africa. As individuals become more resistant to intrusive messages from platforms as well as regulations, communicators need to consider the effectiveness of their budget spend in reaching the right individuals on social media, whose main motivations for engagement with social media are driven by the need to foster their interpersonal communication.

## References

- AccessNow. (2023). Internet shutdowns in 2021 report: resistance in the face of blackouts in Africa. Available from: Report: Who shut down the internet in Africa in 2021? Retrieved from [accessnow.org](https://accessnow.org)
- Basuki, Y., Akbar, R. and Miharja, M. (2015). ICT and social relationship engagement: Women's online communities in Indonesia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 184, pp. 245-251.
- Brailovskaia, J., Schillack, H., & Margraf, J. (2020). Tell me why are you using social media (SM)! Relationship between reasons for use of SM, SM flow, daily stress, depression, anxiety, and addictive SM use—An exploratory investigation of young adults in Germany. *Computers in human behavior*, 113, 106511.
- Cowling, N. (2024). Most used social media platforms in South Africa as of the 3rd quarter of 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1189958/penetration-rate-of-social-media-in-south-africa/>.
- Crystal Jiang, L. & Hancock, J. T. (2013). Absence makes the communication grow fonder: Geographic separation, interpersonal media, and intimacy in dating relationships. *Journal of Communication*, 63(3), 556-577.
- Cummings, J. N., Butler, B., & Kraut, R. (2002). The quality of online social relationships. *Communications of the ACM*, 45(7), 103-108.
- De Ridder, S. (2017). Social media and young people's sexualities: Values, norms, and battlegrounds. *Social Media+ Society*, 3(4), 2056305117738992.
- Digital Marketing Community. (2018). The Marketing Activities That Takes The Highest Share of Advertising Spending, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.digitalmarketingcommunity.com/indicators/the-marketing-activities-that-takes-the-highest-share-of-advertising-spending-2018/>
- Du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C., & Bezuidenhout, R. M. (Eds.). (2021). *Research matters*. Juta Limited.
- Gartner. (2023). Gartner Predicts 50% of Consumers Will Significantly Limit Their Interactions with Social Media by 2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2023-12-14-gartner-predicts-fifty-percent-of-consumers-will-significantly-limit-their-interactions-with-social-media-by-2025>
- Hertlein, K. M., & Ancheta, K. (2014). Advantages and disadvantages of technology in relationships: Findings from an open-ended survey. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(11), 1-11.

- Hong, J. C., Hwang, M. Y., Hsu, C. H., Tai, K. H., & Kuo, Y. C. (2015). Belief in dangerous virtual communities as a predictor of continuance intention mediated by general and online social anxiety: The Facebook perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 48, 663-670.
- Kemp, S. (2024). Digital 2024: South Africa. Retrieved from: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-south-africa>
- Kujur, F., & Singh, S. (2020). Visual communication and consumer-brand relationship on social networking sites-uses & gratifications theory perspective. *Journal of theoretical and applied electronic commerce research*, 15(1), 30-47.
- Lichy, J., & Racat, M. (2021). Tracing digital fragmentation at the user level: Gen Y & Gen Z from a European perspective. *Management international*, 25(spécial), 124-147.
- Mahrt, M. (2020). Why we find little evidence of digital fragmentation, but should not stop researching it. *69489*, 27-35.
- Malinen, S. (2015). Understanding user participation in online communities: A systematic literature review of empirical studies. *Computers in human behavior*, 46, 228-238.
- Matusitz, J. (2014). Intercultural perspectives on cyberspace: An updated examination. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 24(7), 713-724.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 1(2), 13-22.
- MyBroadband. (2023). Where South African companies spend their advertising budgets – Download the 2023 report. Retrieved from: <https://mybroadband.co.za/news/industrynews/495349-where-south-african-companies-spend-their-advertising-budgets-download-the-2023-report.html>
- Poushter, J. (2016). Smartphone ownership and internet usage continues to climb in emerging economies. *Pew research center*, 22(1), 1-44.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Sitto, M. K. (2019). *A comparison of social representation of re-identity of voluntary economic migrants in online and offline interpersonal communication within personal networks*. University of Johannesburg (South Africa).
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). (2018). General Household Survey 2018. Retrieved from: [https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/GHS\\_2018\\_presentation.pdf](https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/GHS_2018_presentation.pdf).
- Tandoc Jr, E. C., Lou, C., & Min, V. L. H. (2019). Platform-swinging in a poly-social-media context: How and why users navigate multiple social media platforms. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 24(1), 21-35.

- Tanta, I., Mihovilović, M., & Sablić, Z. (2014). Uses and gratification theory—why adolescents use Facebook?. *Medijska istraživanja: znanstveno-stručni časopis za novinarstvo i medije*, 20(2), 85-111.
- Urista, M. A., Dong, Q., & Day, K. D. (2009). Explaining why young adults use MySpace and Facebook through uses and gratifications theory. *Human communication*, 12(2), 215-229.
- Wang, X., Chen, M., & Jiang, W. (2024). Why Is One Social Media Platform Not Enough? A Typology of Platform-Swinging Behavior and Associated Affordance Preferences. *Social Media+ Society*, 10(2), 20563051241254373.
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative market research: an international journal*, 16(4), 362-369.
- World Bank. (n.d.). Individuals using the Internet (% of population) - Sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved from:  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=ZG>
- Yang, C. C., Brown, B. B. & Braun, M. T. (2014). From Facebook to cell calls: Layers of electronic intimacy in college students' interpersonal relationships. *New Media & Society*, 16(1), 5-23.

**Contact email:** [sitto-kaunda.mk@up.ac.za](mailto:sitto-kaunda.mk@up.ac.za)

## ***Revolutionizing Newsgathering: The Impact of Digital Media and New Technologies***

Nurhadiyati, Monash University, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

The rise of digital media and new technologies has fundamentally changed news gathering, allowing journalists to gather, analyze and share information with unprecedented speed and accuracy. This article explores the integration of tools such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and data analytics into journalism, improving the ability to process large data sets, identify trends and verify information - critical to combating disinformation. We explore the role of social media in real-time newsgathering and the ethical implications of using advanced technologies. Digital tools increase the speed and reliability of reporting, increase transparency and public trust. Our empirical research includes analysis of case studies of major news organizations that have integrated these technologies. A mixed-methods approach is used: qualitative data from in-depth interviews with reporters and editors, and quantitative data on news speed, audience engagement, and information accuracy before and after technology adoption. This article highlights both the practical applications of new technologies and the challenges of news gathering. It includes case studies and recent examples of journalistic practice. While these advances offer significant benefits, they also require new skills and ethical standards for journalists to effectively navigate the complex digital landscape. This research contributes to the debate about the future of journalism in the digital age and offers recommendations for media organizations to integrate new technology into their news gathering processes.

Keywords: Digital Media, New Technologies, News Gathering, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Data Analytics, Journalism, Disinformation, Social Media, Ethical Implications, Real-Time Reporting, Transparency, Public Trust, Case Studies, Mixed-Methods Approach

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## 1. Introduction

Research on the impact of digital media and new technologies has a long tradition. For decades, one of the most popular ideas in journalism literature is the notion that technological advancements have a transformative effect (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2014; Diakopoulos, 2019). Recent theoretical developments have revealed that the integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics into journalism significantly enhances the ability to process large data sets, identify trends, and verify information (Schapals & Schaewitz, 2019; Broussard, 2019). This constitutes a relatively new area which has emerged from the confluence of journalism and technology (Stray, 2020).

In the past several decades, digital tools have played an important role in news gathering, enabling journalists to gather, analyze, and share information with unprecedented speed and accuracy (Thurman & Walters, 2019; Wu, Tandoc, & Salmon, 2019). There are growing appeals for leveraging these advanced technologies to combat disinformation (Hermida & Kleis Nielsen, 2020). This field of study deals with the integration and application of new digital tools in journalism, which is critical in improving the speed and reliability of reporting, as well as increasing transparency and public trust (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2019; Beckett, 2011).

This study is motivated by the need to understand the practical applications and challenges of new technologies in news gathering. It therefore analyzed the role of social media in real-time newsgathering and the ethical implications of using advanced technologies (Lewis & Westlund, 2015; Jones & Jones, 2020). Our empirical research includes analysis of case studies of major news organizations that have integrated these technologies. A mixed-methods approach is used: qualitative data from in-depth interviews with reporters and editors, and quantitative data on news speed, audience engagement, and information accuracy before and after technology adoption (Wenzel, 2020).

The aim of this work is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the integration of new technologies in journalism. This research contributes to the debate about the future of journalism in the digital age and offers recommendations for media organizations to integrate new technology into their news gathering processes (Fink & Anderson, 2015; Carlson & Usher, 2021).

This research, which is supported by LPDP (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Agency) as the funding body, explores the transformative effects of digital media and new technologies on journalism practices.

## 2. Related Work

The integration of digital media and new technologies into journalism has been the subject of extensive research in recent decades. This section reviews the previous literature and highlights the main contributions, limitations and gaps that this study aims to address.

### Previous Literature

The literature review shows that the development of technology has significantly affected journalistic practices. Previous research has shown that the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML) and data analytics tools has transformed the



processes of news gathering, reporting and distribution. Several researchers have made significant contributions showing that these techniques improve the ability to process large amounts of data, identify trends, and authenticate data effectively.

When exploring new sources of news, it has been found out that social media being one of the tools, are vital in real-time collecting of news. The effects of such tools have been explained by various theories, while some of them relate mainly the effect to speed in delivery, others are related to the content of the news. This has been in several occasions applied in the research aim to determine the extent to which technology has influenced the fight against disinformation.

Past research has demonstrated that the use of AI and ML can enhance the verification process in journalism by a great deal. These tools', various research indicate that these tools assist the journalists to detect the false information more efficiently, thus boosting the credibility of the news reports. Following, there are several questions closely related to the focus on ethical issues of high technology in journalism.

### **Limitations of Previous Research**

There are several unresolved questions related to the ethical implications of high technology in journalism. A closer look at the literature on AI and ML in journalism, however, reveals a number of gaps and shortcomings. Most studies have relied on theoretical frameworks and have not provided empirical evidence from practical applications within news organizations.

Previous studies by different authors cannot be regarded as definitive because they largely limited their scope to certain kinds of media organizations, for example, print or Internet-based ones. In the present studies, few cases of ethical problems like privacy, security, and bias found in AI algorithms and the solutions are not vast and do not include various fields of journalism. Secondly, even though the literature has established the significance of using the new technologies, none of the existing studies has provided a detailed analysis of how it influences speed and accuracy of news reporting.

## **3. Methods**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study examines the impact of digital media and new technologies on news gathering using mixed methods. The research combines quantitative data from a structured survey and qualitative data from in-depth interviews. This design allows for in-depth analysis of both statistical trends and personal opinions of media professionals.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants in this study are professionals working in various capacities in the media industry. These roles include reporters, editors, reporters, news writers and other similar positions. Participants were drawn from various types of media organizations, including print, broadcast (TV/radio), digital/online, and independent.

## 4. Data Collection

### 4.1 Survey

The quantitative data was collected through an online survey, which consisted of several sections:

#### Section 1: Demographic Information

- **Primary role in the media industry:** Reporter, Editor, Journalist, News Writer, Other
- **Years of experience in journalism:** Less than 1 year, 1-3 years, 4-7 years, 8-10 years, More than 10 years
- **Type of media organization:** Print, Broadcast (TV/Radio), Digital/Online, Freelance, Other
- **Primary focus of reporting:** Politics, Business, Technology, Health, Entertainment, Sports, Other

#### Section 2: Usage of Digital Tools

- Frequency of using digital tools (1 = Never, 5 = Always):
  - Social Media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)
  - Data Analytics Software (e.g., Google Analytics, Tableau)
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools (e.g., natural language processing, machine learning)
  - Sentiment Analysis
  - Content Creation (e.g., automated writing tools)
  - Trend Analysis (e.g., identifying trending topics)
  - Verification Tools (e.g., Fact-checking websites, reverse image search)

#### Section 3: Impact of New Digital Technology in News & Media

- Extent of agreement with statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):
  - Digital tools have increased the speed of my reporting.
  - Digital tools have improved the accuracy of my reporting.
  - Digital tools have made it easier to verify information.
  - Influence of data analytics on information verification before publishing.
  - Impact on audience engagement.

#### Section 4: Ethical Implications and Challenges

- Ethical concerns regarding advanced technologies in journalism: Privacy Issues, Data Security, Bias in AI Algorithms, Transparency, Disinformation, Other
- Preparedness to handle ethical challenges: Not prepared at all, Slightly prepared, Moderately prepared, Very prepared, Extremely prepared
- Training or resources needed for better integration of new technologies: Workshops/Seminars, Online Courses, In-house Training Programs, Mentorship/Guidance from Experienced Colleagues, Other

#### Section 5: Combating Disinformation

- Frequency of encountering disinformation in reporting (1 = Never, 5 = Always)
- Agreement with statements about combating disinformation (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):
  - Digital tools have significantly enhanced my ability to detect disinformation.

- AI and machine learning tools are effective in identifying false information.
- Social media platforms are a major source of disinformation.
- Tools used to combat disinformation: Fact-checking websites, AI-based disinformation detection tools, Data verification software, Social media monitoring tools, Other

### Section 6: Deeper Understanding

- Descriptions of specific instances where digital tools significantly impacted the newsgathering process.
- Additional tools or resources needed to combat disinformation more effectively.
- Perceptions of the future role of digital tools in journalism.
- Biggest challenges faced in integrating new technologies into journalistic practices.
- Examples of how machine learning has helped identify significant trends or patterns in reporting.
- Effectiveness of AI tools in identifying and combating disinformation, with specific instances.
- Desired improvements or additional features in digital tools used for newsgathering.

## 4.2 Interviews

The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with a subset of survey participants. These interviews focused on:

- Personal experiences with digital tools in newsgathering.
- Ethical considerations and challenges.
- Strategies for combating disinformation.
- Insights into the future role of technology in journalism.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to describe the effects of digital media and new technologies in the process of collecting the news and determine the potential for journalists working in the conditions of the digital society. This integration of the new technology enhances the potential of acquiring, analyzing and transforming information into knowledge and facilitates the recognition of patterns and investigation of data, and hastens and enhances the strategies of reporting. Thus, it can be stated that the given field is rather promising, though there is a long way to go, and it is helpful in the majority of cases.

## 6. Summary of Findings

It has also been discovered from the survey that the use of digital tools is quite common among media professionals irrespective of their designation. Key findings include:

1. **Increased Speed and Accuracy:** Along with the traditional tools, digital tools have greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the news gathering reporting process, through expediting the phase of gathering the information and or data, doing the analytical work and sharing the information with a wider audience.
2. **Ethical Concerns:** The concerns and challenges that journalists encounter in the use of AI including privacy matters, security issues, and bias related to the algorithms used therein (Lewis & Westlund, 2015; Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2019). However, there is a pressing sense that many reporters are ready to confront these concerns though many of them are demanding for more capacity-building (Wenzel, 2020).

3. **Combating Disinformation:** Digital assets have been instrumental in the fight against disinformation since many journalists have been using the fact-checking websites, AI based detection tools, and the social media monitoring tools for substantiating the information and for detecting the fake news narrativesc (Hermida & Kleis Nielsen, 2020; Jones & Jones, 2020).

## 7. Implications

The outcomes of the current study highlight the beneficial impact of digital media and new technologies in journalism. But these benefits can only be obtained to the fullest if the media organizations that create and circulate content solve the ethical issues and ensure that their journalists are trained and equipped with proper tools. In this way, they can also increase the quality and reliability of the provision of information, increase the transparency, and gain the citizens' confidence (Carlson & Usher, 2021; Beckett, 2011).

It also examines the crucial function of digital aids in distinct forms and as defenses against deception. That said, the following tools have proven efficient during the enforcement of counteracting disinformation. Though, it remains an important challenge to fight disinformation on social media. Consequently, the sustained development of advanced verification tools and approaches remains a critical requirement for news organizations' relevance (Hermida & Kleis Nielsen, 2020; Fink & Anderson, 2015).

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made for media organizations: Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made for media organizations:

1. **Invest in Training and Resources:** Develop a consequential training for the journalists with features such as workshops, online and in-service training programmes to enable them update themselves with the technology and ethical practices (Lewis & Westlund, 2015; Carlson & Usher, 2021).
2. **Develop Ethical Guidelines:** Create stiff ethical bounds concerning the application of AI and other digital tools to mitigate issues concerning privacy, security, and fairness of algorithms (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2019).
3. **Enhance Verification Processes:** Acquire better verification technologies that will enable the fight and eliminating fake news as well as improvements to news reports themselves (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2019).
4. **Foster Collaboration:** Call for convergence and engagement of other relevant stakeholders like journalists/tech people and ethicists to design solutions for the emerging technology problems (Wenzel, 2020).

## References

- Anderson, C. W., Bell, E., & Shirky, C. (2014). *Post-industrial journalism: Adapting to the present*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia Journalism School.
- Beckett, C. (2011). *SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save the World*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Broussard, M. (2019). *Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World*. MIT Press.
- Carlson, M., & Usher, N. (2021). *News for the Rich, White, and Blue: How Place and Power Distort American Journalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Diakopoulos, N. (2019). *Automating the News: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Media*. Harvard University Press.
- Diakopoulos, N., & Koliska, M. (2019). *Algorithmic Transparency in the News Media*. *Digital Journalism*, 7(8), 1065-1082.
- Fink, K., & Anderson, C. W. (2015). *Data journalism in the United States: Beyond the "usual suspects"*. *Journalism Studies*, 16(4), 467-481.
- Hermida, A., & Kleis Nielsen, R. (2020). *Social Media and Journalism: Trends, Connections, Implications*. *Digital Journalism*, 8(6), 703-709.
- Jones, S., & Jones, M. (2020). *Disinformation and Digital Media: The Impact of Algorithms and Automation on News*. *Journalism Studies*, 21(7), 885-902.
- Lewis, S. C., & Westlund, O. (2015). *Actors, actants, audiences, and activities in cross-media news work: A matrix and a research agenda*. *Digital Journalism*, 3(1), 19-37.
- Schapals, A. K., & Schaewitz, L. (2019). *Artificial Intelligence in Journalism: Research and Implications*. *Journalism Practice*, 13(8), 975-993.
- Stray, J. (2020). Making Artificial Intelligence Work for Investigative Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 8(3), 310-330.
- Thurman, N., & Walters, A. (2019). *Live Blogging and Social Media Curation: Challenges and Opportunities for Journalism*. *Digital Journalism*, 7(5), 629-648.
- Wenzel, A. (2020). *Resisting Reduction: The Role of the Journalism Community in AI and Algorithmic Decision-Making*. *Journalism*, 21(7), 1028-1044.
- Wu, S., Tandoc Jr., E. C., & Salmon, C. T. (2019). *A Field Analysis of Journalism in the Era of Data: Understanding the Practices, Challenges, and Implications of Data Journalism*. *Journalism Studies*, 20(2), 256-273.

**Contact email:** nurh00003@student.monash.edu



## *Childism and Maternal Dysfunction in Tatsushi Ōmori's "Mother" (2020)*

Gamze Hakverdi, Linköping University, Sweden

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Tatsushi Ōmori's *Mother* (2020) vividly portrays the harrowing realities of childism through a profoundly dysfunctional maternal relationship. The film centers on Akiko and her son Shuhei, showcasing how childism manifests in their tumultuous family dynamic. Akiko's manipulative and neglectful behavior starkly represents childism, exploiting and mistreating Shuhei to serve her own needs while disregarding his fundamental rights and emotional well-being. Despite enduring constant manipulation and neglect, Shuhei's loyalty to his abusive mother underscores the complex nature of familial bonds affected by childism. Inspired by a true story, the film documents Shuhei's struggle with maternal dysfunction and the lack of protective measures for vulnerable children, which impede his development and identity formation. His quest for a sense of self amid relentless abuse provides a poignant commentary on the broader impacts of childism. While the film primarily focuses on personal family dynamics, it implicitly critiques societal neglect and the failure to protect vulnerable children. This paper will discuss how *Mother* serves as a powerful portrayal of systemic child discrimination, urging a reevaluation of societal attitudes toward children's rights and well-being.

Keywords: Childism, Maternal Dysfunction, Tatsushi Ōmori, *Mother*, Japanese Cinema

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction: Ethics of Care

Tatsushi Ōmori's *Mother* (2020), available on the Netflix streaming platform to reach a global audience, offers an unsettling exploration of a dysfunctional mother-son relationship in the backdrop of modern Japanese society. The film follows Akiko and her son, Shuheï, in his childhood and adolescent years. Akiko is a manipulative and neglectful mother, and Shuheï becomes her primary source of control and survival. Akiko involves Shuheï in her dysfunctional world—using him to extract money from her lovers and relatives while completely disregarding his education, future, and emotional well-being. Shuheï, in turn, is caught in a profound psychological bind. Despite being the victim of his mother's manipulation, he remains fiercely loyal to her, unable to break free from the emotional dependency that ties them together even when he is older. As Shuheï grows older, Akiko manipulates him into increasingly dangerous situations, including an involvement in the crime that shatters the remnants of his childhood innocence. The film's narrative is steeped in emotional tension, highlighting the devastating impact of Akiko's manipulative and neglectful mothering on Shuheï's development.

Based on true events, *Mother* is both an intimate portrayal of familial dysfunction and a more extensive critique of society's failure to protect vulnerable children. It challenges viewers to reflect on the complexities of parental bonds and the devastating consequences of societal indifference to the suffering of children. In one pivotal scene, after forcing her son to commit the murder of his grandparents for money, Akiko responds to the interrogation officer about Shuheï: "I can raise him however I want. I am his mother, after all. I gave birth to him. He is my flesh and blood. Why is that a problem? He is my son". This question posed by Akiko — *Why is that a problem?* can be addressed in many ways within the film's narrative, but I will approach it through the lens of the "ethics of care". This question raises a more profound inquiry into where maternal rights over a child begin and where they end. Does giving birth or sharing biological ties justify every act of a mother towards her child?

As the film, based on true events, illustrates in the presence of maternal dysfunctionality, maternal rights over a child can quickly turn into childism—a violation of the child's right to be cared for. Nel Noddings (2013, pp. 59-78) offers a framework for understanding this through the "ethics of care" which posits that caring is a reciprocal relationship. The *one-caring* conveys attentiveness, empathy, and a commitment to the well-being of the *cared-for*. However, this relationship only becomes fully realized when the *cared-for* acknowledges and accepts the care offered, creating a mutual bond based on trust and understanding. In the case of *Mother*, Akiko's actions fundamentally violate these principles. Her treatment of Shuheï is transactional and manipulative, devoid of the empathy and attentiveness that define ethical care. Noddings argues that caring relationships require emotional engrossment and responsibility on both sides, with the *one-caring* recognizing and responding to the needs of the *cared-for*. Akiko's refusal to acknowledge Shuheï's emotional needs or developmental rights and her exploitation of him for her gain represents a profound dysfunctionality in the caregiving dynamic. Her declaration that she can raise Shuheï however she wishes reflects a distorted understanding of maternal rights, one that prioritizes herself over Shuheï's well-being, thus leading to childism—a disregard for the child's rights and autonomy.

Noddings emphasizes that care involves not only physical provision but also an emotional and ethical commitment to the flourishing of the *cared-for*. In contrast, Akiko's approach to motherhood is marked by self-interest and neglect, reducing Shuheï to an instrument of her survival rather than nurturing his potential. Shuheï remains loyal to his mother despite her



neglectfulness. As Noddings touches on, even when the *one-caring* fails to fulfill their responsibilities, the *cared-for* may still maintain the connection, which Noddings calls “ethical heroism.”: “When caring is not felt in the cared-for, but its absence is felt, the cared-for may still, by an act of ethical heroism, respond and thus contribute to the caring relation” (Noddings, 2013, p. 78). Shuhei, in his devotion to his mother, embodies this position, clinging to the remnants of their bond despite the emotional harm it causes him. His loyalty, however, is not the result of reciprocal care but a reflection of his emotional entrapment, illustrating how, in the absence of proper care, the *cared-for* can become trapped in a cycle of dependence and manipulation.

Motherhood starts with a physical act, yet it is inherently connected with ethics of care, as defined in Nel Noddings’ account. As Noddings emphasizes, mothers guided by care ethics remain aware of the broader network of care surrounding them. The concept of the “web of care” in care ethics highlights the importance of making decisions that minimize harm to anyone within this interconnected system (Noddings, 2010, pp. 73-74). Akiko, on the other hand, exhibits no characteristics of the ethics of care. She shows no compassion or responsibility toward her son, Shuhei, her second child, Fuyuka, or anyone else in the film, including her own parents, whom she manipulates Shuhei into murdering for money. Akiko represents the epitome of maternal dysfunction in terms of care ethics, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and exploitation that causes deep and lasting harm to everyone involved.

### **Maternal Dysfunctionality and Childism**

Psychoanalyst Alice Miller, in the Preface of her influential book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, talks about her childhood, stating that: “I was amazed to discover that I had been an abused child, that from the very beginning of my life, I had no choice but to comply totally with the needs and feelings of my mother and to ignore my own” (1990, p. xii). Miller reveals that the knowledge she shares in her writings arises from reconnecting with her own silenced inner child, complemented by her formal education and psychoanalytic training. After years of suppressing the truth about her childhood, Miller came to realize, through spontaneous painting, that she had been abused by her mother—a pedagogue who inflicted emotional terror upon her. Her father and others failed to notice or intervene in this abuse, and Miller reflects on how different her life might have been “if just one person had recognized it and come to her defense” (1990, p. xii-xiii). She states, “That person could have helped me to recognize my mother’s cruelty for what it was instead of accepting it for decades, to my great detriment, as something normal and necessary” (1990, p. xiii). Alice Miller defines this person who courageously stands up for children and protects them from adults’ abuse of power as an “enlightened witness” (1990, p. xiii). She notes that although individuals like this are still rare in our society, with its “hostility toward children”, their numbers are steadily growing (1990, p. xiii).

What Miller defines as “hostility toward children” is conceptualized by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl as “childism”. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2012) introduces the concept of childism as a specific form of prejudice against children, similar to racism and sexism:

The word *childism* could similarly guide us to an understanding of various behaviors and acts against children as instances of stereotyping children and childhood. We could recognize the many social and political arrangements that are detrimental to children or that fail to meet their needs—the many anti-child trends in every aspect of our society, from legal structures to cultural productions—as instances of adult behavior toward

children that is rationalized or justified by a prejudice. *Childism* could help identify related issues, child imprisonment, child exploitation and abuse, substandard schooling, high infant mortality rates, fetal alcohol syndrome, the reckless prescription of antipsychotic drugs to children, child pornography, and all other behaviors or policies that are not in the best interests of children. The behavior of adults who are childist—most of whom are *parents*—harms directly or indirectly the huge human population under the age of eighteen, which is now close to a third of the population worldwide, and in some places more than half. (2012, p. 7)

This quote from Young-Bruehl highlights two critical aspects of childism. First, it encompasses both explicit and implicit behaviors, ranging from the stereotyping of children at the cognitive level to outright child abuse at the behavioral level. Second, childism is embedded not only in individual actions but also in broader societal, legal, and cultural frameworks that systematically neglect or harm children. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl highlights that childist attitudes often arise from the most unexpected people—*parents*, who are typically seen as primary caregivers.

Mothers, being generally idealized figures, “sometimes neglect, abuse and even murder their own children. Such incidences generate feelings of disgust, horror, and severe judgment. Mothers like this are thought to be abominations, pathological, violations of the very definition of *mother*” (Lachance-Adams, 2014, pp. 27- 28). These dysfunctionalities, whether stemming from psychological, economic, or a combination of various factors, create a harmful, unsettling, and even dangerous environment for the child. In other words, the primary caregiving system, which is meant to protect the child, becomes a source of harm and threat. The film’s pressing question arrives at this point: “*Who is responsible for the children in case of parental or maternal dysfunctionality?*” Children exposed to dysfunctional caregivers are at risk of neglect, emotional harm, and physical danger. In these circumstances, the concept of responsibility extends beyond the immediate family and becomes a societal issue, urging communities, institutions, and individuals to recognize and address the needs of vulnerable children. Children in these environments need not only passive observation but proactive support and protection to prevent them from enduring harm or potentially being driven into situations where they might harm others. As Miller argues, enlightened witnesses serve as critical protectors for at-risk children. However, this role should not be considered exclusive to professionals; it must be a shared social responsibility requiring collective commitment with a heightened awareness of childism.

### **Rethinking Responsibility and Care**

Lachance-Adams contends that while mothers, like anyone, are capable of committing heinous acts, the impact is particularly shocking when these crimes are directed at their own children—those who depend on them for survival and trust. Balancing self-care and other-care is complex; not every mother can achieve this, and maternal love, like any love, has limits and sometimes fails (Lachance-Adams, 2014, pp. 190-191). She discusses a case from USA, Oregon, Angela McAnulty, who murdered her 15-year-old daughter, Jeanette Maples. Based on this case, Lachance-Adams points out:

McAnulty’s abuse of her daughter is undeniably horrific, and she should be held responsible for what she did. However, when we remove the assumption that mothers *alone* are responsible for the well-being of their children, we must challenge the prosecutor’s argument that only her mother could have saved her. Many other people

could have saved Jeanette Maples: her father, her stepfather, her step-grandmother, state officials in Oregon and California, teachers and peers at Jeanette's school. Every one of these people had some indication that the girl could be in trouble. (2014, p. 192)

As Lachance-Adams emphasizes: "Indeed, it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to allow one to be so severely abused" (2014, p. 192). Here, the question we should collectively respond to is not why the mother killed her children. We should collectively respond, as Lachance-Adams asks, "How did *we* let this happen in our community?"

In the case of maternal or parental dysfunctionality, society in its entirety must assume the ethical responsibility of care for the child/ren. This responsibility goes beyond the scope of social service agencies, government policies, or child protection programs alone. While many societies have these institutions in place, the core issue lies in the need for a care-centered foundation within the fabric of society. For these institutions to truly fulfill their purpose, the principles of care ethics must be deeply embedded in the social structure itself, beyond mere institutional presence. As Nel Noddings asserts, "The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring. Parents, police, social workers, teachers, preachers, neighbors, coaches, older siblings must all embrace this primary aim. It functions as end, means, and criterion for judging suggested means" (2013, p. 172). Noddings highlights that this ethical *ideal* shapes the overall climate, providing a framework to assess acceptable practices across all aspects of life. Ethical concerns arise universally, making it essential that nurturing this ideal is a shared responsibility across society, not confined to just a few institutions (2013, pp. 172-173).

In *Mother*, we see a stark contrast to this ideal. Akiko's family, including her parents and the random men in her life, appear to play peripheral or dysfunctional roles. Social workers like Aya try to intervene—offering a school for Shuhei and attempting to find stability for the family—but their well-intended efforts are undermined by Akiko's refusal to engage with the help provided. The film illustrates how individual interventions are insufficient in the face of severe familial dysfunction. Noddings' assertion that nurturing the ethical *ideal* demands the collective involvement of all societal sectors holds here. Without a widespread network of care, even the most well-intentioned individuals are unable to address the deeply rooted issues of neglect and abuse effectively. "The ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone." (Gilligan, 1982, p. 62). *Mother* critiques the breakdown of this web of connection, showing how personal and institutional neglect leaves individuals like Shuhei abandoned to tragic outcomes. Through its portrayal of maternal dysfunction and social neglect, the film serves as a powerful call for a more collective, robust approach to caregiving—one that addresses not only the personal responsibilities of parents like Akiko but also the societal systems that allow such dysfunction to persist.

## Conclusion

Tatsushi Ōmori's *Mother* serves as a stark critique of both maternal dysfunction and societal neglect, revealing how personal failures in caregiving are intertwined with the broader systemic issue of childism. Akiko's abusive and exploitative treatment of her son Shuhei demonstrates the devastating consequences of an absence of care ethics. At the same time, the film also exposes society's failure to intervene and protect vulnerable children. Ultimately, *Mother* calls for reevaluating our collective responsibility in nurturing and safeguarding children.

Alice Miller's concept of "enlightened witnesses" underscores the importance of moving beyond mere observation; active intervention is crucial to breaking cycles of abuse and neglect. Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan further stress that caregiving should be a collective responsibility embedded deeply within society to ensure no child is left unsupported. Ros Coward echoes this sentiment, stating, "Children are the place where the best of humanity is expressed" (1997, p. 115). Safeguarding and fostering children must be a shared responsibility across society, ensuring that every child has the chance to grow and flourish in an environment that upholds their rights, well-being, and intrinsic worth.

## References

- Coward, R. (1997). The heaven and hell of mothering: mothering and ambivalence in the mass media. In W. Hollway & B. Featherstone (Eds.), *Mothering and Ambivalence* (pp. 111–118). London and New York: Routledge.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Lachance-Adams, S. (2014). *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Miller, A. (1990). *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (R. Ward, Trans.). USA: Basic Books.
- Noddings, N. (2010). *The Maternal Factor Two Paths to Morality*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics Moral Education*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Ōmori, T. (Director). (2020). *Mother*. [Movie]. Star Sands. <https://www.netflix.com/>
- Young-Bruehl, E. (2012). *Childism Confronting Prejudice Against Children*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

**Contact email:** gamzehakverdi@gmail.com



***Communication Campaign of Social Marketing to Reduce Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs): The Case of Diabetes Mellitus at BaanTakhun Hospital in Southern Thailand***

Siripan Krasaesan, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), particularly diabetes mellitus, represent a significant public health crisis in Thailand, contributing to approximately 17 million cases and over 300,000 deaths annually, with a majority occurring before age 60 (World Health Organization, n.d.). Recognizing the crucial role of diet in diabetes management, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation launched a communication campaign promoting the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula (2 portions vegetables, 1 portion carbohydrates, 1 portion protein) (ThaiHealth Official, 2019). This study assesses the campaign's effectiveness at BaanTakhun Hospital in Suratthani province, Southern Thailand. Data from 27 patients in the hospital's remission clinic program out of 695 treated were analyzed to evaluate the impact of the communication campaign and lifestyle intervention, alongside medical treatment. The findings demonstrate that this integrated approach successfully improved the patients' conditions. However, the study also revealed a need for context-specific adaptations of the communication strategy to enhance its effectiveness across diverse regions of Thailand.

Keywords: 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula, Diabetes Mellitus, Social Marketing

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The global burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is substantial, and Thailand is no exception. According to the World Health Organization, NCDs are a leading cause of death in the country, with diabetes playing a significant role. The sheer scale of the problem, involving approximately 17 million Thais suffering from NCDs and over 300,000 deaths annually, many before the age of 60, necessitates the development and implementation of comprehensive prevention and management strategies. The high prevalence of diabetes, heavily influenced by dietary habits, underscores the need for effective interventions (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Recognizing this pressing issue, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation initiated a communication campaign designed to promote healthier eating habits among individuals with diabetes. This campaign focused on the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula, emphasizing the importance of balanced meals with appropriate proportions of vegetables, carbohydrates, and protein. The rationale for this formula stems from the recognized link between unhealthy diets and increased risk of developing diabetes. Specifically, diets high in processed foods, sugar, and unhealthy fats contribute to obesity and insulin resistance. The 2:1:1 healthy eating formula serves as a simple and easy-to-remember guideline for promoting healthier food choices.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of this communication campaign as implemented at BaanTakhun Hospital in Surat Thani Province in Southern Thailand. BaanTakhun Hospital, situated in a region with a unique cultural and socioeconomic contexts, serves as a relevant case study for assessing the campaign's impact on diabetes management in a real-world setting. This study aims to assess not only the overall impact of the communication campaign but also to explore the nuances of the implementation of such strategies within specific contexts, acknowledging the need for tailoring interventions to local needs and realities.

NCDs also known as chronic diseases, are not passed from person to person. NCDs affect people of all ages, regions, and countries. While often associated with older age groups, NCDs contribute to 17 million deaths before the age of 70 each year. Alarming, 86% of these premature deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. From children to adults to the elderly, everyone is vulnerable to the risk factors contributing to NCDs, including unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, and exposure to tobacco smoke, harmful alcohol use, and air pollution. The main types of NCD are cardiovascular diseases (such as heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.

The remission of diabetes is defined as an A1C (Hemoglobin A1C; HbA1C) level of less than 6.5% for a duration of three months or more without the use of glucose-lowering medications, indicating that blood sugar can be self-managed. It is important to note that diabetes in remission is not considered a cure. Weight loss is a crucial factor used to assess the likelihood of achieving diabetes remission. If a patient with diabetes can achieve a weight loss of 10-15% of their initial body weight, this can facilitate their entry into a state of diabetes remission. The mechanism behind weight loss involves a reduction in the amount of fat present in the liver and pancreas, which in turn decreases insulin resistance and enhances the effectiveness of insulin.



Social marketing uses strategies from commercial marketing to create plans and run programs. According to Bryant and others, social marketers have less freedom to change their products. While commercial marketing tries to get people to buy things, social marketing focuses on getting individuals to change their deep-seated habits. This often involves encouraging actions that have benefits that aren't immediately obvious, like quitting smoking, drinking less alcohol, or exercising more. The target groups for social marketing can also be different and often have fewer resources. As mentioned before, having a good marketing mix is important for both commercial and social marketing. Both types use the 4Ps and market segmentation to find the right audience. The main goal of social marketing is to inspire people to adopt behaviors that help both society and themselves. To connect with their target audience, social marketers need to clearly understand their products and services, ensuring they match the audience's values. This shows how important it is to gather feedback from the audience, linking social and commercial marketing efforts (Choi, 2003, p. 2).

Today, many different marketing methods are being used because of changes in society and what people want. As a result, businesses need to change how they operate to keep up. One very important part of running a successful business is having a clear "concept." This concept acts like a plan or strategy for marketing that helps to meet the various needs and wants of customers. The study also considers how communication was utilized throughout the project. It is noteworthy that communication did not exclusively manifest as verbal dialogue or mass media; instead, the communication process associated with the 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula was adapted to align with the communication styles of the target audience. From the theory of Community-Base Social Marketing Campaign (CBSM), CBSM aims to promote behavior change by encouraging individuals and businesses to participate in a variety of actions, which include reducing waste, enhancing water and energy efficiency, and quitting smoking, among others. Research has demonstrated that behavior change is more significant when campaigns leverage personal contacts within the community. To effectively implement their campaigns, community-based social marketers utilize a range of strategies and tools, such as fostering commitments, providing prompts, increasing convenience, establishing social norms, and engaging in effective communication. One of the primary problems we face is a lack of knowledge regarding effective communication; communication serves as a key mechanism for conveying messages with the goal of facilitating learning and encouraging individuals to make positive changes in their behaviors. Communication plays a vital role in successfully persuading, educating, and conveying the desired behavior changes within a community-based social marketing campaign. Without the careful creation or "framing" of a message, it would be challenging for new ideas and attitudes to spread effectively throughout a community (Pickens, 2002). Another significant issue is the lack of habitual practice, which can be addressed through the use of prompts; these prompts, which may take the form of stickers, signs, or phrases placed in proximity to specific objects—such as ashtrays or recycling containers—serve to remind individuals to engage in correct and responsible behavior (Lightman, 2011). Additionally, the lack of motivation can be remedied through the use of commitments, a tool designed to encourage individuals to make personal promises regarding their actions. This often involves motivating people to sign a commitment, and should they contemplate reverting to their previous undesirable behaviors, the commitment serves as a reminder of their promise, prompting them to consider the implications of failing to uphold their commitment, which they may perceive as irresponsible. Moreover, for norms to effectively influence the behavior of others, individuals must be aware of these norms. For instance, the simple act of taking recyclables to the curbside communicates a community norm that emphasizes the importance of recycling. However, many sustainable practices do not possess the same level of community visibility that recycling does, which necessitates

that norms supporting these activities be promoted more vigorously. It is essential to identify strategies for publicizing participation in sustainable practices, such as providing ongoing community feedback about the volume of water that households have conserved through efficient use (Lura Consulting, 2010). Finally, incentives also play a crucial role in motivating behavior change; these incentives are most effective when there is a close connection between the incentive offered and the behavior desired, particularly when both are highly visible. Research, including studies conducted by Wang and Katzev, has demonstrated that incentives can be a key factor in successfully prompting behavior change, particularly when they are well-aligned with the targeted actions.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the campaign's effectiveness to the community (BaanTakhun Hospital in Surat Thani province, Southern Thailand).

### ***Study Design***

The Diabetes-Hypertension Remission Service is a new treatment model that is gaining popularity worldwide. Its primary goal is to help patients achieve a new therapeutic milestone where they can potentially discontinue medication, achieving what is known as "disease remission." The specific approach may vary by country. In Surat Thani, Thailand, the Remission Service has been established as a specialized clinic under the name "Diabetes-Hypertension Medication Reduction Clinic (Remission Clinic)" in six pilot hospitals: Baan Takhun Hospital, Kanchanadit Hospital, Bannadoem Hospital, Bannasan Hospital, Chaiburi Hospital, and Koh Phangan Hospital. This initiative aims to help patients better manage their conditions and improve their quality of life through sustainable remission-focused care. A study was conducted at Baan Takhun Hospital, one of the hospitals offering the Remission Clinic service (Hfocus, 2023, May 21). The study focused on patients with diabetes who utilized the Smart NCD Clinic - Remission Clinic services (Manager Online, 2023, February 4). The sample included 27 patients with type 2 diabetes who had already achieved remission, selected from a total of 695 patients treated at the hospital. In addition, interviews were conducted with healthcare professionals and diabetic patients using the Smart NCD Clinic - Remission Clinic during May 2024. The objective of this study is to study effectiveness of a social marketing campaign to encourage BaanTakhun Hospital in Surat Thani Province, Southern Thailand to adopt the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula in order to reduce cases of Diabetes Mellitus.

### ***Participants***

The study included data of 27 patients who achieved remission from a larger sample of 695 receiving treatment from BaanTakhun Hospital's Remission Clinic Program. These participants were selected purposively based on their successful completion of the program.

### ***Data Collection***

Data collected included demographic information (age, gender, occupation), medical history (duration of diabetes, previous treatments, A1C levels before and after the intervention), weight changes, and adherence to the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula., Data were collected through interviews with healthcare professionals involved in delivering the campaign,

patients who achieved remission, and community members. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions of the campaign's impact. The qualitative data provided contextual understanding and insights. And also collected data from various sources, including databases, reports, surveys, research conducted by both government offices and universities, civil society organizations, and international organizations. The data collection took place in May 2024.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data were collected from a total of 27 patients, which included 20 females and 7 males, with their ages ranging from 40 to 90 years old, and they came from various occupations; notably, farming emerged as the most common occupation among these patients. Out of the 27 patients, 10 of them adhered to the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula, allowing them to enter the remission clinic, where they successfully experienced a reduction in their medication. Qualitative data gathered from interviews were analyzed thematically to uncover repeating themes and patterns related to the successes and challenges of the campaign's implementation and reception. The effectiveness of the communication process used to adopt the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula involves several important steps. The steps as below:

- Define the problem clearly.
- Group patients into relevant categories.
- Analyze data with input from healthcare professionals, pharmacists, and nutritionists, while defining healthy eating.
- Identify barriers such as environmental factors, educational gaps, and law enforcement issues.
- Plan strategies to maintain positive behaviors among participants for sustainable outcomes.

### **Results**

**Output:** 27 patients achieved remission. Out of the 27 patients, 10 of them adhered to the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula, allowing them to enter the remission clinic, where they successfully experienced a reduction in their medication.

**Outcome:** Understanding of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.

**Impact:** Behavioral change and the remission clinic program.

The approach to social marketing communication campaign involves collaboration among all sectors, including medical personnel from various hospital departments, families, and communities. The elements of communication include:

**Message:** 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula

**Sender:** Healthcare Professionals at BaanTakhun Hospital

**Receiver:** Patients at BaanTakhun Hospital, specifically focusing on 27 patients achieved remission clinic.

### ***Why do Healthcare Professionals use the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula?***

Healthcare professionals choose to implement the Healthy Eating Formula because it is evidence-based, promoting health and preventing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. This approach enables medical personnel to provide clear and easily actionable nutritional advice to patients. Furthermore, improvements in the patient's condition can often be achieved through behavioral adjustments. The

healthcare team must maintain an open, peer-like relationship with patients, monitor their conditions, and continually educate them on nutrition and exercise.

***What barriers do Healthcare Professionals face when using the 2:1:1 healthy eating Formula?***

Barriers encounter include:

- Challenges in helping patients change their eating behaviors.
- Patients tend to modify their eating habits only on the days they visit the hospital for treatment.
- Forgetting the details of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.
- Lack of resources or time for comprehensive nutritional counseling due to limited staffing.
- Differences in understanding among healthcare professionals who are not familiar with this guideline.

***What factors contribute to the success of using the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula for Healthcare Professionals?***

Success factors include:

- Having accessible guides or resources on the 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula in various formats.
- Establishing a support network for promoting the health of the Thai population.
- Teamwork among healthcare professionals, including collaboration between doctors, nurses, dietitians, and physical therapists, providing continuous support, monitoring, and a peer-like patient care approach.

***What are the barriers faced by patients when using the 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula?***

Patients often encounter barriers such as:

- Lack of understanding or confusion about the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.
- Misunderstanding local vegetable options compared to those recommended in the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.
- Difficulty in changing eating behaviors because of the occupation.
- Financial limitations in accessing healthy food choices.
- Lack of motivation or support from close acquaintances.
- Environmental and cultural conditions that are not conducive to following the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.
- Suratthani is a province where several types of high-sugar seasonal fruits, such as durians, are grown and sold.
- Religious ceremonies of locals traditionally involve the host providing food and snacks to guests, and these foods are often high in fat. These make it challenging for people in this province to adhere to the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.

***What success factors contribute to the use of the 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula for patients?***

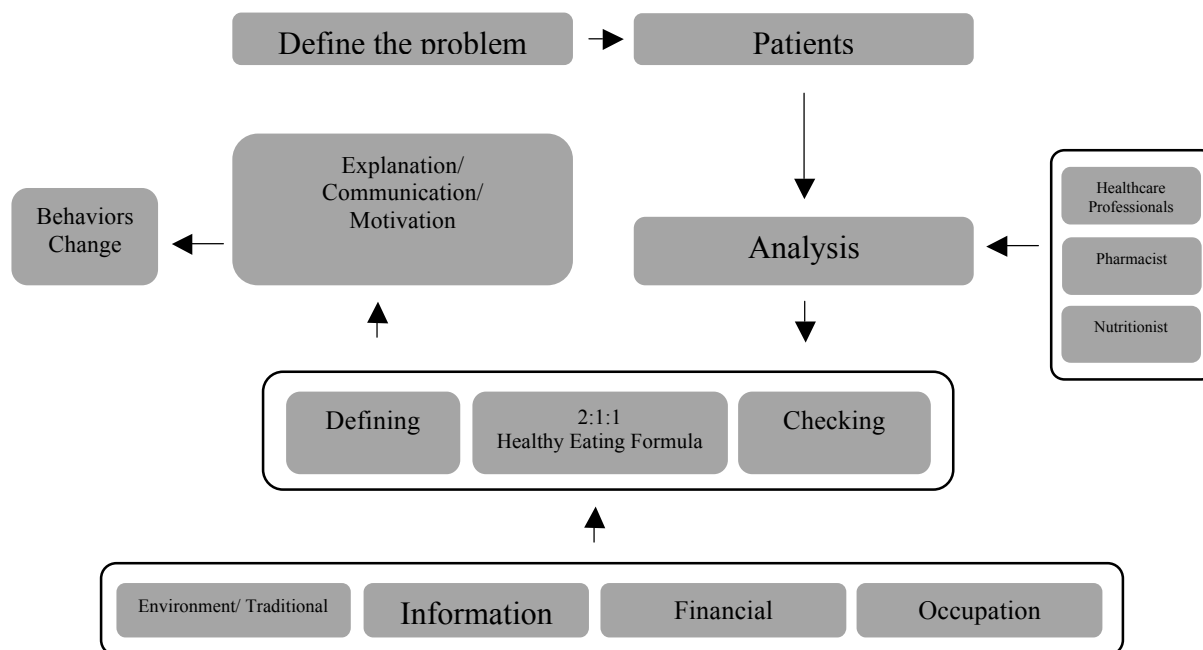
Success factors for patients include:

- Continuous guidance and support from healthcare professionals.
- Clear explanations of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula.

- Regular encouragement and reminders.
- Recommendations for easily understandable resources.
- Motivation fostered through examples of successful individuals.

**Framework**

Process of social marketing communication campaign to change behaviors of diabetes mellitus at BaanTakhun Hospital



**Discussion**

Preventing diabetes in the future depends on making positive lifestyle changes and eating healthy foods in the right amounts. This can be achieved by following the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula guideline, which suggests that two parts of your plate should be filled with vegetables and fruits, while protein and carbohydrates should each take up one part. Reducing the amount of rice and starchy foods is important, along with increasing vegetables and fruits, because the fiber in these foods helps remove fats from the body and slows down sugar absorption into the bloodstream. It's also important to track what you eat at every meal, which can help you decide what to add or cut back on next time. Additionally, making sure you get enough rest and manage stress is crucial, even if it takes some time to adjust.

The idea of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula has already been promoted widely, but its application specifically for diabetes patients is intriguing and yields direct results for them. Patients understand this concept through guidance from health professionals, including pharmacists and nutritionists who work together as a team to monitor progress.

Diabetes is a chronic disease related to metabolism, where the body cannot effectively use sugar, leading to high blood sugar levels. Managing diet and changing eating behaviors can help keep diabetes in a calm state, known as remission. If patients can control their blood sugar levels, they can reduce their medication use and overall treatment costs, which are estimated to be around 28,200 baht per person per year (Muang Thai Life, n.d.).

Using social marketing strategies to change behaviors is a noteworthy success, especially when focusing on communities facing diabetes issues. Educating patients on the right practices is essential, as some may choose foods that fill them up, like sticky rice, due to their labor-intensive jobs. Furthermore, a lack of understanding about proper nutrition and work schedules can make it difficult to eat regularly, which is another key factor to consider.

Clear communication is needed so that patients know what foods to eat, including community-specific fruits and vegetables. Some local foods, like durian in the South, can raise blood sugar levels, so consistent promotion in hospitals is necessary to help patients remember and understand the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula guideline. Additionally, showcasing success stories of individuals who have maintained normal blood sugar levels can inspire other patients and build trust in methods that have been endorsed by expert doctors in their community.

## **Conclusions**

This study emphasizes the importance of social marketing communication in promoting health behavior changes, specifically through the use of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula. While the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula is typically communicated broadly, this study focuses on its specific application for diabetic patients at BaanTakhun Hospital. The objective was to investigate how targeted marketing communication could create change within this particular group and assess the outcomes associated with using the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula. The results showed that all 10 diabetic patients who adhered to the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula were able to attend the Remission Clinic, reduce their medication, maintain a stable condition, and lower their medical expenses.

The effectiveness of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula stems from the collaboration among healthcare professionals, families, and community members, which forms the basis of communication and leads to increased patient engagement and improved health outcomes. Healthcare professionals have leveraged the extensive marketing campaigns aimed at promoting healthy eating habits among Thai citizens, specifically targeting the diabetic community at BaanTakhun Hospital.

However, challenges remain, including difficulties in changing patients' eating behaviors, the understanding of the 2:1:1 healthy eating formula and a lack of resources for nutritional counseling. The study identifies critical success factors, such as the availability of clear and accessible resources, the establishment of support networks, and the collaboration of multidisciplinary teams working together to provide ongoing guidance and monitoring.

Patients themselves face various barriers, such as confusion about dietary guidelines, financial constraints in accessing healthy foods, and a lack of motivation from those around them. Nonetheless, this study highlights that continuous support from healthcare professionals, clear explanations of the 2:1:1 formula, and motivational strategies can significantly enhance adherence to recommended dietary practices.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that future research should examine and address the complex barriers faced by both healthcare professionals and patients in implementing the 2:1:1 Healthy Eating Formula. It is essential to develop specialized educational materials, promote community engagement, disseminate reminders throughout the hospital, and create a supportive environment that encourages healthy behaviors.

Focusing on these areas will enable stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of health promotion efforts and ultimately improve the management of diabetes and other chronic diseases.

### **Recommendations**

Future study should focus on expanding the target groups and conducting experiments in diverse areas to clearly observe comparisons and differences within each context. Collecting and integrating data and results from these studies is essential for improving and refining the research, ensuring its credibility and relevance to various environments. Furthermore, effective communication that is aligned with local contexts can significantly enhance the positive impact on social change and sustainable development in the future.

Understanding the specific context of each area will help ensure that solutions are tailored to meet the needs of the local population. Additionally, it can foster community engagement in the development of policies or projects related to change, making stakeholders feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the outcomes. Future study should prioritize building partnerships between researchers and communities to facilitate collaborative learning and development, which is a crucial step toward achieving meaningful and sustainable change in society.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study could not have been achieved without the inspiration drawn from over 20 years of marketing efforts aimed at behavioral change as vision of Thai Health Promotion Foundation “All people living in Thailand have capability and live in society and environment conducive to good health”. Additionally, I have received valuable support and information from Ekkaporn Pisan, M.D. the Director of BaanTakhun Hospital, and the dedicated Healthcare Professionals at BaanTakhun Hospital.

## References

- Choi, P. H. -N. (2003). Organization of public parks and recreation web page: application of social marketing concept (Unpublished master's thesis). San Jose State University, Department of Disease Control. (2019). *NCDs Situation Report*. <https://ddc.moph.go.th/uploads/publish/1035820201005073556.pdf>
- Hfocus. (2023, May 21). *News*. <https://www.hfocus.org/content/2023/05/27677> California.
- Lightman, D. (2011). Community-based social marketing at the neighborhood scale: sustainable behavior or neighborhood sustainability? Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/67228>
- Lura Consulting. (2010). Rondeau bay community-based social marketing project: CBSM strategy report. Retrieved from [http://www.beyondattitude.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/07/Rondeau-Bay-CBSM-Strategy\\_Report.pdf](http://www.beyondattitude.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/07/Rondeau-Bay-CBSM-Strategy_Report.pdf)
- Manager Online. (2023, February 4). *Health News*. <https://mgronline.com/qol/detail/9660000011189>
- Muang Thai Life. (n.d.). *Health*. <https://www.muangthai.co.th/th/article/health/high-bill-senior-disease>
- Pickens, P. M. (2002). Community-based social marketing as a planning tool. Retrieved from <https://www.empowermentinstitute.net/index.php/docmandefault-enabler/behavior-change-research/41-ecoteam-program-in-context-ofcommunity-based-social-marketing/file>
- ThaiHealth Official. (2019, August 26). *2:1:1 Healthy Easting Formula*. <https://www.thaihealth.or.th/2-1-1>
- World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Noncommunicable diseases: Mortality*. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/topic-details/GHO/ncd-mortality>

**Contact email:** sa221021@hotmail.com



***“Shanghai in the Night”: A Study of Urban Memory on Ballroom Dance Culture in Republican-Era Shanghai Cinema (1920s-1940s)***

Qiyun Tan, Michigan State University, United States  
Yiqiao Sun, Zhejiang University, China

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

In the rapid process of modernization, Chinese metropolises like Shanghai have gradually tended towards a homogenization – the city’s identity formed by its semi-colonial history, vernacular architecture, and local’s habits has been largely replaced by modernist design, culture and lifestyle. To retrieve the vanishing urban memory, this study aims to use film as a method to trace back Shanghai’s past to one of its most distinctive urban images - the ballroom dance culture in the Republican era. The popularity of ballroom dancing represented the modern qualities of Shanghai deeply influenced by Western lifestyle, which imparted the city with a unique charm of blending culture. This study utilizes filmic materials to explore Shanghai’s ballroom dance culture from an urban perspective. More precisely, after having collected all the Republican Shanghai films (1920s to 1940s), a qualitative analysis was conducted to examine the related information embodied in filmic urban images. Through the lens of film, the urban memory on ballroom dancing is deconstructed into two facets: the venues and the participants. The venues are classified according to the architectural features, while the participants are explicated on the character’s traits represented. Furthermore, the study interprets the filmmaker’s intension and viewpoint as well as the public attitudes on ballroom dance culture to unravel the social ideology of the time. By reviving such unique urban memory, this research polishes the city’s cultural image and strengthens the local spirit, and thus to provide valuable insights for the development of Shanghai by projecting its past to the future.

Keywords: Republican Era, Film, Old Shanghai, Ballroom Dance Culture, Urban Memory

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## 1. Introduction

During China's rapid urbanization, metropolises including Beijing and Shanghai have witnessed a rapid transformation. However, this urban growth, driven mainly by economic factors, lacks cultural depth. Cities have increasingly adopted similar modern designs that often erase traces of their unique histories, making them less distinguishable from global counterparts. To enhance the vibrancy and appeal of urban spaces, it is crucial to preserve their cultural and local identities. Focusing on Shanghai, a representative international metropolis known for its thriving commerce, modernity, and openness, this research aims to explore and revive Shanghai's unique urban memory, and thereby delve into its cultural essence, and make it a more engaging and attractive place for future generations. This, in turn, will stimulate local economic growth and cultural development, as well as provide valuable insights for the growth of other cities facing similar challenges.

To enhance Shanghai's cultural image, we can trace its rich history back to the Republican era, when ballroom dance was a defining aspect of city life. Following Shanghai's open in 1843, ballroom dance was introduced by foreign residents, initially limited to a few small ballrooms often located within hotels, restaurants, clubs, or cafes, rather than as independent establishments (Ma and Bai, 2007). At this time, traditional Chinese values in the feudal society discouraged close interaction between men and women, and thus confining ballroom dancing to the expatriate community. However, during the Republican era, Chinese society entered a period of modern transformation, with Western values increasingly influencing traditional Chinese culture. Shanghai, as the commercial center of China, with its concessions and large foreign population, fostered a unique ballroom dance culture shaped by a booming commodity economy and entertainment industry. The first Chinese-owned ballroom, the Carlton Ballroom, which opened on Park Road in 1923, made a turning point (Xue, 2000). From then on, ballrooms began springing up throughout Shanghai, embodying the modern spirit of Shanghai; meanwhile ballroom dancing emerged as a favored lifestyle, and "dancing girls" became a popular profession.<sup>1</sup> By the early 1920s, Shanghai earned the moniker 'Paris of the East' renowned for its vibrant ballroom culture (Clifford, 1991).

Currently, research on Shanghai's ballroom dance culture remains limited in architecture and urban studies. The research in the fields of history and sociology generally follows two main directions:

### 1) *Studies on Dancing girls in the Republican Era*

Field (1999) explores the rise of the dancing girl profession in the Republican era, drawing on historical sources like magazines, newspapers, novels, and city guides from 1920 to 1949. Ma (2013) examines the lives of local Shanghai dancing girls in the late 1920s, focusing on their backgrounds, income, and public perception. Deng (2022) expands on this research, investigating the livelihoods of Shanghai's dancing girls from 1932 to 1937, analyzing demographics, work conditions, and income based on sources like newspapers and personal diaries. Ren (2017) identifies three roles for dancing girls: independent women, commodified products and objects of sexual fantasy. More

---

<sup>1</sup> Common Sense Newspaper, 1928 "There were over two hundred public and private ballroom dance halls of various sizes throughout Shanghai, employing around two thousand dancing girls. Nightly expenses for dancing in the entire city amounted to about forty to fifty thousand yuan, and on Saturday nights, the expense soared to as much as hundred thousand yuan. Every night, the time spent on dancing exceeded fifty thousand hours, with tens of thousands of customers frequenting ballroom dance halls every night. The assets of all ballroom dance halls in Shanghai totaled five to six million yuan."

specifically, Yang and Wan (2011) compare the dancing girls of the Republican era with Shanghai courtesans, arguing that they shared a similar social role. While these studies provide a broad view of the dancing girl community, Sun (2010) adopts a micro perspective by narrating the life of Chen Manli, a well-known dancing girl at the Paramount Hall, which provides deeper insights into the individual lives of prominent dancing girls from that period, and helps illuminate the complexities of their roles in Shanghai's social landscape.

## 2) *Studies on Ballroom Dance Halls in the Republican Era*

Scholars like Lee (1999) take ballroom dance culture as a have examined Shanghai's entertainment industry broadly, including, to portray the city's nightlife during that time. Some scholars like Zhang (2014), focus specifically on ballroom dance halls, having analyzed their historical origins, aesthetics, and influences over time. Ma and Bai (2007), from a social management perspective, investigate management practices, operational methods, and government policies of the ballroom dance halls across various administrative regions in Shanghai from 1927 to 1943. Other researchers concentrate on high-end dance halls to offer a more focused view of Shanghai's ballroom culture during this era. Gui (2013) details the evolution of Shanghai's ballroom dance hall industry, including popular songs, dance styles, and the lives of dancing girls, with Paramount Hall as a central example. Similarly, Xue presents a narrative on Paramount Hall covering its history, architectural design, and management systems. Lu (2007), drawing from his experience at Ciro's Dancing Palace in the 1940s, shares firsthand insights into its operations, the lives of dancing girls, and changes that occurred post-1949.

Despite the existing body of research, there remains a gap in analyzing the lived space and consumer groups associated with ballroom dance culture from an architectural perspective. Additionally, most studies focus on a broad, macroscopic perspective, with few exploring the ballroom dance culture through a micro and everyday lens. Furthermore, these studies rely heavily on traditional historical documents—such as newspapers, magazines, personal notes—and traditional social research methods, including interviews. While valuable, these traditional sources and methods often limit researchers from capturing an immersive, spatially aware, and daily perspective on the culture. Addressing these limitations, this study adopts an architectural and urban studies perspective, using old films shot in Shanghai during the Republican era (1920s-1940s) as primary research material to investigate the ballroom dance culture of the time. Films, as a relatively new audiovisual medium, offers several advantages for this research:

***Visual Historical Records.*** Old films from the Republican era serve as invaluable historical resources, which capture the architecture, urban landscapes, clothing, behaviors, and even the accents of people from a century ago. Although some scenes may be staged and thus not entirely authentic, directors often aimed for realism, lending these depictions considerable historical significance. Additionally, the films analyzed in this study were mostly shot on location, which enhances their accuracy. Any scenes or screenshots that are not actual settings will be identified and explained in this article.

***Microscopic Perspective.*** Films offer an intimate glimpse into daily life, and allows us to explore ballroom dance culture from a personal, micro-level perspective. Unlike conventional historical sources, films enable us to immerse ourselves in the lived experiences of

individuals from that era, and thus revealing the nuances of their everyday interactions and social dynamics.

***Sense of Space.*** Film allows us to visually and intuitively explore the spatial environment of Republican-era Shanghai, from intimate room interiors to expansive cityscapes. This medium captures both outdoor spaces—such as buildings, streets, transportation, and public areas—and indoor settings, including leisure venues, residential spaces, interior decor, and furnishings. Through film, we gain a layered understanding of Shanghai’s architectural and urban landscape, bringing the spatial and cultural contexts of that era vividly to life.

***Audio.*** As an audiovisual medium, film uniquely captures the musical and auditory landscape of its time, including background music, musical interludes, character voices and accents, and the ambient sounds of the city. Unlike textual sources that may be censored or altered, music is much more difficult to manipulate; its rhythm, melody, and other musical elements convey cultural trends and sometimes reveal ideological undercurrents intended by the director. Dialogues capture accents and speech patterns of the time, and enrich the understanding of the historical context. Since this study focuses on the ballroom dance culture, music plays a particularly crucial role that adds depth and authenticity to the exploration.

***Plot.*** The plot can serve as a lens into cultural attitudes, values, and prevailing ideologies. Through analyzing these narrative choices, we can gain insights into the societal background and underlying social trends of the time, which helps us better understand the character’s behaviors.

In summary, film as an emerging audiovisual medium offers valuable new perspectives for this study. It not only provides a personal, daily, and micro-level view of the ballroom dance culture in Republican-era Shanghai, but also delivers a sense of space and auditory elements that enhances our understanding of that historical context—insights often inaccessible through traditional sources. This study deconstructs Shanghai’s ballroom dance culture into two focal areas: the spaces where this culture thrived and the primary participants involved. It analyzes the layout, architecture, and social norms of these venues, as well as the characteristics and attire of the people engaged. Additionally, it explores the filmmakers’ perspectives and societal views on ballroom dance, offering insights into broader social contexts and trends of the time. Ultimately, this research aims to help Shanghai recovery its urban memory, rediscover its cultural essence, and preserve its identity amid rapid urbanization, thereby enhancing its attractiveness and strengthening its soft power. The findings also provide valuable insights for the development of other cities seeking to balance cultural preservation with modernization.

## **2. Classification of Ballroom Dance Culture Venues in Shanghai During the Republican Era**

Dance halls were central to the ballroom dance culture in Shanghai. By early 1949, there were 269 dance halls in the city, although only 20 held legitimate operating licenses (Lu and Sun, 2007). These venues were generally categorized as high-end or low-end each with distinct interior designs, clientele, and service styles. Despite these differences, both types carried a degree of erotic undertones. In addition, ballroom dancing was especially popular among the elite and held significant social values. For instance, in upscale restaurants and various public or private spaces, ballroom dance served as a post-dinner pastime that fostered socializing, entertainment, and lively interaction. This study examines the unique

characteristics of different dance hall types by analyzing spatial settings and social behaviors as depicted in films, and thus providing insights into how these spaces shaped Shanghai's ballroom dance culture.

## 2.1 High-end Dance Hall

During the Republican era in Shanghai, high-end dance halls were opulent venues frequented by the city's elite and foreign visitors seeking leisure and entertainment. Many of these establishments, such as the International Hotel, Paramount Hall, and St. Anna Ballroom, became iconic landmarks in Shanghai (Lee, 1999). For instance, in the film *The Spring River Flows East* (1947), Paramount Hall was referenced, underscoring its association with affluent businessman. These dance halls were known for their lavish architecture and interiors, which showcased Western influences that had permeated Shanghai, a city blending Western modernity with traditional Chinese culture in its semi-colonial context. The St. Anna Ballroom, featured in the film *The New Year's Gift* (1937), is a prime example of a high-end dance hall (Figure 1a). Distinguished by its modern Western style, marble construction, and bilingual signage, it exuded sophistication. Every detail of its interior decoration contributed to a sense of luxury, with elements such as neon lighting, silk drapes, and ornate fixtures, as depicted in *The Spring River Flows East* (Figure 1b). Spacious dance floors were surrounded by tables adorned with flowers and refreshments, while guests enjoyed live music from top orchestras, occasionally featuring foreign bands. These settings illustrate the cosmopolitan atmosphere of high-end dance halls, which symbolized Shanghai's unique fusion of Eastern and Western cultural elements.



Figure 1: (a) The Exterior Architecture of High-end Dance Hall (St. Anna Ballroom).

(b) The Interior Decor of High-end Dance Halls (in Chongqing).

Source: (a) from film *The New Year's Gift* (1937),

(b) from film *The Spring River Flows East* (1947)

The primary clientele of high-end dance halls in Republican-era Shanghai consisted of the city's elite, both local and foreign. These patrons often sought excitement after dining at restaurants or attending theaters. They frequently visit these venues with extramarital partners to enjoy leisure time with a hint of romantic or sexual undertones. For example, in *The New Year's Gift*, the theater manager is shown ballroom dancing with his extramarital partner at St. Anna Ballroom, despite being engaged. Similarly, in *The Spring River Flows East*, Zhang Zhongliang, a department store secretary, conceals his marriage to take the owner's "Sugar Daughter" to a dance hall. Attending these high-end venues required patrons to observe certain social norms (Field, 1999). As outlined in Wang Dingjiu's *Guide of Shanghai* (1932), customers were expected to arrive in cars and wear Western-style suits; it was noted that dancing girls often looked down upon patrons without a car (Wang, 1932). These social cues are echoed in films, where characters like the theater manager and Zhang are shown arriving

at the dance halls in cars, with doormen or security staff opening doors and escorting women into the venue, which exemplify the gentlemanly manners expected at these establishments.

## 2.2 Low-end Dance Hall

In contrast to the famous high-end dance halls, Shanghai had a larger number of low-end dance halls during the Republican era (Lee, 1999). As depicted in *The New Year's Gift*, these low-end halls were smaller, with modest simple storefronts and signboards displaying their names. Unlike the high-end dance halls, they lacked elaborate decorations and security guards, often marked by simple posters or signs at the entrance (Figure 2a). Catering to a less affluent clientele, these halls frequently relied on discounts and promotions to attract patrons, advertising deals like "Ten dances for One Yuan" or offering "Free Tea and Snacks." Some even used attention-grabbing gimmicks like "Balloon Releases" or "Striptease Performances", which gave these venues a more overtly erotic appeal (Figure 3). Though the interiors of low-end dance halls were simple and unadorned, their layout was similar to high-end halls, featuring a central dance floor surrounded by tables. However, the decor was much more restrained, reflecting the modest means of both the proprietors and their patrons (Figure 2b).



Figure 2: (a) The Exterior Architecture of Low-end Dance Halls.

(b) The Interior Decor of High-end Dance Halls.

Source: from film *The New Year's Gift* (1937)



Figure 3: Posters and Signboards at the Entrance of the Low-end Dance Halls.

Source: from film *The New Year's Gift* (1937)

The clientele of low-end dance halls consisted primarily of middle- and lower-class individuals, including local workers and foreign soldiers (Field, 1999). These patrons frequented the halls seeking entertainment, indulging in drinking, and sometimes looking for potential sexual partners, treating the venue as a preliminary step before visiting a brothel.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Jian Guang, "Novel Daily", 1941: "Hunting grounds for romantic encounters and dens of pleasure. Few attend the dance halls to actually dance; rather, it is a pretense to approach the dancing girls and seek intimate connections."

Unlike the refined, unwritten codes of conduct in high-end venues, low-end dance halls had no established social rules guiding interactions between customers and dancing girls. In films, patrons in these low-end halls are portrayed not only as having less money but also as lacking manners, with scenes often involving conflicts. For instance, in *The New Year's Gift*, a construction foreman is enticed by a sign advertising “Striptease Performances” and decides to enter the hall. Unfamiliar with dancing, he accidentally steps on his dancing partner’s feet, which sparks an argument. The scene escalates as the foreman slaps the dancing girl and overturns a table, illustrating the more chaotic and rougher environment of these establishments.

### 2.3 Other Venues

Beyond dance halls with subtle erotic undertones, ballroom dancing also played an important social role among Shanghai’s upper class, frequently appearing at private gatherings, celebrations, and events. After a satisfying meal, ballroom dancing often served as entertainment to enhance the atmosphere. In these instances, ballroom dancing was not limited to dance halls but took place in lavish villas and private homes of the wealthy. For example, in *The Spring River Flows East*, characters perform a tango at their wedding, emphasizing ballroom dancing’s role in upper-class social rituals (Figure 4a). Besides, ballroom dancing was also popular in upscale restaurants. In *The Spring River Flows East*, after the World War II, people celebrating their return to Shanghai engage in ballroom dancing at a banquet (Figure 4b). This culture, originating in Shanghai, spread to other cities in China. Following the Japanese occupation of Nanjing, Chongqing became the “Provisional Capital”, drawing elites and wealthy merchants who brought the ballroom dancing with them. In the film *Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (1947), upper-class individuals are shown dancing in high-end restaurants in Chongqing, highlighting how ballroom dance culture extended beyond Shanghai to other urban centers (Figure 4c).

Ballroom dance events held in upscale restaurants, public venues, and private residences emphasized etiquette similar to that of high-end dance halls. Typically, the host would invite a guest to dance, but social decorum often required the invited person to decline initially out of modesty. To enliven the atmosphere, other guests might suggest piano accompaniment or offer encouraging words, which persuades the invitee to participate. This custom is depicted in *The New Year's Gift*, where a banker invites a lady to sing. Initially, she declines, citing a sore throat, but after someone offers to play the piano as accompaniment, the lady agrees to perform. Likewise, in *The Spring River Flows East*, two characters are invited to perform a tango. One of them initially declines but eventually agrees after gentle encouragement from a store owner. These scenes highlight how ballroom dance in upper-class settings was not only about dancing itself but also about following social rituals that underscored courtesy, grace, and mutual encouragement.





Figure 4: (a) Ballroom Dance Culture in Luxurious Villas of the Upper-Class Individuals.  
 (b) Ballroom Dance Culture in Upscale Restaurants.  
 (c) Ballroom Dance Culture in Upscale Restaurants.

Source: (a) from film *The Spring River Flows East* (1947), (b) from film *The New Year's Gift* (1937), (c) from film *Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (1947)

### 3. Singing and Dancing Girls in Ballroom Dance Hall

In addition to ballroom dance halls, singing and dancing girls play a prominent role in representing the ballroom dance culture of Republican-era Shanghai as portrayed in films. During the 1920s, the decline of the feudal system and the influence of Western trends among the commercial and political elite provided urban women with greater social freedom. This shift, along with the rise of magazines, radio broadcasts, and the film industry, spurred the emergence of new professions. The Republican era (1920s–1940s) saw the rise of songstresses, movie stars, singing girls, and dancing girls, each contributing to the vibrant entertainment scene in Shanghai (Field, 1999).

#### 3.1 The Portrayal of Singing and Dancing Girls in Films

The filmic portrayal of singing and dancing girls in Republican-era Shanghai reveals a nuanced mix of traits, which emphasizes not only their modern, Western-influenced style but also their commodified roles. While the broader population struggled for basic needs during this tumultuous period, the luxurious clothing of dancing girls suggested a level of material comfort and a higher standard of living. However, their livelihoods depended on catering to male desire and social expectations, and thus reducing them to objects of entertainment and desire (Ren, 2017). For example, in *The New Year's Gift*, the dancing girl Jiang wears a white skirt or floral dress paired with black stockings, shiny heels, and short, curled hair with a stylish fringe, creating a trendy, sensual look (Figure 5a). Her six-year-old cousin also wears a fluffy skirt and heels (Figure 5b), subtly indicating her vulnerability within a commodity society. Meanwhile, the singing girl Yang Lijuan exudes elegance with her neat hair, jewelry, and a fashionable cheongsam (Figure 5c). These outfits were typical among dancing girls of the Republican era, characterized by chic, modern garment that accentuates their figures. Their elaborate, sensual attire primarily served to appeal to male patrons, whose favor was crucial for their economic survival (Ren, 2017). Consequently, the commodification of their bodies assigned these women a set of social labels that shaped their identities within the ballroom dance culture, blending elegance with the transactional nature of their roles. Their costly, carefully curated looks exemplify Shanghai's trend of commodifying women's bodies, underscoring how female beauty became a marketed asset in service to male fantasy and social status (Lee, 1999). This commodification aligns with the broader cultural shift of the time, where women's fashion and social roles became deeply entangled with the city's identity as a modern, Western-influenced metropolis.





Figure 5: (a) The Character Image of Jiang Xiuxia. (b) The Character Image of He Rongrong. (c) The Character Image of Yang Lijuan.

Source: from film *The New Year's Gift* (1937)

### 3.2 The Destinies of Singing and Dancing Girls in Films

The lives of singing and dancing girls in Republican Shanghai films embody a complex contradiction. On one hand, they symbolize a modern profession emerging in the 1920s that allowed women a degree of independence and self-sufficiency, a sharp contrast to the limited roles for women in traditional feudal society (Ren, 2017). These roles brought an opportunity to pursue personal choices in love and marriage, and the allure of the dance halls made dancing a glamorous, exciting activity for many young women. This sense of ambition and allure is vividly portrayed in *The New Year's Gift*, where six-year-old He Rongrong dreams of dancing on stage, encouraged by her family's approval and fueled by hopes of gaining fame. On the other hand, these women were still confined by the pressures of a male-dominated society, unable to fully control their fates. Amid the instability of the Republican era, marked by war and economic downturn, their livelihoods relied on the support of male patrons. Without this backing, they often faced severe hardship. For example, in *The New Year's Gift*, Jiang Xiuxia, originally a stage actress, finds herself abandoned by her fiancé and, without male support, is forced to become a singing girl in a high-end ballroom. Over time, economic struggles and societal constraints ultimately push her into a low-end dance hall, illustrating how vulnerable these women were to the broader societal and economic forces of the era. Her story reveals the precarious nature of these women's lives, where moments of glamour could quickly give way to hardship in a volatile, patriarchal society.

The complex and often tragic portrayal of singing and dancing girls in Republican-era films reflects the broader societal conditions of the time. Simone de Beauvoir's perspective that femininity is a social construct rather than an inherent trait highlights the idea that women's identities were largely shaped by societal expectations, with men in dominant roles defining women's place in society (Beauvoir, 1949; Ren, 2017). In dance halls, women were elevated to a unique status, even described in *Guide of Shanghai* as having a more favorable position than men, despite the broader Chinese culture's patriarchal foundation (Wang, 1932). Yet, while these women enjoyed newfound freedom, Republican society also viewed them through a lens of commodification and objectification. Many left-wing filmmakers depicted them as victims of modern consumerism, and use their tragic fates to critique the societal conditions. For instance, in *The New Year's Gift*, Jiang was forced to perform provocatively to meet audience expectations, and her poster portrays her in revealing attire, emphasizing her reduced agency. This degradation extends even to young girls, as shown with six-year-old He (Figure 6). Their experiences underscore the scarcity of viable, respectable work for women in the Republican era. As highlighted in the *Linglong* magazine (1936), although women could pursue livelihoods, they often faced the difficult choice between repetitive manual labor and the alluring yet stigmatized profession of dancing (Field, 1999). Thus, these

films not only depict singing and dancing girls as modern women but also as figures ensnared by societal constraints. Their identities were caught in a conflict between empowerment and exploitation, shaped by the dual forces of modern opportunity and deep-seated patriarchal values.

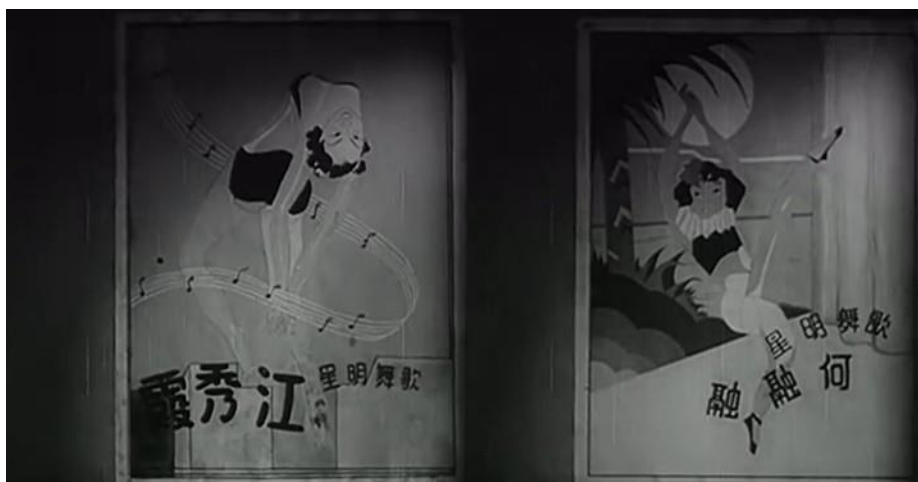


Figure 6: Posters Featuring Jiang Xiuxia and He Rongrong.  
Source: from film *The New Year's Gift* (1937)

In conclusion, the singing and dancing girls in Republican-era Shanghai films represented a dual identity: they were both symbols of the new modern woman and commodified objects in a male-dominated society. These women embodied independence and self-sufficiency, moving away from traditional, submissive roles and stepping into positions where they enjoyed financial autonomy. They were also fashionable icons, embodying new gender dynamics as they captivated the male gaze and engaged in Shanghai's rapidly evolving commercial culture. They stood as central figures in Shanghai's burgeoning commercial culture, with their personas frequently appearing on the packaging or advertisements for commodities like toothpaste, face creams, soap, and became the carriers of the city's material culture. At the same time, these women remained vulnerable to the patriarchy, often treated as commodities, with limited control over their lives. Through their presence, they both reflected and shaped the collective urban imagination of Shanghai, which represents the city's glamour, modernity, and material allure. As Shanghai's social landscape changed, these women became cultural mediators that guides residents through modern lifestyle shifts and embodies the moral and cultural values of a city on the edge of modernity. Thus, they were icons of both empowerment and commodification, representing Shanghai's unique urban image in an era of social transformation.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study uses an architectural and urban lens to analyze Shanghai's ballroom dance culture during the Republican era, and draws primarily from films shot on location in Shanghai. By focusing on key dance venues and main participants, this research aims to reconstruct a vivid picture of the ballroom dance culture in early 20th-century Shanghai. include high-end and low-end dance halls, as well as alternative spaces like upscale restaurants and luxurious private villas. Venues explored include high-end and low-end dance halls, as well as alternative spaces like upscale restaurants and luxurious private villas. The films provide a direct visual reference for understanding these locations' architecture, interior designs, and spatial arrangements, and offers an immersive sense of their ambience. Additionally, the plots

reveal norms and etiquette associated with ballroom dancing. The main participants—singing and dancing girls—are examined for their roles, attire, and symbolic portrayals in the films, as well as unpacks the nuanced messages these characters conveyed in the context of their time. By analyzing these depictions, this study sheds light on contemporary attitudes towards and offers insights into the social dynamics and ideologies of the Republican era. Ultimately, this research contributes to preserving Shanghai’s urban historical memory, and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of its ballroom dance culture during a transformative period in the city’s history.

During the Republican era, Shanghai was undergoing a profound transformation, transitioning from feudalism to modernity and from an agricultural society to an industrial one. In this context, the city uniquely combined traditional and modern elements, while integrated local culture with Western influences. Japanese writer Muramatsu Shofu referred to Shanghai as the “Magic City” to capture the novel and transformative atmosphere that Republican Shanghai presented to him (Muramatsu, 1924). This backdrop fostered Shanghai’s ballroom dance culture, which became an emblem of the city’s modernity, and symbolized its harmonious blend of local and global influences. The ballroom dance hall, in many ways, served as a microcosm of Shanghai itself (Ma, 2013). In the 21st century, Shanghai’s culture heritage has sparked renewed public interest, reflected in a “nostalgic trend” of products inspired by old Shanghai, such as cosmetics and perfumes adorned with cheongsam-clad dancing girls (Figure 7). This trend underscores the enduring image of these dancing girls as a representation of Shanghai’s urban identity. However, nostalgia alone may lack the depth needed to fully appreciate the intricate cultural fusion embodied in this era, reflecting a certain fading of Shanghai’s urban spirit today (Yang, 2006). While ballroom dance culture is no longer a central feature in Shanghai’s contemporary life, it remains embedded in the city’s collective memory. This study utilizes old films as a medium to excavate Shanghai’s urban memory, and to preserve its local identity and cultural essence amid ongoing urban transformations. The prosperity of ballroom dance culture in old Shanghai was supported by the period’s relatively liberal social atmosphere, the ideological liberation movements of the Republican era, and the vibrant capital and entertainment industries. Although Shanghai’s 21st-century social environment and culture differ from those of the Republican era, the enduring spirit of openness, freedom, international integration, and inclusiveness remains integral to the city’s identity. By retaining these qualities, Shanghai can continue to cultivate its unique cultural allure on the global stage.



Figure 7: The Image of Old Shanghai Cheongsam-Wearing Dancing Girls Appears on the Packaging of Nostalgia-Themed Cultural Products Nowadays.  
Source: Author self-captured at a shop named 'Morden Lady' on Nanluogu Lane, Dongcheng District, Beijing, in 2023

## References

- Clifford, N. (1991). *Spoiled Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s*. The University Press of New England, Hanover.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The Second Sex*.
- Deng, C. (2022). The Survival Status and Group Features of Chinese Dancing Girls in Shanghai in the Republic of China (1932-1937). *Academic Journal of Jingchu*, 23(2), 81-88.
- Field, A. D. (1999). Selling Souls in Sin City: Shanghai Singing and Dancing Hostesses in Print, Film, and Politics, 1920–1949. In Zhang, Y. (Ed.), *Cinema Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (pp. 99-127).
- Gui, Q. (2013). Shanghai's Ballrooms and Their Dance Activities During the Republic China: The Case of Paramount Ballroom. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (3), 53-57.
- Lee, L. O. (1999). *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Harvard University Press.
- Lu, Z. and Sun, Q. a. (2007). Some Insights About the Old Shanghai City's Dancing Palace. *Historical Review*, 69-72.
- Ma, J. (2013). Dancing with You—on the Formation of Chinese Dancing Girls in Shanghai in the Middle and Late 1920s. *Historical Review*, (4), 104-111.
- Ma, J. and Bai, H. (2007). Dance Halls Managed by Three Shanghai City Governments from 1927 to 1943. *Journal of Social Sciences*, (8), 169-186.
- Muramatsu, S. (1924). *Mato*.
- Ren, W. (2017). Research on the Dancing Girls' Identity in Shanghai 1912 - 1949. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (5), 41-45.
- Sun, Q. a. (2010). Memoirs of the Paramount Hall: Anecdotes of Shanghai Ballroom Dance Halls in the Republican Era. *Social Sciences Digest*, (4), 66-68.
- Wang, D. (1932). *Guide of Shanghai*. Shanghai Central Bookstore, Shanghai.
- Xue, L. (2000). Dancing Girls and Dance Halls of Old Shanghai. *Century*, (5), 34-35.
- Yang, M. (2006). Shanghai Ukiyo-E: Factors of the Magic City. *South Reviews*, (18), 32-35.
- Yang, Y. and Wan, N. (2011). Analyzing the Characteristics of Dancing Girls in the Republican Era: Focus on Shanghai Dancing Girls. *Tribune of Social Sciences*, (4), 224-228.
- Zhang, L. (2014). Reinterpretation of the Modern Urban Culture of Shanghai "Ballroom Dance". *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (5), 84-88.

**Contact email:** [yiqiao9405@163.com](mailto:yiqiao9405@163.com)



## *Cultural Symbolism in Vietnamese Horror Films*

Liem Bui Quoc, RMIT University Vietnam, Vietnam

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Vietnamese horror cinema has carved a niche in the global film industry, distinguished by its use of cultural symbolism to evoke fear. This study scrutinizes the intricate ways in which Vietnamese horror films incorporate indigenous beliefs, customs, and folklore to instill a profound sense of dread among local viewers. It revolves around three pivotal questions: the method by which these films infuse cultural symbols to craft a fear that is both nuanced and culturally relevant; the degree to which these symbols enhance the films' overarching messages or social critiques, possibly reflecting wider societal concerns or historical accounts; and the contrast in the depiction of these symbols in Vietnamese horror films against those from other national cinemas like Thai, Japanese, or American. The research dissects four acclaimed Vietnamese horror movies: "Thất Sơn Tâm Linh" (Kunmanthong), "Quả Tim Máu" (Vengeful Heart), "Bóng Đè" (The Ancestral), and "Lời Nguyễn Huyết Ngải" (Blood Curse). By analyzing the employment of cultural symbols in these narratives, the study endeavors to enrich the comprehension of Vietnamese horror cinema's unique faculty for tapping into the specific fears and anxieties of its audience, thereby contributing to the genre's discourse. This exploration into the heart of Vietnamese horror aims to unveil how cultural underpinnings shape the genre's impact and resonance with its audience.

Keywords: Cultural Symbolism, Indigenous Beliefs, Social Critique, Vietnamese Horror Cinema, Fear

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

A group of adventurers incidentally stumble upon an ancient statue, accidentally releasing an evil curse that binds them to a vengeful soul. This scary script is inspired by a legend about Kunmanthong, a Khmer item that is strong and soaked in a dark mystery. It shows the combination of typical folk and horror in Vietnamese horror cinema (Nguyen, 2023).

This unique spirit is mostly defined by a complex picture of Vietnamese culture interwoven in the film stories. Vietnamese horror films utilize a strong tool: cultural image. These images, permeated by religious beliefs, long-standing traditions and chilling legends, hit the Vietnamese audience's psyche and evoke gentle scary feelings (Le, 2018). Though they are the scenes of votive paper burning, prayer whispering, or the angry return of an ancestor who has not yet rested, each symbol exploits a scary source and cultural belief, transforming the familiar into the terrifying.

This paper delves into this enthralling domain, exploring the following inquiries:

RQ1: How do Vietnamese horror films utilize specific cultural imagery to evoke a layered sense of terror for Vietnamese viewers?

RQ2: How do the cultural images employed in these films contribute to the overarching themes or social critique conveyed in the narratives?

RQ3: In what ways does the utilization of cultural imagery in Vietnamese horror differ from its portrayal in the horror cinema of another national cinema (e.g., Thai, Japanese)?

Through an examination of four prominent contemporary Vietnamese horror films – Kumathong (That Son Tam Linh, 2019), Vengeful Heart (Qua tim mau, 2014), The Ancestral (Bong de, 2022) and Blood Curse (Loi nguyen huyet ngai, 2012) - This research aims to clarify the power of cultural image in Vietnamese horror films and its role in shaping fear and social discourse.

## Literature Review

### *Unveiling Cultural Depths: Exploring Symbolism in Vietnamese Cinema*

Horror cinema operates by going deep into fear and insecurity of humans. Scholars in horror genres, such as Robin Wood (1986), argue that these films play a vital role in allowing them to face this fear in a controlled and safe environment. This discovery is based on usual cultural themes, distorted and twisted to evoke insecure feeling (Clover, 1992). Besides, horror stories often use specific archetypes such as "Other" or a weak girl who has an accident to stir up terror and explore deeper themes (Carroll, 1990).

Cultural symbols wield significant influence in horror cinema. Leveraging viewers' shared comprehension of their cultural significance, these symbols can evoke a nuanced sense of fear (Le, 2018). As Clover (1992) notes, horror often capitalizes on the "monstrous-feminine" archetype to evoke anxieties surrounding gender roles and societal norms. Similarly, when religious symbols, folklore entities, and customary practices are presented within a horrifying narrative context, they can tap into profound fears and beliefs specific to a particular culture (Silver, 1999).



Vietnamese horror cinema has garnered local acclaim in recent years for its distinctive amalgamation of cultural motifs and chilling storylines (Tran, 2020). These films harness the potency of cultural symbolism to evoke fear that resonates deeply with Vietnamese audiences (Le, 2018). By incorporating symbols derived from Vietnamese spiritual beliefs, ancient traditions, and eerie legends, these movies delve into a reservoir of cultural anxieties, transforming the familiar into the terrifying.

### ***Unraveling Cultural Fears: Exploring Vietnamese Cultural Beliefs in Horror***

Vietnamese cultural heritage presents a diverse array of beliefs and customs that seamlessly intertwine with the horror genre. Unlike Western horror, which is often about the realm of the supernatural and demonic, Vietnamese horror frequently describes the realm of spirits and the delicate equilibrium between the living and the departed (Le, 2018).

Central to Vietnamese culture is the profound reverence and homage paid to ancestors. This reverence profoundly influences horror narratives, often portraying the phenomenon known as "bóng đè" (literally translating to "pressing shadow"), where a malevolent spirit believed to be a restless ancestor weighs heavily on the sleeper's chest, inducing paralysis and dread (Tran, 2017). The disregard for ancestral customs or the failure to honor the departed properly can unleash vengeful spirits, a recurring motif explored in films.

Vietnamese animistic beliefs, which posit that all living beings possess a soul ("vía"), underpin apprehensions regarding soul deprivation and malevolent spirits. Horror movies may depict malevolent entities stealing the "vía," resulting in illness or even death (Nguyen, 2016). Moreover, the concept of "vía" is intricately linked to the dichotomy of "dương" (positive energy) and "âm" (negative energy) forces, central tenets in Vietnamese cosmology. The disruption of this equilibrium, often through acts of violence or transgression, can invite malevolent spirits into the mortal realm.

Vietnamese folklore is replete with chilling narratives that serve as fertile ground for horror storytelling. Films like "Thất Sơn Tâm Linh" (Kunmanthong) (Lê Bình Giang, Trần Hàm, Phan Gia Nhật Linh, 2019) draw upon the legend of the "Kunmanthong," a potent Khmer artifact reputed to harbor sinister powers. These legends act as cultural touchstones, enabling filmmakers to tap into existing fears and beliefs within the Vietnamese audience (Tran, 2020).

### ***A Comparative Exploration: Vietnamese Horror and the Fear of the Unseen***

This study looks at the influence of cultural symbolism on Vietnamese horror films, specifically examining how it cultivates a distinct sense of fear among local audiences. To grasp the unique essence of Vietnamese horror, it is imperative to juxtapose it with another national cinema renowned for its robust horror tradition. In this instance, we turn our attention to Thai horror and Japanese horror, celebrated for its eerie portrayals of vengeful spirits seeking retribution.

Thai horror frequently depicts the notion of "phi," malevolent spirits driven by a profound sense of injustice or violent demise. Works such as "Pee Mak" (2013) by Banjong Pisanthanakun blend humor with horror, narrating the tale of a lingering spirit unable to depart until his wife acknowledges his true form. These narratives often probe themes of karma and the repercussions of misdeeds, wherein the deceased return to exact suffering upon those who have wronged them (Vajdowicz, 2008).

This thematic focus on vengeful spirits contrasts with the approach taken in Vietnamese horror, which goes deeper into apprehensions surrounding the delicate equilibrium between the living and the deceased, ancestral reverence, and the spiritual realm. Although both cultures employ ghosts and spirits in their narratives, the underlying fears and motivations animating these entities diverge significantly.

Japanese horror presents a stark contrast to Vietnamese fears through its portrayal of the infamous vengeful spirits known as "Onryō" (Chow, 2004). These specters, driven by intense fury and a profound sense of betrayal, often appear as pale, wrathful apparitions bent on avenging past wrongs. Works like "Ju-On: The Grudge" (2002) directed by Takashi Shimizu exemplify the formidable power of the "Onryō," whose malevolent curse spreads like wildfire, afflicting torment upon anyone unfortunate enough to cross its path. This thematic emphasis on wrath and the relentless pursuit of vengeance generates a unique atmosphere of terror distinct from Vietnamese horror. While both cultural narratives incorporate vengeful spirits, the "Onryō" epitomize a ferocious wrath and a thirst for retribution, juxtaposing the Vietnamese preoccupation with disrupting ancestral harmony and apprehensions regarding the spirit realm.

## Methodology

### *Unveiling Fear: A Qualitative Inquiry Into Cultural Symbolism in Vietnamese Horror Cinema*

This study is about the realm of Vietnamese horror cinema, with a specific focus on the utilization of cultural symbols to evoke fear and convey nuanced messages. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, this investigation will engage in a meticulous examination of four prominent Vietnamese horror films: "Thất Sơn Tâm Linh" (Kunmanthong) directed by Lê Bình Giang, Trần Hàm, and Phan Gia Nhật Linh, "Quả Tim Máu" (Vengeful Heart) by Victor Vũ, "Bóng Đè" (The Ancestral) by Lê Văn Việt, and "Lời Nguyền Huyết Ngải" (Blood Curse) by Bùi Thạc Chuyên.

Adhering to established principles in film studies methodology (Branston & Stafford, 2000), this analysis will entail a thorough examination of various cinematic elements encompassing narrative structures, visual imagery, sound design, and mise-en-scène. Emphasis will be placed on the portrayal of Vietnamese cultural symbols, including spiritual beliefs, rituals, customs, and folklore. By closely scrutinizing the integration of these symbols within the films' narrative frameworks, visual aesthetics, and auditory compositions, this research aims to elucidate the multi-faceted sense of fear they elicit among Vietnamese audiences (Nguyen, 2016). Through this detailed exploration, the study seeks to unveil the manifestation of specific cultural anxieties and beliefs, thereby illuminating the distinctive brand of horror inherent to the Vietnamese context.

## Results

### *Fear Through the Familiar: Unveiling the Power of Vietnamese Symbols (RQ1)*

Thất Sơn Tâm Linh (Kunmanthong) intricately weaves elements of Vietnamese cultural imagery to evoke layers of fear specifically tailored for its Vietnamese audience. The film is about concerns related to ancestral reverence and the vindictive tendencies attributed to departed spirits. Notably, it explores the significance of "bùa hộ mệnh" (amulets) within

Vietnamese folklore. While traditionally viewed as protective talismans against malevolent forces, the film portrays instances where these amulets, when corrupted or mishandled, bring about calamity, reflecting apprehensions regarding the reversal of their intended safeguarding.

Moreover, the narrative exploits the Vietnamese ritual of "cúng cô hồn" (offerings to wandering spirits) to heighten tension. Scenes depicting neglect or improper execution of these offerings instill a sense of disquietude. Vietnamese viewers recognize the imperative of appeasing these spirits, and the film accentuates the dread of incurring their ire through negligence in observing these rituals. A poignant illustration occurs when a character displays disrespect towards an offering, triggering a harrowing encounter with a wrathful spirit. Through these cultural motifs, *Thật Sơn Tâm Linh* depicts deeply ingrained beliefs, crafting an atmosphere of dread that surpasses the conventional jump scares prevalent in typical horror cinema.

Victor Vũ's *Quả Tim Máu* (Vengeful Heart) skillfully integrates Vietnamese cultural elements to evoke a haunting ambiance resonant with themes of societal hierarchy, broken commitments, and the lingering potency of resentment. Central to the film's narrative is the notion of "oán linh," spirits of vengeance stemming from unresolved animosity. This narrative device taps into Vietnamese beliefs concerning the afterlife, where intense negative emotions can materialize as vengeful entities seeking restitution. A pivotal moment illustrating this occurs when the protagonist, Minh, breaches a solemn pledge made to his departed wife. Through poignant flashbacks and symbolic imagery such as a shattered locket, the film underscores the gravity of this oath. Subsequently, Minh is besieged by nightmares and inexplicable phenomena, suggestive of the wrath of the "oán linh."

Moreover, *Quả Tim Máu* adeptly employs the cultural motif of "bùa hộ mệnh" (amulets) in a duplicitous manner. Initially presented as a safeguard for Minh, the amulet becomes a conduit for the malevolent spirit's influence. This manipulation of a trusted symbol instills apprehension by underscoring the potential hazards of placing undue reliance on external protections. A chilling sequence depicts the amulet ominously aglow, presaging the escalating grip of the malevolent spirit. By subverting these cultural symbols, the film cultivates a climate of unease and skepticism, prompting viewers to question the veracity of safeguarding measures and the repercussions of betraying sacred commitments.

Le Van Viet's *Bóng Đè* (The Ancestral) strategically incorporates Vietnamese cultural motifs to evoke a deeply personal and disconcerting sense of fear. Drawing from Vietnamese folklore, which suggests that the soul can momentarily detach from the body during sleep, rendering it susceptible to spiritual assaults, *Bóng Đè* exploits this belief to depict characters grappling with terrifying hallucinations and a sense of helplessness while immobilized. An illustrative instance occurs when a character awakens to find themselves paralyzed, confronted by a menacing, shadowy presence. This evocative portrayal capitalizes on the cultural apprehension surrounding "bóng đè," instilling an immediate and palpable sense of dread.

Moreover, the film interweaves the significance of "cúng cô hồn" (offerings to wandering spirits) to heighten its horror elements. Scenes depicting neglected ancestral altars or improper observance of these rituals contribute to a mounting sense of unease. Vietnamese viewers, cognizant of the imperative to appease ancestral spirits, are sensitized to the amplified fear of repercussions when these ceremonial practices are neglected. A poignant narrative strand might involve a character grappling with nightmares or inexplicable

phenomena following their failure to adhere to the prescribed "cúng cô hồn" rites. By adeptly employing these cultural symbols, Bồng Đè crafts a domestic horror narrative wherein the source of terror emanates not from external entities, but from the potential disruption of the delicate equilibrium between the living and the ancestral realm.

Bùi Thạc Chuyên's *Lời Nguyễn Huyét Ngải* (Blood Curse) tells the intricate fabric of Vietnamese spiritual beliefs to instill a sense of apprehension rooted in the ramifications of meddling with forbidden realms. The film prominently features the concept of "ngải," a potent manifestation of black magic believed to harness formidable spirits for personal ends. This exploration taps into a pervasive Vietnamese apprehension regarding the perilous implications and moral quandaries associated with such esoteric practices. A pivotal juncture within the narrative might portray a character clandestinely engaging in a "ngải" ritual, underscoring the clandestine nature and societal taboo surrounding such acts. Visuals characterized by darkness and foreboding, coupled with unsettling incantations or musical accompaniment, serve to intensify the prevailing sense of disquiet.

Moreover, the film intricately examines the notion of "oan linh" (vengeful spirits) in a novel light. Rather than solely focusing on spirits wronged by the living, *Lời Nguyễn Huyét Ngải* posits that the vengeful spirit could emerge because of the "ngải" ritual itself. This narrative device taps into the apprehension surrounding unintended repercussions and the potential for malevolent forces to recoil upon their wielders. A chilling sequence might depict a character initially reaping the benefits of "ngải" magic, only to later find themselves besieged by nightmares or haunted by a vengeful specter. This reversal of fortune underscores the film's underlying commentary on the hazards of manipulating forces beyond human comprehension.

### ***Beyond Chills: Social Commentary Embedded in Cultural Symbols (RQ2)***

The selected Vietnamese horror films adeptly employ cultural symbols not merely to instill fear but also to convey poignant messages and social critique. This infusion of cultural anxieties into the narrative fabric transcends the realm of pure horror, offering profound insights into contemporary Vietnamese society.

An overarching theme across these films revolves around the significance of ancestral reverence and adherence to traditional rituals, evident in works like *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh* and *Bồng Đè*. These narratives underscore the repercussions of disregarding age-old customs, tapping into societal apprehensions concerning social hierarchy and filial obligations. Scenes portraying neglected ancestral altars or improper offerings serve as more than atmospheric embellishments; they serve as a critique, underscoring the imperative of upholding these traditions to preserve harmony between the living and the deceased—a concept deeply ingrained in Vietnamese cultural ethos.

Moreover, the portrayal of vengeful spirits in films such as *Quả Tim Máu* and *Lời Nguyễn Huyét Ngải* transcends conventional jump scares, intertwining themes of broken promises, societal pressures, and historical injustices. For instance, in *Quả Tim Máu*, the emergence of a vengeful spirit may symbolize the repercussions of a character's unkept pledge, accentuating the enduring impacts of human actions. This narrative device serves as a social commentary, encouraging viewers to contemplate the significance of social accountability and honoring commitments.

### ***Eerie Landscapes: Insightful Social Commentary in Vietnamese Horror Cinema***

The selected Vietnamese horror films ingeniously employ cultural symbols not solely to evoke fear but also to interweave nuanced yet impactful social commentary. By showing themes encompassing environmental degradation, historical wounds, and societal disparities, these cinematic works present a profound critique of Vietnamese society.

In *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh*, for instance, the majestic beauty and spiritual resonance of the Thất Sơn mountains serve as a poignant backdrop for a narrative addressing greed and ecological devastation. The portrayal of corrupted amulets and misappropriated spells subtly critiques the exploitation of natural resources for personal enrichment. Moreover, the depiction of vengeful spirits and their ensuing repercussions can be construed as a cautionary narrative regarding the perilous consequences of disrupting the fragile equilibrium between humanity and the environment. A chilling scene could depict a character desecrating a sacred site to unearth powerful minerals, only to be met with a vengeful spirit symbolizing the mountains' retribution. This interweaving of environmental anxieties with the misuse of cultural symbols creates a potent message about the consequences of disrupting the natural order.

*Bóng Đè*'s exploration of sleep paralysis mentions deeper the realm of historical trauma. The film's unsettling ambiance and exploration of suppressed anxieties may serve as a reflection on the enduring scars of Vietnam's tumultuous past. The utilization of the "bóng đè" phenomenon may symbolize the weight of unresolved conflicts and the specters of history haunting subsequent generations. A scene showcasing a character experiencing "bóng đè" amidst nightmarish visions of war and violence exemplifies this connection. The "bóng đè" spirit could be interpreted as a manifestation of unresolved historical trauma, haunting the present generation through sleep disturbances and anxieties. This approach utilizes a familiar cultural symbol to address a complex social issue.

*Lời Nguyền Huyết Ngải*'s chilling depiction of "ngải" magic transcends mere supernatural intrigue. The film's portrayal of characters resorting to forbidden practices can be interpreted as a commentary on societal disparities and the desperation they engender. The allure of "ngải" as a shortcut to success may reflect anxieties stemming from navigating a swiftly changing social milieu, where economic pressures and aspirations for upward mobility can lure individuals into perilous paths. Through its portrayal of the dire consequences of such choices, the film offers a critique of societal frameworks that render individuals powerless and vulnerable. A scene depicting a character struggling financially resorting to a secret "ngải" ritual, only to face devastating consequences, exemplifies this theme. By portraying the "ngải" not just as a source of power but also of potential social ruin, the film offers a commentary on the desperation that can arise from a society grappling with economic disparity.

These examples underscore the depth of Vietnamese horror cinema, wherein cultural symbols serve as conduits to explore intricate social issues. Beyond eliciting scares, these films offer a unique perspective through which to contemplate contemporary Vietnamese society.

### ***A Tale of Two Terrors: Comparing Vietnamese and Thai and Japanese Horror (RQ3)***

Vietnamese horror films, exemplified by works such as *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh* and *Bóng Đè*, place a strong emphasis on ancestral reverence and societal harmony. These narratives underscore the significance of upholding traditional rituals and respecting ancestors, with

disruptions to this delicate equilibrium serving as primary sources of fear. By delving into anxieties surrounding social order and filial piety, Vietnamese horror uniquely blends cultural symbols with social commentary to evoke a distinct sense of dread.

In contrast, Thai horror cinema often draws upon Buddhist concepts of karma and reincarnation to craft its narratives. Films like *Shutter* (2008) and *Pee Mak* (2013) frequently feature vengeful spirits seeking retribution for past injustices, reflecting a deep-rooted belief in cosmic justice. Additionally, Thai horror is characterized by its exploration of the grotesque and macabre, utilizing elaborate ghost lore and unsettling visuals to evoke fear and unease among audiences.

Japanese horror, epitomized by classics such as *Ringu* (1998) and *Ju-On* (2002), depicts psychological terror and the uncanny. These films often exploit social anxieties and personal vulnerabilities to create chilling atmospheres, blurring the lines between reality and the supernatural. Masters of the genre, like Kiyoshi Kurosawa, adeptly manipulate audience perceptions, leaving viewers questioning the nature of existence itself in works such as *Pulse* (2001) and *Cure* (1997).

### ***Shared Haunts: Exploring Cultural Symbolism Across Borders***

Vietnamese horror cinema, while possessing its own distinct identity, shares thematic resonance with both Thai and Japanese horror traditions. In examining these cinematic realms, I uncover common motifs and divergent applications of cultural symbols that evoke fear across national boundaries.

Across Vietnamese, Thai, and Japanese horror films, a recurring motif is the presence of vengeful spirits seeking retribution. Vietnamese works like *Quả Tim Máu* depict spirits driven by a desire for revenge, akin to the vengeful ghosts depicted in Thai classics such as *Pee Mak*. Likewise, Japanese films like *Ju-On* portray spirits fueled by anger and unresolved grievances. This shared emphasis on vengeful apparitions taps into a universal fear of the unresolved and the consequences of transgressing societal norms.

Both Vietnamese and Thai horror narratives underscore the importance of honoring the deceased, albeit with cultural nuances. Vietnamese films like *Bóng Đèn* underscore the repercussions of neglecting ancestral rituals, highlighting the significance of maintaining harmony between the living and the dead. Conversely, Thai horror often portrays vengeful spirits driven by specific grievances, as seen in the poignant portrayal of longing in *Pee Mak*. This divergence in cultural interpretation enriches the narrative tapestry of each tradition.

Despite shared thematic elements, Vietnamese horror distinguishes itself by addressing anxieties specific to its social context. Films like *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh* portrays the misappropriation of cultural artifacts, reflecting concerns about environmental exploitation. Similarly, *Lời Nguyễn Huyết Ngải* explores the allure and perils of "ngải" magic, serving as a commentary on societal disparities amid rapid modernization. This interweaving of cultural symbols with social commentary is a hallmark of Vietnamese horror, offering audiences a reflection of their own societal fears.

In Vietnamese horror cinema, the utilization of cultural symbols serves to evoke both universal and uniquely Vietnamese fears. While echoing themes such as vengeful spirits and ancestral reverence found in Thai and Japanese horror, Vietnamese films imbue these

symbols with a distinct socio-cultural context, providing audiences with a haunting reflection of their own societal anxieties.

Vietnamese horror, exemplified by films like *Bóng Đè*, underscores the significance of adhering to proper ancestral rituals and offerings. Disruption of this delicate equilibrium between the living and the deceased emerges as a source of fear, reflecting cultural anxieties surrounding filial piety and the maintenance of familial harmony.

In contrast, Thai horror often portrays vengeful spirits driven by unresolved grievances, such as broken promises or violent deaths. Works like *Pee Mak* exemplify this theme, where the ghost's pursuit of resolution or retribution underscores a cultural belief in the transmutation of earthly injustices into supernatural vengeance.

Vietnamese horror transcends mere frights by utilizing cultural symbols to convey social commentary. *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh*, for instance, employs corrupted amulets to symbolize concerns about environmental exploitation. This narrative approach distinguishes Vietnamese horror from its Thai counterpart, which typically leans toward the macabre and eerie imagery of vengeful spirits.

Japanese horror, while featuring vengeful spirits akin to those in *Ju-On*, often depicts psychological horror and the uncanny. Works like *Ringu* delve into societal anxieties and blurred boundaries between reality and the supernatural. This emphasis on psychological horror diverges from the Vietnamese focus on cultural norms and societal commentary.

## Discussion

### *Eerie Familiarity: Exploring Cultural Symbolism in Vietnamese Horror Cinema*

Vietnamese horror cinema distinguishes itself by adeptly employing cultural symbols to craft a nuanced cinematic experience that extends beyond mere frights. These symbols highlight deeply ingrained beliefs and societal anxieties, evoking fear that resonates on personal and communal levels.

Works such as *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh* and *Bóng Đè* draw upon familiar cultural practices and beliefs to instill fear. The misappropriation of amulets or neglect of ancestral rituals serves as catalysts for horror, underscoring the potential ramifications of disrupting the societal and spiritual equilibrium. In *Bóng Đè*, the phenomenon of sleep paralysis, associated with "bóng đè" spirits, transcends its medical origins, symbolizing the enduring traumas of Vietnam's war-ravaged history.

Vietnamese horror ventures beyond conventional jump scares by utilizing cultural symbols to convey social critique. *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh* employs corrupted amulets as metaphors for concerns about environmental degradation, while *Lời Nguyễn Huyét Ngải* describes the ramifications of "ngải" magic as a reflection of social inequities amidst rapid modernization. By showcasing the dire consequences of cultural transgressions and societal desperation, these films offer poignant critiques of contemporary Vietnamese society.

While sharing thematic elements such as vengeful spirits with Thai and Japanese horror, Vietnamese films deploy these symbols in distinct ways. Vietnamese horror emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony with the deceased, as evidenced by its focus on proper

ancestral rites, contrasting with the Thai emphasis on vengeful retaliation for unresolved grievances. Additionally, Vietnamese horror prioritizes social commentary over the grotesque visuals prevalent in Thai horror or the psychological terror explored in Japanese horror.

### ***The Influence of Cultural Symbolism: Unlocking Vietnamese Horror***

At the core of Vietnamese horror lies the profound influence of cultural symbolism, serving as a conduit between the supernatural realm and the deeply entrenched fears within Vietnamese society. Through the adept utilization of familiar beliefs, customs, and legends, these films craft a multi-dimensional sense of terror that strikes a chord with Vietnamese audiences on a visceral level.

Primarily, cultural symbols draw upon shared societal perceptions to evoke fear by underscoring the potential repercussions of disrupting established norms. For instance, in films like *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh*, anxieties surrounding environmental exploitation manifest through the misuse of amulets, traditionally regarded as protective talismans. Through these symbols, a sense of disquietude is cultivated, emphasizing the significance of maintaining equilibrium between the physical and spiritual realms and within the social fabric.

Moreover, cultural symbols serve as potent instruments for social commentary within Vietnamese horror narratives. Works such as *Lời Nguyễn Huyét Ngải* confront the darker facets of "ngải" magic, a potent form of sorcery. The allure of "ngải" to attain success mirrors anxieties surrounding social inequalities and the desperation engendered by a swiftly evolving society. By illustrating the dire repercussions of succumbing to such practices, these films critique societal structures that engender feelings of powerlessness, offering profound insights into the contemporary social landscape of Vietnam.

### ***Constraints and Future Inquiries: A Deeper Examination of Vietnamese Horror***

While this examination provides valuable insights into the employment of cultural symbols in Vietnamese horror cinema, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, the scope of this study was confined to an analysis of four specific films. A broader selection of works could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways in which cultural symbols are employed throughout the genre. Additionally, this investigation relied primarily on existing analyses and interpretations of the films. Engaging in audience reception studies would furnish firsthand insights into how Vietnamese viewers perceive the utilization of cultural symbols and their efficacy in instilling fear and conveying social commentary.

Subsequent research endeavors could delve into the evolutionary trajectory of cultural symbols within Vietnamese horror cinema. How have these symbols adapted to mirror the shifting social and cultural milieu of Vietnam over time? Furthermore, a comparative exploration that shows the anxieties explored in Vietnamese horror films vis-à-vis those depicted in other national cinemas could yield even richer insights. For instance, a comparative study scrutinizing the portrayal of ancestral spirits in Vietnamese horror alongside films from other Asian nations with robust ancestor veneration traditions may unveil intriguing cultural subtleties.



## Conclusion

To summarize, cultural symbolism serves as the very essence of Vietnamese horror cinema. It grants filmmakers access to a shared reservoir of beliefs, fears, and societal truths, thereby crafting fear that reverberates on both individual and communal levels. Through the adept utilization of familiar rituals, folklore, and spiritual motifs, Vietnamese horror transcends mere frights, offering a poignant reflection of Vietnamese society's essence. It delves into environmental concerns, the enduring scars of historical trauma, and the trials of adapting to a swiftly evolving world.

Moreover, the distinctive treatment of cultural symbols in Vietnamese horror sets it apart from its regional and global counterparts. The emphasis on upholding harmony with ancestors, the integration of social commentary with supernatural elements, and the exploration of uniquely Vietnamese apprehensions all contribute to its singular cinematic allure. As Vietnamese horror garners increased international attention, comprehending the significance of cultural symbolism is pivotal in recognizing the depth and sophistication of these eerie tales.

Vietnamese horror cinema, marked by its potent amalgamation of cultural symbolism and societal critique, stands as a distinct contributor to the global horror genre. By intertwining universal fears with Vietnamese beliefs and traditions, these films transcend geographical confines, resonating with audiences of diverse backgrounds. Core themes such as societal pressures, the repercussions of tradition disruption, and the yearning for spiritual connection strike a chord universally.

## References

- Branston, J., & Stafford, P. (2000). *The Cambridge companion to film studies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carroll, N. (1990). *The philosophy of horror or paradoxes of the heart*. Routledge.
- Chow, R. (2004). *Spectral encounters: Anxiety and the logic of the ghost in Japanese cinema*. Columbia University Press.
- Clover, C. J. (1992). *Men, women and chainsaws: Gender in the modern horror film*. Princeton University Press.
- Le, H. T. (2018). Cultural symbolism and fear in Vietnamese horror films. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 13(2), 1-23.
- Nguyen, A. T. (2016). Haunting the past: Historical trauma and the Vietnamese horror film. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 11(3), 1-22.
- Nguyen, V. T. (2016). Soul loss narratives in Vietnamese folk religion. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 11(3), 22-52.
- Nguyen, A. V. (2023). The enduring power of folklore: The Kunmanthong legend in contemporary Vietnamese horror cinema. *Asian Journal of Film and Media Studies*, 10(1), 52-70.
- Silver, A. (1999). *Film noir*. A&C Black.
- Tran, D. H. (2017). Haunting the silver screen: The "bóng đè" phenomenon and the Vietnamese horror film. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 12(3), 1-27.
- Tran, D. H. (2020). Haunting the homeland: National identity and the global appeal of Vietnamese horror. *Cinema Journal*, 59(3), 102-120.
- Vajdowicz, M. (2008). *Thai cinema: The complete guide*. I.B. Tauris.
- Wood, R. (1986). *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. Columbia University Press.

## Fimography

- Banjong Pisanthanakun & Parkpoom Wongpoom. (2004). *Shutter* [Film]. Thailand.
- Bùi Thạc Chuyên. (2014). *Lời Nguyền Huyết Ngải* [Blood Curse]. Vietnam.
- Lê Bình Giang, Trần Hàm, & Phan Gia Nhật Linh. (2017). *Thất Sơn Tâm Linh* [Kunmanthong]. Vietnam.
- Lê Văn Việt. (2013). *Bóng Đè* [The Ancestral]. Vietnam.

Shimizu, T. (2002). *Ju-on: The Grudge* [Film]. Japan.

Victor Vũ. (2014). *Quả Tim Máu* [Vengeful Heart]. Vietnam.



***Unpredictable Box Office Performance of Franchise Blockbusters:  
The Fading "Magical" Appeal of the "Fantastic Beasts" Series in Mainland China***

Ruixuan Wu, University of Southampton, United Kingdom

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

To achieve success in the box office, many filmmakers attempt to regroup the factors from the previous successful films into subsequent productions. The *Fantastic Beasts* series exemplifies a combination of multiple factors seen in the past successful formula, such as well-known intellectual property, famous stars, appealing spectacles, and less culturally specific genres. However, the box office of three *Fantastic Beasts* films has been declining, suggesting that it is nearly impossible to replicate the success of earlier films by integrating these factors. This research aims to investigate the factors that influenced the box office of the *Fantastic Beasts* series in mainland China and analyse the reasons for its decreasing performance. The Chinese box office performances of this series were examined using secondary data analysis. Also, content analysis was conducted to explore the Chinese audience reviews of the three films on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao (two major ticketing platforms in China) from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The findings indicate that the previous succeeded factors were only effective during the early stages of these films' exhibition in China. Additionally, an increasing number of Chinese audience reviews expressed dissatisfaction with these films' illogical narratives. I argue that the previous succeeded factors should be regarded as marketing assets and not as crucial components that have a positive long-term impact on the film's box office. Meanwhile, the strategy of emphasising spectacle over narrative seems ineffective in sustaining the success of franchise blockbusters in China because poor storytelling would alienate new customers and disappoint the existing fan base.

Keywords: Box Office Performance, International Film Flow, The *Fantastic Beasts* Series

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

According to Zuckerman and Kim (2003), it is fundamental to acknowledge the profound uncertainty that is inherent in a film project in order to comprehend the film industry. Hence, improving understanding of the factors that influence a film's box office success and their interrelations becomes essential (Hennig-Thurau, et al, 2007). The film industry is interested in combining the factors that have contributed to previous successes to reduce uncertainty in future productions (Wasser, 1995). However, this paper provides further evidence to suggest that simply regrouping the factors that previously contributed to box office success is not sufficient for a film to replicate that success.

In order to establish a prediction model that is based on a substantial sample size, prior research has aimed to identify the factors that influence box office performance, primarily through the use of quantitative methodology. The most pioneering articles are those of Litman, which attempt to predict film success by evaluating relevant factors through regression analysis. Litman and his colleagues identify several factors that may impact the domestic box office of American films, including budget, genres, MPAA ratings, the presence of stars, the use of pre-sold intellectual property (IP), the type of distributor, the release timing, the pattern of release, any awards or nominations, and critics' reviews (Litman, 1983; Litman & Kohl, 1989; Litman & Ahn, 1998). The relationships between box office and these factors are further investigated in several studies, such as those conducted by Prag and Casavant (1994), Chang and Ki (2005), and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2007). In recent box office research, such as those by Craig et al. (2005), Fu (2012), and Lee (2006, 2008), there has been a growing interest in the performance of films in overseas markets, with culture and language emerging as significant factors. Culturally specific films would encounter obstacles in their ability to transcend cultural barriers, as foreign audiences necessitate a higher level of cultural literacy to comprehend and appreciate the content (Fu, 2012). Hoskins and Mirus (1988, p.500) coined the term "cultural discount" to describe the phenomenon in which the value of a media product, which is rooted in a particular cultural context, "will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions and behavioural patterns of the material in question." In order to improve the probability of success in the global market, films often universalise their themes and content to make them less culturally specific and more accessible to diverse audiences (Lee, 2006).

A notable example of how films mitigate uncertainty in the international market is the production of franchise blockbusters, which not only regroups those positively correlated factors but also diminishes their cultural specificity. For example, the substantial budget allows for extensive marketing campaigns, use of advanced special effects, and recruitment of a stronger cast (Litman, 1983; Litman & Kohl, 1989). Additionally, their genres tend to be less culturally specific, such as action, adventure, and fantasy, which feature less dialogue and emphasise special effects to enhance their accessibility in a wide range of cultural contexts (Barthel-Bouchier, 2012). Furthermore, it is also common for franchise blockbusters to use pre-sold IP, which allows them to take advantage on the established fan base (Basuroy & Chatterjee, 2008; Cucco, 2009; Gunter, 2018). Therefore, franchise blockbusters are expected to encounter diminished cultural discount and draw more moviegoers in the worldwide market. However, they do not always succeed. I argue in this paper that the previous quantitative research did not take into account for one of the most critical influencing factors of box office performance: the storytelling abilities of individual films.

In 2016, J.K. Rowling, working as the screenwriter, initiated a new film series named the *Fantastic Beasts* series, which is also rooted in the Wizarding World established in the *Harry Potter* franchise. This series now consists of three films: *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016), *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (2018), and *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (2022). This paper will refer to the three films as *Fantastic Beasts 1, 2, and 3*. This film series exemplifies a typical franchise blockbuster that incorporates numerous successful factors from the past, such as pre-sold IP, famous stars, large budget, and less culturally specific genres. Nevertheless, the box office of these three films continues to decrease. The aim of this research is to investigate the factors contributing to the declining performance of the three films in the *Fantastic Beasts* series, with a particular focus on the mainland Chinese market, a significant global film market with a substantial fanbase for the *Harry Potter* franchise. I examined film reviews written by empirical Chinese consumers to evaluate the factors that affected the box office performance of each case study film. The research findings suggest that the strategy of prioritising spectacle over narrative appears to be ineffective in maintaining the popularity of these franchise blockbusters in China, as their unsatisfactory storytelling not only alienated new customers but also disappointed the existing fan base. The results of this study will aid in comprehending the significance of storytelling ability in influencing the box office performance of franchise blockbusters, a factor that has been frequently disregarded in previous research.

## Methodology

The mixed-methods case study design was employed in my research to address the gap in qualitative and case study research methods, as the previous study on box office performance primarily concentrates on quantitative methodologies that are based on a large number of samples, which fail to adequately capture the complexity of an individual film.

Quantitative content analysis was implemented to investigate the film reviews posted by Chinese viewers on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao during the theatrical run of these films in order to investigate the perceptions of Chinese customers regarding these films. These are two major ticketing applications that collectively control nearly 80% of the Chinese film ticket market (Frater, 2018). I gathered a total of 150 reviews by collecting 50 reviews for each film, with 25 reviews obtained from each platform. The first 25 reviews shown to users on platforms (with the filter set to default mode) were sampled. As there is no comparable existing research, I conducted the subset of coding categories based on the factors identified in the previous research, including “Genre”, “Stars”, “Cultural Specificity”, “Language”, “Pre-sold IP”, “Audio-visual effects”, “Marketing”, and “Awards”. Considering the absence of a professional film critic platform and a film classification system in China, I excluded these two factors that cited in prior research from my study. The factor of distributor was also excluded, as the state-owned China Film Group Corporation and Huaxia Film Distribution are the only organisations authorised to distribute foreign films in mainland China (Cheung, 2016; Yeh & Davis, 2008; Su, 2016). Additionally, in light of Bordwell (2017)’s claim that the main objective of viewing activities is to construct a meaningful narrative from the plot, the coding categories were further broadened to include the factors of the visual narrative that Goodnow (2020) suggested, including “Plots”, “Characters in story”, and “Places in story”. To acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of these factors on the box office of these films, I analysed the frequency and manner of references to these factors in the comments of Chinese consumers. Meanwhile, to assess the attitudes of Chinese viewers about these factors, the coding procedure also included an evaluation of the general sentiments of the comments, which were classified as “Positive”, “Negative”, or “Neutral” in

accordance with these categories. Subsequently, I implemented qualitative textual analysis from the viewpoint of Chinese viewers to ascertain their perceptions of these factors and films, as the beliefs, values, and conventions of the audience may influence film interpretation. Textual analysis could offer an in-depth understanding of the way in which the mentioned factors influence the box office performance of the films by relying on the results of the content analysis. In addition, I used secondary data analysis to evaluate the factors mentioned by Chinese consumers in each film on the films' performance in China. This was achieved by utilising data from IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Maoyan Pro (the data analysis application of Maoyan), and Dengta Pro (the data analysis application of Taopiaopiao).

## Findings & Discussions

As Table 1 indicates, the three *Fantastic Beasts* films in China have experienced an ongoing decline in both box office revenue and cinema admissions (Box Office Mojo, 2016, 2018, 2022; Maoyan Pro, 2016, 2018, 2022; Dengta Pro, 2016, 2018, 2022). Their ratings on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao have consistently dropped as well (Maoyan, 2016, 2018, 2022; Taopiaopiao, 2016, 2018, 2022). It is important to note that *Fantastic Beasts 3* was released during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which the Chinese film market was adversely affected by the implementation of the “dynamic zero COVID” policy (Brzeski, 2022). The attendance and opening rates of cinemas were significantly impacted (Liu & Lu, 2023). The impact of this policy on the decrease in attendance and income for *Fantastic Beasts 3* needs to be acknowledged. Yet, it is undeniable that these three films have encountered progressively deteriorating reception and performance in China.

Table 1: Performance of Three *Fantastic Beasts* Films in China

Title	Cinema admissions (approximate)	Box office revenue (approximate)	Rating on Maoyan	Rating on Taopiaopiao
<i>Fantastic Beasts 1</i>	17 million	\$86 million	8.9 / 10	8.8 / 10
<i>Fantastic Beasts 2</i>	10 million	\$57 million	7.9 / 10	8.1 / 10
<i>Fantastic Beasts 3</i>	5 million	\$29 million	7.9 / 10	7.7 / 10

Source: Box Office Mojo, Maoyan Pro, Dengta Pro, Maoyan, and Taopiaopiao

The subsequent sections will present an in-depth analysis of each of these three films to clarify the factors contributing to the fading appeal of the Wizarding World in China. Owing to the space constraints, this study primarily focuses on factors extensively discussed by Chinese users, omitting those less frequently stated.

### *Fantastic Beasts 1*

Out of the 50 Chinese audience reviews for *Fantastic Beasts 1*, 45 users gave it a positive rating (7 to 10 out of 10), 4 users gave it a neutral rating (4 to 6 out of 10), and only 1 user gave it a negative rating (0 to 3 out of 10). The factors they mentioned were summarised in Table 2, which suggests that the film was generally well-received by most Chinese consumers.



Table 2: Most Frequently Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016)

Mentioned Factors and Their Frequency				
Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<b>Pre-sold IP</b>	27	3	1	31
<b>Characters in story</b>	20	5	0	25
<b>Plot</b>	13	8	1	22
<b>Audio-visual effects</b>	17	3	0	20
<b>Stars</b>	20	0	0	20
<b>Cultural specificity</b>	8	4	1	13
<b>Genre</b>	3	1	0	4
<b>Marketing</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Places in story</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Language</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Awards</b>	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

The most frequently mentioned factor was the “Pre-sold IP”, as most users watched this film due to their devotion to the *Harry Potter* franchise. For example:

As a loyal *Harry Potter* fan, how can you miss “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them” written by J.K. Rowling, the mother of magic world. (Maoyan user)

This really is a must-see film for die-hard *Harry Potter* fans. (Taopiaopiao user)

In the same vein, many users addressed J.K. Rowling under the “Stars” category:

If Stan Lee created the Marvel Universe, then Rowling constructed the entire magical world. (Maoyan user)

I really admire Rowling’s logic and ability to handle the plot. The various details in the film are really good news for *Harry Potter* fans. (Maoyan user)

Rowling’s storytelling ability and the Wizarding World she established in the *Harry Potter* series appeared to be appreciated by many Chinese viewers. It indicates that the popularity of *Harry Potter* and its original author could be viewed as advantageous promotional assets for *Fantastic Beasts 1*. This supports the arguments of Basuroy and Chatterjee (2008) and Gunter (2018), which propose that using a pre-sold IP can take advantage on the existing fan base and remaining value of the parent brand for financial benefits.

The “Characters in the story” were also frequently referenced by users, with many of them expressing their fondness for the magical creatures portrayed in the film, particularly Niffler, which they thought to be funny and adorable:

The animals are so cute! Every one of them is cute! (Taopiaopiao user)

I like Niffler very much, it made me laugh the whole time. (Taopiaopiao user)

Likewise, the film’s vivid depiction of the Wizarding World prompted viewers to frequently engage in discussions regarding the “Audio-visual effects”:

The 3D effect is unexpectedly good. It is the most enjoyable 3D film in recent years. From beginning to end, all kinds of magic effects and animals “jump out” of the screen. This is what a true 3D film is! (Maoyan user)

The IMAX effect is great. The appearance of the magical animals and several fighting scenes feel like they are coming towards you! (Taopiaopiao user)

It seems that the presence of magical creatures is not only the key themes that differentiate the *Fantastic Beasts* series from the *Harry Potter* series, but it could be regarded as a prominent attraction for many Chinese viewers. In addition, the integration of spectacular special effects, 3D, and IMAX allowed Chinese consumers to experience a more immersive portrayal of the Wizarding World, which could also be considered a significant selling point of this film. This supports the findings of Elliott et al. (2018), which reveal that box office revenues in mainland China are considerably and positively influenced by enhanced format films (i.e. 3D and IMAX films).

The “Plot” was also a frequently discussed factor; however, many Chinese viewers maintained a relatively conservative attitude towards it. Users who held positive attitudes toward the plot assessed the film as possessing a compelling narrative with a well-structured pace:

The pace is very good. It’s just over two hours long, but it feels like a long story, but it still leaves people wanting more. (Maoyan user)

Almost every scene has a clever and exquisite design. The supernatural carnival makes the 133-minute film a non-stop experience. (Taopiaopiao user)

Conversely, those who held a neutral stance on the plot noted that while the overarching narrative was captivating, comprehending it required some effort:

But this new story line is a bit tiring to watch, and some things are confusing at the beginning, such as Obscurus. (Taopiaopiao user)

I was a little confused at first, and even fell asleep at one point, but then I slowly understand the plot a little bit and find it very exciting! (Taopiaopiao user)

It suggests that the film contained some settings and details that might not sufficiently elucidated, which may impede comprehension for certain ordinary viewers. This can also be regarded as an aspect of “Cultural specificity”. Nevertheless, under this category, most users claimed that the film was accessible to non-fans and did not require extensive prior knowledge regarding the *Harry Potter* series for comprehension and appreciation:

Even if you are not a *Harry Potter* fan, the interesting creatures and wonderful magic in the film are still very attractive. (Maoyan user)

Except that Dumbledore is mentioned only once in the line, the whole story is very clear to a viewer who has not watched *Harry Potter*. It is a masterpiece that is very suitable for *Harry Potter* fans and other audiences who simply like magic-themed films. (Taopiaopiao user)

In addition, some viewers noted that, as devoted *Harry Potter* fans, they could find numerous familiar elements throughout this film, which further enriched their viewing experience. Hence, although the culturally specific content in this film presented some challenges in comprehending certain aspects of the setting for ordinary viewers, as observed under “Plot”, it seems that it did not hinder most viewers’ comprehension of the overall narrative.

Overall, the pre-sold IP (the *Harry Potter* franchise), the star power of Rowling, the adorable magical creatures depicted in the film, and the captivating audio-visual effects were received positively by Chinese viewers. These factors can be regarded as being effective in attracting Chinese consumers to *Fantastic Beasts 1*, which may have a positive impact on its box office performance in China. Although the film’s plot and cultural specificity were subject to some neutral evaluations, most Chinese fans and casual viewers found the overall quality of *Fantastic Beasts 1* to be satisfactory.

### ***Fantastic Beasts 2***

Out of the 50 reviews for *Fantastic Beasts 2*, 41 users gave it a positive rating, 2 users gave it a neutral rating, and 7 users gave it a negative rating. Although the positive ratings of this sequel did not decline significantly in comparison to the first film, they did experience an increase in the negative ratings. As illustrated in Table 3, Chinese users generally expressed more neutral attitudes towards the factors they mentioned.

Table 3: Most Frequently Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (2018)

<b>Mentioned Factors and Their Frequency</b>				
<b>Category</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Plot</b>	2	22	8	32
<b>Pre-sold IP</b>	17	10	1	28
<b>Audio and visual effects</b>	23	0	0	23
<b>Characters in story</b>	11	8	1	20
<b>Cultural specificity</b>	2	8	7	17
<b>Stars</b>	10	2	0	12
<b>Genre</b>	2	0	0	2
<b>Language</b>	1	0	0	1
<b>Places in story</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Marketing</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Awards</b>	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

Although the “Plot” was the most frequently discussed factor, few people expressed positive opinions about it. Most users maintained a neutral stance and voiced dissatisfaction with the film’s excessive number of characters, which led to a lack of clarity in the main storyline:

First of all, the distribution of roles is uneven, and each character wants to stand out, but in the end none of them stand out. .... The plot is rather complicated, and it is obviously a foreshadowing for the next film, so it is not friendly to plot lovers. (Maoyan user)

To be fair, the story is very fragmented, there are many characters, and the focus is not prominent. (Taopiaopiao user)

Users with negative attitudes were enraged by the film's plot, asserting that the confusing narrative disappointed consumers:

Apart from the special effects, it's a really bad film. It's boring and long, with many and complicated characters, and the story is not clear! It's not commercial, and it's not artistic. The ending is also incomplete! Are you waiting for the next film to make more money? (Maoyan user)

I don't understand what you are talking about, it's boring. 99% of the people in the cinema hall were sleeping. Really, the film is just here to cheat people out of their money. (Maoyan user)

Dissatisfaction over the "Plot" may also be associated with the film's "Cultural specificity", which was likewise mainly mentioned with neutral and negative attitudes. Many users who maintained a neutral stance acknowledged that, despite their extensive knowledge of the narrative of the *Harry Potter* series, the film's abundance of characters and the lack of elaboration on certain background stories could render it less accessible to ordinary consumers. For example:

Rowling's grand magic world has expanded from the UK to the whole world, which is a good supplement and inheritance to the entire series. The disadvantage is that there are too many characters, and the plot is a bit trivial, so non-fans can easily get confused. (Taopiaopiao user)

Users with negative attitudes complained that this film was inappropriate for viewers who have not watched the *Harry Potter* series and *Fantastic Beasts 1*:

As a non-*Harry Potter* fan, what the hell is this film? I want to give it a score of 0. This is the first time in my life that I have no idea what a film is about after watching it. *Fantastic Beasts 2* is really a film that purely serves *Harry Potter* fans. It can be said that it is not friendly to other groups of people at all. ... So, if you are not a *Harry Potter* fan, I really don't recommend you waste tickets and waste two hours to watch this film. (Maoyan user)

It is evident that a specific level of familiarity with the Wizarding World was required to comprehend the numerous plots and details in *Fantastic Beasts 2*. Despite its roots in the renowned *Harry Potter* and its classification within the fantasy genre, the film exhibited high cultural specificity that may hinder comprehension for non-fans in China. This finding aligns with Schauer's (2007) argument that the narrative of a franchise blockbuster can be exciting and intricate for a fan deeply engaged with the associated supplementary material, yet it may lack narrative coherence for the general public.

Besides, the film's "Audio-visual effects" and Rowling's storytelling ability under the "Stars" category were still appreciated by some users, indicating that the construction of the magical world and its vivid depiction remained crucial in captivating Chinese viewers. Despite extensive discussion about the "Pre-sold IP" as a significant selling point for the film, the number of individuals adopting a neutral stance on this factor increased. For instance:

If you haven't watched the first film, you can't even be sure who the protagonist is. ... Rather than "Fantastic Beasts 2", it's more like "A Large Trailer for Fantastic Beasts 3." (Maoyan user)

Similarly, those who adopted a neutral stance towards the "Character in story" also increased, primarily articulating dissatisfaction with the diminished presence of magical creatures:

Compared to the first film, the magical creatures don't appear much, and I feel like the focus is no longer on the magical creatures. ... But I hope there will be more magical creatures, especially the Niffler! (Maoyan user)

It is evident that although many people expressed disappointment about the "Pre-sold IP" and "Character", the general sentiment remained tolerant. This may illustrate the effectiveness of these factors in China, as many users continued to exhibit interest for the forthcoming sequel, hoping that it would provide new insights into the story.

In general, although the pre-sold IP, Rowling, and audio-visual effects continued to be effectively attract Chinese consumers to *Fantastic Beasts 2*, there was a notable rise in complaints about the film's culturally specific narrative, which might negatively affect its box office performance. However, despite the rise in neutral comments regarding each factor of the film, the overall tolerant sentiment among Chinese consumers could potentially reflect the effectiveness of these factors as marketing assets in China.

### ***Fantastic Beasts 3***

Out of the 50 reviews for *Fantastic Beasts 3*, 32 users gave it a positive rating, 5 users gave it a neutral rating, and 13 users gave it a negative rating. It experienced a substantial drop in positive ratings compared to its two predecessors, with a higher number of users assigning a negative rating. In terms of the factors mentioned in their comments, as shown in Table 4, the "Plot" received an overwhelming number of negative comments, while the other factors received fewer positive comments in comparison to the previous two films.

The analysis of this film will concentrate on the negative reviews of Chinese viewers in order to investigate the reasons for its box office decline, as the factors that attracted Chinese consumers were basically the same in this series and have been previously addressed in the analysis of the previous two films.

Table 4: Most Frequently Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (2022)

Mentioned Factors and Their Frequency				
Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Plot	7	2	20	29
Characters in story	15	4	5	24
Pre-sold IP	8	2	4	14
Audio and visual effects	8	2	2	12
Stars	8	1	1	10
Cultural specificity	1	1	0	2
Genre	1	0	0	1
Places in story	0	0	0	0
Language	0	0	0	0
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

The “Plot” was still the most discussed and dissatisfying factor, as most users perceived the narrative as lacking in logical coherence:

It’s completely a script problem. The screenwriter has no respect for the audience’s intelligence and feelings. The characters are broken. ... The timeline is confusing everywhere. The political struggle methods are childish. (Maoyan user)

It’s so tiring to watch. I really don’t know what these characters are busy with. Why are they fighting! It’s already the third film, and I still don’t know what the point of this series is. Who is the protagonist? (Maoyan user)

Additionally, while some users continued to express their fondness for the magical creatures, there were varying perspectives concerning “Characters in story”. Some users articulated discontent with the inconsistencies of character settings in the film compared to its two predecessors and the previous *Harry Potter* films. For example:

The character settings of Dumbledore and Grindelwald are completely broken. Where is Grindelwald’s prophetic ability reflected? (Maoyan user)

Meanwhile, some viewers expressed their dissatisfaction with the limited presence of magical creatures in the film:

The reason why *Fantastic Beasts* is called *Fantastic Beasts* is that the focus is on the creatures that attract fans, but there are not that many scenes with creatures in this film. (Maoyan user)

This may indicate that the film’s “Plot” and “Characters” can be difficult to engage with, disappointing many Chinese consumers. Unlike its two predecessors, Chinese consumers were not actively engaged in discussions about the film’s “Cultural specificity”, which indicates that the narrative’s incomprehensibility for viewers may not stem from the cultural specificity impacting non-fan consumers. The fans of *Harry Potter* also held an unfavourable assessment of the film’s narrative. As a prequel to the *Harry Potter* narrative, the primary reason why many Chinese viewers were interested by the *Fantastic Beasts* films could be

their desire to investigate additional stories and details within this magical world. However, this film apparently did not satisfy the expectations of most Chinese fans. These negative reviews of the film's plot and characters could potentially discourage potential Chinese consumers as well. Thus, the narrative's illogicality and ambiguity in *Fantastic Beasts 3* could be considered as a significant drawback that adversely affects its performance in China.

Moreover, although many users maintained their appreciation for the film's "Audio-visual effects" and Rowling's "Star" power, opinions diverged about the "Pre-sold IP", with some complaining that the film exploited the loyalty of *Harry Potter* fans:

I had high expectations and went to see it as soon as it came out. But after watching it, I am very disappointed. This is the worst of the eight *Harry Potter* films and the three *Fantastic Beasts* films. (Maoyan user)

It's really bad. ... Anyway, I won't support the *Fantastic Beasts* series in the future. What a waste of such good actors. (Maoyan user)

It appears that many Chinese consumers perceived the *Harry Potter* series' production quality as an important selling point for the *Fantastic Beasts* series, therefore resulting in higher expectations for the latter. However, their expectations were not met by the quality of this film. In the first two films, many viewers exhibited a level of tolerance and expected that the upcoming instalments in this series would fulfil their expected criteria. Yet, comments from Chinese viewers regarding *Fantastic Beasts 3* suggest a loss of patience and trust in the series.

Generally, the film's unsatisfactory plot and character construction were the primary issues that Chinese customers complained about. The deficiencies in production quality and storytelling ability in turn undermined the reputation of the pre-sold IP. Thus, the audio-visual effects, the devotion of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and the appeal of Rowling, which were previously effective marketing assets, appear to be insufficient to maintain the series' popularity and box office success in China, as both fans and ordinary viewers were disappointed with the story in *Fantastic Beasts 3*.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the findings of this research indicate that the primary attractions of this series for Chinese consumers could be attributed to the pre-sold IP (i.e. the *Harry Potter* series), the star power of J.K. Rowling, the fascinating audio-visual effects of the Wizarding World, and the presence of adorable magical creatures. Nevertheless, these factors could only be regarded as important marketing assets, as they are capable of attracting viewers but incapable of sustaining the long-term popularity of this franchise. The main aim of watching this series for many Chinese consumers appears to be not just to enjoy the special effects but also to explore more stories set in the Wizarding World before the events of the *Harry Potter* series. Yet, the culturally specific content, confusing narratives, and inconsistent character constructions in these *Fantastic Beasts* films not only alienated potential new customers but also disappointed the current fan base. Therefore, although these three films incorporated previously successful factors that enhanced global appeal and somewhat diminished cultural specificity, past successes cannot be replicated, primarily due to the compromised narrative logic and coherence of the films.

The particular significance of this study lies in the implementation of the mixed-methods case study design, which analyses both qualitative and quantitative evidence from the empirical Chinese audience, which addresses the gap in existing research on box office performance that primarily relies on quantitative methods. The findings of this research contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding the importance of storytelling abilities in influencing box office performance, a factor often overlooked in earlier research. However, due to the restricted personnel and financial resources of my research, I was the only coder, and the sample sizes were constrained. Future studies could improve reliability by utilising more coders and samples to develop a more in-depth comprehension of the factors influencing box office performance of films from a qualitative and case-study perspective.



## References

- Barthel-Bouchier, Diane. (2012). Exportability of Films in a Globalizing Market: The Intersection of Nation and Genre. *Cultural Sociology*. 6(1). 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975511401269>
- Basuroy, Suman, and Subimal Chatterjee. (2008). Fast and Frequent: Investigating Box Office Revenues of Motion Picture Sequels. *Journal of Business Research*. 61(7). 798–803. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.07.030>
- Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith. (2017). *Film Art: An Introduction*. (11<sup>th</sup> edition). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Box Office Mojo. (2016). *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Retrieved from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3670495749/>
- Box Office Mojo. (2018). *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. Retrieved from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3275837957/>
- Box Office Mojo. (2022). *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*. Retrieved from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1221480965/>
- Brzeski, Patrick. (2022, Oct 17). Xi Jinping's Extended Rule Casts Shadow Over China's Film Market. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/china-movie-industry-xi-jinping-1235243367/>
- Chang, Byeng-Hee, and Eyun-Jung Ki. (2005). Devising a Practical Model for Predicting Theatrical Movie Success: Focusing on the Experience Good Property. *Journal of Media Economics*. 18(4). 247–269. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327736me1804\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327736me1804_2)
- Cheung, Ruby. (2016). *New Hong Kong Cinema: Transitions to Becoming Chinese in 21st-Century East Asia*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Craig, C. Samuel, William H. Greene, and Susan P. Douglas. (2005). Culture Matters: Consumer Acceptance of U.S. Films in Foreign Markets. *Journal of International Marketing*. 13(4). 80–103. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jimk.2005.13.4.80>
- Cucco, Marco. (2009). The Promise is Great: The Blockbuster and the Hollywood Economy. *Media, Culture & Society*. 31(2). 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708100315>
- Dengta Pro. (2016). *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Retrieved from <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=178125&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>

- Dengta Pro. (2018). *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. Retrieved from <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=215401&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>
- Dengta Pro. (2022). *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*. Retrieved from <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=534344&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>
- Elliott, Caroline, Palitha Konara, Haiyi Ling, Chengang Wang, and Yingqi Wei. (2018). Behind film performance in China's changing institutional context: The impact of signals. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*. 35(1). 63–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-016-9501-0>
- Frater, Patrick. (2018, Sep 20). China to Ban Movie Ticket Subsidies. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2018/film/asia/china-ban-movie-ticket-subsidies-1202950197/>
- Fu, W. Wayne. (2012). National Audience: Tastes in Hollywood Film Genres: Cultural Distance and Linguistic Affinity. *Communication Research*. 40(6). 789–817. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212442085>
- Goodnow, Trischa. Narrative Theory: Visual Storytelling. In Sheree Josephson, James D. Kelly, and Ken Smith (Eds.). *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pp.265-274). New York, Oxon: Routledge.
- Gunter, Barrie. (2018). *Predicting Movie Success at the Box Office*. Gewerbestrasse: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71803-3>
- Hennig-Thurau, Thorsten, Mark B. Houston, and Gianfranco Walsh. (2007). Determinants of Motion Picture Box Office and Profitability: An Interrelationship Approach. *Review of Managerial Science*. 1. 65–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-007-0003-9>
- Hoskins, Colin, and Rolf Mirus. (1988). Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes. *Media, Culture and Society*. 10(4). 499-515. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344388010004006>
- Lee, Francis L. F. (2006). Audience Taste Divergence Over Time: An Analysis of U.S. Movies' Box Office in Hong Kong, 1984-2004. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 83(4). 883–900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900608300410>
- Lee, Francis L. F. (2008). Hollywood Movies in East Asia: Examining Cultural Discount and Performance Predictability at the Box Office. *Asian Journal of Communication*. 18(2). 117–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292980802021855>
- Litman, Barry R. (1983). Predicting Success of Theatrical Movies: An Empirical Study. *The Journal of Popular Culture*. 16(4). 159–175. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1983.1604\\_159.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1983.1604_159.x)

- Litman, Barry R., and Hoekyun Ahn. (1998). Predicting Financial Success of Motion Picture: The '90s Experience. In Barry R. Litman, (Ed.). *The Motion Picture Mega-Industry*. (pp.172-197). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Litman, Barry R., and Linda S. Kohl. (1989). Predicting Financial Success of Motion Pictures: The '80s Experience. *Journal of Media Economics*. 2(2). 35–50.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08997768909358184>
- Liu, Hanwen, and Jiajia Lu. (2023). The Analysis Report of 2022 Chinese Film Industry Development. *Contemporary Cinema*. 2. 15-25.  
[https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aePF\\_MqfokLcCSKZB5\\_5KA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aePF_MqfokLcCSKZB5_5KA)
- Maoyan. (2016). *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Retrieved from  
[https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/248918?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm\\_source=maoyan\\_appShare&utm\\_content=c\\_g42lbw3k](https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/248918?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k)
- Maoyan. (2018). *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. Retrieved from  
[https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/577564?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm\\_source=maoyan\\_appShare&utm\\_content=c\\_g42lbw3k](https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/577564?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k)
- Maoyan. (2022). *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*. Retrieved from  
[https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/522013?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm\\_source=maoyan\\_appShare&utm\\_content=c\\_g42lbw3k](https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/522013?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k)
- Maoyan Pro. (2016). *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Retrieved from  
<https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/248918/boxshowna?barTheme=595936>
- Maoyan Pro. (2018). *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. Retrieved from  
<https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/577564/boxshowna?barTheme=365959>
- Maoyan Pro. (2022). *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*. Retrieved from  
<https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/522013/boxshowna?barTheme=1D402E>
- Prag, Jay, and Jame Casavant. (1994). An Empirical Study of the Determinants of Revenues and Marketing Expenditures in the Motion Picture Industry. *Journal of Cultural Economics*. 18. 217–235. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01080227>
- Schauer, Bradley. (2007). Critics, Clones and Narrative in The Franchise Blockbuster. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. 5(2). 191–210.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17400300701432894>
- Su, Wendy. (2016). *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Taopiaopiao. (2016). *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Retrieved from  
<https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=178125>

- Taopiaopiao. (2018). *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. Retrieved from <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=215401>
- Taopiaopiao. (2022). *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*. Retrieved from <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=534344>
- Wasser, Frederick. (1995). Is Hollywood America? The Trans-nationalization of the American Film Industry. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. 12(4). 423-437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039509366949>
- Yeh, Emilie Yueh-yu, and Darrell William Davis. (2008). Re-nationalizing China's film industry: case study on the China Film Group and film marketization. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*. 2(1). 37-51. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.2.1.37\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.2.1.37_1)
- Zuckerman, Ezra W., and Tai-Young Kim. (2003). The Critical Trade-off: Identity Assignment and Box-Office Success in the Feature Film Industry. *Industrial and Corporate Change*. 12(1). 27-67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/12.1.27>

***The Integration of Cross-Cultural Communication in Performing Arts:  
A Short Video Making Project***

Peishi Weng, Taipei University of Marine Technology, Taiwan  
Yijie Ou, Taipei University of Marine Technology, Taiwan

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Recently, under the influence of the internationalization of universities, many international students have been attracted to study in Taiwan. Therefore, the opportunities for students to interact and communicate across cultures on campus have gradually increased; however, most Taiwanese students still have insufficient cross-cultural experience when facing international students. Due to the above problems, the purpose of this study is to explore how international students can complete a short video project with Taiwanese students' assistance. This is a one-semester project with 20 students' involved (10 international students and 10 Taiwanese students). Those students are all from Innovative Design College of a University in Northern Taiwan. With on-site observation, post-interviews and "Intercultural Competence Scale" questionnaires, the researcher collect both students' feedback related to cross-cultural communication, trying to figure out the challenges between international students and Taiwanese students in the learning process. The findings will help to understand the impact of cross-cultural cooperation on the development of students' cross-cultural communication skills, provide relevant suggestions for future studies and finally create a friendly international campus environment.

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## 1. Introduction

With the increased globalization and rapid information spread in modern society, transnational and cross-cultural interactions become more frequent. Driven by the New Southbound Policy in Taiwan, there are more and more international students willing to study abroad, which has resulted in an influx of students from different countries on campus. Faced with the integration of multiculturalism, we must think deeply and solve the problem of how to effectively understand the cultural differences between the two sides.

Recently, Taiwan's universities have made significant progress in internationalization, attracting many international students to study. The resulting opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges have gradually expanded. However, despite this, Taiwanese university students still have relatively insufficient cross-cultural experiences on campus (Lu Mulin et al., 2014). So far, although we are committed to improving students' international cultural competence (ICL) in general education courses, most of them focus on the cultivation of foreign language abilities (Zhang Shanli, 2015), while courses with cross-cultural experience as the theme are still relative scarcity (Zhou Wanqing, 2017; Huang Wending, 2019). Therefore, teachers should think about how to establish an international teaching environment in the classroom so that students have the opportunity to truly experience cross-cultural interaction and engage in self-reflection to cultivate their international cultural abilities and enhance cultural understanding on both sides.

With cross-cultural communication, we can learn each other's cultures, sharing each other's experiences. However, there are still challenges existed. As Chi (2016)'s study, it showed that the challenges people from both cultures faced while working with others. The challenges included different working styles, different language levels, and non-verbal communication. Also, misunderstanding is the foremost barrier to communication in a multicultural environment. Jenifer and Raman (2015) described that it is common among people of different cultural backgrounds whose values and beliefs vary. The variation always results in anxiety and uncertainty and finally the misunderstanding occurs. Thus, based on the cases, it is significant of getting language and cultural awareness training and doing the observation to other cultures while having communication and relation with different people in the different culture.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Structure

Nowadays, new southbound policy currently implemented by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan mentions the importance of talent exchange and resource sharing. It is expected that through in-depth cultural introduction, students can understand cultural differences, share their own culture with others, and enhance cultural understanding. Therefore, this study integrated cross-cultural communication into a video-making project. The purpose is to break the limitations of traditional teaching and through cooperation learning by international students and Taiwanese students, and assist students from both sides to use a cooperative learning method with campus experience and life as the theme. Through a series of learning activities, students can learn and understand foreign cultural experiences on campus, enhance students' international perspective, and create a friendly international campus.

## 2.2 Research Design

This study adopts a research method with qualitative and quantitative data. Through pre- and post-test questionnaires, students' attitudes towards the integration of cross-cultural communication into the topic were obtained, and students' understanding of their own and other cultures was explored. In addition, after-class interview questionnaires are supplemented, and more detailed information can be obtained through open questions. Finally, students' attitudes towards cross-cultural learning can be summarized and summarized from the students' interview data.

## 2.3 Participants

This is an one-semester project with 20 students' involved (10 Pilipino students and 10 Taiwanese students). Those students are all from Innovative Design College of a University in Northern Taiwan. It mainly focuses on collecting the learning process of students' project production and understanding the development of cross-cultural communication skills of students from both sides.

## 2.4 Research Instruments

Two of the factors of Chao's (2014) Intercultural Communication Competency Scale was adopted in this study: Affective orientation to intercultural interaction and Behavioral performance in intercultural interaction, with 13 questions on a 5-point Likert scale. Students will be tested once before and after the project to investigate if students' cross-cultural communication competences changed.

In addition, qualitative data used in this study to investigate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural learning. The open questions are as follows:

Q1: What are your experiences on working with students of different nationalities on special projects?

Q2: After this project is completed, will it help to understand foreign cultures and improve learning motivation?

Q3: During communication and coordination, do you encounter learning difficulties? Can they be solved?

## 3. Result and Discussion

Collected data were analyzed and discussed based on the purpose of this study. First, the researcher presented the results of satisfaction on Intercultural Communication Competency Scale Survey to investigate the difference. Then, to get detailed information, the researcher used open questions to get students' feedback.

The pre-and post- Intercultural Communication Competency Scale Surveys results showed that students were willing to learn each other's cultures, share each's cultures, and develop communication strategies. The descriptive statistics were provided in the following.

Table 1: Pre-intercultural Communication Competency Scale Survey Results (N =20)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Fair	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>Factor: Affective orientation to intercultural interaction</b>					
1. I enjoy communicating with people from different cultures	0	0	0	80%	20%
2. I am willing to acquire knowledge regarding different world cultures.	0	0	20%	75%	5%
3. I am willing to manage emotions and frustrations when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	0	25%	75%	0
4. I am willing to demonstrate my interest in understanding people of other cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	0	0	10%	80%	10%
5. I am willing to modify my attitude and behavior for interacting appropriately with people of other cultures.	0	0	25%	60%	15%
6. I am willing to communicate with people of other cultures to broaden my worldview.	0	0	10%	80%	10%
<b>Factor: Behavioral performance in intercultural interaction</b>					
7. I can effectively use target to communicate with other people of different cultural backgrounds.	0	50%	40%	10%	0
8. I can eat what others eat in culturally diverse situations.	0	0	40%	30%	20%
9. I can use functional languages (e.g., invitation, refusal, and apology) flexibly for achieving appropriate intercultural communication.	0	40%	25%	35%	0
10. I can develop appropriate interactive strategies (e.g., directness and face-saving) to adjust to the diverse styles of intercultural communication.	0	50%	40%	10%	0
11. I can modify the way I dress when it is necessary in intercultural situations.	0	50%	40%	10%	0
12. I can change my verbal behavior (e.g., speed, accent) when it is necessary in intercultural situations.	0	20%	40%	20%	0
13. I can change my non-verbal behavior (e.g., gestures, facial expressions) when it is necessary in intercultural situations.	0	10%	60%	30%	0



Table 2: Post-intercultural Communication Competency Scale Survey Results (N =20)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Fair	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>Factor: Affective orientation to intercultural interaction</b>					
1. I enjoy communicating with people from different cultures	0	0	0	60%	40%
2. I am willing to acquire knowledge regarding different world cultures.	0	0	0%	65%	35%
3. I am willing to manage emotions and frustrations when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	0	20%	80%	0
4. I am willing to demonstrate my interest in understanding people of other cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	0	0	0%	85%	15%
5. I am willing to modify my attitude and behavior for interacting appropriately with people of other cultures.	0	0	20%	65%	20%
6. I am willing to communicate with people of other cultures to broaden my worldview.	0	0	0%	20%	80%
<b>Factor: Behavioral performance in intercultural interaction</b>					
7. I can effectively use target to communicate with other people of different cultural backgrounds.	0	40%	40%	20%	0
8. I can eat what others eat in culturally diverse situations.	0	0	40%	40%	20%
9. I can use functional languages (e.g., invitation, refusal, and apology) flexibly for achieving appropriate intercultural communication.	0	35%	30%	35%	0
10. I can develop appropriate interactive strategies (e.g., directness and face-saving) to adjust to the diverse styles of intercultural communication.	0	40%	50%	10%	0
11. I can modify the way I dress when it is necessary in intercultural situations.	0	35%	55%	10%	0
12. I can change my verbal behavior (e.g., speed, accent) when it is necessary in intercultural situations.	0	5%	60%	35%	0
13. I can change my non-verbal behavior (e.g., gestures, facial expressions) when it is necessary in intercultural situations.	0	0%	70%	30%	0

### ***The Willingness in Cross-Cultural Communication***

Among 20 participants, before this project started, all of the participants were willing to communicate with each other. In the factor “Affective orientation to intercultural interaction,” participants enjoyed to know more each other, and showed the interest to understand foreign culture. As Ho (2000) claimed the interaction process between the two parties and the teacher's role in this process were collected and investigated. This study indicated that during the communication process, the process of questions and answers between students helps students acquire specific cultural knowledge of each other's countries. Therefore, through authentic communication, it can indeed enhance Students have cultural exchanges and gain a deeper understanding of other cultures. Here are some responses and feedbacks form the open questions:

“I like to make friends from different countries. I would like know more about other cultures.” (A, June 19, 2024)

“This is my first time to study abroad. I want to know more about Taiwan’s culture and enjoy my life here.” (B, June 19, 2024)

### ***Challenges in Cross-Cultural Communication***

However, in the analyzed cases, there were illustrations of the difficulties that students faced when solving language and cultural problems. Factor” Behavioral performance in intercultural interaction” showed that there are some challenges existing during communication. The language barrier was the most important issue. Language barrier is the greatest problem encountered in multi-cultural communication. Most participants reflected that the did not have enough language level to communicate with each other, so that the misunderstanding would happened. Finally the frustrations would appeared. Communication becomes more accessible when participants speaking in different languages, if not impossible. Even when people speak the same language, differences in dialects, accents, and idioms can confuse them. Sometimes, people may speak the same language but with different meanings for certain words or phrases.

“I am not good at English. Sometimes I can not express myself, so that I avoid speaking, just use my body language.” (C, June 19, 2024)

“During the learning process, because of my poor English, I am too shy to speak. I think I need to learn English more.” (D, June 19, 2024)

## **4. Conclusion**

Based on the above discussion, understanding and appreciating the cultural differences would be a main issue during the learning process. Both sides of the students were willing to know and share each other’s cultures. However, due to language barriers, students faced challenges and difficulties. Thus, language training should be given for those who have more chances of coming into contact with foreigners. Thus, for improving cross-cultural communication, there are some suggestions for educators: Avoid stereotypes and assumptions, learn more about cultures, improve language proficiency, and use non-verbal communication. Effective cross-cultural communication requires understanding cultural differences, language barriers, and stereotypes. By active communication, we can overcome the challenges and finally communicate effectively across cultures.

## References

- 呂木琳, 徐昌慧, 馮莉雅. (2014). 我國高等教育國際化基礎條件之探究。國家教育研究院計畫 (編號 NAER-102-09-C-1-13-07-1- 25), 未出版. [Lu Mulin et al. (2014). *Research on the basic conditions for the internationalization of higher education*. National Institute of Education Program. Unpublished.]  
<https://www.naer.edu.tw/ezfiles/0/1000/img/49/NAER-102-09-C-1-13-07-1-25.pdf>
- 周宛青. (2017). 高等教育國際化下臺灣本籍生整體學習經驗質性研究. 臺灣教育評論月刊, 6(4), 228-254. [Zhou Wanqin. (2017). Learning Experience of Taiwanese Students in the Context of Higher Education Internationalization: A Qualitative Study. *Taiwan Educational Review Monthly*, 6(4), 228-254.]
- 張善禮. (2015). 外語教育的前瞻：以跨文化溝通能力建構國際行動能力的外語教育. 外國語文研究, 22, 97-115. [Zhang Shanli. (2015). Foreign Language Education Perspectives: Achieving International Competences by Building Cross-cultural communication Skills. *Foreign Language Study*, 22,97-115.]
- 黃文定. (2015). 融合跨文化溝通能力與全球公民素養的外語教育：評介《從外語教育邁向跨文化公民素養教育》. 課程研究, 10(2), 97-106. [Huang Wending. (2019). From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: Essays and reflection. *Curriculum Study*, 10(2), 97-106.]
- 黃光國. (1995). 《知識與行動：中華文化傳統的社會心理詮釋》. 台北：心理出版社. [Hwang, Kwang-Kuo (1995). Knowledge and Action. Taipei: Psychological Publishing.]
- Chao, T.-C. (2014). The development and application of an intercultural competence scale for university EFL learners. *English Teaching & Learning*, 38(4), 79-124.
- Chi, D. L. (2016). *Intercultural Communication: Differences between Western and Asian Perspective*. Centrica University of Applied Sciences.
- Ho, C. M. L. (2000). Developing intercultural awareness and writing skills through email exchange. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 6(12). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Ho-Email.html>
- Jenifer, R & Raman, G. P. (2015). Cross Cultural Communication Barriers in Workplace. *International Journal of Management*, 6(1), 348-351.

**Contact email:** paigerabbit@gmail.com



## *The Reflection of Society in Udom Taephanich's Stand-Up Comedy*

Panurit Sarasombat, Ramkhamhaeng University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

This mixed-methods research investigates the social reflections and audience perceptions in Udom Taephanich's stand-up comedy show, "Deaw 13" or "No. 13". Content analysis of the show reveals 13 topics of social, cultural, and political themes domains, predominantly employing humor based on reality. Quantitative findings showed that the audience most frequently recalled issues related to the competence of national leaders (Fe = 37; 30.7%), followed by criticism of political systems and figures (Fe = 28; 23.3%), and guidelines for appropriate living (Fe = 11; 9.2%). The most common reflection type, the "lantern," highlights shared societal experiences and beliefs. Deeper reflections, categorized as the "projector" type, connect to life philosophies, sociocultural dynamics, and political perspectives, demonstrating the potential of stand-up comedy to address social issues and challenge power structures. A free elicitation procedure reveals that political themes domain was most readily recalled and recognized, followed by social and cultural themes. In terms of recognition, the most notable issues were the competence of national leaders and criticism of political systems and figures (Fe = 84; 17.5%), followed by principles of life management (Fe = 47; 9.8%). The study also finds that younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Y) exhibit more positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards the show than older generations (Gen X and Baby Boomers) at the .05 significance level ( $F = 3.691$ , Sig. < .05). These findings underscore the influence of stand-up comedy in shaping audience perceptions and the potential for utilizing humor to communicate complex social issues effectively.

Keywords: Stand-Up Comedy, Social Reflection, Media Effect, Udom Taephanich, Content Analysis, Mixed-Methods Research

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## 1. Introduction

Performance arts, a form of cultural communication, have a long-standing relationship with humanity, reflecting societal identities across eras (Costanzo, 2020). In the realm of communication, performance art involves a performer (sender) conveying messages through various channels to an audience (receiver) with diverse objectives depending on the performance genre.

Comedic performance, a genre within the broader category of comedy, focuses on communicating happiness, joy, and amusement, contrasting with tragedy, which delves into sorrow, hardship, and loss. Both genres are psychologically linked to human emotions, primarily serving an entertainment function across various media like theater, television, radio, film, and literature (Taflinger, 1996).

Stand-up comedy, a notable comedic performance style, resembles traditional Thai comedic performances (such as *jum-uad*, which uses words and gestures to elicit laughter) (Royal Institute of Thailand, 2011) but features a single performer directly communicating their perspectives and experiences to the audience through storytelling and humor (Zoglin, 2021). While stand-up comedy's primary function is entertainment, it can also serve other roles, such as presenting alternative viewpoints, challenging power structures, and advocating for political ideologies (Kaewthep, 2009). For example, a study on dark comedies by Joel and Ethan Coen revealed their function in presenting distorted views of society, such as the illusion of freedom outside of prison and the economic exploitation of the working class (Tamthai, 2010). Furthermore, stand-up comedy has been observed to serve as a tool for presenting diverse ideas and even as a means for political resistance (Manager Online, 2021), aligning with Kaewthep's (2009) research, which suggests that resistance is one of the communicative functions of comedy across various media.

Numerous studies have shown that performances can influence audience perceptions and attitudes on multiple levels, from knowledge acquisition and awareness to attitude formation and behavioral tendencies (Kaewthep, 2009). This research aims to explore this phenomenon in the context of stand-up comedy, positing that it transcends mere entertainment to reflect societal issues, perform various functions, and influence audience perceptions on multiple levels.

## 2. Research Objectives

- To study the content communication patterns in the stand-up comedy show "Deaw 13".
- To examine the reflection of social context connections in "Deaw 13".
- To investigate the audience's perception of social issues presented in "Deaw 13".

## 3. Review of Literature

### 3.1. Reflection Theory

Reflection theory, as applied to the analysis of media content, posits that society serves as the blueprint for what is depicted in the media (Kaewthep & Chaikhunphon, 2012). This theoretical standpoint suggests that society, or the "real world," is primary, while the representation of people, objects, or events in the "media world" is secondary. In essence, media content is seen as a reflection or a recording of real-world phenomena. For instance,

the depiction of the attack on the U.S. naval base by the Japanese Empire in the film "Pearl Harbor" reflects the historical event that led to World War II. Without the occurrence of this event in the real world, there would be no such depiction in the media world.

Within reflection theory, there are three distinct levels of reflection (Kaewthep & Chaikhunphon, 2012):

1. **Mirror Reflection:** This level pertains to the reflection of reality based on physical appearance, behavior, shape, face, or attire. It is a straightforward representation of the external characteristics of the real world.
2. **Lantern Reflection:** This level reflects social structures and shared societal perspectives. It delves into the nuances of class differences, generational views, and other collective viewpoints within society.
3. **Projector Reflection:** This is the deepest level of reflection, focusing on social theories, ideologies, beliefs, or values. It involves a critical examination of societal phenomena through the lens of established social theories and critiques.

### 3.2. *Ladder of Comedy*

The ladder of comedy is a concept that outlines a hierarchy of humor, relating to human emotions and psychological functions (Kaewthep, 2009). Humor in various media serves a psychological purpose, such as ego release, venting frustration, aggression, or anger. Laughter acts as a safety valve, shielding individuals from painful realities. In the absence of humor, human mental well-being could be adversely affected. Therefore, humor is essential for providing temporary relief from suffering.

Thompson (1946, as cited in Kaewthep, 2009) proposed six levels in the ladder of comedy:

1. **Obscene Jokes:** This is the lowest level of humor, involving vulgar and indecent jokes.
2. **Physical Comedy:** Humor derived from physical actions, often involving slapstick or misfortunes.
3. **Situational Comedy:** Humor arising from contrived situations, coincidences, or improbable scenarios that are presented as believable.
4. **Wit and Wordplay:** Humor based on clever use of words, language, tone, or dialogue.
5. **Character Comedy:** Humor derived from impersonating others or using comedic personalities.
6. **Satire and Irony:** The highest level of humor, utilizing real-world issues, situations, thoughts, or events for comparison, mockery, satire, or sarcasm.

## 4. Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both content analysis and audience surveys.

**Content Analysis:** The "Deaw 13" show (2 hours 56 minutes) is analyzed using a taxonomy to categorize content of communication patterns and examine reflections of social contexts. The analysis considers the levels of reflection, structural characteristics of the performance (content, presentation style, emotional basis), and the ladder of comedy. Data is categorized using a tally sheet.

Free Elicitation Procedure: A representative sample of 120 audience members is surveyed using a single elicitation question to assess their recall and recognition of social issues presented in "Deaw 13." Additional questions gauge their attitudes and behavioral tendencies after watching the show.

#### **4.1. *Sample Selection***

The sample is selected from audiences of "Deaw 13," specifically those who have already watched the show. Convenience sampling is used, followed by screening for willingness to participate. The sample size of 120 is based on Korchia's (2001) method, increased sixfold for greater reliability and to compare generational differences.

#### **4.2. *Research Instrument***

Data collection involves a free elicitation procedure with a single elicitation question: "When you think about the content you watched in "Deaw 13", what issues, stories, or topics come to mind?" A structured questionnaire is used, along with additional questions to assess attitudes and behavioral tendencies after the show. The questionnaire includes sections on demographics, the single elicitation question, and a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate attitudes and behavioral tendencies.

#### **4.3. *Data Analysis***

Data analysis involves creating network weight diagrams of the sample's responses, categorizing them into domains, and creating a comprehensive network weight diagram for each domain. Descriptive statistics analyze the mean of attitudes and behavioral tendencies, while inferential statistics (One-way ANOVA and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient) compare the mean across generations.

### **5. Analysis and Results**

#### **5.1. *Content Analysis Results of "Deaw 13"***

Content analysis of "Deaw 13" reveals a diverse range of social, cultural, and political themes, totaling 13 distinct topics. These themes encompass various aspects of contemporary Thai society, reflecting the complexities and nuances of everyday life. The show's content predominantly focuses on social issues (53.84%), followed by cultural (30.76%) and political (15.38%) themes, as shown in Table 1. This distribution suggests that the show prioritizes commentary on social issues while also incorporating cultural and political elements to provide a comprehensive reflection of Thai society.



Table 1: Distribution of Themes in "Deaw 13"

<b>Main Topic Category</b>	<b>Number of Themes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Social Issues	7	53.84%
Cultural Issues	4	30.77%
Political Issues	2	15.39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The analysis also reveals the show's predominant use of humor rooted in reality, drawing upon relatable situations and experiences to resonate with the audience. This approach not only enhances the entertainment value but also facilitates a deeper understanding and engagement with the social issues being addressed. The most common reflection type identified in the show is the "lantern" type, which sheds light on shared societal experiences and beliefs. By highlighting commonalities in awareness, thoughts, and behaviors, this reflection type fosters a sense of collective identity and shared understanding among the audience. For instance, the show's depiction of the respect given to elders in social ceremonies (weddings and funerals) resonates with the audience's cultural values and reinforces social norms.

In addition to the "lantern" type, the show also utilizes "mirror" and "projector" reflections. "Mirror" reflections realistically depict situations and behaviors, providing a straightforward representation of societal realities. For example, the show's portrayal of the challenges faced when using public restrooms in Thailand reflects a common experience for many audiences. On the other hand, "projector" reflections delve deeper, connecting to life philosophies, sociocultural dynamics, and political perspectives. This is evident in the show's critique of consumerism and its encouragement of a simpler, more meaningful life.

Table 2: Distribution of Humor Types in "Deaw 13"

<b>Humor Type</b>	<b>Number of Themes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Character Impersonations	39	27.86%
Situational Comedy	28	20.00%
Wit and Wordplay	28	20.00%
Satire and Irony	28	20.00%
Physical Comedy	14	10.00%
Obscene Jokes	3	2.14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The humor in "Deaw 13" is predominantly derived from character impersonations (27.86%), followed by situational comedy, wit and wordplay, and satire/irony (20.00% each), as

depicted in Table 2. These higher-level forms of humor contribute to the show's intellectual appeal and social commentary. The frequent use of character impersonations allows Udom to embody different perspectives and satirize various social roles, while situational comedy, wit, and wordplay create humorous scenarios that underscore the show's social commentary. Satire and irony are employed to expose the absurdities and contradictions within Thai society, prompting the audience to question prevailing norms and beliefs. While physical comedy and obscene jokes are less frequent, they still play a role in diversifying the comedic elements and catering to a broader audience.

### ***5.2. Reflections of Social Context Connections***

The content analysis underscores the show's ability to effectively reflect and communicate real-world social contexts. The reflections are firmly grounded in reality, allowing the audience to easily connect with the content and recall shared experiences and events. For example, the show's discussion of modern dating practices through apps like Tinder reflects a prevalent phenomenon in contemporary Thai society. This grounding in reality enhances the show's credibility and relevance, making the social commentary more impactful.

The predominance of the "lantern" reflection type further emphasizes the show's focus on shared societal experiences. By highlighting common struggles, aspirations, and beliefs, the show creates a sense of solidarity among the audience, fostering a collective understanding of the social issues being addressed. This shared understanding can potentially lead to increased awareness and engagement with these issues beyond the realm of entertainment. For instance, the show's portrayal of the frustrations associated with attending funerals and the Qingming festival resonates with many audiences who have experienced similar situations.

The deeper "projector" reflections, while less frequent, are crucial in elevating the show's social commentary. By connecting to life philosophies, sociocultural dynamics, and political perspectives, these reflections encourage the audience to think critically about the underlying causes and consequences of the social issues presented. For example, the show's critique of the Thai political system and the capabilities of its leaders prompts audiences to reflect on the broader implications of these issues for society.

### ***5.3. Free Elicitation and Additional Question Results***

The audience survey results provide valuable insights into the impact of the show on audiences' perceptions and attitudes. The findings reveal that political themes domain is the most readily recalled and recognized (40.03%), followed by social themes domain (38.84%) and cultural themes domain (21.13%). This suggests that the political commentary in "Deaw 13" resonates strongly with the audience and is more likely to be remembered and discussed, as shown in Figure 1. The high retention or memorable (recall and recognition) of political themes may be attributed to their immediate relevance to the audience's lives and the ongoing public discourse surrounding these issues.

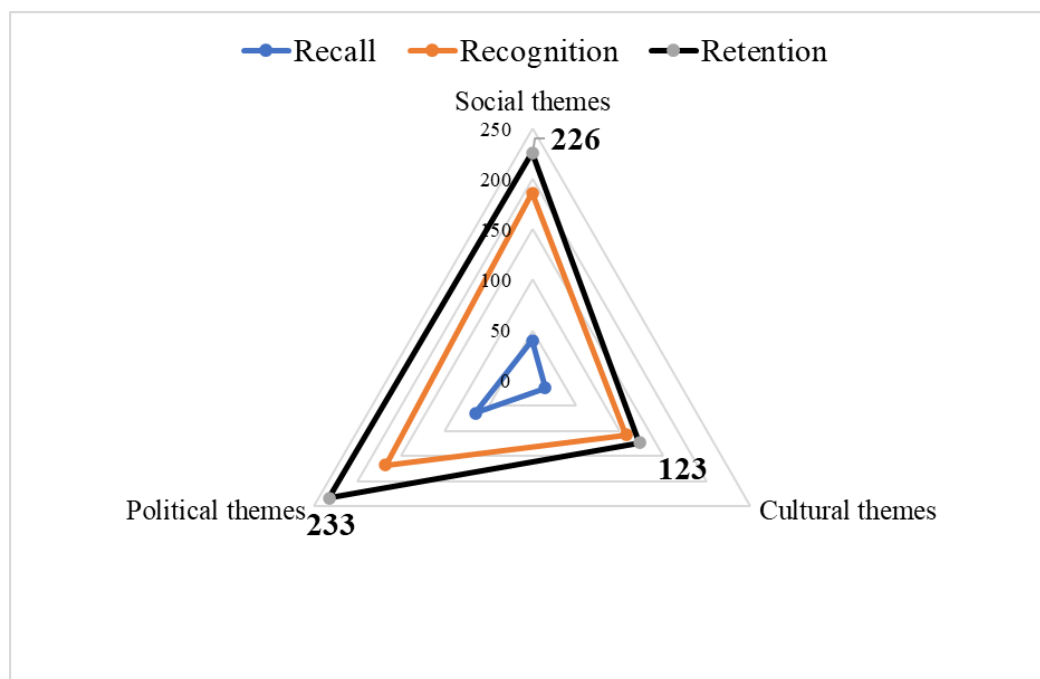


Figure 1: Frequency Weight of Recall, Recognition, and Retention in "Deaw 13"

The survey also reveals generational differences in audience perceptions. Younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Y) exhibit more positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards the show than older generations (Gen X and Baby Boomers), as shown in Table 3. This finding aligns with the observation that the show's content and humor are tailored towards a younger demographic, who may be more receptive to its social commentary and critical perspectives. The positive attitudes among younger audiences suggest that stand-up comedy can be an effective tool for engaging and influencing this demographic on important social issues.

Table 3: Mean of Attitude and Behavioral Tendency by Generation

Generation	Mean of Attitude and Behavioral Tendency
Gen Z	4.56
Gen Y	4.09
Gen X	4.09
Baby Boomer	3.72

Furthermore, the survey results indicate that the show's impact extends beyond mere entertainment. The high scores on understanding and valuing social issues (Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.737), agreeing with and supporting the performer's views (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.784; Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.845), and willingness to change opinions and engage with social and political news (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.948) suggest that the show has the potential to stimulate critical thinking and promote civic engagement. However, the moderate score on the intention to change personal behavior (Mean = 3.39, SD = 0.938) highlights a potential gap between attitude change and behavioral modification, warranting further investigation in future research.

#### **5.4. Hypothesis Testing Results**

The research hypothesis posited that generation (age group) is associated with attitudes and behavioral tendencies after watching "Deaw 13." The results of a one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference in attitudes and behavioral tendencies among different age groups ( $F = 3.691, p < .05$ ). Post-hoc tests using the Least Significant Difference (LSD) method further clarified these differences.

Specifically, the Baby Boomer generation exhibited significantly less positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies compared to both Gen Z ( $p = .012$ ) and Gen Y ( $p = .043$ ). Additionally, Gen X also showed less positive attitudes and tendencies compared to Gen Z ( $p = .004$ ).

These findings are further supported by a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient analysis, which revealed a significant negative correlation between age and attitudes/behavioral tendencies ( $r = -0.297, p < .05$ ), indicating that younger audiences tend to have more positive attitudes towards the show's content and message. This finding suggests that stand-up comedy may be a particularly effective tool for engaging and influencing younger audiences on social and political issues.

In summary, the hypothesis testing results confirm that age plays a significant role in shaping audience perceptions and responses to "Deaw 13." Younger generations, particularly Gen Z, are more receptive to the show's message and exhibit more positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies compared to older generations. This highlights the importance of considering generational differences when analyzing media effects and tailoring communication strategies to specific age groups.

#### **6. Discussion**

The findings of this research provide compelling evidence of the significant influence that stand-up comedy can have in shaping audience perceptions and effectively communicating social issues. The show's ability to resonate with a diverse audience, particularly younger generations, underscores its potential as a tool for social commentary and change. The predominance of social and political themes, coupled with the use of higher-level humor, suggests that stand-up comedy can be a powerful platform for raising awareness and fostering critical thinking about societal issues.

The research also highlights the importance of considering generational differences in media effects research. The varying attitudes and behavioral tendencies across generations, as evidenced by the significant difference in mean scores between Gen Z (Mean = 4.56) and older generations (Gen X: Mean = 4.09, Baby Boomer: Mean = 3.72), suggest that media messages may be interpreted and internalized differently based on age and life experiences. This finding has implications for the design and delivery of media content aimed at specific demographics, emphasizing the need to tailor messages to resonate with the target audience's values and experiences.

The negative correlation between age and attitude towards the show ( $r = -0.297, p < 0.05$ ) further reinforces the notion that younger audiences may be more receptive to the show's social commentary and critical perspectives. This may be due to their heightened awareness of social and political issues, as well as their familiarity with the comedic style and cultural references employed in the show. Understanding these generational differences is crucial for

developing effective communication strategies that can bridge the gap between different age groups and foster a more inclusive and informed public discourse.

## **7. Observations and Implications**

### ***7.1. Incongruity Between Presented Issues and Audience's Retention***

The content analysis reveals an interesting discrepancy between the quantity of issues presented within each thematic category and the audience's retention of those issues. While social issues constitute the largest category (7 themes), they are not the most recalled or recognized by the audience. Conversely, political themes, despite being the smallest category (2 themes), are the most readily recalled and recognized (40.03%). This suggests that the salience and relevance of the issues, rather than their mere quantity, play a crucial role in audience retention.

The prominence of political themes in audience recall and recognition can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, political issues, particularly those concerning the capabilities of national leaders, are of paramount concern to the public as they directly impact their livelihoods and the overall direction of the country. Secondly, political issues often involve conflict and controversy, making them more engaging and memorable for the audience. The show's humorous take on these issues may further amplify their retention by creating an emotional connection and stimulating discussion.

### ***7.2. Generational Influence on Attitudes***

The study's findings highlight the significant influence of generational differences on audience attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards the show. Younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Y) exhibit more positive attitudes and are more likely to be influenced by the show's message compared to older generations. This suggests that stand-up comedy, as a form of entertainment and social commentary, may be particularly effective in engaging and mobilizing younger audiences.

This generational divide can be attributed to several factors, including differences in values, life experiences, and media consumption habits. Younger generations may be more attuned to the show's humor and cultural references, making them more receptive to its message. Additionally, they may be more open to challenging traditional norms and beliefs, making them more likely to engage with the show's critical perspectives.

The implications of this finding are significant for communication strategies aimed at promoting social change. By understanding the generational nuances in media reception, communicators can tailor their messages to resonate with specific age groups, thereby maximizing their impact and fostering a more inclusive and participatory public discourse.

### ***7.3. "Deaw 13" Analysis Through the Communication Process Model***

Analyzing "Deaw 13" through the lens of the S-M-C-R communication model provides further insights into the show's effectiveness:

1. **Sender (S):** Udom Taephanich, as the sender, strategically selects real-life situations and social experiences to craft his message. He employs high-level humor, character impersonations, and thought-provoking comparisons to engage the audience and deliver his social commentary.
2. **Message (M):** The show's message is multifaceted, encompassing social, cultural, and political themes. It not only highlights societal problems but also offers potential solutions, encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection among the audience.
3. **Channel (C):** The show is disseminated through both live performances and online streaming on Netflix, reaching a broad audience across different demographics and geographic locations. This multi-channel approach maximizes the show's reach and impact, allowing it to transcend the limitations of traditional performance spaces.
4. **Receiver (R):** The audience actively engages with the show, interpreting its message and potentially applying it to their own lives. The positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies observed in the survey suggest that the show effectively influences audience perceptions and fosters a willingness to engage with social and political issues.

The show's success can be attributed to the sender's skillful encoding of the message through humor, the relevance and resonance of the content with the audience's experiences, and the effective utilization of multiple channels to reach a wide audience. The active engagement of the audience further reinforces the show's impact, demonstrating the potential of stand-up comedy as a tool for social commentary and change.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of the social reflections and audience perceptions in Udom Taephanich's "Deaw 13." The findings highlight the show's effectiveness in communicating social issues through humor based on reality and its potential to influence audience attitudes and behaviors, particularly among younger generations. The study also underscores the importance of considering generational differences in media effects research and suggests avenues for future research in this field.

## 9. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its focus on a single stand-up comedy show and a specific cultural context. Future research could expand to other comedic performances and diverse cultural settings to examine the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of stand-up comedy on audience attitudes and behaviors would provide valuable insights into its potential for social change.

## References

- Costanzo, W. M. (2020). *When the world laughs: Film comedy East and West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaewthep, K. (2009). *Media analysis: Concepts and techniques*. Bangkok: Phapphim.
- Kaewthep, K., & Chaikhunphon, N. (2012). *New media studies handbook*. Bangkok: Phapphim.
- Korchia, M. (2001). *Brand image and brand associations*. (Doctoral dissertation). Paris: Graduate School of Economics and Management, ESSEC (France).
- MGR Online. (2021, June 4). *Remember to show off in front of the curtain, the Thai troupe can't stand it*. Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9640000053970>
- The Office of the Royal Society. (2011). *Dictionary of the Royal Institute, B.E. 2554*. Retrieved from [https://dictionary.orst.go.th/lookup\\_domain.php](https://dictionary.orst.go.th/lookup_domain.php)
- Sincharu, T. (2020). *Research and statistical data analysis with SPSS and AMOS*. Bangkok: Business R&D.
- Spring News. (2021, September 30). *Which generation consumes the most content via Streaming on mobile phones? Lifestyle*. Retrieved from <https://www.springnews.co.th/spring-life/816568>
- Statista. (2023). *Number of Netflix paid subscribers worldwide from 1st quarter 2013 to 4th quarter 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly-number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/>
- Taflinger, R. F. (1996, May 30). *Sitcom: What it is, how it works A theory of comedy*. Retrieved from <https://public.wsu.edu/~taflinge/theory.html>
- Tamthai, N. (2010). *An analysis of the characteristics of dark comedy films by Joel and Ethan*. (Master's thesis). Bangkok: Department of Film and Still Photography, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.
- Zoglin, R. (2021, December 20). Stand-up comedy. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved February 17, 2024, from <https://www.britannica.com/art/stand-up-comedy>

**Contact email:** panurit@rumail.ru.ac.th





*Exploring the Dynamics of Violence and Power in School in Thai Teen Series  
“Girl From Nowhere”*

Thanapol Chaowanich, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand  
Preeda Akkarachantachot, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Exploring the Dynamics of Violence and Power in School in Thai Teen Series “Girl From Nowhere” is a qualitative research. The objective is to investigate and analyze the issues of violence and power in schools portrayed in the series ‘Girl From Nowhere’. The study found that ‘Girl From Nowhere’ presents various forms of violence—physical violence, including both physical and psychological acts of violence; structural violence, manifested through hierarchical structures or class orders associated with unequal power; and cultural violence rooted in the belief systems upheld in a society that perpetuates certain norms. This societal acceptance contributes to various types of violence. This violence is also linked to power in different dimensions embedded within society, involving the use of power by teachers and students, as well as the power of key characters like Nanno, portrayed as a character possessing superhuman qualities who holds ultimate power in penalizing individuals who exert violence in schools.

Keywords: School Violence, Power, Teen Series, Girl From Nowhere

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The Global School-based Student Health Survey 2021 by the World Health Organization revealed that 25% of Thai children aged 13-17 years experienced physical violence within a year. Social media has further highlighted school violence, with incidents among students—such as physical altercations and verbal threats—and teacher violence, including punitive measures like cutting students' hair for rule violations, sparking public concern.

School violence is not only reported in the news but also explored in the Thai teen series *Girl From Nowhere*. The first season aired in 2018 on GMM 25 and reaching a global audience with its second season on Netflix in 2021, the series adopts a unique narrative approach. Each episode features Nanno, a mysterious student who confronts a particular issue in a different school, with episodes inspired by real-life incidents. Unlike typical teen series, *Girl From Nowhere* addresses structural social problems beyond individual issues, reflecting societal conflicts within school settings.



Figure 1-2: Posters of the Series *Girl From Nowhere*, Season 1 and Season 2

The series has generated significant viewer responses, with many people sharing personal experiences of school-related violence online. Producers Phawit Chitrakorn and Damisa Ongsiriwattana noted that, after the show aired, female viewers began opening up about their experiences with bullying, which sparked support and discussion within the fan community.

As a fictional narrative, *Girl From Nowhere* mirrors and constructs societal realities, allowing the creators to blend real issues with imaginative storytelling. The researcher observes that the school violence depicted in the series is deeply connected to power dynamics, highlighting both teacher-student power struggles and peer violence. This study analyzes the portrayal of violence and power within the series' narrative framework.

## Research Objectives

1. To study the presentation of forms of school violence in the series "Girl From Nowhere."
2. To examine the dimensions of power depicted in the series "Girl From Nowhere."

## Theoretical Concepts Used in the Research

### Concept of School Violence

Kanokporn Klindokkeaw and Adipon Euajarusphan (2022) categorize violence into three types: **Direct Violence**, **Structural Violence**, and **Cultural Violence**. Direct violence includes observable actions that inflict physical or psychological harm, such as hitting or verbal abuse. Structural violence is more insidious, embedded within social structures and systems, and manifests through power dynamics that create unequal hierarchies, often in ways that are not immediately visible. Finally, cultural violence is perpetuated by societal beliefs and traditions that legitimize certain forms of violence, leading to the normalization of harmful attitudes and behaviors. This form of violence shapes societal perceptions, making some violent acts appear acceptable or even justified. Together, these categories offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing the types and sources of violence, especially within school environments.

According to UNESCO's *School Violence and Bullying: Global Status Report* (2017), school violence can be categorized into four main forms. **Physical violence** includes harmful acts, such as corporal punishment and bullying, intended to cause physical pain or discomfort. **Psychological violence** encompasses emotional abuse, such as humiliation, intimidation, and other behaviors that can harm a student's mental well-being. **Sexual violence** refers to harassment, abuse, or any other non-consensual sexual behavior affecting students. Finally, **bullying** involves repeated actions intended to inflict pain, humiliation, or distress, including both in-person bullying and cyberbullying. These classifications help in understanding the different dimensions of school violence and provide a basis for analyzing its portrayal in media and educational contexts. This study uses these concepts to classify and explore the origins of violence depicted in *Girl From Nowhere*, examining how the series presents violence within the school setting.

Steven Lukes (2004) defines power in three dimensions. **The First Dimension** involves overt actions where power is visibly exercised, such as directing or commanding others to act. **The Second Dimension** refers to more subtle forms of power, where influence is exerted indirectly, often through non-decisions or by setting agendas that limit choices without overt confrontation. **The Third Dimension** represents the most profound form of power, where authority shapes beliefs and perceptions so that people accept power structures as legitimate, often unconsciously. This dimension aligns closely with ideology, as it creates an environment in which alternatives seem either unnecessary or nonexistent, reinforcing established authority as natural and unquestioned.

This third dimension aligns with the analysis by Wasan Pounpunwong and Panuwat Foojakham (2020) on authoritarian power in educational institutions, where power is legitimized through ideologies and rituals that encourage students to accept teachers' authority. This hierarchy grants teachers the power to discipline students, sometimes disproportionately.

### Theoretical Perspectives on Media Portrayal

The Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal proposes that media functions as a powerful tool for constructing and interpreting meanings, shaping how subjects are depicted and influencing viewers' perceptions of reality and ideology. This theory examines the methods media uses to

present subjects, the reality it constructs, and the ideologies it supports, which, in turn, affect audience behaviors and beliefs.

As a form of fictional media, series blend imagination with storytelling to provoke emotional responses. This theory is useful for analyzing how *Girl From Nowhere* portrays violence through its aesthetic and narrative choices, shaping audience perceptions of school violence.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative approach to analyze the series *Girl From Nowhere*, focusing on its depiction of violence and power within a school setting. The study covers both seasons, totaling 21 episodes: Season 1, which premiered on August 8, 2018, on GMM 25, and Season 2, released globally on Netflix on May 7, 2021. The analysis is limited to episodes that address school-related stories and conflicts, including eight episodes from Season 1—*The Ugly Truth*, *Trophy*, *Social Love*, *Wonderwall*, *Trap*, *Thank You Teacher*, and *BFF*—and four episodes from Season 2—*Pregnant*, *True Love*, *Sotus*, and *Liberation*. The study uses textual analysis to explore the series' portrayal of these themes.

### **Research Findings**

The study of violence depicted in the series *Girl From Nowhere* reveals several types of violence and power, categorized as follows:

#### **Physical Violence**

The analysis shows that physical violence is a central element of the narrative in *Girl From Nowhere*, used to advance the story and captivate viewers. The series presents physical violence in various forms and intensities, often to help characters achieve their goals. For example, in *Wonderwall*, physical assaults are used to coerce victims; *The Rank* features a violent confrontation among female students competing for beauty; *Trophy* depicts a character injuring herself with a hammer to avoid performing; and *BFF* shows a group of friends luring Nanno to a secluded spot, where they severely beat her while covering her head with a bag. These portrayals of physical violence are integral to the series, driving the plot and eliciting strong emotional reactions from the audience.

The depiction of physical violence in the series reveals that confrontations often occur among female students. The motives for this violence include betrayal (as seen in *Wonderwall*), desperation leading to survival tactics (*Trophy*), jealousy over the victim's status and beauty (*Wonderwall* and *The Rank*), and issues of love and jealousy resulting in violent behavior (*Social Love* and *BFF*). These motivations are deeply personal and individualistic. The perpetrators of this violence face consequences for their actions, as determined by the creators' direction for the characters. This setup underscores the themes and messages each episode aims to convey to the audience.



Figure 3-4: Depiction of Physical Violence in *Girl From Nowhere*

### Structural Violence

In schools, structural violence is reflected in the power relationship between teachers and students, where teachers are positioned above students and have the authority to discipline or control their behavior. This form of violence is evident in *Liberation*, where the teacher's authority over students is highlighted, illustrating that students must comply with school rules without question or challenge. Those who question or resist are subject to disciplinary action. The director portrays the administrative teacher as an intimidating figure, instilling fear in the students and reinforcing the hierarchical power dynamics within the school.

The portrayal of strict teachers controlling students' behavior is further exemplified in the episode *True Love*, which features Naruemon, a strict teacher at an all-girls school. Teacher Naruemon uses her authority to enforce a school policy separating male and female students, following the school's decision to admit male students to address financial issues. She believes that boys would undermine the school's moral standards. Although this episode does not depict physical violence, the enforcement of discriminatory school rules based on Teacher Naruemon's personal biases represents structural violence. This is evident in how students must comply with rigid rules, restricting their freedom and reinforcing the hierarchical control within the school environment.

Structural violence can also manifest in the form of unequal hierarchical arrangements, as illustrated in the episode *The Rank*. This episode depicts an all-girls school that places great importance on students' physical beauty, with real-time rankings based on appearance. Those who rank in the top ten receive special treatment and access to the prestigious "Leht Fah" building, reserved for students deemed attractive—akin to a higher social class. Each year, a "Shining Star" award is given to the most beautiful student. The rules and privileges associated with these rankings create competition among students who aspire to join the elite group, reflecting structural violence through privilege and inequality. As a result, when one character aspires to be the most beautiful in the school, she resorts to violence against a more beautiful peer to secure the top position. While this character becomes a perpetrator of violence, she is also a victim of the structural violence imposed by the school's hierarchy.

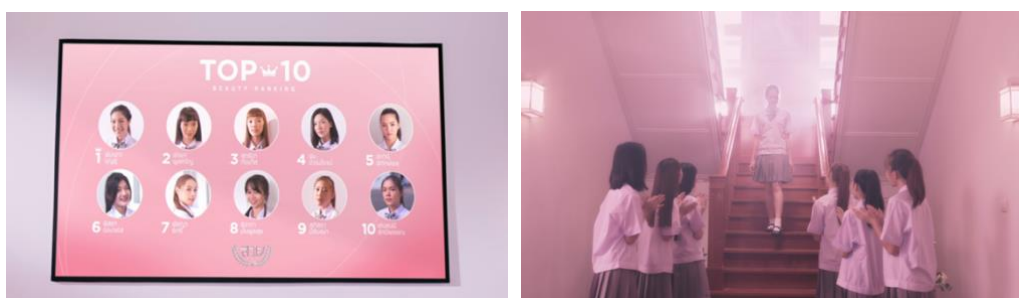


Figure 5-6: Structural Violence in the Form of Ranking and Privilege of the Superior

## Cultural Violence

In the context of schools, cultural violence is evident in the authoritarian relationships that exist, such as those between teachers and students or between senior and junior students. These dynamics are perpetuated through social learning and become normalized within the societal framework. There is a particular cultural acceptance of teachers using their authority to reprimand or punish students. When such punishments cause physical or psychological harm, they constitute acts of violence. Despite experiencing this violence, students often acquiesce to the unchecked authority of teachers, influenced by societal values and narratives like "improvement through corporal punishment." This ingrained cultural acceptance allows for the perpetuation of violence as a standard practice within educational settings.

Cultural violence, illustrated by the binary thinking that contrasts high-achieving students with average students, is reflected in the episode *Trophy*. The series depicts a school that prioritizes and values students who excel in various fields to enhance its reputation. Students with outstanding abilities receive ample attention and support, while those without notable achievements face pressure to discover their own talents and contribute excellence. The intense pressure from both peers and teachers leads to Pui and Mew, two close friends among the less remarkable students, frequently being demeaned by Teacher Ploy. Eventually, when Pui is declared the new prodigy of the school after winning first place in a Thai literature association contest, Mew becomes highly envious. This envy drives Mew to follow Nanno's advice to copy an artwork from the internet and present it as her own, which wins a top prize and boosts the school's reputation. Mew becomes special in the school, but when it comes time for her to showcase her talents at the annual event, she uses a hammer to injure her hand as an excuse to avoid performing. The self-inflicted violence Mew engages in is a direct result of the school's pressure on students to meet the standards of excellence it imposes.

Cultural violence, manifested through the authoritarian relationship between teachers and students and deeply ingrained in societal norms, is evident in the episode "Liberation." The story unfolds at Phannana Witthaya School, known for its long-standing strict rules that are rigorously enforced. Students who violate these rules face severe punishment. The authority figures in the school include Teacher A, a strict and intimidating disciplinary teacher who monitors students' adherence to the rules with vigilance, creating an environment where students submissively comply with the school's rigorous regulations and strive to be model students in the eyes of adults.

When Nanno joins the school as a new student, she perceives the rules as unfair and outdated. From her first day, she challenges these rules, sparking a significant shift as other students begin to question and defy the system. This resistance against the authoritarian regime will be further explored in the following sections of the research.

## Teacher's Power

In the series *Girl From Nowhere*, the power dynamics between teachers and students are portrayed across several episodes, reflecting the creators' intent to highlight underlying issues within the school environment. The most tangible conflict arises between teachers and students, characterized by power and hierarchical relationships. In the context of Thai society, where respect for teachers is deeply ingrained, educators are often granted authority to admonish or even use violence under the guise of benevolence and a desire for students' success. This power comes with a sense of legitimacy, allowing teachers to exercise control

over students. Conversely, students, conditioned by societal norms to respect and obey teachers, often acquiesce to this authority, illustrating how cultural values perpetuate the acceptance of such power dynamics.

In many cases, the violence teachers use against students is intended to maintain their authority and suppress dissent. Teachers are granted legitimacy and trust by parents to guide and discipline students within the school environment. As institutions with large numbers of students, schools must enforce rules to ensure order and prevent chaos. Consequently, teachers, as enforcers of school regulations, have the authority to control, monitor, and correct behavior that deviates from societal norms. This authority can sometimes lead to violence. For example, in the episode *True Love*, Teacher Naruemol imposes a rule segregating male and female students. Students comply with this rule without objection, demonstrating how the enforcement of such regulations can lead to a form of violence, even when it is masked as a means of maintaining order.

In the episode *Liberation*, Teacher A, the disciplinary teacher, strictly enforces the school's rules and expects unquestioning obedience from students. Any student who questions or breaks the rules is punished by being locked in the "repentance room" until they show remorse and agree to follow the school's rules. This creates a climate of fear, reinforcing the power of the school's authority and discouraging students from challenging or intentionally breaking the rules. Furthermore, in the episode *The Ugly Truth*, Teacher Win sexually abuses female students and threatens the victimized students that if the victims tell anyone else the secret, the victim's clip will be released online and the victim's future will be ruined immediately. Of course, this threat makes the victims afraid and not dare to tell anyone. These things reflect the students' fear of allowing the teachers to use their power and commit violence without daring to stand up and question or resist the teacher's power.

The researcher observes that teachers, as educators responsible for instilling moral values and guiding students' behavior, inherently hold power over their students. This authority, when coupled with the control teachers exert within the school environment, makes it relatively easy for them to employ violence against students. Such violence can manifest through disciplinary punishments, derogatory remarks, verbal abuse, and humiliating acts. For example, news reports often highlight instances where teachers have physically punished students for violating dress codes or have disciplined them harshly for behavioral infractions, sometimes resulting in physical harm. This situation reflects a broader societal value that venerates teachers as benevolent figures who, despite their use of violence, are perceived as acting out of a desire to correct and improve their students. Consequently, such actions are often justified under the guise of fostering students' moral development and conformity to societal norms.

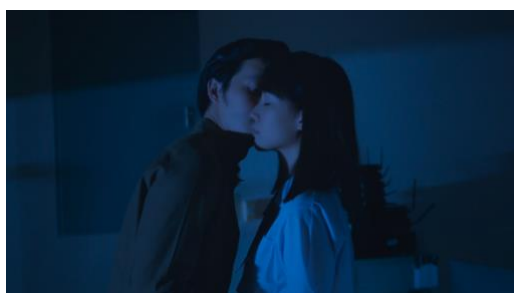


Figure 7-8: Teachers' Use of Power in Sexual Harassment and Physical Violence



At the same time, while teachers wield authority by enforcing school rules and resorting to violence against students who break these rules, they also possess the power to overlook or violate these rules if it serves the school's ideology or their own interests. This dynamic is illustrated in the episode *Trophy*, where Mew follows Nanno's advice by claiming internet artwork as her own, leading to her school's acclaim. When another student publicly exposes Mew's dishonesty, the principal, instead of punishing her, protects and praises Mew for her contribution to the school's reputation. Although this scenario is presented with a satirical twist, it highlights a critical example of teachers using their power to turn a blind eye to misconduct, prioritizing the school's prestige over ethical standards and the proper verification of achievements. This reflects a broader issue where authority figures can manipulate or disregard rules to maintain their own or their institution's standing.

### Student's Power

The series also explores the power dynamics between students and teachers, highlighting their resistance and struggles for autonomy. In the episode *Liberation*, the students, oppressed by the authoritarian rule of Teacher A, unite in rebellion. They forcibly detain all the teachers in the gym and coerce them into confessing their wrongdoings. This illustrates that students' power over teachers cannot be achieved by an individual alone but requires collective action. However, their newfound authority is short-lived; a violent act by one student against a teacher triggers fear and internal conflict among the students. Their power further dissipates when the school principal uses a gun to threaten and disperse them.

Ultimately, the principal capitulates when the true power lies with the students, symbolized by their collective use of mobile phones to record and expose the situation. This scene illustrates how mobile phones and social media have become formidable tools for empowering the oppressed, capable of shifting power dynamics instantly. The episode *True Love* similarly demonstrates students exploiting communication apps to maintain relationships in defiance of school rules banning interactions between boys and girls, reflecting their ability to navigate and subvert oppressive controls within their environment.



Figure 9-10: Student Resistance and Power Struggles Through Social Media

Additionally, the research reveals that the power dynamics among students themselves are a significant theme. Students not only unite to resist unjust authority from teachers but also wield power over their peers. This is often observed in the way senior students assert dominance over juniors. For example, in the episode "Sotus," seniors exert control through violent initiation rituals, while in "The Rank," beauty is used as a means to gain privileges and special treatment within the school.



## Nanno's Power

Nanno is the main character in the series *Girl from Nowhere*, and the background of her creation was explained by Kongdej Jaturanrasamee, one of the show's writers, in an interview with The101.World. He described the character's conception, noting that Nanno was designed to represent the existing malevolence in society, which manifests in various ways depending on the storyline and her actions. Kongdej compared Nanno to characters from the series *Black Mirror*, highlighting her ability to transcend the boundaries of realism and fantasy, depending on the context of each episode. This blend of realism and fantasy in her design makes Nanno a unique and defining figure in the series.



Figure 11: Nanno, the Main Character of the Series *Girl From Nowhere*

From Kongdej Jaturanrasamee's interview, it is evident that Nanno was created as a fantasy character—a mysterious girl with no clear origin. Her background remains unknown, and both the audience and the characters around her perceive her merely as a new student entering the school. Nanno's role is to provoke, incite, and guide other characters into making morally questionable decisions, thereby revealing their darker sides. This aligns with the statements made by Phawit Chitrakorn and Damisa Ongsiriwattana, the series producers, in an interview with *The People*, where they described Nanno as "the new girl in every school. From the first day she introduces herself to the last day she leaves, the school will never be the same. She represents all forms of women from every era. Her presence will disrupt those around her, causing them to reveal aspects of themselves they may not even know. Some people love her, some want to be her, and some want to kill her. But no matter the outcome, each new episode will always have Nanno as the new girl." Thus, Nanno's appearance is akin to the daughter of Satan, showcasing the darker aspects of human nature, with the school serving as a testing ground for these moral challenges.

Thus, while Nanno endures violence from her peers and teachers in the series, she always finds a way to make the perpetrators learn from their actions. The violence depicted in the series serves to engage the audience in observing the karmic outcomes of these actions. Nanno represents a victim of school violence within Thai society, but with a significant difference: she possesses the power to exact revenge on those who harm her, which is virtually impossible in real life. Consequently, the series constructs Nanno with a mysterious power to confront and challenge individuals driven by authority, desire, hatred, and violent instincts.

Nanno's role as the new student in each school is deliberately designed to disrupt the status quo and challenge the existing power dynamics. Her actions, which involve both power and violence, serve as a form of retribution against those who have previously exerted power or

violence over her. Although she does not always use direct, eye-for-an-eye violence, the consequences of her actions often lead viewers to feel a sense of satisfaction and agreement with Nanno's form of justice.

By creating Nanno with such extraordinary power, the series explores themes of moral judgment and retribution, presenting her as a force that unsettles and punishes those who perpetuate injustice. Her presence in the narrative serves to expose and confront the systemic issues within schools and society at large, making her a symbol of both retribution and moral reckoning.

## Conclusion & Discussion

The series *Girl From Nowhere* transforms the ideal vision of schools as safe, nurturing environments into a depiction of violence and power struggles. Schools, as portrayed in the series, become sites of physical and sexual violence, bullying, and systemic abuse, reflecting the creators' intent to address both individual and structural issues within educational settings. The series highlights the authoritarian power systems that legitimize teachers' use of violence to control and suppress students and depicts students responding with violence to resist this oppression. Additionally, it explores intra-student power dynamics, such as seniority hierarchies, revealing how violence and power struggles permeate even the most protected spaces like schools.

The analysis of the series *Girl From Nowhere* reveals a significant relationship between power and violence. Those in power tend to use their authority to inflict violence on those without power, particularly evident in the school setting, where a clear division of power exists between teachers and students. Teachers are granted the legitimacy to enforce disciplinary actions against students who violate school rules, with these regulations serving to control and punish the powerless. The hierarchical structure makes it difficult for those being governed to challenge those in authority, reflecting a microcosm of broader societal power struggles where conflicts and dominance are perpetually at play.

Additionally, societal values and discourses emphasize the respect and obedience students owe to teachers, imbuing them with legitimate authority to instruct and correct students, guiding them to become virtuous members of society. However, this power can lead to violence when teachers use their authority to impose disciplinary measures on students who violate school rules. When teachers wield their legitimate authority to engage in excessive and harmful punishment, it results in both physical and psychological damage to students. Thus, the authority of teachers, while justified in its intent, can also manifest as violence when misused.

Conversely, violence can also serve as a tool for establishing power, particularly among students within the school. In this context, violence among students often stems from the hierarchical power dynamics enforced by teachers. Senior students typically wield authority over junior students, leveraging the seniority system to assert dominance. Junior students are expected to show respect and deference to their seniors. Direct violence among students manifests through acts that induce shame and fear, such as intimidation, physical assault, and bullying. This type of violence is employed to assert superiority and enforce compliance. Ultimately, if such violence reaches the attention of teachers—who hold the highest authority in disciplining students—the power to adjudicate and impose punishment remains with the teachers.

The study of violence and power dynamics in schools, as depicted in the series *Girl from Nowhere*, presents a clear exploration of these themes. However, examining similar adolescent series could provide additional insights. Future research is recommended to focus on analyzing how different adolescent series depict violence and power dynamics. Understanding the techniques producers use to create narratives and characters that reflect these themes will offer a broader perspective on their representation in Thai teen series. This approach will help provide a more comprehensive view of the various ways these issues are portrayed and addressed in adolescent media.

### **Acknowledgments**

This article is part of a doctoral dissertation “Representation of schools and adolescent ideologies in Thai teen series” for the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

## References

- Chonthorn, W. (2019). "Nanno's role is to provoke the evil within people" – Insights from the writers of 'Girl from Nowhere The Series'. *The 101 World*. Retrieved from <https://www.the101.world/dekmai-scriptwriter-interview/>
- Decharat, S. (2023). Policies to prevent violence in schools. *Move Forward Party*. Retrieved from <https://think.moveforwardparty.org/article/education/3677/>
- DeFleur, M. L., & Plax, T. G. (1980). Human communication as a bio-social process. *Paper presented at the International Communication Association, Acapulco, Mexico*.
- Kanokporn, K., & Adipon, E. (2022). Cultural violence: Reflections of oppression from social learning in Thai society. *Suthiparithat Journal*, 36(1), 1–24.
- National Institute for Multi-Cultural Education, South Korea. (2023). *School violence: Prevention and remediation (Parent edition)*. Retrieved from [https://www.gne.go.kr/upload\\_data/board\\_data/BBS\\_0000300/160522737623397.pdf](https://www.gne.go.kr/upload_data/board_data/BBS_0000300/160522737623397.pdf)
- Noppason, S. (2018). New and trending: Pao Vit, CEO from GMM Grammy, and Lek Domisat from SOUR Bangkok reveal new formula for creating series with advertising thinking. *The Cloud*. Retrieved from <https://readthecloud.co/scoop-girl-from-nowhere-2/>
- Piyanun, J. (2022). Biopolitics: When the pandemic reveals the face of Thai state power. *Way Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://waymagazine.org/biopolitics-covid-19/>
- Sakkbongkot, K. (2021). Nanno: The satan of the modern era in the form of a young girl. *The People*. Retrieved from <https://www.thepeople.co/read/33387>
- Shaughnessy, O. M., Stadle, J., & Casey, S. (2016). *Media and society*. Oxford University Press.
- Thasook, J. (2011). School violence: Voices from children, youth, and stakeholders. *Journal of Behavioral Science for Development*, 3(1).
- UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). (2017, January 13). *School violence and bullying: Global status report*.
- Wasan, P., & Panuwat, F. (2020). Teacher-Student: Authoritarianism in Relationship and Error of Body of Knowledge' Transmittance. *Lampang Buddhist College Journal*, 9(3), 246–259.

**Contact email:** Thanapoldew@gmail.com

## ***Co-creating Media Innovation for Social Value: The Thai Media Lab Model***

Sakulsri Srisaracam, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

This research explores a collaborative approach between academia and media professionals for media innovation with social value. The data collected from the "Thai Media Lab" process (2021-2023) served as a model for this "co-creation media innovation research network." The lessons learned from the media development process between academia and media professionals were analyzed. The study found that key needs in the media industry are: fostering innovation to enhance communication capabilities and leveraging technology for process, product, and social innovation within media organizations. Promoting "Co-creation partnerships" involves three steps: 1) Expanding partnerships by identifying media organizations' specific challenges or goals. 2) Ideating and experimenting with media content and technology use. This stage involves brainstorming and testing media content and technologies with the participation of audiences, communities, and professionals. Lessons learned from this process inform the development of effective media product and content strategies. 3) Piloting and evaluating media for communication impact and further development. This involves testing the media in real-world situations, assessing its communication effectiveness, and using the feedback to refine the media for a more complete solution. This collaborative process empowers participating media to develop further, explore business opportunities, and ultimately achieve financial sustainability while delivering social value.

Keywords: Media Lab, Media Innovation, Digital Media, Social Media, Social Value

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The convergence of technology has revolutionized the media landscape, transforming the way information is produced, consumed, and disseminated. This convergence encompasses technological advancements in communication tools, distribution channels, and individual skillsets. Audiences have evolved into active participants in the communication process, generating content and shaping public discourse. User-generated content (UGC) has gained prominence in the media ecosystem, often incorporated by mainstream media outlets. This trend fosters a culture of participation and enables the development of niche and issue-specific communication formats.

The media industry is undergoing a significant transformation as a result of four key factors that are reshaping the value chain. Firstly, audiences are becoming increasingly segmented, demanding content that caters to their specific interests and needs. Secondly, technology plays a pivotal role in enabling media producers to develop and distribute content across multiple platforms. From social media to streaming services, media organizations must leverage the power of technology to enhance storytelling, audience engagement, and content distribution. Thirdly, effective dissemination strategies are essential for reaching target audiences and maximizing impact and social value. Finally, the changing media landscape demands innovative business models to ensure the survival and growth of media organizations. Exploring new revenue streams and adapting to evolving consumer preferences are key to sustainable growth.

However, these challenges can be turned into opportunities for media innovation. By embracing these challenges as opportunities, we can explore new directions for media innovation that address societal needs and enhance the role of media in society. This involves engaging with target audiences, building partnerships with technology developers, and employing innovative storytelling techniques. Ultimately, media organizations that can adapt to the changing landscape by creating social value alongside innovative business models will be best positioned to thrive in the evolving media ecosystem.

Lessons learned from media innovation development during 2017-2021, as evidenced by case studies of five countries (Srisaracam, 2021), reveal that the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, South Korea, and Japan prioritize the development of digital technologies that create "experiences" and "interaction with content, both online and in real life," to achieve behavioral change, promote learning about social issues, and facilitate cultural transmission.

In many countries, the emergence of "Media Labs" has dedicated to fostering media innovation with social value. These labs, often found within educational institutions and media organizations, engage in multidisciplinary research and media design experimentation.

Media Labs function as hubs for innovative media creation, focusing on four key areas. Firstly, they explore innovative ways to create engaging experiences for audiences around various social issues. (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013; Pérez-Seijo, Melle-Goyanes, & Paniagua-Rojano, 2018). Secondly, they experiment with diverse storytelling techniques, utilizing various platforms with collaboration and creativity (Frost, 2019; Henriksson, 2019) Thirdly, some labs explore the potential of virtual reality technology, games, immersive experience in social awareness campaigns, and behavior-changing tools (Tanaka, 2011). Lastly, media labs aim to develop innovative media applications that serve as valuable tools for addressing and solving social problems (Mills & Wagemans, 2021).

Thailand established a unique initiative called the Thai Media Lab network in 2019. This network brings together communication academics, media professionals, and local communities across provinces in the country. Through collaborative efforts, they tackle social issues by developing innovative communication processes and media prototypes specifically tailored to these challenges.

The Thai Media Lab network has shifted its focus in recent years. Initially emphasizing academic and professional benefits, the network now prioritizes fostering "Co-creation Partnerships." This collaborative process aims to create socially valuable media innovations that are academically enriching and commercially viable. The network sees this as a crucial step towards ensuring media survival and continued positive social impact.

This research delves deeper into the Thai Media Lab network's journey, specifically focusing on the lessons learned from developing its "Co-creation Partnership" process. It also examines how the research methodology employs action research in media innovation development, analyzing how the network's collaborative efforts lead to innovations in content, process development, and social innovation.

## **Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a combination of methods for data collection. Participatory observation allows the researcher to immerse themselves within the Thai Media Lab process across three projects. Through interviews with key participants and analysis of the resulting media products, the research aims to examine the media lab process itself, the collaboration model employed, and the implications of media innovation fostered within the network.

The first project, undertaken in 2021, involved collaboration between four universities and four local communities. The project focused on utilizing transmedia storytelling to reach and engage diverse audiences with specific community issues. The ultimate goal was to test the effectiveness of media as a participatory communication tool, empowering communities to raise their voices on matters of importance.

The second project, conducted in 2022, built upon the success of the first by expanding the network to include ten universities. This project aimed to test the efficacy of media design and production processes as tools for behavioral and attitudinal change in junior high school students regarding bullying. The project emphasized that media innovation goes beyond simply raising awareness. By actively participating in the media design and production process, participants themselves learn and develop new attitudes and behaviors towards social issues.

The most recent project, launched in 2023, sees the Thai Media Lab partnering with a funding organization to provide media organizations with the resources necessary to integrate the media lab process within their own organizations. This project specifically focuses on developing engaging digital media narratives that foster audience participation. By overcoming initial obstacles and integrating a media lab process, media organizations are empowered to develop innovative media products and explore new opportunities for social and business value creation.

The qualitative case study methodology serves as a well-suited research tool in this context. As Gerring (2006) highlights, this approach allows for a deep dive into the journey of developing "co-creative media innovation research and development," including the analysis of its structures and management processes. Data collection relies on participant observation within the three chosen projects, supplemented by interviews and media analysis focusing on three key aspects: 1) collaboration strategies, 2) the media lab process for developing media prototypes and implementing innovation for target audiences, and 3) the model by which the Thai Media Lab supports the media industry and the broader media ecosystem.

### Result: Co-creating Media Lab Model

Based on an analysis of three Thai Media Lab projects from 2021 to 2023, we have developed a collaborative framework known as the "Co-Creating Media Lab Model." This model fosters an integrated approach that brings together academia, industry, government, communities, and the public to create media innovations that address real-world societal challenges. The model emphasizes research, human resource development, and audience-centric design, utilizing collaborative processes within field labs and co-production environments. The ultimate goal is to develop media innovations with a positive social impact and to establish a sustainable media ecosystem that benefits all stakeholders.

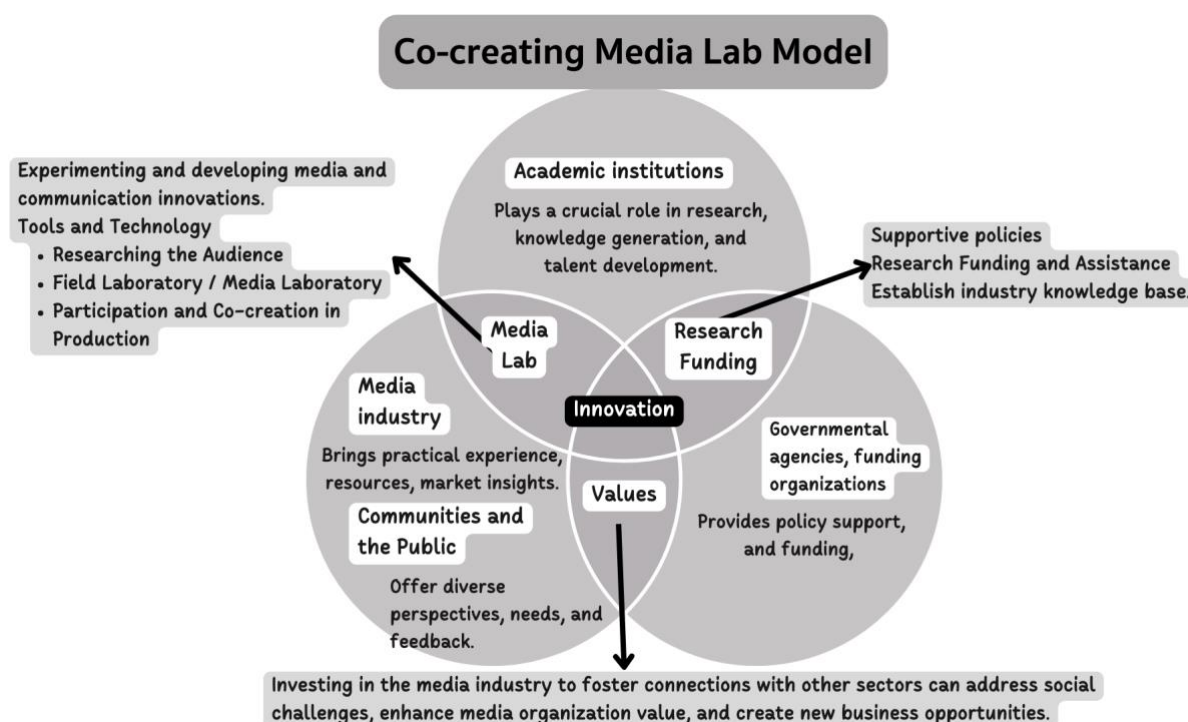


Figure 1: Co-creating Media Lab Model

This framework is a collaborative effort involving three key stakeholder groups: academia, the media industry and communities, and government agencies and funding organizations. Central to this model is the concept of co-creation, which brings together diverse perspectives to drive media innovation. Academic institutions play a pivotal role in research, knowledge generation, and talent development. The media industry contributes practical experience, resources, and market insights. Communities and the public offer invaluable perspectives,



needs, and feedback. Government agencies and funding organizations provide essential policy support and financial resources.

The model emphasizes collaboration among all stakeholders to address real-world challenges. The media lab process, a partnership between academia, the media industry, and communities, is a core component, fostering experimentation and development in media and communication innovations, tools, and technologies. Concurrently, government agencies and funding organizations collaborate to provide research funding and supportive policies aimed at building a robust industry knowledge base.

A shared belief in the value-creation potential of media collaboration is essential for government and funding agencies to effectively engage with the media industry and communities. By investing in the media industry and fostering connections with other sectors, these entities can contribute to addressing social challenges, enhancing media organization value, and creating new business opportunities.

The convergence of the media lab process, research funding, and a shared focus on value creation presents significant opportunities for innovation. This framework aims to stimulate innovation across media content, technology, communication tools, and process.

### **Media Lab Expanding Partnerships: Building Partnerships for Media Innovation**

The foundational step in constructing a robust media innovation partnership involves the identification and understanding of key stakeholders. Media organizations represent a critical component, necessitating a comprehensive analysis of their challenges, aspirations, and strategic objectives. This includes a detailed assessment of their pain points and an exploration of potential growth opportunities. Simultaneously, academic institutions offer a wealth of expertise and resources that can significantly contribute to the partnership. Their research capabilities, intellectual capital, and available resources must be thoroughly evaluated. A broader societal perspective is equally important, requiring an examination of pressing social issues and the potential role of media in addressing them.

A convergence of media organizational objectives and academic research expertise, aligned with societal needs, is essential for identifying optimal partnership opportunities. A collaborative media laboratory emerges as a suitable platform for fostering such collaborations. Clearly defined shared goals and motivations are crucial for building a cooperative alliance focused on media development. By creating a shared vision and establishing a collaborative environment, partners can effectively identify and capitalize on opportunities to generate new value through innovation.

Implementing this process, The Thai Media Lab has experienced significant growth in its partnership network over a three-year period, expanding from collaborations with three to thirteen academic institutions. Concurrently, the initiative has engaged with over twenty media organizations and local communities as participants in the media lab process. This expansion is directly linked to the identification of pressing social issues and the pursuit of innovative approaches to address them. By focusing on news opportunities and value creation through process and product innovation within media organizations, the Thai Media Lab has successfully cultivated a robust ecosystem for media development and social impact.

## **The Thai Media Lab's Evolutionary Journey: Innovation Development Process**

In 2021, the Thai Media Lab embarked on a series of social experiments, engaging with communities and target audiences through the innovative lens of transmedia storytelling. The findings revealed that while the implementation of media lab processes varied across different contexts and development challenges, three core elements consistently emerged: audience research, innovative media design based on research findings, and rigorous evaluation through pilot testing. A key outcome was the development of change agents capable of communicating effectively across diverse platforms.

Building on this success, the 2022 project involved a consortium of ten research teams, each exploring a unique social issue and developing corresponding media products. The overarching theme emphasized audience co-creation, with a focus on harnessing media production as a tool for behavioral change. The project highlighted three key stages:

- 1) **Design Thinking and Shared Experience:** A design thinking approach facilitated diverse perspectives on shared issues, empowering participants to contribute their personal narratives. This process fostered a sense of shared experience and empathy.
- 2) **Story Worldbuilding:** Collaborative brainstorming sessions encouraged participants to explore various perspectives and experiences, creating rich and multifaceted narratives.
- 3) **Iterative Media Production and Evaluation:** A rigorous iterative process was employed, involving research, design, production, and evaluation. Continuous feedback from target audiences informed the refinement of media products.

The collaborative nature of the project enabled researchers to observe how different teams addressed similar issues within unique contexts. By focusing on in-depth exploration rather than the quantity of media produced, the project fostered a deeper understanding of the media production process and its impact on participants.

In 2023, the Thai Media Lab shifted its focus to collaborating with media organizations, aiming to foster process and product innovation within the industry. By applying the same co-creation principles used with community partners, the lab successfully developed seven media prototypes that not only addressed social issues but also generated new revenue streams for the participating organizations. This demonstrated the potential of media labs to drive both social impact and organizational sustainability.

## **The Impact of Media Labs on Society and Industry**

A strategic approach to fostering social communication involves leveraging networks of collaborators to address shared challenges and opportunities. By focusing on issues of significance to the community, media innovation projects can develop effective communication tools that provide solutions, raise awareness, and promote understanding. When selecting communication themes, it is essential to identify issues that are both relevant and amenable to collective action.

Media labs offer more than just media production; they serve as platforms for knowledge transfer, empowering participants to apply the acquired skills to future communication endeavors. Through active engagement, participants gain firsthand experience and contribute to the creation of meaningful and impactful communications.

The impact of co-creating media through media labs is twofold. First, it positions media as a powerful tool for addressing social issues, promoting positive behaviors, and disseminating information to the public. Second, it offers new business opportunities for media practitioners, enabling them to create targeted content, explore diverse distribution channels, and develop innovative products and services.

By designing experimental processes that foster the development of individuals, methodologies, and media content, media labs can generate diverse and innovative solutions. Collaborative research involving individuals from various disciplines and local communities can lead to the creation of specialized media labs, each with unique strengths and areas of expertise. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, funding agencies should support the development of these specialized labs to cultivate deeper knowledge and create replicable models.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of media labs aligns with the principles of user-centered design, emphasizing the importance of understanding and responding to user needs. Additionally, the iterative nature of media lab processes resonates with design thinking methodologies, as articulated by Richard Buchanan (2019). These frameworks underscore the importance of user involvement throughout the design and development process.

Stakeholder engagement is paramount to the success of media labs. Informed by social network analysis and collaboration theories, media labs harness diverse perspectives to generate innovative solutions. This approach aligns with the concept of co-creation, which Nambisan (2002) posits as a catalyst for organizational innovation. Drawing on insights from living labs, as explored by Følstad (2008), media labs can evolve into dynamic spaces for experimentation and knowledge exchange. Romero-Frías and Robinson-García (2017) emphasize the transformation of traditional research centers into collaborative ecosystems. By adopting these principles, media labs can foster user involvement and drive innovation.

By examining the relationship between media, culture, and technology, media labs can contribute to a deeper understanding of the social implications of their work. By fostering partnerships and leveraging the expertise of diverse stakeholders, media labs can address complex societal challenges and drive meaningful social change.

When considering the broader implications of media labs, it is essential to delve into the concept of media innovation. Media innovation refers to novel ideas, practices, or artifacts that are either entirely new or represent significant improvements upon existing ones. These innovations drive efficiency, effectiveness, and progress.

Scholars have proposed various frameworks for categorizing media innovation. Bessant and Tidd (2007), Storsul and Krumsvik (2013), and Dogruel (2014) identify four primary types: product innovation, process innovation, position innovation, and content innovation. While product innovation focuses on new media products, services, and technologies, process innovation pertains to changes in production, distribution, and organizational processes. Position innovation involves altering the context of media or services, such as rebranding or targeting new audiences. Content innovation, as highlighted by Dogruel (2014), emphasizes novelty, risk, and the potential for both commercial and social impact.

The Thai Media Lab's focus on user-centric design, iterative development, and stakeholder engagement aligns closely with the principles of media innovation. By creating opportunities for experimentation and co-creation, the lab has not only produced innovative media products but also contributed to broader social and cultural changes. The projects undertaken by the lab can be classified as both product and process innovations, as they involve the development of new media formats and novel approaches to media production. Moreover, the emphasis on social impact aligns with the broader goals of media innovation, as outlined by scholars such as Reca (2006), Napoli (2009), and Mulgan (2012) that media innovations can shape public opinion, influence behaviors, and drive broader societal transformations. Media innovations can empower individuals, foster community engagement, and address pressing social issues.

In conclusion, the Thai Media Lab serves as a valuable model for fostering media innovation and social change. By embracing user-centered design, iterative development, and stakeholder engagement, the lab has demonstrated the potential of media to address complex societal challenges.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of these initiatives and the potential for scaling up media labs in other contexts. Furthermore, a significant challenge lies in securing sustainable funding for media labs. The long-term viability of these collaborative spaces is contingent upon the development of robust funding models. Identifying strategies to increase financial support for media organizations participating in media lab initiatives is essential to ensure their continued operation and growth. Further research is necessary to explore sustainable funding mechanisms that can support the ongoing evolution of media labs.

## References

- Bessant, J. R., & Tidd, J. (2007). *Innovation and entrepreneurship*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Buchanan, R. (2019). Systems thinking and design thinking: The search for principles in the world we are making. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 5(2), 85-104.
- Dogrueel, L (2014). What is so special about Media Innovations? A Characterization of the Field. *The Journal of Media Innovations* 1.1 (2014): 52-69.
- Følstad, A. (2008). Living Labs for Innovation and Development of Information and Communication Technology: A Literature Review. *Electronic Journal for Virtual Organizations and Networks*, 10, 99–129.
- Frost, C. (2019, July 11). *Media Lab Culture in the UK*. Furtherfield. <https://www.furtherfield.org/media-lab-culture-in-the-uk/>
- Gerring, J. (2006). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henriksson, T. (2019, November 29). VPRO Medialab: bringing storytelling to new technologies –. Global Alliance for Media Innovation. <https://media-innovation.news/media-lab/vpro-medialab-bringing-storytelling-to-new-technologies/>
- Mills, John, & Andrea Wagemans. (2021). “Media Labs: Constructing Journalism Laboratories, Innovating the Future: How Journalism is Catalysing its Future Processes, Products and People.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 27 (5): 1462–1487. doi:10.1177/1354856521994453
- Mulgan, G. (2012). The Theoretical Foundations of Social Innovation. In A. Nicholls & A. Murdock (eds.), *Social Innovation: Blurring Boundaries to Reconfigure Markets* (pp. 33-65). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nambisan, S. (2002). ‘Designing virtual customer environments for new product development: toward a theory’, *Academy of Management Review*, 27, pp. 392–413.
- Napoli, P. M. (2009). *Media Economics and the Study of Media Industries*. In J. Holt & A. Perren (eds.), *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method* (pp. 161-170). West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing.
- Pérez-Seijo, Sara, María Melle-Goyanes, & Francisco José Paniagua-Rojano. (2018). “Innovation in European Public Broadcasters: Immersive Narratives and Organization of 360-Degree Contents on Digital Platforms.” *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 73: 1115–1136.
- Reca, A. A. (2006). *Issues in Media Product Management*. In A. B. Albarran, S. M. Chan-Olmsted & M. Wirth (eds.), *Handbook of Media Management and Economics* (pp. 181-201). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Romero-Frías, E., & Robinson-García, N. (2017). Social labs in universities: Innovation and impact in medialab UGR.

Storsul, T., & Krumsvik, A. H. (2013). What is Media Innovation? In S. Storsul & A. H. Krumsvik (eds.), *Media Innovation. A Multidisciplinary Study of Change* (pp. 13-26). Göteborg: Nordicom.

Tanaka, Atau. (2011). "Situating Within Society: Blueprints and Strategies for Media Labs." In *A Blueprint for a Lab of the Future*, edited by A. Plohman, 12–20. Eindhoven: Baltan Laboratories.

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

## *Toward Automating the Classification of Films' Narrative Structures*

Nuttanai Lertpreechapakdee, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand  
Tatri Taiphapoon, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand  
Sukree Sinthupinyo, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Traditional methods of analyzing film narrative structure typically involve qualitative analyses of script and film elements as well as quantitative assessments of editing patterns. These approaches are limited by scalability and efficiency due to the extensive manual human labor required, making them impractical for analyzing large datasets. This paper examines how machine learning techniques can be leveraged to classify film narrative structures in a more scalable and efficient manner, particularly when dealing with extensive collections of films. To address the limitations of traditional methods, two main approaches are proposed. The first approach utilizes natural language processing (NLP) to perform script sentiment analysis and identify the hidden emotional structures across a large body of film scripts. The second approach uses computer vision techniques to detect editing elements such as transitions and shot duration patterns, which are then analyzed to uncover the underlying narrative structures within a corpus of films. Each approach has its strengths and limitations depending on the availability of samples and practical considerations. These machine learning techniques offer a scalable and efficient way to analyze narrative structures, enabling film scholars to uncover hidden complex patterns within large datasets of films. Practically, these techniques can also assist filmmakers in fine-tuning their work, ensuring that the pacing and emotional impact align with their creative vision. Overall, this integration of technology into film studies and production enhances traditional methods of film study and helps filmmakers make more informed decisions.

Keywords: Machine Learning in Film Studies, Film Analysis Automation, Computer Vision in Film, Data-Driven Film Studies

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The analysis of narrative structures in film has long been a cornerstone of film studies, offering profound insights into how stories are crafted and experienced. Traditionally, these analyses have been conducted through qualitative methods, where researchers engage in a meticulous examination of film elements to uncover the narrative framework. For instance, Thompson (1999)'s analysis involves segmenting films into distinct acts to understand the progression and organization of the story. While this method yields rich, detailed insights, it is inherently time-consuming and subject to individual interpretation, which can limit its scalability and consistency across different studies.

Quantitative approaches have also made significant contributions to the field by providing a more objective lens through which to view narrative structures. Cutting et al. (2011)'s work, for example, demonstrates that shot duration and the frequency of cuts are closely tied to the narrative intensity of films. This analysis suggests that longer shot durations are often used at the beginning and end of a movie, as well as at key transitional points, such as act boundaries, highlighting how variations in editing rhythms can significantly affect the emotional and narrative flow of a film. However, despite these advancements, quantitative methods still require extensive manual effort to collect and analyze data, limiting their practical application on a larger scale.

In recent years, the convergence of increased computational power and the availability of vast datasets has opened new possibilities for film analysis. Machine learning, with its ability to process and analyze large volumes of data efficiently, offers a transformative approach to studying narrative structures (Fan, 2018). By automating aspects of narrative analysis, machine learning addresses the limitations of traditional methods, providing a scalable, objective means of analyzing films that can be applied across large datasets.

This paper introduces two innovative approaches to film narrative classification: natural language processing (NLP) for script sentiment analysis and computer vision for analyzing editing elements such as shot duration and transitions. These methods, grounded in machine learning, offer the potential to not only enhance the efficiency and scale of narrative analysis but also to provide new insights into the structure and pacing of films. Through these approaches, this paper seeks to demonstrate how the integration of machine learning into film studies can revolutionize both academic research and practical filmmaking, enabling a deeper and more nuanced understanding of narrative structures.

## Traditional Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches in Film Studies

Traditional approaches to film studies have been the bedrock of the discipline, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods that provide scholars with tools to dissect and interpret films from various perspectives. These methods allow researchers to explore a wide range of film elements, including visual styles, thematic content, cultural contexts, and narrative structure.

Narrative structure refers to the way in which a story is organized and presented to the audience, shaping how the plot unfolds over time. Narrative structure is central to guiding the audience's experience, helping to create tension, build characters, and deliver thematic messages. Common structures, such as the three-act framework, divide a story into distinct sections—beginning, middle, and end—each with its own purpose in advancing the plot. This



structure serves as the backbone of many films, influencing how stories are told and how audiences perceive them (Chatman, 1980).

Qualitative methods emphasize an in-depth exploration of themes, visual compositions, and how films communicate their messages to audiences (Bordwell et al., 2004). Researchers using qualitative approaches typically engage in close readings of films, meticulously analyzing elements such as cinematography, editing, and sound design to uncover deeper meanings and artistic intentions. For example, Thompson (1999)'s analysis of narrative structures involves dissecting formal elements like shot composition, editing patterns, and narrative devices, which are then segmented into act structures such as the four-act model. This model divides a film into setup, complication, development, and climax, providing a clear framework for understanding the flow and progression of a film's story.

In addition to narrative structure, qualitative methods also encompass other critical approaches such as auteur theory, which focuses on the director's personal influence and recurring themes throughout their body of work (Sarris, 1962). For instance, analyzing recurring motifs and directorial styles in the films of Alfred Hitchcock offers valuable insights into his impact on the thriller genre. Psychoanalytic film theory, as applied by scholars like Mulvey (2013), examines how films reflect and shape unconscious desires and societal norms, particularly through concepts like the "male gaze." These qualitative methods allow for a thorough exploration of the filmmaker's techniques and the audience's emotional and intellectual responses. However, such analysis is often time-consuming and subject to the analyst's personal biases and interpretations, which can limit its objectivity and scalability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Quantitative methods in film studies, in contrast, involve the systematic and empirical investigation of film-related phenomena through statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques. These methods provide objective data that can reveal trends, patterns, and correlations, complementing the subjective insights gleaned from qualitative analysis (Redfern, 2014). For instance, box office statistical analysis can reveal the financial success of films over time and across different markets. Researchers might use regression analysis to determine the factors contributing to a film's success, such as genre, star power, or marketing expenditure (Liu & Xie, 2019).

Quantitative approaches have also been essential in analyzing stylistic elements like shot length, camera movement, and scene transitions. Salt (1974)'s pioneering work in statistical style analysis offers an objective approach to understanding film style, where he quantified variables, such as shot length and camera movement across a diverse sample of films. This method revealed subtle stylistic patterns and variations among directors, which traditional qualitative analysis might overlook. Similarly, the study of shot length and pacing by Cutting (2016) has shed light on how editing rhythms influence narrative intensity. For example, longer shot durations often occur at significant narrative junctures, such as act boundaries, highlighting how variations in editing rhythms can greatly affect the emotional and narrative structure of a film. These quantitative methods uncover trends and patterns that may not be immediately evident through qualitative analysis alone. However, despite their objectivity, traditional quantitative methods often rely on manual data collection, which limits their scalability and efficiency.

While traditional qualitative and quantitative approaches have significantly contributed to the field of film studies, they also present challenges related to labor-intensive data collection and

limited scalability. These limitations underscore the need for innovative methodologies that can overcome these challenges. Integrating machine learning techniques into film studies offers a promising solution by automating data collection and analysis processes. This technological advancement not only enhances the scalability and efficiency of film analysis but also complements traditional methods, paving the way for more comprehensive and nuanced explorations of elements like narrative structures.

### **Machine Learning Approaches in Film Studies**

One of the earliest and most impactful applications of machine learning in film studies has been genre classification. Traditionally reliant on manual coding of film characteristics—a process that is both inconsistent and labor-intensive—genre classification has been revolutionized by machine learning. Models trained using supervised learning techniques have proven highly effective in automatically categorizing films into genres such as action, comedy, or drama by analyzing dialogue, plot summaries, visual style, and external metadata like posters and trailers (Kumar et al., 2023). Deep learning, particularly through convolutional neural networks (CNNs), has further advanced this field by recognizing complex patterns in both text-based and visual components of films, thus providing a fast and scalable alternative to human classification (Simões et al., 2016).

Beyond genre classification, sentiment analysis has emerged as another significant application. Originally developed for assessing the emotional tone of text, sentiment analysis has been adapted to analyze film scripts and viewer reviews, offering insights into how films resonate emotionally with audiences (Narendra et al., 2016). Machine learning models, particularly those based on natural language processing (NLP), have been instrumental in mapping the emotional trajectories within scripts, revealing narrative pacing and intensity contribute to the audience's overall experience. These models, using techniques like sentiment lexicons and advanced methods such as recurrent neural networks (RNNs) and transformers, allow for the automated analysis of the emotional dynamics across large datasets, identifying common narrative structures like the "hero's journey" arc often found in dramas (Reagan et al., 2016).

In addition to text-based analysis, machine learning has significantly advanced the stylistic analysis of films through computer vision techniques. Computer vision enables the automatic extraction and interpretation of visual data, which is critical for understanding the aesthetic and narrative structure of films (Rasheed & Shah, 2005). CNNs trained on large datasets of film frames can identify distinct visual styles, analyze editing rhythms and shot compositions (Karpathy et al., 2014). Another key application of computer vision is in the analysis of shot length and pacing, where machine learning models can automatically detect cuts and transitions, revealing editing patterns that are often linked to a film's narrative structure (Brunick et al., 2013). For instance, faster editing may correlate with high-intensity sequences, while longer shots might be used to build tension.

By complementing traditional methods, these machine learning techniques open up new avenues for film studies, offering insights into narrative structures that were previously inaccessible. The automation of narrative analysis not only enhances the efficiency of film studies but also deepens our understanding of how films are constructed and resonate with audiences. This, in turn, contributes significantly to both academic research and practical filmmaking.

## Proposed Methodologies

To address these challenges and harness the potential of machine learning for movies' narrative structure analysis, this section outlines two methodologies: Script sentiment analysis and Editing pattern analysis using computer vision techniques. These methodologies are designed to work at different stages of film's production, providing a comprehensive approach to automating the classification of film narrative structures through both script analysis in pre-production and the examination of editing patterns in post-production.

### Script Sentiment Analysis for Narrative Structure Classification

The first proposed approach leverages natural language processing (NLP) techniques to systematically analyze the emotional and narrative structures embedded within film scripts, aiming to automate the identification of narrative patterns by examining sentiment dynamics throughout a script, which can reveal underlying emotional arcs and structural elements critical to understanding a film's overall narrative framework (Eliashberg et al., 2007). This methodology begins with the extensive collection and preprocessing of a diverse corpus of film scripts, ensuring the selection encompasses a broad range of genres, historical periods, and narrative styles to allow the model to generalize across various film types. These scripts, sourced from publicly available databases, screenwriting forums, and licensed repositories, will be meticulously cleaned and standardized, a process that includes removing extraneous elements like stage directions, character names, and annotations not directly relevant to narrative analysis. Tokenization will then break down the text into individual words or phrases, followed by part-of-speech tagging to focus the sentiment analysis on the most narratively significant components of the script, particularly dialogue and descriptive passages.

The development of a sentiment analysis model specifically tailored to the language of film scripts is central to this methodology. Traditional sentiment analysis models, typically trained on generic text corpora, may not fully capture the nuances of cinematic language, necessitating the fine-tuning of a pre-trained transformer-based model, such as BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers), on a domain-specific dataset of film scripts (Devlin et al., 2018). This fine-tuning process enables the model to adapt to the unique language patterns, emotional cues, and narrative structures present in screenplays, with supervised training using labeled data, where segments of scripts are annotated with sentiment labels to guide the model in recognizing similar patterns in unseen scripts.

Once the sentiment analysis model is in place, scripts will be segmented into scenes or acts based on standard screenplay formatting cues, such as "INT." and "EXT." for scene changes. Each segment will undergo sentiment analysis to generate a sentiment score that reflects the emotional tone of that particular scene. These scores will then be aggregated to produce an emotional arc for the entire film, capturing narrative patterns such as rising tension, climactic moments, and resolutions. Advanced sentiment analysis techniques, including contextual sentiment scoring, will be employed to account for the broader narrative context of each sentiment-laden word or phrase, ensuring a more nuanced and accurate depiction of the film's emotional landscape (Zhang et al., 2018).

Following the mapping of emotional arcs, key features will be extracted from these sentiment trajectories, including the frequency and intensity of emotional peaks and troughs, the overall emotional polarity, and the rate of emotional change between scenes or acts. These features

will serve as inputs for a machine learning classifier designed to categorize films based on their narrative structure. Various algorithms, such as support vector machines (SVM), random forests, or neural networks, will be explored to determine the most effective approach for this classification task, with the classifier trained on a portion of the dataset and tested using cross-validation to ensure it generalizes well across different types of scripts and narrative styles (Li et al., 2009).

To validate the effectiveness of the proposed methodology, the classified narrative structures will be compared against manually annotated ground truth data, which may be provided by film scholars or based on established narrative theory frameworks. The model's performance will be evaluated using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score to provide a quantitative measure of its effectiveness (Powers, 2020). Additionally, qualitative assessments will be conducted by examining cases where the model's predictions align or diverge from traditional narrative analyses, offering insights into the model's interpretability and identifying potential areas for refinement.

### **Editing Pattern Analysis Using Computer Vision Techniques**

The second proposed approach utilizes advanced computer vision techniques to analyze the editing patterns of films, with a particular focus on shot duration—a key element that significantly influences a film's narrative structure and pacing (Cutting & Candan, 2015). This methodology automates the detection and analysis of shot transitions, such as cuts, fades, and dissolves, to uncover the underlying temporal patterns that contribute to a film's pacing and narrative flow. The analysis begins with the detection of shot boundaries, known as shot boundary detection (SBD), which are transitions between consecutive shots in a film. This process is crucial for determining the duration of each shot and subsequently constructing the shot duration pattern of a film (Abdulhussain et al., 2018). SBD algorithms analyze visual and audio features in the video to identify the points where these transitions occur. Basic SBD methods compare consecutive frames based on pixel intensity, color histograms, or edge detection, while more advanced methods leverage machine learning models, such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs), which are trained on large datasets of annotated videos. These models learn to recognize patterns associated with various types of transitions, enabling them to detect shot boundaries with high accuracy. The integration of multimodal approaches, which combine visual and audio data, enhances detection accuracy by providing a more robust analysis of transitions. Once the shot boundaries are detected, the shot durations are calculated by measuring the time intervals between consecutive boundaries. These durations are then organized into a chronological sequence, representing the shot duration pattern of the film. This sequence offers a temporal overview of the film's pacing, where shorter durations indicate faster-paced sections and longer durations reflect slower, more deliberate moments.

The next phase of the methodology involves extracting key features from the shot duration data that characterize the film's editing patterns. These features may include the average shot duration, the variance in shot lengths, and the frequency of transitions, all of which contribute to the film's overall pacing and narrative intensity. Additional features, such as the distribution of shot durations across different sections of the film, are analyzed to identify patterns related to the film's emotional arcs or narrative structure. Given the sequential nature of shot duration data, time-series analysis techniques are employed to group films with similar editing patterns. Time-Series K-Means, for example, modifies the traditional K-Means algorithm by incorporating temporal information into the clustering process. By using

distance metrics like Dynamic Time Warping (DTW), which accounts for variations in timing and sequence among the shot duration patterns, the method helps to identify clusters of films with similar editing rhythms (Petitjean et al., 2011). Time-Series K-Medoids offers a robust alternative by using actual data points as cluster centers, enhancing the algorithm's resistance to outliers (Huy & Anh, 2016). Additionally, methods such as Spectral Clustering and Agglomerative Clustering provide further means of grouping films based on their shot duration patterns, with each method offering unique strengths in handling the complex dynamics of time-series data (Rani & Sikka, 2012).

The results of the clustering process are evaluated for validity and consistency through multiple approaches. The first step involves a visual inspection, where the centroids of each cluster—representing the average shot duration pattern of the films within that cluster—are compared to the individual shot duration patterns of the films. This comparison assesses whether the centroids effectively capture the key features of the editing patterns. Further validation involves cross-cluster comparisons using metrics such as Adjusted Mutual Information (AMI) to measure the similarity between different clustering results (Romano et al., 2016). By comparing the outcomes of various clustering methods, researchers can ensure that the identified patterns are robust and not artifacts of a single algorithm. Additionally, methodological triangulation, which involves comparing the clustering results with those obtained from alternative methods like Spectral Clustering or Agglomerative Clustering, provides further confidence in the reliability of the findings (Monti et al., 2003).

### **Implications for Film Studies**

The integration of machine learning into the analysis of film narrative structures represents a transformative shift in film studies, moving from traditional, labor-intensive methodologies to more scalable and data-driven approaches. By automating the processes of script sentiment analysis and editing pattern detection, the methodologies proposed in this paper have the potential to significantly broaden and deepen our understanding of cinematic storytelling.

One of the implications of these methodologies is their ability to democratize film analysis. Traditionally, in-depth narrative analysis has been accessible primarily to scholars with the time and resources to engage in close readings of films. However, by utilizing machine learning, these methodologies make it possible to analyze vast datasets of films quickly and efficiently, thus broadening the scope of analysis to include a wider range of cinematic works. This democratization could lead to a more inclusive understanding of global cinema, allowing for the study of films from diverse cultures and genres that have historically been underrepresented in academic discourse.

Moreover, the scalability of these methodologies is one of their key strengths. Their ability to handle large datasets enables researchers to uncover trends and patterns that would be difficult to identify through manual analysis alone. This scalability is particularly important in an era where digital archives of films are expanding rapidly, necessitating tools that can keep pace with the growing volume of cinematic works. By processing and analyzing vast amounts of data, these methodologies not only enhance the efficiency of film studies but also allow for a more comprehensive exploration of narrative structures across different genres, cultures, and time periods.

Another significant strength of these methodologies is their capacity to integrate different types of data—namely, textual data from film scripts and visual data from editing patterns—

into a unified analytical framework. This multimodal approach provides a more holistic understanding of narrative structures, capturing both the emotional arcs conveyed through dialogue and the pacing effects created by editing. By combining these elements, the proposed methodologies offer a comprehensive view of how narrative structures are constructed and how they function within the broader context of a film.

The use of advanced machine learning techniques, such as BERT for sentiment analysis and CNNs for shot boundary detection, further enhances the sophistication and accuracy of the analysis. These models are capable of capturing the nuanced and complex nature of cinematic language and visuals, leading to more reliable results that can inform both academic research and practical filmmaking. This integration of cutting-edge technology into film studies not only provides new insights but also aligns with contemporary shifts towards data-driven research methodologies across various disciplines.

In practical terms, these methodologies also offer significant benefits to filmmakers and the broader film industry. By providing tools to analyze and optimize narrative structures, filmmakers can use these insights to align their creative vision with audience expectations, enhancing the emotional and narrative impact of their work. Additionally, the ability to analyze editing patterns in detail can inform decisions about pacing and shot composition, leading to more effective storytelling techniques that resonate with viewers.

## **Conclusion**

The integration of machine learning into the analysis of film narrative structures presents a transformative opportunity for film studies. Traditional methods, while rich in detail and depth, are often limited by the extensive manual effort required, making them impractical for analyzing large datasets. By leveraging machine learning techniques such as natural language processing for script sentiment analysis and computer vision for editing pattern detection, this paper proposes a scalable and efficient approach to classifying narrative structures across extensive collections of films.

These methodologies not only address the limitations of traditional approaches but also offer new insights into the construction and function of narrative structures in cinema. The ability to process and analyze vast amounts of data enables a more comprehensive understanding of narrative trends and patterns across different genres, cultures, and historical periods. Additionally, the integration of textual and visual data into a unified analytical framework provides a holistic perspective on how narrative elements such as emotional arcs and pacing contribute to the overall storytelling experience.

The implications of these advancements extend beyond academic research, offering practical tools for filmmakers to optimize their creative work. By aligning narrative structures with audience expectations, filmmakers can enhance the emotional and narrative impact of their films, ultimately contributing to a richer and more nuanced cinematic experience.

However, as with any emerging technology, there are challenges to be addressed. The reliance on the quality and diversity of training data, the interpretability of machine learning models, and the need for human expertise in certain aspects of the analysis are all factors that require ongoing attention and refinement. Future research will need to focus on these areas to further develop and enhance the methodologies proposed in this paper.

In conclusion, the integration of machine learning into film studies represents a significant advancement in the field, providing both scholars and practitioners with powerful new tools for analyzing and understanding narrative structures. As these technologies continue to evolve, they will undoubtedly play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of film analysis, offering new ways to explore, interpret, and create cinematic works.

### **Acknowledgments**

Nuttanai Lertpreechapakdee, a Ph.D. candidate in the Technopreneurship and Innovation Management Program at the Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, gratefully acknowledges the research grant provided by the program. This funding has been crucial in advancing my doctoral research on machine learning applications in film narrative analysis. I sincerely appreciate the program's support and dedication to fostering academic excellence and innovation.

## References

- Abdulhussain, S. H., Ramli, A. R., Saripan, M. I., Mahmmud, B. M., Al-Haddad, S. A. R., & Jassim, W. A. (2018). Methods and Challenges in Shot Boundary Detection: A Review. *Entropy*, 20(4), 214. <https://www.mdpi.com/1099-4300/20/4/214>
- Bordwell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. (2004). *Film art: An introduction* (Vol. 9). McGraw-Hill New York.
- Brunick, K. L., Cutting, J. E., & DeLong, J. E. (2013). Low-level features of film: What they are and why we would be lost without them.
- Chatman, S. B. (1980). *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Cornell University Press.
- Cutting, J. E., Brunick, K. L., & DeLong, J. E. (2011). How act structure sculpts shot lengths and shot transitions in Hollywood film. *Projections*, 5(1), 1-16.
- Cutting, J. E., & Candan, A. (2015). Shot durations, shot classes, and the increased pace of popular movies. In: Berghahn Journals.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. sage.
- Devlin, J., Chang, M.-W., Lee, K., & Toutanova, K. (2018). Bert: Pre-training of deep bidirectional transformers for language understanding. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1810.04805*.
- Eliashberg, J., Hui, S. K., & Zhang, Z. J. (2007). From story line to box office: A new approach for green-lighting movie scripts. *Management Science*, 53(6), 881-893.
- Fan, L.-T. (2018). On the value of narratives in a reflexive digital humanities. *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, 8(1).
- Huy, V. T., & Anh, D. T. (2016). An efficient implementation of anytime k-medoids clustering for time series under dynamic time warping. Proceedings of the 7th Symposium on Information and Communication Technology.
- Karpathy, A., Toderici, G., Shetty, S., Leung, T., Sukthankar, R., & Fei-Fei, L. (2014). Large-scale video classification with convolutional neural networks. Proceedings of the IEEE conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition.
- Kumar, S., Kumar, N., Dev, A., & Naorem, S. (2023). Movie genre classification using binary relevance, label powerset, and machine learning classifiers. *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, 82(1), 945-968.
- Li, S., Xia, R., Zong, C., & Huang, C.-R. (2009). A framework of feature selection methods for text categorization. Proceedings of the Joint Conference of the 47th Annual Meeting of the ACL and the 4th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing of the AFNLP.



- Liu, Y., & Xie, T. (2019). Machine learning versus econometrics: prediction of box office. *Applied Economics Letters*, 26(2), 124-130.
- Monti, S., Tamayo, P., Mesirov, J., & Golub, T. (2003). Consensus clustering: a resampling-based method for class discovery and visualization of gene expression microarray data. *Machine learning*, 52, 91-118.
- Mulvey, L. (2013). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In *Feminism and film theory* (pp. 57-68). Routledge.
- Narendra, B., Sai, K. U., Rajesh, G., Hemanth, K., Teja, M., & Kumar, K. D. (2016). Sentiment analysis on movie reviews: a comparative study of machine learning algorithms and open source technologies. *International Journal of Intelligent Systems and Applications (IJISA)*, 8(8), 66.
- Petitjean, F., Ketterlin, A., & Gançarski, P. (2011). A global averaging method for dynamic time warping, with applications to clustering. *Pattern recognition*, 44(3), 678-693.
- Powers, D. M. (2020). Evaluation: from precision, recall and F-measure to ROC, informedness, markedness and correlation. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.16061*.
- Rani, S., & Sikka, G. (2012). Recent techniques of clustering of time series data: a survey. *International Journal of Computer Applications*, 52(15).
- Rasheed, Z., & Shah, M. (2005). Detection and representation of scenes in videos. *IEEE transactions on Multimedia*, 7(6), 1097-1105.
- Reagan, A. J., Mitchell, L., Kiley, D., Danforth, C. M., & Dodds, P. S. (2016). The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes. *EPJ data science*, 5(1), 1-12.
- Redfern, N. (2014). Quantitative methods and the study of film. *Lecture delivered at the University of Glasgow*, 14.
- Romano, S., Vinh, N. X., Bailey, J., & Verspoor, K. (2016). Adjusting for chance clustering comparison measures. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, 17(134), 1-32.
- Salt, B. (1974). Statistical style analysis of motion pictures. *Film quarterly*, 28(1), 13-22.
- Sarris, A. (1962). Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962. In.
- Simões, G. S., Wehrmann, J., Barros, R. C., & Ruiz, D. D. (2016). Movie genre classification with convolutional neural networks. 2016 International Joint Conference on Neural Networks (IJCNN).
- Thompson, K. (1999). *Storytelling in the new Hollywood: Understanding classical narrative technique*. Harvard University Press.
- Zhang, L., Wang, S., & Liu, B. (2018). Deep learning for sentiment analysis: A survey. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery*, 8(4), e1253.



## *Unraveling Themes of Feminism and Postmodernity in “And Just Like That...”*

Noble Po-kan Lo, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR  
Bryan Ka-ho To, Xi’an Jiaotong–Liverpool University, Suzhou, China

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

This essay examines the feminist and postmodern themes in *And Just Like That...* (2021–), and examines the malleability of their portrayal in its prequel, *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). Since its initial broadcast, *Sex and the City* has been the subject of several media and academic critiques, which argue that it inadequately addresses feminist themes, including the integration of sexuality and diversity concerns. Subsequently, the introduction of *And Just Like That...* has displayed a revised strategy for addressing issues from feminist and postmodernist perspectives. The essay concludes that *And Just Like That...* adopts a more implicit feminist approach and exhibits a diminished prevalence of postmodern ideas on current issues, tackling contemporary issues in a straightforward and earnest manner.

Keywords: *Sex and the City*, *And Just Like That...*, Postmodernity, Post-feminism, Gender Roles

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

*Sex and the City* (hereafter, SatC) was an American romantic comedy-drama of the late 1990s and early 2000s, renowned for its frank depiction of life for single women in contemporary New York (Barton, 2018). HBO broadcast the series, which centres around four single women in their thirties: lifestyle columnist Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), world-weary lawyer Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon), conservative art dealer Charlotte York (Kristin Davis), and sexually adventurous public relations consultant Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall). This allowed for more overt depictions of sex and discussion of topics too controversial for advertisers on American network television. The programme received both praise and criticism for its portrayal of a number of themes considered controversial or taboo, such as sexual liberation, modern romances, gender roles, female identity, and work-life balance (Demopoulos, 2024).

Following the release of two films in 2004 and 2008, the series was rebooted in 2021 with *And Just Like That...* (hereafter, AJLT), but without Cattrall's reprisal of Samantha, who does not appear as a main character in the series (White, 2021). With nearly twenty-five years having passed since the debut of SatC, the original series had received criticism in recent years on a number of counts, such as its portrayal of people of colour (Varghese, 2017), of certain elements of the LBG community (Da Costa, 2021), and of feminism's representation (Wignall, 2008). While the producers asserted that they would maintain the show's original focus while updating it to align with the moral expectations of a modern audience (Barr, 2021), others questioned if they could translate the original's straightforward tone into a more politically appropriate setting (Burnell, 2021). This sparks interest in the thematic content of AJLT from the perspective of contemporary feminism and postmodernism.

## Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

This study seeks to explore what themes AJLT contains from the feminist and postmodern perspectives. These frameworks have been selected because SatC received so many plaudits for its representation of feminist (Brandt, 2006) and unconventional issues. However, it has also received in recent years criticism of its handling of various themes (Silverstein, 2008). This has presented AJLT with a challenge, which its creators appear to be attempting to address by enhancing the show's representation of contemporary societal and universal values. This study aims to investigate AJLT's approach to these themes and draw comparisons with SatC's treatment of similar themes.

This study aims to address three research questions:

1. What are the main themes that *And Just Like That...* explores?
2. In what way does *And Just Like That...* deal with themes pertinent to feminism and postmodernity?
3. Does *And Just Like That...* differ in its choice and handling of themes as compared with *Sex and the City*?

## Literature Review

### Context and Impact

Columnist Candace Bushnell's real-life column, '*Sex and the City*' for the New York Observer, served as the foundation for SatC (Kurutz, 2018). In this context, Carrie emerged

as an alter ego of Bushnell, bringing a degree of verisimilitude to the character and stories. The series was an instant hit producing considerable praise for its tackling of difficult and controversial themes pertinent especially to modern women (Akass & McCabe, 2004). It has appeared in numerous polls as one of the best television programmes of all time (Poniewozik, 2007), highlighting its significant impact on popular culture.

AJLT was created after the cancellation of the third *Sex and the City* film due to Cattrall's refusal to reprise her role (Lewis, 2021). Notwithstanding a robust commencement of the series (Del Rosario & Andreeva, 2021), audience attrition by the second series indicated a notable decrease in viewership (Fitzgerald, 2023). Critical assessments were predominantly unfavourable, with some characterising the series as having excessive, or as having forcibly integrated, social and cultural consciousness into a narrative that did not seamlessly accommodate it (Singh, 2021; Wright, 2021). Certain reviewers contended that the show has been acclaimed for including individuals from marginalised gender identities and ethnic backgrounds (Behzadi, 2022), efforts to address critiques regarding its previous treatment of LGBT matters and portrayals of people of colour resulted in superficial gestures and tokenism, which appeared inconsistent with the earlier approach of the show to candidly confronting current issues (Corry, 2022).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study takes a feminist perspective on its analysis of AJLT. Typically, feminist perspectives on film and television scrutinise the construction, reinforcement, or challenge of gender roles, power dynamics, and the representation of women and other marginalized genders through media (Gaines, 2004). A feminist study may interrogate women's agency, their representation in relation to men, and intersectional identities within a post-feminist and postmodern cultural context (Mayne, 1985). Feminist cinema theorists analyse the influence of context, including the 'man gaze', on content and how narrative frameworks can undermine female autonomy, particularly through male decision-makers steering narratives (Mulvey, 1975). The methodology frequently critiques perceived patriarchal frameworks in both production and content, whereas modern feminist critics may target 'lazy' feminist tropes or narratives that perpetuate hegemonic feminism (Kaplan, 2004). Thus, a different critical lens can apply to the content, production, and context of a given film, rather than a single feminist approach or methodology.

Moreover, this study incorporates a postmodernist perspective on its analysis of AJLT. Analysing media from a postmodern perspective emphasises the deconstruction of traditional narratives, contests the concept of hegemonic or absolute truth, and embraces representations of reality that are ambiguous or fragmented (Constable, 2004). In particular, postmodernists may seek to challenge depictions of reality in media that are objectivist from their perspective, preferring portrayals that emphasise subjectivity and leave some aspect of interpretation up to the viewer (Rodowick, 1988). Postmodern literary critics may also favour stories that elide genres and reject storytelling conventions such as linearity (Connor, 2004). Postmodernist film theorists tend to be positive about filmmaking that reveals self-awareness and a willingness to break the fourth wall, thereby rejecting the depiction of events as definitive reflections of an objective reality (Constable, 2014).

To cultivate a nuanced comprehension of the themes of AJLT, it is imperative to recognise its similarities and differences with its prequel, SatC. A comparison between AJLT and SatC is

undertaken to deliver an in-depth examination of the construction and malleability of the themes in AJLT.

## **Analysis**

This section presents an analysis of aspects of AJLT relevant to certain themes of feminist and postmodern critique of film, television, and society, supplemented with its comparison to SatC. It is important to acknowledge that SatC and AJLT collectively comprise over 100 episodes; this research does not aim for exhaustiveness but rather emphasises trends by highlighting major sequences from both series.

## **Feminist Themes**

### **Gender Roles**

The theme of gender roles dominates AJLT, much like SatC, and explores how women can balance their individualistic desires with the roles society expects of them. AJLT differs significantly by emphasising women's roles more than those of men. In the initial episodes, the death of Carrie's husband, 'Big' (Chris Noth), prompts Miranda to contemplate leaving her husband. In terms of their interactions with men, AJLT delves deeper into the roles that women play, particularly in relation to their relationships with men. This to some extent abandons a form of feminist critique evincible from SatC, which considers how the role of one gender is influenced by their relations with the other against a backdrop of a still largely patriarchal society. However, a recurring theme is the ongoing concern about women's ability to balance a career, a love life, and marriage. One such case involves the difficulties Nya (Karen Pittman) faces in conceiving a child, with a significant portion of her story centring around her fears that her husband might abandon her as a result. Ultimately, this issue leads to the couple's breakup, reflecting, to a certain extent, the reality that men often view women in long-term relationships as potential mothers.

Another theme of SatC was the rejection of homogenous femininity in favour of multiple ways to be a woman and occupy gender roles. However, AJLT tends to interpret dissent from traditional gender roles as a rejection of a cisgender identity, making such discussions less prominent. This is especially evident in the instance of Charlotte's daughter Rose (Alexa Swinton), whose repudiation of conventional gender roles prompts her to renounce her identity as a woman. A discernible shift in social attitudes is seen, moving away from recognising rebellious or non-standard gender roles for females as acceptable within the identity of 'woman' and towards associating similar tendencies or behaviours with other genders. AJLT perceives non-traditional gender roles as indicative of gender variation, whereas SatC acknowledges non-traditional femininity.

### **Sexuality and LGBT Issues**

Miranda's plotline in the first season of AJLT sees her enter into an affair with a non-binary female in episode 3. This mirrors her plotline in episode 3 of the first season of SatC in which Miranda questions her sexuality and resolves that she is heterosexual. The implication of this earlier episode and a focus of the episode is that being a heterosexual woman does not necessarily involve a commitment to hyperfemininity. The intentional erasure of this previous message is evident in the reversal of plotlines throughout the episodic sequence, as Miranda's traditionally masculine character becomes bisexual. From a postmodern

perspective, this mirroring of plotlines across equivalent SatC and AJLT episodes coupled with art mirroring reality constitutes a breaking of the fourth wall given the audience's potential knowledge of the context. The inclusion of a non-binary character in this episode likewise appears to contradict the hostility towards 'confusion' between the genders mentioned above. One of Charlotte's children expresses that they no longer feel like women and want to be referred to at school as "Rock." The inclusion of these trans and non-binary characters in the show in a manner that is not derogatory or stereotyped thus reflects a significant break with its past representation of trans characters. However, there is little reflection upon what it means to be non-binary and how, as a bisexual female, this intersects with other related issues facing the character within society.

It is in this respect that the programme's handling of sexuality may be interpretable within a post-feminist lens. While the series' positive portrayal of bisexual and trans characters raises sexuality issues common to a feminist lens, the series' lack of criticality in their representation suggests a society that has largely settled feminist issues. Even in the case of Charlotte, her initial shock at her child coming out as trans soon gives way to acceptance without much discussion of underlying issues regarding social attitudes toward gender dysphoria. From a feminist perspective, the programme seemingly neglects to critically address the challenges encountered by trans and bisexual individuals, nor does it engage with the characters' prior perspectives on these subjects. Modern culture predominantly portrays marginal LGBT identities as blindly embraced, mirroring a post-feminist framework akin to the earlier post-feminist context but now incorporating LGBT identities into the spectrum of permissible sexual identities.

### **Race and Diversity**

AJLT is, to a large extent, more diverse in its representation of ethnic minority women than SatC. The earlier series was criticised both for its lack of diversity as well as for its epistemic elevation of the worldviews of privileged white women (Jones, 2018). Specific criticisms include an episode where Miranda heavily stereotypes and fetishises a black partner (s03e05), as well as its depiction of Middle Eastern culture's attitudes towards women in *Sex and the City 2* (Makalintal, 2020). AJLT sees its three main protagonists strike up friendships with a number of women from different ethnic backgrounds, though it has received criticism on this front for the depiction of their ethnicity as serving as 'accessories' to the main characters (Nair, 2022).

Despite some accusations of tokenism, the show explores the cultural backgrounds of its characters, particularly in relation to their status as women. An example of this is the character of Seema (Sarita Choudhury), who talks about her family's expectations for her to marry, yet she prioritises her career and finding an equal partner over marriage. Another example is that Miranda's interactions with Nya portray her as adhering to racial stereotypes, particularly when she misinterprets a black professor (Nya) as a student. However, the main characters serve as mentors for their non-white friends, such as Charlotte's recognition of the monetary value of Lisa's (Nicole Parker) collection of black artists, while the women of colour alleviate their anxieties about the lack of diversity within their friendship group. The series seeks to allay white concerns about their guilt for microaggressions or other forms of exclusion or discrimination.

## Postmodern Themes

### Narrative Structure

The original *SatC* played around substantially with narrative structure. For instance, in the first season of *SatC*, Carrie would frequently break the fourth wall and address the viewer directly. Other minor characters occasionally addressed the camera directly, prompting the viewer to assume Carrie's perspective as she probed them about their perspectives on relationships and gender roles. Later seasons replaced this with Carrie acting as the narrator, putting her thoughts into text as she sat at a typewriter under the conceit of writing her column. One should understand that the use of first-person perspective and switching between various individuals addressing the camera emphasised the subjectivity and plurality of various positions on love, marriage, and sexual etiquette, whereas Carrie's narrativising monologues typically ended in a question: 'Is it that men have an innate aversion to monogamy, or is it more than that? I wondered, in a city like New York, with its infinite possibilities, has monogamy become too much to expect?' (*SatC*, s01e07). By way of comparison, *AJLT* eschews all fourth-wall breaks as well as Carrie's narration of events. One could interpret this as a liberation from elevating Carrie's perspective to contextualise events and issues for the audience. On the other hand, it conveys an association that specific themes tend to serve less as the overt focus of each episode and that there is no overt questioning of grand narratives through the use of narration.

However, the show questions some grand narrative tropes. For instance, Big's sudden death immediately shatters Carrie's lasting happiness, which she sought throughout the series and confirmed in her marriage to Big. In addition, Miranda's exploration of her sexuality and subsequent divorce shatters her own happy ending, while Charlotte's marriage and happiness remain the most intact among the three. However, it may be argued that these grand narratives are frustrated more so than deconstructed, given that fulfillment through relationships is an unspoken end for practically all the main and secondary female characters on the show. The notion that women's pleasure is contingent upon successful relationships, a prevalent theme in women's television programs (Smith, 2016), remains largely unchallenged compared to the original series, where Miranda emphasised profession and Samantha focused on sexual fulfilment.

Furthermore, the changes to narrative structure have implications for *AJLT*'s approaches to the programme's approach to epistemology. The context is arguably more post-feminist than *SatC*, but it is postmodern in a non-critical sense. The protagonists' choices about how to live their lives as women receive little in the way of challenge, unlike in the original series. Contemporary ethics such as acceptance of diverse LGBT identities, IVF, divorce, reparations, etc. are monolithic, and whilst the characters at times struggle to navigate them, they at no point challenge or reject them. *AJLT* shifts to a more conventional narrative, firmly rooted in a clearly realist ontology and epistemology, thereby making both social reality and morality more objective compared to *SatC*.

### Identity and Meaning

Within *SatC*, the women struggle at times with the compartmentalisation of various aspects of their identities. For instance, in *SatC* s03e12, Miranda assumes the role of an air hostess after discovering that her career as a lawyer intimidates men. There are numerous instances where sexual fetishes and other identity-related features intrude on people's personal



relationships, highlighting the highly compartmentalised way people interact with each other. However, identities with AJLT are more clear-cut. Miranda's admission of her attraction to women after twenty years of marriage does not raise questions about her true identity or seem to clash with her other identities (such as wife, ciswoman, mother, etc.). Similarly, Rose's coming out as Rock does not appear to alter how Charlotte approaches parenting her child, nor does Big's death see Carrie grapple with her loss of status as 'wife', a status much elevated and sought after in SatC. Transitions between identities are distinct and involve little personal struggle in terms of transitions or inter-identity conflicts.

### **Self-Referentiality and Pastiche**

AJLT leans into its connections with SatC and makes continual reference to previous plotlines. For example, the AJLT season 1 finale alludes to the SatC season 6 finale, reversing the roles of Miranda and Carrie as they plead with each other not to follow their boyfriend abroad. Parallels between series episodes of the present and the past make occasional use of this form of self-referentiality. Other references tend to be continuations of the original series rather than self-referentiality. In the SatC finale, Carrie scatters Big's ashes on the Parisian Bridge, symbolising the sentimentality of the show's self-references. Callbacks to SatC rarely appear to directly critique or parody the material, while AJLT also appears to be somewhat less self-critical than SatC. SatC's fundamental component was its plurality and self-conscious exploration of contemporary social mores, whereas AJLT lacks any controversial challenges to the established norms of contemporary culture and ethics. Compared to SatC, AJLT is less self-parodying and significantly more sincere, with callbacks and self-references designed to evoke nostalgia rather than serve as self-criticism or pastiche.

### **Discussion**

The preceding analysis examines how AJLT articulates themes prevalent in feminist and postmodernist film critiques, encompassing gender roles, sexuality, LGBT concerns, and race, alongside postmodern elements such as narrative structure, identity and meaning construction, self-referentiality, and the employment of pastiche and parody. The analysis situates AJLT within the post-feminist framework commonly linked to SatC (Press, 2009), potentially addressing its topics in a manner that is less overtly feminist than SatC.

The series maintains its predecessor's emphasis on women's difficulties and gender roles, although it lacks the same pluralistic viewpoint on gender roles as its earlier version. The series interprets divergence from conventional feminine norms as unequivocal evidence of belonging to an alternative gender. This represents a substantial change in a series where the characters were highly doubtful about the conflation between binary genders. The acceptance of non-binary individuals and transitioning children is often complex and not instantaneous; yet, the notion that gender variety is normative faces minimal opposition, which illustrates the show's context within a post-feminist framework.

Similarly, there is a deliberate attempt to diversify perspectives away from cis, white feminism towards admitting diverse sexualities and ethnicities into the show. However, this only serves to challenge the characters' assumption that there is an outdated feminist mode regarding certain incidents involving women of colour. The show initially explores the race or ethnicity of non-white characters but then tends to ignore their ethnicity and its potential intersection with their womanhood. For instance, the second season does not focus on Seema's struggles with cultural expectations of marriage, instead implicitly equating her

status as an unmarried woman with Carrie's as a widow. Issues of identity receive little exploration in the same way as they did in the original series, despite the identities of characters being far more diverse in AJTL.

Moreover, AJTL adopts a more traditional narrative structure, eliminating the unreliable narrator present in *Carrie* and the *vox populi* segments where ordinary New Yorkers express their diverse opinions on the episode's subject matter. The episodes exhibit a less distinct thematic structure, as it emphasises the presentation of events in a more objective fashion, with diminished apparent subversion of ontological and epistemological objectivity or narrative authority. AJTL tends to pose fewer enquiries on contemporary topics and aims to elucidate the appropriate ethical stances rather than reflecting the realities of modern pluralism and cultural relativism. Charlotte's social conservatism is now limited to remarks about hair dye, rather than addressing more significant social concerns where disagreement is minimal.

In other respects, AJTL displays a high degree of resemblance to SatC. It remains uncritical of capitalism and effectively glorifies a consumerist lifestyle in which consumption serves both to elevate one's social status and is a therapeutic means for resolving one's emotional problems. Inclusion within the show may be regarded as tokenistic, failing to challenge contemporary feminist perspectives from a postmodernist critique of it as a monolithic ideology.

## Conclusion

This essay has explored AJTL and how it handles themes relevant to feminism and postmodernity through the text, comparing this approach to that of SatC. The analysis highlights how themes such as gender roles, sexuality, race and identity are represented by the show, taking a less overtly feminist stance than its predecessor and situating itself more firmly within a new, third-wave post-feminist paradigm. Unlike SatC, AJTL does not prevaricate long over gender roles and treats deviations from its accepted canon of feminities as indicative of alternative gender identities. Though targeted at being more inclusive, its handling of LGBT identities, sexuality and ethnicity often sees exploration of intersectional issues happen in an introductory and perfunctory manner, with the characters often becoming immediately thereafter integrated without experiencing any additional challenges or generating unique perspectives resultant from their identities.

Despite acknowledging past transgressions, the show maintains its updated progressive approach through casting and character diversity without delving deeply into the exploration of intersectional issues. The handling of AJTL on themes is less exploratory and takes on a more superficially didactic tone, offering clear ethical positions that are represented, accepted, then moved on from immediately. As a result, it is interpretable as not only post-feminist but post-postmodern, shifting away from the irony and cynicism of SatC's take on the social and personal lives of privileged New Yorkers towards attempting to affect a sincere engagement with contemporary progressive ideals and indeed between individuals in their interpersonal relationships.

Lastly, it has been observed that characters' identities have become cohesive and stable, while their roles as women in society are less ambiguous, despite their fluctuating statuses and identities, from wives to widows, heterosexuals to bisexuals, and girls to non-binary individuals. Consequently, the show embodies wider cultural transformations, which are

undoubtedly evident in the gradual emergence of post-feminism in SatC and are now deeply embedded in media portrayals of reality as both post-feminist and post-postmodern.

## References

- Akass, K., & McCabe, J. (2004). *Reading Sex and the City*. London: IB Tauris.
- Barr, S. (2021). *And Just Like That* star Nicole Ari Parker reveals *Sex and the City* reboot will address 'the elephant in the room' and tackle race issues. Retrieved from <https://metro.co.uk/2021/10/27/sex-and-the-city-reboot-star-reveals-series-will-address-race-15498944/>
- Barton, C. (2018). *Must Reads: 'Sex and the City' turns 20: How the HBO series revolutionised TV and dating forever*. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-ca-sex-and-the-city-20th-anniversary-20180601-story.html>
- Behzadi, S. (2022). 'Euphoria', 'Abbott Elementary' & Apple Among ReFrame Stamp Recipients For Gender-Balanced Hiring; Numbers Down From 2020-2021. Retrieved from <https://deadline.com/2022/07/euphoria-abbott-elementary-apple-reframe-stamp-gender-balanced-hiring-2021-22-1235072102/>
- Brandt, J. (2006). Making Strides: Manolo Blahniks and Postfemininity in *Sex and the City*. *The Journal of American Popular Culture*.
- Burnell, E. (2021). *The Sex and the City* reboot won't work because we don't want to be their friends anymore. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/sex-and-the-city-reboot-tv-women-b1786093.html>
- Connor, S. (2004). Postmodernism and Literature. In S. Connor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (pp. 62-81). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Constable, C. (2004). Postmodernism and Film. In S. Connor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (pp. 43-61). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Constable, C. (2014). *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Corry, K. (2022). 'And Just Like That' Is Desperately Trying to Prove It Has Black Friends. Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5qjb9/and-just-like-that-sex-and-the-city-is-trying-to-prove-it-has-black-friends>
- Da Costa, C. (2021). *When Sex and the City Returns, Will It Finally Get Queer People Right?* Retrieved from <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2021/01/when-sex-and-the-city-returns-will-it-finally-get-queer-people-right>
- Del Rosario, A., & Andreeva, N. (2021). 'And Just Like That...' Delivers HBO Max's Strongest Series Debut; 'The Sex Lives Of College Girls' Peaks In Viewers With Finale. Retrieved from <https://deadline.com/2021/12/and-just-like-that-hbo-max-strongest-series-debut-the-sex-lives-of-college-girls-peaks-viewers-finale-1234889116/>

- Demopoulos, A. (2024). *Sex and the City is on Netflix. Perfect – gen Z are a bunch of Charlottes*. Retrieved, from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2024/apr/05/sex-and-the-city-netflix>
- Fitzgerald, T. (2023). *What's Behind the Season 2 Viewer Slump for 'And Just Like That...'*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonifitzgerald/2023/06/27/whats-behind-the-season-2-viewer-slump-for-and-just-like-that/>
- Gaines, J. (2004). Film History and the Two Presents of Feminist Film Theory. *Cinema Journal* 44(1), 113-19.
- Jones, E. (2018). *That show was as white as it gets! Sex and the City's problematic legacy*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/apr/21/that-show-was-as-white-as-it-gets-sex-and-the-citys-problematic-legacy>
- Kaplan, E. (2004). Global Feminisms and the State of Feminist Film Theory. *Signs* 30(1), 1236-48.
- Kurutz, S. (2018). *It's an It Girl! The Birth of 'Sex and the City'*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/06/style/how-did-sex-and-the-city-start.html>
- Lewis, I. (2021). *Kim Cattrall responds to fan theory that she's going to space to avoid appearing in Sex and the City revival*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/kim-cattrall-sex-and-the-city-b1868446.html>
- Makalintal, B. (2020). *Let's Revisit 'Sex and the City 2' for the Sake of Pure Masochism*. Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/lets-revisit-sex-and-the-city-2-for-the-sake-of-pure-masochism/>
- Mayne, J. (1985). Feminist Film Theory and Criticism. *Signs* 11(1), 81-100.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* 16(3), 6-18.
- Nair, Y. (2022). *Sex and the City's Soft White Supremacy*. Retrieved from <https://inthesetimes.com/article/sex-and-the-city-franchise-whiteness-racist-tokenism>
- Poniewozik, J. (2007). *The 100 Best TV Shows of All-TIME*. Retrieved from [http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1651341\\_1659196\\_1652655,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1651341_1659196_1652655,00.html)
- Press, A. (2009). Gender and Family in Televisions Golden Age and Beyond. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625, 139-50.
- Rodowick, D. (1988). *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Silverstein, M. (2008). *Sex and the City Part 2: Feminism and Backlash*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sex-and-the-city-part-2-f\\_b\\_101941](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sex-and-the-city-part-2-f_b_101941)

Singh, A. (2021). *And Just Like That... review: Sex and the City revival is tediously woke and needlessly bitchy*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2021/12/09/sex-and-city-review-just-like-that-new-kim-cattrall/>

Smith, B. (2016). *Gender Representation and Occupational Portrayals in Primetime Television*. Fayetteville: Thesis at University of Arkansas.

Varghese, S. (2017). *It's outdated, wealthy and white – so why do I still reach for Sex and the City?* Retrieved from <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/feminism/2017/08/its-outdated-wealthy-and-white-so-why-do-i-still-reach-sex-and-city>

White, A. (2021). *Why is Kim Cattrall not in the Sex and the City reboot?* Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/kim-cattrall-sex-and-the-city-reboot-sarah-jessica-parker-feud-b1785329.html>

Wignall, A. (2008). *Can a feminist really love Sex and the City?* Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/apr/16/women.film>

Wright, M. (2021). *And Just Like That review: This is not Sex and the City as you know it*. Retrieved from <https://www.radiotimes.com/tv/drama/and-just-like-that-review/>

## Resources

Bicks, J., Chupack, C., King, M. P., Melfi, J., Parker, S.J., Star, D. (Executive Producers). (1998 – 2004). *Sex and the City*. Darren Star Productions; HBO Entertainment.

Davis, K., Nixon, C., King, M. P., Melfi, J., Parker, S.J., Rottenberg, J., Star, D., Zuritsky, E. (Executive Producers). (2021 – ). *And Just Like That...* Michael Patrick King Productions; HBO Entertainment; Pretty Matches Productions; Rialto Films.

**Contact email:** noble.lo@cpce-polyu.edu.hk

***Performing Microcelebrity:  
Analysing Kairos, Modes, and Practices in the Era of Breaking of World Record in Ghana***

Ephraim Danquah, University of Wisconsin-Madison, United States

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Ghana was shaken when Afua Asantewaa Aduonum attempted to break the Guinness world record for the longest singing marathon by an individual dubbed the “sing-a-thon”. Drawing inspiration from Hilda Basse in Nigeria who broke the world record for the longest cooking marathon by an individual dubbed “cook-a-thon” which lasted only for a while. Ghanaian social mediaspace sprang into a spiral of a ripple effect to hold the record-breaking event as it draws others to do the unimaginable to attain break a world record. In this essay, I seek to understand how attempters of the Guinness world record in Ghana are performing micro-celebrity practices by deploying Kairos and modes of credibility through Guinness world-breaking events to advance their agenda of attaining a microcelebrity status. I argue these world-breaking events aid in manufacturing creative practices and modes for attaining micro-celebrity status in Ghana. I address these questions; In what ways does the practice of breaking world records enact micro-celebrityness? how do the Kairos and modes influence the making of micro-celebrities in Ghana? I focus on how Guinness World Record events held in Ghana produce microcelebrities through mediatization. Using rhetorical analysis, I employ Afua Asantewaa’s Aduonum sing-a-thon (longest singing marathon by an individual) as a case study. I conduct a microscopic analysis of her discourse from her TikTok account leading to the Guinness world-breaking event. This paper contributes to existing research on microcelebrity production and labor, especially in the Ghanaian context, and provides a nuance to understanding microcelebrity practices and their participatory nature.

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The Ghanaian social media space was enthused by Hilda Baci's cooking marathon dubbed "cook-a-thon" a world-record event that broke the internet with overwhelming support from Africans (Stewart, 2023). This inspired a wave of record-breaking attempts across Africa, as countries sought to make their mark on the world stage. Ghana yearned for a hero to elevate its global standing. Afua Asantewaa Aduom took to her TikTok page to announce her Guinness World Record event as she sought to break the world record for the longest singing marathon by an individual dubbed the "sing-a-thon" (Asantewaa, 2023: TikTok). Afua Asantewaa an event entrepreneur proclaimed her Guinness World Record attempt as a medium to promote Ghanaian-ness. Following this event, traditional media in Ghana gave significant attention to world record attempts, elevating them to a national discussion. In this essay, I examine how Afua Asantewaa's Guinness World-Breaking Record (hereafter GWR) event in Ghana constitutes performing micro-celebrity-ness by deploying kairos, modes, and creative practices for breaking world records. I argue that these world-breaking events aid in manufacturing creative practices and modes for attaining micro-celebrity status in Ghana. I address these questions: in what ways does the practice of breaking world records enact micro-celebrity? how do the kairos and modes influence the making of micro-celebrities in Ghana? I focus on how Guinness World Record events held in Ghana produce microcelebrities through mediatization.

## Methodology

I deploy rhetorical analysis to understand how Afua Asantewaa's utilizes kairos, and modes and manufactures practices for microcelebrity. Applying rhetorical analysis enables the researcher to draw out the "universal discourse" (Discenna et al., 2017) that takes into consideration every facet of the situation which provides a nuanced approach to understanding the text. Winton (2013) argues that rhetorical analysis provides a critical examination of text that identifies its strengths and biases to advance access to the circulation of ideas, values, and beliefs that shape diverse discourse. Analyzing Asantewaa's discourse and promotional campaign preceding the GWR event implies drawing the connection between her persona, microcelebrities and usage of Tiktok offers a rich critical reading that exhibits the rich relationship in the text, which makes us understand the presence, meaning, and intricacies of a text. Exposing its implication for broader discourses that help build and define communities. (Woo et al., 2019). First, I discuss the Guinness World Record and its significance for creative industries. I then delve into assessing how kairos, modes, and practices were deployed by Afua Asantewaa and their implications for microcelebrity culture in Ghana. I ultimately conduct a microscopic analysis of her discourse from her TikTok account leading to the Guinness world-breaking event.

### *Of Setting and Breaking Records: The Story of Guinness World Records*

The GWR is an organization set out to push everyday people to do the unimaginable. The organization started in 1955 with its first published records (Guinness World Record, 2024). GWR was started by Sir Hugh Beaver and his twin brothers Norris and Ross McWhirter because they could not fact-check information in their time. Subsequently, the brothers then published a book of record every year in Britain as a reference book for individuals who set or broke a record. In 1999, the name of the book was changed from Guinness World Record to The Guinness Book of Records and produced in the United States. The book features



individuals and animals who have accomplished remarkable feats in the natural world (Guinness World Record, 2024).

GWR is published internationally in 23 languages, currently in its 69<sup>th</sup> publication, and maintains over 53,000 records in its database (Guinness World Record, 2024). Guinness World Record has become the primary international source for cataloguing and verification of a huge number of records. It has become an authenticator for setting and breaking records. To ensure credibility and fairness, it deems that participants follow their guidelines and protocols to be considered eligible. GWR also owns a television station, merchandise, an educator's program, a kids' section for the Guinness World Record, and museums. With the vision of inspiring wonder and documenting the incredible, GWR is not stopping any time soon.

Ghana is not new to the Guinness World Record. Several individuals and organizations have set or broken GWR records. Ghana entered the books of GWR in 1980 and 1991 when Ferdie Ato Adobe set the record for running 100 meters backward in 13.7 and 12.1 seconds respectively. (Okyere, 2024). Since then, Ghanaians have continued to appear in the GWR achieving incredible milestones. The last time a Ghanaian set a record was in 2015. However, none of the previous record holders have achieved the microcelebrity status of Afua Asantewaa. How did she gain so much attention?

On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023, Hilda Baci, a Nigerian chef set out to break the GWR or the longest cooking marathon done by an individual (Throne, 2023). She was awarded the world record on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2023 after cooking for 87 hours and 50 minutes. Hilda Baci dubbed her cooking marathon a "cook-a-thon" which saw the presence of a lot of celebrities and political figures from Nigeria (Daramola, 2024). With various hashtags such as #Hildabacicookathon, and #GoHildaGo<sup>1</sup> raced across social network sites to support her effort. Hilda Baci singlehandedly inspired a lot of Africans to set or break a record. Afua Asantewaa attributed her inspiration to break the record to Hilda Baci's strength and determination. Given that Ghana and Nigeria have a cultural banter,<sup>2</sup> Afua Asantewaa's sing-a-thon provides the right time for Ghana's image to be enhanced through the GWR. Thus, GWR offered an opportunity for these countries to exhibit their incredible talents which would lead to their recognition in their respective countries, in the continent, and across the world.

### ***Kairos***

Kairos is traditionally described as the opportune moment characterized by "the right time and due measure" (Thompson, 2000, p. 75). Wilson (1981) defines kairos in three ways: as a due measure, as an opportunity, and as spatial or tactical/temporal. He categorizes kairos as multifaceted that is "kairos as due measurement", "kairos as an opportunity", and "kairos as spatial and tactical or temporal". Rooted in Aristotelian and Isocratean traditions, kairos emphasizes seizing timely opportunities. Smith (1969) elaborates that kairos involves a special temporal position crucial for historical action and inquiry, highlighting its relevance to understanding events' significance and purpose within specific temporal sequences.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Twitter trends #Hildabacicookathon and #GoHildaGo circulated on African Twitter to encourage Hilda Baci during her Guinness World Record Event. This trend circulated from May 12<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ghana and Nigeria have been battling with geocultural diplomacy since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These cultural banterers focus on cultural supremacy and are conducted cordially online. Examples of these banterers include the famous jollof wars, football, and music.

Kairos denotes the optimal moment for events to unfold or actions to be taken, akin to the English concept of "timing." However, it also extends beyond mere timing to encompass spatial dimensions (Crowley & Hawhee, 2002). This implies that critical moments and opportunities are not only temporally defined but also influenced by the specific contexts or environments in which they occur. Just as timing is critical, so too is the physical or social space where decisions or actions transpire. Unlike *chronos*, which measures time directly, *kairos* focuses on linear windows of opportunity that require recognition and decisive action (Smith, 1969; Crowley & Hawhee, 2002; Simile, 2022).

For rhetoric, *kairos* encourages rhetors not to seek certainty before composing but rather to embrace writing and speaking as exploratory processes that engage with the nuances of timing, place, and community. *Kairos* in rhetoric emphasizes the importance of understanding an issue's relevance to its temporal and spatial contexts (Simile, 2022). Rhetors must be prepared to recognize and respond to *kairotic* moments, which demand awareness of community perspectives and the dynamic nature of arguments over time.

*Kairos*, then, combines the temporal and spatial dimensions, highlighting the fact that taking advantage of the perfect opportunity requires not only the proper timing and strategy but also the right location and context for actions or decisions. This all-encompassing understanding of *kairos* encourages contemplation on the relationship between time, place, and action, increasing its relevance in rhetoric, ethics, and decision-making (Crowley & Hawhee, 2002).

I argue that most celebrities and microcelebrities are born out of *kairos*. From YouTube to Twitter, individuals have grown into microcelebrities due to their ability to harness the opportunities and environment in which they find themselves. For example, Khaby Lame became a TikTok sensation and rose to fame during the pandemic by simply posting comedy skits and making them affable while not speaking (Binoo, 2024). Lame appeared on the app at a time when people needed humor as a distraction during the pandemic: his TikTok videos appeared at the right time for the right audience. Senft (2008) coined the term microcelebrity and defines microcelebrity as a burgeoning online trend wherein people attempt to gain popularity by employing digital media technologies - videos, blogs, social media, etc". Microcelebrity is defined as a set of practices wherein a user's audience is viewed as a fan base with whom they constantly engage to ensure continued popularity (e.g., Abidin, 2014; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008). Hence, it takes specific planning and management to display oneself for consumption. Furthermore, Abidin (2014) argues that microcelebrity is a process that evolves to capture structures, practices, and platforms that enable celebrification. She indicates that in contemporary times microcelebrities exist in two forms: systematic and diffuse (Mavroudis & Milne, 2016; Abidin, 2015b). Systematic micro-celebrities are strategic and lean towards branding themselves for marketability, however, diffuse microcelebrities typically have a less structured approach and are followed by audiences consistently, often gaining popularity before achieving micro-celebrity status. Thus, the taxonomy of microcelebrities points to the continuous use of digital tools for the attention economy which leads to their visibility and profitability (Gamon, 1994; Lanham, 1997; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016). By harnessing likes, shares, and comments on social network platforms, becoming a microcelebrity has become the norm for living which is produced through *kairos* as it facilitates the process of harvesting fans and enacting an attention economy.

To demonstrate how attention to *kairos* can guide the analysis of an issue, I look at how Afua Asantemanwaa sing-a-thon constitutes *kairos*. Before Asantewaa's world-breaking announcement in 2023, no Ghanaian had attempted a GWR *event*, given that a Nigerian had

undertaken such an arduous task. Hilda Baci, a Nigerian chef, cooked for 93 hours and 11 minutes while distributing her meals to the less privileged in Nigeria. Hilda Baci was officially recognized by GWR on June 13, 2023, and as she says, “I cooked for 100 hours to put Nigeria on the map” (BBC, 2023). Six months after Hilda Baci was officially endorsed by GWR, Afua Asantewaa was the awaited heroine to put Ghana on the map by announcing her sing-a-thon on her TikTok page. Having that no Ghanaian had attempted the GWR after Baci’s attempt, she painstakingly educated Ghanaians about the Guinness record processes. This built her ethos which is a desired quality in the eyes of the everyday Ghanaian. She asserts, “even if I want to give up on myself at this point I can’t because the support is too much. I thank all other African countries for reaching out and supporting me, but this is not about me, it’s about Ghana it’s a win for Ghana” (Mensah, 2023).

Her decision to host the event in December during the Christmas festive season was also very strategic. In Ghana, Christmas festivities create an atmosphere of joy, and an abundance of events where people enjoy themselves thus the GWR became a concert instead of a GWR event. The GWR event was held from the 24<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> of December. With such timing, she was able to attract the everyday Ghanaian who had free time during the December period to support her mission (Asantewaa, 2023). She also changed her venue to a spacious area indicating her ability to host a lot of people. An invitation to the Ghanaian to show up and turn up (Thiga, 2022).

Furthermore, her GWR event clashed with the Creative Arts Agency Ghana’s “Play Ghana” campaign which advocated for playing seventy percent of Ghanaian music on traditional media and occasions (GhanaWeb, 2023). According to Afua Asantewaa, her aim for the GWR event was to sing and advocate for authentic Ghanaian music which was phasing out in Ghanaian society. In this way her effort was helping save the Ghanaian industry, she asserted “This is a fine opportunity to sell amazing Ghanaian music to the world” (Nairaland, 2023). This provided an allyship with the national agenda of promoting Ghanaian authentic music and provided her with governmental support hence a greater visibility and reach. Afua Asantewaa’s GWR then became the face of the “Play Ghana campaign”. Thus, she enjoyed support from the government and the creative art industry in Ghana helping her ascend to celebrification.

With a combination of these factors, Asantewaa utilized the opportune moment and built her credibility to break the world record. Using her TikTok page, ethos, and drawing in from the Ghana and Nigerian cultural banter she sparked a flame for microcelebrity at the right time for the yearning audience.

### ***Modes***

Mavroudis theorizes fame labor as the strategies and experiences that afford people visibility labor leading to microcelebrity and non-microcelebrity (Mavroudis, 2018). Hence, microcelebrities need deliberate self-curation to produce a sense of self online which works through social network sites. Microcelebrity and non-microcelebrity utilize several media platforms to project their labor. I define modes as the use of media to project the self toward celebrification. (Abdin, 2015; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016; Mavroudis, 2018) Thus, microcelebrity performs their labor through several modes that facilitate their agency as it draws in followership and through several techniques and socio-political frames enhance their authenticity and likeability (Khamis & Welling, 2017). Here, microcelebrities’ choice of

social network sites produces systems or procedures through which others can become like them and provide nuanced ways of deploying social network sites to attain microcelebrity.

Afua Asantewaa primarily used her TikTok account to promote her Guinness World Record event. TikTok as a platform offered her the opportunity to reach everyday Ghanaians. According to Statistica (2023), TikTok is the third preferred social app in Ghana. Subsequently, Afua Asantewaa announced her eligibility to undergo the GWR event by showing her acceptance email on TikTok (Asantewaa, 2023). This helped her achieve credibility as she started her GWR event by being honest and factual, hence increasing her authenticity. Deploying evidence as ethos sent a message of confidence and assertiveness exhibiting her eruditeness of the Ghanaian populace. According to Gibbs (1978), when individuals build trust in a group it increases their functionality and creates a space for dialogue and solutions. Similarly, Faltesek et al, (2023) conclude that TikTok is growing in popularity because of its flow -the ability to switch to a different account and the abundance of different videos which makes it a great site for “broadcasting talent”. Hence TikTok is the new television because it continuously provides on-demand cultural and technical forms of media flow. TikTok also uses vernacular discourse which makes it one of the preferred short-form video apps.

Afua Asantewaa also uses her persona as a mode. Afua Asantewaa has been active in media and event planning in Ghana, albeit behind the scenes. She has been involved in two prestigious pageantries: inner of Miss Tourism Ghana and second runner-up for Ghana’s Most Beautiful. She capitalized on her pageant success by creating her pageantries: Miss Teen Ghana and Miss Kidi Ghana. She also owns a media production company and three award schemes: Ghana Outstanding Women Awards, Africa Outstanding Women Awards, and a modeling agency, which gained her access to the media (GhanaWeb, 2023). Leff and Utley (2004) argue that the persona of the rhetor adds to their persuasion as their character is composed of “exigencies, constraints, others, and self”. Through her affiliation with the media and pageantry, she produced an online self on TikTok. Consequently, Bhandari and Bino (2022) argue that TikTok offers the everyday person a mode of self-making and self-representation through TikTok features such as the algorithm of a networked self. This is why TikTok is the easiest app to use and to become a microcelebrity on, especially in comparison to Facebook and Instagram. Self-making on TikTok differs from other social network sites through the spread of the algorithmized self.

Afua Asantewaa’s association with the traditional media afforded her acceptance. Her first interview was with Peace FM a very popular media station in Ghana that popularized her GWR event nationally. Thereafter, she paraded across all national television and radio stations explaining the rudiments for attaining a GWR (Asantewaa, 2023). Because of the cultural plurality of Ghanaian society, she had to be interviewed on multiple and diverse media stations which her allowed to reach all the people of Ghana in their various local dialects. Through these interviews, she airs her mission for the GWR and its relevance to the Ghanaian event. In her press conference, she said “I am fully prepared and ready. I have been preparing since my submission. The love shown me urges me more but equally makes me realize that I need to do this regardless of the challenge ahead” (GhanaWeb, 2023). Afua Asantewaa directed the GWR event as a Ghanaian mandate; one that required all citizens to participate to exhibit a sense of patriotism.

Again, Afua Asantewaa’s portrayal of hyper-femininity cemented her authenticity. Murnen and Byrne (1991) define hyperfemininity as an exaggerated commitment to traditional

feminine gender roles in the context of heterosexual relationships. Here, Afua Asantewaa adapts the Ghanaian values of femininity and portrays such through her interviews, fashion sense, and family-centeredness on her TikTok page (Asantewaa, 2023). These posts provided a sense of Ghanaian values which is an enshrined statue of a married Ghanaian woman thus increasing her likeability and believability for the audience. Furthermore, Asantewaa made several references to Hilda Baci's event since it equipped her with the foundation to attempt her own GWR event: drawing inspiration from Hilda Baci. As she puts it:

"I do not like being comfortable. When I saw Hilda's attempt, I was like wow, it is an empowerment bit from her end regardless of the result. She empowered me and inspired me." (3news, 2023)

This enacted the notion of "*women supporting women*,"<sup>3</sup> constituting performative blessing and support from Baci, which christened the Ghana-Nigeria frenemy relationship. However, Afua Asantewaa had not interacted with Hilda Baci. Her use of Ghanaian fashion and style illustrated her motherliness making her the perfect role model for attempting the GWR event.

Afua Asantewaa employed promotional material in advancing her GWR event. Promotional materials are printed, written, or graphic items used to advertise and promote a business, product, or service. Afua Asantewaa used her TikTok account, to push her promotional materials such as countdowns to the event, her images in Ghanaian traditional clothing captioned inspirational quotes, Bible scriptures, Ghana music as TikTok soundbites and T-shirts. (Asantewaa, 2023). These promotional materials helped her to engage with the audience while portraying her ethos to achieve her mission. She posted these promotional materials daily further highlighting her preparedness (Asantewaa, 2023). In the two press conferences, she uses her promotional material as an opportunity to engage the media in the possible ways they can help make the GWR event a successful one by giving them the details of the training she's doing to break the record (Joynews, 2023). She used the press conferences to show her versatility and tenacity as a woman to accomplish such an arduous task. As she asserts "I am ready for the challenge and call on all Ghanaians to come on board to support. This is just not for me but the country as a whole" (Frimpong, 2023).

Afua Asantewaa deployed a strategic campaign for her GWR event by utilizing her persona and TikTok tactically. Although she was on most social networks she did not engage in cross-platform branding but stuck to using TikTok to enhance her visibility and likeability through her promotional materials. Afua Asantewaa deployed hyper-femininity to secure her image as the traditional woman who can do it all and yet be successful (Asantewaa, 2023).

### ***Practices***

Crystal Abidin (2016) defines visibility labor as "the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self-conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favorable ends "Fame labor" identifies the emotional work that cannot be easily observed or quantified by analytic software (Mavourdis, 2018). It's a special kind of unseen work connected to the "feeling of the rules" of microcelebrity culture. Therefore, "fame labor" refers to the unseen, emotional labor that both microcelebrities and nonmicrocelebrities perform (Mavourdis, 2018). This visibility labor becomes a creative

---

<sup>3</sup> "Women supporting women" was a Twitter trend on African Twitter which sort of encouraged 21<sup>st</sup>-century African women to advocate for each other instead of doing the opposite.

process that is then copied or adapted by others, hence enacting a practice. Duffy et al (2021) define “platform practices as the strategies, routines, experiences, and expressions of creativity, labor, and citizenship that shape cultural production through platforms”. Microcelebrity practices are changing constantly and adapting to kairós to be contemporary. In this vein, Goffman (1956) identifies the presentation of the self as a performance made to impress the audience who then believe in the authenticity of the persona (Murphy, 2003), and thus a social identity is constructed as the standard that is opened to the audience for adoption or adaptation.

In the case of Afua Asantewaa’s sing-a-thon event, she provides nuances to microcelebrity practice in Ghana. Social network sites have and are still producing several microcelebrities. The GWR event led to manufacturing microcelebrities practices by attempting the GWR. Thus, it is not surprising that many Ghanaians trooped into GWR to set or break a record. This also indicates that Ghanaian society has many individuals who would want to become microcelebrities. As of the writing of this paper, someone is attempting to break the record for the longest dancing marathon in Ghana. Afua Asantewaa has also shown how TikTok can be used to achieve microcelebrities – growing from a social space into a physical space.

She set the pace on how to successfully organize GWR events in Ghana. Firstly, she exhibited her credibility by showing evidence of eligibility to compete and engage the everyday Ghanaian by using Ghanaian music and familiar promotional strategies of the audience. Her project sought to elevate Ghana’s music industry -fitting her mission into the broader national discourse on promoting Ghanaian music. She was readily available to all media houses in Ghana including newspapers- subjecting herself to the media for questioning and promotion. Her knowledge of GWR and ethos created believability and likeability for her image. Her partnership with the Government through the Ministry of Tourism and Art and Culture indicated the national support and a mantle bestowed on her to deliver national unity and pride (JoyNews, 2023).

Afua Asantewaa initially was to hold the *sing-a-thon* in a small venue, but the event was moved to a bigger venue where citizens could freely engage and participate in the event. Additionally, inviting the Ghanaian populace to be present (JoyNews, 2023). This differs from Hilda Baci event, whose venue was smaller and could not hold a large audience. All media houses in Ghana also televised her GWR event with discussions on the impact of the GWR event on Ghana’s image and tourism prospects. After her announcement to attempt GWR’s longest singing marathon, she changes her social media name to “afuaasantewaasingathon” for easy identification and commodification of her online self-branding (Asantewaa, 2023). Interestingly, although she had cross-platform recognition such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube before her sing-a-thon event, she deployed only TikTok for her promotional campaign.

Afua Asantewaa through her GWR event manufactured all these new practices for achieving micro-celebrity through the GWR event in Ghana. Being the pacesetter, she provided the guideline for achieving microcelebrity-ness in Ghana. On this account, it is not surprising that throngs of attempters in Ghana have followed a similar path.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I argue these world-breaking events aid in manufacturing creative practices and modes for attaining micro-celebrity status in Ghana. Afua Asantewaa’s sing-a-thon GWR

event provides an avenue for understanding the Ghanaian microcelebrity culture which is very dependent on kairos. Indicating how the everyday Ghanaian takes advantage of an opportune event to promote their self-image owing to the advantages that an online identity provides for identity management (Papacharissi, 2011). GWR events and associated events also serve as a field to understand the internet culture of fandom and the utilization of TikTok as a platform for (re)constructing and deconstructing performance. Future research must conceptualize the GWR event and its connection to platform labor, identity management, and nationalism as its fame continues to grow stronger.

## References

- Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), 86–100. doi:10.1177/1329878x16665177
- Abidin, C. (2018). In *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online* (pp. i–xxii). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Appiah, F. (2024, February 12). Ghanaians tease Nigerians after AFCON final defeat. Retrieved August 1, 2024, from 3News website: <https://3news.com/sports/football/no-electricity-no-trophy-how-ghanaians-celebrated-nigerias-afcon-final-miss/>
- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 4). Ghana are you Ready.#worldrecord#efiahemma[Video].TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/video/7308712056243490054?lang=en>
- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 14). Ghana are you Ready.#guinnessworldrecord #afuasantewaasingathon #ghanatiktok #recordattempt[Video].TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/video/7312400295495994630?lang=en>
- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 15). Ghana are you Ready.#worldrecord#afuasantewaasingathon[Video].TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/video/7314601779243814150?lang=en>
- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 17). Ghana are you Ready.#guinnessworldrecord#afuaasantewaasingathon#ghanatiktok[Video].TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/video/7314804309814709509?lang=en>
- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 21). Ghana are you Ready.#guinnessworldrecord #afuasantewaasingathon #ghanatiktok #recordattempt[Video].TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/photo/7314962853885250821?lang=en>
- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 22). Akwaaba Village.#guinnessworldrecord #afuasantewaasingathon #ghanatiktok #recordattempt[Video].TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/video/7315477740201790725?lang=en>



- Asantewaa, A.[@afuaasantewaa]. (2023, December 22). Akwaaba Village.#guinnessworldrecord #afuasantewaasingathon #ghanatiktok #recordattempt[Video].TikTok  
<https://www.tiktok.com/@afuaasantewaasingathon/photo/7313832618980691206?lang=en>
- Biino, M. (2024, May 20). How Khaby Lame, the world’s most-followed TikToker, built his business and where he’s headed next. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/khaby-lame-business-biggest-tiktok-creator-in-the-world-2024-5>
- Chin, L. (2021). The presentation of self. Retrieved Monoskop.org website: [https://monoskop.org/images/1/19/Goffman\\_Erving\\_The\\_Presentation\\_of\\_Self\\_in\\_Everyday\\_Life.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/1/19/Goffman_Erving_The_Presentation_of_Self_in_Everyday_Life.pdf)
- Cirucci, A. M. (2018). Facebook and unintentional celebrification. In *Microcelebrity Around the Globe* (pp. 33–45). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Daramola, I. (2024, May 13). Hilda Baci celebrating 1-year anniversary of her cookathon record for next 5 days. Retrieved from Pulse Nigeria website: <https://www.pulse.ng/entertainment/celebrities/hilda-baci-celebrates-anniversary-of-guinness-world-record-cookathon/cdvypz6>
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). “having it all” on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 205630511560433. doi:10.1177/2056305115604337
- Duffy, B. E., Pinch, A., Sannon, S., & Sawey, M. (2021). The nested precarities of creative labor on social media. *Social Media + Society*, 7(2), 205630512110213. doi:10.1177/20563051211021368
- Discenna, T. A. (2017). Sara L. McKinnon, Robert Asen, Karma R. Chavez, and Robert
- Frimpong, D. (2023, December 21). GTA Backs Afua Asantewaa For GWR (Sing-A-Thon) Breaking Attempt. Retrieved from DailyGuide Network website: <https://dailyguidenetwork.com/gta-backs-afua-asantewaa-for-gwr-sing-a-thon-breaking-attempt/>
- Ghana: leading social media platforms. (2022). Retrieved from Statista website: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1171534/leading-social-media-platforms-ghana/>
- Ghanaian Lady Kicks Off Attempt To Break Guinness World Record Sing-a-thon - Celebrities - Nigeria. (2023). Retrieved from Nairaland.com website: <https://www.nairaland.com/7950145/ghanaian-lady-kicks-off-attempt>
- Glenn H. (eds.) (2007). text + field: Innovations in rhetorical method. *International Journal of Communication*, 11(0), 3. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7617>

- GTA official partners of Afua Asantewaa's Guinness World Records singathon attempt. (2023, December 12). Retrieved from MyJoyOnline website:  
<https://www.myjoyonline.com/gta-official-partners-of-afua-asantewaas-guinness-world-records-singathon-attempt/>
- Guinness World Record: I'm ready to make history with Ghana music – Afua Asantewaa. (2023, December 21). Retrieved from GhanaWeb website:  
<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Guinness-World-Record-I-m-ready-to-make-history-with-Ghana-music-Afua-Asantewaa-1902353>
- Guinness World Records explains why Afua Asantewaa was disqualified. (2024, February 25). Retrieved from GhanaWeb website:  
<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Guinness-World-Records-explains-why-Afua-Asantewaa-was-disqualified-1918579>
- Harker, M. (2007). The ethics of argument: Rereading Kairos and making sense in a timely fashion. *College Composition & Communication*, 59(1), 77–97.  
doi:10.58680/cc20076381
- Hilda Baci: I cooked for 100 hours to put Nigeria on the map*. (2023, May 16). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-65616804>
- Home. (n.d.). Retrieved from Guinness World Records website:  
<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/index.html>
- Ikeke, N. (2024, January 3). Afua Asantewaa Hails Hilda Baci for Inspiring Her to Attempt GWR, Video Sparks Debate Online. Retrieved from Legit.ng - Nigeria news. website:  
<https://www.legit.ng/entertainment/celebrities/1571450-ghanaa-afua-asantewaa-nigerias-hilda-baci-empowered-attempt-a-gwr/>
- JoyNews. (2023). Celebrities throng Akwaaba Village to support Asantewaa's singathon world record attempt. (2023, December 26). Retrieved from MyJoyOnline website:  
<https://www.myjoyonline.com/celebrities-throng-akwaaba-village-to-support-asantewaas-singathon-world-record-attempt/>
- Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208.  
doi:10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292
- Lanham, R. A. (1997). The economics of attention. *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XXXVI(2). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0036.206>
- Marwick, A., & Boyd, D. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17(2), 139–158. doi:10.1177/1354856510394539
- Matschiner, M., & Murnen, S. K. (1999). Hyperfemininity and influence. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23(3), 631–642. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.1999.tb00385.x

- Mavroudis, J. (2018). Fame labor: A critical autoethnography of Australian digital influencers: A critical autoethnography of Australian digital influencers. In *Microcelebrity Around the Globe* (pp. 83–93). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Mensah, B. (2023, December 8). It's not for me; it's a win for Ghana – Afua Asantewaa. Retrieved from YFM Ghana website: <https://yfmgghana.com/its-not-for-me-its-a-win-for-ghana-afua-asantewaa/>
- Okyere, S. T. (2024, January 17). 7 remarkable Guinness World Records set by Ghanaians. Retrieved from Pulse Ghana website: <https://www.pulse.com.gh/lifestyle/7-remarkable-guinness-world-records-set-by-ghanaians/rxlzmyb>
- Play Ghana songs always – Akufo-Addo's daughter to radio stations, DJs and nightclubs. (2023, December 14). Retrieved from GhanaWeb website: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Play-Ghana-songs-always-Akufo-Addo-s-daughter-to-radio-stations-DJs-and-nightclubs-1898519>
- Prelims. (2018). In *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online* (pp. i–xxii). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Senft, T. M. (2013). Microcelebrity and the Branded Self. In *A Companion to New Media Dynamics* (pp. 346–354). Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Smilie, B. (2022). A point in time filled with significance: The application of Kairos in contemporary rhetoric and civic pedagogy. Retrieved from Southalabama.edu website: [https://jagworks.southalabama.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=theses\\_diss](https://jagworks.southalabama.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=theses_diss)
- Smith, J. (1969). Time, times, and the 'right time'; Chronos and Kairos. *The Monist*, 53(1), 1–13. doi:10.5840/MONIST196953115
- Stewart, S. (2023, September 17). Nigerian Chef Hilda Baci Is A New World Guinness Record Holder. Retrieved from Essence website: <http://www.essence.com/culture/nigerian-chef-hilda-baci-new-guinness-world-record-holder/>
- Thiga, T. (2022, December 14). Christmas in Ghana: How the holiday is celebrated in the country. Retrieved from Yen.com.gh - Ghana news. website: <https://yen.com.gh/facts-lifetips/quotes-messages/223549-christmas-ghana-how-holiday-celebrated-country/>
- Thorne, D. (2023, November 17). “Y'all are mean!": Hilda Baci reflects on record attempt during visit to GWR HQ in London. Retrieved from Guinness World Records website: <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2023/11/yall-are-mean-hilda-baci-reflects-on-record-attempt-during-visit-to-gwr-hq-i-761339.html>
- Turner, G. (2004). *Understanding Celebrity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Turner, G. (2006). The mass production of celebrity: ‘Celestoids’, reality TV and the ‘demotic turn.’ *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(2), 153–165.  
doi:10.1177/1367877906064028
- Wilson, J. R. M. (1981). Kairos as ‘Profit.’ *Classical Quarterly*, 31(2), 418–420.  
doi:10.1017/S0009838800009745
- Winton, S. (2013). Rhetorical analysis in critical policy research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education: QSE*, 26(2), 158–177.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2012.666288>
- Worlda Quist, Ghana Music. (2024, July 12). Play It Right! Creative Arts Agency to host exciting music copyright event. Retrieved from Ghana Music Just log on! website:  
<https://ghanamusic.com/news/from-the-industry/2024/07/12/play-it-right-creative-arts-agency-to-host-exciting-music-copyright-event/>
- Woo, C. W., Brigham, M. P., & Gulotta, M. (2020). Twitter Talk and Twitter sharing in times of crisis: Exploring rhetorical motive and agenda-setting in the Ray Rice scandal. *Communication Studies*, 71(1), 40–58. doi:10.1080/10510974.2019.1661866
- Xu, H., Weninger, C., & Chen, D.-T. V. (2024). Microcelebrities’ identity construction on social media: A systematic review and synthesis. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. doi:10.1177/13675494241246077

***Mental Health Consultation Through Telemedicine, Does it Work?  
A Case Study of Psychologists and Patients in Online Consultation***

Stefanie Lunardy, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia  
Helga Liliani Cakra Dewi, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

The advancement of technology has brought a significant impact to our lives, including in the health sector. The presence of telemedicine allows us to access health information and health services very easily. It enables users to communicate with doctors virtually via chat consultations and video calls. Halodoc, a telemedicine platform from Indonesia has been providing health services, including psychologist consultation to cover mental health issue in Indonesia. Data stated that a month after Covid-19 break, mental health consultation in Halodoc was rose by 80% than before. Most of the users stated that they satisfied with the consultation sessions. However, quite few number of users also stated that they face several challenges in terms of communication between doctor and patient in online consultation. Therefore, this study aims to discover the interpersonal communication challenges in health communication practice between psychologist and patient in online consultation and how to cope with it. The Interpersonal Communication, Health Communication, and Computer Mediated Communication are used to analyse the case. This study was conducted using qualitative research with case study method. The research technique used was structured interviews with psychologists at Halodoc who actively consulted about mental health at Halodoc. This research found that the challenges in mental health online consultations are patient openness, language barrier, limited non-verbal expression, and patient trust to the psychologist. To address this challenge, the psychologist applied interpersonal communication strategies, such as develop empathy and using alternative tools to develop patient's openness and trust.

Keywords: Mental Health, Online Consultation, Health Communication

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The advancement of technology brought a significant impact on almost every aspect of human life, including the health sector. In the health sector, technology has been utilized to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and quality in the delivery of health services (Setyowati, 2022). According to the World Health Organization, Electronic Health or e-health refers to the use of information and communication technology safely and efficiently with the aim to facilitate comfortable access to health services, improve the quality of those services, and at the same time, it is also able to reduce the cost associated with the provision of health services (Fara, 2021). E-health is usually accessed through a health application. Tempo.co (2020) recorded that 57% of the Indonesian population has downloaded a health application on their smartphone. It showed that Indonesian people are aware of their health condition (Christy, 2020).

Aside from the health application, telemedicine application also has played an important part in the Indonesian people's health condition, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Telemedicine is a health technology that allows health services to be provided remotely or from a different location. Telemedicine is used by patients to consult with doctors through an online platform, get a diagnosis, as well as performing remote treatment without requiring the patient and doctor to come to a health centre. In Indonesia, one of the most chosen telemedicine services is Halodoc (79%) and its most favourite service is Mental Health Consultation (Databoks, 2023). The survey also indicates that respondents use telemedicine for mental health consultation because it is easy (87%), time flexible (76%), affordable (63%), privacy protected (61%), able to give the best solution (40%), and following the trend (15%) (Annur, 2023).

In Halodoc itself, the number of mental health patients significantly increased by 80% during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the majority of those who access mental health consultation services are millennials aged 20 to 30 years old (Annur, 2020). According to a survey conducted by Indonesia-National Adolescent Mental Health (2022), there were about 15.5 million Indonesian teenagers who suffered a mental health issue in the last 12 months. Nevertheless, only 2.6% of teenagers who really have accessed psychological services with a psychologist (Nababan, 2023). There are many reasons why a person with a mental health issue is not willing to seek any professional help; some of these include social stigma toward mental health issues, lack of understanding toward mental health issues, limited access to psychological services, and high consultation fees (Pranita, 2021).

With the presence of online consultation for mental health, it is hoped that it can have a significant impact. As online consultation with a psychologist is more affordable and the patient can consult more comfortably, without thinking about the prejudice of society. Online mental health consultation is also proven to bring a good impact to the patient, similar to face-to-face consultation (Arjadi et al., 2023). It is also quite effective and efficient in dealing with mental health disorders, although the preference for those experiencing acute mental health disorders is to continue to have face-to-face consultation. Greenwood et al. (2022) also stated that the effectiveness of mental health therapy using telemedicine for mild and moderate health disorders has the same effective result as face-to-face therapy.

However, there is still a challenge in doing an online consultation for mental health. As mental health consultation relies on the communication of the patient and psychologist, it

requires a clear and effective communication. While in online consultation through Halodoc, one important communication aspect that could be not accommodated is non-verbal communication. This is because the patient can choose the mode of consultation freely by them self. It could be text based consultation or voice based consultation.

Besides, the interpersonal communication model (between patient and psychologist) in health practice includes several elements as key communication to ensure that patients feel heard and valued, such as openness, empathy, support, positive feeling, and equality (DeVito, 2016). Tarifu et al. (2023) also stated that effective communication in health practice is not only about exchanging medical information, but also building trust and comfort so that the patients feel heard and understood.

Therefore, in telemedicine practice especially in mental health consultation, interpersonal communication between patient and psychologist becomes more prominent because it occurs through electronic media such as text messages, voice calls, video calls, or other special platform. Although there is no direct physical contact, the psychologist's ability to build a strong bond with the patient, understand their concern, and explain medical information clearly remains very important. Accordingly, this research aims to analyse the challenges of the psychologist to deliver a psychological services through Halodoc and how to cope with those challenges.

## **Methodology**

This research employed a qualitative research approach with case study. Qualitative is an approach in exploring to understand a meaning that will be considered to come from a context of social or humanitarian problems by one or more people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While a case study method according to Yin (2018) took an appropriate approach that is more suitable for use in research that focuses on "how" and "why".

The participants of this research are psychologist who actively doing an online mental health consultation at Halodoc. We coded them as P1, P2, and P3. P1 and P3 have joined Halodoc since 2019, while P2 have joined since 2021. An in-depth interview with P1, P2, and P3 was done separately. The interview later was analysed using axial coding to create categorization according the research questions.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the interview, this research found there are several challenges in online mental health consultation, namely technical challenges, verbal and non-verbal challenges, and the openness & trust of the patient toward psychologist.

### ***Technical Challenges***

The participants all agreed that time limitation is one of the biggest technical challenges. Halodoc limits the consultation time to be 30 minutes in every consultation session. It is considered too short for those who have to explore the patient's condition based only on text messages.

"Because 30 minutes is really a lack of time for counseling, when I was at study the minimum counseling was 60 to 90 minutes." (P1, interview, 2024)

“It’s more about time. It is less. Because in my opinion, 30 minutes doesn’t seem like enough time to dig into the patient’s problems.” (P3, interview, 2024)

Therefore if the patients experience a lack of time during the consultation, they must go through the process from the beginning.

### ***Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Challenges***

Mental health consultation at Halodoc could be done in several options, namely text/chat consultation, audio consultation, and video consultation. Verbal communication can only applied in video consultation and not all of the patients choose the video consultation mode at Halodoc. Most of them select chat consultation as this mode is the most affordable option compared to other modes. The absence of verbal communication in chat mode makes patients difficult to describe their feelings to the psychologist. Besides, intercultural challenges between patient and psychologist also appear when the patient uses local language or dialect.

Chat consultation also lacks of non-verbal expression or messages, especially facial expression, body language, tone of voice, and so on. It caused the psychologist more difficult to provide accurate assessment of a patient’s emotions or condition.

### ***Openness and Trust in the Psychologist***

Psychologists have obstacles to ensure that patients can be open and provide accurate information about their condition. Based on the interview results, there are patients who can be open from the beginning of the consultation session and there are those who need to be helped to be open and comfortable talking about their condition.

“Some of them are open and some of them want to be open but are confused about where to start.” (P1, interview, 2024)

“There are some patients who asked me to ask questions for them, so they can tell me more about their feelings.” (P2, interview, 2024)

P1 and P2 also shared their experiences of having patients who doubted their competence as psychologists. This became an obstacle for them to continue building trust between patients and psychologists.

“Oh, there have also been those who, for example, were in the middle of a session and suddenly doubted the psychologist's competence.” (P2, interview, 2024)

“So, the patient is having a consultation not because I trust the psychologists. But they were already searching on Google about their symptom, and more to like me add some information to their assumption.” (P1, interview, 2024)

### ***Strategy to Cope With Those Challenges***

The psychologist uses a guide interview clip piece to guide the patient in telling their stories about what they feel when the patients are not really able to describe their feelings or condition. The psychologist also asks the patient to send them a picture to know more about their story. Moreover, in the chat consultation, the psychologist also uses emoticons to build



an atmosphere and depict the friendly side of the psychologist so that the communication could be more comfortable and warm.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors want to thank Universitas Multimedia Nusantara for supporting this research.

## References

- Annur, C. M. (2020, July 23). Konsultasi Kesehatan Jiwa Halodoc Naik 80%, Mayoritas dari Milenial Artikel ini telah tayanKonsultasi Kesehatan Jiwa Halodoc Naik 80%, Mayoritas dari Milenial [Halodoc Mental Health Consultations Increase by 80%, Majority from Millennials This article has been posted Halodoc Mental Health Consultations Increase by 80%, Majority from Millennials]. <https://katadata.co.id/ekarina/digital/5f199fe7004c4/konsultasi-kesehatanjiwa-halodoc-naik-80-mayoritas-dari-milenial>
- Annur, C. M. (2023, January 19). Telemedicine Terfavorit untuk Konsultasi Masalah Kesehatan Mental [Most favorite telemedicine for Mental Health Consultation] <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/infografik/2023/01/19/telemedicine-terfavorituntuk-konsultasi-masalah-kesehatan-mental>
- Arjadi, K., Purnomo, & Bockting. (2023). Benefits and challenges in implementing online mental health consultation in Indonesia: Survey in practitioners. *Jurnal Psikologi Ulayat: Indonesian Journal of Indigenous Psychology*. Vol 10 (2), 284-299. DOI:10.24854/jpu726
- Christy, F. E. (2020, October 13). Orang Indonesia Peduli Kesehatan dengan Unduh Aplikasi Kesehatan. <https://data.tempo.co/data/1005/orang-indonesiapedulikesehatan-dengan-unduh-aplikasi-kesehatan>.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Fifth Edition Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. In SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Fara, N. (2021, January 20). E-Health Wujud Dari Digital Literacy. <https://kumparan.com/nabila-fara/e-health-wujud-dari-digital-literacy-1v0xpkns6YE/1>
- Greenwood H, Krzyzaniak N, Peiris R, Clark J, Scott AM, Cardona M, Griffith R, Glasziou P Telehealth Versus Face-to-face Psychotherapy for Less Common Mental Health Conditions: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials *JMIR Ment Health* 2022;9(3):e31780. doi:10.2196/31780
- Joseph A. De V. (2016). The Interpersonal Communication Book Fourteenth Edition.
- Nababan, W. M. C. (2023). Cita-cita Indonesia 2045 Terhalang Masalah Kesehatan Mental Remaja [Indonesia's 2045 Vision obstructed with mental health problem]. <https://www.kompas.id/baca/humaniora/2023/02/01/cita-cita-indonesia-2045-terhalang-masalah-kesehatan-mental-remaja>.
- Pranita, E. (2021, August 9). Alasan Orang Enggan Pergi ke Psikolog meski Membutuhkannya [Reasons why people not going to the psychologist even though they need it] <https://www.kompas.com/sains/read/2021/08/09/201500123/5-alasan-orangenggan-pergi-ke-psikolog-meskimembutuhkannya?page=all>

Robert K. Y. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications Design and Methods Sixth Edition*.

Setyowati, D. (2022, April 7). Jumlah Pengguna Baru Layanan Telemedicine Capai 44% dalam 6 Bulan [Teledemicine new users reached 44% in 6 months].  
<https://katadata.co.id/digital/startup/624e9b8b96669/jumlah-pengguna-barulayanan-telemedicine-capai-44-dalam-6-bulan>

Tarifu, L., Wardanhi, S. S., Susilawaty, F. T., & Masrul, M. (2023). *TELEMEDICINE CONSULTATION: IS IT EFECTIVE ?* Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi UHO: Jurnal Penelitian Kajian Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Informasi, 8(2), 180–187.  
<https://doi.org/10.52423/jikuho.v8i2.25>



## ***The Overlooked Cases of Female Hikikomori: Visual Representation in Manga***

Madeeha Nawaz, Ryukoku University, Japan

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

A large amount of Western and Asian consumers has started to watch anime (Japanese animation) and read manga (Japanese comics) resulting in them thinking of Japan as 'exceptional' and 'relaxed'. It has also resulted in Japan possessing soft power globally through visual mediums leading to several debates and discussions from various perspectives. One such debate remains the lesser-known gendered portrayal of Hikikomori, a phenomenon pointed out by Michael Dzieszinski in his paper "Hikikomori as a Gendered issue" (Dzieszinski, 2004). This paper attempts to bring light to the marginalized portrayal of female hikikomori and argues for a bridge between the existing reality and the portrayal in anime and manga (in Japanese pop culture). Through a thorough analysis of selected manga, it begins with a discussion on hikikomori via the lens of gender studies. It will also further discuss the stark difference between the status of female hikikomori in Japanese society, where media creates a biased perspective by prioritizing a view of hikikomori as male. It will then present an in-depth analysis of female hikikomori among selected manga, and how manga communicates using 'visual language theory' through concrete examples. Lastly, the paper brings up suggestions about more contemporary implications from gendered perspectives, media & Japanese visual language and communication and hopes to encourage future discussions.

Keywords: Hikikomori, Manga, Gender Studies, Pop Culture

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

This paper seeks to shed light on the phenomenon of Hikikomori in Japan, focusing on the broader scope of this condition before narrowing it to the relatively underexplored cases of female Hikikomori.

First, what is a hikikomori? To understand this phenomenon let's break the word into its components: the first is "hiki", from the verb hiku, meaning to pull inwards, and the second is "komori", from the verb komoru, meaning to confine. It refers to people who confine themselves within their homes for a long period of time. The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare has defined hikikomori as a condition in which the affected individuals refuse to leave their parents' house, do not work or go to school and isolate themselves away from society and family in a single room for a period exceeding six months (Itou, 2003). The word hikikomori was first coined by Japanese psychiatrist Saito Tamaki in the year 1998 in his book 『社会的ひきこもり—終わらない思春期』 which was later translated into English by Jeffrey Angles as *Hikikomori: Adolescence without an end* in the year 2013. The term was later added to the Oxford English Dictionary in the year 2010. The dictionary defines Hikikomori as "an abnormal avoidance of social contact, usually by adolescent males" (Stevenson, 2010), also ignoring that it affects girls and women too. Adding "hikikomori" to the Oxford English Dictionary indicates that this social withdrawal phenomenon, originally observed in Japan, has gained enough global recognition and relevance to be acknowledged in the English-speaking world.

While there is a lot of awareness within the media of men suffering from this phenomenon, women in the same circumstances are often overlooked. The reason for this is that in Japan, as in many other societies, traditionally men work outside the house, while for women not working outside the home isn't considered as outside the norm. Although more and more young people no longer identify with these traditional values, and the Japanese economy makes it impossible for many to live off just one income, it is still assumed by older generations that women will eventually get married and be taken care of by their husbands. A young woman living with her parents is not regarded as a problem, unless by a certain age she refuses to leave the house even for marriage.

“In Japan, boys go outside; girls (stay) in the house. Therefore, boys who don't go outside are a problem. Because girls who stay inside the home come outside for the purpose of marriage, the parents don't (see) a problem. So, a girl becomes a little withdrawn, a hikikomori. But the parents don't yet understand this: “Ah, you are staying in the home, that's fine”, they think.” (A participant in the study quoted in Dziesinski, 2004)

There are individuals who experience prolonged phases of isolation, lasting from six months to several years, or even until death. Some people prefer to live in isolation, choosing to live and die alone in extreme cases. Most of them desire to change their current state but are unsure how to do so. For these individuals, psychological treatment and support groups can be a crucial source of assistance. A common misconception about hikikomori is that they are lazy and unwilling to engage in society. Society often views them as unproductive if they are not participating in the workforce. For women, being married is often considered a success according to societal norms. Marriage creates a convenient curtain for society to hide the issues that women face extreme cases of social withdrawal as well (Saito, 2013: 93).

## Literature Review

Comics are not languages, comics are written in visual language, and in this book, Neil Cohn attempts to explore just that. The book that I am referring to is "The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images" by Neil Cohn. It is a pioneering work in which he explores the cognitive and structural elements of how comics communicate through visual language.

### *Concept*

When we look at the popular anime Naruto. In the entirety of the manga and the anime adaptation we can see from the beginning that there is a particular swing on a tree right in front of the ninja academy where Naruto is always swinging or sitting alone as a child, which depicted that he was a social outcast without any friends. This swing became so famous among the fans due to its long screen time that they even named it Swing Kun. This panel was repeated various times in the manga and anime when illustrating the flashbacks and such. Many authors consistently use the same panels repeatedly, this does not mean that they are copying the same panels it reflects the storage of these panels in their mental lexicons (Cohn, 2014: 51).

### *Terminologies*

The most recognizable morphemes from comics are thought bubbles and speech balloons. Thought bubbles and speech balloons in comics are visual cues that can be instantly recognized as "bound morphemes" (Cohn, 2014: 35) This means they need to be connected to a character or object to convey meaning—specifically, someone thinking or speaking. Just like how in English affixes cannot mean anything without their root these bound morphemes also cannot stand alone and have meaning. Thought bubbles and speech balloons fall under a broader category of visual lexicon known as carriers, which hold the text or images and connect it to a root which is the thinker or speaker through a tail. In the case of speech balloons, the balloon itself is the carrier, the speaker is the root, and the balloon's tail points toward the speaker, anchoring the speech to its source (Cohn, 2014: 35).

As mentioned Before, Saito Tamaki's book translated by Jeffery Angles called *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without an End*, delves into the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of hikikomori in its first part and the second part explores how to deal with individuals who are socially withdrawn.

Michael Dzieszinski's paper called "Hikikomori as a Gendered Issue" explores the media's focus on male hikikomori while largely ignoring female cases that perpetuate gender biases and social stigma in Japan. This oversight basically neglects the reality that young women also experience social withdrawal and are often labeled differently.

Finally, in their paper "Self and Salvation: Visions of Hikikomori in Japanese Manga", Ulrich Heinze and Penelope Thomas analyze the representation of male hikikomori in the manga NHK によろこそ(Welcome to NHK). They assert that manga featuring female protagonists as hikikomori often depict them as merely socially inept "loners" in adolescence, and therefore, not radical enough to truly embody the hikikomori label. Moreover, they argue that to effectively challenge Japan's social norms, manga often resorts to male characters, as they are seen as more representative of the phenomenon.

While I acknowledge their point about the predominance of male hikikomori characters in manga, I would like to contest the first part of their argument. Through a case study of Hikikomori Niizuma, I will demonstrate that the portrayal of female hikikomori, in this instance, transcends the depiction of a socially awkward loner and embodies the deeper psychological withdrawal that characterizes the hikikomori experience. The female protagonist in Hikikomori Niizuma is not simply inept due to adolescence but is a fully realized hikikomori grappling with the similar yet gendered existential and societal pressures as her male counterparts.

That said, I do concur with the second part of Heinze and Thomas' thesis, which highlights the tendency of manga creators to favor male protagonists when addressing the hikikomori phenomenon. However, this should not be interpreted as a denial of the existence or significance of female hikikomori. Rather, it underscores the broader gendered dynamics in the portrayal of social deviance in Japanese media. While male characters dominate the discourse, the experiences of female hikikomori are equally complex and deserve deeper exploration.

### **Objectives and Research Questions Addressed**

In Japanese society, the remnants of deeply rooted traditional norms often lead to distinct social expectations for men and women (Belarmino, Roberts, 2019: 273). These expectations not only contribute to the marginalization of female Hikikomori but also obscure the unique factors that drive women into social withdrawal. By addressing these gendered dimensions, this paper aims to reveal the specific social pressures and biases faced by the protagonist in the data, which, in turn, can give some insights into significant causes for female Hikikomori to retreat from society.

In the second part of the analysis, which is the primary focus of this paper, visual language theory is applied to examine the manga Hikikomori Niizuma as a case study. This manga, an autobiographical account by the author, offers a valuable lens for exploring the portrayal of female Hikikomori in Japanese popular culture. Through this medium, the study analyzes two key aspects: first, how female Hikikomori are represented, and second, the societal issues that are brought to light through this representation. Hikikomori Niizuma provides a nuanced perspective on the personal and systemic factors that contribute to the experience of female Hikikomori, offering insights that might otherwise be neglected in a male-centered discourse.

This paper's exploration of Hikikomori Niizuma therefore serves as a critical examination of how social withdrawal among women is not only stigmatized but also shaped by societal norms. By bringing attention to these overlooked narratives, this study attempts to highlight the need for understanding of female Hikikomori within both academic and popular discourse.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework Used**

The methodology that I have used in my research is mainly qualitative, encompassing, content analysis and dialogue analysis using visual language theory and manga expression theory respectively. The primary data for analysis is a manga called Hikikomori Niizuma.



This manga was drawn by Mangaka Ura and published in the year 2020. There are a total number of 11 chapters in the manga. There are 2 main reasons I chose this manga as my primary data for my research:

1. It is an essay manga meaning it is the autobiography of the mangaka.
2. The protagonist of this manga is a woman struggling with social withdrawal.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

“When we talk about languages, [...] structured sequential sounds become spoken languages of the world, structured sequential body motions become sign languages, and structured sequential images literally become visual languages.” (Cohn, 2014: 3)

The proponents of this framework are Modality, Meaning, and Grammar of Visual Languages Graphic Structure of JVL (Japanese Visual Language) - Big eyes, big hair, small mouths, and pointed chins (Cohn, 2014: 154). This style came into fashion after the God of comics Osamu Tezuka. Other mangakas started using the same style. This way of drawing the manga became so normal that it was quite difficult to differentiate between characters, so artists started using different hairstyles and colors to make characters stand out (Natsume, 1998; Rommens, 2000).

### **Female Hikikomori**

When I first started my research three years ago, these two were one of the first questions that popped up in my head. Do female hikikomori even exist? And if they what percent? reason being all the data that I had consumed mentioned that most men suffer through social withdrawal in Japan. They do exist and are around the same percentage as men.

“While hikikomori was often associated with young men, recent studies have shown the extensive number of older hikikomori as well as the increasing number of women hikikomori, who accounted for 52.3 percent for those between 40 and 64 in the 2023 survey. In response to these new findings, former female hikikomori-turned-advocates have praised the representation of women in the statistics and called for governments to implement women-specific hikikomori measures” (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2023d).

Recent studies show an apparent increase in female hikikomori cases which raises the question: does it reflect genuine growth in female *hikikomori* cases or rather the acknowledgment of an already existing group that was previously overlooked? Historically, societal expectations and cultural biases may have rendered female *hikikomori* cases less visible, framing *hikikomori* as a male-centered issue and obscuring the struggles of women facing similar isolation.

And as a result, the media and public are curiously silent on the matter of female hikikomori. It almost approaches a collective denial about something clearly observable in the field (Dziesinski, 2005: 26-27). The accepted discourse is that it is young males who suffer from social withdrawal in Japanese society. Taking the example of the parasite single and the media framing it as a female issue, what appears to be occurring is that the focus of public discourse in Japanese society is to ‘blame’ those ‘victims’ of these phenomena for not behaving in traditional ways that conservative society expects: Males should go out and work upon attaining adulthood and so the segment of young men classified as hikikomori seem to have public scorn and alarm heaped upon them for not fulfilling the expected role in society

that is proscribed for them. For young women who socially withdraw, concern only develops when they don't eventually leave the house to marry and raise a family.

Thus, drawing a parallel to the "parasite single" stereotype, which the media often frames as a female issue, it becomes evident that public discourse in Japan tends to blame the "victims" of such phenomena for not adhering to traditional societal expectations (Dziesinski, 2005: 23). Specifically, young men who become hikikomori face public criticism and concern for failing to assume the conventional role of entering the workforce upon reaching adulthood. In contrast, concern for socially withdrawn young women only arises when they do not eventually leave their homes to marry and start families.

One reason is our society has embraced a set of rules that says, "If you don't work, you don't deserve to eat." (Saito, 2013: 93) As a result, we tend to take an overwhelmingly negative attitude toward social withdrawal, we deny that it is a problem with real roots and causes. In other words, there is a tendency to pretend that it is not there at all, even when it exists right before our very own eyes (Saito, 2013: 93). When society pretends that male hikikomori does not exist, it exacerbates the situation for women experiencing social withdrawal, making it even less likely for their condition to be acknowledged. As discussed in the book *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*, three main systems that affect hikikomori are the individual, society, and family (Saito, 2013: 82). When a man socially withdraws and fails to meet societal expectations, such as going outside and securing a job, it becomes a significant concern first for his parents and then for society at large.

In contrast, when a woman experiences social withdrawal, traditional mindsets often downplay its seriousness. Society may rationalize her behavior with notions such as,

"It's acceptable if she doesn't work or only holds a part-time job; she doesn't need to go out much. Someone will eventually take care of her; she just needs to do housework and get married." (Saito, 2013: 93)

These entrenched norms dismiss the dreams and aspirations of the individual woman, making it even more difficult for her to seek help or even have her condition recognized. Consequently, the social and familial systems that already marginalize male hikikomori are even more neglectful towards female hikikomori, perpetuating their isolation and hindering their access to necessary support and acknowledgment.

The specter of traditional values is still prevalent in some parts of Japanese society, however, entering the 2000s, there was a rapid change in values among younger people, the author of the manga *Hikikomori Niizuma* is also of this generation, where young women do get an education with the aim of building a career outside the home, regardless of whether they get married or not (Aronsson, 2020: 571). In the manga, as explained below, the author struggles with the gap between traditional and non-traditional values, because they contradict in many ways.

### **Summary – Hikikomori Niizuma (Data)**

The protagonist Ura has a Job in Tokyo, she has been dating her boyfriend since college and they went long distance because their jobs demanded different locations. Ura then decides to marry her boyfriend. She envisions a bright happy married life which takes a drastic turn due to her mental health and relocation. After marriage she moves to her husband's place in

Osaka, leaving behind her whole ecosystem, her friends, acquaintances, and job in Tokyo. Her situation becomes like a fish out of the pond. She quits her job and hopes to find another one in Osaka, and it turns out that finding a suitable job while having all the qualifications required is quite difficult as a married woman. Companies do not want a newly married woman who would then bear a child and take leave. She lived seven years of her life by herself, and she found it quite difficult to accommodate another person. She succumbs to depression, isolates herself, goes through a lot of physical pain due to stress, and even considers committing suicide.

### Data – Hikikomori Niizuma – Panel Analysis

#### Pages 4 and 5

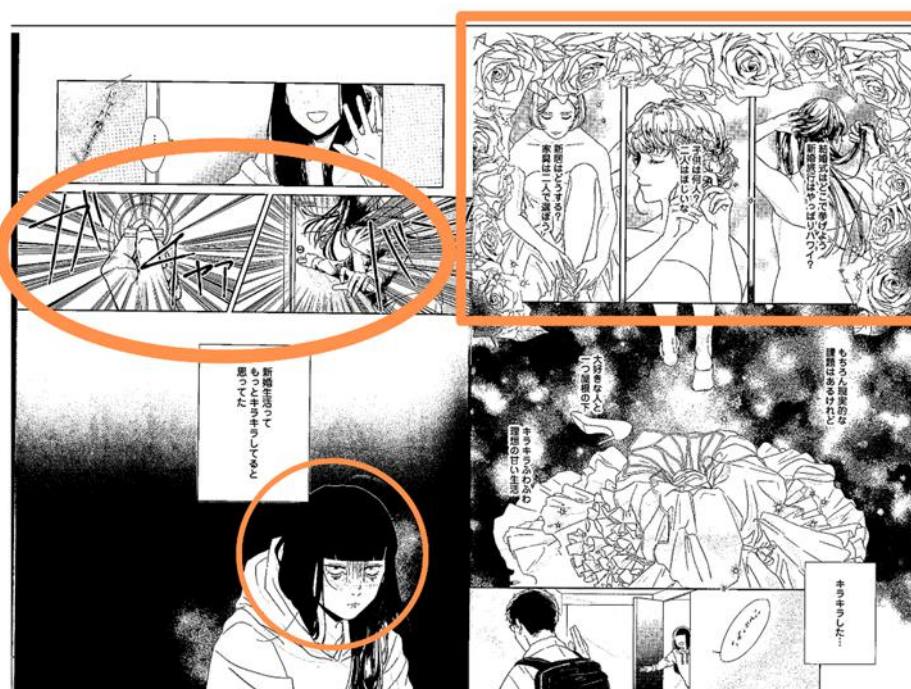


Figure 1: Hikikomori Niizuma, 2020: 5 and 4

The visual depiction of panel borders on page 4, adorned with flowery designs, serves as a symbolic representation of love and marriage. These flowery motifs are commonly employed in shōjo manga to signify romantic or erotic moments, often evoking a sense of joy and idealized love. In this case, the bright and decorative imagery suggests that the protagonist envisions a blissful and perfect marriage, reflective of romanticized ideals. However, this symbolism is disrupted when the protagonist is shown stepping out of her wedding dress, an act that signifies her transition from the fantasy of a "sparkly" and idealized union to the sobering reality of a depressive and unfulfilling marriage.

The contrast between pages 4 and 5 is striking, particularly in the shift from the flowery and light aesthetic to one characterized by sharp lines and a dark, oppressive layout. This shift visually mirrors the protagonist's descent from hopeful anticipation into despair. Notably, the change in the protagonist's hair color is also of significance. While hair color might appear trivial at first glance, a close reading of the entire manga reveals that the protagonist's lighter hair is consistently depicted during moments of happiness, which comprise 20 to 30 percent of the narrative. In contrast, during scenes that convey her struggles with mental health and isolation, her hair is shown as growing out, darker, and often unkempt. This visual cue

highlights her declining emotional state, suggesting a lack of energy or desire to maintain her physical appearance, further reflecting her inner turmoil.

### Pages 6 and 122

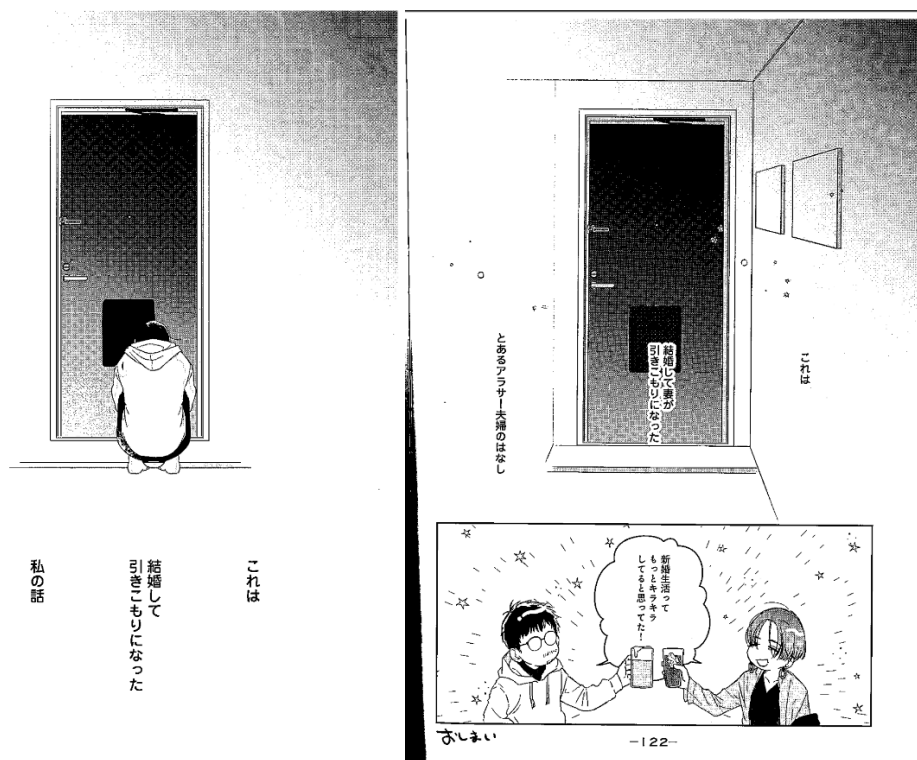


Figure 2: Hikikomori Niizuma, 2020: 6 and 122

In the subsequent pages of the manga, the visual lexicon established in earlier panels is reappropriated and recontextualized to convey different narrative meanings. On page 6, from the opening chapter, we encounter the protagonist crouched in front of a closed door, a poignant visual metaphor marking the onset of two significant developments: first, the emotional decline that characterizes her oppressive marriage, and second, her progressive withdrawal from social life. The door, in this context, becomes a powerful symbol of both physical and psychological confinement, accentuating her entrapment within an environment that fosters isolation and despair.

In stark contrast, on page 122—from the final chapter of the manga—the door is depicted with no figure standing before it. The background is subtly brightened, evoking a sense of openness and potential. Beneath this panel, we see a brighter, more hopeful scene in which the protagonist is sharing drinks with her husband, suggesting the beginning of her healing journey. The absence of the protagonist before the door visually signifies her liberation from the emotional entrapment that dominated the earlier narrative. Together, the brighter composition and the convivial moment with her husband signal a shift towards reconciliation, particularly with herself, as she moves toward a state of emotional recovery and reintegration into social life. This progression is masterfully articulated through the transformation of the door motif, which evolves from a symbol of isolation to one of renewed possibilities.

Pages 11 and 12



Figure 3: Hikikomori Niizuma, 2020: 11 and 12

Let us turn our attention to pages 11 and 12 of the manga, where we observe a compelling visual contrast in the marked panels. In the highlighted panel on page 11, the protagonist is depicted against a bright, sparkly background, performing a 35-degree bow while uttering the phrase, "yoroshiku onegaishimasu." This bow, traditionally signifying respect and a wish for favorable relations, in this context conveys a sense of optimism and joy, encapsulating the beginning of the protagonist's relationship. The radiant background reinforces this sentiment, symbolizing the hopeful and positive energy surrounding the nascent stage of their courtship.

However, the tone undergoes a dramatic shift on page 12. Here, the background behind the protagonist turns markedly dark, and she is now depicted bowing deeply, her forehead touching the ground. This form of bow, often associated with profound apology or submission, serves as a visual metaphor for the disillusionment and emotional burden that characterizes her marriage. The stark contrast between the two panels not only highlights the shift in the protagonist's emotional landscape but also speaks to the broader narrative arc of her relationship, from its hopeful beginnings to its painful decline.

The narrative above the marked panel on page 11 centers on the protagonist's college relationship with her boyfriend, representing the early stages of their romance. In contrast, the marked panel on page 12 reflects a moment from the future, after their marriage, and serves as a symbolic portrayal of the disheartening reality that her relationship has become. The rest of the page juxtaposes this post-marriage scene with events from a period in their relationship when they were separated due to work commitments, navigating a long-distance relationship. This narrative structure is both intricate and cohesive, seamlessly intertwining three distinct time periods, their initial courtship, the stability of their long-distance relationship, and the



subsequent unraveling of their marriage. Through this complex temporal layering, the manga effectively charts the protagonist's emotional journey from optimism and connection to the eventual strain and disappointment of her married life.

Pages 32 and 42

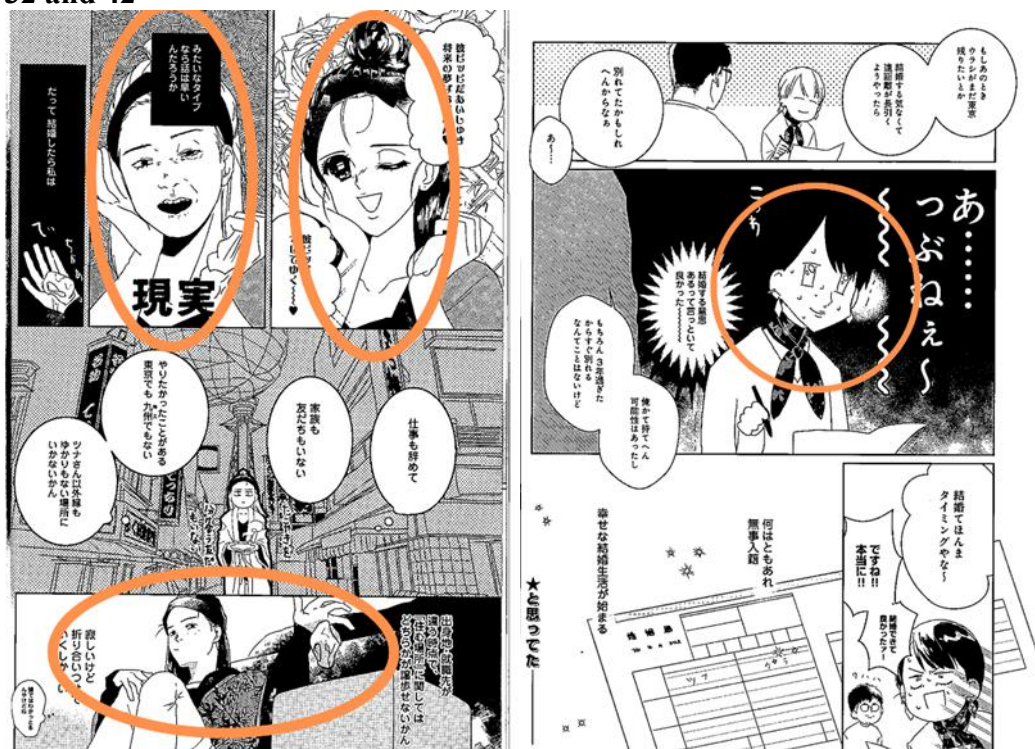


Figure 4: Hikikomori Niizuma, 2020: 32-42

On pages 32 and 42 of this manga, we once again encounter the use of shōjo manga visual conventions within key panels. On page 32, the mangaka has drawn herself employing typical shōjo features—large, luminous eyes, glossy hair, and a charming smile—attributes that are conventionally used to emphasize feminine beauty. This aesthetic invites multiple layers of interpretation.

First, it reflects the societal idealization of female beauty, as portrayed through shōjo manga’s exaggerated and idealized visual tropes. Second, it conveys the protagonist’s self-perception, rendered in a self-deprecating image that distorts her face, suggesting her low self-esteem and internalized critique. Finally, we observe a more neutral portrayal of the protagonist, positioned somewhere between these extremes, serving as a more balanced depiction of her reality. These three visual perspectives effectively juxtapose societal expectations of beauty, the protagonist’s self-image, and her actual physical appearance, thereby illustrating the tension between external ideals and internal identity.

Additionally, shōjo manga stylistic elements are used on page 42 to depict the protagonist’s panic upon encountering a marriage registration form. In this instance, features such as large eyes, a sharp, pointy chin, and beads of sweat on her face are employed to visually express her heightened anxiety and emotional turmoil. These exaggerated elements capture the intensity of her panic, utilizing familiar shōjo aesthetics to convey a moment of psychological distress. Through these techniques, the mangaka artfully uses shōjo manga's visual motifs to reflect complex emotional states and societal pressures on female identity.



## Conclusion

My initial analysis of this essay manga featuring Ura identifies three specific social issues she personally contends with within contemporary Japan: limited job prospects after marriage, high and restrictive beauty standards, and pressures to excel in both career and household responsibilities—a phenomenon often described as “Superwoman Syndrome.” Through Ura’s perspective, this manga reveals the nuanced ways these challenges manifest in her life, offering an intimate view into how societal expectations impact her sense of agency and self-worth.

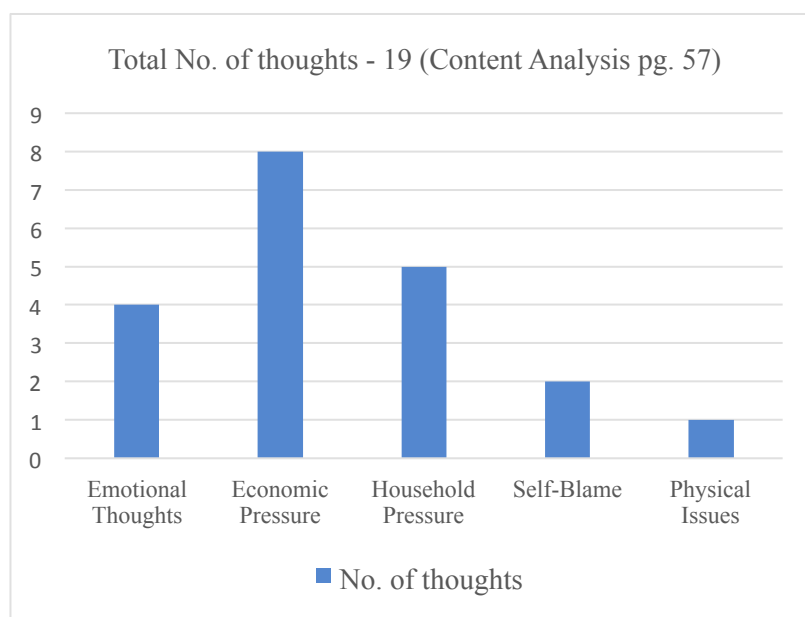


Figure 6: The Number of Monologues the Protagonist Is Thinking (Content Analysis of the Monologues)

Firstly, Ura’s difficulty in securing employment after marriage reflects a complex challenge. For her, marriage appears to signal a shift in how she is perceived professionally, impacting her opportunities and adding to her frustration. The manga’s portrayal of this struggle presents Ura’s unique experiences as she navigates a workforce that can sometimes appear restrictive or unaccommodating to married women.

The manga also delves into Ura’s interactions with beauty standards. Here, we see how specific ideals shape her day-to-day experiences and emotional landscape, including pressure to maintain a particular appearance and demeanor—always polished and smiling. These pressures, for Ura, seem ever-present and contribute to an ongoing struggle with self-perception. The work’s emphasis on Ura’s inner conflicts captures how such standards uniquely affect her, rather than implying a uniform experience across Japanese women.

Lastly, Ura’s experience with “Superwoman Syndrome” conveys her internal conflict as she tries to balance her career ambitions with domestic expectations (Heinze, Thomas, 2014: 159). This pressure to excel on multiple fronts is, for Ura, a significant source of strain and self-doubt. The manga explores how this dual burden affects her outlook and personal fulfillment, providing insight into her negotiation of societal expectations without if all women face this in the same way.



Additionally, I aim to expand the scope of this research by incorporating more essay manga that feature female hikikomori protagonists. By doing so, I hope to provide a comparative framework that captures a broader spectrum of experiences related to social withdrawal and gender in Japan. This approach will contribute to a more diverse and robust data set, allowing for an analysis that highlights the varied, yet interconnected, experiences of women who defy or struggle within prescribed social roles.

Through this combined approach, my research seeks to deepen our understanding of how contemporary manga reflects and critiques the gendered social structures in Japan, particularly as they impact women's lives and identities. This study will ultimately contribute to the discourse on manga as a medium for social commentary and as a site of resistance against traditional gender norms.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has supported and guided me throughout this journey. My heartfelt thanks go to my supervisor, Jessica Sensei, and Co-Supervisor Matsui Sensei, for their invaluable insights, encouragement, and patience, which have been instrumental in the completion of this work.

A special thank you to my family and friends, whose unwavering support and understanding kept me motivated during challenging times.

## References

- Aronsson, A. S. (2020). "Contemporary Japanese Career Women: Reflections on Profession, Life, and Purpose". *The Qualitative Report*, 25(3), 569-595.  
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4024>
- Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. (2023d, April 18). *2% of Japanese Labour Force Could be 'Modern-day Recluses': Government Survey*.  
<https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/2-percent-japanese-labour-force-modern-day-recluses>
- Belarmino, M., & Roberts, M. R. (2019). Japanese gender role expectations and attitudes: A qualitative analysis of gender inequality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20(7), 272-288.
- Cohn, N. (2013). *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images*. Bloomsbury.
- Dziesinski, M. J. (2003). "Hikikomori as. Investigations into the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal in contemporary Japan". Undergraduate paper, University of Hawai'i Manoa, 25(10), 2013.
- Heinze, U., & Thomas, P. (2014). Self and Salvation: visions of hikikomori in Japanese manga. *Contemporary Japan*, 26(1), 151-169.
- Holtaway, J. (2021, March 2). Hikikomori artists – how Japan's extreme recluses find creativity and self-discovery in isolation. *The Conversation*. Retrieved January 19, 2023, from <http://theconversation.com/hikikomori-artists-how-japans-extreme-recluses-find-creativity-and-self-discovery-in-isolation-155420>
- Itō, J. (2003). *Hikikomori No Taiou Gaido-Rain (Guideline on Mental Health Activities in Communities for Social Withdrawal)*. Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare.
- Keeni, G. A. (2013). Development of the Japanese Department at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal (日本研究の新しい動向). *世界の日本研究*, 35-37).
- Kinsella, S. (1998). Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 24(2), 289–316.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/133236>
- Masangkay, M. (2016, October 19). Support groups emerge to help female recluses in Japan. *The Japan Times*. Retrieved January 19, 2023.
- Natsume, F. (1998). *The Future of Manga (Japanese Comics)*.
- Okonogi, K. (1977). *Moratoriumu ningen no jidai [The era of the moratorium people]*. Tokyo: Chūōkōronshinsha.

- Okonogi, K. (2000). *Keitai netto ningen no seishin bunseki: shōnen mo otona mo hikikomori no jidai* [The mental state of the mobile phone and Internet person: The age of youngsters and adults becoming hikikomori]. Tokyo: Asukashinsha.
- Rommens, A. (2000). Manga story-telling/showing. *Image [&] Narrative*, 1(1).
- Stevenson, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press (OUP).
- Tamaki, S., & Angles, J. T. (2013). *Hikikomori: Adolescence without end*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Ura. (2020). *Hikikomori Niizuma*, Kodansha.
- Yong, R. K., Fujita, K., Chau, P. Y., & Sasaki, H. (2020). Characteristics of and gender difference factors of hikikomori among the working-age population: a cross-sectional population study in rural Japan. *Nihon Kōshu Eisei Zasshi (Japanese Journal of Public Health)*, 67(4), 237-246.

**Contact email:** [madeehanawaz67@gmail.com](mailto:madeehanawaz67@gmail.com)



***Comparative Analysis of the Political Message Strategies and Transmedia Storytelling Techniques in the 2022 Philippine Presidential Elections***

Rayns Keneth Ampon, King Mongkut University of Technology, Thailand  
Jessada Salathong, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

The 2022 Philippines presidential election has been among the most divisive and digitally active in the country's electoral history. Numerous political messaging strategies have been used to create a compelling and persuasive message to engage the electorate. This study contributes to the growing global literature on message and platform studies focusing on political message strategies and transmedia. This research utilized qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews to compare the political message strategies of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. and Leni Robredo. The study evaluated the campaign materials such as multimedia, artworks, and speeches throughout the campaign period. It also explored the use of transmedia storytelling to connect narratives across platforms. The study found that political message framing in Philippine elections revolves around the themes of patriotism, unity, compassion, post-pandemic response, and hope for a better nation. Electoral campaigns are now carried out heavily on social media, efficiently engaging the public. However, traditional political tactics still perform because they can persuade a specific demographic. Transmedia storytelling is a potent tool for communicating political messages to the voting public. Moreover, this comparative analysis further concludes that while both candidates utilized a theme of "pagkakaisa" or "unity," how the message was delivered decided whether it would bring voters together or drive them apart.

Keywords: Elections, Political Communication, Transmedia, Qualitative Content Analysis, Philippines

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Integrating marketing in politics has been very beneficial since political candidates try to sell themselves to the electorate. Understanding the basic marketing communication concept can suit candidates since they can easily connect to the voting public (Shama, 1975). Nowadays, campaigners explore innovative communication strategies to optimize their efforts (Towner & Dulio, 2012). Messages during the campaign can help in the election results, controlling the campaign type and the delivery of political messages, which affects the percentage of votes. Lower vote percentages were observed in those campaigns that emphasized negative and issues-oriented advertising appeals (Himmelboim et al., 2012).

Modern political campaigns increasingly rely on Facebook to engage with digital audiences and disseminate information (Muñiz et al., 2019). The emergence of the internet has leveraged grassroots campaigning and media as it can provide a broader segment of the online audience. Although, according to Karan et al. (2009), traditional campaigning still complements social media in delivering the message, there is no monopoly of information dissemination channels in political campaigns.

In the Philippines, campaign messages either unite or divide communities. The rise of public opinion has also come to influence the process of election campaigning itself, as seen in the floating and junking of candidates, the party-switching of politicians, and the unraveling of coalitions, all developments noted by informed observers (Hedman, 2010). Politicians are always crafting their political advertisements to understand the plight and chaos of an ordinary Filipino but need more to grasp the actual on-ground scenario (Malindog-Uy, 2021). Recently, though, Bodegon-Hikino (2022) explored the dynamics of political campaigns in the country, noting that election campaign in the Philippines highlights jingles and repetitive and sometimes obnoxious songs. It is a traditional approach that is still effective because it is highly remarkable.

With the growing use of social media, a story from a politician can be retold on various platforms. In the Philippines, for example, politicians will use colors, personal narratives, photographs with emotional appeal, and videos featuring common people so that people on social media can react and even produce a story from their point of view. Transmedia is an emerging concept in political campaigning since the audience can participate in the storytelling scene. According to Rutledge (2012), narratives in transmedia have always been participatory. The creativity of transmedia and social collaborations for audiences elevated their engagement and involvement in the story.

Moreover, a political campaign is now a battle of message strategy, wherein it is the art of crafting a creative plan for a message using elements of verbal, nonverbal, rational, emotional, and unique cognitive strategies (Simmons, 2021). While the content of a political message matters, the manner in which it is conveyed can have a significant impact. How it is said can spell the difference in persuading the electorate to vote (Neema, 2013).

## Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the political message strategies of Bongbong Marcos and Leni Robredo in their electoral campaign.
2. To explore the potential of transmedia storytelling as a communication strategy for an electoral campaign.

## Review of Literature

A political communication campaign is a very specific form of persuasion. Using modified principles in marketing, politicians and their ideas are advertised to a voting public (Powell & Cowart, 2015). The way politicians speak and communicate can be crafted so that it resonates with the voting public as they are targeting a large audience. It is important to answer the right questions during debates or public presentations, wear the right clothes, act reasonably, and be mindful in framing the narrative (Burton et al., 2015). Hence, these campaigns are there to capture the hearts and minds of the electorate. Voters need more time to screen and know the candidates representing their political ideas. The recognition of the candidate is important in gaining the public's vote as they will rely on the provided information ("How to Formulate a Winning Marketing Strategy for a Political Campaign," 2023).

Strategic messaging and positioning should be more noticed. It is difficult to quantify the impact of bad messaging, and it is just as difficult to present any accurate implementation or change the approach of how someone talks. This, however, should be considered a vital part of the communication process because the way the message is designed creates a brand in the audience's mind (Pono, 2016). Framing and using archetypes for the candidate's message in a political campaign is relative to creating a powerful message. A voice from a campaigner who can communicate the audience's desires will surely resonate well, as they can be represented in some ways (Smith, 2021).

Using different communication methods helps the messaging campaign to be more visible to the target electorate. Hancox (2017) evaluated examples of transmedia materials that tell a story and engage people to use a platform for activism and social participation. She said that materials could be a good messaging campaign where the story can resonate well with the audience by involving them in the thinking process. Social media offers a broad platform for sharing information that enables messages to be transmitted across various platforms (Tadic et al., 2017). Strategic use of language and visuals can significantly sway public opinion, giving a candidate a competitive edge (Bloomfield & Tscholl, 2018).

A message that considers culture, the Filipino spirit, and solutions to daily problems has been the theme for politicians' messages in the past campaign. The political campaign has the same strategy as commercial marketing and advertisement in winning the audience to buy a product; it has a good narrative, compelling reason, and authenticity, as stated by Garcia in an interview with *Inquirer.net* (Go, 2015). When discussing the importance of message framing, Filipino politicians have consistently delivered messages linked to their name, political affiliations, principles, and Filipino traits to have quick recognition during the campaign. In an interview with a Filipino voter (CNN Philippines, 2019), the main reason for patronage is personality and their message (political platform and promise delivery).

Framing of political messages can be perceived in a negative or positive light, depending on how messages are presented. Crafting a message can be tricky since a positive appeal can be interpreted as a persuasive attempt, thus decreasing the source's trustworthiness and the truth (Koch & Peter, 2017). Considering the political communication context, George Lakoff postulates the framing theory in politics by seeing how candidates frame their message to gain the support of the target audience. Furthermore, he analyzes the relation of frames in public relations. He examines how politicians will use mental images against the audience themselves (Rathje, 2017). Image bite analysis of audiovisual segments in which candidates are shown but not necessarily heard employs detailed measurement of candidate depictions,

structural features of newscasts such as camera angles, shot lengths, and durations, and visual framing of candidates. As social media campaigns provide a variety of images, videos, and audio, this coding scheme helps align the candidate's image to a descriptive analysis for a comparative study.

## Methodology

The research sample and method provided the necessary information for the research objectives. Online and offline materials of Leni Robredo and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. were collected to analyze data. The research sample for Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) included 220 Online Political Campaign/Marketing Materials from both Leni Robredo and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. from Facebook (60), Tiktok (60), and Twitter (100). Note that it also includes user-generated content to analyze the transmedia concept. Then, there are 12 offline materials, which are Murals (6), Songs (4), and Speeches (6).

Using the online application *Trackalytics* and Manual Coding, each social media profile was verified for the number of posts, engagements, and posting frequency. The post should be among the most engaging posts of the month regarding likes, shares, and comments from netizens with content aligned with their campaign message. The political campaign-related post could be the first one, the announcement of candidacy, the campaign themes, candidates' credentials, and campaign rallies.

The most significant offline campaign materials were selected as those that should play a significant role in their campaign. They should also be consistent with the theme of Rosas or Unity, which shares the campaign narrative to be selected for analysis. Offline materials are Songs (Bagong Pilipinas, Rosas, etc.), Murals (Biggest Mural, Volunteer Driven, Community Painting, etc.), and Speeches (Proclamation Rally and Miting De Avance).

Furthermore, campaign strategists answered the semi-structured interview questions. Purposive or judgmental sampling helps qualify a participant based on the set criteria of the study. However, due to the need for more direct contact with the potential participants, a snowball method that helps in networking for potential participants is necessary to finish the study. The key informant should work for the whole period of the national election campaign from November 2021 to May 2022. They should be knowledgeable in political campaign marketing and working in the related field.

The research instrument is Qualitative Content Analysis through manual coding and Computer-Aided Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQAS) to study the political campaign materials during the 2022 Philippine elections, where it was analyzed to evaluate the message behind each campaign. The massive amount of data from all the targeted social media platforms and the selected offline materials needs a basis for proper evaluation, an approach developed from Pratheepwatanawong's (2017) study of Social Networking Sites (SNS) of political candidates during the 2013 Bangkok Gubernatorial campaign served as a framework of coding and data analysis of this study. Using content analysis allows the researcher to analyze and systematically evaluate the data.

The themes that emerged from both manual and computer-aided qualitative tools were evaluated carefully to present the political message strategies of candidates during the campaign. Selective coding was utilized to undermine interesting terms and answers from the participants. Braun and Clarke (2013) claimed that selective coding provides a more



comprehensive analysis. In line with this, data provided by the key informants were cross-checked, and a comparative review of previous research was conducted to triangulate the findings.

## Discussion

### *Political Campaign Analysis*

Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, candidate 'No. 7', a part of the Partido Federal ng Pilipinas (PFP), launched his electoral campaign at the world-famous Philippine Arena. He called their campaign and political alliance "UniTeam," a word coined from "Unity" and "Team," as he wanted to focus his campaign messaging on uniting the Filipino people. Bongbong has always consistently used the color 'red' to identify his campaign, team, and supporters. This tactic is essential in Philippine politics as colors and imagery can quickly help the electorate identify a certain candidate.

Bongbong Marcos's campaign slogan contains two central ideas: unity and post-pandemic response. *'Sama Sama* depicts togetherness, a value known in a collective Filipino society. He calls for unity and to work as one to rise from the pandemic. *'Babangon Muli'* is not just a message of 'to rise again.' However, it notably includes the letters of this candidate BBM (BongBong Marcos), a trademark he has used to create a recall and easier recognition.

Bongbong's social media campaign heavily relied on Facebook. His video campaign trails, showing his interaction with supporters, gained sympathy from the public. One of his viral moments was when a lady offered him a small amount of money. While his team rarely utilized TikTok, social media content creators are creating content for him.

On the other hand, Leni Robredo, candidate 'No. 10' formerly under the Liberal Party list (LP), pursued an independent campaign launched in her hometown, Naga City, Bicol. She called it the people's campaign and her political alliance *Tropa*, 'a Filipino word referring to a group of friends. Leni recently changed her political color to 'pink' precisely for this campaign to identify her and her advocacies. A color that is fresh and barely used in Philippine politics as this depicts a color often associated with women.

Leni Robredo's slogan contains two central ideas for her campaign: good governance and inclusive development. *'Sa Gobyernong Tapat'* portrays a transparent and honest government, a message that yearns for system reform to provide the best public service to the Filipino people. Honesty is the message that the campaign wants to convey through the reflection of Leni's politics, which she was able to support with her authored laws, the 'full-disclosure bill' and 'freedom of information bill' that promotes government transparency. *'Angat Buhay Lahat'* promotes an inclusive development where every member of society can alleviate their struggles. Leni has been serving the poorest of the poor in her entire political career, and she envisioned the continuity of her service through a development that would include not just infrastructure but also long-term economic and sustainable growth for Filipinos.

Leni is the clear frontrunner on Twitter. Her campaign rallies are always trending; famous hashtags include #InWednesdayWeWearPink, #KulayRosasAngBukas, and #IpanaloNa10ito. Since her campaign is volunteer-driven, lots of Facebook pages will post based on their

unique marketing strategy. Photos and videos from her campaign rallies went viral because of funny placards containing witty statements.

As observed, themes and political branding are integral to the Philippine election campaign. It is widely practical that an inclusive message of "togetherness" and "everyone" is both included in the campaign slogans of Robredo and Marcos as this also tackles the Filipino culture of "Bayanihan Spirit," or helping each other and winning altogether. Furthermore, both campaigns hint at a post-pandemic response as either they wanted to alleviate the status of the people (Bongbong) or reform the current administration to a responsive government (Leni) that both will help the country that suffered from COVID-19 from health, economy, and other factors. This comparison is relevant to Todd's (2014) study, which states that relating to electorates' emotional currency is necessary to persuade them. Campaigns with advocacy that relates to people's current needs can help them remember which candidate to vote for.

However, the message strategy of Bongbong and Leni differs in their presentation of this campaign. Bongbong retained his political color and advocacy of unity while developing the central concept of the country's current trends and issues. Meanwhile, to sway from the old yellow color associated with her former party list, Leni utilized a new campaign color and developed her grassroots approach to a more inclusive and personal theme. It is also evident that Bongbong still clings to the theme, resounding his late father's message and incorporating the same color even with controversies. Leni swayed away from her former political color as disagreements from the Duterte administration have targeted the party list. Hence, the analysis of Pono (2016) argues that while it is difficult to gauge the extent of bad messaging, including the issues related to the candidate, a strategic approach to designing the campaign is necessary. Packaging of either retaining a former image or branding to a new color can either make or break the overall campaign.

May bagong silang, May bago nang buhay, Bagong bansa, bagong galaw, Sa bagong lipunan. Nagbabago ang lahat, tungo sa pag-unlad at ating itanghal, bagong lipunan! [There is a new birth, there is a new life, new country, new movement, in a new society, everything is changing, towards development. And let's show a new society!] (Plethora, 2021)

In Bongbong's campaign, he utilized two songs. "*Bagong Lipunan*" can directly be translated into a new society. A song revival of Plethora from the campaign jingle of the late president-dictator Marcos Sr. and "*Bagong Pilipinas, Bagong Mukha*," composed and performed by a famous rapper Andrew E., means the same message of changing the Philippines by electing new leaders. The first sounded like a classic and slow song that captivated the older generation's preferences. In contrast, the second one was an impactful campaign jingle that even kids could sing along to. Emerging themes from the songs created for Bongbong Marcos are *new beginnings, change, and support*.

At alam ko ang aking kaya, alam ko ang hindi, alam ko ang kailangan upang makapagsilbi. Hangga't may kabutihan, hangga't may pag-ibig, liwanag ang mananaig. [And I know what I can do, and I know what I can't, I know what is needed to serve. If there is goodness, if there is love, light will prevail.] (Flip Music Records PH, 2022)

Nica Del Rosario wrote Leni's campaign songs. Her trending song ROSAS, translated to a "rose flower" or "pink," complimented the candidate's campaign message of being an empowered woman who can rally the Philippines to bloom from the crisis. This is an inspirational type of song that resonated with the youth as it motivates people to volunteer for good, knowing that there is a trusted leader. Her campaign song 'Kay Leni Tayo' also describes characteristics one can connect to Leni, such as courage, strength, and heart [to serve]. Common themes of her songs are *inclusive government, public service, and resiliency*.

Moreover, Bongbong's songs can be classified as traditional song jingles in Philippine politics, where common themes include changing for the better, new governance, hope, and serving the people. Leni's songs have provided a more complex take on public service. The line *If there is love, the light will prevail* can simply be attributed to the fact that if we exist with love as a nation, we can get through everything.

Murals and street artworks are the equivalent of audience-curated content online. Volunteers create a visual representation of the candidates they are supporting. Bongbong's murals used symbols that reflected the developments of the provinces they came from, such as windmills and farmlands. A fascinating move from the camp of Leni is how they turned an insult into a brand. They rode on the common insult to Leni, as people refer to her as "lugaw" or "congee" (*in Filipino slang, refers to a mentally absent person*). They have utilized it to deliver their programs on food security.

Indeed, traditional campaign tactics still complement modern campaigning as they follow the traditional method of political marketing. Kits and other marketing collaterals are needed during campaign rallies to communicate to certain demographics that are not heavily using social media. A mixed-method approach in the campaign is still the key to convincing the electorate.

### ***Transmedia Storytelling Techniques***

This research aims to explore the Transmedia Storytelling techniques used in the 2022 Presidential campaign. With the collected content from social media and traditional tools used in the campaign, transmedia storytelling is an emerging concept that can be explored in politics. Hence, this part will illustrate the potential transmedia utilization during the campaigns of Bongbong Marcos and Leni Robredo.

This section provides a framework of transmedia storytelling that can be used in a political campaign. In understanding this concept, the integration of the campaign messages and the platforms used in the 2022 electoral campaign in the Philippines was considered, and a network of connections has been made that led to this framework.

Using Jenkins's (2006) transmedia narrative outline, Gambarato's (2012) analysis of transmedia narratives, Gurel & Tigli's (2014) transmedia and social media, and Penn's (2020) video-first transmedia framework, a political campaign transmedia framework was formed from the examples of Leni Robredo and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos.

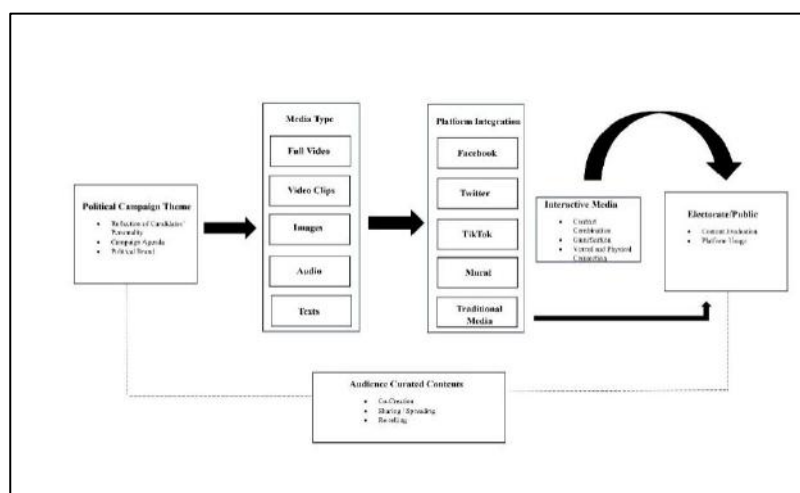


Figure 1: Transmedia Narrative Framework for Political Campaign (Ampon & Salathong, 2022)

The figure shows the transmedia narrative framework explicitly postulated for political campaigns. The framework aimed to serve as a political message flow chart for campaign strategists to understand the needed integration to reach and persuade the electorate. With the examples from the 2022 Philippine presidential elections message campaign strategies and previous transmedia frameworks and literature, this framework entails an understanding of the concept. Transmedia Storytelling frameworks available in literature constantly input the origin of the story, the media classification, the platform integration, and the target audience. This provides the idea of interactive media, such as gamification and combination of contents, as seen in the complexity of new media. The framework also highlights the importance of audience-curated content. It allows the story to expand through the content creators and ordinary people's vision. The idea of co-creation, spreading, and retelling the story can impact the target audience in a way that might resonate well with them as they are close to the target demographic.

### *Strategists' Perception*

Message strategy and planning about the campaign theme are crucial as they are something that the voting public remembers and identifies the candidates with. During the campaign, candidates sent out numerous messages, and each post that inspired, triggered, motivated, and challenged the electorate started with a comprehensive communication plan before organizing the campaign.

The "Liwanag sa Dilim" [Light in Times of Darkness] is an important message during the election campaign. This reflects the goals not just of Leni but of Filipinos to go out of the dark times either from a pandemic or from the oppressive system we have been through. (Leni Robredo's Campaign Strategist)

Central messaging is a known strategy during the campaign. Aside from ROSAS [Pink: Women Empowerment and Hope] and "Sa Gobyernong Tapat, Angat Buhay Lahat" [In an Honest Government, A better life for everyone]. The idea of helping Filipinos recover from the pandemic through transparent leadership solidifies Leni's marketing point by focusing on something that swerves away from the old and traditional political messaging. Her message campaign is fresh and always calling for action, hence, her volunteer-driven campaign.

Unity works well with BBM as it provides a connection for everyone. With due respect to the opposing side, the critics of BBM's work wonder to sustain his campaign because it does not divide people into groups. Including the positive campaign to only focus on the good side and will not rebut criticism as it plays a typical Filipino heroine narrative. (Bongbong Marcos, Campaign Strategist)

As redundant as it may seem to political analysts and people on social media, the consistency of talking about the message of unity helped the Marcos campaign be recognizable even with non-voters, as he used limited message themes only. A positive campaign, on the other hand, is a technique that focuses only on campaigning and persuading people without involving them in major issues, as explained by strategists.

Leni campaign also includes humor and engaging the youth supporters like the trending placard where people can share their ideas and stories about Leni, her personality, her record, and her political brand. It is so impactful specifically to youth because it promotes positive campaigns for everyone and challenges people to think critically. (Leni Robredo's Campaign Strategist)

Interestingly, Leni is nothing short of humor and personality. The creativity in the campaign throughout is remarkable. The political campaign placards from the audience allowed them to share their perceptions and insights on the message they can associate with the campaign. True enough, this placard messaging serves as the "memes" to captivate online users.

We need to have synchronized messaging. If a message can misalign the message, we need to divert that and think of a way during our daily meeting. There is also intensive research from social media monitoring, public relations writers, marketing, and campaign strategists that will plan and strategically send out content. (Bongbong Marcos, Campaign Strategist)

The consistency of the messaging in all aspects speaks volumes about how organized Bongbong's political messaging is. The collective message concept can help the campaign create one view, making it easier for the candidate to reiterate the campaign message. Research and collaboration with different messaging experts are needed to ensure the quality of the message.

Leni's and Bongbong's political message strategies differ in how they plan out their messaging campaigns. Leni's message strategy includes a new touch to the electoral campaign as she presents topics that are commonly neglected. Her campaign includes a complex and creative messaging process from her and her supporters alike. Meanwhile, Bongbong strategizes so that every bit of information can be related to the central idea of unity.

## **Conclusion**

In the battle of two leading presidential candidates, they both use the concept of "pagkakaisa" or "unity" as a similar message with a different delivery. While it is argued that a political message during any campaign is necessary for winning, there is no denying that how the candidates deliver the message changes the electorate's perception and makes a better impact. The candidate's framing of calling the Filipinos to come together and show strength in unison directly impacts how the message resounds. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos consistently

mentioned *pagkakaisa*, "or that being one is necessary to achieve greatness. He reiterates This broad statement and message in every speech rally, campaign materials, song, mural, and social media post. Leni Robredo also sends a message of *thagma*, "or joining forces, as if taking the initiative to create a union against a force. Her speech rallied people together to work and volunteer for a cause of the campaign to win not the candidate but the people. Her message of "unity" requires people to work, volunteer, sacrifice, and compromise to achieve better. Unfortunately, it is hard to unite and sacrifice in a country where the public does not have so much on their plate.

In this electoral campaign trail, it is essential to create a simple and understandable message for the public at large because the candidate should sell the message to them. At the same time, developing a message of working with the people is progressive, like a grassroots approach; consideration of the audience's understanding is deemed necessary. If the message is not delivered to the target audience, the communication will not work.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, for their scholarship support to complete my Master's degree and this thesis. To my co-researcher, who is also my research adviser, your guidance is much appreciated. To the key informants who provided valuable insights about the 2022 Philippine Presidential elections and to my coders and evaluators of this research to ensure quality and validity, thank you for your support. Lastly, this project is for my *kababayan*, who are always hoping for a better Philippines.



## References

- Ampon, R. K. S. & Salathong, J. (2022). Transmedia Narrative Framework for Political Campaign. Unpublished Material [Master's Thesis Repository]. Chulalongkorn University.
- Bloomfield, E. F., & Tscholl, G. (2018). Analyzing warrants and worldviews in the rhetoric of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton: Burke and argumentation in the 2016 presidential election. *The Journal of the Kenneth Burke Society*, 13(2).
- Bodegon-Hikino, K. (2022, May 2). Here's a look at how Filipino political campaign jingles are made. <https://www.bandwagon.asia/articles/how-philippine-political-jingles-songs-campaign-are-made-elections-halalan-vote-president-vice-filipino-2022>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners.
- Burton, M. J., Miller, W. J., & Shea, D. M. (2015). Campaign craft: The strategies, tactics, and art of political campaign management: The strategies, tactics, and art of political campaign management. ABC-CLIO.
- CNN Philippines. (2019, April 1). Personality politics in the Philippines. [Video]. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_OyMtc2z44&t=65s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_OyMtc2z44&t=65s)
- Flip Music Records PH. (2022, March 4). Nica del Rosario ft. Gab Pangilinan - ROSAS [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI Tou-6vngk>
- Gambarato, R. R. (2012). How to analyze transmedia narratives. *In Conference New Media: Changing Media Landscapes*.
- Go, J. (2015, April 17). Marketing political campaigns. <https://business.inquirer.net/190286/marketing-political-campaigns>
- Gürel, E. M. E. T., & Tıǵlı, Ö. (2014). New world created by social media: Transmedia storytelling. *Journal of Media Critiques*, 1(1), 35-65.
- Hancox, D. (2017). From subject to collaborator: Transmedia storytelling and social research. *Convergence*, 23(1), 49–60.
- Hedman, E. L. E. (2010). The politics of “public opinion” in the Philippines. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 29(4), 97-118.
- Himmelboim, I., Lariscy, R. W., Tinkham, S. F., & Sweetser, K. D. (2012). Social media and online political communication: The role of interpersonal informational trust and openness. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(1), 92-115.
- How To Formulate A Winning Marketing Strategy For A Political Campaign. (2023). *Business First Family*. <https://businessfirstfamily.com/winning-marketing-strategy-political-campaign/>

- Jenkins, H. (2006). New York University Press. *Convergence Culture: where old and new media collide*. *New York University*, pp. 307–319.
- Karan, K., Gimeno, J. D., & Tandoc Jr, E. (2009). The internet and mobile technologies in election campaigns: The GABRIELA Women's Party during the 2007 Philippine elections. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 6(3-4), 326-339.
- Koch, T., & Peter, C. (2017). Effects of equivalence framing on the perceived truth of political messages and the trustworthiness of politicians. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 81(4), 847-865.
- Malindog-Uy, A. (2021, August 15). Philippine Politics at A Crossroads. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/philippine-politics-crossroads>
- Muñiz, C., Campos-Domínguez, E., Saldierna, A. R., & Dader, J. L. (2019). Engagement of politicians and citizens in the cyber campaign on Facebook: a comparative analysis between Mexico and Spain. *Contemporary social science*, 14(1), 102-113.
- Neema. (2013, May 30). Message Framing: The Art of Persuasion. <https://www.relevance.com/message-framing-the-art-of-persuasion/>
- Penn, C. S. (2020, December 16). Approaches To Creating And Using Media. <https://agrelationscouncil.org/christopher-s-penn-approaches-creating-using-media/>
- Plethora. (2021, November 8). BBM - Bagong Lipunan (New Version) [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-8lbAbGGww>
- Pono, M. (2016, December 14). Strategic Messaging. <https://medium.com/the-marketing-playbook/strategic-communication-how-to-develop-strategic-messaging-and-positioning-3cc59689ca28>
- Powell, L., & Cowart, J. (2015). *Political campaign communication: Inside and out*. Routledge.
- Pratheepwatanawong, M. (2017). ‘As if it was something spoken by a friend’: Political Public Relations and Digital Vote-canvassing Networks via Facebook during the 2013 Bangkok Gubernatorial Election Campaign (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham).
- Rathje, S. (2017, July 21). The power of framing: It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it. *The Guardian*, 20.
- Rutledge, P. (2012, December 24). What is transmedia? <https://www.pamelarutledge.com/speaking-consulting-2/transmedia-storytelling-is-the-future-of-communication/transmedia-storytelling/what-is-transmedia-storytelling/>
- Shama, A. (1975). *An analysis of Political Marketing*. OH: Association for Consumer Research.



- Simmons, S. (2021). Thoughts on what makes a good marketing message.  
<https://www.counterpartcd.com/blog/what-is-message-strategy-survey-results/>
- Smith, V. (2021). Naming and framing: Understanding the power of words across disciplines, domains, and modalities. *Routledge*.
- Tadic, D. P., Ratkic, H., & Suput, B. (2017). Comparative analysis of marketing communication strategy on social networks: case study of presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. *Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings*, 372-380.
- Todd, C. (2014). Message Framing in Political Advocacy Campaigns: A Media Study of the 2014 Scottish Referendum for Independence from the United Kingdom.  
<https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/urc/2014/communication/12/>
- Towner, T. L., & Dulio, D. A. (2012). New media and political marketing in the United States: 2012 and beyond. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 11(1-2), pp. 95–119.



## ***Women's Voices: An Analysis of Arab Women's Poetry and Its Role in Empowerment***

Aisha Ali Alkhulaifi, Mahidol University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

This paper explored the content and poetic style of Arab feminist poems that interact with race, class, sexual orientation, etc. The analysis featured three Arab poets namely Souad Al-Sabah, Ghada Al-Samman, and Fadwa Tuqan. They used poetry to empower women and challenge societal norms. This research used literary qualitative content analysis. Fifteen (15) of their poems were analyzed in the paper, looking into common themes, content structure, and the overall message about women's experiences in Arab society. The study found various perceptions, such as expressing female desire, sexuality, love, and pain. Souad Al-Sabah tackled gender roles and societal expectations. Ghada Al-Samman merged love, agony, and the reality of war. Fadwa Tuqan's poems utilized representation and symbols to express the deep suffering of women. While Arab feminist writing has been a safe space for contemporary resistance against patriarchy, looking into the multicultural aspect of women's experiences through their work can guide the future of Arab literary research.

Keywords: Feminist Writing, Arab Women, Poetry, Content Analysis, Empowerment

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Arabic poetry has been evolving in recent years; in the past, most of the published poems highlight love, hope, and longing. Nowadays, many poets use their voices to touch on social movements and political discussions. Poetry has been linked to art, which can transmit a powerful message to society. Elgebily (2017) said that the concept of revolutionary poetry promotes opposition or rebellion. They argue that a true revolutionary poet must not only challenge the ruling authority but also break free from stagnant literary traditions. The innovative use of prose poetry is praised for its ability to challenge societal norms and address deeper issues of tyranny and oppression. Darwish (2010) explained that using the unique cultural perspective of Arabs, they are incorporating their distinct experience and cultural knowledge to the global audience. New techniques emerged as a helpful tool to add innovation to their writing. One of the developments of poetry is the power to include women and know their experiences through their text.

The Arab world has been a patriarchal society, and any space for women to participate and be empowered is an essential aspect of changing norms. Al-Matrafi (2023) said that women's own ideals of progress and freedom will often be represented in literature. The negative and stereotypical portrayals of veiled women as oppressed victims create a false narrative, ignoring the diversity of Muslim/Arab experiences and beliefs. Literature covers reduce Muslim/Arab women to a single, suffering group defined by their race and culture. Furthermore, the lack of critical thinking by the public allows these inaccurate portrayals to shape their worldviews. Feminist writing explores, understands, and provides space for women to pursue gender equality. It varies from all literary genres, such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, etc. Women produced pieces to share their voices with people by reading their stories in a literary way.

Hooks (1989) further argues that writing can be an unstoppable tool for women writers to challenge the status quo and be a catalyst for social movement. It can raise awareness, call to action, and even advocate for women's liberation. The unique discussion of women's struggles signifies the importance of the literary piece to propagate.

The development of feminist writing in the Arab world is a complex phase that transcends the various challenges Arab women face. Though no single story can capture the multitude of narratives and diversity of the region, the keys and themes are essential to identify and understand the perspective of women writers in the Arab world. Zaynab Fawwaz of Lebanon (1846) and Fatima Mirat of Algeria (1877) are among the first women feminist writers in the Arab region. In the 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, educated women pushed for change through journals and daily news commentaries. They often address the issues of education, political involvement, and marriage. Now, women are using social media to spread their work. There is a constant development for feminist writing that is integral to women's empowerment.

Thus, this paper aimed at understanding and exploring women's voices in the Arab world by using their poetry as data. Their writing style, content, and background were triangulated to provide a strong interpretation of their feminist writing and how it can play a vital role in empowerment and liberation.

## Research Problem

1. What are the common themes of Souad Al-Sabah, Ghada Al-Samman, and Fadwa Tuqan?
2. What are the implications of women's poetry in Arab society?

## Review of Literature

Life around us is crowded with signs and symbols. However, symbols have a broader, more comprehensive, and deeper scope than signs because they call for our impressions, whether from ideas, imaginations, or dreams. In women's poetry, according to Sattar et al. (2021) there's a diverse range of strategies employed by women poets to challenge patriarchal norms. While some, exclude the male presence, others engage with patriarchal discourse to subvert its meanings. Women poets often use language to redirect masculine aggression, invert male positions, or erase male presence. They create space for their own individuality and challenge the male-as-norm. Though, the patriarchal language they use can also introduce insidious connotations, limiting the malleability of their meanings. On the other hand, metaphors, similes, and personifications are employed to create vivid imagery and convey complex ideas. It demonstrates how poets use figurative language to explore themes of womanhood, identity, and societal expectations. As language can shape perception and evoke emotional responses, deepening the reader's understanding of the poems' messages (Firmansyah et al. 2013).

Meanwhile, Irmawati (2014) said that language is a powerful tool for conveying social reality, patterns of behavior, and personal feelings. Effective language use is crucial for clear communication. Poetry analysis can be a valuable tool for language learning, as it allows people to explore language, culture, and personal emotions. Analyzing poetry can develop critical thinking skills, appreciate literary devices, and gain a deeper understanding of the world around them.

In connection with the premise of the study, the distinctive features of feminist discourse, if we mean that what is linked to feminism is the voice that expresses in writing about women, their social experience, and their relationship with others, in which they reflect their human identity, their vision of the world, their awareness of reality, and their struggle with social and cultural forces. Poetry, a cornerstone of expression, gave way to Western literary forms like short stories and novels, influenced by European translations and colonial discourse. While this period led to a culture of mimicry, it also opened doors for Arab voices to be heard globally. However, the Arabic literature must be approached thoughtfully, avoiding stereotypes and ensuring a diverse representation of Arab experiences and aspirations (Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016).

According to Boezar et al. (2017) poems can shape the idea of emotional and idealistic landscapes. Poets can use a symbol of peace and comfort that contrasts with the materialistic city. Time, too, holds symbolic significance. While the day, with its cyclical rhythm, represents worldly pleasures and heavenly constraints, the morning, particularly in contemporary poetry, symbolizes change and renewal. Arab poetry can also tackle romantic genre, explore themes of love and longing. Sometimes using a persona of a real woman as a symbol of homeland, becomes a focal point poetic expression.

Arab writing employs a unique miniscule form that can be applied to various word types, including verbs. This diminutive is formed through infixation of -(a)y-, and its position varies

based on the word's structure. It can have both positive and negative connotations, depending on the context. This flexibility allows for expression of emotions and attitudes, making the morphology a significant aspect of the language's expressive power (Taine-Cheikh, 2018).

Historically, Arabic literary criticism and theory, dating back to the 8th century CE, has been influenced by various factors, including the evaluation of poetry, the beauty of the Quran, and the translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Early critics focused on the truthfulness and naturalness of poetry, contrasting the "ancients" with the more ornate "moderns." However, by the 10th century, the emphasis shifted to the aesthetic of wonder, valuing strangeness, the unexpected, and the ability of language to evoke surprise and discovery. This shift marked a significant development in Arabic literary theory (Harb, 2020).

According to Curry (2021) women's literature emphasize the resilience and agency in the face of oppression. It offers a powerful insight into the lives of Arab women, showcasing their strength and determination to resist and rebuild. Through their feminist lens, these writers contribute to a broader understanding of the conflict, giving voice to the marginalized and empowering women in the struggle for liberation. Mocabil (2022) said that Arab women's feminist discourse has focused on critical issues such as education, employment, and marriage rights. Yet, they have also faced significant challenges in breaking down gender barriers, particularly in rural areas undergoing rapid urbanization and societies where religion plays a dominant role. Arab women's feminist struggles are uniquely complex due to historical and cultural factors.

However, there is an apparent conflict in studying and writing about feminism and feminist discourse in the region. Common themes of silenced voices, suppressed desires, and the complex interplay between religious adherence and sexuality. The relevance of Muslim feminism in understanding women's literature, which, though written in Arabic, resonates with universal themes of female identity and agency (El Miniawi, 2013). Furthermore, the emergence of women writers in Arab region is a promising development, largely driven by increased access to education. As more girls pursue education, they are gaining the skills and confidence to express themselves creatively. While societal challenges and conservative attitudes persist, the growing number of women writers is a testament to their determination and the shift in patriarchal norms. As education continues to expand and support systems for women writers strengthen, Arab society can expect to see a flourishing literary scene that reflects the diverse voices and perspectives of its female population (Al-Mutawakel, 2005).

The changing landscape of feminism in the Arab world has been very progressive in challenging societal norms. When looking at feminist theory in the Arab context, there is a clear movement that aims for equality and empowerment. While tradition still upholds the reality of the Arab region, women's leadership has been useful in the past decades, providing spaces, rights, and opportunities.

Based on the above literature, there is a link between feminist writing and empowerment. There is also a distinct voice for women to share their stories and struggles. Poetry allows women to participate and share their emotions that are otherwise oppressed. There is still a need to write case studies and research papers regarding this topic to enhance the understanding of feminist writing. The stylistics, symbols, and implications of empowerment can be a profound combination of variables to shed light on women's voices. The Arab literary scene has been very complex yet beautiful because it allows women to share a part of themselves.

## Methodology

This literary qualitative content analysis features three women poets whose poems revolve around activism, social participation, and gender. Souad Al-Sabah, Ghada Al-Samman, and Fadwa Tuqan are the leading poets of their time in the Arab region. The analysis explored their themes, styles, symbols, and implications for empowerment and liberation.

## Poet's Biography and Reason of Selection

### *Souad Al-Sabah*

She was born in 1942, a Kuwaiti poet, writer and a doctor of economics and political science. She founded the Souad Al-Sabah Publishing and Distribution House in 1985. She speaks English and French, and her mother tongue is Arabic. Her poetry and literary collections have won many awards and honors, a prominent scholar in Arabic literature. She is considered the mouthpiece of the Arab woman (*Souad Al-Sabah | Arab Women's Writing*, 2023).

Selected Poems:

1. Remains of a Woman
2. Papers from a Gulf Woman's Notebook
3. They Say
4. Exceptional Wishes for an Exceptional Man
5. Man Below Zero

### *Ghada Al-Samman*

She was born in Damascus, Syria. Her father is Dr. Ahmed Al-Samman, who was the president of Syria University and served as the Minister of Education in Syria for some time. She was greatly influenced by her father because her mother died when she was young. She presented different and distinct literature that took her out of the narrow framework of women's problems and feminist movements to social, psychological, and humanitarian horizons (Ismat & Ismat, 2019).

Selected Poems:

1. I bear witness to the night of stations
2. Princes in your snow palace
3. I bear witness that your time will come
4. I bear witness to my madness
5. I bear witness to the seven pillars of forgetfulness.

### *Fadwa Tuqan*

She was born in Nablus in 1917. She received her primary education in a public school. Her conservative family considered female participation in public life unacceptable, so Fadwa left school and continued to educate herself on her own, with the help of her brother, the poet Ibrahim Tuqan, who developed her talents (Hejleh & Ismail, 2013).

Selected Poems:

1. Escape
2. Life

3. The Time
4. Fire and Fire
5. I'm Alone with the Night.

### **Literary Qualitative Content Analysis**

The collected fifteen (15) poems from three (3) poets were analyzed in three categories:

1. Themes: Using the five poems of each artist that represent women's empowerment and their view of Arab society, the common themes will be interpreted and evaluated to understand the literary style of each poet.
2. Stylistics: This part will mainly focus on the use of literary devices, particularly of the figure of speech. Most styles used might indicate their writing culture and their perception of poetry and Arab society.
3. Implications: The content analysis of their poems depicting society, culture, and history will play an important role in addressing the voices of women in their time and their feminist view of Arab society in general.

### **Discussion**

The Arab poet has broken many of the barriers set by men through poetry until it has become a tool for defending women's rights in all forums. Perhaps the shared characteristics between the three poets and those I chose for research are defending women's rights, explaining their suffering, breaking the barrier of fear, and demonstrating women's strength and will. Arab-women poets use their work as a tool for resistance and social change. They have sought to dismantle stereotypes, connect with other marginalized groups, and reclaim their identities. By exploring themes of identity, belonging, and social justice, these poets have contributed to a better understanding of the Arab experience (Abdulrahim, 2013).

Also, the wide spread of the poetry of the three poets in the Arab world and the presence of a large audience for them encouraged me to research their poetry and analyze it in depth. The different countries (Syria, Kuwait, Palestine) showed that there is a great similarity in Arab customs and that women were oppressed in some aspects of life and needed a woman like her to carry the banner of her rights and defend the "she" everywhere. Contemporary Arab women writers draw inspiration from a rich historical and cultural tradition, including strong, independent women and the storytelling prowess of (Ashour et. al. 2009). Moreover, female literacy studies confirmed that gender differences in language use can convey various messages. Contemporary feminist linguistics emphasizes the diversity of women's language use, considering factors like region and social context (Ghasemi Arani et. al. 2020).



Table 1: Souad Al-Sabah's Poem Themes and Analysis

Poem	Themes	Excerpt from the poem	Qualitative Analysis
1	Desire, Dependence, Longing	<i>"You clothed me with a garment of fire"</i> (Al-Sabah, 1986, p. 35)	The womanhood of Arabian poets and their love.
2	Identity, Independence	<i>"I am Gulf...I am the Arabian Palm Tree"</i> (Al-Sabah, 1986, p. 47)	Provides the idea that women are needed in Arab society.
3	Culture, and Expectations.	<i>"I was not poisoned by the ink on my desk"</i> (Al-Sabah, 1986, p. 13)	Provides the idea that living in society requires no gender.
4	Love, strong will	<i>"Love is greater than all times"</i> (Al-Sabah, 1986, p. 66)	Her love as a woman can defy expectations.
5	Love, sexuality, desire	<i>"Your lips are like thorns"</i> (Al-Sabah, 1986, p. 80)	The desire to have a man in her life.

Souad's voice is intertwined with the need to be independent. Although sexuality and gender are not common topics in Arab society, she challenged the limiting beliefs. Her works commonly feature a combination of metaphor, hyperbole, and simile. The theme of her writing revolves around femininity, sexuality, and gender roles. The awareness of women's experience in the region where there is a rampant arranged marriage and the traditional boundary between the love of men and women, her works feature a strong message. Her ideas should never be dictated, from gender roles to love and relationships.

"Praying in front of letters is forbidden. Don't come close.  
 The ink of poems is poison.  
 Don't drink  
 And here I am  
 I drank too much  
 I was not poisoned by the ink on my desk."  
 (Al-Sabah, 1986, p. 13)

"They Say" is a poem that directly challenges men, a confrontation. It is essential to note that the poet used terms related to writing and literature to show her attachment to poetry and her love for writing as she commonly uses objects around her writing corner like ink, pen, paper, etc. Here, the poet expresses the women's desire to have a voice, and a space to write. In a time when it is not permitted for women to express their feelings.

Table 2: Ghada Al-Samman's Poem Themes and Analysis

Poem	Themes	Excerpt from the poem	Qualitative Analysis
1	Society, Cultural Barriers	"My love for you was as sincere as death" (Al-Saman, 1995, p. 99)	It showcases the idea of a society that forbids us to move.
2	Pain, suffering	"Where are you, my dear fool?" (Al-Saman, 1995, p. 114)	Shows the sufferings of a woman falling in love in the Arab world.
3	War, Chaos, Panic	"the gunman was met by a terrifying hyena...they hugged warmly" (Al-Saman, 1995, p. 122)	Provides the fear of war and the experiences of fear and chaos.
4	Love, strong will, the scene of terror in the country	"And my blood circulation goes in reverse" (Al-Saman, 1995, p. 133)	Her intense love can defy the current situation.
5	Love, sexuality, desire	"It filled my burning throat with love" (Al-Saman, 1995, p. 141)	The woman's desire is a strong power.

Ghada's voice is characterized by a unique interpretation of her experience and expression. The combination of love, gender, pain, and even the state of war and chaos were captured in her poems. While many techniques are reflected in her poetry, the most common figure of speech to imply her style is accompanied by simile, rhetoric, personification, hyperbole, and metaphor. Her symbolism is mainly situated with war or a harsh environment. Her interesting view of Arab women implies her experiences as a Syrian woman. The voice during war and chaos adds a layer to the idea that women can go beyond societal problems. It embodies the nature of the poet, as she frequently mentions the night in her poems, and the reason for this is that the night suggests revelation, calm, and tranquility.

"I was thinking about a real human  
 relationship. We live it together  
 in the corridors of our sorrows and  
 disappointments, we face death, sadness, and  
 the unknown...  
 We take off our masks and love  
 each other on the rainy, lonely  
 nights of the stations."  
 (Al-Saman, 1995, p. 99)

It is known about women that they are very emotional, but at the beginning of her poem, the poet tries to show that she loves with her mind and heart and to show that she is right in her vision, as she says, 'I was thinking of a real human relationship'. In this sentence, we find the poet's sincerity as she speaks in the mouths of all disappointed women. In it, at the beginning of love is a real human relationship. A relationship that can challenge war and conflict.

Table 3: Fadwa Tuqan's Poem Themes and Analysis

Poem	Themes	Excerpt from the poem	Qualitative Analysis
1	Pain, Hate	"Safe from the swirling cries of heart" (Tuqan, 1997, p.16)	The poem talks about the misery and suffering of humans.
2	Sorrow, Longing	"My life is torn" (Tuqan, 1997, p.76)	Shows the sufferings of a woman living in the Arab World.
3	Hate, Pain	"Time did me a lot of harm" (Tuqan, 1997, p.32)	Endurance of pain when suffering for too long.
4	Suffering, searching for love	"You are my storm" (Tuqan, 1997, p.51)	This signifies a complete search for love.
5	Mystery, Longing	"My eyelids embrace him" (Tuqan, 1997, p.23)	There is an intense desire to know the truth.

Fadwa's voice talks about the pain and suffering of a woman. The suffering from man and society is a reflection of her life as an oppressed Palestinian woman who devoted her time to using poetry as a tool. Her common themes revolve around pain, hatred, and longing for something. Her usual literary style includes personification and metaphor. A literary device that is appropriate to give life to something inanimate and provide a direct comparison.

My life is tears and a passionate heart longing,  
a collection of poetry,  
and promises my life, my whole life is sorrow  
if its shadow disappears tomorrow.  
(Tuqan, 1997, p. 76)

This poem embodies the poet's life path, especially since she was exposed to many calamities and loss, as her father died, and then her brother and teacher, Ibrahim, died. Here, the poet detailed the degrees of sadness that she experienced and experienced greatly. She began her poem by saying, "My life is torn and a passionate heart." Here is the beginning of the sadness and oppression that the poet experiences. She used many terms related to sadness in her poem, as she said (tears, sorrow, grief, faded, grief, ashes, graves, and the departed). The multitude of sadness expresses the great sorrow that she had experienced. The poet resorts to poetry to express her experiences, especially the experiences of loss in her life.

## Conclusion

Writing is an inspiring and effective tool to enable women to triumph for themselves, their abilities, their status, and their opinions by expressing all of this in a literary way. Women are no longer just readers of what is imposed on them but they have become writers that has a space in society, a space of freedom they enjoy. Feminist discourse in Arab societies is grounded in Islamic principles. It emphasizes the need for a gradual approach, aligning with societal norms to empower women without isolating them. Sharing personal experiences is seen as a crucial step towards social change (Gallant, 2008). In the time of global feminist

awakening and women can be published in local media there is a movement to challenge the norm. They not only highlight the oppression faced by women but also emphasize the importance of women taking charge of their own liberation, individually and collectively, to overcome patriarchal control (Tijani, 2019).

Writing has become a successful tool for women to reach their goals without obstacles, especially since we live in a reality that urges us to listen to women's voices and give them all attention and appreciation. Poetry can be used to challenge traditional gender roles, religious dogma, and other oppressive social and cultural norms. By questioning and critiquing these norms, poetry can help to create a more open and inclusive society.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University, Thailand. I am deeply indebted to my advisor, Ajarn Sirijit Sunanta, for her invaluable guidance and support. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Ali and Maryam, for their unwavering encouragement.

## References

- Abdulrahim, S. (2013). *Between Empire and Diaspora: Identity Poetics in Contemporary Arab-American Women's Poetry*.
- Al-Matrafi, H. (2023). The Image of Muslim/Arab Women on the Front Covers of Literary Works. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5(1), 52-67.
- Al-Mutawakel, A. M. A. (2005). *Gender and the writing of Yemeni women writers*.
- Al-Sabah, S. (1986). *Fragments of a Woman*. Souad Al-Sabah Publishing and Distribution House.
- Alsaif, O. A. (2014). *Desire for Freedom in Modern Women's Poetry from the Arabian Gulf Area*.
- Al-Samman, G. (1995). *Lover in an inkwell*. Ghada Al-Samman Publications.
- Ashour, R., Berrada, M., Ghazoul, F. J., Rachid, A., & McClure, M. (2009). Arab women writers. *Southwest Review*, 94(1), 9-18.
- Boezar, R., Mehr, M. S., & Husseinjanzadeh, F. (2017). Semiotic Analysis of Place and Time in Poems of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 5(4), 655-665.
- Curry, B. N. (2021). *Nationalism and Postcolonial Feminism: A Literary Approach to Palestinian Women's Resistance* (Doctoral dissertation, Wichita State University).
- Darwish, A. (2010). *Translation and news making in contemporary Arabic television*. Writescop Publishers.
- El Miniawi, N. (2013). Religion and Feminism in the Short Story of Alifa Rifaat—The Voice of the “Voiceless”. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 3(7), 402-414.
- Elgebily, S. (2017). The word against the sword: Arabic Poetry in the face of despotism. *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 5(1), 51-60.
- Firmansyah, A., Ardian, S. Y., & SS, M. P. (2013). Figurative Language and Symbol In Poems “She Dwelt among the untrodden ways”, “women”, “homage to my hips”.
- Gallant, M. (2008). The application of feminism in the Arab world: Research perspectives. *Education, business and society: Contemporary Middle Eastern issues*, 1(3), 193-199.
- Ghasemi Arani, A., Marouf, Y., Salimi, A., & Hemati, S. (2020). Analysis of the language of women in the poems of. *Journal of Lyrical Literature Researches*, 18(34), 165-184.
- Harb, L. (2020). Arabic literary theory. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of literature*.

- Hejleh, A., & Ismail, N. (2013). *Fadwa Tuqan. A poetisa palestina* (Doctoral dissertation, Dissertação de Mestrado).
- Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. South End Press.
- Irmawati, N. D. (2014). Understanding how to analyze poetry and its implication to language teaching. *Internasional Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 2(1), 35-45.
- Ismat, R., & Ismat, R. (2019). Ghada Samman: Mosaic of Memory. *Artists, Writers and The Arab Spring*, 45-51.
- Mahrooqi, R., & Denman, C. (2016). Arab identity and literature in translation: The politics of selection and representation. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on Translation*, (5).
- Mocbil, A. S. A. (2022). The History of Feminism in the Arab World. *Journal of Social Studies*, 28(4), 82-91.
- Sattar, G., Afzal, H., Zafran, F., & Riaz, N. (2021). DICHOTOMOUS IPSEITY: MULTIVALENT TRANSGRESSIONS IN WOMENS'POETRY ACROSS TIME AND CULTURES. *Elementary Education Online*, 20(5), 4351-4351.
- Souad al-Sabah | Arab Women's Writing. (2023, December 8). Utoronto.ca. <https://arabww.digital.utsc.utoronto.ca/000a388>
- Taine-Cheikh, C. (2018). Expressiveness and evaluation in Arabic: the singular development of the diminutive in Ḥassāniyya Arabic. *Studies in Language*, 42(1), 81-113.
- Tijani, O. I. (2019). Raising Feminist Consciousness through Literature: Two Women's Texts from the Arabian Gulf. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 9(2), 145-163.
- Tuqan, F. (1997). *Diwan Fawda Tuqan*. Dar Al-Awda.

***Bright on the Grey Sea: Reconsider Film Poetry Through a Chinese Lens***

Chen Chen, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This presentation stands between worlds. It has its roots in the beauty of the work of a Late Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin but its voice speaks into the realm of internationally considered film poetry as a form of short film. The researcher will showcase a practice-led, artistic project which develops a corpus of three film poems. Then the researcher will introduce the Xiang system (a philosophical and aesthetic system adapted from Chinese Tang Dynasty poetry) as the central creative strategy to heighten poetic thinking within film poetry. This approach becomes a mediator between film poetry and the researcher as a lyrically reflective practitioner. In introducing this project and laying the ground for its reflective journey through the research, the researcher will also briefly discuss the following topics: Li Shangyin's poetry in the context of the Late Tang Dynasty, the Xiang system, and film poetry as a media form. To date film poetry has been a largely understood as a Western media form. Given the rich and distinctive nature of Chinese poetry I believe that there is a reason for Chinese artists to engage with the media form as a way of not only surfacing and sharing Chinese ways of conceiving and understanding poetry but also as a way of exposing some of the nuance and delicacy of thinking that underpins the construction of Chinese poetic work.

Keywords: Film Poetry, Li Shangyin, The Xiang System

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Film poetry as a media form pays homage to both film and poetry. William Wees (1999) suggests as a subgenre of film, film poetry fuses spoken word poetry, visual images, and sound to create a distinctive presentation and interpretation of meaning. Often film poetry is characterized by a nonlinear style of editing where a flow of images and spoken or written words are used to interpret an existing poem. However, the media form has expanded in recent years so there are now examples emerging where an existing poem is no longer visually or aurally evident in the work. This recent phenomenon is indicative of my practice-led artistic research project where the film poems draw their essence from the poetry of Li Shangyin but they are not physical illustrations of his text. Instead, they reflect on the spirit of his writing to generate discrete artefacts.

### Towards the *Late Evening 1&2* and *Le You Yuan*

*Towards the Late Evening 1&2* are two short, related film poems. They are constructed in a lyrical documentary style. In them I compare an elderly New Zealand woman's life with that of my Chinese grandmother. This comparison is achieved through a consideration of small ritual activities accompanied by a voiced over monologue.

These two film poems are inspired by Li Shangyin's poem *Le You Yuan*. Li's poetry often deals with memories and Owen notes that he frequently compares "speculative images of permanence with the fragile and the transient" (Owen, 2006, p. 486). Through these comparisons, the reader gains a sense of the melancholic. *Le You Yuan* is typical example of this strategy.

The first two lines of this poem may allude to the melancholic in time and space.

Late in the day

... may suggest a psychological state of "lateness" rather than a period of physical time. The line is open to interpretation; it might also refer to the end of a dynasty, the closing period of a person's life, an unavoidable destiny or the final stages of a journey.

[The] ancient plain

... as the location of the poem may refer to a once prosperous place or to a site of deep physical or cultural history. Xun Jiang [蒋勋] (2012) notes that *Le You Yuan* (the ancient Le You Plain) suggests a delicate and melancholic beauty that emerges from a contrast between a supposed flourishing past and a present in demise.

The last two lines of Li's poem...

The evening sun was limitlessly fine,

It was just that it was drawing towards dusk.

... juxtapose the splendid evening sun and the encroaching dusk, as a way of reminding us that the resplendent scenery will soon disappear. In other words, at the end of the late



evening, darkness will descend. Thus, by considering the long-term quality of time and space in nature, we may also become aware of the brevity of our human lives and the transience of beauty that accompanies them. It is by this comparison that Li establishes the melancholic tone of his poem.

In my film poem, *The New Zealand woman*, Mrs Vinka Garelja, is of Dalmatian descent and her husband George had been dead for two years before I made the work. However, the memory of Sunday afternoon tea rituals with her husband were still palpable memories for her. Afternoon tea was a remembered event that was imbued with melancholic memories of love and the flourishing of earlier days. This state touches the essence of Li's poem *Le You Yuan* which considers the relationship between sorrow, a flourishing past and memory at the close of a period of time.

My grandmother, Mrs Aixia Shou, is a Chinese woman who is the same age as Mrs Garelja. She was born into a poor family. The liberation by the Communist Party saved her from poverty and provided her with an opportunity to study and work. In memory of the changes the Party brought to her life, she collected badges of Chairman Mao. This collection demonstrates her gratitude and ideological commitment. For my grandmother, framing Chairman Mao badges was a way of recalling the revolutionary passion of her youth and an idealism that contrasted with her later years. Li's *Le You Yuan* considers both the passion (the galloping coach) and the drawing of life into a quiet, gradual close. These two ideas form the primary concepts in the film poem.

### **The Xiang System**

In my opinion Xiang, Yi Xiang and Yi Jing may be seen as components of a Xiang system. However, their conceptual emphases are different. Xiang is associated with appearance and exists through exterior physicality. Yi Xiang is a fusion of the exterior and interior, objectivity and subjectivity. Yi Jing is associated with the mental state, and it reaches into feelings beyond appearance.

In the process of my artistic practice, the Xiang system functions as the mediator between the artwork and the idea or concept underpinning it. There are three possible layers according to the Xiang system. The first layer is the appearance of Xiang, which is a pathway that guides the interpretation of Yi Xiang. The second layer is Yi Xiang that embraces the mental picturesque scene [画境] which will emerge through creation. The third layer is Yi Jing, which stimulates the philosophical feeling and comprehension of life, memory and the universe that goes beyond the specific Xiang, event and scene. Once Yi Jing is achieved, the function of the facilitators Xiang and Yi Xiang is rendered redundant.

In order to illustrate these ideas, let us consider a piece of blue velvet. This fabric can be found inside my film poem *Towards the Late Evening 2*. We can use Xiang, Yi Xiang, and Yi Jing as three theoretical lenses to interpret this cloth.

Looking at the blue velvet through the lens of Xiang, we may focus on its physicality, for instance its colour, texture, or the way that light moves on it. Using the lens of Yi Xiang, we bring our subjective and emotional responses to interpret the materiality of the cloth. Through this lens, our subjective response and interpretation will differ based on past experience. For instance, my grandmother might interpret the cloth as passion, based on her experiences selling blue velvet when she worked for the communist party. Conversely, when I see it from

the perspective of a filmmaker, I may link it to the mysterious feeling I recall when watching David Lynch's 1986 American neo-noir mystery film, *Blue Velvet*. Another person might interpret it through their childhood memories of a comfortable velvet covered toy. All of these responses are subjective. As Yi Xiang they are emotional reactions to the Xiang (physicality) experienced through the first lens.

Looking through the third and most abstract lens of Yi Jing, we may consider the piece of fabric as a representation of deeper philosophical understandings and comprehensions of life. This consideration is normally generated from responses at the first two levels. In my grandmother's case, the velvet may link to the communist ideology. In my case, it may relate to the philosophical concept of mystery.

Inspired by the Xiang system from Li Shangyin's poetry, I will discuss integration and how it impacts on approaches to editing. In Li Shangyin's poetry, on the surface, different Xiangs may not bear direct or logical relationships to one another in a poem, but they contribute to the flow of feelings throughout a poetic text. Jingbo Zhao [赵景波] (1990) argues that the underlying connections inside the Xiang system come from Li's "stream of consciousness" [意识流]. In other words, the Xiangs and Yi Xiangs are arranged according to Li's psychological sense of space and time.

In general, I consider editing a process of integrating Xiangs. I see imagery, sound, light, colour, music, objects and people as different categories of Xiang. Under each category there exists a series of Xiangs. Depending on the constitution of an audience, different categories of Xiangs may gather together to become either several or a single Yi Xiang. Yi Jing may appear based on the construction of the Yi Xiangs in the work.

For example, when I was editing the scenes of the community where my grandmother was born, I imported footage and sound that I had recorded. While dwelling with this material, I recalled my senses when I was shooting the material. I remembered how when I stepped into this world, I inhaled the mixed scent of fried food and dry plants ... I heard the subtle sounds of dog barking nearby... several light notes of traditional music in the distance ... and the faint sound of water. Concurrently I saw the texture of empty buildings ... old objects in the ancestor's house ... and I heard the sound of an old electro car passing.

In my mind's eye, I "saw" my grandmother walking in an uninhabited house. I searched through the footage and audio recordings and selected a range of Xiangs (including imagery, sound, light, colour, music, objects and people) that were able to generate the same emotional responses that I felt on location. In this process I was able to connect olfactory, auditory and visual Xiangs, and through the contemplation on physical experience surfaced a central Yi Xiang of "the timeless hometown".

## Conclusions

To date film poetry has been widely understood as a Western media form. Given the rich and distinctive nature of Chinese poetry, I believe my research will not only share Chinese ways of conceiving and understanding poetry, but also expose some of the nuance and delicacy of thinking that underpins the construction of Chinese poetic work.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my colleague and PhD supervisor Professor Welby Ings for his valuable and generous suggestions in both filmmaking and academic research. I am also grateful for the support offered by the School of Art and Design and the Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies at Auckland University of Technology, particularly for the research grant for materials and consumables that has helped in the realization of this research.

## References

Jiang, X. (2012). *Jiang Xun talks about poetry of the Tang Dynasty*. Beijing, China: China Citic Press.

Owen, S. (2006). *The Late Tang: Chinese poetry of the mid-ninth century*. Cambridge, MA: the Harvard University Asian Center.

Wees, W. (1984). The poetry film. In W. Wees & M. Dorland (Eds.), *Words and Moving Images*. Montreal, Canada: Mediatexte Publications.

Zhao, J. B. (1990). A discussion on the mechanism of Menglong from Shangyin Li's untitled poetry. *Journal of Qiqihar University*, 6, 44-50.

**Contact email:** chen.chen@aut.ac.nz

***Broadcast Media Diversity as an 'Enabling Environment' for Sustainable Media  
Democratization: A Media Ecology Perspective***

Maulin Ni'am, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia  
Astried Herawati Basala, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This research aims to examine media diversity based on broadcasting categories and broadcast areas. Based on media ecology theory, this research focuses on the current state of the broadcast media industry in Indonesia from the perspective of media ecology and media democratization. This research uses digital methods that focus on data mining to collect and manage a large set of broadcasting media institution data obtained from the official website of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI). Based on the data of broadcasting institutions at the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, there are 3408 broadcasting institutions in Indonesia. Furthermore, the data is analyzed based on the available data structure, including institution type, network system, broadcasting type, broadcast system, and province. The result of this finding is that the ecological diversity of broadcast media in Indonesia has not been fully realized. The dominance of private broadcasters indicates a very high level of competition. Meanwhile, community broadcasters only exist in some provinces. Furthermore, this condition has the potential to weaken the broadcasting media ecosystem both in terms of industry and democracy.

Keywords: Media Ecology, Media Diversity, Digital Television, Indonesian Broadcasting Commission

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Despite many critics, the Indonesian Government finally enacted Analog Switch Off (ASO) policy in the broadcasting industry amid Covid-19 Pandemic in August 2023. Digital migration policy in Indonesia has been carried out since 2009 and has been planned to be accomplished by 2018. Meanwhile, the plan ran into multiple postponements.

Since its inception, digital TV migration has raised many questions. The development of digital broadcasting infrastructure through multiplexing technology is vital in the digital TV business. It requires capital that is not cheap. It is planned that all broadcasters must rent to be able to broadcast. Prabowo (2012) noted the potential suppression of local and community TV. The majority of the Multiplexing Broadcasting Institution or *Lembaga Penyiaran Penyelenggara Penyiaran Multipleksing* (LP3M) were existing broadcasting actors who had dominated television in Indonesia.

More than two decades of broadcasting media technology transition is not a short period of time. During this transition period, the development of broadcast media in Indonesia has experienced dynamic fluctuations. The growth in the number of television stations owned by political figures as well as the increasing number of media businesses is influenced by the complex economic, political, habitual and cultural order of Indonesian society (Wahyuni, 2017). Regarding the delay in digital TV migration in Indonesia, Simamora et al. (2022) argued that it was caused by legal uncertainty, infrastructure, and *setup box* provision as the main factors that hindered the analog switch-off process in Indonesia.

Broadcasting landscape in Indonesia is significantly changing. In terms of quantity, at the start of the Broadcasting Law in 2002, there were only five private (free-to-air) television broadcasters. Subsequently, at the beginning of the Digital TV migration, this number increased to 400 broadcasters. A total of 218 of them are owned by private television stations that broadcast nationally and 27 public television stations under TVRI (Rianto et al., 2012, p. 62).

In terms of ownership, there is a concentration of ownership of private broadcast media. Armando (2014) argues that commercial television growth in Indonesia has conflicted with the country's media democratization. According to Armando, Indonesia's television industry is dominated by five large media corporations which he called 'the greedy giants.' Furthermore, within liberal-democratic context, concentration of media ownership set Indonesia back to being more authoritarian. Therefore, strong policies promoting diversity in ownership and in political viewpoints are needed (Masduki & d'Haenens, 2022).

Media diversity, as a concept, is extensively investigated as an important factor for democracy. In the context of democracy, media diversity is considered as the guarantee of citizens' right to information and right to expression. In addition, media diversity becomes more significant when democracy is realized in crisis. The fact that the media oligarchy has had a significant impact on the development of democracy in Indonesia in a more authoritarian direction is self-evident of the crisis. What we are trying to say is that encouraging media diversity from a normative paradigm is not sufficient. As Plaisance noted, media theorists have created competing normative frameworks based on libertarian and communitarian philosophies (Plaisance, 2005). Media theorists also often get caught in epistemic myopia or blind spots which result in judgments that negate each other. Therefore,

we need to expand our epistemic horizon on media diversity in terms of democracy, such as media ecology.

This paper focuses on media diversity in contemporary Indonesia from the perspectives of media ecology and media democratization. Although the two concepts developed from relatively different epistemic areas, we argue that at a certain point they have an intertwined intersection. For example, the *fake news* phenomenon can be seen as an indicator of media ecology problems (De Biase, 2017). Another example is the failure of print media to adapt, causing some of them to go out of business. According to data from *Serikat Perusahaan Pers*, a press companies union, 593 print media were registered in 2021, but a year later this number declined to 399 (Dwi, 2023). The low wages of media workers are disproportionate to the workload and risks they face (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, 2021). Furthermore, the rampant misuse of online media for short-term political and economic interests has led to a decline in the professionalism of journalists and media organizations. This research aims to examine media diversity based on broadcasting categories and broadcast areas.

Both ecological and democratic perspectives recognize the importance of media diversity. Not only as a guarantee of human rights in obtaining information but also the survival of the media itself. The question is then, how is the current state of broadcasting media diversity in Indonesia based on broadcasting categories and broadcast area?

## **Theoretical Framework**

Within the field of communication studies, the concepts of media democracy and media ecology have emerged from distinct scholarly traditions. To construct a theoretical framework, this study begins with an exploration of media diversity within the context of democratic societies. It subsequently delves into the ecological perspective of media diversity. Finally, we concludes by proposing media diversity as an enabling environment for the media systems sustainability.

## **Media Diversity in the Context of Democracy**

A common argument for the importance of media diversity in a democracy is that diversity of ownerships and, a guarantee that broadcasting ownership is not centralized and monopolized by a few individuals, groups or business entities, which is desirable to ensure a climate of fair competition in the broadcasting industry (Judhariksawan, 2014, as cited in Kholik, 2021). Furthermore, media diversity is often represented by diversity of contents or diversity of voices. That is the availability of diverse information to the public based on the type of program as well as the content of the program (Chandrabuwono & Maulina, 2021). Another type of media diversity is based on spatial or geographical location of broadcasters (Harwood, 1962).

A democratic media and communication life needs to ensure diversity of ownership, voice, and content (Nugroho et al., 2013). In the era of the digital revolution, technological diversity also needs attention. Studying media diversity has become a significant focus in today's media landscape. Researchers anticipate that filtering algorithms and *audience* shifts from old media to new media will reduce diversity in news consumption, leading to societal polarization, the spread of misinformation, and a divided society.

The study of media diversity covers various fields, from journalism to law and computer science. However, the terms, frameworks, and measurements in operation will be very different. Loecherbach et. al. (2020) attempts to unify various theories of *media diversity* using a systematic literature review. Of the 189 studies that mentioned diversity or pluralism, 116 defined the concept. So far, there is an apparent discrepancy between empirical research (54.4% of empirical studies that provide a definition/interpretation) and theoretical research (78.2%). Therefore, the term diversity is often used without a precise definition, especially in empirical research. Raeijmaekers & Maesele (2015) call it a *buzzword*. However, several experts have also discussed whether diversity and pluralism should be considered as different concepts or interchangeable. Some experts argue that diversity measures media content, and pluralism is an ideological concept.

According to Loecherbach et. al. (2020), there are at least four normative frameworks for the concept of media diversity: *liberal aggregative*, *liberal-individual*, *deliberative*, and *adversarial*. The differences between the four normative frameworks can be seen in their focus on markets, consumers, public spaces, and alternative voices. Loecherbach et. al. (2020) also suggests that researchers should start paying attention to automated *approaches*, such as digital footprint analysis, and qualitative approaches, such as exploring differences in perceptions of diversity. In terms of analysis, balance and inequality need to be emphasized, especially when discussing possible limits to diversity. Recognizing the complexity of the discursive space, the concept of media diversity requires interdisciplinary studies in order to contribute to the sustainability of democratic media.

### **Media Diversity From Ecological Perspective**

From an ecological perspective, variety is needed to maintain or sustain the homeostasis of ecology/ at the same time, too much variety has its own threat to the system's sustainability. Since the 1960s McLuhan has reminded us that *'the electric technology is within the gates, and we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed'* (McLuhan, 2013). By definition, McLuhan explains media ecology as follows, *"It means arranging various media to help each other so they won't cancel each other out, to buttress one medium with another"* (McLuhan & Wolfe, 2005).

Liu (2010) used media ecology theory to study the influence and function of digital television on the living environment of television media. By applying the basic analysis of equilibrium paradigm in modern economic theory, Liu emphasized the discussion of the transition of the media ecological system, which is the curve of the ecological environment of the media industry. Liu (2010) stated that digital technology shifts the television transmission patterns, *"digital technology breaks the shackles of frequency resources, providing a variety of business forms by the compression, encoding, multiplexing to information source"* (p. 768).

One of the characteristics of media ecology is the complexity of broadcast media. Wahyuni (2017) reflected the complexity and adaptive system of Indonesia Television Broadcasting. She argued that the Indonesian Broadcasting System faces a very complex environment television and their adaptive and autopoietic mechanism is still weak to cope with the challenges. The prepared system, Wahyuni (2017) added, is not reliable enough to embody community TV as a media that strengthens the public. Community media (TV) has to face serious technical problems, funding issues, and community involvement in the management. She suggested that building a robust broadcasting system needs a comprehensive view of



decision-makers communication function, growing temporal through continuous evolution and developing functions through a *process of differentiation*.

### **Media Diversity as an Enabling Environment for Media Sustainability**

In the context of democracy, the media is a vehicle (both as a medium and form) for interaction of the community to participate in social life, nation and state. Media democratization will open up a large probability for all parties to be involved in media activities where the media is a bridge that is connected to the government, entrepreneurs, political parties, and civil society to build a sustainable and better community life.

The process of media democratization, according to Siregar (2014), was never been easy because of its complexity. Reformation movement in 1998 became a democratic milestone for Indonesia broadcasting system. Various regulations enacted to build a stronger democratic system, especially in communication and broadcasting.

In terms of democratic media system, the issue of diversity implementation was discussed as a way to measure pluralism in the digital media market. Media diversity can be seen in five levels: system, organization, production, output, and message reception (Sjøvaag, 2016). The organizational aspect shows differences in resource management, while framework conditions are considered features that explain the structural level. Diversity in reporting is part of the production aspect, while diversity in output shows the distribution and frequency of topics and sources. The actual diversity of media messages faced by the *public* is related to reception.

Discussing the relationship between democracy and the environment must comprehensively be done from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Pickering et. al. (2020) identifies four key challenges and opportunities for theory and practice: participation, populism, technocracy and expertise, governance, and ecological rights and limits. The ecological concept of democracy and the environment seeks to unite two normative principles; maintaining democracy and preserving the environment. However, these ideas are sometimes seen as contradictory because democracy is considered too slow and difficult to undertake the large-scale collective action needed to address environmental problems. Theories that address the relationship between democracy and the environment can be classified into various categories. These can range from theories of ecological democracy, which are more of a crisis to existing liberal democratic institutions, to theories of environmental democracy that push for improvements.

Applying the ecology metaphor to media can be interpreted in two complementary ways: the *media as environments* or the *media as species* that interact with each other (Scolari, 2012). Media institutions as a species experience growth from emergence to adaptation. The ability of a media institution to adapt determines whether it will change or be replaced. Scolari offered (2013) four phases of media evolution such as, emergence, dominance, survival, and extinction.

### **Research Methods**

In this research, we will use digital-based research methods, which involve the use of digital technology (Snee et al., 2016). In collecting and processing data, we focus on *data mining*,

which involves extracting information from a large set of observed data to find unexpected patterns and relationships in the data.

According to Duque et. al. (2023) there are five main stages of *data mining*: collecting and processing data. First, data selection is a process for data discovery. Although Indonesia has long implemented the One Data Policy, data related to broadcast media has not been well integrated. We selected the data of broadcasting media institutions provided by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission through the website <https://smiled.kpi.go.id/lembaga>. The selection of data sources is based on the assumption that (1) KPI is the regulator of broadcasting in Indonesia, so the data sourced from it is official, valid, and open to the public; (2) Utilization of open data sources has proven useful for finding unexpected patterns and relationships. Second, pre-processing is done to improve the validity of the data, i.e., the data is sorted and selected into a form that is easier to understand. Pre-processing involves transforming text prior to analysis by identifying what units of data will be used (tokenization), removing content deemed irrelevant for analysis (e.g., removing non-alphabetic characters and linking words with certain punctuation marks), combining semantically related terms to reduce data sparseness and increase predictive power (i.e., lowercase conversion, correcting spelling errors), and increasing the amount of semantic information obtained (Hickman et al., 2022). At this stage, we also re-names or re-categorizes. For example, private, public, local public and community broadcasting media types are included in the free-to-air category while all subscription broadcasting media types are included in the subscription category. Third, data transformation involves developing the best data model to obtain quality information. It is generally carried out in conjunction with the pre-processing stage. Fourth, data mining is done to see if the selected data matches the objectives defined in the previous stage. Fifth is the evaluation or interpretation of the final knowledge discovery process in the database, which determines the patterns and relationships of the resulting data processes.

In order to measure the diversity of broadcast media in Indonesia, we adopted indicators from Rodrigues et al. (2011) in categorizing broadcasters based on province, media density, network density, and the density ratio of free-to-air TV broadcasters:

Table 1: Indicators of Ecological Media Diversity

Indicator	Description
Different types of broadcasting organizations in Indonesia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of broadcasters by TV and Radio category</li> <li>- Number of private and public (both govt-owned and community) broadcasting by region</li> <li>- Number of free-to-air and subscription TV broadcasters</li> </ul>
Media density	Total broadcast media by region
Network density	Ratio between the number of broadcasting network and all broadcasting institutions in the provinces suggesting the ecosystem's level of concentration
Relative density of the Free-to-Air TV Networks	Ratio between the number of free-to-air TV Networks to media density

Adapted from Rodrigues, et al. (2011).

The data used in this study are provincial data, types of broadcasting institutions, network systems, types of broadcasting, and broadcast systems.

## Result and Discussion

The first step in presenting the results of these findings is to take and categorize them based on the data structure of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission website. The data structure is a list of institution types, network systems, broadcasting types, broadcast systems, and provinces. We explain the findings in three main concepts, starting from data description to media ecology and diversity of broadcast media in Indonesia.

Table 2 shows Indonesia broadcaster's data distribution of 3408 entries.

Table 2: Data Distribution

Data	Unique Value	Non-blank record	Blank record	Total Record
Province	34	3408	-	3408
Types of Institutions	7 (Subscription, Cable Subscription, Subscription, Satellite, Community, Public, Local Public, Private)	3408	-	3408
Network System	4 (Networked, Subscription, Network Parent, Local)	3408	-	3408
Type of Broadcasting	2 (Television, Radio)	3408	-	3408
Broadcast System	5 (AM, FM, Analog, Digital, Subscription)	3406	2	3408

## Different Types of Broadcasting Organizations in Indonesia

Based on the data from (<https://smiled.kpi.go.id/>), there are seven types of broadcasting institutions in Indonesia. Private institutions are the most prevalent, accounting for 2590 (76.00%) of all institutions. Other types include cable subscription (402, 11.80%), community (214, 6.28%), local public (178, 5.22%), satellite subscription (17, 0.50%), subscription (5, 0.15%), and public (2, 0.06%).

The data clearly indicates that private broadcasting institutions dominate the Indonesian media landscape, while public broadcasting institutions represent the smallest segment.

## A Confused Taxonomy: The Problematic Categorization of Broadcasting Institutions in Indonesia

The categorization of broadcasting institutions in Indonesia is fraught with inconsistencies. Criteria such as access methods (subscription or free-to-air), institutional function (social, economic, cultural), and broadcast reach (community, local, national) are often used

interchangeably, leading to overlapping categories. For instance, the term "local" is applied to both network systems and institutional types.

This lack of clarity in categorization has been a longstanding issue. Since the enactment of Law No. 32 of 2002, the ambiguous definitions of broadcasting institutions have been subject to criticism. Ashadi Siregar (2005) aptly noted that the taxonomy of broadcasting media according to this law is conceptually flawed. It equates 'Public Broadcasting Institutions' with government-owned media (TVRI and RRI), while 'Private Broadcasting Institutions' are defined as commercial media. The remaining categories, 'subscription broadcasting' and 'community broadcasting', are based on technical criteria rather than fundamental differences in purpose or function. This inconsistent approach to categorization highlights a conceptual flaw in the law.

From an ecological perspective, media categories can be likened to species within a biological ecosystem. Each category, much like a species, possesses distinct characteristics and fulfills specific functions within the broader media environment. A failure to recognize these distinctions can lead to unintended consequences, such as misdirected regulation, administrative mal-practices, unfair competition, and, ultimately, the demise of certain media outlets<sup>1</sup>.

### Media Density

Media density, measured by the number of broadcast media (television and radio) within a specific area, is concentrated primarily on the island of Java. As illustrated in Figure 1, Central Java leads with 389 media outlets, followed by East Java (374), West Java (349), DKI Jakarta (240), and North Sumatra (141).

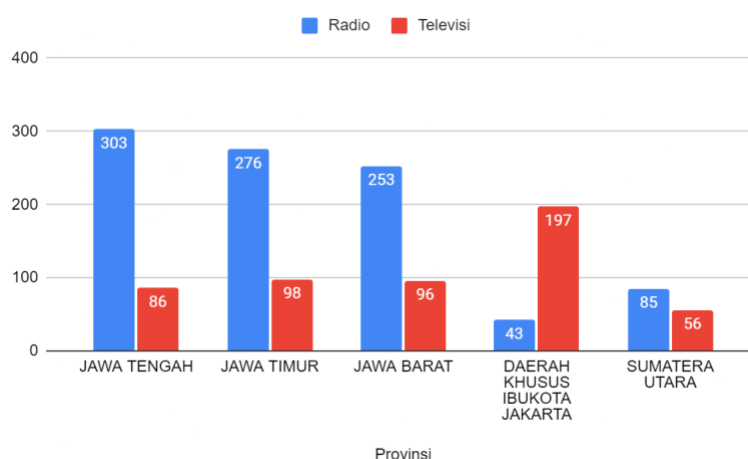


Figure 1: Top 5 Highest Media Density Provinces

A closer examination of television media reveals that DKI Jakarta dominates with 197 stations, followed by East Java (98), West Java (96), Central Java (86), and North Sumatra (56). In contrast, radio media density is highest in Central Java with 303 stations, followed by East Java (276), West Java (253), North Sumatra (85), and DKI Jakarta (43).

<sup>1</sup> ADiTV, a local TV station located in Yogyakarta, officially stopped operating in May 31, 2024 after almost 15 years on air due to financial issue.

Conversely, regions outside Java exhibit significantly lower media density. As illustrated in Figure 2, North Maluku, with 34 media outlets, has the lowest density. Gorontalo and North Kalimantan follow with 29 each, followed by West Sulawesi (25) and West Papua (15). For television, Maluku (21), North Kalimantan (20), West Sulawesi and Gorontalo (17 each), and West Papua (11) have the lowest density. Similarly, for radio, Maluku (13), Gorontalo (12), North Kalimantan (9), West Sulawesi (8), and West Papua (15) have the lowest density.

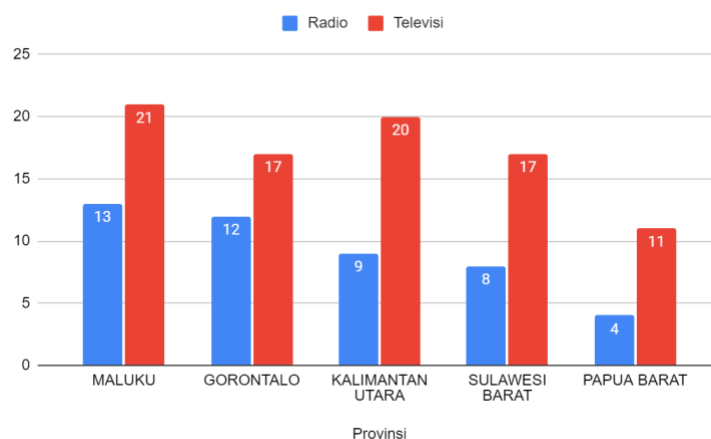


Figure 2: Top 5 Lowest Media Density Provinces

These findings underscore a significant geographical disparity in broadcast media distribution across Indonesia. Java-centric concentration limits accessibility in outer regions, particularly in Maluku, Gorontalo, North Kalimantan, West Sulawesi, and West Papua.

### Network Density

This section discusses the density of broadcasting networks in Indonesia, particularly focusing on the division based on network systems (networked, network parent, and local). The data shows a high concentration in the DKI Jakarta area, especially for the network parent system. Network density provides a comprehensive overview of networked broadcasting. The following data presents the distribution of network density by province.

KPI data indicates that the nomenclature of networked and subscription media applies only to television, while radio is categorized solely as local broadcasting. The categorization of network systems by province is divided into three categories: networked, network parent, and local network. The network parent system exclusively involves television and is concentrated in specific provinces, namely Banten, Central Java, DKI Jakarta, and Lampung. Of the total networked television systems, 610 (42.96%) are classified as networked, 20 (1.41%) as network parent, and 370 (26.1%) as local. In contrast, radio is exclusively classified as local, with a total of 1988 stations. This is the reason why the number of local broadcastings is higher than others.

Table 3: Broadcasting Population by Province

Province	Local	Networked	Network Parent	Subscription	Total
Aceh	61	20		5	86
Bali	66	16		3	85
Banten	72	5	1	15	93
Bengkulu	23	14		3	40
Yogyakarta	72	13		1	86
Jakarta	103	60	17	60	240
Gorontalo	12	13		4	29
Jambi	38	14		14	66
West Java	293	44		12	349
Central Java	331	48	1	9	389
East Java	322	26		26	374
West Kalimantan	45	15		11	71
South Kalimantan	82	28		20	130
Central Kalimantan	32	12		18	62
East Kalimantan	70	26		21	117
North Kalimantan	16	9		4	29
Bangka Belitung Islands	24	14		5	43
Riau Islands	30	13		19	62
Lampung	86	14	1	4	105
Maluku	19	13		2	34
North Maluku	9	10		16	35
West Nusa Tenggara	48	12		3	63
East Nusa Tenggara	35	12		1	48
Papua	16	18		11	45
West Papua	5	5		5	15
Riau	61	14		32	107
West Sulawesi	10	7		8	25
South Sulawesi	66	15		24	105

Central Sulawesi	25	15	17	57
Southeast Sulawesi	19	12	14	45
North Sulawesi	26	15	9	50
West Sumatra	56	19	7	82
South Sumatra	82	17	1	100
North Sumatra	103	22	16	141
<b>Total</b>	<b>2358</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>420</b>

The data reveals a significant concentration of network systems in DKI Jakarta. Notably, the network parent system is primarily concentrated in four provinces, with DKI Jakarta hosting 17 out of the total 20 network parents. This indicates an uneven distribution of network parent systems, suggesting that their equitable distribution has not been fully realized.

### Relative Density of Free-to-Air Television Networks

In 2023, Indonesia was home to 1420 television broadcasting institutions. While the KPI dataset does not explicitly categorize stations as "free-to-air," this category was derived independently based on the listed institutional types.

Table 4 presents the distribution of television broadcasting institutions by type. As shown, 70.49% of all television stations can be classified as free-to-air.

Table 4: Television Broadcasting Institutions Based on Institution Type

Types	Amount	Percentage
<b>Subscription</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>29,51%</b>
<i>Subscription Broadcasting Institutions</i>	5	0,35%
<i>Cable Subscription Broadcasting Institutions</i>	401	28,24%
<i>Satellite Subscription Broadcasting Institutions</i>	17	1,20%
<b>Free-to-Air</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>70,49%</b>
<i>Community Broadcasting Institute</i>	13	0,92%
<i>Public Broadcasting Institution</i>	1	0,07%
<i>Local Public Broadcasting Institutions</i>	19	1,34%
<i>Private Broadcasting Institutions</i>	964	67,89%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1420</b>	<b>100%</b>

When cross-tabulated with network systems, the data in Table 5 reveals that the majority (61%) of free-to-air television stations operate within a networked system, while 37% are local stations, and 2% are network parents.

Table 5: Number of Free-to-Air TV Based on Network System

Network System	Count	Percentage
<b>Networked</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>61%</b>
Local	368	37%
Network Parent	20	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>100%</b>

It is also noteworthy that several provinces reported having neither public nor community broadcasting institutions. This implies that commercial broadcasting is the sole form of media operation in these areas. Furthermore, some provinces, including Bengkulu, Gorontalo, Central Kalimantan, Bangka Belitung Islands, North Maluku, Papua, West Papua, Central Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, and West Sumatra, exhibit a network density ratio between 0.8 and 1 (see Figure 3). Assuming that networked free-to-air television stations rely on a parent network, this indicates that most of the information disseminated through television broadcasts in these regions originates from Jakarta or nearby areas.

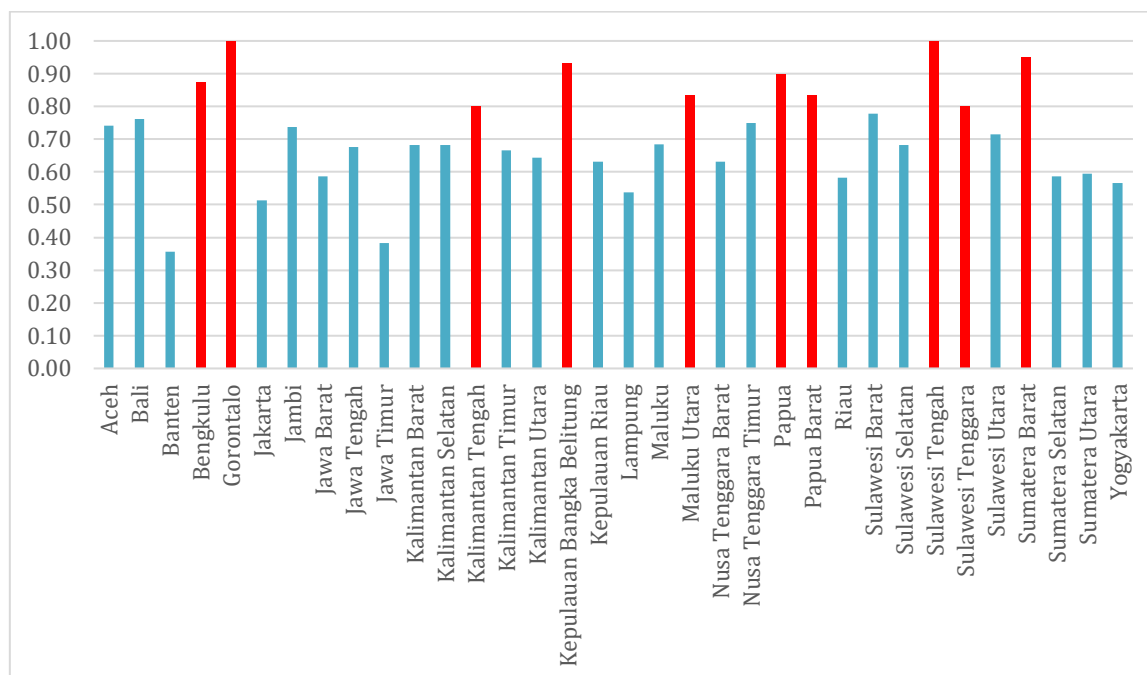


Figure 3: Network Density of Free-to-Air Television

These findings indicate that free-to-air television plays a dominant role in Indonesia’s broadcasting landscape, accounting for 70.49% of all television stations. Furthermore, the prevalence of networked systems among free-to-air stations suggests a high degree of interconnectedness within the industry.



### Community Media: An Endangered Species in the Media Ecosystem

This section discusses community media from a media ecology perspective, emphasizing the importance of community media in a democratic context and highlighting threats to its sustainability.

Technically, community broadcasting stations are low-power, open broadcast systems designed to serve a localized audience, often referred to as narrowcasting (Siregar, 2005). The existence of community broadcasting is crucial in a democratic context, given their distinct value orientation compared to commercial broadcasting. From a normative democratic perspective, community media represent an extension of citizens' right to freedom of expression, ensuring diversity of content.

KPI data reveals that there are only 214 community broadcasting stations distributed across 26 out of 34 provinces in Indonesia. As illustrated in Figure 4, community radio stations dominate, with 201 in operation, while community television stations number only 13 and are present in just 7 out of 34 provinces.

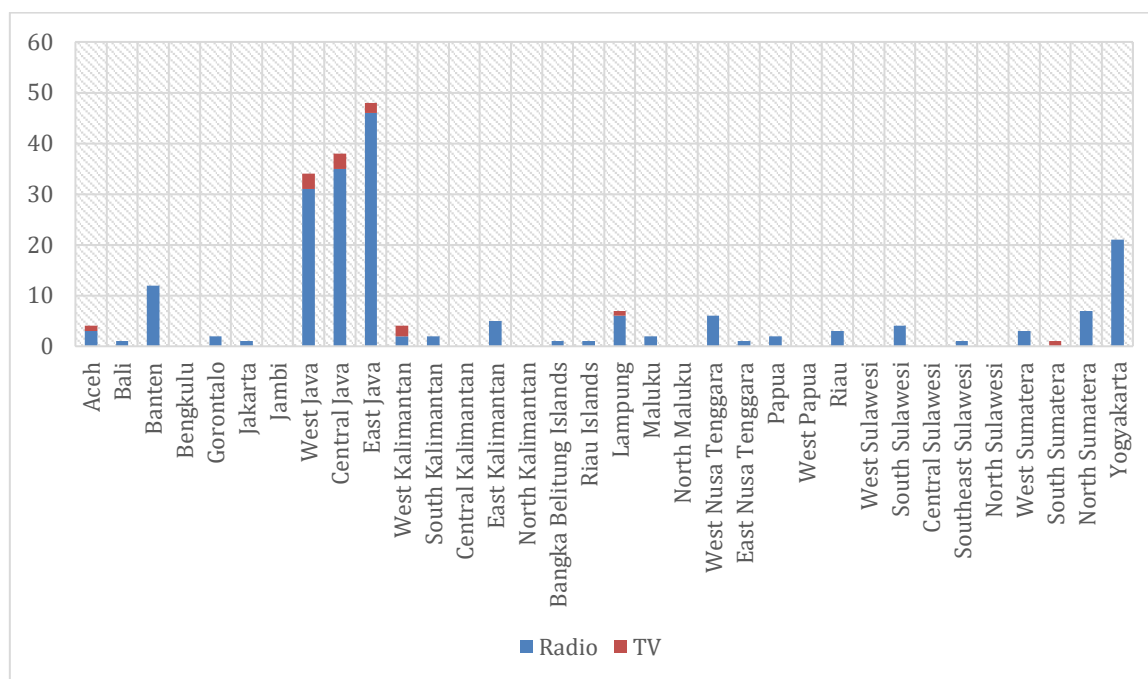


Figure 4: Community Broadcasting by Province

Moreover, 7 out of 13 (53%) of community television stations are operated by educational institutions. This is disproportionate to the number of broadcasting-related study programs in Indonesia, which exceeds 226<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, echoing Wahyuni's suggestion (2017) to develop functional media through a differentiation process is something worth doing.

### Conclusion

This study aims to see the diversity of broadcasting media based on the data structure of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission which includes types of institutions, network systems, types of broadcasting, broadcast systems and provinces from a total of 3408 broadcasting

<sup>2</sup> Indonesia Higher Education Database (PDDIKTI).

institution data entries in Indonesia, it was found that the operationalization of the diversity of broadcasting media that can bridge public and industrial interests is still dominated by private broadcasting media institutions. There is confusion in the categorization of broadcasting institutions, for example based on access methods, nature and function and coverage of broadcast areas. Community broadcasting institutions have an important existence in the context of democracy.

The noteworthy finding of this KPI's data is that the digital broadcasting migration policy is more oriented towards technological and economic imperatives. The promise of expanding free-to-air digital terrestrial broadcasting channels by government was not delivered to community broadcasters, especially educational institutions whose broadcasting or media programs.

This fact also indicates the neglect of stakeholders towards improving the skills and competencies of human resources which are needed for the survival of the broadcasting industry itself. The lack of broadcasting technology infrastructure managed by educational institutions causes the gap between theoretical and practical competencies to widen. In other words, the government's policy of providing a portion of digital television broadcasting channels for economic purposes makes the ecology of the broadcasting industry unhealthy.

Media diversity when viewed from the density of media and networks cannot yet be said to be diverse because the concentration of broadcasting media, both TV and radio, is still dominated on the island of Java, especially in the capital city area. So that the equality of media and broadcasting diversity has not been met.

## References

- Aliansi Jurnalis Independen. (2021). *Upah Minimum 2022 Tak Berpihak ke Pekerja Media, Bisa Berdampak ke Publik* [Press Release]. Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI). <https://aji.or.id/informasi/upah-minimum-2022-tak-berpihak-ke-pekerja-media-bisa-berdampak-ke-publik>
- Armando, A. (2014). The greedy giants: Centralized television in post-authoritarian Indonesia. *International Communication Gazette*, 76(4–5), 390–406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048514524106>
- Chandrabuwono, A. B., & Maulina, N. (2021). Ekologi Media Televisi Swasta Berdasarkan Program Informasi Lokal Di Kalimantan Selatan. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Lingkungan Lahan Basah*, 6.
- De Biase, L. (2017, June 3). *Fake news is a media ecology problem*. The OECD Forum Network. <https://www.oecd-forum.org/posts/17511-fake-is-a-form-of-pollution-in-the-media-ecology>
- Duque, J., Silva, F., & Godinho, A. (2023). Data Mining applied to Knowledge Management. *Procedia Computer Science*, 219, 455–461. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2023.01.312>
- Dwi, A. (2023, July 1). Daftar Perusahaan Media Cetak di Indonesia yang Berhenti Terbit. *Tempo.Co*. <https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/daftar-perusahaan-media-cetak-di-indonesia-yang-berhenti-terbit-171334>
- Harwood, K. (1962). The ecology of broadcasters in the United States. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 6(3), 221–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838156209386014>
- Hickman, L., Thapa, S., Tay, L., Cao, M., & Srinivasan, P. (2022). Text Preprocessing for Text Mining in Organizational Research: Review and Recommendations. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(1), 114–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428120971683>
- Kholik, K. (2021). Peran Media Penyiaran di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0. *Jurnal SOMASI (Sosial Humaniora Komunikasi)*, 2(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.53695/js.v2i1.434>
- Liu, L. (2010). *Digital Television's position and effect in the media ecology environment of broadcast and television*. 9, 766–769. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCSIT.2010.5564539>
- Loeberbach, F., Moeller, J., Trilling, D., & van Atteveldt, W. (2020). The Unified Framework of Media Diversity: A Systematic Literature Review. *Digital Journalism*, 8(5), 605–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1764374>
- Masduki, & d'Haenens, L. (2022). Concentration of Media Ownership in Indonesia: A Setback for Viewpoint Diversity. *International Journal of Communication*, 16(0), Article 0. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/17769>

- McLuhan, M. (2013). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (W. T. Gordon, Ed.). Gingko Press. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1222206>
- McLuhan, M., & Wolfe, T. (2005). *Understanding me: Lectures and interviews* (S. McLuhan, Ed.; 1. MIT Press paperback ed). MIT Press.
- Nugroho, Y., Siregar, F., & Laksmi, S. (2013). *Mapping Media Policy in Indonesia*. Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance. <https://cipg.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MEDIA-1-Media-Policy-2012.pdf>
- Pickering, J., Bäckstrand, K., & Schlosberg, D. (2020). Between environmental and ecological democracy: Theory and practice at the democracy-environment nexus. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 22(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2020.1703276>
- Plaisance, P. L. (2005). The Mass Media as Discursive Network: Building on the Implications of Libertarian and Communitarian Claims for News Media Ethics Theory. *Communication Theory*, 15(3), 292–313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00337.x>
- Prabowo, A. (2012). Era Penyiaran Digital: Pengembangan atau Pemberangusan TV Lokal dan TV Komunitas? *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 1(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v1i4.27>
- Raeijmaekers, D., & Maesele, P. (2015). Media, pluralism and democracy: What's in a name? *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(7), 1042–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715591670>
- Rianto, P., Wahyono, S. B., Yusuf, I. A., Zuhri, S., Cahyono, Moch. F., Rahayu, Masduki, & Siregar, A. E. (2012). *Digitalisasi Televisi Di Indonesia: Ekonomi Politik, Peta Persoalan, Dan Rekomendasi Kebijakan*. PR2Media: Yayasan Tifa.
- Rodrigues, M. A. D. S., Chimenti, P. C. D. S., & Nogueira, A. R. R. (2011). The convergence challenge: An analysis of the ecosystem of free-to-air TV in Brazil. *Revista de Administração*, 61–72. <https://doi.org/10.5700/rausp0998>
- Scolari, C. A. (2012). Media Ecology: Exploring the Metaphor to Expand the Theory. *Communication Theory*, 22(2), 204–225. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2012.01404.x>
- Scolari, C. A. (2013). Media Evolution: Emergence, Dominance, Survival and Extinction in the Media Ecology. *International Journal of Communication*, 7(0), Article 0. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1919>
- Simamora, J., Yuniarso, S. W., & Pamungkas, S. (2022). Analisis Faktor Penghambat Analog Switch Off (ASO) Ke Televisi Digital Di Indonesia Dari Perspektif Mediamorphosis. *The Source: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 4(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.36441/thesource.v4i2.1458>

- Siregar, A. (2005, July 18). *Strategi Pengelolaan Televisi Kampus*. Workshop Strategi Pengelolaan Televisi Kampus, Fakultas Seni Media Rekam Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta. <https://ashadisiregar.files.wordpress.com/2008/08/strategi-pengelolaan-tv-kampus.pdf>
- Siregar, A. E. (2014). *Mengawal demokratisasi media: Menolak konsentrasi membangun keberagaman*. Penerbit Buku Kompas.
- Sjøvaag, H. (2016). Media diversity and the global superplayers: Operationalising pluralism for a digital media market. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 13(3), 170–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2016.1210435>
- Snee, H., Hine, C., Morey, Y., Roberts, S., & Watson, H. (Eds.). (2016). *Digital Methods for Social Science*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137453662>
- Wahyuni, H. I. (2017). Complexity and Adaptive System of Television Broadcasting: The Reflection of Autopoietic Mechanism of Indonesian Television Broadcasting System. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik*, 20(3), 189. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.27204>

**Contact emails:** [maulin.niam@ugm.ac.id](mailto:maulin.niam@ugm.ac.id)  
[astriedherawatibasala@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:astriedherawatibasala@mail.ugm.ac.id)



***In Birth Control We Trust: Analyzing Modern Contraception Behavior and Parasocial Relationships With Health Personalities Online***

Nicole Claire A. Desierto, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Family planning in the Philippines is a complex topic because of difficulties in accessing modern contraceptives exacerbated by various external factors. Because of this, Filipinos go to social media to seek reproductive health information, especially among health professional content creators. To further bridge the gap between health communication and social media, this study aimed to analyze how parasocial relationships (PSRs) with health professionals in TikTok contributed to Filipinos' contraceptive habits using a quantitative research design through a self-administered survey. Anchored on the Integrative Model of Behavioral Prediction (IMBP) and the PSR, results revealed that stronger the PSR with the health professional, the higher the likelihood that the respondents generally have a positive attitude regarding modern contraceptives, have most of their friends think that they should use modern contraceptives, have high confidence in their ability to use modern contraceptives, and have positive intentions of using modern contraceptives. Nonetheless, results show that PSR, contraceptive access, and contraceptive intent do not influence contraceptive behavior but contraceptive knowledge does. So even though health professionals on TikTok are doing their job in disseminating accurate contraceptive information through their social media platforms, affecting an increase in one's contraceptive knowledge, this becomes obsolete when individuals are not given the proper physical resources to actually acquire these methods of contraceptives. This thus emphasizes the importance of interventions, perhaps in policy or with influencers, in improving contraceptive access, and not solely contraceptive knowledge, by acknowledging, lessening, and resolving external factors that prohibit the transition from contraceptive intent to behavior.

Keywords: Parasocial Relationship, Contraceptives, Birth Control, TikTok

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Reproductive health care has always been a global topic due to its ties to cultural, societal, and economic issues. The trend of smaller family preferences and younger generations delaying or avoiding childbearing has also heightened discussions around contraceptive use.

In the Philippines, the 2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reports that only 24% of sexually active women use modern contraceptives (Philippine Statistics Authority & ICF, 2023). According to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.7.1 of the United Nations (UN), only 56% of women of reproductive age in the Philippines have met family planning needs through modern contraceptives in 2017, rising slightly to 58% in 2022—still short of the 100% target for universal reproductive healthcare access by 2030.

One factor that may have contributed to this is Filipinos' social media access, the primary source of family planning messages in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority & ICF, 2023). With 84 million Filipino users (72% of the population) and 43 million on TikTok (Kemp, 2023), the platform's unique For You Page (FYP) algorithm has enabled social media influencers to shape public content and messages.

Health and fitness influencers, including certified health professionals, share valuable health information on social media, aiding information exchange. In these online interactions, parasocial relationships (PSR) form; a type of relationship between media beings and their audience, often one-sided in nature. Originating in the 1950s, PSRs serve as an extension of social networks (Giles & Maltby, 2004 as cited in Lotun, 2021) and help explain social media influencers' impact on their audiences (Sakib, 2020; Sakib et al., 2020). PSRs have been widely studied in fandom, marketing, and platform usage, often focusing on credibility, homophily, and attractiveness.

With recent advances in parasocial relationship research, I focus on the concept of one-and-a-half-sided PSR (Kowert & Daniel, 2021), emerging in the social media age, which enables potential reciprocity between influencers and their audiences.

Drawing from literature on health influencers who "personalize" health content for higher social media engagements, health issues become relatable topics that their followers subscribe to. This underscores the need to examine parasocial relationships formed in these interactions.

This study then poses the question: "How do one-and-a-half sided parasocial relationships with health professionals online play a role in Filipinos' contraception behavior?" Specifically, it aims to examine differences in attitudes, perceived norms, perceived behavioral control, intention, and behavior across varying levels of parasocial relationships with Filipino health professionals on TikTok.

Reproductive health, family planning, and contraceptive use have been widely studied since the 1970s to the early 2010s. With advances in technology and social media, new research on the interaction of contraceptive use and social media, particularly in the Philippine context, could enrich discussions on sex education, reproductive health policies, and PSR studies.

This study aims to look at PSR with a new perspective, employing the concept of a "one-and-a-half way" parasocial relationship, as well as using PSR with the Integrative Model of



Behavioral Prediction (IMBP) as a guide to understand how certain factors, including PSR, may explain a certain health behavior.

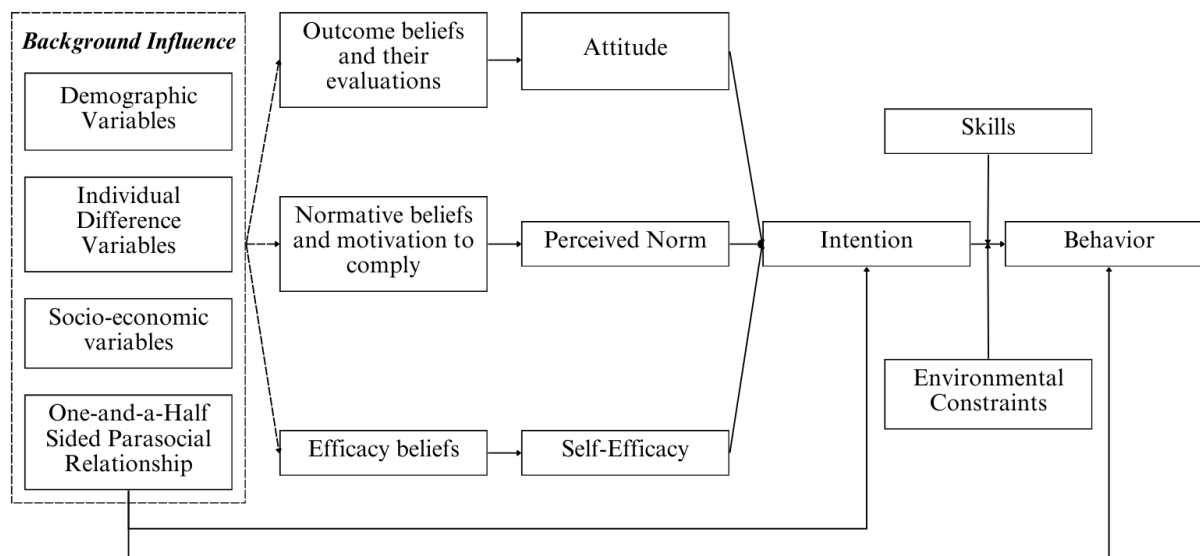


Figure 1: Integrated Theoretical Framework

Additionally, the IMBP highlights the importance of demographics in understanding the uniqueness of belief sources (Yzer, 2012). Prior studies focused on college students (Bader, 2015; Sutton & Walsh & Buhi, 2017) and married women (Gul, 2021), creating an opportunity for this TikTok user-focused study to add to the literature on contraceptive intentions and behavior.

This study explores social media personalities who aren't professional influencers, contributing to research on health professionals who use social media for health information. It also addresses a gap in studies linking PSRs with health content, particularly on TikTok, offering a Filipino perspective on contraceptive behavior and views of health professionals on the platform.

Regarding social media research, TikTok is a fairly new social media platform but albeit new, it has contributed a lot in the information dissemination realm. Most studies about TikTok and information dissemination revolve around misinformation and fake news studies, as well as platform use intention. This study aims to provide a different perspective on how social media users perceive social media information away from the misinformation/disinformation paradigm.

Using a quantitative approach, a survey was conducted among women of reproductive age (18-49) who use or have used modern contraceptives, have TikTok accounts, and have seen health professionals discuss contraceptives on the platform. Pre-testing was conducted to ensure the validity of the survey questionnaire.

Data were collected via Google Forms, coded in Google Sheets, and analyzed in JASP. Frequency tables provided an overview, and association tests explored relationships between variables based on the "one-and-a-half way" PSR and IMBP frameworks.

## Results

The study surveyed 438 respondents with the greatest number of respondents being aged 25-34 (43.1%), married (46.3%), and with a junior high school education (35.8%). Almost all respondents lived in the city (95.5%), most were Roman Catholic (86.1%), a big majority were unemployed (60.5%), and most are currently using modern contraceptives (85.8%).

Regarding TikTok use, the greatest number had accounts for one to two years (34.7%) and spent less than one hour daily on the platform (40.6%). Among the respondents who follow a health professional on TikTok that discusses modern contraceptive use, half followed them for less than a year (50.6%) with 51.4% seeing them on their For You Page (FYP) and 57.8% on their Following Page. Table 1 presented the demographic details.

### One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Attitude

An association test between contraceptive attitude and one-and-a-half-sided PSR showed a strong significant positive relationship ( $\chi^2(4) = 207.902, p < .001, G = .869$ ). This indicated that contraceptive attitude predicts PSR levels by 86.9%. Among those with mid and high PSR scores, 67.8% and 98.3%, respectively, had high contraceptive attitudes, compared to just 30.5% of those with low PSR scores (see Table 2).

A one-way ANOVA showed significant differences in contraceptive attitudes across low, mid, and high one-and-a-half-sided PSR scores ( $F(2, 435) = 101.544, p < .001$ ), with PSR score explaining 31.8% of the variance (see Table 3). Tukey's HSD post-hoc test revealed that individuals with high ( $M = 13.4, s = 1.6$ ) and mid ( $M = 11.6, s = 2.5$ ) PSR scores had higher contraceptive attitudes than those with low scores ( $M = 7.9, s = 4.4$ ),  $p < .001$ . These results indicate that PSR score significantly influences contraceptive attitude.

These findings align with research suggesting that mass media exposure enhances contraceptive knowledge and women's empowerment (Ansary & Anisujjaman, 2012; Ayanore et al., 2015; Bakht et al., 2013; Das et al., 2021), improving their decision-making regarding contraceptive use (Das et al., 2021; Leong et al., 2018; Mađra-Sawicka et al., 2020; Nair et al., 2019; Seidu et al., 2020). Specifically, social media influencers (SMIs) can significantly impact attitudes toward health due to the sense of connection felt by followers (Breves et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022; Pfender & Devlin, 2023). PSRs also influence media consumers' tendency to adopt the attitudes of role models, with credibility increasing attitude change (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Cohen et al., 2023; Kresovich & Noar, 2020).

However, some studies show that PSRs or factors like perceived identification, attractiveness, and trustworthiness may not significantly influence safe sex attitudes (Droppers, 2021; Gelauff, 2021; Hoeben, 2020). These inconsistencies may stem from differences in study populations, cultural norms, media access, and PSR measurement methods.

### One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Perceived Norms

An association test between contraceptive descriptive perceived norm and one-and-a-half-sided PSR showed a strong significant negative relationship ( $\chi^2(4) = 195.915, p < .001, G = -0.629$ ), meaning that as perceived peer contraceptive use increases, one-and-a-half-sided PSR

decreases (see Table 4). This inverse relationship allows for 62.9% predictability of PSR based on the perceived norm.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Profile of Respondents (N=438)

Sociodemographic Variables	n	%
Age		
18-24	132	30.1
25-34	189	43.1
35-49	117	26.7
Relationship Status		
Single	88	20.1
In a relationship	147	33.6
Married	203	46.3
Residence		
City	414	95.5
Town Proper	8	1.8
Rural	16	3.7
Highest Completed Education Level		
Elementary and below (Kindergarten, Nursery, None)	17	3.9
Junior high school	157	35.8
Senior high school	136	31.1
Tertiary education and beyond (Associate Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Post-Graduate)	128	29.2
Occupation		
Student	86	19.6
Employed	87	19.9
Not Yet Employed	265	60.5
Religion		
Roman Catholic	377	86.1
Protestant (i.e. Christians, Methodists, Baptists, Adventists, etc.)	33	7.5
Iglesia ni Cristo	17	3.9
Islam	2	0.5
No Religion	9	2.1
Contraceptive Use		
Current modern contraceptive users	376	85.8
Former modern contraceptive users	62	14.2
TikTok History		
Less than 1 year	125	28.5
1-2 years	152	34.7
3-4 years	112	25.6
More than 4 years	49	11.2
Daily average TikTok consumption		
Less than 1 Hour	178	40.6
1-2 Hours	151	34.5
2-3 Hours	56	12.8
3 Hours and beyond	53	12.1

*Note.* Percentage rounded off to the nearest tenths.

Table 2: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Attitude

		One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR							
		Low		Mid		High		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contraceptive Attitude	Low	29	49.2	7	3.4	1	0.6	37	8.4
	Mid	12	20.3	59	28.8	2	1.1	73	16.7
	High	18	30.5	139	67.8	171	98.3	328	74.9
Total		59	100	205	100	174	100	438	100

Note. Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(4) = 207.902, p < .001, G = .869$

Table 3: One-way ANOVA Table: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Attitude, Perceived Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control

	One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR						$F(2, 435)$	$\eta^2$
	Low		Mid		High			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Contraceptive Attitude	7.9	4.4	11.6	2.5	13.4	1.6	101.544	.318
Contraceptive Descriptive Perceived Norm	2.0	1.5	2.4	1.4	0.6	1.3	80.249	.270
Contraceptive Injunctive Perceived Norm	3.6	1.4	3.9	1.2	3.9	0.8	2.324	.011
Contraceptive Perceived Behavioral Control	3.9	1.4	4.4	1.1	4.8	0.7	17.411	.074

Note.  $p < .001$

Table 4: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Descriptive Perceived Norm

		One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR							
		Low		Mid		High		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contraceptive Descriptive Perceived Norm	Low	12	20.3	17	8.3	133	76.4	241	55.0
	Mid	24	40.7	89	43.4	19	10.9	53	12.1
	High	23	39.0	99	48.3	22	12.6	144	32.9
	Total	59	100	205	100	174	100	438	100

Note. Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(4) = 195.915, p < .001, G = -0.629$

For the injunctive perceived norm, the association test was significant ( $\chi^2(4) = 26.398, p < .001$ ), showing a weak positive relationship ( $G = .388$ ). The contraceptive injunctive perceived norm predicts one-and-a-half-sided PSR by 38.8% (see Table 5).

Table 5: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Injunctive Perceived Norm

		One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR							
		Low		Mid		High		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contraceptive Injunctive Perceived Norm	Low	13	22.0	24	11.7	17	9.8	54	12.3
	Mid	10	16.9	31	15.1	5	2.9	46	10.5
	High	36	61.0	150	73.2	152	87.4	338	77.2
	Total	59	100	205	100	174	100	438	100

Note. Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(4) = 26.398, p < .001, G = .388$

A one-way ANOVA showed significant differences in contraceptive descriptive and injunctive perceived norms across one-and-a-half-sided PSR scores ( $F(2, 435) = 80.249, p < .001$  and  $F(2, 435) = 2.324, p < .001$ , respectively) (see Table 3). One-and-a-half-sided PSR scores accounted for 27% of the variance in descriptive and 1.1% in injunctive norms. Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test revealed that those with low and mid PSR scores had higher descriptive norms than those with high PSR scores. Conversely, those with high and mid PSR

scores had higher injunctive norms than those with low PSR scores. These results suggest that PSR more strongly influences descriptive norms than injunctive norms, with higher PSR linked to lower perceived peer contraceptive use.

The findings suggest that respondents with low and mid one-and-a-half-sided PSR scores perceive most of their friends as using modern contraceptives, while those with high PSR scores perceive fewer friends using them. However, injunctive perceived norms were high across all PSR levels.

Past research supports these results, with theories suggesting that parasocial relationships influence social norms. Studies show that online exposure and parasocial interaction enhance perceived subjective norms, particularly among peers (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Pfender & Bleakley, 2023). Research on celebrity influence, such as in vaping, also supports the idea that PSRs impact social norms (Cohen et al., 2023).

However, differences in PSR and social norm measurements, as well as varying perceptions of celebrity credibility and content accuracy, may explain discrepancies. Additionally, since this study focused on respondents' "friends," the online content they engage with may not accurately reflect real-world behaviors and opinions.

### **One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Perceived Behavioral Control**

An association test showed a significant, moderate positive relationship between one-and-a-half-sided PSR and contraceptive perceived behavioral control ( $\chi^2(4) = 35.193$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $G = .520$ ), with contraceptive perceived behavioral control predicting 52% of the variance in PSR (see Table 6). A one-way ANOVA further revealed significant differences in perceived behavioral control across low, mid, and high PSR scores ( $F(2, 435) = 17.411$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (see Table 3). PSR scores explain 7.4% of the variance in contraceptive attitude. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test showed that respondents with high ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $s = 0.7$ ) and mid ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $s = 1.1$ ) PSR scores had higher perceived behavioral control than those with low scores ( $M = 3.9$ ,  $s = 1.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These findings suggest that higher PSR with health professionals on TikTok increases confidence in using modern contraceptives during sexual activity.

Moyer-Gusé's (2008) theory suggests parasocial interactions with personalities can affect self-efficacy. High exposure to safe sex vlogs increases perceived behavioral control (Droppers, 2021), and YouTube campaigns have influenced social norms, such as women carrying condoms (Moors, 2020). Similar effects have been observed with fitness influencers (Kim, 2021) and COVID-19 communicators (Liebers et al., 2023).

However, some studies contradict these findings, such as PSR with podcast hosts or The Biggest Loser personalities not influencing self-efficacy (Wolterink, 2022; Siegenthaler et al., 2021). Despite this, the current study supports that PSRs with health professionals increase confidence in contraceptive knowledge, empower women, and reduce stigma.

Table 6: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Perceived Behavioral Control

		One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR							
		Low		Mid		High		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contraceptive Perceived Behavioral Control	Low	11	18.6	14	6.8	7	4.0	32	7.3
	Mid	5	8.5	28	13.7	2	1.1	35	8.0
	High	43	72.9	163	79.5	165	94.8	371	84.7
	Total	59	100	205	100	174	100	438	100

Note. Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(4) = 35.193, p < .001, G = .520$

**One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Intention to Use Contraceptives**

An association test between overall one-and-a-half-sided PSR score and contraceptive intention was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(4) = 52.228, p < .001$ ). The relationship is positive and strong ( $G = .702$ ), with contraceptive intent predicting PSR by 70.2%. Results show high contraceptive intent across all PSR levels: 97.7% for high PSR, 79.5% for mid PSR, and 62.7% for low PSR (see Table 7).

Table 7: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Intention to Use Contraceptives

		One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR							
		Low		Mid		High		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contraceptive Intention	Low	14	23.7	19	9.3	3	1.7	36	8.2
	Mid	8	13.6	23	11.2	1	0.6	32	7.3
	High	37	62.7	163	79.5	170	97.7	370	84.5
	Total	59	100	205	100	174	100	438	100

Note. Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(4) = 52.228, p < .001, G = .702$

Past research supports the current study’s findings on parasocial interactions predicting various behavioral intentions, including safe sex (Droppers, 2021; Gelauff, 2021), purchasing

(Leite & De Paula Baptista, 2021; Lin et al., 2021), and travel (Bi et al., 2021). Increased YouTube viewership has also been linked to improved digital health literacy and exercise behavior intentions (Kim et al., 2024). In healthcare, social media positively influences health communication, affecting patient decisions (Gentry & Prince-Paul, 2021; Bussey & Sillence, 2019), though ethical concerns like sponsorships and blurred content boundaries exist (Stein et al., 2022).

**One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Behavior**

The association test between contraceptive use and overall one-and-a-half-sided PSR revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship ( $\chi^2(2) = 96.851, p < .001, G = -0.720$ ). This indicates that as contraceptive behavior increases, the one-and-a-half-sided PSR decreases, with the ability to predict PSR levels increasing by 72% based on contraceptive behavior (see Table 8).

Table 8: One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR and Contraceptive Behavior

Contraceptive Behavior	One-and-a-Half-Sided PSR							
	Low		Mid		High		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	5	10.9	11	6.6	3	1.8	19	5.1
Seldom	4	8.7	16	9.6	22	13.4	42	11.2
Often	7	15.2	32	19.3	116	70.7	155	41.2
Almost Always	8	17.4	19	11.4	10	6.1	37	9.8
Always	22	47.8	88	53.1	13	7.9	123	32.7
Total	46	100	166	100	164	100	376	100

*Note.* Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(8) = 130.544, p < .001, G = -0.435$

The negative behavioral association, despite a positive relationship with behavioral intention, suggests a gap between intention and behavior. This discrepancy may indicate that while respondents believe the information from health influencers on TikTok, certain barriers prevent them from translating their positive contraceptive intent to behavior.

Filipinos’ cultural pride and resistance to change, coupled with low TikTok consumption (40.64% spending less than an hour daily), likely contribute to the weak effect of PSRs on contraceptive behavior. Additionally, low engagement with contraceptive content on TikTok (40.41% encountering it occasionally) and short follow-up periods complicate measuring behavior consistency.



Another reason for the inconsistency between PSR and contraceptive behavior could be the short time frame. If respondents have followed a health professional on TikTok for less than a year, and their contraceptive behavior is fairly new, it would be challenging to measure consistency without a longitudinal study.

These findings contrast with previous research showing media use influences contraceptive behavior (Gafar et al., 2020), even in the Philippine context (Chang, 2022; Das et al., 2021), with stronger PSRs promoting healthy behaviors (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). However, few studies explore the intersection of PSRs and contraceptive use.

### **Contraceptive Knowledge and Contraceptive Behavior**

Association tests revealed that the relationship between contraceptive knowledge and contraceptive behavior is moderately statistically significant ( $\chi^2(4) = 46.593$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $G = .541$ ). Knowing the level of contraceptive behavior increases our ability to predict the level of contraceptive knowledge by 54.1%.

Association tests showed that 83 respondents had high contraceptive knowledge scores, while 293 had low scores. Among those with high knowledge, 61.4% reported "always" using modern contraceptives in the past 12 months, whereas 48.1% of those with low knowledge reported "often" (see Table 9).

These are expected results since the more an individual uses a certain contraceptive method, the more they are exposed to its usage and side effects, informing them of its use. Studies have found a direct link between reproductive health knowledge and behavior (Fisher & Fisher, 1998; Liddelow et al., 2020), and that poor knowledge is associated with poor contraceptive use (Buga, 1996 as cited in Hlongwa et al., 2020).

Across all levels of contraceptive use, respondents showed low contraceptive knowledge, with most answering only three out of nine questions correctly (42.8%). Of these, 64.0% reported using contraceptives "often" in the past year, while only two respondents, both answering "always," scored a perfect nine (see Table 9).

Interestingly, respondents were most frequently misinformed about sterilization (tubal ligation), oral contraceptive pills (OCP), and intrauterine devices (IUD) (see Table 10). Among respondents familiar with sterilization ( $n=294$ ), 256 (66.8%) answered incorrectly. For oral contraceptive pills (OCPs), 251 of 345 familiar respondents (78.0%) were incorrect. For intrauterine devices (IUDs), 234 of 357 familiar respondents (82.1%) answered incorrectly.

Condoms or vaginal barrier methods show the largest knowledge-familiarity gap (86.6%): of respondents who claimed familiarity ( $n=369$ ), 161 answered incorrectly (see Table 10). Interestingly, oral contraceptive pills (OCPs) were the most used method ( $n=324$ ), with condoms/vaginal barriers third ( $n=181$ ). Among OCP users, 112 past users and 96 current users answered the OCP question incorrectly (see Table 11). This indicates that despite frequent or consistent use, many respondents lack knowledge about common misconceptions on these contraceptives, even on topics commonly discussed on TikTok.

Table 9: Contraceptive Knowledge and Contraceptive Behavior of Current Modern Contraceptive Users

Contraceptive Behavior	Contraceptive Knowledge Result					
	Low		High		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	15	5.1	4	4.8	19	5.1
Seldom	38	13.0	4	4.8	42	11.2
Often	141	48.1	14	16.9	155	41.2
Almost Always	27	9.2	10	12.0	37	9.8
Always	72	24.6	51	61.4	123	32.7
Total	293	100	83	100	376	100

*Note.* Percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(4) = 46.593$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $G = .541$

These findings underscore the need for caution when relying on social media for health information, as it may not be the most reliable source. Prior research also highlights low reproductive health knowledge in the Philippines, which may contribute to risky reproductive behaviors (Choi & Lee, 2021).

### External Factors Regarding Contraceptives and Contraceptive Behavior

Among current contraceptive users ( $n=376$ ), only 15 reported difficulty obtaining resupplies. Key barriers included financial concerns (53.3%), side effects (40.0%), and lack of availability (33.3%), with some citing restrictions and personal issues (6.7% each). Association tests revealed a significant moderate inverse relationship between contraceptive behavior and ease of access,  $\chi^2(8) = 52.455$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $G = -0.142$  (see Table 12). This suggests that as contraceptive behavior increases, ease of access decreases, and vice versa.

Results indicate that contraceptive behavior frequency varies with ease of access: those finding it easier to obtain contraceptives most often reported “always” using them (42.5%), while those experiencing no change reported “often” (49.8%). Among those who found access harder, responses were split between “often” and “always” (33.3% each) (see Table 12). This suggests that access ease doesn’t directly predict contraceptive behavior.

For previous users, the primary reasons for stopping were unbearable side effects (29.0%) and infrequent intercourse (25.8%) (see Table 13).

Table 10: Contraceptive Knowledge and Contraceptive Method Familiarity

Modern Contraceptive Method	Contraceptive Knowledge Result per item	Method Familiarity						
		Unfamiliar		Neither familiar nor unfamiliar		Familiar		Total n
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
Sterilization (Tubal Ligation)	Wrong	99	25.8	28	7.1	256	66.8	383
	Right	10	18.2	7	12.7	38	69.1	55
Intrauterine devices (IUD)	Wrong	38	13.3	13	4.6	234	82.1	285
	Right	21	13.7	9	5.9	123	80.4	153
Implants	Wrong	37	27.2	10	7.4	89	65.4	136
	Right	29	9.6	12	4.0	261	86.4	302
Injectables	Wrong	26	28.3	10	10.9	56	60.9	92
	Right	29	8.4	17	4.9	300	86.7	346
Condoms or Vaginal barrier methods	Wrong	14	7.5	11	5.9	161	86.6	186
	Right	32	12.7	12	4.8	208	82.5	252
Lactational amenorrhea method (LAM)	Wrong	138	62.4	36	16.3	47	21.3	221
	Right	26	12.0	11	5.1	180	82.9	217
Emergency contraception	Wrong	73	24.1	32	10.6	198	65.3	303
	Right	30	22.2	12	8.9	93	68.9	135
Oral contraceptive pill	Wrong	44	13.7	27	8.4	251	78.0	322
	Right	18	15.5	4	3.4	94	81.0	116
Patches	Wrong	114	29.3	45	11.6	230	59.1	389
	Right	17	34.7	7	14.3	25	51.0	49

*Note.* Symptothermal Contraception was not included in the Q&A questionnaire.

Previous research shows that external factors, such as side effects (Britton et al., 2021; Groene et al., 2024), financial concerns (Agha et al., 2021; Budu et al., 2022), partner influence (Abejo et al., 2024; Bhushan et al., 2021), and desire for pregnancy (Ballon & Tamoria, 2023; Edrial et al., 2022), impact contraceptive behavior. In the Philippines, as a low- to middle-income and religious country, women may face challenges translating contraceptive intent into use due to affordability issues and lack of partner or family support.

Table 11: Contraceptive Knowledge and Modern Contraceptive History

Modern Contraceptive Method	Contraceptive Knowledge Result per item	Modern Contraceptive History				
		Method was used before		Method is currently being used		Total
		n	%	n	%	
Sterilization (Tubal Ligation)	Wrong	10	2.6	12	3.1	22
	Right	2	3.6	2	3.6	4
Intrauterine devices (IUD)	Wrong	40	14.0	38	13.3	78
	Right	11	7.2	8	5.2	19
Implants	Wrong	9	6.6	10	7.4	19
	Right	42	13.9	44	14.6	86
Injectables	Wrong	8	8.7	9	9.8	17
	Right	122	35.3	113	32.7	235
Condoms or Vaginal barrier methods	Wrong	6	3.2	8	4.3	14
	Right	91	36.1	76	30.2	167
Lactational amenorrhea method (LAM)	Wrong	0	0	1	0.5	1
	Right	2	0.9	2	0.9	4
Emergency contraception	Wrong	5	1.7	6	2.0	11
	Right	13	9.6	7	5.2	20
Oral contraceptive pill	Wrong	112	34.8	96	29.8	208
	Right	70	60.3	46	39.7	116
Patches	Wrong	1	0.3	1	0.3	2
	Right	1	2.0	1	2.0	2

*Note.* Symptothermal Contraception was not included in the Q&A questionnaire. Percentage shown is out of those who answered the question right or wrong.

## Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between parasocial relationships (PSRs) with health professionals on TikTok and contraceptive intent and behavior. As social media has become a key health information source in the Philippines, health professionals who also create content serve as an accessible resource. While PSRs with these professionals influence contraceptive intent, they do not necessarily lead to consistent contraceptive use, indicating challenges in converting intent to behavior.

Table 12: Access to Modern Contraceptive Use Among Current Modern Contraceptive Users and Contraceptive Behavior

Contraceptive Behavior	Access to Modern Contraceptive Use							
	Easier		Harder		No Change		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	18	13.4	0	0	1	0.4	19	5.1
Seldom	8	6.0	2	13.3	32	14.1	42	11.2
Often	37	27.6	5	33.3	113	49.8	155	41.2
Almost Always	14	10.4	3	20.0	20	8.8	37	9.8
Always	57	42.5	5	33.3	61	28.9	123	32.7
Total	134	100	15	100	227	100	376	100

*Note.* Total percentage shown is out of those who are current contraceptive users (n = 376). Other percentages are presented within the column.  $\chi^2(8) = 52.455$ ,  $p < 001$ ,  $G = -0.142$

Table 13: External Factors Regarding Modern Contraceptive Use Among Previous Modern Contraceptive User

External Factor	n	%
Side effects of modern contraceptives were unbearable	18	29.0
Absence of intercourse / long intervals between intercourse	16	25.8
Personal concerns (scheduling and prescription conflicts, trying to get pregnant or already pregnant, etc.)	9	14.5
Change of contraceptive method	5	8.1
I am not allowed to get modern contraceptives (i.e. parents, significant other, religion doesn't allow, etc.)	4	6.5
Modern contraceptives are not available (i.e. facilities closed, provider is not around, crowded health facility, facility ran out of stock, don't know where to get, etc.)	3	4.8
Financial Concerns (i.e. no transportation or stable income to obtain contraceptives, etc.)	7	1.6

*Note.* Percentage shown is out of those who are not currently using modern contraceptives (n = 62). This item also allowed for multiple responses. Other percentages are presented within the row.

Results showed that attitudes, injunctive perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control positively impact the intention to use contraceptives, while descriptive perceived norm does not. This may be because the opinion of one's peers does not really have a large impact on an individual's intent as other external factors may hold more importance. Barriers like financial constraints, personal beliefs, and cultural influences may prevent Filipinos from acting on their intentions.

Future policies and influencer strategies should address these real-world barriers, aiming not just to shape positive attitudes but also to bridge the gap between intent and behavior. Boosting contraceptive knowledge could support this effort, helping individuals make informed reproductive choices.

## **Implications**

Studies have explored social media's role in health-related behavior change, yet Filipino academics might benefit from a localized theory to better reflect Filipino responses to social media messages, as Western frameworks may not fully apply. With growing social media use, integrating Filipino-specific variables and beliefs could enhance relevance. Research on TikTok as an information source and factors influencing contraceptive intent and behavior beyond established variables could also be valuable.

This quantitative survey study, limited by its sample size (N=438) and urban-centric focus, is not fully generalizable to all Filipinos. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, including rural areas or other countries. A longitudinal or experimental design could provide insight into PSR effects on contraceptive behavior over time. Additionally, questionnaires in multiple languages and improved variable definitions, especially for "friends" in social norms, are recommended.

The study highlights the need to bridge the gap between contraceptive intent and use, suggesting that social media partnerships with health influencers could enhance health campaigns. Policymakers could promote open discussions on contraceptives and institutionalize sexual health education, while health professionals can leverage social media to provide practical contraceptive advice. Supporting influencers to maximize their impact could also contribute to improved reproductive health behaviors.

## **Acknowledgments**

This manuscript is derived from my undergraduate thesis.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to those who made my pursuit of advocating to improve health and media literacy in the Philippines possible.

To my mentors, Assoc. Professor Randy Jay C. Solis, Ph.D., thesis proposal adviser, and Asst. Professor Maria Jeriesa P. Osorio, thesis adviser, thank you for your invaluable guidance, support, constructive feedback, and most importantly trust in me throughout the entire research process. Your expertise and encouragement were instrumental in shaping this study and guiding me mentally to finish an individual thesis.

To my parents, Hazel and Jun, thank you for supporting me physically, emotionally and financially.

To Tristan, thank you for your patience, moral support, and especially for letting me borrow your laptop during the last month of the thesis writing process. Your encouragement and understanding allowed me to dedicate the necessary time and effort to this research.

To all who contributed to this study in various capacities, I am profoundly grateful. Thank you.

## References

- Abejo, J. R. A., Gulle, J. S., Jr, & Montajes, R. S., Jr. (2024). Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices of Contraceptives Used among Indigenous Women of Reproductive Age in Barangay Hawilian, Esperanza, Agusan Del Sur. *American Journal of Agricultural Science, Engineering, and Technology*, 8(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajaset.v8i1.2303>
- Agha, S., Morgan, B., Archer, H., Paul, S., Babigumira, J. B., & Guthrie, B. L. (2021). Understanding how social norms affect modern contraceptive use. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11110-2>
- Ansary, R., & Anisujjaman. (2012). Factors determining pattern of unmet need for family planning in Uttar Pradesh, India. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(4). <http://www.isca.in/IJSS/Archive/v1/i4/3.ISCA-IRJSS-2012-059.pdf>
- Ayanore, M. A., Pavlova, M., & Groot, W. (2015). Unmet reproductive health needs among women in some West African countries: a systematic review of outcome measures and determinants. *Reproductive Health*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-015-0104-x>
- Bader, V. G. (2015). *Influences on contraceptive use among college women* [PhD Dissertation, University of Missouri]. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/influences-on-contraceptive-use-among-college/docview/1681306914/se-2>
- Bakht, M. B., Arif, Z., Zafar, S., & Nawaz, M. A. (2013). Influence of media on contraceptive use: a cross-sectional study in four Asian countries. *Journal of Ayub Medical College Abbottabad - Pakistan*, 25(3–4). <https://www.demo.ayubmed.edu.pk/jamc/index.php/jamc/article/view/1680>
- Ballon, J. J. R., & Tamoria, J. R. (2023). Factors contributing to and biological concepts about early pregnancy among Filipino adolescent mothers. *International Journal of Public Health Science*, 12(1), 100. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijphs.v12i1.21066>
- Bhushan, N. L., Fisher, E. B., Maman, S., Speizer, I. S., Gottfredson, N. C., Phanga, T., Vansia, D., Pettifor, A. E., & Rosenberg, N. E. (2021). Communication, social norms, and contraceptive use among adolescent girls and young women in Lilongwe, Malawi. *Women & Health*, 61(5), 440–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2021.1917479>
- Bond, B. J., & Drogos, K. L. (2014). Sex On the Shore: Wishful identification and Parasocial Relationships as Mediators in the Relationship Between Jersey Shore Exposure and Emerging Adults' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors. *Media Psychology*, 17(1), 102–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2013.872039>
- Breves, P., Amrehn, J., Heidenreich, A., Liebers, N., & Schramm, H. (2021). Blind trust? The importance and interplay of parasocial relationships and advertising disclosures in explaining influencers' persuasive effects on their followers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(7), 1209–1229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1881237>



- Britton, L. E., Williams, C. R., Onyango, D., Wambua, D., & Tumlinson, K. (2021). “When it comes to time of removal, nothing is straightforward”: A qualitative study of experiences with barriers to removal of long-acting reversible contraception in Western Kenya. *Contraception*, *X*, 3, 100063. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.conx.2021.100063>
- Budu, E., Ahinkorah, B. O., Seidu, A., Armah-Ansah, E. K., Salihu, T., Aboagye, R. G., & Yaya, S. (2022). Intention to use contraceptives among married and cohabiting women in sub-Saharan Africa: a multilevel analysis of cross-sectional data. *BMJ Open*, *12*(11), e060073. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-060073>
- Bussey, L. G., & Sillence, E. (2019). The role of internet resources in health decision-making: a qualitative study. *Digital Health*, *5*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2055207619888073>
- Chang, W. S. (2022). The Effect of TV/Radio Media Family Planning Messages on Modern Contraceptive Use among Women: Empirical Evidence from the Philippines. *Journal of Development Studies*, *58*(10), 2132–2153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2022.2086045>
- Choi, Y., & Lee, T. (2021). A structural equation modeling of reproductive health promoting behaviors among female adolescents in the Philippines. *Japan Journal of Nursing Science*, *19*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/jjns.12463>
- Cohen, E. L., West, M., Yoshimura, K., Farrell, M. E., & Swain, A. (2023). Normative Influence of the Stars: The Relative Indirect Effects of Celebrity Exemplars on Vaping Norm Perceptions Through Liking, Parasocial Relationship Strength, and Wishful Identification. *Health Communication*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2023.2245594>
- Das, P., Samad, N., Banna, H. A., Sodunke, T. E., Hagan, J. E., Ahinkorah, B. O., & Seidu, A. (2021). Association between media exposure and family planning in Myanmar and Philippines: evidence from nationally representative survey data. *Contraception and Reproductive Medicine*, *6*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40834-021-00154-9>
- Droppers, N. (2021). *Influencers as ambassadors of sexual health: Can self-disclosing and humorous vloggers evoke more positive attitudes towards safe sex and higher intentions towards practicing safe sex with young adults?* [MA Thesis, Tilburg University]. <https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=155319>
- Edrial, D. A., Madrangca, J. D., Tinae, J. L., & Peñas, J. D. D. (2022). Knowledge, exposure, peer pressure, and awareness among teenagers on perceived factors influencing teenage pregnancy. *International Journal of Research Publications*, *103*(1). <https://doi.org/10.47119/ijrp1001031620223421>
- Gafar, A., Suza, D. E., Efendi, F., Has, E. M. M., Pramono, A., & Susanti, I. A. (2020). Determinants of contraceptive use among married women in Indonesia. *F1000Research*, *9*, 193. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.22482.1>

- Gelauff, E. E. L. (2021). *Social influencers as sexual health promoters: The relationship between the intimacy of influencer self-disclosure, camera angle and the persuasiveness of vlogs about sexual health behavior* [MA Thesis, Tilburg University]. <https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=155360>
- Gentry, H., & Prince-Paul, M. (2021). The nurse influencer: A concept synthesis and analysis. *Nursing Forum*, 56(1), 181–187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12516>
- Groene, N., Nickel, A., & Rohn, A. E. (2024). Toward More Informed Choices: Analysis of the Side Effects of Female Contraception Options Using Natural Language Processing of Online Reviews. *Research Square*. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3892109/v1>
- Gul, A. X. (2021). *Application of the integrated behavior model to explain and promote uptake of modern family planning methods among married women of reproductive age in rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan: The IRADA project* [PhD Dissertation, The George Washington University]. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/application-integrated-behavior-model-explain/docview/2572552014/se-2>
- Hlongwa, M., Mashamba-Thompson, T., Makhunga, S., & Hlongwana, K. (2020). Evidence on factors influencing contraceptive use and sexual behavior among women in South Africa. *Medicine*, 99(12), e19490. <https://doi.org/10.1097/md.00000000000019490>
- Hoeben, K. (2020). *Influencers as ambassadors of sexual health: Self-disclosure and direct gaze as communication strategies in sexual health vlogs to evoke positive attitudes and intentions towards practicing safe sex among young adults* [MA Thesis, Tilburg University]. <https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=157510>
- Hoffner, C., & Bond, B. J. (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45, 101306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306>
- Johnson, B. K., Bradshaw, A. S., Davis, J., Diegue, V., Frost, L., Hinds, J., Lin, T., Mizell, C., Quintana, D., & Wang, R. (2021). Credible influencers. *Journal of Media Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000310>
- Kemp, S. (2023, February 8). *Digital 2023: The Philippines — DataReportal — Global Digital Insights*. DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-philippines>
- Kim, H. (2021). Keeping up with influencers: exploring the impact of social presence and parasocial interactions on Instagram. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(3), 414–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1886477>
- Kim, J., Youm, H., Kim, S., Choi, H., Kim, D., Shin, S., & Chung, J. (2024). Exploring the Influence of YouTube on Digital Health Literacy and Health Exercise Intentions: The Role of Parasocial Relationships. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(4), 282. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040282>

- Kowert, R., & Daniel, E. S. (2021). The one-and-a-half sided parasocial relationship: The curious case of live streaming. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 4, 100150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100150>
- Kresovich, A., & Noar, S. M. (2020). The Power of Celebrity Health Events: Meta-analysis of the Relationship between Audience Involvement and Behavioral Intentions. *Journal of Health Communication*, 25(6), 501–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2020.1818148>
- Leite, F. P., & De Paula Baptista, P. (2021). The effects of social media influencers' self-disclosure on behavioral intentions: The role of source credibility, parasocial relationships, and brand trust. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 30(3), 295–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2021.1935275>
- Leong, C., Pan, S. L., Bahri, S., & Fauzi, A. (2018). Social media empowerment in social movements: power activation and power accrual in digital activism. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 28(2), 173–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085x.2018.1512944>
- Liddelow, C., Mullan, B., & Boyes, M. (2020). Adherence to the oral contraceptive pill: the roles of health literacy and knowledge. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 8(1), 587–600. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2020.1850288>
- Liebers, N., Vogel, A., Breves, P., & Schramm, H. (2023). The Impact of Familiarity with a Communicator on the Persuasive Effectiveness of Pandemic-Related Fear Appeals Explained Through Parasocial Relationships. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2023.2216688>
- Lim, M. S. C., Molenaar, A., Brennan, L., Reid, M., & McCaffrey, T. A. (2022). Young adults' use of different social media platforms for health information: Insights from Web-Based Conversations. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 24(1), e23656. <https://doi.org/10.2196/23656>
- Lin, C. A., Crowe, J., Pierre, L., & Lee, Y. (2021). Effects of parasocial interaction with an instafamous influencer on brand attitudes and purchase intentions. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 10(1), 55–78. <https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/811/435>
- Lotun, S. (2021). *Social media for social good: Understanding, creating, and harnessing the strength of parasocial relationships* [Thesis, University of Essex]. <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/33077/1/PhDThesisFinal17.06.22docx.pdf>
- Mądra-Sawicka, M., Nord, J. H., Paliszkiwicz, J., & Lee, T. (2020). Digital Media: Empowerment and Equality. *Information*, 11(4), 225. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info11040225>
- Moyer-Gusé, E. (2008). Toward a Theory of Entertainment Persuasion: Explaining the Persuasive Effects of Entertainment-Education Messages. *Communication Theory*, 18(3), 407–425. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2008.00328.x>

- Nair, S., Dixit, A., Ghule, M., Battala, M., Gajanan, V., Dasgupta, A., Begum, S., Averbach, S., Donta, B., Silverman, J., Saggurti, N., & Raj, A. (2019). Health care providers' perspectives on delivering gender equity focused family planning program for young married couples in a cluster randomized controlled trial in rural Maharashtra, India. *Gates Open Research*, 3, 1508. <https://doi.org/10.12688/gatesopenres.13026.1>
- Pfender, E., & Bleakley, A. (2023). An elicitation study to understand young adults' beliefs about seeking health information from social media influencers. *Qualitative Health Research*, 34(3), 205–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323231208391>
- Pfender, E., & Devlin, M. M. (2023). What Do Social Media Influencers Say About Birth Control? A Content Analysis of YouTube Vlogs About Birth Control. *Health Communication*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2022.2149091>
- Philippine Statistics Authority & ICF. (2023). *2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS): Final Report*. PSA and ICF. Retrieved from <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR381/FR381.pdf>
- Sakib, N. (2020). *How YouTube health vloggers influence viewer compliance: The interplay between vlogger characteristics, parasocial interaction, and viewer characteristics* [PhD Dissertation, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley]. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/how-youtube-health-vloggers-influence-viewer/docview/2493013695/se-2?accountid=47253>
- Sakib, N., Zolfagharian, M., & Yazdanparast, A. (2020). Does parasocial interaction with weight loss vloggers affect compliance? The role of vlogger characteristics, consumer readiness, and health consciousness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 52, 101733. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.002>
- Seidu, A., Hagan, J. E., Agbemavi, W., Ahinkorah, B. O., Nartey, E. B., Budu, E., Sambah, F., & Schack, T. (2020). Not just numbers: beyond counting caesarean deliveries to understanding their determinants in Ghana using a population based cross-sectional study. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-2792-7>
- Siegenthaler, P., Aegerter, T., & Fahr, A. (2021). A Longitudinal Study on the Effects of Parasocial Relationships and Breakups With Characters of a Health-Related TV Show on Self-Efficacy and Exercise Behavior: The Case of The Biggest Loser. *Communication & Sport*, 11(4), 744–769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795211045039>
- Stein, K., Yao, Y., & Aitamurto, T. (2022). Examining communicative forms in #TikTokDocs' sexual health videos. *International Journal of Communication*, 16, 23. <https://doi.org/10.25417/uic.19759213.v1>
- Sutton, J. A., & Walsh-Buhi, E. R. (2017). Factors influencing college women's contraceptive behavior: An application of the integrative model of behavioral prediction. *Journal of American College Health*, 65(5), 339–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2017.1312414>

Wolterink, S. K. (2022). *How podcast hosts influence the sexual behavioral intention of the audience through parasocial relationships* [MA Thesis, Tilburg University]. <https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=158934>

Yzer, M. (2012). The integrative model of behavioral prediction as a tool for designing health messages. In *Designing Messages for Health Communication Campaigns: Theory and Practice* (pp. 21–40). Sage. [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43568\\_2.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43568_2.pdf)

**Contact email:** nicoledesierto2000@gmail.com



## *It's Time to Podcast: Hype or Here to Stay? A Pre- and Post-pandemic Trend Study*

Matthias Werner, University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Germany  
Carsten Rennhak, University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Germany

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Podcasts represent a significant media trend due to their accessibility, variety of content, and ability to reach niche audiences by offering a personalized listening experience. A scholarly study of podcast usage is critical as it provides insight into changing media consumption patterns. This study integrates Uses and Gratification Theory, which has been applied by many researchers (e.g., Perks et al., 2019; Craig et al. 2021; Chung & Kim 2016), to explore the factors behind podcast usage motivations. Unlike previous ad hoc studies, this research includes two surveys from 2020 and 2024, with 196 and 268 valid responses, uncovering changes in podcast listeners' motivations pre- and post-pandemic. Results show typical podcast users are predominantly young, educated females who prefer comedy podcasts on smartphones. Primary motivations include entertainment, attention, convenience, relaxation, escape, social interaction, and information/education, with attitudes, affinity to the medium, and perceived realism also influencing consumption. Notably, information/education, escape, and social interaction are key predictive factors for podcast usage. The study offers valuable recommendations for media industry practitioners, highlighting podcasts' potential to displace other media through customizable experiences and multitasking opportunities, making listeners feel 'productive' both physically and mentally.

Keywords: Podcast, Education, Information, Uses & Gratification

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

In the context of the global health crisis precipitated by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, the World Wide Web witnessed a surge in usage, with an array of online platforms, including e-commerce sites, virtual conferences, and entertainment portals, experiencing a notable increase in activity (Alexander, 2020; Kuhle, 2020; Barth, 2020). It is therefore unsurprising that there is also a growing demand for podcasts and their diverse content (Otto, 2020). In the United States, the medium has been experiencing a period of significant growth for several years, particularly in comparison to Europe and Germany (Kleinz, 2019). In the United States, podcasts have been a popular medium for several years, with Statista reporting that approximately 55% of Americans have already discovered the medium (Polshova, 2020). As predicted by Webster (2008) and Verna (2009), the number of listeners has increased by 30% since 2008. A study conducted by the digital association Bitcom has revealed that podcasts are becoming an increasingly significant phenomenon in Germany. In 2018, the proportion of the population who listened to podcasts increased from 14% to 22% compared to 2016. It can thus be posited that one in five Germans utilised podcasts in 2018. In 2019, there was a further increase in the utilisation of this medium within society. The proportion of the German population who listen to podcasts has increased to 26% (Carius, 2018; Klöß & Krösmann, 2019). The 2020 study conducted by the digital association Bitkom indicates a continued and steady increase in the use of podcasts compared to previous years. At the time of writing, one-third of the German population currently utilise the 'new' medium. The most popular topics among podcast listeners in Germany are news (53%) and comedy (44%), according to a study by Klöß and Krösmann (2020).

The term 'podcast' is derived from the combination of two words: 'pod', which is an abbreviation of the term 'play on demand', originally used in reference to Apple's iPod MP3 player, and 'cast', which is the short form of the English word 'broadcast'. In this context, 'broadcast' can be understood to mean either 'transmission' or 'dissemination'. A podcast is a series of discrete episodes, typically in the format of audio files, but also including video files (VODcasts), which are made available for download free of charge via a suitable device, such as a smartphone. The individual episodes can be accessed at any time and from any location, irrespective of the specified broadcast times. This is referred to as a flexible on-demand service, which allows listeners to access the episode at their convenience (Duden, 2020; Gatewood, 2008, p. 91; Harris & Park, 2008, p. 548; Markgraf, 2020; McClung & Johnson, 2010, pp. 83f.; Laing et al., 2006, pp. 514f.; Potter, 2006, p. 64). Despite the notable expansion in the number of podcast listeners, there has been a paucity of systematic research on podcast listening habits (Markman, 2015, p. 240). The existing academic research on podcasts has primarily concentrated on addressing three key areas: firstly, the identification of the demographic profile of podcast users; secondly, an examination of the ways in which podcasts are utilised within business and educational contexts; and thirdly, an investigation into the extent to which individuals consume podcasts. Despite the relatively recent advent of technology, podcasts have had a profound impact on human interaction with media, becoming an integral part of today's world and everyone's environment (McClung & Johnson, 2010, p. 82). As podcasts continue to gain in popularity, it is important to gain an understanding of how they are used. It is essential to analyse the motives behind the use of podcasts, the gratifications associated with them and the attitudes of the respective users towards podcasts. This paper employs the Uses and Gratifications Approach to examine these aspects. The concept of the Uses and Gratifications Approach is employed in media research to elucidate the motives or gratifications that underpin the selection of a preferred medium, as well as the associated behaviour and attitude that inform the decision to direct one's attention



towards that medium (Severin & Tankard, 1986, p. 1ff.). The following section will address the question: *What motives are behind people turning to the podcast medium in Germany?*

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Uses and Gratifications Approach (U&G) is a recipient-centred perspective that views the audience as an active and individual actor (Prokop, 1995). The role of the recipient was originally given little consideration in media research. However, in the 1970s, there was a shift in focus from the question 'What do the media do to people?' to the question 'What do people do with the media?' (Suckfill, 2004; Katz, 1959). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) developed the theory as a link between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and media use. The theory posits that people use media to satisfy a range of needs, including the seeking of information, entertainment, social interaction and self-identification. The selective selection of content by recipients that aligns with their personal views and needs, coupled with a consistency between expectations and gratifications received, fosters repeated use (Unz et al., 2016). The theory has been applied to new media and technologies, including streaming services and podcasts, where specific gratifications such as entertainment, relaxation and information acquisition are sought (Ruggiero, 2000; Perks et al., 2019). In addition to the theoretical findings already mentioned in the literature with regard to traditional and modern media, there are also some studies that deal with the relatively young and new medium of podcasts. Jham et al. (2007, pp. 278ff.) conducted an analysis of the purpose of podcasts, their use, and their advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, McClung and Johnson (2010, pp. 82–83) examined the motives of podcast users.

Moreover, Mou and Lin (2015, pp. 475ff.) investigated the motivations underlying the adoption of podcasts in relation to socially perceived norms, interpersonal communication, and the theory of planned behaviour. Subsequently, Sundar and Limperos (2013, pp. 504–505) investigated the emergence of new gratifications associated with the advent of new media. Their findings indicate that each technological affordance gives rise to a distinctive set of gratifications. In his work, Domenichini (2018, pp. 46–47) explicitly focused on the use of podcasts in Germany and identified their potential and characteristics as an advertising medium. In their research, Perks, Turner and Tollison (2019, pp. 617–618) developed a benefit and gratification scale with the objective of elucidating the underlying satisfaction associated with the consumption of podcast content. This study differs from its predecessors in that it employs the benefit and gratification approach to examine media use, focusing specifically on podcasts in Germany. The objective is to identify the motives of podcast users and explain the underlying benefits of podcast use, specifically the value-added and gratification effects. Previous studies have primarily concentrated their analyses on the benefits and rewards within the context of traditional mass media. Additionally, studies have been conducted in relation to podcasts. However, the majority of these studies have surveyed non-podcast users and podcast listeners outside of Germany. This study, in contrast, surveys solely German podcast users, or individuals in Germany who express interest in trying podcasts, with the objective of identifying their motives and the benefits they derive from consuming the media content in question. As posited by McClung and Johnson (2010, p. 83), the act of downloading the content in question has already been subjected to analysis. Nevertheless, there has been a paucity of research into the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. The objective of this study is to extend the research conducted by McClung and Johnson (2010, pp. 82ff.) and others. This central research question will be answered based on the information collected and the central approaches of Uses and Gratification Theory as well as the Expectation-Gratification Model (GS/GO Model):

*RQ1.0: What motives are behind people turning to the podcast medium in Germany?*

According to Palmgreen (1984, p. 20ff.) there is a connection between media use behaviour and the underlying motives. In this context, there are other studies that measure media use behaviour in terms of the degree of satisfaction that the audience experiences through use and the extent or duration of use (Rubin, 1981, pp. 529ff; Rubin et al., 1986, pp. 353ff; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983, pp. 97ff; Elliot & Quattlebaum, 1979, pp. 61ff). In addition to studies on television and radio consumption, such analyses have also been carried out in relation to newspapers, telephones and the Internet. The result of this research is that the gratification factor and the motives for media use are an influential driver in relation to people's use of different media (Dobos, 1992, p. 29ff.; Finn, 1997, p. 507ff.; Greenberg, 1974, p. 71ff; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p. 175ff; Payne et al., 1988, p. 909ff; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979, p. 155ff; Palmgreen et al., 1980, p. 161ff; Palmgreen et al., 1981, p. 451ff). According to Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983, p. 97ff.), because of their different functions, media can project different images that show a mismatch between the choice of degree of need satisfaction and the user's needs. Greenberg (1974, p. 71ff.) found that viewers use media content differently, e.g. watch violent vs. non-violent television programmes, depending on what they are looking for in the medium, i.e. the motives behind its use. This research also found that the use of the medium of television, and the extent to which it is used, has an impact on the perception of reality and affinity of the British children surveyed (Greenberg, 1974, pp. 71ff). In 1979, Rubin followed Greenberg's findings and was also able to demonstrate a positive and significant correlation between most of the motives for watching television and affection for television. In particular, the factors of relaxation, excitement, forgetting, habit, pastime, socialising and learning were positively significant in relation to the degree of affection and the degree of reality of television content (Rubin, 1979, pp. 109ff). Rubin's 1983 study concluded that users of the medium of television who are guided by the underlying motives of entertainment, sociability, habit, pastime, etc., watch more television than people whose motive is to escape from the world (Rubin, 1983, p. 37ff.). This gives rise to the following research questions, which will now be transferred to the podcast medium with the help of existing theoretical findings on traditional media:

*RQ1.1: Which motives influence the intensity of podcast use?*

*RQ1.2: Which motives have an influence on the gratification gained from podcast use?*

*RQ1.3: Which motives have an influence on the benefits derived from the use of podcasts?*

*RQ1.4: What is the relationship between the motives reality, affinity and attitude in connection with the intensity of podcast use and the degree of gratification?*

*RQ1.5: How do the different motives/motive characteristics differ between the test subjects in terms of age and educational level?*

## **Methodology**

Chung and Kim's (2016, p. 13ff.) study explored the motivations for using podcasts in higher education. The researchers interviewed 636 university students. In line with the available literature, 11 factors and a specially created factor (education) were reduced to an appropriate number of factors using principal factor analysis. The result was further analysed using hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis. As a result, Chung and Kim identified six

central motives for podcast use among college students: (1) voyeurism/social interaction/companionship, (2) entertainment/relaxation/attention, (3) education/information, (4) pastime/escape, (5) habit, and (6) convenience. Following on from this study (Chung & Kim, 2016, p. 13ff.), all 12 factors are examined again in the present study as part of a comprehensive multiple linear regression analysis, and the resulting findings are used to advance research on podcast use in Germany.

The design of the questionnaire is based on the research work and motives behind media and especially podcast use by scholars Greenberg (1974), Rubin (1979), Rubin (1981), Bantz (1982), Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983), Rubin (1983), Perse and Rubin (1988) and Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), as well as Scherer and Schlütz (2004), McClung and Johnson (2010), Sundar and Limperos (2013), Chung and Kim (2016) and Perks et al. (2019). The various motives and needs are categorised and presented as motive dimensions and satisfaction typologies. These differ depending on the research question. In his study, Greenberg (1974), on the one hand, focused on the following typologies: relaxation, sociability, information, habit, pastime, self-identification, arousal and escape from everyday life. McQuail et al. (1972, p. 135ff.), on the other hand, focused on pastimes, social relationships, personal identity and environmental control (Schenk, 1987, p. 393-397). The study used an online survey distributed via WhatsApp and Facebook to various universities and podcast-related groups. Both surveys, the pre-pandemic survey and the post-pandemic survey, remained online for ten days. The data were analysed in SPSS with reference to Field (2013) for statistical guidance. In contrast to the previous studies, this study deliberately tried to exclude the dependent variable of usage by changing the wording of the questions and statements within the questionnaire. Instead of the usual statement in the literature *'I use podcasts because they are entertaining'*, the wording of the question was changed to *'Podcasts are entertaining'*. This was done to give the respondent more freedom in answering or judging the facts, without any subconscious influence regarding the individual interpretation of the word 'benefit'. There is also the possibility of a circular definition: *'I use podcasts because they are entertaining. - I use podcasts because they are entertaining'*. Motives should therefore be measured independently of the behaviour to be explained (Langens et al., 2005, p. 70ff.).

The two studies of podcast use, conducted in 2020 and 2024, captured meaningful trends and motivations of podcast listeners. The first study in 2020 included 196 participants, of whom 66.8% were female and 33.2% male, with an average age of 27. The second study in 2024 included 268 participants, also predominantly female (65%) and male (34%), with a slightly higher average age of 28. Both studies were aimed at podcast listeners in Germany and focused on usage behaviour, motives and preferences. The level of education of the participants in both studies was comparable: In the first study, 60.7% had an academic degree; in the second, the distribution was similar at 62%. The proportion of students and freelancers remained consistently high at around 58-60%, followed by permanent employees (around 27-28%). Most respondents were single (over 85%). Moreover, the evening was the preferred time to listen to podcasts (2020: 31%; 2024: 32%), followed by the afternoon (2020: 29%; 2024: 30%). The average number of episodes listened to increased from 6.34 episodes in 2020 to over 7 episodes in 2024, indicating a growing frequency of use. The most popular genres in both years were comedy and society/culture podcasts (both 35.7% in 2020 and 36.2% in 2024). Topics such as education, politics and lifestyle had observable increased demand in 2024, with educational content attracting around 25% of respondents. The smartphone was the main playback device in both studies (2020: 93.9%, 2024: 95.1%), while PCs/laptops and tablets were used much less frequently. Willingness to pay was limited in

both studies, but the proportion of those who would pay for podcasts increased from 26.5% in 2022 to just over 30% in 2024. Satisfaction with the German podcast offering remained stable, with 75% of participants in the first study and 77% in the second saying they were satisfied.

The motives of entertainment, social interaction, relaxation and escaping from everyday life emerged as the main motives for podcast use. In 2024, the proportion of respondents using podcasts for educational and informational reasons increased, which may be due to the growing variety of content and the increasing popularity of educational formats. Community and habit played a minor role in both years but were moderately relevant for specific community formats. The 7-point Likert scale showed consistent results in measuring the motivational factors mentioned, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 for almost all motives recorded. The reliable consistency of the factors confirms the relevance of the identified motives and their importance for podcast use. The high acceptance of smartphones as the main device for podcast use was striking in both studies, underlining the flexibility and mobile consumption behaviour of listeners. In summary, the results of both studies show that podcast usage in Germany is developing in a direction where flexible, mobile and educational formats are increasingly in demand. Both studies show that podcasts are not only used for entertainment, but increasingly for social interaction and information transfer.

Using multiple regression analyses to investigate the relationship between motivational factors such as entertainment, social interaction, escape from everyday life and the combined factor education/learning/information on the intensity of podcast use as well as perceived satisfaction and benefits. The analysis showed that affinity and attitude had a significant positive influence on the intensity of use. However, the combined factor education/learning/information had a negative effect on intensity in both studies, suggesting that podcasts are primarily used for entertainment purposes. The factors social interaction, escape from everyday life and education/learning/information were found to be significant in terms of perceived satisfaction and benefits. In the second study from 2024, the motive of education/learning/information was even more pronounced and was the most important predictor of benefit creation, underlining the increasing importance of podcasts as an educational medium. Here, perceived satisfaction and benefits increased significantly the more educational content the podcast provided. A further influence of the variables educational level and age on the intensity of use could not be proven significantly, but age had a negative effect on the motives entertainment and escape from everyday life. These results confirm the relevance of education, social interaction and escape as central motives for podcast use, with educational content becoming increasingly important.

## **Conclusion**

The present study corroborates the findings of previous research, confirming the presence of all the motives identified therein in the context of podcast use. The primary motives were found to be entertainment, social interaction, education/learning/information, affinity and attitude. Regarding the motive of education and information, this study yields a contrasting result when considered in the context of podcasts, in comparison to studies on other media. This motive appears to be a significant factor with a central function in podcasts. Considering the findings of this study and the motives identified, it is possible to discern both similarities and differences between podcasts, television and YouTube. The results of the podcast study and Rubin's (1983, pp. 37ff.) study of motives associated with television differ. In the case of the television study, for instance, the strongest correlation was identified between the motives

of pastime/habit and community. In contrast, the podcast study identified a correlation between the factors of pastime and escape from everyday life. In addition to the aforementioned factors, convenience also plays a pivotal role in media consumption. Prior research has identified similarities in the consumption of podcast and YouTube content (Chung & Kim, 2016, pp. 25ff.; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009, pp. 317ff.). To illustrate, the ease of access afforded by the context of media use serves to increase the degree of need satisfaction that is triggered in the user. In the context of podcasts, ease of access can be considered a distinctive motive, offering users a specific benefit and level of satisfaction. This aligns with the established characteristics of traditional media. In contrast with the findings of Chung and Kim (2016, pp. 25ff.) and Haridakis and Hanson (2009, pp. 317ff.), the convenience motive was not identified as a significant factor in this study. However, it is obvious that podcasts can be used not only for educational and informational purposes, but also to cover a broad area that has been little researched. Depending on personal background and mental state, they are thus used to satisfy human needs.

Liechtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983, p. 37ff.) found that the motives of entertainment, information and pastime had moderately large regression coefficients with the level of satisfaction with television. In the present study, however, the factors attitude, affinity and education/learning/information were mainly responsible for the increase in the level of satisfaction. The findings on the motives of attitude and affinity bring with them another important consideration for theory and practice. Both factors are significant predictors of the dependent variables intensity of podcast use, gratification and utility. According to Rubin (1983, p. 37ff.), one's inner attitude and affinity towards a (new) medium or media use contribute significantly to adaptation in this context, be it, for example, turning to the podcast medium or in the sense of media use to achieve satisfaction of a general nature. Accordingly, the intensity of use would also increase based on positive attitudes and affinity. Regarding the factors of attitude and affinity, podcasts show clear differences compared to the medium of television. Consequently, all that is needed to increase TV consumption are media-savvy users. Depending on the type of media, attitudes and behaviours, as well as the motives for attention related to use and satisfaction, lead to specific and unique interactions between people and the medium. For podcasts to appeal to the widest possible audience, their development should focus primarily on educational and informational motives, social interaction components, as well as leisure, entertainment and escape factors. Depending on the nature of the target audience's main motive, these components should form the main part of a podcast.

According to the literature reviewed, all twelve factors are relevant to answering *Research Question 1.0: What motives are behind people turning to the podcast medium in Germany?* applicable. However, the reliability test utilising Cronbach's alpha excluded the factors habit and community, in addition to individual items. Considering these findings, the primary motivations behind podcast consumption can be distilled into the following categories: entertainment, attention/excitement, relaxation, education/learning/information, convenience, voyeurism, social interaction, pastime and escape from everyday life. This result may be surprising, given that the media itself consistently elicits similar or analogous needs in its audience, while simultaneously offering a means of gratification for those needs. Nevertheless, in comparison to traditional media, podcasts exhibit only slight differences in terms of the motivational factors under examination. Due to the arbitrariness of the utility and gratification approach, many motives can be created ad libitum, so that not a rigid but a creative approach will lead to further progress in this area, also by changing the framework of the interviewees and the questionnaire layout.

*RQ 1.0: What motives are behind people turning to the podcast medium in Germany?*

The main motives for using podcasts are entertainment, attention, relaxation, education, convenience, voyeurism, social interaction, pastime and escape from everyday life. The results show a slight deviation from traditional media, which indicates the flexibility of the Uses and Gratifications Approach.

*RQ 1.1: Which motives influence the intensity of podcast use?*

Education/learning/information showed a negative influence on the intensity of use, as informative content is perceived as less entertaining. In contrast, affinity and attitude towards the platform have a positive influence on usage and encourage more intensive engagement with the medium.

*RQ 1.2: What motives influence the gratification gained from podcast use?*

Social interaction, escape from everyday life and education/learning/information increase the satisfaction experienced. Education/learning/information provides a form of security that contributes to increased satisfaction among users.

*RQ 1.3: Which motives have an influence on the creation of benefits when using podcasts?*

The motives of social interaction, escape from everyday life and education/learning/information correlate positively with benefits as they address basic social and personal needs.

*RQ 1.4: What is the relationship between the motives reality, affinity and attitude in connection with the intensity of podcast use and the degree of gratification?*

Affinity and attitude towards the platform have a positive effect on intensity of use and satisfaction, while the motive reality shows no significant effect. High affinity and positive attitude increase both frequency of use and satisfaction.

*RQ 1.5: How do the various motives/motive characteristics differ between the test subjects in terms of age and educational level?*

The level of education does not significantly influence the use, but a higher level of education could promote openness to new media. Age correlates negatively with the motive of entertainment and positively with the decreasing need to escape from everyday life, suggesting that the need to escape from reality decreases with age.

One of the limitations of this study is that the respondents are quite young and have an above-average level of education. Secondly, the sample, which was recruited via Facebook groups and WhatsApp, does not reflect the German population as a whole and the statistically significant independent variables explain only a small proportion of the total variance. Furthermore, due to the nature of the study, it was not possible to control environmental factors when conducting the survey. This means that it cannot be ruled out that respondents may have been under stress and therefore not concentrating when completing the questionnaires, and this may have influenced the results. This study also did not investigate podcast use in the context of multitasking and edutainment, which are becoming increasingly important factors in today's fast-paced world. The use of the Uses and Gratifications Approach has also been criticised for its theoretical weakness (Elliot, 1974, p. 249ff.). The arbitrariness of applying this theory to every possible medium is denounced, an unwavering combination of all media use behaviours and needs. According to Rubin (2009, p. 165ff.), there is a lack of clear statements in the context of usage studies of current media. This could be because the same measurement tools as for traditional media are consistently used, in a

slightly different way, to analyse benefits and satisfaction in relation to new media. This suggests that the same or similar gratifications are analysed and ultimately found for new media as for traditional media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, pp. 504ff; Unz et al., 2016, p. 22).

Based on the limitations of this work, the following implications arise for practice and for further research on podcast use in Germany. For example, more balanced groups of participants in terms of age, gender and education could be surveyed, which might allow other motives and satisfactions associated with podcast use to be observed. The results of this research in relation to the motive of education/learning/information also provide scope for further studies within the education and learning sector. More detailed research could lead to podcasts being used as a central means of educational support in Germany soon. Further research should also be carried out in edutainment and multitasking in Germany in connection with the use of podcasts as a medium, as entertainment during boring compulsory tasks is becoming increasingly important today. In the context of the criticism of the U&G Approach as a basic theory, future research could take more distance from literature to find new, yet unknown motives in connection with the use of modern media. Similarly, consistent findings in motive identification would mitigate criticisms and support its use as a basis for further research. In addition, the area of podcasts and podcast use is still relatively under-researched in Germany, so this work can serve as a central building block for further, more detailed analysis. Due to the delayed penetration of the German market with podcasts compared to the US, this market can be expected to grow strongly over the next few years. Podcasts and their reach, as well as their diverse and mobile applications, including support for education, as a tool for disseminating up-to-date information or simply to pass the time on the way to work, will grow from a niche to a mass medium of central economic importance. More and more companies, including music streaming providers such as Spotify, are recognising the flourishing sector and will invest large sums of capital in its future expansion (Becker, 2016).

In conclusion, the motives of education/learning/information, social interaction and escape from everyday life as well as the factors of affinity and attitude play a decisive role in the use of podcasts. Above all, education/learning/information is important for podcast listeners to satisfy their need for up-to-date information and content for further education and training. This shows that podcasts can be used as a suitable tool in the education sector and thus contribute to modernised learning. In addition to this motive, the second key factor is social interaction, which is ingrained in human nature and is addressed by every type of media. Whether it is exchanging information and content with other people or simply consuming it together. However, without a sufficiently high affinity and positive attitude towards the podcast medium, it is relatively unlikely that people will turn to the media content in question, so these two factors form the basis for podcast use in this study.

## References

- Alexander, M. (2020). Folgen Des Coronavirus: Stresstest für das öffentliche und private Leben. In FAZ.NET. Retrieved from <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/coronavirus-stresstest-fuer-das-oeffentliche-und-private-leben-16678664.html>
- Bantz, C. R. (1982). Exploring Uses and Gratifications: A Comparison of Reported Uses of Television and Reported Uses of Favorite Program Type. *Communication Research*, 9(3), 352-379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365082009003002>
- Barth, N. (2020). Merkel zur Corona-Krise "Seien Sie geduldig". In Tageschau.de. Retrieved from <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/coronavirus-deutschland-209.html>
- Becker, A. (2016). Nach Spotifys Schulz/Böhmermann-Deal: Kommt jetzt der große Podcast-Durchbruch? Retrieved from <https://meedia.de/2016/04/26/nach-spotifys-schulzboehmermann-deal-kommt-jetzt-der-grosse-podcast-durchbruch/>
- Carius, L. (2018). Jeder Fünfte hört Podcasts. In Bitkom Presseinformation. Retrieved from <https://www.bitkom.org/Presse/Presseinformation/Jeder-Fuenfte-hoert-Podcasts.html>
- Chung, M.-Y., & Kim, H.-S. (2016). College Student's Motivations for Using Podcasts. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 7(3), 13-28. <https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-7-3-2>
- Craig, C.M., Brooks, M.E., & Bichard, S.L. (2021). Podcasting on Purpose: Exploring Motivations for Podcast Use among young adults. *International Journal of Listening*, 37(1), 39-48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2021.1913063>
- Dobos, J. (1992). Gratification Models of Satisfaction and Choice of Communication Channels in Organizations. *Communication Research*, 19(1), 29-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365092019001002>
- Domenichini, B. (2018). Podcastnutzung in Deutschland. *Media Perspektiven*, 46-49.
- Duden. (2020). Definition Podcast. Retrieved from <https://www.duden.de/sprachwissen/sprachratgeber/Podcast#:~:text=Beim%20Podcast%20handelt%20es%20sich,produzieren%2C%20bereitstellen%20oder%20herunterladen%E2%80%9C>
- Elliot, P. (1974). Uses and Gratifications Research: A Critique and a Sociological Alternative. In J. G. Blumler, & E. Katz (Eds.), *The Uses of Mass Communication* (pp. 249-268). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Elliot, W. R., & Quattlebaum, C. P. (1979). Similarities in Patterns of Media Use: A Cluster Analysis of Media Gratifications. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 43(1), 61-72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570317909373954>
- Field, A. (2013). *Discovering Statistics Using: IBM SPSS Statistics*. (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.



- Finn, S. (1997). Origins of Media Exposure – Linking Personality Traits to TV, Radio, Print, and Film Use. *Communication Research*, 24(5), 507-529.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009365097024005003>
- Gatewood, K. (2008). Podcasting: Just the Basics. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 44(2), 90-93.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2008.10516502>
- Greenberg, B. S. (1974). Gratifications of Television Viewing and Their Correlates for British Children. In J. G. Blumler, & E. Katz (Eds.), *The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* (pp. 71-92). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Haridakis, P., & Hanson, G. (2009). Social Interaction and Co-Viewing with YouTube: Blending Mass Communication Reception and Social Connection. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53(2), 317-335.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150902908270>
- Harris, H., & Park, P. (2008). Educational usages of podcasting. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 39(3), 548-551. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00788.x>
- Jham, B. C., Duraes, G. V., Strassler, H. E., & Sensi, L. G. (2008). Joining the Podcast Revolution. *Journal of Dental Education*, 72(3), 278-281.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.0022-0337.2008.72.3.tb04493.x>
- Katz, E. (1959). Mass Communication Research and the Study of Popular Culture. *Studies in Public Communications*, 2, 1-6.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual. In J. G. Blumler, & E. Katz (Eds.), *The Uses of Mass Communications. Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* (pp. 19-32). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kleinz, T. (2019). Spotify und Co. - Was hinter dem Podcast-Boom steckt. In zdf heute. Retrieved from <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute/podcasts-was-hinter-dem-boom-steckt-100.html>
- Klöß, S., & Krösmann, C. (2019). Jeder Vierte hört Podcasts. In Bitkom Presseinformation. <https://www.bitkom.org/Presse/Presseinformation/Jeder-Vierte-hoert-Podcasts>
- Klöß, S., & Krösmann, C. (2020). Podcast-Boom hält an. In Bitkom Presseinformation. <https://www.bitkom.org/Presse/Presseinformation/Podcast-Boom-haelt-an>
- Kuhle, K. (2020). EINGRIFF IN GRUNDRECHTE: Corona darf unsere Freiheit nicht zerstören. In FAZ.Net. Retrieved from <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/grundrechte-coronavirus-darf-unsere-freiheit-nicht-zerstoeren-16694370.html>
- Laing, C., Wootton, A., & Irons, A. (2006). iPod! uLearn? *Current Developments in Technology-Assisted Education*, 514-518.

- Langens, T. A., Schmalt, H.-D., & Sokolowski, K. (2005). Motivmessung: Grundlagen und Anwendungen. In R. Vollmeyer, & J. C. Brunstein (Eds.), *Motivationspsychologie und ihre Anwendung* (pp. 70-89). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Lichtenstein, A., & Rosenfeld, L. B. (1983). Uses and Misuses of Gratifications Research: An Explication of Media Functions. *Communication Research*, 10(1), 97-109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365083010001005>
- Markgraf, D. (2020). PODCAST. In Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon. Retrieved from <https://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/definition/podcast-53629>.
- Markman, K. M. (2015). Everything Old Is New Again: Podcasting as Radio's Revival. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 22(2), 240–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2015.1083376>
- McClung, S., & Johnson, K. (2010). Examining the Motives of Podcast Users. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 17(1), 82-95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376521003719391>
- McQuail, D., Blumler, J. G., & Brown, J. R. (1972). The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective. In D. McQuail (Ed.), *Sociology of Mass Communications* (pp. 135-165). Middlesex, England: Penguin.
- Mou, Y., & Lin, C. A. (2015). Exploring Podcast Adoption Intention via Perceived Social Norms, Interpersonal Communication, and Theory of Planned Behavior. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 59(3), 475-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2015.1054997>
- Otto, K. (2020). Podcastnutzung steigt – Viele Veranstaltungen finden als Podcast statt. In wuv. Retrieved from [https://www.wuv.de/medien/podcastnutzung\\_steigt\\_viele\\_veranstaltungen\\_finden\\_als\\_podcast\\_statt](https://www.wuv.de/medien/podcastnutzung_steigt_viele_veranstaltungen_finden_als_podcast_statt)
- Palmgreen, P. (1984). Uses and Gratifications: A Theoretical Perspective. In R. N. Bostrom, (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 8* (pp. 20-55). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Palmgreen, P., & Rayburn, J. D. (1979). Uses and Gratifications and Exposure to Public Television: A Discrepancy Approach. *Communication Research*, 6(2), 155-179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027900600203>
- Palmgreen, P., Wenner, L. A., & Rayburn, J. D. (1980). Relations Between Gratifications Sought and Obtained. A Study of Television News. *Communication Research*, 7(2), 161-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365028000700202>
- Palmgreen, P., Wenner, L. A., & Rayburn, J. D. II. (1981). Gratification Discrepancies and News Program Choice. *Communication Research*, 8(4), 451-478. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365028100800404>
- Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. M. (2000). Predictors of Internet Use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(2), 175-196. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4402\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4402_2)

- Payne, G. A., Severn, J. J. H., & Dozier, D. M. (1988). Uses and Gratifications Motives as Indicators of Magazine Readership. *Journalism Quarterly*, 65(4), 909-913. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769908806500411>
- Perks, L. G., Turner, J. S., & Tollison, A. C. (2019). Podcast Uses and Gratifications Scale Development. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63(4), 617-634.
- Poleshova, A. (2020). Nutzeranteil von Podcasts in den USA bis 2020. In Statista Online, Retrieved from <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/685641/umfrage/anteil-der-nutzer-von-podcasts-in-den-usa/>
- Potter, D. (2006). Ipod, You Pod, We All Pod. *American Journalism Review*, 28(1), 64.
- Prokop, D. (1995). *Medien-Macht und Massen-Wirkung. Ein geschichtlicher Überblick*, Freiburg/Breisgau: Rombach Druck- und Verlagshaus.
- Rubin, A. M. (1979). Television Use by Children and Adolescents. *Human Communication Research*, 5(2), 109-120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1979.tb00626.x>
- Rubin, A. M. (1981). A Multivariate Analysis of '60 Minutes' Viewing Motivations. *Journalism Quarterly*, 58(4), 529-534. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769908105800402>
- Rubin, A. M. (1983). Television Uses and Gratifications: The Interaction of Viewing Patterns and Motivations. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 27, 37-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838158309386471>
- Rubin, Alan M. (2009). The Uses-and-Gratifications Perspective on Media Effects. In J. Bryant, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp. 165-184.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rubin, R. B., Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., Armstrong, C., McHugh, M., & Faix, N. (1986). Media Use and Meaning of Music Video. *Journalism Quarterly*, 63(2), 353-359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769908606300217>
- Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3-37. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02)
- Schenk, M. (1987). *Medienwirkungsforschung*, Tübingen: Mohr.
- Scherer, H., & Schlütz, D. (2004). Das neue Medien-Menü: Fernsehen und WWW als funktionale Alternativen? *Publizistik*, 49, 6-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-004-0002-7>
- Severin, W. J., & Tankard, J. W. (1986). *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, Uses*, New York, NY: Hastings House.
- Suckfüll, M. (2004). *Rezeptionsmodalitäten: Ein integratives Konstrukt für die Medienwirkungsforschung*, München: Reinhard Fischer Verlag.

Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(4), 504-525.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2013.845827>

Unz, D., Aelker, L., & Winter, S. (2016). Teil I Motivation. In N. C. Krämer, S. Schwan, D. Unz, & M. Suckfüll (Eds.), *Medienpsychologie: Schlüsselbegriffe und Konzepte* (pp. 15-37). (2nd ed.). Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer.

Verna, P. (2009). Podcasting goes Mainstream: The pods have arrived“, in eMarketer. Retrieved from <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Podcasting-Goes-Mainstream/1006937>

Webster, T. (2008). The Podcast Consumer Revealed 2008. The Arbitron/Edison Media Research Internet and Multimedia Study. Retrieved from [https://www.edisonresearch.com/the\\_podcast\\_con\\_1/](https://www.edisonresearch.com/the_podcast_con_1/)

***Indonesian Online Media Coverage Regarding the Thorium-Powered Nuclear Power Plant: Media Conglomeration Practices for Reporting Nuclear Issues to the Public***

Muhammad Yunus Zulkifli, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This research examined how media conglomeration practices made the public aware of the construction plan issue of a thorium-powered nuclear power plant on Gelasa Island, Central Bangka Regency, Bangka Islands Province through the coverage in three news articles on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* as online news media platforms out of media conglomerates in Indonesia, for the duration of 1 August 2022 to 31 August 2023. This qualitative research took the perspective of media theory and cultural political economy concepts, sharpened by the constructivist paradigm and news discourse analysis methods. This research showed that the discourse emerging from news articles on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* supported the government to build a thorium-powered nuclear power plant in Indonesia. Based on the government's perspective used in the reporting narratives of these two online media, it can be seen that the media which are actually controlled by media conglomerates who are also involved in practical politics tend to support all the programs promoted by the government. This affects the coverage in the media under the control of the media conglomerates. It can be seen how media ownership as a political economic power structure can influence media production and distribution, thereby causing media conglomeration practices which play an important role in regulating public opinion.

Keywords: Media Conglomeration, Thorium-Powered Nuclear Power Plant, Gelasa Island, Coverage, News Articles, Online News Media, Discourse, Media Ownership, Public Opinion

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Globally, the development of nuclear power plants (NPP) for Indonesia as the largest archipelagic country is very much in line with the energy transition in order to achieve the target of zero carbon emissions by 2060. It is because nuclear energy is a kind of clean energy as well as an alternative to fossil energy. The government needs to conduct a public campaign to increase the level of public acceptance of the use of NPP by educating the public to obtain accurate and non-misleading information regarding nuclear energy and NPP through the media.

One effective way to communicate the issue of the construction of NPP as a form of environmentally friendly nuclear technology to the public is through online news media. Online media is a new order that continues to develop along with technological advances, so it can become one of the media that will experience rapid development every year (Sari, 2020). This study used sources from *detikcom* (PT Trans Digital Media as the media owner) and *KOMPAS.com* (KG Media as the media owner). Based on the 2023 Digital News Report Data, *detikcom* was the most visited online media in Indonesia, while *KOMPAS* was the most trusted media in 2023 where *KOMPAS.com* is the online media under it (Reuters Institute & University of Oxford, 2023). In this case, *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* are the representation of media conglomeration because of their correlation with the political affiliation of the conglomerates or media owners. The NPP issue is very political and influences government policy, as well as the influence of media conglomerates on political parties or other politicians related to the portion of news coverage of the nuclear issue in the media they own.

Based on the topic of NPP in Indonesia in general on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* from August 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023, there were a total of 19 news articles consisting of 12 articles on *detikcom* and 7 articles on *KOMPAS.com*. In accordance with the dynamics related to the plan of NPP construction in Indonesia in several years, there is a specific issue regarding Gelasa Island, Central Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province which is being studied as a pilot plant for the location of the construction of a thorium-powered nuclear power plant (thorium-powered NPP) starting in 2022. Thorium is a radioactive element that is included in nuclear raw materials and can be mined in Indonesia (Tim detikcom, 2023; Dahnur & Alexander, 2023; Dahnur & Arief, 2023). Therefore, a number of articles found on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* were narrowed down to a specific scope regarding the plan to build a thorium-powered NPP on Gelasa Island, so that it is expected to provide a novelty through the current and prominent nuclear issue in Indonesia. In this case, there were 3 articles as data sources found: 1 article on *detikcom* entitled “Pulau Ini Dilirik Jadi Lokasi Pembangunan Pembangkit Bahan Baku Nuklir” and 2 articles on *KOMPAS.com* entitled “Bakal Jadi Percontohan se-Asia, Pembangkit Nuklir Thorium Rp 12 Triliun Dibangun di Babel” and “Indonesia Bakal Punya PLTN Thorium di Pulau Gelasa Babel”.

News discourse can be understood as a sociocognitive process involving sources, journalists and audiences operating in a shared cultural world and based on socially defined roles (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), so is the delivery of news related to this topic on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* which also framed the news discourse. In the issue of the construction of a thorium-powered NPP in these two online media, there is a practical side of media conglomeration through the emerging discourse. Therefore, this study attempted to answer one main question related to how the practice of media conglomeration made the public aware of the issue of the construction plan of a thorium-powered NPP on Gelasa Island, Central Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province through reporting in three news articles on *detikcom* and

*KOMPAS.com* as online news media platforms from media conglomerates in Indonesia, during the duration of August 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023.

With the aim of examining the practice of media conglomeration regarding the issue of the construction plan of a thorium-powered NPP on Gelasa Island in these two online media, this study used a qualitative approach, which usually functions to obtain detailed data and contains actual data (Sugiyono, 2015). The constructivist paradigm used in this study emphasizes that knowledge does not depend entirely on objective reality, but is constructed through subjective interpretation and individual mental construction, where reality is seen as the result of complex interactions between individual experiences, thoughts, and social contexts.

This study is expected to provide significance as an effective communication strategy for the government in educating the public through news related to nuclear issues in online media, as a substitute for mainstream media. In addition, the results of this study can also support the policy-making strategy by the government and actors in the issue of NPP development in Indonesia. It should be noted that the issue of NPP is political and cross-institutional, namely regulators including the legislative council and related government agencies; and operators in this case government research institutions in the context of nuclear technology.

### **Media Theory and the Concept of Cultural Political Economy**

This study took the perspective of media theory by Hesmondhalgh (2010) and the concept of cultural political economy by Sum & Jessop (2013). Understanding the concept of media ownership in media theory with the concept of cultural political economy opens up the connection between actors, including individuals, organizations, and the media in influencing how nuclear technology issues are reported by the media, and how these issues are understood and criticized by actors. The perspective of media theory related to the media industry and production that recognizes the important role of media ownership in shaping views, ideologies and understandings in society, and the concept of cultural political economy shows how media ownership as a political economic power structure can influence media production and distribution. This leads to media conglomeration, which plays an important role in regulating public opinion. Therefore, this study argued that conglomeration in the media can influence how nuclear issues, in this case the construction of NPP in Indonesia, are conveyed to the public, and the same media owners are able to influence the dominant narrative about the technology.

Media conglomeration is a phenomenon in which a large number of mass media such as television stations, newspapers, radio, and news websites are owned or controlled by a small number of large companies or groups. This relationship can have a significant impact on how information is delivered, accessed, and processed by the public and how scientists understand the role of media in society. With the influence of conglomeration in the media and its relation to the economic, political, and cultural contexts, there is a risk of concentration of power and media ownership in the hands of a large number of media companies (Fachrudin, 2022). This can shape the way news and information are delivered to the public, and will limit the diversity of perspectives on content choices in the media (Khumairoh, 2021). Especially if the owners of large media companies have significant political influence, because they have a platform to influence the views of the public and politicians (Teguh Priyo & Nurtyasih Wibawanti Ratna, 2023). In turn, this phenomenon determines how large the portion of scientific information on nuclear science issues is in the media, including online media, which also has an impact on the acceptance of nuclear science issues for the public.

## Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The author used the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method to analyze the news discourse in the online media *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com*. CDA is a method for analyzing both spoken and written discourse, where aspects of language and the accompanying context are both examined. This means that the language is used for certain purposes and practices (Silaswati, 2019; Ismail, 2008).

In general, the steps commonly taken in CDA begin with identifying news sources; analyzing the text structure which usually includes the title and lead, word choice, and sources or informants; analyzing social and political context; identifying power relations through narrative power by examining how articles balance between government narratives and criticism; evaluating discourse impact. Therefore, this CDA provides an understanding of how pro-government media conglomerates can shape and direct news narratives to support government policies, especially related to the construction of thorium-powered NPP as the main issue.

For critical discourse analysis (CDA) related to media conglomeration in reporting on the issue of thorium-powered NPP in Indonesia, especially in online media that support the government, the author correlated the thoughts of two figures who are very relevant in this case. **The first** is Fairclough's thinking which sees language as a social practice and connects linguistic analysis in texts with social, political, and ideological contexts; introduces the concept of 3-dimensional analysis involving texts, discourse practices, and social practices; and emphasizes that discourse not only reflects reality, but also shapes and changes it (Fairclough, 2013a; Fairclough, 2013b). CDA with Fairclough's thinking examines how discourse in the media contributes to the formation of power and domination, and how language is used to legitimize or challenge the status quo.

**The second** is Van Dijk's thinking which focuses on the relationship between discourse, power, domination, social injustice reflected in the text, and ideology; develops an analysis model that combines discourse structure with cognitive and social context; and emphasizes the importance of studying macro (themes and topics) and micro (sentences and words) structures in the text (Van Dijk, 2015; Van Dijk, 2013). As a linguist and sociologist, Van Dijk has done a lot of research on minority representation in the media and how discourse can function to reproduce social injustice. Van Dijk argued that the media is often a tool for reproducing dominant ideologies, so CDA analyzes how discourse and language structures reflect or reinforce power. This analysis includes cognitive structures, discourse access, and social cognition related to information control and ideology.

Fairclough and Van Dijk have a very suitable approach to analyzing how media discourse is shaped and also shapes power and ideology (Susilo et al., 2021; Cenderamata & Darmayanti, 2019; Humaira, 2018; Munfarida, 2014; Fauzan, 2013).

## Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Results

As an initial stage, the author identified 3 news articles on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* as follows:



## Data Source Identification

Article 1: news source from *detikcom* (March 20, 2023)

Article 2: news source from *KOMPAS.com* (March 30, 2023)

Article 3: news source from *KOMPAS.com* (June 12, 2023)

## Text Structure Analysis

Article 1 from *detikcom*

1. Title: “Pulau Ini Dilirik Jadi Lokasi Pembangunan Pembangkit Bahan Baku Nuklir”
2. Lead: information that currently a pilot plant is being studied on Gelasa Island for a Thorium Power Plant (the words “pilot plant” give a positive impression)
3. Word Choice: Indonesia's contribution, renewable energy, new energy barn, cheap, tin sand, accessory minerals, more advanced industry
4. Source Person: Ridwan Djamaluddin
5. Affiliation: government official (Acting Governor of the Bangka Belitung Islands)

Article 2 from *KOMPAS.com*

1. Title: “Bakal Jadi Percontohan se-Asia, Pembangkit Nuklir Thorium Rp 12 Triliun Dibangun di Babel”
2. Lead: information that the results of the ecological study provide a positive signal regarding the realization of the construction of the Thorium Power Plant on Gelasa Island, Bangka Belitung Islands Province. If it is built, then the Thorium Power Plant in Bangka Belitung will be the first in Indonesia, as well as being a national and Asian example (the words “ecological study results” give a positive impression).
3. Word Choice: environmental impact analysis, spatial changes, benefits, cheap electricity, many experts, positive impacts, risks can be avoided
4. Sources: Bob S. Effendi, Ridwan Djamaluddin
5. Affiliation: representative of company supporting the thorium-powered NPP project, (Director of Operations of PT Thorcon Power Indonesia), government officials (Acting Governor of the Bangka Belitung Islands)

Article 3 from *KOMPAS.com*

1. Title: “Indonesia Bakal Punya PLTN Thorium di Pulau Gelasa Babel”
2. Lead: information that the plan to build a Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in the Bangka Belitung Islands (Babel) continues to roll (the word “continues to roll” has a positive impression).
3. Word Choice: the importance of energy for Indonesia, nuclear energy to boost the economy, education for the community
4. Source: Agus Puji Prasetyono, Suganda Pandapotan
5. Affiliation: both government officials (Member of the National Energy Council, Acting Governor of Bangka Belitung)

Article 1 from *detikcom* was released on March 20, 2023, article 2 from *KOMPAS.com* was released on March 30, 2023, and article 3 from *KOMPAS.com* was released on June 12, 2023. In general, the political background in Indonesia throughout 2023 was still around the hustle and bustle of preparations for the 2024 General Election, including the Presidential Election and economic conditions influenced by inflation and post-pandemic recovery and their impact on political stability. On the other hand, the context of Indonesian foreign policy at that time focused on Indonesia's important role in ASEAN and in various international forums related

to global issues, relations and opportunities for cooperation with major countries such as the United States, China, and Russia.

Furthermore, the results of the general analysis above are correlated with the thoughts of Fairclough and Van Dijk as a whole, so that the following results are obtained:

### **Fairclough's Approach**

In this case, the author examined the news text by considering 3 dimensions of Fairclough's analysis, namely: text, discourse practice, and social practice.

#### **1. Text Analysis**

At the text level, this analysis looks at how thorium-powered NPP is reported in terms of word choice, sentence structure, and narrative construction. Then, *detikcom*, owned by PT Trans Digital Media, presented news in a more to-the-point journalistic style and used language that is easily digested by the general public. In reporting thorium-powered NPP, *detikcom* focused on the economic benefits and technological advantages of thorium power plants compared to uranium-based NPP, used words such as "Indonesia's contribution", "renewable energy", "new energy barn", "cheap", "tin sand", "accessory minerals", and "more advanced industry". The choice of words can form the perception that thorium power is a positive choice that is beneficial and does not carry many risks.

Furthermore, *KOMPAS.com* as part of KG Media, used more analytical language and provided a broader perspective on the implications of thorium use, such as potential environmental impacts, government policies, and public resistance. *KOMPAS.com* used more neutral or critical language, considering the pros and cons of this technology.

#### **2. Discourse Practices**

At the discourse practice level, this analysis examines how the news is produced, who the news sources are, and how the information is structured. The news about the thorium NPP on *detikcom* more quoted government or corporate parties involved in the development of this technology. This shows a pattern of discourse that supports the narrative of development and modern technology. The discourse that is constructed tends to support the thorium NPP project as a national energy solution, by highlighting the economic side or technological achievements. Such a discourse practice shows the tendency of *detikcom* to position itself as a media that supports modernization and national development, which is often in line with the interests of the government or large investors.

In contrast, *KOMPAS.com* presented a more balanced discourse by presenting various perspectives, including those from environmental activists, scientists, and the government. This discourse practice can reflect the efforts of *KOMPAS.com* to balance the narrative that supports the thorium NPP project with concerns regarding social, environmental, and political impacts. By citing various sources, the discourse constructed on *KOMPAS.com* can encourage readers to consider broader aspects of thorium energy development. For example, in article 2 *KOMPAS.com* presented the views of energy companies that highlight the potential for Indonesia's lack of readiness in terms of initial thorium processing, thus requiring technology transfer from foreign countries. In article 3 *KOMPAS.com* also highlighted the many negative stigmas in society related to the construction of NPP, thus requiring education.

### 3. Social Practices

At the level of social practices, CDA looks at how this discourse relates to the broader social context, including the economic and political interests of media conglomerates that influence reporting. As part of a media conglomerate that has close ties to various industries, the reporting by *detikcom* is influenced by the economic interests of large corporations or governments that invest in new energy technologies such as thorium. In this context, *detikcom* promoted the narrative that thorium-powered NPP is an innovative, safe energy solution that can strengthen Indonesia's position as an energy-independent country. This discourse is in line with the interests of conglomerates that have ties to the government and large industries. This social practice shows how *detikcom* can support the discourse on national development that prioritizes advanced technology and large infrastructure projects, without highlighting too many negative impacts.

On the other hand, *KOMPAS.com*, which is known to be more independent and has a reputation as a credible media, focused more on the social and environmental impacts of thorium-powered NPP. The social practices built through this discourse can reflect the commitment of KG Media to critical journalism by digging deeper into issues related to sustainability, development ethics, and local community rights. This is in line with KG Media's efforts to maintain their reputation as a media that prioritizes balance in reporting, although they are also not free from the influence of large corporations. In a broader social context, *KOMPAS.com* helped readers to not only see the economic and technological benefits of the thorium-powered NPP project, but also understand its potential impacts on the environment and society.

#### Van Dijk's Approach

In this case, the author examined the news text by considering 4 aspects, namely: structural analysis, discourse access, social cognition, and reflected ideology.

#### 1. Structural Analysis (Macro and Micro Structures)

##### *Macro Structure (Main Theme)*

In reporting on thorium-powered NPP, *detikcom* focused on the technological advantages and economic benefits of developing thorium as an energy source. The main theme raised is "Thorium-powered nuclear power plants as a cheap energy solution and Indonesia's contribution to renewable energy". This theme showed an emphasis on positive aspects, which supports the narrative of the government or corporations that want to encourage the use of new and renewable energy. In Van Dijk's analysis, this reflects a pro-development and pro-modernization ideology, in accordance with the interests of the media owner (PT Trans Digital Media).

Meanwhile, *KOMPAS.com* raised a more balanced theme, covering the pros and cons of thorium use. The main theme raised in article 2 is "Thorium-powered nuclear power plant development: national independence or foreign dependence?". This theme showed a diversity of perspectives, reflecting the media ideology that seeks to be a bridge between pro-government views and critical views from civil society or environmentalists.

The main theme raised in article 3 *KOMPAS.com* is "Thorium Nuclear Power Plant Development: Public Acceptance or Negative Stigma?". This theme similarly showed a

diversity of perspectives, reflecting the media ideology that seeks to be a bridge between pro-government views and critical views from civil society or environmental experts.

### ***Microstructure (Text Detail)***

At the microstructure level, *detikcom* used simple sentences and positive, evocative words, such as “Indonesia’s contribution”, “renewable energy”, “new energy barn”, “cheap”, “tin sand”, “accessory minerals”, and “more advanced industry”. This creates a narrative that supports the development of thorium-powered NPP without highlighting too much of the possible risks. In this case, the use of optimistic language is a way to strengthen an ideological position that supports government or large corporate policies.

In contrast, *KOMPAS.com* used more neutral or sometimes more critical language in presenting the news. In article 2, words or terms such as “longer time”, “gradual processing itself”, “funds”, “presidential regulation” appeared to describe the balance between positive potential and concerns about the development of thorium-powered NPP. This reflects a more complex approach in explaining this issue to the public.

In article 3, words or terms such as “in the early stages”, “along with the operation of the power plant”, “ecological study”, “synergize”, “education”, “negative stigma” appeared to describe the balance between positive potential and concerns about the development of thorium-powered NPP. This similarly reflects a more complex approach in explaining this issue to the public.

## **2. Access to Discourse**

Van Dijk emphasized that access to discourse is influenced by who has control over the information. In this context, access to news coverage of the thorium-powered NPP on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* can be greatly influenced by media conglomeration and relationships with sources of power, such as the government or large companies.

As part of PT Trans Digital Media, *detikcom* has close ties with industry and government. This can influence access to discourse, where pro-technology development parties such as government officials, academics who support the thorium-powered NPP, or representatives of the energy industry are more often used as news sources or informants. The sources who support this policy will be prioritized in news coverage, and those who are critical may appear less frequently or only be mentioned briefly.

The article 1 *detikcom* cited a local government official as the sole source, in this case the Acting Governor of the Bangka Belitung Islands (Ridwan Djamaluddin).

In contrast to *KOMPAS.com*, although it is also under a large media conglomerate, it often provides wider access to various parties, including groups that are critical of the government or certain policies. This access to discourse is reflected in the variety of sources, such as environmental experts, critical academics, and civil society groups. This shows an effort to create a more balanced and representative discourse.

The article 2 *KOMPAS.com* quoted 2 sources with different backgrounds: the Director of Operations of PT Thorcon Power Indonesia (Bob S Effendi) and the Acting Governor of the Bangka Belitung Islands (Ridwan Djamaluddin).

The article 3 *KOMPAS.com* also quoted 2 sources with different backgrounds: the Member of the National Energy Council/DEN (Agus Puji Prasetyono) and the Acting Governor of Bangka Belitung (Suganda Pandapotan). Some examples are as follows:

### 3. Social Cognition

Social cognition refers to how people's views are influenced by the discourse in the media. In this case, the coverage of the thorium NPP by *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* can shape public understanding of the risks and benefits of this technology, as well as who benefits from its development.

Through the coverage that tends to highlight the positive side of the thorium NPP, *detikcom* plays a role in shaping social cognition that supports modernization and new energy technology. The public will tend to see this project as part of a national agenda that is important for the progress of the country, without considering too much of its environmental or social impacts. This discourse can create the perception that such a project is necessary to achieve Indonesia's energy independence.

In terms of its impact, the public exposed to news by *detikcom* may be more accepting of the thorium NPP project as something that is not too controversial, and part of national technological progress.

Conversely, with more critical and balanced coverage, *KOMPAS.com* can shape social cognition that is more aware of the implications of the thorium NPP project. *KOMPAS.com* readers may be more likely to question the long-term impacts, both environmental and social, and demand greater transparency and accountability from the government and companies involved.

In terms of impact, the public exposed to news by *KOMPAS.com* may be more critical of the project, considering both the benefits and risks, and more likely to encourage open public debate.

### 4. Reflected Ideology

The ideology reflected in the reporting of *detikcom* is pro-development and pro-technology, where the narrative around the thorium-powered NPP emphasizes the benefits and modernization aspects. This is in accordance with the position of the media which often supports the agenda of the government and large corporations, which focus on economic and infrastructure progress. In this case, *detikcom* plays a role as a reinforcement of the development ideology, where criticism or risk tends to be minimized.

In contrast, the ideology that emerges from the reporting of *KOMPAS.com* focuses more on balance and social responsibility. By highlighting the positive and negative sides, *KOMPAS.com* reflects a more independent and critical media ideology, where the public is invited to consider the broad impact of each policy or major project.

Therefore, through the CDA results of these 2 figures, the main question has been answered regarding how the media conglomeration practices made the public aware of the issue of the construction plan of a thorium-powered NPP on Gelasa Island, Central Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province through reporting in three news articles on *detikcom* and

*KOMPAS.com* as online news media platforms from media conglomerates in Indonesia, during the duration of August 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023.

## Conclusion

From a CDA perspective, according to Fairclough, *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* can influence the public's perspective on thorium-powered NPP through their choice of words, news framing, and the discourse they construct. Moreover, *detikcom* tends to support the narrative of development and modernization that is in line with the interests of the government and industry. Meanwhile, *KOMPAS.com* tends to be more critical and tries to provide a more balanced view, inviting the audience to consider various aspects of the development of this technology. The influence of media conglomeration is seen in how the news is structured and pushed, which ultimately influences how the public understands important issues such as nuclear energy.

Using Van Dijk's approach, we see that *detikcom* tends to support the dominant narrative that benefits the government and corporations through pro-modernization and pro-technology news related to thorium nuclear power plants. Meanwhile, *KOMPAS.com* emphasizes balanced news, by opening up space for various parties, including those critical of the project. Different access to discourse in these two media influences how the public understands the issue of thorium-powered NPP, where *detikcom* promotes acceptance of this project, while *KOMPAS.com* encourages critical and balanced discussions.

This study showed that the discourse that emerged from the news articles on *detikcom* and *KOMPAS.com* supports the government to build a thorium-powered NPP in Indonesia. Based on the government's perspective used in the news narratives of these two online media, it can be seen that the media which are actually controlled by media conglomerates who are also involved in practical politics tend to support all programs carried out by the government. This affects the news coverage in these media or media that are under the control of these media conglomerates. In this case, it can be seen how media ownership as a political economic power structure can influence media production and distribution, resulting in media conglomerates playing an important role in regulating public opinion.

Based on Fairclough's approach, it can be seen how news texts are specifically designed to support the government's views and how media conglomerates facilitate the spread of these views. Meanwhile, by applying Van Dijk's theory we understand how the media frames a thorium-powered NPP as a solution to national energy problems, and may ignore the risks or criticisms that come from independent parties. These two CDA figures provide a very effective analytical tool for understanding how news discourse can be shaped by wider political and economic forces, especially in the context of media conglomerates that have common interests with governments.

## Acknowledgements

The author expresses his deep gratitude to LPDP (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan) for generously providing full financial assistance for his Doctorate degree as well as his participation in this conference and the publication.

## References

- Cenderamata, R. C., & Darmayanti, N. (2019). Analisis Wacana Kritis Fairclough pada Pemberitaan Selebriti di Media Daring. *Literasi: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia Serta Pembelajarannya*, 3(1), 1–8.
- Dahnur, H., & Alexander, H. B. (2023, March 30). *Bakal Jadi Percontohan se-Asia, Pembangkit Nuklir Thorium Rp 12 Triliun Dibangun di Babel*. Kompas.Com. <https://lestari.kompas.com/read/2023/03/30/060000086/bakal-jadi-percontohan-se-asia-pembangkit-nuklir-thorium-rp-12-triliun?page=all>
- Dahnur, H., & Arief, T. M. V. (2023, June 12). *Indonesia Bakal Punya PLTN Thorium di Pulau Gelasa Babel*. Kompas.Com. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2023/06/12/195526078/indonesia-bakal-punya-pltn-thorium-di-pulau-gelasa-babel>
- Fachrudin, A. (2022). Oligarki Demokrasi & Konglomerasi Media Massa. *Penerbit Literasi Demokrasi Indonesia (Literasindo)*.
- Fairclough, N. (2013a). Critical discourse analysis. In *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 9–20). Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (2013b). *Language and power*. Routledge.
- Fauzan, U. (2013). Analisis wacana kritis model Fairclough. *Jurnal Pendidik*, 5(2), 1–10.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2010). Media industry studies, media production studies. *Media and Society*, 5, 145–164.
- Humaira, H. W. (2018). Analisis wacana kritis (AWK) model Teun A. Van Dijk Pada pemberitaan surat kabar Republika. *Literasi: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia Serta Pembelajarannya*, 2(1), 32–40.
- Ismail, S. (2008). Analisis wacana kritis: Alternatif menganalisis wacana. *Jurnal Bahas Unimed*, 69TH, 74626.
- Khumairoh, U. (2021). Dampak konglomerasi media terhadap industri media massa dan demokrasi ekonomi politik di era konvergensi media. *Muqoddima Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Riset Sosiologi*, 2(1), 63–78.
- Munfarida, E. (2014). Analisis wacana kritis dalam perspektif Norman Fairclough. *KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 8(1), 1–19.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10(1), 55–75.
- Reuters Institute, & University of Oxford. (2023, June 21). *Digital News Report 2023*. Reutersinstitute.Politics.Ox.Ac.Uk.

- Sari, W. P. (2020). Technology and Online Media Conglomeration. *Tarumanagara International Conference on the Applications of Social Sciences and Humanities (TICASH 2019)*, 53–57.
- Silaswati, D. (2019). Analisis wacana kritis dalam pengkajian wacana. *METAMORFOSIS| Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Indonesia Dan Pengajarannya*, 12(1), 1–10.
- Sugiyono, P. D. (2015). *Metode penelitian Pendidikan (Pendekatan Kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D) (2015 Ed)*. Alfabeta.
- Sum, N.-L., & Jessop, B. (2013). *Towards a cultural political economy: Putting culture in its place in political economy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Susilo, D., Kom, S. I., & Kom, M. I. (2021). *Analisis wacana kritis van dijk: sebuah model dan tinjauan kritis pada media daring*. Unitomo Press.
- Teguh Priyo, S., & Nurtyasih Wibawanti Ratna, A. (2023). THE IMPACT OF MEDIA CONGLOMERATION IN THE MEDIA CONVERGENCE ERA ON SELECTION OF NEWS CONTENT. *JOURNAL OF TIANJIN UNIVERSITY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*, 56.
- Tim detikcom. (2023, March 20). *Pulau Ini Dilirik Jadi Lokasi Pembangunan Pembangkit Bahan Baku Nuklir*. Detikcom. <https://finance.detik.com/energi/d-6628813/pulau-ini-dilirik-jadi-lokasi-pembangunan-pembangkit-bahan-baku-nuklir>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2013). Ideology and discourse analysis. In *The Meaning of Ideology* (pp. 110–135). Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 466–485.

**Contact email:** muhammad.yunus32@ui.ac.id



***Photography and Visual Diary: Participatory Visual Research for Creating Educational Toys That Enhance Social Skills in Children With Disabilities***

Lia Herna, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Intervention in education regarding social relations, especially understanding profiles and role tasks within the family, becomes a fundamental social issue experienced by children with mental and intellectual disabilities. Due to their limitations in communication and interaction with others, these children find it challenging to comprehend the complexity of social relations within the family. Educational toys are a fun learning medium, and with their holistic approach, they can improve children's motor, sensory, and creative skills. In designing educational toys, it is essential for researchers to collaborate with parents, companions, and children as key stakeholders. Researchers use the method of participatory visual research (PVR), specifically photograph diaries and visual diaries, to understand the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of children with mental and intellectual disabilities that cannot be conveyed through words. The research team consisted of 6 people who collaborated with 12 children with intellectual disabilities, 12 parent representatives, and 4 accompanying teachers at the elementary school level at Ulaka Special School, South Jakarta. In its implementation, photographic diaries and visual diaries were distributed to teachers' companions at school, which will be filled by the child and assisted by the parents for 1 week. The results of the photographic diary and visual diary were analyzed using thematic analysis, which generated insight for educational toys. This research shows that the PVR method is effective in providing deep insight into creating educational solutions that meet user needs.

Keywords: Photography Diary, Visual Diary, Educational Toys, Disabilitas Intellectual, Children

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) states that children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID) have limited intellectual functioning and adaptive behavioral characteristics in conceptual, social and practical skills seen from the age before 22 years of age (Benitez et. al., 2020; AAIDD\_CMS, 2024). Interpersonal skills are a challenge in themselves for children with ID (Freitas, L. & Del Prette, Z. A., 2010). With the involvement of ID, Social Skills (SS) disorders were seen to be greater compared to children with autism, ADHD and related to behavioral problems such as anxiety, withdrawal and social isolation (Freitas & Del Prette, 2013). SS is needed in childhood to create harmonious relationships with parents, peers and for a successful transition in adulthood and work (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013). SS is a protective factor in behavioral problems, allowing children to interact better with family members, teachers and peers, for social development and problem-solving (Bolsoni-Silva et al., 2011; Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013). On the other hand, if children have difficulties in SS, it will cause long-term negative consequences, such as disability in social interactions, psychological stress and decreased quality of life (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013). Dmitrieva et al (2020) in their study showed that preschool children with disabilities, including ID, lack systemic social competence. According to Garrote (2017) identified that ID children have lower SS compared to children without disabilities related to social Pro-behavior, cooperative, leadership, boundary setting, and social participation. The journey of understanding social relations can start from the smallest environment, namely the family, especially understanding the profile and duties of roles in the family.

Given the importance of SS for ID children, the role of educators is very important, both parents, teachers and other accompanying agents. Del Prette and Del Prette (2008) describe 4 categories that can develop SS from ID children, such as the category 'Building an interactive context that has the potential to educate', such as regulating the physical environment, organizing the material; the category 'Transmitting or exposing SS content', such as paraphrasing; category 'Establishing boundaries and disciplines such as describing unwanted and desirable behavior', organize negotiations; and finally the 'Positive monitoring' category which involves praise, encouragement and empathy. An effective learning model to improve children's SS with their environment, especially starting from social relations with the family, can use educational toys which include development that prioritizes a structured and iterative approach, given in a planned and directed manner using clear instructions and support from teachers and companions (Satria et. al., 2023) Educational toys are important for children's development, as they contribute positively to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional systems, and provide opportunities for companions to engage directly with children. (Healey & Mendelsohn, 2018). In addition, educational toys can be adjusted to the individual needs of children, in terms of speech, motor, social interaction or cognitive development skills. (Leonard & Hill, 2014). Toys can adapt to a child's specific developmental stage or learning difficulties. With toys, children can explore their senses. Through sensory (sight, touch, sound) to help children explore their environment and regulate their sensory input. For children with sensory processing difficulties, these toys are helpful in creating a calm and stimulating learning experience (Guha & Murthy, 2018; Healey & Mendelsohn, 2018).

Considering that SS learning is very important for ID children, this study aims to design an educational toy that can help ID children in building SS, and understand social roles in the family.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach using participatory visual research (PVR), especially Photography and Visual Diary. The research team consisted of 6 people who collaborated with 14 ID children, 14 pairs of parents, and 4 accompanying teachers at SLB Ulaka Penca, South Jakarta, who were 7 to 14 years old equivalent to grades 1-6 of elementary school. In this study, the researcher was assisted by the school to collect data with Photography and Visual Diary.

At the time of its implementation, Photography and Visual Diary were made in 1 A4 size book of 32 pages including the book cover, to make it easier for participants to fill in. The Photography and Visual Diary is distributed through teachers at school, which will be filled out by parents for 1 week every day from Saturday to Sunday, the next week.

In the photography and visual diary, it is entitled "Me and My Family" which is expected to describe the social relationship between ID children and their nuclear family, namely Father, Mother, Brother and Sister. In the photography and visual diary, it contains activities that can be completed by parents after discussing with ID children, based on the AEIOU approach, where A (activities) how the child's daily activities are; E (environment) how the environment can affect children's behavior and interactions and vice versa, I (Individual) is a child who has emotions (happy, sad, disappointed), needs and behaviors, O (Object) how objects interact with children and vice versa; and U (understanding) in the context of the relationship between children, activities, objects and the environment in which the relationship takes place (Chen et. al., 2012). This approach is needed to learn the attitude of 'empathy' and 'reflection' in action, to collect data that has the potential to identify opportunities and needs of users and evaluate every decision made in the design process of Schon, D. A. (1983).

In the photography diary, parents are asked to take photos of their children's daily activities and stick them on the 'My Daily Photos' sheet and tell about what activities are carried out, when the activities take place, how long, where the activities occur, with whom, how they express themselves during the activity, whether there are changes at the beginning and end of the activity and how the child responds during the activity. Every day, his parents were asked to stick 5 photos and tell him, for 7 days in a row.

Visual Diary here parents are asked to fill out an activity sheet with their child to find out the child's understanding of their physique and members of the nuclear family, such as father, mother, brother and sister. Then parents analyze the habits carried out by children which are divided into 3, namely according to 1. the learning style, namely visual, auditory, or kinesthetic; 2. The 9 types of intelligence according to Gardner; and 3. Bloom's taxonomy is affective, motor and cognitive. After that, parents are played to fill their children's daily activities from 5 am to 12 pm for 7 consecutive days.

The results of the photography and visual diary were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, to identify patterns in qualitative data and report them as themes produced by researcher Lochmiller, C. (2021).

## Result and Discussion

The results of the Photography Diary are obtained as follows:

1. Routine and Structured Activities
  - a. Description of Daily Activities: from the photos, it can be seen that the daily activities carried out by children such as playtime, homework time, wake-up time and night sleep time, occur regularly and structured, so as to provide stability and order for children.
  - b. Activities that provide happiness: many photos depict moments of happiness for children, such as playing with friends, participating in dance events, coloring. This indicates that elements of creativity and social interaction play an important role in children's emotions.
2. Social Interaction and Family Relationships
  - a. Togetherness with Family: many photos depict children being together with family and siblings, such as playing with older siblings or parents in the park. This shows the importance of social and emotional support from the family, and creates a strong bond with the family so that the child feels comfortable carrying out daily activities.
  - b. Relationships with Friends and Teachers: In addition to Family, interactions with friends and teachers are also seen in photos, for example when children are in class doing activities with classmates and teachers. This shows the role of the school environment as a social space for children.
3. New Development and Abilities
  - a. New Achievements and Abilities: some photos show when children play new skills, such as playing an angklung musical instrument or participating in a new sport. This shows that ID children can be able to develop their talents by trying new things, where success in this activity builds children's confidence and motivation. Physical activity can also improve children's social and physical skills.
  - b. Response to Challenges: some photos show where the child faces challenges such as adapting to the child's discomfort, such as cleaning the room, sweeping the yard, etc. This shows the resilience and adaptive abilities of children, as well as the active role of parents and teachers in supporting them when facing obstacles.
4. Emotional Expression and Self-Regulation
  - a. Positive Emotional Expressions: many photos depict children looking happy, such as smiling, laughing, playing in the water, or riding a swing in the park, as well as when with family. This shows that fun activities and positive interactions are very important in supporting children's emotions. Children are also happy when they receive positive attention from family members and surroundings.
  - b. Overcoming Negative Feelings: on the other hand, there are also photos that show sadness because of their unfulfilled desires or dislike of the rules at home or at school. In this case, the role of parents is very important in helping children calm down and directing to calming activities.
5. Independence and Participation in Activities
  - a. Initiative and Independence: Many photos illustrate that children can also be independent, by doing their own daily activities such as eating by themselves, wearing their own clothes, helping their mother cook. This shows the process of developing independence and the initiative of children to carry out their own activities with minimal support.
  - b. Involvement in Classroom or School Activities: photos of children doing activities such as dancing, group learning, drawing, showing the role of the

school environment in social skills with group activities to support cooperation and active engagement.

The conclusion of this analysis is that the daily life of children has shown a structured routine that can help children to stabilize children's emotions, supported by the presence of family, friends and teachers to help social interactions that support children's SS and emotional development. Activities involving the family strengthen emotional bonds, while school interactions help children learn to work together and SS.

The achievement of new skills by children builds confidence and motivation. The ability to express positive emotions and manage negative feelings through parental assistance shows a supportive environment to support children's emotional regulation. Overall, these findings demonstrate the need for educational toys designed to support routine, social interaction, creativity, emotion regulation, and self-development for children with ID.

As for the visual diary, because there are more parents' views on their children, here are the results of the analysis:

1. Parents' Observations on Happiness. Parents often tell how children look happy in familiar daily activities. For example, one parent recounted, "My child is happy to play in the park and meet his friends," which shows the importance of social interaction in a safe and familiar environment. Another example reads, "I am very happy when I participate in angklung lessons at school," where parents observe their children's happiness when participating in structured and inclusive activities.
2. Parents' Views on Grief and Challenges. On the contrary, sadness is often seen from the wishes of children that are not fulfilled. For example, one parent mentioned, "the child feels sad because he can't go for a walk when mom is away," which shows the emotional bond of the child to always be close to the family. Another note stated, "sad when friends don't want to play together," indicating the child's desire to have social relations and parents' awareness of how interaction with friends can affect children's emotions.
3. Frustration and Regulatory Strategy. Moments of frustration often arise, especially when routines are disrupted. For example, one parent wrote, "the child gets upset when he is not allowed to play outside during the day," which reflects the child's frustration with the limits. Parents often note solutions to these situations, such as "the solution is to distract attention to other activities such as drawing or listening to music." This note shows the dedication of parents to help children cope with this frustration by providing comfortable alternative activities for the child.
4. Family and Social Dynamics. Family is the main aspect of a child's emotions, notes about moments of togetherness with family become a positive experience for children. One of the notes reads, "it's great to be able to accompany mom and dad to the park, making the child feel closer," which shows the importance of togetherness activities. Similarly, parents often record moments of playing with siblings or family gatherings, such as "the child is very happy when he can play with his brother in the morning." These notes reflect parents' understanding of the value of family time for children's social emotions.
5. Adaptive Response and Growth. Parents play an important role in helping children manage their emotions, especially when they are disappointed, angry and stressed. They show dedication in teaching adaptability. For example, one parent observed, "when the child is disappointed because he can't buy ice cream, I gently explain it and invite him to another activity," which shows a subtle diversion strategy. Another

example is "the solution is to try to be patient and try to understand the rules that apply at home or at school," which shows the efforts of parents in building patience and understanding.

The conclusion of this analysis shows that emotional stability and the creation of positive emotions come from familiar, structured, and together activities with the people closest to them such as family. On the other hand, emotional challenges arise when children's expectations are not met or their routines are disrupted. This record also shows the dedication of parents in building the adaptive ability and independence of ID children and the importance of providing an environment that supports the emotional and social development of children holistically. This shows the embrace of educational toys that can strengthen emotional regulation, promote happiness and facilitate social interaction.

In addition to thematic analysis, the author conducts behavioral observation analysis, to provide an overview based on general behavior, activities followed, emotional responses and children's preferences in their daily lives. The following are the results of the analysis of behavioral observations and their implications for educational toys:

1. Ability to Remember Notes and Music  
In daily habits, it can be seen that 10 out of 14 children have an easier time remembering notes and music. This suggests that more than half of children are more responsive to auditory stimuli than to visual or verbal instructions. These findings could be used to design toys or activities that involve music or tunes to attract their attention.
2. Fun of Playing Outdoors  
Most children love outdoor play. This suggests that outdoor environments and physical activity may be more appealing to them, so it's important to consider outdoor activities in the creation of educational toys.
3. Response to Calls  
Four children were seen not responding when called, indicating a challenge in interaction or focus. This aspect can be a consideration in making tools that can attract children's attention in a more effective way, for example through sound effects or attractive visuals.
4. Preference for Playing Alone  
More than half of the children prefer to play alone and only play with siblings for a short time. This is a challenge on how to make children to do social relations more often to help SS.
5. Difficulty Distinguishing Colors and Numbers  
Most children have difficulty distinguishing colors and not recognizing numbers. This is an important finding that suggests that games or toys that rely on colors or numbers as key components may need to be designed with other elements that are easier for children to understand.
6. Lack of Compliance with the Rules of the Game  
A total of 10 children did not play according to the set rules. This may be due to limitations in understanding the rules or preferences for free play. Flexible toys, which are less structured, may be more suitable for them.
7. Participation in Therapy  
Less than half of the children regularly attend therapy. This may affect their adaptive abilities. Therefore, toys designed to support therapy at home can be a useful solution.

#### 8. Short Concentration Range

Children's attention spans are very short, a maximum of 15 minutes per activity, and they are easily distracted. These findings suggest that the toys or activities created should be short, engaging, and able to distract them quickly, such as using interactive features that can change dynamically.

### Conclusion

This study illustrates the complexity of understanding the emotional and social development of children with special needs through the lens of parental observation. While parents provide valuable insights, their perspectives are often shaped by personal expectations and societal norms, which can overlook a child's unique emotional experiences. By combining parental input and children's direct expressions, through photographs and visual diaries, a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of their development can be achieved.

From this study, we found that Participatory Visual Research (PVR) in photography and visual diaries is effective in understanding the social and sensory needs of children with disabilities.

These findings provide a solid basis for designing educational toys that address emotional, social, and cognitive development, i.e. the data shows that the data shows the importance of routines, structures, and social support in their lives. Creative and social activities have been shown to improve these children's happiness and emotional well-being, while changes in routines often trigger frustration. The role of parents as emotional mediators is very important, especially in helping children manage negative feelings and facilitate activities that make them feel more comfortable and confident.

In this study, there are still many shortcomings that are hoped to get maximum results in the future. The suggestions for future research are as follows:

1. Increased Child Participation: Future research should aim to involve children more in the visual diary by allowing them to contribute through their own drawings.
2. Parental Enthusiasm: Most parents showed unexpected high enthusiasm during the process of completing the photography and visual diary, despite the challenges of daily life with children with special needs. Their participation is highly appreciated.
3. Support for Parents: Some parents experienced difficulties with reading and writing, and they received significant assistance from school teachers, highlighting the importance of external support.
4. There are notable biases in how parents document their children's lives, including selection bias, where positive moments are more frequently highlighted, and expectation bias, where parents' hopes for their child's progress shape the narrative. These biases underscore the importance of combining parental observations with the child's own perspective for a more balanced understanding.
5. The findings and interpretations from parental observations and visual diaries must be validated by professional psychologists to ensure accuracy in understanding the emotional and social dynamics of children with special needs.

## References

- Benitez, P., Kirchner, L. de F., Ribeiro, G. W., & Tatmatsu, D. I. B. (2020). Educational social skills of parents of children with and without intellectual disability. *Psico-USF*, 25(3), 415–424. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-82712020250302>
- Bolsoni-Silva, A. T., Loureiro, S. R., & Marturano, E. M. (2011). Problemas de comportamento e habilidades sociais infantis: modalidades de relatos. *Psico*, 42(3), 354-361.
- Chen, C., Branham, R., Hsiao, W., Chen, S., & Huang, Y. (2012). Workshop Process for Design Education by Using AEIOU Approach to Wayfinding Application, in Israsena, P., Tangsantikul, J. and Durling, D. (eds.), *Research: Uncertainty Contradiction Value - DRS International Conference 2012, 1-4 July*, Bangkok, Thailand. <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers/drs2012/researchpapers/19>
- Criteria. AAIDD\_CMS. (2024). <https://www.aidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition>
- Del Prette, Z. A. P., & Del Prette, A. (2008). Um sistema de categorias de habilidades sociais educativas. *Paidéia*, 18(41), 517-530. *Ribeirão Preto*. doi:10.1590/S0103-863X2008000300008
- Del Prette, Z. A. P., & Del Prette A. (2013). *Psicologia das habilidades sociais na infância: teoria e prática* (6a ed.). Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Dmitrieva E. E., Medvedeva, E. Y., Olkhina, E.A., Uromova, S. E., Kashtanova, S. N. (2020). The Development of Social Competence in Preschoolers with Disabilities as the Condition for Their Successful Educational Integration. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*. 8(7), 3244-3250. DOI:10.13189/ujer.2020.080754
- Freitas, L. C., & Del Prette, Z. A. P. (2010). Validade de construto do Sistema de Avaliação de Habilidades Sociais para crianças brasileiras com deficiência intelectual. *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, 44, 312- 320. doi:10.1590/S0102-79722010000300003
- Freitas, L. C. de & Del Prette, Z. A. P. (2013). Habilidades sociais de crianças com diferentes necessidades educacionais especiais: Avaliação e implicações para intervenção. *Avances en Psicología Latinoamericana*, 31(2), 364-382. Recuperado de: <https://revistas.urosario.edu.co/index.php/apl/article/viewFile/2144/2102>
- Garrote, A. (2017). The relationship between social participation and social skills of pupils with an intellectual disability: A study in inclusive classrooms. *Frontline Learning Research* 5(1), 1-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14786/flr.v5i1.266>
- Guha, S., & Murthy, K. (2018). Understanding The Role Of Toys In Child Development: Special Focus On Traditional Channapatna Toys. *Indian journal of applied research*, 7.



Healey, A., & Mendelsohn, A. (2018). Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children in the Digital Era. *Pediatrics*, *143*. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-3348>

Leonard, H., & Hill, E. (2014). Review: The impact of motor development on typical and atypical social cognition and language: a systematic review. *Child and adolescent mental health*, *19* 3, 163-170. <https://doi.org/10.1111/CAMH.12055>

Lochmiller, C. (2021). Conducting Thematic Analysis with Qualitative Data. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008>

Satria, M. H., Aliriad, H., Kesumawati, S. A., Fahritsani, H., Endrawan, I. B., & Adi, S. (2023). Model pengembangan keterampilan motorik My Home Environment terhadap anak disabilitas intelektual. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, *7*(2), 2336–2347. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i2.4415>

Schon, D. A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

**Contact email:** [lia.herna@umn.ac.id](mailto:lia.herna@umn.ac.id)



***Empowering Indonesian Ceramicists Through Participatory Design:  
Co-designing a Mobile App***

Rani Aryani Widjono, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Ceramics is a form of culture that carries traditional values that have existed for a long time in Indonesian society. More than 100 Indonesian ceramicists gathered in ID Ceramics community, an Indonesian ceramicist community initiated by ceramic enthusiasts in Jakarta. Every ceramicist has many ways of explorations and practices in making ceramic glazes. The iterative process of making ceramic glazes is crucial as it contains valuable information that must be properly documented. Several Indonesian ceramicists log the process of making ceramic glaze by using handwritten notes which were prone to damage. Mostly glaze exploration is a spontaneous process that occurs in the studio and is missed to be logged. This paper presents the participatory design process for developing a glaze production log mobile application for Indonesian ceramicists. The participatory design approach involved 8 Indonesian ceramicists in the Ideation phase as end users. Co-design and observation are used as the main methods. Each participant with their expertise to provide insight into the design process of the mobile app, ensuring that future mobile app features align with the specific characteristics of the practical needs of the ceramic maker's workflow. This paper discusses the participatory design process involving Indonesian ceramicists, the challenges, and the overall impact on the design and features of future mobile applications. The results highlight the importance of end-user involvement in the development and design process to gain valuable insights for future mobile applications that integrate technology with traditional practices, especially ceramics in Indonesia.

Keywords: Participatory Design, Indonesia Ceramicists, Co-design, Mobile Application

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Pottery, grab an important role in Indonesian society since long time ago, it represent an intangible manifestation of long-lived traditions. Archaeological evidence from the Sriwijayan era, Southeast Asia's most well-known maritime empire, witness to the widespread use of ceramics in the archipelago (Taim, 2020). This historical significance highlights ceramics' enduring role in Indonesian society. While pottery is consistently associated with rural handi-craft centers, the past few years independent ceramic studios in Indonesia's urban areas has expand rapidly. Ceramicists in Indonesia possess unique techniques and traditions that represent an intangible cultural heritage (Yasmine et. al., 2021). A preliminary survey, combining self-reported data and social media analysis, identified over 100 independent ceramic studios, primarily in Java and Bali. These situations suggest a significant potential for further exploration and documentation of Indonesia's ceramic heritage. Every ceramicist has many ways of explorations and practices in making ceramic glazes. The complex process of making glaze formulation involves numerous iterations and represents a valuable repository of knowledge. The iterative process of glaze formulation involves a wealth of knowledge that is often undocumented. To address this gap, a participatory design approach was adopted to co-create a mobile application tailored to the specific needs of Indonesian ceramicists. In the process of making ceramic glazes requires well documentation, so the processes can be evaluated later on (Widjono & Oktanuryansyah, 2023). Through collaborative workshops with eight ceramicists of varying experience levels, the project aims to develop a user-friendly tool for documenting glaze recipes and experimental processes. Participatory design (PD) is a user-centered approach that empowers end-users to collectively create solutions that align with their needs, preferences and technology capabilities (Simonsen & Robertson, 2013). The primary objective of this study is to reveal the process of participatory design workshop that involves Indonesian ceramicists, by discussing the benefits, challenges, and impact on the design process for future development. By highlighting these valuable insights, this study will contribute to the preservation of Indonesia's intangible tradition and empower ceramicists to share their knowledge with future generations.

## Material and Methods

This participatory design workshop aimed to mapping content priorities and visualize the ideal mobile application features as perceived by each participant.

### *Creating Participant Criterias*

To select participants for the participatory design workshop, criteria were established based on studio profile data collected by the ID Ceramics community since 2018 to 2024 more than 100 studios was recorded.

1. Demographic:
  - Age: 27-50 year old
  - Sex: Male & Female
  - Occupation: Full-timer Ceramicist
  - Level: Ceramicist in last 2 years
  - Tech skill: Any
2. Geographic: Indonesia
3. Other Criteria: Actively making ceramics, using glaze on their ceramics

Based on the data, eight ceramicists from the Jakarta, Tangerang, and Bogor areas were selected. These participants were chosen based on criteria that would make them representative of ceramicists across Indonesia. All participants volunteered their time for this research.



Figure 1: 8 Indonesian Ceramicists as Participants in Participatory Design Workshop

### ***Techniques***

Another important aspect was the physical space that was convenient for the participant. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' daily work environment and practices, on-site visits were conducted at their ceramic studios between the 8th and 13th of September 2024. Given time and geographical constraints, data collection was limited to the Jakarta, Tangerang, and Bogor regions, covering approximately 100 kilometers in total. Visits were limited to one or two studios per day to optimize time spent on travel between studios.

The participatory design workshop utilized the following methods:

1. Studio observations were conducted to understand the participants' work environment and routines.
2. Interview: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to gather the ceramicists' perspectives.
3. Card Sort: Participants were asked to categorize information cards based on their preferences and priorities.
4. Co-Design: Participants were tasked with designing their ideal mobile application for daily studio use. To provide a clear context, participants were given a simple scenario to guide their visualization process.

### **Findings**

The table below provides a summary of the progress and time taken by each participant during the workshop. Each participant required a different amount of time to complete all workshop sessions. As Table 1 illustrates, some participants were unable to fully complete all sessions.

Table 1: Session Completion of the Participatory Design Workshop

Participant	Est. Studio	Studio Loc.	Observation	Interview	Card Sort	Co-design	Duration
Participant A	1995	Jakarta	✓	✓	✓	-	2h 47m 27s
Participant B	2023	Tangerang	✓	✓	✓	✓	2h 57m 25s
Participant C	2018	Tangerang	✓	✓	✓	✓	2h 55m 09s
Participant D	2015	Tangerang	✓	✓	✓	✓	1h 17m 32s
Participant E	2015	Jakarta	✓	✓	✓	✓	1h 28m 30s
Participant F	2023	Bogor	✓	✓	✓	✓	2h 54m 30s
Participant G	2010	Jakarta	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Participant H	2023	Bogor	✓	✓	✓	✓	1h 7m 09s

### ***Observation***

In many cases, Indonesian ceramicists fail to document their studio explorations adequately. Handwritten methods are commonly used to record glaze recipes, with labels attached to glaze samples. While this approach is widely adopted, it is susceptible to damage, loss, and incomplete records, which can hinder the reproducibility and preservation of traditional glaze-making knowledge. Each ceramicist possesses unique approaches to glaze formulation and application. The lack of comprehensive documentation among Indonesian ceramicists poses a significant threat to the preservation of their intangible cultural heritage. The challenges associated with documenting diverse glaze-making practices, including the complexities of recipe sourcing, customization, and evaluation, often discourage ceramicists from developing systematic documentation practices.

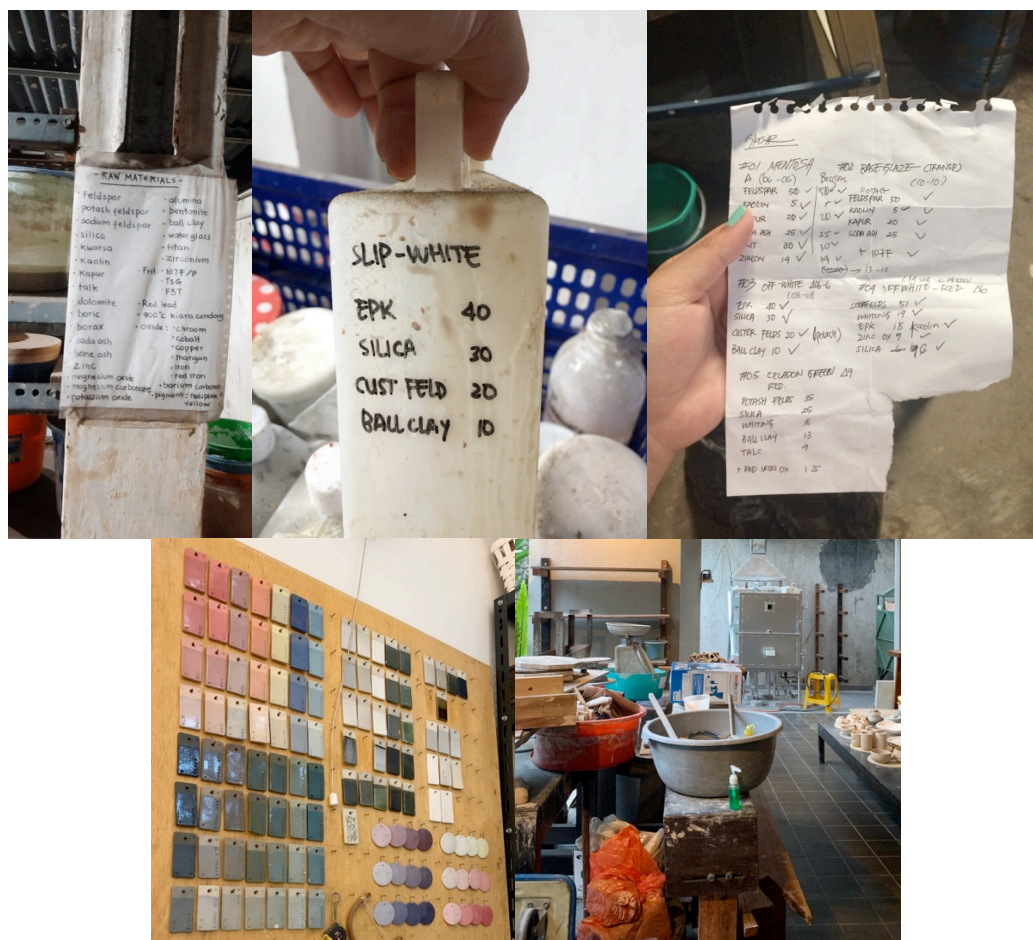


Figure 2: Ceramics Studio Environment and Glaze Documentation

**Interview**

The interview session consisted of 15 open-ended questions. Given the diverse experience levels of the eight participating ceramicists, the interviews provided valuable insights into their thoughts and feelings. While the research aimed to co-design a digital tool to enhance ceramicists' documentation practices, some participants expressed enthusiasm, while others, particularly one with extensive experience, voiced concerns about the potential negative impact on their creative process. This participant shared numerous personal anecdotes and expressed fears that such a tool might hinder their creativity and diminish the enjoyment of their craft.



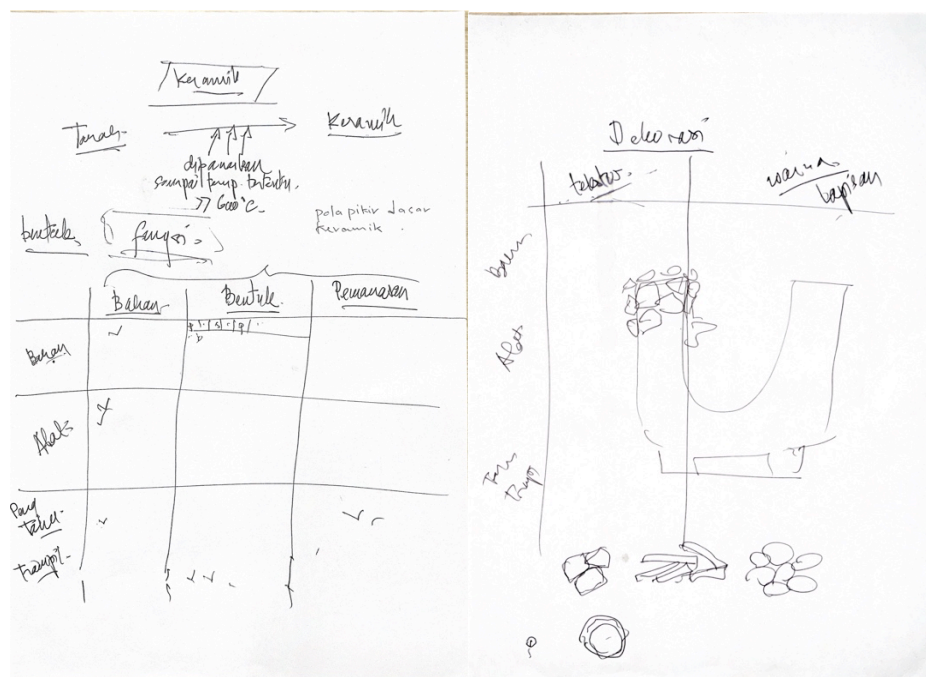


Figure 3: Participant's Sketches of His Long-Held Beliefs About Pottery on Interview Session

### Card Sort

Card sorting was employed to classify and organize data based on individual interests (Lobringer & Brantner, 2020). The card sorting session aimed to identify participants' priority information. With 8 main topics and 46 subtopics, the task involved sorting 54 cards. Some cards contained similar terms across different main topics, leading to potential confusion. Due to the small size of the cards and the redundancy in terminology, participants often found the task overwhelming and required repeated clarification to ensure accurate understanding. During the card sort session, Participant A expressed discomfort with the structured research approach, stating that it forced him to question his long-held beliefs about pottery. Since the participant voiced discomfort with the research's imposition of a structured approach, asserting that it conflicted with his deeply held beliefs, I decided to discontinue the next session, Co-Design.





Figure 4: Card Sort Session

### *Co-design*

Co-design refer to creative cooperation during creative process (Steen, Manschot, & Koning, 2011). During the co-design session, participants were tasked with envisioning their ideal mobile application for studio use. While some participants expressed confidence in their ability to visualize their concepts, others struggled to differentiate between application and website formats. To facilitate clarity, participants were given the option to verbally describe their ideas, rather than relying solely on visual representations.

Sometimes the participants have no confidence to expressing their idea through pen and paper. As seen in figure 4, one of participants successfully visualize her mobile app concept into simple wireframe. Some of participant likely to making a list of main menu & sub menu. And draw a layout of mobile app page at the beginning, and end up with Information Architecture. One of participant more comfortable to describing the concept with words since text is more like understandable. And last participant trying to visualize the concepts but mixed up between mobile app and websites.

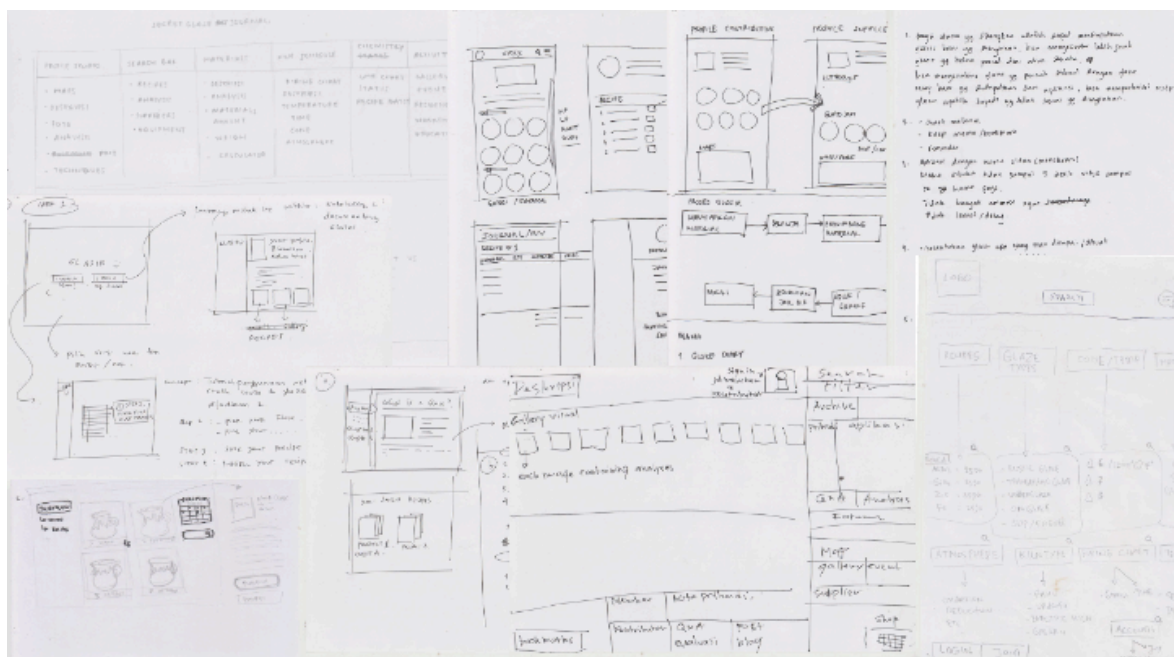


Figure 4: 7 Participants' Sketches on Co-design Session

## Discussion

The following examples demonstrate the potential of participatory design to yield more inclusive, effective, and sustainable design outcomes:

1. **Enhanced User Experience and Usability:** By actively involving ceramicists in the design process, participatory design ensures that the final product aligns closely with their specific needs and expectations. Understanding their studio practices provides valuable insights for future design iterations. When ceramicists are actively involved, they contribute to the design process, leading to increased usability and satisfaction.
2. **Increased Adoption and Ownership:** When ceramicists are directly involved in the design process, they often experience a greater sense of ownership and connection to the final product. This increased sense of ownership can lead to higher adoption rates, especially in community-oriented projects where user buy-in is crucial.
3. **Locally Relevant Designs:** A wider target audience can foster the development of habits and locally relevant designs, particularly among participants from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of digital literacy. By incorporating users' cultural contexts into the design, the product can be more appropriate and effective in its specific setting.
4. **Amplifying Diverse Voices:** Indonesian ceramicists, especially those with limited formal training or experience, can benefit significantly from participating in the design process. This can lead to more equitable and inclusive outcomes. By giving them a voice in the design process, we can ensure that the final product meets the needs of a diverse range of users.
5. **Sustainable Development:** The involvement of Indonesian ceramicists in the design process can contribute to the development of more sustainable and long-term solutions that genuinely reflect the needs and capabilities of the community. Participatory design is often employed in sustainability initiatives. By involving local stakeholders in the design process, projects are more likely to result in sustainable, long-term solutions that reflect the needs and capabilities of the community.

Despite the potential benefits, several limitations were encountered during this study:

1. Time and logistical constraints: Co-design sessions were conducted individually at each ceramicist's studio, which was a time-consuming process. While the literature does not explicitly state that participatory design (PD) must be conducted on-site, the data collection in this study required participants to be observed in their familiar work environments (ceramic studios) to facilitate their ability to envision potential applications. Applying distributed participatory design (DPD) in future research could help to overcome these geographical challenges.
2. Participant recruitment: Recruiting suitable participants for co-design was challenging. In addition to meeting the criteria for end-users, potential participants needed to be able to articulate their needs. This was because they might not have been aware of existing problems that could be addressed. The ability to engage in creative and critical thinking was a necessary soft skill for participating in the co-design process.
3. Tool and instruction design: Appropriate tools and clear instructions were necessary. The brief needed to be easily understandable, especially considering the varying levels of creative and critical thinking abilities among participants.

## **Conclusion**

This participatory design process revealed both the potential and challenges of developing a mobile app for ceramicists. While some participants felt the app might restrict their creativity, others offered valuable insights into how it could support their studio work. The card sorting and co-design sessions helped clarify user priorities, though participants sometimes struggled to understand terms and differentiate between digital formats.

The process showed that involving ceramicists directly in the design leads to more tailored solutions and a stronger sense of ownership. However, challenges included the time-consuming nature of onsite co-design sessions, finding suitable participants who could clearly express their needs, and ensuring the tools and instructions were easy to understand. Despite these difficulties, this approach offers a promising way to create long-term, sustainable solutions that meet the needs of diverse ceramicists, particularly in Indonesia.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Indonesian ceramicists, especially Haryo Soenggono, Nabila Nareswari, Anggy Sherwinda, Nabila Ardhani, Amalia Auliyani, Ignasius Tommy, Muhammad habibunzar, and Yarah Prihatini, who voluntarily participated in this study. This research is dedicated to the Indonesia Ceramics community.

## References

- Lobringer, K., & Brantner, C. (2020). Picture-sorting techniques: card-sorting and q-sort as alternative and complementary approaches in visual social research. *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods. 2nd Revised and Expanded Edition* , 309-321.
- Simonsen, J., & Robertson, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Routledge international handbook of paerticipatory design*. London: Routledge.
- Steen, M., Manschot, M., & Koning, N. D. (2011). Benefits of co-design in service design project. *International Journal of Design*, 5(2).
- Taim, E. A. (2020, 10). Sebaran keramik asing pada masa sriwijaya (abad ke-7-13 masehi) di pesisir timur sumatera bagian selatan: bukti kronologi dan hubungan internasional. *Forum Arkeologi*, 33(2), 121-130.
- Widjono, R. A., & Oktanuryansyah, M. N. (2023). User research of ceramics glaze database platform as instructional information: study case glazy.org. *Proceedings of the International Conference of Innovation in Media and Visual Design (IMDES 2023)*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Yasmine, F., Puspita, A. A., & Sriwarno, A. B. (2021). Collecting artifact data from craftsmen with participatory design methods. *ICON ARCCADE 2021: The 2nd International Conference on Art, Craft, Culture and Design* (pp. 460-467). Bandung: Atlantis Press.

**Contact email:** rani@umn.ac.id

*Ephemeral Content as an Instrument to Convey Identitary Values in  
Masstige Fashion Brands' Communication*

Sigita Kamašauskė, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

During the last decades economists have noticed the increased power of middle-class consumers and call it a key megatrend. Scholars notice middle-class consumers changing their purchase habits and leaning more towards hedonic values than the utilitarian, aiming for social power and self-improvement. These changes have caused the emergency of masstige strategies among brands which refers to affordable luxury, or the “sweet spot between mass and class”. Masstige strategies that are focused on the powerful middle-class are found to be radically different from the luxury and needs clear separate research insights. Ephemeral communication in social media is an exclusively important channel for masstige brands as people tend to spend longer time watching ephemeral content and remember better the message. This research fills the research gap and finds the relationship between ephemeral social media content, masstige strategies and consumers associations of it. The research will delve into how consumers perceive the messages conveyed by masstige brands in their Instagram Stories. This research will involve a triangulation approach, combining both qualitative content analysis and quasi-experiment.

Keywords: Ephemeral Communication, Masstige Fashion Brands, Social Media

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Recent reports indicate a significant shift in the luxury fashion market, with a growing emphasis on younger consumers. For instance, Gucci's sales in 2018 were primarily driven by millennials (Handley, 2018). While luxury brands once resisted social media due to concerns about exclusivity, they have increasingly embraced it to appeal to this younger demographic (Felix et al., 2017; Phau & Prendergast, 2000). The rise of young fashion influencers on social media platforms has further fueled this trend, attracting a younger customer base. It's estimated that by 2026, 60% of global luxury spending will be made by consumers under 40 (Jiang et al., 2021). In order to achieve results, luxury brands must actively engage their young audience through social media.

In response to these changing consumer trends, scholars have observed the emergence of *masstige* brands and strategies. These brands target the middle class by combining prestige with affordability (Paul, 2015). The term "*masstige*" was introduced in 2003 by Silverstein and Fiske to describe this concept. However, this concept of new luxury provides many unanswered questions to the media scholars and the existing research is scarce (Kim et al., 2019).

Visual communication of *masstige* fashion brands is in need of exploration due to theoretical reasons – in literature analysis it was found that even though there are specific identity values defined that distinguishes *masstige* fashion brands from luxury, there are no clear tools for empirical investigation (besides MMSS). Also, exploration of *masstige* fashion brands could contribute to a better understanding of practitioners – how to apply strategies in order to build a recognizable *masstige* fashion brand. The lack of knowledge in society also is an issue – it was not found a clear translation of this term in Lithuanian – the country of the empirical research. Scholars notice the advantages of Instagram for brands (brands can reach a large audience at a relatively low cost) and highlight a need for investigation on visual modality of Instagram to understand different appeals (Rietveld et al., 2020).

This study employs qualitative content analysis of six global *masstige* fashion brands (Calvin Klein, Coach, Armani Exchange, Ralph Lauren, Michael Kors, and Diesel) and semi-structured interviews with potential *masstige* brands consumers were. The research investigates the identity values of *masstige* fashion brands (Freire, 2014) and aims to explore the way fashion brands represent their values in Instagram Stories. While focusing on three identity values, which exclusive to *masstige* fashion brands, - Seasonality, Sexuality and Seduction, and Renewal, - this research employs Active Audience Theory and see audience as an active participant seeking for engagement. This research aims to answer what associations do *masstige* fashion brands' communication on Instagram Stories provoke for consumers and what representation consumers perceive as the most attractive and which – as the least attractive. We study three exclusive *masstige* brands' values – Seasonality, Sexuality and Seduction, and Renewal (Kim et al., 2019) and consider them to be reflected in chosen *masstige* fashion brands' communication on Instagram Stories. Furthermore, we validate the perception of these values by analysing the official websites of companies' – to see what values they declare by themselves in verbal communication.

With high respect to Critical discourse, the aim of this thesis is to focus on *masstige* fashion brands engaging communication, but not to contribute to higher sales rates of fashion brands. Moreover, the author of the thesis sees *masstige* fashion brands as an alternative to fast



fashion – by helping masstige brands to emerge and succeed it is possible to suspend the prosperity of destructive fast fashion.

This thesis introduces the novel concept of "masstige" to Lithuanian research, examining its relationship to ephemeral social media content, fashion brand identity values, and consumer associations. The study aims to develop a framework for future research and practical applications and tools for research. In the presented part of the research the masstige term is presented.

### **Masstige Concept**

Term “masstige” as the combination of mass and prestige was introduced by Silverstein and Fiske (2003). The masstige products are defined being in the “sweet spot between mass and class” (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Pioneers of the term discuss the changing in consumption and notice that people can buy premium products in categories that matter to them and buy low-cost products that do not matter so much – people’s spending habits do not correspond directly to their income (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003).

Masstige, combining two words - “mass” and “prestige” refers to the core element of communication – the receiver. While masstige brands convey the prestige just like the luxury, masstige brands are directed towards the mass consumption (Goyal, 2020), so the brands must balance the strategy and maintain the prestige while reaching the masses. Goyal (2020) summarizes that masstige brands are for masses and considered to be prestigious, are not rare, high quality and affordable in comparison to the luxury brands. While the term “masstige” is employed in this work, the literature offers a more nuanced spectrum of conceptualizations to characterize this market segment, like new luxury (Hart et al., 2016) or mass-consumed luxury (Nobre & Simoes, 2019).

In contrast to the traditional luxury which was about the product and defined by the company, scholars discuss the “new luxury” to be perceived by consumers as highly experiential and defined by the consumer (Florin et al., 2007). Prestige is often considered to be a trait of luxury and “prestige sensitivity” is one of the most widely discussed concepts in the study of prestige brand shopping. It defines “Favorable perceptions of price, based on feelings of prominence and status that higher prices signal to other people about purchaser” (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). Vigneron and Johnson (1999) highlight three types of brands according to their prestige (in an increasing order): upmarket brands, premium brands, and luxury brands. Later Vigneron and Johnson (2017) changed the “premium” into “luxury” and developed a brand luxury index. In addition to the new luxury brands, scholars introduce “masstige” term to define brands targeted to the mass and less expensive than traditional luxury goods (Truong et al., 2009). Paul (2015) argues that masstige brand positioning techniques radically differ from traditional luxury which are very strictly consistent about maintaining their exclusivity, therefore combining perceived prestige with price premiums. Masstige, or new luxury, is a combination of a high-perceived prestige and reasonable price, so they would attract middle-class consumers (Paul, 2015). This way of democratizing luxury can be reflected as masstige campaigns on social media and luxury fashion brands collaborating with fast fashion brands for exclusive yet affordable collections (Mrad et al., 2019; Loureiro et al., 2018). Scholars define masstige to refer to these characteristics: accessible, new, and populous luxury (Kim et al., 2019). Scholars consider new luxury being masstige referring to not necessarily being rare, yet acquiring the luxury label because of the product design, additional services or the aura created by the brands (Brun & Castelli, 2013).

Truong et al. (2009) propose a three levels model of brands – traditional luxury, new luxury, and middle-range brands. Truong et al. (2009) find that old luxury brands cost three times more than new luxury brands and gives some examples what could be considered as the new luxury – BMW 1-series starting from \$19,000 or Swarovski crystals with prices from around \$20. Truong et al. (2009) investigate two new luxury fashion brands – Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren. It was found that masstige brands are perceived as more prestige than middle-range brands while their prices maintained reasonable in order to target wide segment of the audience (Truong et al., 2009). The trust, satisfaction and repurchase intention is considered to be the outcome of relationship marketing including elements of masstige fashion brands (Hong et al., 2010). People's need for status products was noticed in the early 2000s (Powderly & Macnulty, 1990) and it has increased so far.

Paul (2015) categorized Louis Vuitton's Japanese market strategy into three steps: loyal customers attached to the brand via shaped values of society, traditions, history, art; masstige strategy – collaboration of the brand with Japanese and western designers; the principles of four Ps (product, price, place and promotion) – maintaining the high quality and adapting them according to the changes in society and cultures (Paul, 2015). Common masstige strategies include collaborations between fast fashion companies and high-end fashion designers (Mrad et al., 2019). Another study exploring the collaboration between luxury brand Dior and mass brand Nike highlights the hedonic consistency such dualism bring to a consumer and identifies brand coolness of mass brands as a key element creating a perceived fit between such collaborations (Suzuki & Kanno, 2022).

In addition to the masstige strategies, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) introduced a Bandwagon Luxury Consumption model which refers to brand position strategies fostering the mass consumption of luxury brands. Another approach was the introduction of Populence paradigm – a process when the premium products are marketed and popularized to achieve mass consumption (Granot et al., 2013). Finally, Paul (2015) introduced a Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) and Masstige Index (MMI) as a tool to measure the “Masstige value” using likert scale. The method consists of data collection of customers or potentials customers and calculating the score of responses to the ten questions (Paul, 2015). Paul (2015) is also introducing a pyramid model to depict that brands should target not only high income group, but also all the members of the middle class and upper part of the bottom of the pyramid. The brand with a higher masstige value has a higher success chance, according to Paul (2015). Later on Paul (2018) expands his idea and states that following a masstige strategy based on MMSS a brand can gain a strong masstige value in a foreign country. Scholars find that masstige value of a brand is related to consumer engagement with the brand (Jabbar et al., 2023).

Scholars find that masstige fashion brand with a perceived functional value increases the willingness to buy. The same effect has a masstige brand with a perceived experiential value and perceived symbolic value, so marketers are advised to strengthen these dimensions by improving quality and enhancing sincerity (Das et al., 2022). Masstige social media strategies for luxury and mass-market fashion brands are found to receive neutral or positive attitude by consumers, therefore brands can employ this strategy sustaining attitude towards the brand and widening the range of offers (Bilro et al., 2021). Paul (2015) explains Japanese luxury market employing masstige strategies and causing bandwagon effect – luxury market became mass market. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) proposes that bandwagon consumers pay less attention to the price of a product as the sign of the prestige, but will emphasize the attitude of others while consuming prestige brands.



Scholars state that status and conspicuousness are two different constructs (Truong et al., 2008). The demand for masstige brands can be explained by the shift of consumption from conspicuousness to inconspicuousness in three steps – traditional conspicuous consumption, the rise of luxury for masses and the death of classes, and the rise of inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2014). Scholars also use terms quiet and loud luxury to categorize luxury brands (Amatulli et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2021; Pino et al., 2019). Loud luxury brands have clear brand signals, such as logos, while quiet luxury brands are less recognizable to the masses (Jiang et al., 2021). Wiedmann et al. (2007) found that individual, social, financial and functional factors significantly influence consumers' perception of luxury and their purchasing behaviour globally.

Scholars find neo-luxury and the masstige brands to be emerging topic with high need for scholarly implications, masstige marketing needs separation from luxury consumption (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Das et al., 2022).

### **Changing Consumption**

Although research on masstige consumption is subject to limitations, some scholars have initiated to define the relationships between consumer and masstige brands (Moorlock et al., 2023). Consumers employ masstige brands as instrumental tools for their identity projects, utilized to signal worth and desired self-concepts (Granot et al., 2013). Scholars highlight consumers deriving hedonic benefits and psychological empowerment through their association with masstige brands (Kim et al., 2019). Scholars identify customer – masstige brand relationship to be more complex and intense than the relationship with less prestigious or luxury brands, also highlight the features of such relationship to be volatility, multiplicity and fluidity (Moorlock et al., 2023). Scholars have found that consumers' affective desire and perceived value for masstige products ignites inspiration which is leading to purchase intention and masstige engagement (Das et al., 2021). Innovations in fashion and the ability to adapt them is a way to stand out and it brings distinction, therefore high-status consumers first adopting them, converts those into status symbols (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979).

The transformation of luxury from status symbol to a lifestyle choice has paved the way for masstige brands. Hemetsberger et al. (2012) notice that luxury consumption is no longer regarded as a marker of social class; luxury is more about activities and experiences than brand names (Hudders & Pandelaire, 2013). Scholars find the boundaries between narcissism and luxury consumption – overt narcissistic consumers hold a value-expressive attitude towards luxury products which leads to quiet luxury, while covert narcissistic consumers hold social-adjustive attitude and it leads to loud luxury (Jiang et al., 2021). Scholars notice that growing luxury market fosters the growth of masstige brands (Goyal, 2020).

Scholars of the last century have noticed that consumers often learn about affluent lifestyle from television shows (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997) and then try to imitate this kind of lifestyle and consume similar prestige products. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) juxtapose the "high" and "mass" culture as the consumption of both of them construct prestige. Terms ambiguousness is related to the encoding and decoding processes of communication described by Stuart Hall (Hall, 1973). S. Hall describes television through the process of creation of a message, a decoder. ada and Ibáñez (2020) describes Instagram stories as

“always-on” TV show” and states that audience constantly needs availability and accessibility.

Masstige is fundamentally predicated on prestige-seeking behavior, which is conceptualized by Vigneron and Johnson (1999). Scholars find five values of prestige and combine them with motivations as follows: conspicuous – Veblenian, unique – snob, social – bandwagon, emotional – hedonist, quality – perfectionist (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Scholars propose different attitudes of consumers regarding prestige – Veblenians consider price to be an indicator for prestige, snobs perceive price as indicator of exclusivity, bandwagon consumers pay less attention to the price but the effect they make on others is a key factor for them (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Granot et al. (2013) find that from a consumer's standpoint, masstige brands appeal due to their quality, style, selective conspicuousness, signaling, self-catering, exploring and inconspicuous consumption. Kapferer et al. (2017) states that the newly rich people want their success to be visible, and upper middle classes imitate the wealthy – luxury has become extremely visible. Another idea arguing the shift in luxury market is that many brands claim luxury because the word itself sells and the efforts to update the term are useless because of the fundamental meaning of luxury in various subjects (Kapferer et al., 2017). Scholars find that consumption of masstige brands lead to brand happiness (Kumar et al., 2021).

Von Wachenfeldt (2018) proposes the myth of luxury to consist of brand, object in the ad campaign, social narratives, and meaning. While deconstructing luxury ads, author notices that while luxury is dedicated for a few people, advertising is for the masses – the communication of luxury applies seductive strategies for mass-mediated products (von Wachenfeldt, 2018).

### **Identitary Values of Masstige Brands**

Visual aesthetics refers to a balance between design elements and concepts (Cai & Xu, 2011) and can be classified into expressive aesthetics and classical aesthetics (Bhandari et al., 2019). The brand identity is made visible through elements, such as logos, typography, color and layout (Phillips et al., 2014). Freire (2014) introduces the “identitary values” which signify the characteristics of luxury. Following this approach Kim et al. (2018) aims to identify indentitary values of masstige brands vs luxury brands in their advertisements. Based on various rankings for the luxury brands category scholars chose Gucci, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Dolce&Gabbana, while for the masstige – Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Coach, and Armani Exchange (Kim et al., 2018). The common inherent values for both luxury and masstige brands were found to be exclusivity, sophistication, authenticity, accomplishment, and pride. The fundamental themes for the luxury brands were found to be heritage, timelessness, and aesthetic pleasure, while themes linked to the masstige brands – seasonality, sexuality, and a sense of renewal (Kim et al., 2018). It is also found that masstige brands differ from luxury by their functional, financial, social, and individual brand values (Goyal, 2020). Analysis of luxury ads confirmed the identitary values or the themes of luxury to be – adventure, seduction, love, and play (von Wachenfeldt, 2018). Wiedmann et al. (2007) defines luxury consumers’ value perception sets: functional, financial, social, and individual.

## Conclusions

The presented part represents masstige as the emerging type of fashion brands that still lacks scholar attention. This dissertation contributes to the growing body of research on masstige fashion brands and their visual communication on social media platforms. By examining the identity values of masstige brands and analyzing their representation on Instagram Stories, this study offers valuable insights into the strategies employed by these brands to engage younger consumers. The findings highlight the importance of understanding consumer associations with masstige brands and the role of social media in shaping these perceptions.

This research provides a theoretical framework for analyzing masstige brands and their visual communication, as well as practical implications for marketers and brand managers. By identifying the key identity values that resonate with younger consumers, brands can develop more effective marketing strategies and strengthen their brand identity.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the changing landscape of luxury consumption and the role of social media in shaping consumer behavior. It offers a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between masstige brands, consumers, and social media platforms.

## References

- Amatulli, C., De Angelis, M., & Donato, C. (2020). An investigation on the effectiveness of hedonic versus utilitarian message appeals in luxury product communication. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(4), 523-534.
- Arriagada, A., & Ibáñez, F. (2020). “You need at least one picture daily, if not, you’re dead”: content creators and platform evolution in the social media ecology. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(3), 2056305120944624.
- Bhandari, U., Chang, K., & Neben, T. (2019). Understanding the impact of perceived visual aesthetics on user evaluations: An emotional perspective. *Information & management*, 56(1), 85-93.
- Bilro, R. G., Loureiro, S. M. C., & dos Santos, J. F. (2022). Masstige strategies on social media: The influence on sentiments and attitude toward the brand. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46(4), 1113-1126.
- Brun, A., & Castelli, C. (2013). The nature of luxury: a consumer perspective. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 41(11/12), 823-847.
- Cai, S., & Xu, Y. (2011). Designing not just for pleasure: effects of web site aesthetics on consumer shopping value. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 15(4), 159-188.
- Das, M., Jebarajakirthy, C., & Sivapalan, A. (2022). How consumption values and perceived brand authenticity inspire fashion masstige purchase? An investigation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 68, 103023.
- Douglas, M., Wilk, R., & Isherwood, B. (2021). *The world of goods*. Routledge.
- Eckhardt, G. M., Belk, R. W., & Wilson, J. A. (2015). The rise of inconspicuous consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(7-8), 807-826.
- Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., & Hinsch, C. (2017). Elements of strategic social media marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of business research*, 70, 118-126.
- Florin, D., Callen, B., Mullen, S., & Kropp, J. (2007). Profiting from mega-trends. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 16(4), 220-225.
- Freire, N. A. (2014). When luxury advertising adds the identity values of luxury: A semiotic analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(12), 2666-2675.
- Goyal, A. (2020). Consumer perceived associations of Masstige brands: An Indian perspective. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 27(3), 399-416
- Granot, E., Russell, L. T. M., & Brashear-Alejandro, T. G. (2013). Populence: Exploring luxury for the masses. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 21(1), 31-44.
- Hall, S. (2019). Encoding—Decoding (1980). In *Crime and Media* (pp. 44-55). Routledge.

- Handley, L. (2018). "How luxury fashion brands are increasingly using Instagram to win over millennials". CNBC 9 January. Retrieved from [www.cnbc.com/2018/01/09/how-luxury-fashion-brands-are-using-instagram-to-win-over-millennials.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/09/how-luxury-fashion-brands-are-using-instagram-to-win-over-millennials.html)
- Hart, B. T., Teah, M., & Butcher, L. (2016). Predictors of purchase intention of luxury South Sea pearls. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 24(4), 344-350.
- Hemetsberger, A., Von Wallpach, S., & Bauer, M. (2012). 'Because I'm Worth It'-Luxury and the Construction of Consumers' Selves. *Advances in consumer research*, 40.
- Hong, B. S., Lee, E. J., & Yun, Y. J. (2010). The effect of relationship marketing implement factors of masstige fashion brand on the trust, satisfaction, and repurchase intention. *Journal of the Korean Society of clothing and Textiles*, 34(4), 663-672.
- Hudders, L., & Pandelaere, M. (2012). Indulging the self positive consequences of luxury consumption. In *Luxury marketing: A challenge for theory and practice* (pp. 119-137). Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag.
- Jabbar, A., Sheikh, A. A., & Raza, S. H. (2023). Examining the role of masstige value between celebrity endorsement and consumer engagement of fashion brands: An empirical study. *International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs*, 8(3), 103-111.
- Jiang, L., Gao, H., & Shi, L. H. (2021). The effect of power distance beliefs on the inconspicuous versus conspicuous consumption of luxury accessories in China and the USA. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37(15-16), 1459-1489.
- Kapferer, J. N., Kernstock, J., Brexendorf, T. O., & Powell, S. M. (Eds.). (2017). *Advances in luxury brand management*. Springer.
- Kastanakis, M. N., & Balabanis, G. (2012). Between the mass and the class: Antecedents of the "bandwagon" luxury consumption behavior. *Journal of business research*, 65(10), 1399-1407.
- Kim, J. E., Lloyd, S., Adebeshin, K., & Kang, J. Y. M. (2019). Decoding fashion advertising symbolism in masstige and luxury brands. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 23(2), 277-295.
- Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Starčević, S. (2021). Do brands make consumers happy?-A masstige theory perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102318.
- Lichtenstein, D. R., Ridgway, N. M., & Netemeyer, R. G. (1993). Price perceptions and consumer shopping behavior: a field study. *Journal of marketing research*, 30(2), 234-245.
- Loureiro, S. M., Cavallero, L., & Miranda, F. J. (2018). Fashion brands on retail websites: Customer performance expectancy and e-word-of-mouth. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 41, 131-141.

- Moorlock, E., Dekel-Dachs, O., Stokes, P., & Larsen, G. (2023). Constructing Consumer-Masstige brand relationships in a volatile social reality. *Journal of Business Research*, 155, 113381.
- Mrad, M., Farah, M. F., & Haddad, S. (2019). From Karl Lagerfeld to Erdem: a series of collaborations between designer luxury brands and fast-fashion brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26, 567-582.
- Nobre, H., & Simões, C. (2019). NewLux Brand Relationship Scale: Capturing the scope of mass-consumed luxury brand relationships. *Journal of Business Research*, 102, 328-338.
- O'Guinn, T. C., & Shrum, L. J. (1997). The role of television in the construction of consumer reality. *Journal of consumer research*, 23(4), 278-294.
- Paul, J. (2015). Masstige marketing redefined and mapped: Introducing a pyramid model and MMS measure. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 33(5), 691-706.
- Paul, J. (2018). Toward a 'masstige' theory and strategy for marketing. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(5-6), 722-745.
- Phau, I., & Prendergast, G. (2000). Consuming luxury brands: the relevance of the 'rarity principle'. *Journal of brand Management*, 8, 122-138.
- Powderly, John and Christine MacNulty (1990), "Consumer Trends: A Turbulent Time Ahead," *Marketing*, Oct 11, 33-34.
- Rietveld, R., Van Dolen, W., Mazloom, M., & Worrying, M. (2020). What you feel, is what you like influence of message appeals on customer engagement on Instagram. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 49(1), 20-53.
- Rodrigues, C., & Rodrigues, P. (2019). Brand love matters to Millennials: the relevance of mystery, sensuality and intimacy to neo-luxury brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(7), 830-848.
- Silverstein, M. (2003). *Luxury for the masses*. Harvard Business Review.
- Suzuki, S., & Kanno, S. (2022). The role of brand coolness in the masstige co-branding of luxury and mass brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 149, 240-249.
- Truong, Y., McColl, R., & Kitchen, P. J. (2009). New luxury brand positioning and the emergence of masstige brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5), 375-382.
- Truong, Y., Simmons, G., McColl, R., & Kitchen, P. J. (2008). Status and conspicuousness—are they related? Strategic marketing implications for luxury brands. *Journal of strategic marketing*, 16(3), 189-203.
- Vigneron, F., & Johnson, L. W. (1999). A review and a conceptual framework of prestige-seeking consumer behavior. *Academy of marketing science review*, 1(1), 1-15.

Vigneron, F., & Johnson, L. W. (2017). Measuring perceptions of brand luxury. *Advances in luxury brand management*, 199-234.

von Wachenfeldt, P. (2018). Communicating seduction. Luxury fashion advertisements in video campaigns. *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 18(2), 353-363.

Wiedmann, K. P., Hennigs, N., & Siebels, A. (2007). Measuring consumers' luxury value perception: a cross-cultural framework. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 2007, 1.

**Contact email:** [sigita.kamasauske@vilniustech.lt](mailto:sigita.kamasauske@vilniustech.lt)





***Stealth Advertising Awareness, Knowledge, and Perceived Ethicality in TV Patrol and 24 Oras News Programs Among Select Communication Students***

Jessa Ericka Bien-Munsayac, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines  
Reyjane Calicdan-Del Campo, Far Eastern University, Philippines

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Stealth advertising (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004) is seemingly becoming prevalent in Filipino television shows and news broadcasts are no exemption. Stealth ads are characterized by covert promotional messages embedded within media content. The quantitative study investigated the news and ad literacy level of communication students towards the presence and ethicality of stealth advertisements in the identified primetime news programs in Philippine media which are TV Patrol and 24 Oras. An online survey was applied in determining the correlation of advertisement placement knowledge (APK) and stealth ad awareness (SAA) with the perception of ethicality (PE) in news advertising through a Pearson correlation test. A One-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze gender and year-level group comparisons of student-respondents' online and offline news exposure frequency and duration. A univariate analysis was employed to identify the online and offline news exposure, advertisement placement knowledge and awareness as nuanced with the Ads Standards Council Guidebook, and perception of ethicality in news and advertisements of the communication student-respondents. Findings reveal that online news exposure frequency is higher than offline viewing. APK is at the middle level. A big majority of the respondents readily recognized stealth ads in 24 Oras indicating that the identified sneaky ads are placed intentionally while there is skepticism whether the identified stealth ads in TV Patrol are placed intentionally or accidentally. Both news programs are still deemed ethical in terms of trustworthiness, competence, and goodwill. Given this, there should still be a call for stricter adherence to ethical guidelines in media practices.

Keywords: Stealth Advertisements, Philippine Primetime News Programs, TV Patrol, 24 Oras, Communication Students

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

Broadcasting is one of the most effective ways to reach multitudes of people in a short span of time. Such is especially true in the archipelagic Philippines, where the citizens have utilized and maximized existing broadcast media: from radio sets that were considered “a friendlier medium since even illiterate people who could not read nor write were able to understand news and information being “told” them by the radio broadcast,” (Elcolumbus, n.d.) to the television that “became a status symbol” (The Journalistic View, 2018), Filipinos went with the flow. Thus, it is unsurprising that Filipinos have caught on with the trend of worldwide interest in digital content. Despite limitations in network infrastructure, they are among the biggest audience of online or digital media that in 2020, the country was among the top five with the highest online media market value (Statista, 2023).

## **Philippines News Landscape**

In a Pulse Asia national survey in 2021, it was found that a big majority of the adult population get their political news from television, with 82% citing national television and 25% mentioning local television. Chua (2023) affirms this information, noting that Filipinos access news at least three days per week. Despite the shift to online content consumption, however, Statista Research Department (2023) noted that a large portion of viewers still consumed news and entertainment through television: as of June 2023, a considerable 70% of the respondents tapped for a survey on digital news in the Philippines said their source of news was still the TV. Dependence on offline platforms is still prevalent, dominantly from news programs of GMA Network, and its counterparts in rival channel ABS-CBN’s TV (Statista, 2023). Prior to the suspension of its franchise to operate, ABS-CBN and GMA were the country’s media giants that went head-to-head in engaging audiences with their entertainment and news and public affairs programs. The suspension did not keep ABS-CBN from making itself felt, however, as the network tapped the digital realm via social networking sites and the development of its own over-the-top (OTT) platform, iWantTFC (Statista, 2023). They also partnered with other local channels such as TV5 to ensure the continuity of their flagship programs (Adobo Magazine, 2022).

This unprecedented move of previously-rival companies sharing frequencies and the continuous growth of the digital media pushed networks to ensure their presence in all possible platforms. This is particularly apparent in news programs, which are simultaneously delivered in radio, TV, and the networks’ preferred social media sites. Primetime news, traditionally shown in the early evening, can now be viewed at a time most convenient to the audience as video recordings are curated and conveniently located in YouTube. Regardless of the platform, audiences get the same viewing experience: the usual news show format that starts with the program’s stimulating opening music, the anchors’ introduction of themselves, and the news stories pursued from all over the metro, the nation, and the globe. Latest and relevant reports on politics, economics, livelihood sectors and industries, lifestyle, sports, entertainment, and world events are delivered to the audience to ensure they are kept informed about key happenings. It is expected that journalists provide the audience with the basic information about local society and international whereabouts.

## **Ethics in News Reporting**

Media, as the fourth estate and watchdog of society, is assumed to be critical and credible. In the Philippines, news media outfits like ABS-CBN and GMA are expected to adhere to the

Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP / *Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines*) Code (2011), whose preamble indicates that “broadcasting, because of its immediate and lasting impact on the public, demands of its practitioners a high sense of responsibility, morality, fairness and honesty at all times” (p. 5). Its Article 2 Section 7 states that “personal bias or prejudice shall not be allowed to distort facts” (p.11). The virtue of truthfulness transcends beyond the subjective stand of the journalists but should extend with the news and information presented free from marketing propaganda.

Thus, covertly inserting product placements in news content obscures the agency of news media outfits and journalists. In fact, “TV viewers have the right to know which side the broadcaster represents and what the motivation behind the message is...(but) the evening news are appealing to stealth marketers because the audience expects greater independence, hence, persuasion is easiest where the audience is most credulous and least defended against promotional messages” (Georgieva, 2013, p.6). Yet, in keeping with the similar experience that television and social media viewers would have, commercial breaks are also observable in shows that are transmitted, recorded, and curated in YouTube. This has forced Filipino audiences to adopt an anti-advertisement behavior, demonstrated by the way they sift through channels and programs with their remote controls. Although a limit of 18 minutes of commercials per hour has been prescribed for local advertising in the Philippines – a level that is already highest in Asia – a content analysis study done by De La Salle University students found that GMA has a commercial load of 30 minutes per hour while ABS-CBN has 15 to 20 minutes per hour (Castro, Jr., 2008). GMA withdrew its membership from the KBP in September 2003 after a tiff over commercial loading limits set by the association (The PCIJ Blog, 2011), and is thus no longer bound by the regulatory body’s guidelines.

### **Research Problem and Objectives**

This analyzed communication students’ association of knowledge on advertisement placement, awareness on stealth ads, and their perception of its ethicality in news advertisements observed in the country’s two leading primetime news shows: GMA’s 24 Oras and ABS-CBN’s TV Patrol. The researchers measured the duration, frequency, and consistency of communication students’ online and offline news exposure; determined their advertisement placement knowledge as nuanced with the Ads Standards Council (ASC) Guidebook and the level of their awareness on stealth advertising; and distinguished the respondents’ level and dimensions of perception of ethicality in news and advertisements.

### **Framework**

Anchored on the tenets of Media Agenda and Social Responsibility, this study extends from the Agenda Setting Theory, which has ever since lent its ideals to various explorations in the way media and other institutions prime and frame issues and events for their audiences (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

The media, as the gatekeeper, decides what information should be disseminated and what information should not (Lighare, 2021). The value assigned to the information being shared with the public thus sets the agenda – under the hope and premise that the gatekeeping team of news editors, research staff, and broadcasters have their loyalties anchored on the truth. A critique of the media's capacity to shape perception is that this capability is also open to abuse and misuse. This led to the development of media effects as a field of study focusing on the scrutiny of media agenda vis-a-vis media credibility.

Schauster, et. al. (2016) share Altschull's (1997) observation that despite the shifts in the press' system to continually find funding, journalists have continued to advocate for and retain a semblance of autonomy. Quoting Christians, et. al. (2009), they further that media personalities often shielded themselves from financial pressures and pursued the production of news that informed the citizens and strengthened democracy. However, advertisers, public relations professionals, and all those whose interests lie in securing resources for the press' operations, digress from journalists' objectives.

Moreover, Schauster, et. al. (2016) noted that threats to the accuracy and objectivity of news reports have been recorded since the prevalence of yellow journalism of the late 19th century, leading to the development of a set of standards that upheld the roles and responsibilities of the press vis-a-vis a concern for the public good. Thus the birth of social responsibility theory, which served as an ethical guide for what needs to be done in response to changing media practices.

Achieving social responsibility meant that the media maintained the following criteria (Siebert, et. al., 1956; Schauster, et. al, 2016):

- a) serve the political system with information, and with forums for debate and discussion;
- b) assist the public in self-governance;
- c) act as the government watchdog;
- d) serve the economic system with advertising;
- e) provide entertainment; and
- f) maintain sufficient financial independence, free from the pressure of special interests.

With the changing times, media practices, platforms, models, and journalists' duties are also egged to shift. Expansions of the tenets of social responsibility became concerned with aligning its guiding principles with global perspectives that include respect for "human dignity, truth telling, and nonviolence" (Schauster, et. al., 2016). The importance of social responsibility and the concept of credibility also came into the picture, with Deuze (2005) suggesting that without both an industry-wide credibility and a specific organization's credibility, the press cannot uphold the tenets of social responsibility theory.

This study is anchored on the understanding of the media's capacity to set the public agenda that operates within the tenets of social responsibility theory to evaluate stealth advertising in news broadcasts.

## **Methodology**

The study implemented a news and ad literacy survey on communication students' news exposure, advertisement placement knowledge, and perception of ethicality on stealth ads in news programs. It is vital to understand the audience' recognition of their moral agency and stand on a particular moral issue such as stealth advertisements in news programs. The tenets of reception analysis were referenced in the formulation of this survey.

The news and ad literacy survey pre-data gathering preparations included the construction of the survey instrument, table of specifications for part three, and letters of approval. The online survey was pre-tested with students who are taking different majors aside from advertising. The actual data gathering and survey roll-out commenced within a three-week duration. Post-data gathering tasks included the downloading of information from online

forms, transforming, and cleaning the data for statistical analyses through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics to address the research's objectives. All the demographic characterization and variables were analyzed through frequency and distribution count. Analysis of the association of variables ad placement knowledge, stealth ad awareness, and ethical perception, were conducted through the Pearson Product Moment Correlation test with a confidence level of 95% ( $\alpha=0.05$ ).

## **Findings**

The total number of respondents was 133. After data encoding and cleaning, the study collected a total of  $n=131$  valid responses. The discussion details the univariate, group comparison, and correlation statistical analyses applied.

### ***Part 1. Demographics of Communication Student-Respondents***

Majority of the survey respondents identify themselves as females (59.50%). Far second are those who identify as males (21.40%), while the rest label themselves as part of the LGBTQIA+ group (19.1%). Notably, those who selected "Other" (3.10%) in the gender category identify themselves as non-binary. More than half of the respondents were second year students (68.70%). This is akin to the fact that the survey invite was disseminated in advertising classes in FEU which was offered during communication students' second year. The researchers welcome this figure as, more than any of the communication students, those with advertising classes are expected to be more knowledgeable about the ethicality of advertisements in various programs.

Majority of the respondents (54.20%) came from one of the study's pre-testing sites, FEU. As the institute of employment of one of the researchers, networking was much easier and the desired number of participants was reached. In contrast, only a quarter of the responses (25.20%) came from UPD, the original study site. Survey responses from FCPC, PSAU, and MSU – universities outside Metro Manila – totalled to 17.50%, drastically more than the 3.10% from PUP, which served as another pre-testing site.

In summary, from the total of  $n=131$  survey respondents, the majority of the communication student-respondents are in their second year level (68.70%), have identified their gender as female (59.50%), and are from FEU-Manila (54.20%).

### ***Part 2. Univariate Analyses***

In addressing the research objectives one to four, this section elaborates the univariate data results on the following variables: (1) the levels of offline and online news exposure in terms of frequency and duration; (2) student-respondents' ad placement knowledge; (3) stealth ad awareness in conjunction with perception on identified product placement and brand or product recall enhancement, and (4) perception of ethicality of news programs in terms of trustworthiness, competency, and good will.

#### ***Objective 2.1: Online and Offline News Exposure.***

Respondents' frequency of exposure to online news shows how the student-respondents are heavily reliant on the internet. With often (34.40%), sometimes (32.10%) and always (26.00%) being the students' recurring choices, these digital natives are indeed hung up on

their smartphones as it lets them do practically anything they want, including catching up on the latest headlines (Knit, n.d.). Directly contrasting the students' frequency of exposure to online news are their responses to the recurrence of their offline news utility. Sometimes (37.40%) and rarely (36.60%) make up almost three quarters of the responses combined, reiterating their dependence on the internet.

Interestingly, more than tenth of the respondents admitted to never using traditional media as their news source – somehow depicting the foreboding decline of the utility of these mediums in the coming years. Grundy (2022) writes that the rise of digital media and technology has transformed the way we access news. This confirms that the student-participants exert effort to get information about current events: almost half of the respondents (44.30%) said they immerse themselves in online news for less than an hour weekly, while those who consume news online for a couple of hours (29.80%) and up to four hours (15.30%) come in second and third spots. Interestingly, almost a tenth of the respondents affirm that their online news exposure could take five to more hours in a week – which could imply that some youngsters have news viewing as part of their online habit.

Despite the respondents' receding frequency of offline news exposure, the duration of their news consumption via traditional media remains fairly high. More than half (57.30%) of the respondents say they spend less than an hour a week getting current events information from legacy media. Reuters Institute's qualitative research on "How Younger Generations Consume News Differently," noted that most young consumers "have an 'anchor news brand' that they will turn to when a major story breaks and needs verifying" (Kalogeropoulos, 2019, par. 18). While the preferred anchor brand is influenced by their parents, the format remains to be digital.

### ***Objective 2.2: Ad Placement Knowledge.***

The study sought to identify the level of ad placement knowledge of communication student-respondents through the crafted 10-item multiple choice objective questions based on the guidelines of Ad Standards Council (ASC) (2019) and *Kapisanan ng Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* (KBP) (2011). This part of the survey questionnaire resembles an objective quiz, in which the difficulty is distributed and planned based on the identified table of specifications. The greatest number of student-respondents garnered a score of four and seven points (17.60%). Second to the greatest percentage is eight points (16%) and least number of garnered scores are one point (3.80%) with a frequency count of five and nine points (3.10%) with a frequency count of four. The average score of ad placement knowledge of respondents is 5.32 points (SD=2.14). This indicates that the average of 5.32 points is barely passing to an almost fail score that may be referred to as poor performance and needs improvement in terms of studying the ASC and KBP guidelines.

In summary, student-respondents' advertisement placement knowledge is at the middle level with the mean score is 5.32. In fact, 17.60% of respondents scored seven and four equally. The least number of scores attained was nine points (3.10%). Based on the item analysis, items seven (80.9%) and two (74%) garnered the most correct answers, which centers on ad placement knowledge. Items five and four are the questions that respondents answered incorrectly that focus on advertisement definition based on the ASC guidelines.

### ***Objective 2.3: Stealth Advertisement Awareness.***

In identifying the level of communication student-respondents' awareness of stealth advertising, respondents were prompted to view and analyze two news clips from 24 Oras and two from TV Patrol. Videos A and C are from 24 Oras and videos B and D are from TV Patrol. After each clip, respondents were asked if they have recognized a stealth ad in each of the four news clips. A big majority of student-respondents reported that they have recognized stealth advertisements in 24 Oras videos SAA\_A1 (70.20%) and SAA\_C1 (75.60%) while 22.1% reported that they are 'not sure' with SAA\_A1 and 12.2% with SAA\_C1. Student-respondents' answered 'no' with A1 are 7.6% while C1 has 12.2%. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents reported that they have recognized stealth advertisements from TV Patrol news clips, particularly video D (57.30%). Moreover, less than half of the communication student-respondents recognized stealth ads in video B with the frequency count of 51 (38.90%) and 47 (35.90%) student-respondents reported that they did not recognize stealth advertisements in video B. This reveals that stealth ad recognition is more evident in news clips from 24 Oras rather than TV Patrol.

Brand placements in 24 Oras news clips as perceived by respondents are mostly intentional with 65 frequency count for video A (49.60%) and 97 frequency count for video C (74%). It was reported that these stealth ad placements in 24 Oras, such as video A (38.9%) and video C (52.7%), are perceived to have improved the brand or product recall. Meanwhile, TV Patrol news clips are perceived to be intentional to a point accidental. Video D is deemed intentional with the count of 58 (44.3%) while 45% or 60 respondents have 'no opinion' about video B; 46 or 35.1% have shared that ad placement in the TV Patrol news clip was placed accidentally. With video D, the perceived ad placement in TV Patrol news clips is deemed to have improved the brand or product recall by a thin margin of 48 count (36.6%) as compared to those who reported 'no opinion' with 45 count (34.4%). TV Patrol video B coincides with the opinion that the accidental product placement did not improve the brand or product recognition and recall with a thin margin of difference of those who said 'no' with 55 frequency count (42%) and those who reported of having 'no opinion' with 52 frequency count (39.7%).

Stealth advertising awareness is more evident with news clips from 24 Oras as reported by the big majority of the student-respondents based on videos A (70.20%) and C (75.60%). These ad placements are deemed to be intentionally placed, in which the intention is to improve brand or product recall and recognition. Student-respondents are skeptical of their stealth ad recognition on TV Patrol news clips. Accidental ad placements as observed in TV Patrol are perceived to have no improvement in terms of brand or product recognition and recall.

Table 1: Stealth Ad Awareness

Program	Video		No	Not Sure	Yes	Total
24 Oras	A	<i>f</i>	10	29	92	131
		%	7.60	22.10	70.20	100
	C	<i>f</i>	16	16	99	131
		%	12.20	12.2	75.60	100
TV Patrol	B	<i>f</i>	47	33	51	131
		%	35.90	25.20	38.90	100
	D	<i>f</i>	33	23	75	131
		%	25.20	17.60	57.30	100

Looking at the perception of stealth ad awareness between TV Patrol and 24 Oras clips, the latter was revealed to have easier recognition of stealth ads as reported by the student-respondents. This may be attributed with the fact that 24 Oras under the GMA-Global Media Arts Network is not affiliated with KBP. GMA Network has withdrawn its KBP membership since 2003 (Philstar, 2003). Severing ties with KBP spurs critical inquiry on the regulation of GMA content and ad placement in forwarding the best interest of its audience instead of its capitalistic cause.

#### ***Objective 2.4: Respondents' Perception of Ethicality.***

Despite the participants' recognition of intentionally-placed stealth ads in 24 Oras and TV Patrol, their perception of the news programs' ethicality remained generally positive as scores on trustworthiness, competence, and decency accumulated on ratings five and up. In fact, there were null instances of responses for ratings zero and one for all three categories.

The participants consider 24 Oras and TV Patrol as ethical vis-a-vis their perceptions of the news programs' trustworthiness ( $M = 7.36, SD = 1.69$ ), competence ( $M = 7.44, SD = 1.72$ ), and goodwill towards their audiences ( $M = 7.50, SD = 1.76$ ). Given these data, the student-respondents think the news programs are ethical despite the recognized presence of stealth advertisements in the shows. According to The Media Insight Project (2022), local news media remain to be the key sources of information that this generation makes use of to get information about news they can use. In the Philippines, these news programs are shown on free TV and YouTube, thereby being more accessible to the respondents' age group.

### ***Part 3. Group Comparison Analyses***

#### ***Objective 3.1: Determining the Student-Respondents' Online and Offline News Exposure.***

To further determine and characterize the news exposure of student-respondents in terms of online and offline viewing through the aspects of frequency (how often) and duration (how



long), the researchers applied group comparison analysis through a One-Way ANOVA test. The grouping variable, which are the respondents' gender and year level statistically analyzed with test variables of online and offline news exposure in terms of frequency and duration.

In summarizing the group comparisons of gender and year level with news exposure, student-respondents' year level has no significant difference with news exposure frequency and duration may it be online or offline viewing. Additionally, gender groups means comparison is not significant with their news online exposure frequency and duration. With offline or traditional news viewing duration, gender group comparisons between (a) female and male ( $p = .042$ ); (b) female and pansexual ( $p = .007$ ); (c) male and pansexual ( $p = .058$ ); (d) gay and pansexual ( $p = .053$ ); and (e) pansexual and 'other' gender including lesbian ( $p = .008$ ).

#### ***Part 4. Correlation Analyses***

##### ***Objective 4.1: Analysis of the Association Between Stealth Advertising and Perceived Ethicality.***

To better analyze and describe the association between the student-respondents' knowledge and awareness of stealth advertising and their perceptions of ethicality of 24 Oras and TV Patrol vis-a-vis their ratings on the shows' trustworthiness, competence, and goodwill towards audiences, the researchers employed Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test.

The result of the Pearson correlation test between advertisement placement knowledge (APK) and perception of ethicality with dimensions of trustworthiness and goodwill indicated no significant correlation. In particular, APK and trustworthiness yielded  $r = 0.12$ ,  $r^2 = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.186$ ; while APK and goodwill towards the audiences resulted in  $r = 0.13$ ,  $r^2 = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.126$ . On the other hand, there was a significant weak positive relationship between ad placement knowledge and ethical dimension of competence,  $r = 0.23$ ,  $r^2 = 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.009$ . Albeit very weak, only competence has a significant positive correlation among the three variables. This indicates that as communication student-respondents increase their ad placement knowledge, there is also a small or weak possibility of increase with their perceived ethical competence ( $M = 7.44$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) of the news programs in focus, which are 24 Oras and TV Patrol.

This could imply that the participants could or would tolerate the presence of stealth advertisements in news programs provided they are competent and effective at what they do. Surprisingly, younger viewers have a much higher tolerance for advertising, with the Gen Zs considering 10.61 minutes per hour of ad breaks just fine (Friedman, 2019). This aligns with the previous exposition about the respondents' belief that 24 Oras and TV Patrol are ethical despite the sneaky ads in the news segments since they perceive them as experts in their field.

Table 2: Correlation of Advertisement Placement Knowledge and Ethical Perceptions

	<b>Variables of Ethical Perception</b>	<b>Correlations</b>
<b>Stealth Advertising Awareness</b>	<b>Trustworthiness</b>	$r = 0.12, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.186$
	<b>Competence</b>	$r = 0.23, r^2 = 0.05, p < 0.009$
	<b>Goodwill Towards Audience</b>	$r = 0.13, r^2 = 0.02, p < 0.126$

#### *Association of Stealth Ad Awareness and Perceived Ethicality in 24 Oras.*

Student-respondents' stealth advertisements awareness, or to be referred to as SAA, in news segments of 24 Oras and TV Patrol yielded varying results. The Pearson correlation test between 24 Oras's first clip (SAA\_A1) and perceived ethicality, with dimensions of trustworthiness, competence, and goodwill, are not significant. The results indicated that with SAA and trustworthiness yielded  $r = 0.09, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.298$ ; SAA and competence with  $r = 0.08, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.383$ ; and SAA and goodwill to audiences with  $r = 0.13, r^2 = 0.02, p < 0.135$ .

Similar results were gathered from 24 Oras' second sample clip (SAA\_C1), with neither trustworthiness ( $r = 0.12, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.174$ ), competence ( $r = 0.11, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.232$ ), nor goodwill towards audiences ( $r = -0.01, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.953$ ) having significant correlations with the recognition of stealth advertisements.

#### *Association of Stealth Ad Awareness and Perceived Ethicality in TV Patrol.*

No significant correlations can be deduced between the detection of sneaky ads and trustworthiness (SAA\_B1 with  $r = -0.10, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.247$  and SAA\_D1 with  $r = 0.11, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.204$ ) or competence (SAA\_B1 with  $r = -0.16, r^2 = 0.03, p < 0.061$  and SAA\_D1 with  $r = 0.10, r^2 = 0.01, p < 0.246$ ).

Meanwhile, a significant correlation was recorded in the ethicality variable goodwill towards audiences in both TV Patrol clips (SAA\_B1 and SAA\_D1). Despite the significant correlations, however, both the holiday traffic news clip ( $r = -0.17, r^2 = 0.03, p < 0.050$ ) and Philippine air traffic maintenance work news clip ( $r = 0.20, r^2 = 0.04, p < 0.022$ ) clips have very small positive associations. This indicates that the increase or positive upward movement with communication student-respondents stealth and awareness, there would also be a small or weak movement and increase with their perceived ethicality particularly with their perceived good intention of TV Patrol new program towards their audience.

Aside from the slim instances of perceived goodwill towards audiences, the student-respondents' recognition of stealth advertisements in news programs do not affect their perception of 24 Oras and TV Patrol's ethicality. Probably associated with how public relations helps shape and enhance reputation, students assume that news programs could "create narratives to advance their agenda" (Wynne, 2016, par.6).

Although student-respondents perceive news programs 24 Oras and TV Patrol as ethical despite the prevalence of stealthy advertisements, the majority of them still advocate for the concealment of these ads. At 80 frequency counts, this is 61.10% of the total participants. This implies that as future media practitioners, these communication students understand that abiding by ASC and KBP's regulations for responsible advertising and broadcasting is vital in maintaining news and news programs' integrity, and cultivating transparency and trust.

## Synthesis

News exposure frequency is higher than offline viewing, while in terms of length of news viewing, offline (57.30%) and online (44.30%) reported news exposure is 50 minutes or less. Ad placement knowledge (APK) is at middle level ( $M = 5.32$ ), in which the student-respondents are adept with ad placement protocols as indicated by the KBP and ASC guidelines. In terms of stealth ad awareness, a big majority of the respondents readily recognized stealth ads in 24 Oras indicating that the identified sneaky ads are placed intentionally to improve product and brand recall. In TV Patrol, respondents were skeptical whether the identified stealth ads are placed intentionally or accidentally, in which no product or brand recall was elicited. Both news programs are still deemed ethical in terms of trustworthiness ( $M = 7.36$ ), competence ( $M = 7.44$ ), and goodwill towards their audiences ( $M = 7.50$ ) on a scale of one to 10, with the latter as the highest.

Through One-way ANOVA test, findings reveal that offline news exposure duration differs significantly with the groups of (a) female and male ( $p = .042$ ); (b) female and pansexual ( $p = .007$ ); (c) male and pansexual ( $p = .058$ ); (d) gay and pansexual ( $p = .053$ ); and (e) pansexual and 'other' gender including lesbian ( $p = .008$ ). With Pearson correlation test, significant correlation was found with APK and competence. Significant correlation was found in TV Patrol news clips and ethical dimensions of competence and goodwill, in which stealth ad placements in one of the videos is deemed as placed accidentally.

## Conclusion

It was found that respondents were more likely to consume online news than offline news, illustrating their dependence on digital news media. Despite its lower utility, legacy media are still patronized by the respondents as more than half (57.30%) of them say they spend around an hour a week securing current events information from traditional means. Kalogeropoulos (2019) ascribes this to the 'anchor news brand' notion, which are the participants' go-to sources when they need to verify something. Respondents possess a moderate level of understanding regarding product placements and show a clear recognition of stealth advertising, particularly through the snippets of 24 Oras episodes. It was much easier for the participants to detect stealth ads in GMA's primetime news program, possibly due to the number of placements that were allowed to air. It should be remembered that GMA Network has been out of KBP membership for a decade now. The respondents still deemed 24 Oras and TV Patrol to be ethical despite the presence of hidden commercials, and a correlation between ad placement knowledge and perceived ethical competence was also detected. As the most accessible and available local news sources where the respondents can get information for immediate use, it could be said that they are more tolerant of stealthy advertisements as long as the news programs remain competent and effective at what they do.

## References

- Ad Standards Council. (2019). Ad Standards Council For Responsible Advertising Guidebook. Updated Version March 2019. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://asc.com.ph/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ASC\_Guidebook.pdf
- Altschull, J. H. (1997). Boundaries of journalistic autonomy. In D. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Social meanings of news: A text-reader* (pp. 259-268). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Broadcast Code of the Philippines. (2007). Kapisanan ng nga Broadkaster ng Pilipinas. [https://www.kbp.org.ph/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/KBP\\_Broadcast\\_Code\\_2011.pdf](https://www.kbp.org.ph/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/KBP_Broadcast_Code_2011.pdf)
- Castro, Jr., I. (2008, June 19). Advertisers losing audience in RP due to too many commercials. ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/sardines/06/19/08/advertisers-losing-audience-rp-due-too-many-commercials>
- Chua, Y. (2023, June 14). Philippines. Thomson Reuters Foundation. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/philippines#:~:text=Radio%20and%20TV%20brands%20remain,further%20boosting%20local%20TV%20news>
- Deuze, M. (2005). What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, 6, 442-464.
- Elcolumbus. (n.d.). Brief History of The Philippines' Broadcast Media. Elcolumbus. [https://www.elcomblus.com/brief-history-of-the-philippines-broadcast-media/#google\\_vignette](https://www.elcomblus.com/brief-history-of-the-philippines-broadcast-media/#google_vignette)
- Friedman, W. (2019, October 2). *Gen Z, Millennials Have Higher Tolerance For TV Ads, Study Finds*. Media Post. <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/341528/gen-z-millennials-have-higher-tolerance-for-tv-ad.html>
- Georgieva, F. (2013). The Effect of Stealth Advertising in Newscasts on Viewers' Recall. [Graduate Theses and Dissertation]. USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4677>
- Grundy, A. (2022, June 7). *Service Annual Survey Shows Continuing Decline in Print Publishing Revenue*. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/06/internet-crushes-traditional-media.html>
- The Journalistic View. (2018, September 14). The Birth of Philippine Television. The JournalisticView. <https://thejournalisticview.com/the-birth-of-philippine-television/>

- Kaikati, A. M., & Kaikati, J. G. (2004). Stealth Marketing: How to Reach Consumers Surreptitiously. *California Management Review*, 46(4), 6–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41166272>
- KBP: Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas. (2011). Broadcast code of the Philippines 2007: As amended 2011. [https://www.kbp.org.ph/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/KBP\\_Broadcast\\_Code\\_2011.pdf](https://www.kbp.org.ph/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/KBP_Broadcast_Code_2011.pdf)
- Knit (n.d.). *Extra, Extra: How Gen Z Checks The News*. Knit. <https://goknit.com/how-gen-z-checks-the-news/>
- Lighare, D. (2021, December 8). Gatekeeping in the wake of new media.- Tunapanda Institute -Medium. Medium. <https://medium.com/tunapanda-institute/gate-keeping-in-the-era-of-new-media-3585251d0743>
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. SAGE.
- The Media Insight Project. (2022, November 17). *Knowing the news: How Gen Z and Millennials get information on essential topics*. American Press Institute. <https://americanpressinstitute.org/knowning-the-news/>
- The PCIJ Blog. (2011, June 15). GMA Network responds to KBP broadcast code proposal. PCIJ.Org. <https://old.pcij.org/blog/2011/06/15/gma-network-responds-to-kbpbroadcast-code-proposal>
- Schauster, E., Ferrucci, P. and Neill, M. (2016). Native Advertising Is the New Journalism: How Deception Affects Social Responsibility. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1-17. DOI:10.1177/0002764216660135
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Statista. (2023, June 29). Weekly offline use of TV, radio, and print news outlets Philippines 2023, by brand. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1219636/philippines-television-radio-print-news-outlets-brand-use/>
- Statista. (2023, September 25). Share of adults who trust news media most of the time in selected countries worldwide as of February 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/308468/importance-brand-journalist-creating-trust-news/>
- Statista Research Department. (2023, February 3). Media in the Philippines - statistics & facts. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/topics/6119/media-industry-in-the-philippines/#topicOverview>
- Statista Research Department. (2023, June 29). Sources of news in the Philippines in 2023, by channel. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1219918/philippines-sources-of-news-by-channel/>

Wynne, R. (2016, January 21). *Five Things Everyone Should Know About Public Relations*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertwynne/2016/01/21/five-things-everyone-should-know-about-public-relations/?sh=66579f6a2a2c>

**Contact emails:** rdelcampo@feu.edu.ph  
jcbienmunsayac@up.edu.ph

***The Adoption of Artificial Intelligence Into Journalism Practice:  
Perspectives From the Ghanaian Media Industry***

Samuel Adefioye, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in journalism globally is characterized by a significant disparity, with Western countries exhibiting more widespread and advanced usage compared to non-Western countries. As a result, research on AI's application in journalism has predominantly focused on developed economies, creating a substantial knowledge gap and scarcity of studies exploring AI's use in journalism in developing countries. This study addresses this gap by examining the current state of AI deployment in Ghana's media industry, its potential benefits and risks, and the challenges hindering its adoption. The study was anchored on Rogers' adoption-diffusion theory and van Dijk's digital dichotomy theory. Based on eighteen in-depth interviews with journalists selected through purposive and snowball sampling, this study reveals that AI is being leveraged to improve newsroom efficiency, but a significant digital divide persists. While some newsrooms actively adopt AI, others lag behind. The adoption of AI is expected to yield both positive outcomes, such as enhanced efficiency and innovative broadcasting, and negative outcomes, including diminished human creativity and potential disinformation. The high cost of deployment, inadequate data, and poor internet connectivity are barriers to AI adoption in Ghana's media industry.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Newsroom, Journalism Practice, Perspective

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is defined by the European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence as "Systems that display intelligent behavior by analyzing their environment and taking actions— with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals." (HLEGAI, 2018: p1). According to de Zuniga et al. (2023), AI refers to the observable, practical ability of machines or computer programmes to think, learn, and act like humans. This implies that AI technology perceives and interprets its surroundings, operates independently, and initiates activities to achieve specific objectives.

AI is redefining the landscape of work in many ways across various sectors. In journalism, AI is revolutionizing the entire production chain, transforming the way news is gathered, processed, and disseminated (Amponsah & Atianashie, 2024; Stanescu, 2023; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Noain-Sanchez, 2022; Diakopoulos, 2019). As observed by the London School of Economics and Political Science, AI technology has already been embraced by the journalism industry, with news organisations and journalists utilizing it in a wide range of innovative ways to improve their news gathering, production, and dissemination processes (LSE, 2024). AI is alleviating the workload of overwhelmed resources, influencing newsroom decisions, facilitating innovative forms of audience engagement, and unlocking new revenue streams through cutting-edge products that can boost news media consumption and reach (Jamil, 2020, Diakopoulos, 2020). Thus, AI has rapidly evolved to become a crucial element in contemporary journalism.

While AI technology is being employed in journalism practice worldwide, its usage is more widespread and advanced in Western countries compared to non-Western countries, where its implementation is still in its early stages. Consequently, research on AI's application in the news media industry and journalism has primarily focused on developed economies like the US, EU, Scandinavia, and China (Makwambeni et al., 2024; Jamil, 2020). As a result, there is a significant knowledge gap and scarcity of studies exploring the use of AI in journalism in developing countries and continents, such as Africa.

Also, despite the several advantages offered by AI, some experts warn that it poses risks, including privacy violations, job losses, perpetuating biases, and spreading fake news among others (Amponsah & Atianashie, 2024; Noain-Sanchez, 2022). If left unchecked, these consequences could disrupt the journalism industry, undermining the relevance of traditional news sources and compromising the fundamental principles of journalism (Newman, 2022; Nwanyanwu & Nwanyanwu, 2021; Hansen et al., 2017). Again, the adoption of AI technologies in journalism faces several obstacles, including concerns about AI being exploited for harmful purposes, inertia in the face of change, complex institutional structures, inadequate funding, audience preferences, and a shortage of necessary expertise (Simon, 2024; de-Lima-Santos & Mesquita 2021).

Notwithstanding, although newsrooms in non-Western societies including various African nations are integrating AI into their operations (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022; Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022), very little is known about the possible impact. To fill this gap, there is a need to examine the level of AI deployment, its potential effects, and the challenges of AI adoption in the media industry in countries in the Global South. The current study therefore explores the views of journalists on the deployment of AI in Ghana's news media industry. This research focuses on the current state of AI integration in the Ghanaian media industry,



analyzing the ways AI is being deployed, the potential benefits and challenges associated with AI integration, and the key factors that obstruct its adoption.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways is AI being deployed into journalism practice in Ghana?
2. What outcomes are expected by adopting AI in journalism practice in Ghana?
3. What are the factors that hinder the deployment of AI in journalism practice in Ghana?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Adoption-Diffusion Theory***

Everett Rogers' Adoption-Diffusion Theory (ADT) emerged from research on innovation adoption in the 1950s and 1960s. ADT explores how new technologies spread within social systems over time, focusing on the presence or absence of an innovation. The theory categorizes adopters into five groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 2003). Innovators are the gatekeepers who introduce an innovation into a system. Early adopters are role models or opinion leaders who shape opinions about an innovation and decrease uncertainty about the innovation through their experiences. Early majority adopters are deliberate in adopting an innovation, and they want to see evidence of success before making a decision to adopt. Late majority adopters are skeptical about an innovation and its outcomes. They therefore wait until most of their peers adopt the innovation. Laggards are the last to adopt an innovation. Rogers (2003) further classified these five categories of innovation adopters into two main groups: earlier adopters (innovators, early adopters, and early majority) and later adopters (late majority and laggards). This theory is applied to the study to examine how AI is being deployed in the Ghanaian media industry and determine its adopter category.

### ***Digital Dichotomy Theory***

The concept of digital dichotomy refers to the disparities in access, adoption, and utilization of digital technologies. The concept of digital dichotomy originated from van Diyk's theory of digital divide. The digital dichotomy theory proposes that entities with differing predisposing factors will exhibit variations in adoption time and experiences with current digital technologies (Nyam, 2021). According to the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria, the theory assesses the uneven imperatives of AI-based media communication between societies that drive AI innovation and those that adopt imports (ACSPN, 2021). The digital dichotomy theory is applied to the study to examine the factors that influence the deployment of AI in Ghana's media industry, aiming to conclude whether the digital divide is being bridged or widened.

### ***Uses of AI in Journalism***

The integration of AI in journalism has triggered a profound transformation of the industry, leading to improvements in efficiency and productivity. Some of the benefits of this integration are discussed below.

### ***Task Automation.***

Automated journalism refers to the process of using algorithms to generate and distribute large volumes of news content for audience consumption. This involves converting data into news stories that are easy to read and understand (Biswal & Gouda, 2020). In recent years, newsrooms have increasingly leveraged AI to automate news production, including transcribing interviews and distributing news (Stanescu, 2023; de-Lima-Santos et al., 2022). According to AI World School, AI can automate up to 9% of an editor's tasks and 15% of a reporter's tasks (AIWS, 2024). However, Simon (2024) questions whether AI automation will lead to improved quality or merely increased quantity, and argues that some aspects of journalism will always require human expertise. The present study would shine light on this debate.

### ***Monitoring.***

AI-powered tools possess the ability to scrutinize trends, detect patterns, and keep track of other publications, enabling reporters and web editors to stay informed and up-to-date. Moreover, these tools can be utilized to monitor airplay and data, as highlighted by Makwambeni (2024) and Nurelmadina et al. (2024). By automating the task of monitoring other publications, AI resources can streamline the workload of reporters and web editors, freeing up valuable time for more in-depth reporting and analysis (Stanescu, 2023).

### ***Content Personalization.***

AI enables the customization of journalistic content to suit the unique tastes and interests of each individual audience member. Amponsah and Atianashie (2024) highlight the relevance of AI in tailoring news feeds and suggesting articles that align with individual interests and preferences, leveraging insights from their behavioural patterns, likes, and previous interactions. In their view, the tailored approach strengthens the bond between news platforms and their audience, driving engagement and loyalty (Amponsah & Atianashie, 2024). Additionally, through content personalization, AI-powered news platforms can provide content in multiple languages, expanding their reach and engaging a vast, globally dispersed audience (Biswal & Gouda, 2020).

### ***Fact-Checking and Verification.***

Journalists are currently grappling with the challenges of fake news and misinformation. While there is a risk that unsupervised AI-generated content may perpetuate falsehoods (Amponsah & Atianashie, 2024), AI can actually support journalists in improving news quality and accuracy by detecting and debunking fake news, as well as upholding ethical journalism standards through fact-checking and disinformation dismantling (Biswal & Gouda, 2020).

### ***Content and Image Creation.***

AI-powered tools can simulate human-like creativity, suggesting ideas, generating comprehensive storylines, and even creating images based on accompanying text (Hudikova & Nagyova, 2024; Noain-Sanchez, 2022). Moreover, AI is capable of producing basic content, such as concise news updates, sports recaps, financial summaries and visual elements. According to Stanescu (2023), AI can be leveraged to create immersive and

interactive journalistic content, utilizing virtual and augmented reality technologies to explain complex topics. The AI-generated images, derived from text inputs, not only captivate audiences but also provide a realistic and experiential experience, blurring the lines between human and artificial creativity.

### ***Virtual Reporting.***

AI avatars, as described by Liu and Siau (2023), are virtual representations of AI systems that mimic human-like characteristics. These AI avatars have the ability to facilitate human-like interaction and engagement, making them ideal for roles such as virtual presenters or reporters. By leveraging their human-like interface, AI avatars can also enhance credibility and trustworthiness (Liu & Siau, 2023; Stanescu, 2023).

The literature on AI adoption in journalism presents varied views on the capabilities of AI and its potential to enhance news quality and accuracy (Biswal & Gouda, 2024; Simon, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to define the specific role AI can play in journalism, particularly in developing countries [like Ghana], where AI technology implementation is still in its infancy (Makwambeni et al., 2024; Jamil, 2020).

### ***Bottlenecks for the Deployment of AI in Journalism***

#### ***Newsroom Brain Drain.***

The deployment of AI in news media faces an obstacle in the form of talent competition. Newsrooms struggle to attract and retain skilled professionals, who are lured away by higher salaries in the tech industry, leading to a brain drain that hinders AI adoption (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022).

#### ***High Cost.***

Implementing AI projects in newsrooms can be costly (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022) because AI models are often tailored to specific stories, requiring redevelopment and retraining for new projects. This means that initial investments may not be recouped across multiple applications (Stray, 2019). Moreover, investigative journalism projects that utilize AI technologies such as computer vision require substantial investments in infrastructure and expert personnel to develop the necessary code (de-Lima-Santos & Salaverría, 2021).

#### ***Perceived Risks Associated With AI.***

AI's ability to generate convincing deepfakes, potentially leading to the dissemination of misinformation, poses a risk to the reliability of news and information (Amponsah & Atianashie, 2024). Besides, as AI systems become more adept at performing complex tasks, concerns arise that they may replace human journalists, resulting in job losses. Additionally, AI algorithms are designed to engage users by presenting content that aligns with their existing beliefs, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and viewpoints. This can impede the development of a well-informed public by restricting the flow of varied opinions and analyses.

A review of the existing studies reveals a significant knowledge gap in the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism practice in developing countries. Numerous studies

on AI's application in journalism have been conducted in developed economies (Simon, 2024; Stanescu, 2023; Liu & Siau, 2023; Noain-Sanchez, 2022; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Nurelmadina et al., 2021). However, AI's role in journalism within countries in the Global South remains largely understudied. In Africa, research on this topic has concentrated on South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria (Makwambeni, 2024; Kioko et al., 2022). Ghana-specific research on AI's application in journalism is scarce. This highlights a research gap in understanding AI adoption in journalism practice in developing countries, including Ghana.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm to explore the understanding of AI adoption in journalism practice in Ghana, from socially constructed multiple realities. Interpretivists believe that reality is subjective and must be interpreted to understand its underlying meaning. As a result, interpretivist research aims to produce thick, contextualized descriptions and interpretations of social realities (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Qualitative research techniques are often employed by interpretivists (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to uncover new perspectives and meanings that reveal the intricacies and complexities of human experience. Thus, the study utilized a qualitative research approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of AI adoption in journalism practice in Ghana, leveraging participants' lived experiences and perceptions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The study employed a multiple case study research design, focusing on four media organisations: two broadcast media firms and two print media firms. Multiple case studies yield more robust outcomes as they examine several cases to reveal insights that a single case cannot (Baraska, 2014). This design enabled in-depth exploration of AI adoption from multiple perspectives, which would have been lost with other designs. The target population comprised journalists from four leading media organisations in Ghana: Graphic Communications Group Limited, New Times Corporation, Multimedia Group Limited, and Media General. Graphic Communications Group Limited and the New Times Corporation are prominent players in Ghana's print media landscape (Appiah-Adjei, 2020). Multimedia Group Limited and Media General are Ghana's premier broadcast media entities, boasting an extensive media presence with online news portals, TV, and radio stations that reach a nationwide audience. Given their diverse digital platforms and multiple channels, these organisations are likely to leverage AI technologies in their operations. These organisations were chosen to gather a diverse and rich dataset, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Simon, 2024). Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select eligible participants for the study. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is employed to deliberately select information-rich individuals or sites that can provide the most insightful information about the research problem under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In snowball sampling, the researcher taps into the social networks of existing participants who have provided rich data, asking them to recommend others who have relevant experiences, characteristics, or viewpoints (Patton, 2015). To be included in the study, participants had to meet two criteria: they had to have worked as journalists for at least one year in any of the selected media organisations, and they had to have used AI tools for at least three months. Eligible participants for the study were identified and asked to recommend colleagues with similar experiences, who in turn referred others. The process continued until the desired sample size was reached, yielding a total of eighteen (18) participants from the four media organisations.

Table 1: List of Media Organisations With Participants for the Study

Name of Media organisation	Organisation type	Number of participants
Multimedia Group Limited	Broadcaster	7
Media General	Broadcaster	5
Graphic Communications Group Limited	Newspaper	4
New Times Corporation	Newspaper	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>

Data for this research was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, offers flexibility and enables probing and clarification of participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews continued until saturation was reached. All the interview sessions were tape-recorded and anonymized. Data analysis involved thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013), where the recorded interviews were transcribed from an audio to a text format and read through thoroughly to identify relevant codes and themes which were then interpreted and the findings compared with existing literature.

## Findings and Discussion

This research explored the views of journalists on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in Ghana's media industry. To achieve the objectives of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen journalists from four media organisations in Ghana. The participants' responses are presented anonymously, labeled as AI-1 to AI-18, to maintain confidentiality and ensure frank responses. The following section presents the findings and discussion of the data collected from the interviews.

### *Ways AI Is Being Deployed in Journalism in Ghana*

The data suggest that currently newsrooms in Ghana deploy AI applications to analyse data, transcribe audio recording, translate language, check grammar and spelling, and research and write stories.

### *Data Analysis.*

The interviews revealed that Ghanaian newsrooms leverage AI-powered tools to streamline data processing and analysis. Journalists utilize these tools to uncover trends, relationships, and relevant insights hidden within large datasets. As one journalist noted, "The data analyzing tool makes it easy to process data, breaking down large data into meaningful insights." (AI-1) This finding aligns with previous research by Makwambeni (2024) and Biswal and Gouda (2020), which highlight AI's ability to rapidly analyze vast amounts of data, thereby enhancing newsroom efficiency.

### ***Audio Transcription.***

The journalists interviewed disclosed that they utilized AI-powered transcription tools to streamline their workflow, reducing the time spent on transcribing audio recordings. The journalists noted that previously, they had to manually transcribe interviews and other audio files, but with the advent of AI, they could now quickly and accurately transcribe recordings, which helped to file their stories on time. According to the journalists, some AI-powered transcription tools offered advanced features that enabled them to edit both audio and video files, further enhancing their productivity and efficiency. Consistent with this finding, studies by Stanescu (2023) and de-Lima-Santos et al. (2022) have shown that in recent years, newsrooms have been increasingly adopting AI technology to automate various aspects of news production, such as transcription of interviews.

### ***Language Translation.***

The study's findings show that newsrooms in Ghana utilize AI's Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools to translate text from one language to another. This helps the journalists to communicate with sources and audiences in different languages. As intimated by a journalist, "We make use of the natural language processing tool which translates text from one language to another. This helps to foster communication with our diverse audience and sources." (AI-9). The finding corroborates the assertion by Biswal and Gouda (2020) that AI-powered news platforms can offer multilingual content, expanding their reach and engaging a diverse audience.

### ***Grammar and Spell Checking.***

It also emerged from the interviews with the journalists that newsrooms in Ghana are harnessing AI technology to improve the accuracy and precision of their writing. By utilizing AI-powered grammar and spell checking tools, journalists are able to refine their writing and ensure error-free content. The journalists emphasized that these tools have become essential to their workflow, as they enhance the overall quality and standards of their writing. A journalist stated as follows:

*We observed that the team responsible for adding text overlays on television programmes initially had a high rate of spelling and grammatical errors. So, we decided to go in for ChatGPT to help them in correcting grammar and spellings. Everyone in the newsroom now makes use of ChatGPT and it is really helpful. (AI-8)*

### ***Researching and Story Writing.***

The study found that Ghanaian newsrooms utilize AI technology to identify and access relevant sources, articles, and documents which contain additional information that complement field research. As a journalist put it, "You need AI to guide you when you are crafting a story and need to ensure the facts are accurate. So, AI helps me to get precise information in order to enhance the credibility of my story." (AI-3). This finding supports the ideas of Hudikova and Nagyova (2024), Noain-Sanchez (2022), and Biswal and Gouda (2020) who suggested that AI-powered tools can suggest ideas, generate comprehensive storylines, and support journalists in improving news quality and accuracy, and upholding ethical journalism standards.

The study uncovers a digital divide, not only between developed and developing countries, but also within the media industry. The disparities in AI technology adoption and utilization among media organisations in Ghana are notable. This supports van Dijk's digital dichotomy theory, which suggests that entities with differing predisposing factors will exhibit varying adoption rates and experiences with digital technologies (Nyam, 2021). While some newsrooms in Ghana are making progress in AI adoption, bridging the digital divide, many other newsrooms lag behind, confirming Rogers' adoption-diffusion theory.

### ***Outcomes Expected by Adopting AI in Journalism in Ghana***

The study also sought to determine the expected outcomes of adopting AI in journalism practice in Ghana. The two broad themes that emerged from the data are positive and negative outcomes. The positive outcomes include; improved work efficiency and innovative broadcasting. The negative outcomes include; decline in human creativity and abilities, potential for disinformation and deepfakes, employee downsizing and layoffs.

#### ***Positive Outcomes***

##### ***Improved Work Efficiency.***

The journalists interviewed envisaged that a full integration of AI into journalism practice would boost productivity. They suggested that AI could optimize tasks to enable them complete their assignments in a timely manner. The interviewees explained that by eliminating tedious tasks, AI can help journalists manage their time more effectively, leading to increased productivity and improved work efficiency. One of the journalists stated that; "AI adoption will save me a significant amount of time, meaning I will be able to complete tasks in a much shorter time frame." (AI-5). The finding aligns with the views of AIWS (2024) and Stanescu (2023) who suggested that AI resources can alleviate the workload of journalists.

##### ***Innovative Broadcasting.***

In enumerating some of the benefits to be expected on the integration of AI in journalism practice in Ghana, the journalists noted that AI technologies could offer innovative ways of presenting news. They suggested that AI could be used to reduce the need for physical movement and travel, and solve the challenge of news anchors having to wake up early or stay late to read the news. The journalists also noted that a full adoption of AI could help with automated news anchoring, allowing for uninterrupted news coverage without the need for human anchors.

Again, the journalists expressed the expectation that AI could be relied upon to automate tasks such as scheduling and playing adverts. As AI-8 put it; "In the master control room, we schedule specific times for adverts and other contents to be played. AI could be used to programme these tasks, enabling automated playback at the designated times." The findings support the claim made by Liu and Siau (2023) that AI applications can mimic human-like qualities including facilitating human-like interaction and engagement, making them ideal for roles such as presenters or reporters.

The fact that journalists in developed countries are already exploiting these expected affordances of AI, underscores the disparities in access, adoption, and utilization of AI

technologies. The findings thus support the digital divide theory, which highlights the unequal dynamics of AI-driven media communication between societies that pioneer AI innovation and those that rely on imported technologies (ACSPN, 2021).

### ***Negative Outcomes***

#### ***Decline in Human Creativity and Abilities.***

Participants of the study thought that a fully AI-integrated journalism industry could make people lazy and less creative, as they would rely too heavily on AI's capabilities and struggle to think independently without it. The journalists were of the view that an over-reliance on AI technologies would result in the loss of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. AI-11 commented that; "We will become redundant and struggle to think beyond what we are supposed to do when AI is taken away."

The journalists felt that over-reliance on AI could lead to a sense of disconnection and unfamiliarity with our own systems, making us seem like strangers to ourselves. This finding highlights the need for a balanced approach that combines the benefits of AI with the development of human skills and abilities.

#### ***Potential for Disinformation and Deepfakes.***

The journalists were concerned about the potential for AI-generated deepfakes to be used to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion, particularly during elections. They worry that people may accept fake news and manipulated media (such as videos or audio recordings) as genuine, without verifying the source or fact-checking, which could lead to confusion, misinformation, and potentially harmful consequences. A journalist (AI-15) stated that; "During elections, someone could use deepfake technology to make it appear as though the EC chairperson is declaring election results when, in fact, they have not. This can cause chaos."

The finding lends credence to the research of Amponsah and Atianashie (2024), in which the researchers found that AI's ability to generate deepfakes could lead to the dissemination of misinformation, posing a threat to the trustworthiness of news and information. This finding emphasizes the need for implementing proper safeguards, rigorous fact-checking, and thorough verification of sources.

#### ***Employee Downsizing and Layoffs.***

Participants of the study believed that AI's integration into journalism would inevitably lead to job losses, decimating the very fabric of the industry. They observed that AI's ability to automate such routine tasks as data analysis, report generation, and content editing threatens journalism jobs as it could render human journalists redundant. A journalist (AI-11) stated that; "We've heard that AI is replacing human jobs in Europe, America, and elsewhere. So, if we fully integrate AI, it will mean we have to downsize our newsrooms, leading to unemployment."

In the view of the participants, as AI takes over these routine tasks, the need for human journalists will diminish and many news organisations will see this as an opportunity to lay off journalists and cut costs. This finding contradicts earlier observation by de-Lima-Santos



and Ceron (2022) who posited that the integration of AI in news media could result in a brain drain where media organisations struggle to attract and retain skilled professionals (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022).

### ***Factors that Hinder the Deployment of AI in Journalism in Ghana***

This segment of the research sought to identify and examine the factors that hindered the adoption, implementation, and full integration of AI into journalism practice in Ghana. Themes that emerged from the data are high cost of deployment, inadequate and unreliable data, and unreliable internet.

#### ***High Cost of Deployment.***

The journalists observed that purchasing or subscribing to AI infrastructure and integrating AI into existing newsroom systems and processes can be costly. They explained that the deployment would require major capital expenditure on consulting, purchasing, and maintenance. This, in their view, is beyond the financial capabilities of the media owners. As noted by AI-4, “We don't have the money and media owners themselves are not ready to put more money into the business.” This finding is consistent with those of de-Lima-Santos and Ceron (2022); Kioko et al. (2022); de-Lima-Santos and Salaverría (2021); and Stray (2019), in which it was found that the deployment of AI in newsrooms requires substantial investments, further adding to the financial burden.

#### ***Limited Local and Unreliable Data.***

The journalists are worried that the scarce availability of local data is hindering the adoption of AI technology in Ghana's media industry. They pointed out that the limited contribution of Ghanaian data makes it challenging for AI systems to learn and provide responses that are culturally relevant and accurate. Thus, AI-generated contents are out of touch with local contexts and risk being inaccurate. In line with the five key attributes of Rogers' (2003) adoption-diffusion theory, the findings suggest that the limited availability of local data in Ghana reduces the relative advantage of AI technology, making it less appealing for adoption in the Ghanaian media industry. Since AI relies heavily on relevant data to function effectively, the lack and incompatibility of local data with AI systems hinders the adoption process, adds complexity, and makes it more challenging for media organisations to test the technology and witness its advantages.

#### ***Poor Internet Connectivity.***

The journalists interviewed also cited poor internet connectivity as a factor that could hinder the adoption of AI technology in Ghana's media industry. The journalists observed that AI systems required stable internet connectivity to update and function effectively. However, Ghana's internet infrastructure is unreliable. This, the journalists emphasized, could limit the ability of newsrooms to utilize AI technology. The comments by the journalists highlight the slow adoption of AI in Ghana's media industry; and further reinforce the adoption-diffusion theory which categorizes innovation adopters as earlier adopters and later adopters (Rogers, 2003). The findings suggest that Ghana's media industry typifies later adopters, with a majority of newsrooms falling into the late majority and laggard categories.

## Conclusion

The study examines the current deployment of AI in Ghana's media industry, the potential benefits and risks of AI adoption, and the challenges that hinder its adoption. The findings reveal that while AI is being leveraged in various ways, a significant digital divide exists within the industry. Some newsrooms actively adopt AI technology, while others lag behind. The adoption of AI is expected to bring about both positive outcomes, such as improved work efficiency, innovative broadcasting, and automated tasks, and negative outcomes, including a decline in human creativity and abilities, potential disinformation and deepfakes, and employee downsizing and layoffs. The high cost of deployment, inadequate and unreliable data, and poor internet connectivity are major factors hindering AI adoption in Ghana's media industry. The study supports Rogers' adoption-diffusion theory and van Dijk's digital dichotomy theory. Addressing financial, data, and infrastructure challenges is crucial to promote AI adoption and effective utilization in Ghana's media industry. Encouraging widespread AI adoption with human skill development and proper safeguards is essential to bridge the digital divide, enhance journalism quality, and competitiveness.

## References

- ACSPN. (2021). Knowledge societies: Artificial Intelligence and the media. UNESCO.
- AI World School. (2024). The impact of AI in journalism. Retrieved from <https://aiworldschool.com/research/the-impact-of-ai-in-journalism/>
- Amponsah, P. N. & Atianashie, A. M. (2024). Navigating the new frontier: A comprehensive review of AI in journalism. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 12, 1-17.
- Appiah-Adjei, G. (2020). The role of news media organisations in countering threats to media freedom and journalists' safety. *Handbook of research on combating threats to media freedom and journalist safety*. DOI:10.4018/978-1-7998-1298-2.ch011
- Baškarada, S. (2014). Qualitative case study guidelines. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(24)1-18.
- Biswal, S. K. & Gouda, N. K. (2020). Artificial intelligence in journalism: A boon or bane? In A. J. Kulkarni and S. C. Satapathy (eds.), *Optimization in machine learning and applications: Algorithms for intelligent systems*. Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed). Sage.
- de Lima-Santos, M. F. & Ceron, W. (2022). Artificial intelligence in news media: Current perceptions and future outlook. *Journalism and media*, 3, 13- 26.
- de Zuniga, H. G., Goyanes, M. & Durotoye, T. (2023). A scholarly definition of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Advancing AI as a conceptual framework in communication research. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2290497>
- Diakopoulos, N. (2019). *Automating news: How algorithms are rewriting the media*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hansen, M., Roca-Sales, M., Keegan, J. M., & King, G. (2017). *Artificial intelligence: Practice and implications for journalism*. New York: Tow Center for Digital Journalism. <https://towcenter.org/research/artificial-intelligence-practiceandimplications-for-journalism/>
- High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence. (2018). *A definition of AI: Main capabilities and scientific disciplines*. European Commission.
- Jamil, S. (2020). Artificial intelligence and journalistic practice: The crossroads of obstacles and opportunities for the Pakistani journalists. *Journalism Practice*, 15(10)1400-1422.
- Kioko P.M., Booker N, Chege N., Kimweli P. (2022). The Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Newsrooms in Kenya: A multi-case Study. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 18 (22), 278.

- Kothari, A. & Cruikshank, S. A. (2022). Artificial intelligence and journalism: An agenda for journalism research in Africa. *African Journalism Studies*, 43(1)17-33.
- Liu, Y. & Siau, K. L. (2023). Human-AI Interaction and AI Avatars. In: Degen, H., Ntoa, S., Moallem, A. (eds) HCI International 2023 – Late Breaking Papers. HCII 2023. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol 14059. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-48057-7\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-48057-7_8)
- London School of Economics and Political Science. (2024). Case studies: Exploring the intersection of AI and journalism. Retrieved from Case studies (lse.ac.uk)
- Makwambeni, B., Matsile, T. & Bulani, J. G. (2024). Between utopia and dystopia: Investigating journalistic perceptions of AI deployment in community media newsrooms in South Africa. In C. A. Dralega (ed.), *Digitisation, AI and algorithms in African Journalism and media contexts: Practice, policy and critical literacies*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Marinou, C. (2024). The role of artificial intelligence in the newsroom. Retrieved from The role of Artificial Intelligence in the newsroom - iMEDD Lab
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage publications.
- Mutsvairo, B. & Bebawi, S. (2022). Journalism and the global south: Shaping journalistic practices and identity post “Arab Spring.” *Digital Journalism*, 10(7)1141-1155. Full article: Journalism and the Global South: Shaping Journalistic Practices and Identity Post “Arab Spring” (tandfonline.com)
- Newman, N. (2022). Journalism, media, and technology trends and predictions 2022. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Noain-Sanchez, A. (2022). Addressing the impact of artificial intelligence on journalism: the perception of experts, journalists and academics. *Comunicacion y Sociedad*, 35(3)105-121
- Nurelmadina, N., Hasan, M. K., Memon, I., Saeed, R. A., Ariffin, K. A. Z., Ali, E. S., Mokhtar, R. A., Islam, S., Hossain, E., & Hassan, M. A. (2021). A Systematic Review on Cognitive Radio in Low Power Wide Area Network for Industrial IoT Applications. *Sustainability* (Switzerland), 13, Article 338. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010338>
- Nwanyanwu, N. C., & Nwanyanwu, M. (2021). Utilization of Artificial Intelligence in Journalism in Nigeria. *KIU Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2), 205–212. <https://www.ijhumas.com/ojs/index.php/kiujoss/article/view/1239>
- Nyam, I. I. (2021). Knowledge societies: artificial intelligence and the media. (ed), Fayoyin, A & Ademosu, I. *Digital dichotomy theory: towards propositional appraisal of artificial intelligence based media-communication imperative*. UNESCO.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Free Press.

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Person.

Simon, F. M. (2024). *Artificial intelligence in the news: How AI retools, rationalizes, and reshapes journalism and the public arena*. University of Oxford.

Stanescu, G. C. (2023). The impact of artificial intelligence on journalism: Adverse effects vs. benefits. *Social Sciences Education Research*, 10(1), 258-262.

**Contact email:** [sadefioye@uew.edu.gh](mailto:sadefioye@uew.edu.gh)







©The International Academic Forum 2024  
The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)  
Sakae 1-16-26-201  
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi  
Japan 460-0008  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)