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# STALIN AND PODZEMÍ: PIRATE RADIO STATIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1989–1991)[1]

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## ABSTRACT

*The fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 paved the way for a market economy, which, however, did not initially have a clear legislative framework. This is when the first "pirate radio stations" emerged, mostly broadcasting Anglo-American popular music and rock. The early 1990s gave rise to hundreds of such stations. This paper focuses on two renowned Czech pirate radio stations from this period: Stalin and Podzemí ("Underground"). Following an analysis of the literature, periodicals, and eyewitness accounts, the paper describes the circumstances in which these stations emerged and their subsequent existence, while focusing on musical dramaturgy, the public response to illegal broadcasting, and the impact of these stations on legislation.*

Keywords: Post-socialism ▪ Czechoslovakia ▪ transformation ▪ Velvet Revolution ▪ 1989 Popular music ▪ media ▪ radio ▪ private radio broadcasting ▪ pirate radio

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 brought about various changes and opened new possibilities for the original European socialist states. The early 1990s was a time of "catching up with the West" and attempting to bring in comprehensive economic reforms. The transition from a centrally controlled economy to a market economy progressed, at least in the first phase of post-socialism, without a sufficient legislative background. While the original laws of the communist era could no longer be enforced in multiple areas, the new legislation was only emerging, and was not yet able to respond flexibly to rapid developments. Private business (of local entrepreneurs as well as international

1 This study is an outcome of research activity supported from the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic within the grant GA ČR P410/20-24091S "Překrásný nový svět: mládež, hudba a třída v českém postsocialismu

corporations) thus enjoyed an uncoordinated flourish, due to which the 1990s in Eastern Europe have been branded "wild" (Tikhomirov, 2020).

As Colin Sparks (2018, p. 146) notes, "The collapse of communism was accompanied by an explosion of information, opinion and entertainment". The media rapidly adapted to the new situation and became one of the first sectors to be privatized. This was especially true of periodicals. The post-socialist countries witnessed a boom in new publications and the de-nationalization of existing periodicals between 1989 and 1992 (Bednařík et al., 2019, pp. 400–408; Coman, 2009; Raycheva, 2009). Electronic media, namely radio and television, faced a much more problematic situation as the frequency spectrum was limited and the legislation for leasing frequencies to private broadcasters was very slow to develop, often taking several years. All this encouraged the rapid arrival of pirate radio (radio stations that operated illegally without the necessary licences or permissions to broadcast on a specified frequency). These largely presented Anglo-American popular music – music that had been heavily regulated under the original media monopolies of the socialist states and in some cases continued to be unavailable in the context of emerging capitalism due to the disproportionate pricing policy of music companies and corporations entering the free market.[2] Given the circumstances, the stations came to serve, in part, as instruments of political activism aimed at the transformation of the legal environment.

This article studies pirate radio in Czechoslovakia immediately after 1989. Our case studies involve the Prague-based Radio Stalin (later Radio Ultra, now Radio 1) and České Budějovice's Radio Podzemí (later Radio Faktor, now Hitrádio Faktor). These stations were chosen because they are practically the only publicly known institutions of their kind, established in the first months after the fall of the communist regime. The article primarily discusses the historical, organizational, legal and technological aspects, but also the often overlooked and, for radio, crucial issue of the musical dramaturgical contexts of both stations. It also considers the wider international context, particularly regarding the analogies and specifics of other (not only) post-socialist states. Other phenomena explored include the broader issues of ethics and freedom of information (in relation to audience and state legislation), which acquired several new connotations in the administrative context of the post-socialist transformation.

The study follows the line of international research into popular music and its personal and institutional vehicles in the key transformative era of early post-socialism in Europe after 1989, which has been expanding in recent years through the work of the authors of the collective monographs *Popular Music in Eastern Europe* (Mazierska, 2016) and *Popular Music in Communist and Post-Communist Europe* (Blüml et al., 2019). By understanding the complex structure of popular music culture in

2 For example, the recordings of Western musicians often sold in Czechoslovakia at higher prices than in neighbouring (and much richer) Germany. The imbalance subsequently prompted the massive spread of illegal copying. See Elavsky (2013).

the region, including all the relevant institutional overlaps (with the media and the music industry), the article builds on the latest interdisciplinary publications such as *Made in Poland*, edited by Patryk Galuszka, a researcher on popular music and media studies (2020). In terms of resources, the article draws on a detailed analysis of contemporary Czechoslovak press articles issued between 1989 and 1992,[3] and on radio broadcast documents (including audio recordings). Another key source are interviews with the eyewitnesses and representatives of the first pirate radio broadcasts in Czechoslovakia, interviewed in most cases by the author in 2020.[4]

## 2. CZECHOSLOVAK RADIO AND ITS POST-1989 TRANSFORMATION

The production, broadcasting, and distribution of radio content in Czechoslovakia was monopolized, until November 1989, by the state Czechoslovak Radio. This, together with Czechoslovak Television (founded in 1953), was a key medium of the communist regime, run directly by the country's Ministry of Information or Ministry of Culture. Starting in 1964, the tasks of Czechoslovak Radio were defined by law as the promotion of mass political and educational work and the comprehensive awareness of domestic and foreign audiences about developments at home and abroad (Act No. 17/1964 Coll.).

The monopoly of Czechoslovak Radio was, however, never bullet-proof. Residents of border regions were able to tune their receivers (with the CCIR bandplan) to foreign stations. Today, researchers such as Tomek (2014, 2015) focus especially on the political broadcasting of the BBC and Radio Free Europe, which was systematically disrupted by the communist regime. Czechoslovak audiences nevertheless also cherished foreign radio stations presenting the latest Western popular music, which was broadcast by the domestic media only to a very limited extent. The most important radio station of this type, specifically in the fifties and sixties, was Radio Luxembourg. This Luxembourg-based station broadcast a stream of music and influenced several generations of musicians and fans, not only in Czechoslovakia. Its popularity among young people even drove Czechoslovak Radio to produce its own popular music programmes (Štefečková, 2012). Other stations reaching the Czechoslovak air were the Austrian Österreich 3 (Ö3) and the German Bayern 3, public radio stations targeted at young people. In contrast to its attitude to Radio Free Europe or the BBC, the Communist Party did not consider these stations dangerous and did not monitor

3 This includes the specialist media journals *Rozhlas* and *Strategie*, and the dailies *Český deník*, *Jihočeská pravda*, *Lidová demokracie*, *Lidové noviny*, *Práce* and *Studentské listy* and magazines *Mladý svět*, *Melodie* and *Respekt*.

4 Reminiscences about Radio Stalin were sourced from interviews held by Šárka Prágrová with narrators from the station for her bachelor's thesis. Another seven interviews were held, as part of our study, with interviewees affiliated with Radio Podzemí. The interviewees included the station founders (Ladislav Faktor, Bohuslav Čtveráček), DJs (Vladimír Kostínek, Vojtěch Vít, Petr Jungmann), and audience (Jiří Tichý). The aim was to find out as much information as possible about the daily operation of the stations.

them or try to interfere with their signal; people were not prosecuted for listening to them (Štefečková, 2012).

As indicated above, the process of profound structural change in post-socialist European states commenced after 1989. The transition to a market economy often primarily affected the media, turning it into the first major area of private enterprise. The key phase of the transformation of the Czechoslovakian media industry, according to Bednařík et al. (2019, pp. 395–399), kicked off in November 1989 and lasted until February 1994. This is when Nova TV – the first nationwide private television station in Czechoslovakia and also in Central and Eastern Europe – was launched. These years saw the unprecedentedly fast arrival of new media legislation, the transformation of media content and property rights, and the rise of the advertising market. The transition to privatized, profit-driven media was the core of the transformation process (Bednařík et al., 2019, p. 410).

The weeks and months after November 1989 fostered the birth of several new periodicals in Czechoslovakia and across post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe: these were both transformed official titles and originally unofficial samizdat titles (Bednařík et al., 2019, pp. 400–408). The situation was noticeably more complicated in the case of private radio and television, where it was first necessary to establish a basic concept of radio and television broadcasting in a democratic society to replace the then system of state-controlled media. The concept was ultimately modelled on the Western European dual broadcasting system, where public service media (into which the former Czechoslovak state television, radio, and news agency were transformed) coexist with private media and holders of licences to operate radio or television. The category of community radio stations such as the ones in Hungary was not considered, although decision-making took place at a time when the ethos of participatory democracy, presented primarily by Václav Havel, still dominated in Czechoslovakia (Hadjiisky, 2001).

Because of the precipitate developments, the legislative process was marked by anomalies and irregularities from the beginning. A number of foreign stations, especially stations from France, where the private radio market was the most developed in the European context, faced new opportunities in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. The French music station Europe 2, for example, started broadcasting completely outside the legal framework in Czechoslovakia mentioned above. In January 1990 its director Martin Brisac arranged a contract for cooperation with Czechoslovak Radio, which lent the foreign station one of its Prague frequencies (Moravec, 2000, p. 8). The state-controlled radio itself thus took the first steps to demonopolize the industry, which reflects the atmosphere of the first post-revolutionary months. The planned joint venture (a youth station) fell through as a result of subsequent personnel changes in the management of Czechoslovak Radio. Precisely due to the complicated relationship between Europe 2 and Czechoslovak Radio, the private station could not create its own Czech program in the first year of its Prague broadcasting, so it only took over the broadcasting of its parent French station with moderated inputs and advertisements in French.[5] In cooperation with the Bratislava management of Czechoslovak Radio, CD International began broadcasting at the same time. Paradoxically, even this station did not speak to its listeners in their mother tongue, as it was targeting listeners in neighbouring Austria, where private broadcasting was not allowed until 1995, and its language was therefore German. While the then government criticized such agreements, in its declaration of 14 June 1990 it allowed Radio Free Europe to broadcast on Czechoslovak territory, with the BBC and RFI following a few months later (Moravec, 2000, pp. 8–9).[6]

Czechoslovakia was, nonetheless, officially still not granting licences for private broadcasting in 1990. Those interested could apply to the relevant interdepartmental commission in charge of selecting applicants for the first experimental non-state radio and television broadcasting, which was established on 11 June 1990. The venture proved very popular, as, a mere two months into its existence, the commission was swamped by 49 applications for radio broadcasting permits: fifteen arrived from abroad, and another six from Czech entrepreneurs who planned to cooperate with foreign entities (Řežábek, 1990, p. 1).

Czechoslovakia issued the very first licences on 22 March 1991, one year after Europe 2 had started to broadcast, and authorized only local radio stations[7] within the Prague territory, where the Radiocommunications Administration was able to ensure that the transmitted signal would not interfere with broadcasting from abroad ((r), 1991). The first non-Prague local licences were granted about two months later. As in other Central and Eastern European countries, some of the stakeholders interested in private radio did not wait for a media law and founded their own pirate radio stations. One of the contributing factors was the exemptions given to foreign stations – the initiators of illegal broadcasting were worried that by the time the legislation was completed, the market would have been divided, without any space for new stations (Reilly, 1990).

Only two instances of continuing illegal radio are reported from Czechoslovakia in this period: Radio Stalin, launched on 19 October 1990, and Radio Podzemí, which began to broadcast on 31 December 1990. It is likely that the number of pirate radio stations was higher. This is indicated by the non-specific claims of media historians (Köpplová & Jirák, 2011, p. 278), members of the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (the licensing and supervision authority) (Řežábek, 1992) and other sources (Hron, 2019). However, no specific information has been preserved about any other pirate stations broadcasting in the early 1990s. It is therefore possible to

5 Even in this form, 35% of people within range of their transmitters listened to the station (EL, 1991, p.6).

6 The situation was similar in other post-socialist countries: for example, the Bulgarian government began issuing special licences to foreign stations in April 1991; Bulgaria first had Voice of America broadcasts to Europe, and Voice of America was later joined by the French RFI, the BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle, and Radio Free Europe (Sotirov, 1998). The Polish government enabled French FUN and RFI broadcasts a whole year earlier (Sagan, 2014a).

7 The law distinguished between local, regional and national broadcasting. The local radio stations had a 1kW transmitter power and therefore a low signal range.

assume that these were only local short-lived experimental radio stations. Further mentions of pirate radio in the Czech Republic are from the turn of the millennium and later in the 2000s (Super-Radio.cz, 2010).

The following chapters introduce both of the Czechoslovak pirate radio stations mentioned above, and explain their role in the context of contemporary politics, legislation, and popular music trends, with a strong emphasis on rock revival and the circumstantial short-term rise of underground bands.

## 3. RADIO STALIN (ULTRA)

The first and most famous pirate radio station in Czechoslovakia was the Prague-based Radio Stalin, which broadcast from 19 to 25 October 1990 from a bunker under the former Stalin monument in the centre of Prague.[8] It was established by students of (prevalently) the Faculty of Education of Charles University. Some of them had participated in a humanitarian operation during the bloody uprising in Romania in December 1989, where they had encountered local student radio. This inspired them later to launch their own station. After returning to Czechoslovakia, the students took advantage of the offer by the French station NRJ of free, old, unused and yet still functional radio equipment. The kit consisted of a 50-watt transmitter, a mixer, a microphone, and two gramophones (Prágrová & Štindl, 2017).

The students applied for a radio licence as early as March 1990, later asking the Radiocommunications Administration to identify a vacant transmission frequency which would not interfere with other broadcast or air or fire communications. Before any decision about the licence was made, the team interested in cooperating on the broadcast gradually grew. The initiators rented premises and carried out test broadcasts, without going live, from spring to autumn 1990 to ensure everything was ready for the moment they could broadcast (Prágrová, 2017, p. 34). Copying Europe 2, the students tried to reach an agreement with Czechoslovak Radio, but the latter did not grant the radio any of its frequencies (Prágrová & Hronek, 2016, p. 2).

In the autumn of 1990, an offer came from the Linhart Foundation, the organizer of the Totalitarian Zone Festival held under the former Stalin monument. The festival combined concerts, artistic performances, and theatre, and the foundation wanted to set up a temporary radio station to report on the festival programme (Prágrová, Vintr & Hnyk, 2016, pp. 4–5). The students moved their equipment to the former telephone exchange in the bunker and named their station Radio Stalin after the new venue. The broadcasting team was made up of about thirty young people, some of whom had gained experience with Czechoslovak Radio, particularly Vladimír Vintr, who had worked for the state radio for a year as a technician and was one of the most

8 For the importance of this site, see the study by Hana Pichová (2008). When mentioning Radio Stalin, the author incorrectly states that it broadcast from here before 1989.

prominent DJs of Radio Stalin. The station was run on a voluntary basis, with festival bar drink vouchers being the only perk (Prágrová, 2017, p. 49).

The daytime playlist included alternative music, and at night the station broadcast festival concerts (mostly alternative Czechoslovak bands such as Z kopce, Hudba Praha, E, and Ľahká múza). The DJs reported on the current festival programme, and the radio also had its own jingle, which introduced the station in various languages, including Russian and French.[9] Interviews with music bands and artists who performed at or simply visited the festival also played a significant role in Radio Stalin broadcasts.

Thanks to media attention, word about the new radio station spread quickly even outside the short range of its transmitter, which covered mainly the centre of Prague. Shortly after Radio Stalin began to broadcast, other people interested in private radio from all over the country visited the station, including Ladislav Faktor, who was intent on launching Radio Podzemí (Prágrová & Hronek, 2016, p. 6).

Radio Stalin was on air for about 20 hours a day. When it was not broadcasting a festival concert or interview, its DJs played music. Instead of following a radio format, they played what was available, which was often their amateur-copied and thus not very high quality audio cassettes (Prágrová, Vintr & Hnyk, 2016, p. 11). The very first track Radio Stalin played was *Rocks Off* by The Rolling Stones. The list of Czech music featured underground bands, some of which had, just months earlier, been banned from performing, such as Garage, MCH Band, Psí vojáci, Jasná páka, Plastic People of the Universe, DG 307, folk singers Karel Kryl and Jaroslav Hutka, and new rock bands such as Ecstasy of Saint Theresa, Here, Naked Souls, and Kurtizány z 25. Avenue (Prágrová, 2017, p. 43). Considerable space was also given to foreign music, ranging from industrial metal through electronic music to rock hits of the sixties or seventies, to meet the audience demand (Prágrová & Zima, 2016, p. 13).

Eyewitnesses remember that, despite the several months of test operation, Radio Stalin suffered greatly from technical imperfections due to faulty technology and the inexperience of its operators. Their communication was often marred by speech imperfections and informality. The poor quality is also evidenced in the reminiscence of the founder of the radio, Pavel Hronek, who said: "I ain't gonna lie, the broadcasting was shitty. Nitwits babbling away, music playing, interviews of hammered musicians at 3am" (Prágrová & Hronek, 2016, p. 11). One of the interviewees, however, was President Václav Havel, who attended the event and thus legitimized the station in the public eye.[10]

Although Stalin is generally considered a pirate radio station, it had, according to the media theoretician Václav Moravec (2000, p. 9), a special permit to broadcast at

9 The sound recordings are available at: https://soundcloud.com/jaduportal/poslouch-te-r-dio-stalin-sie-h?in=jaduportal/sets/radiostalin.

10 The recording of this interview is available at: https://soundcloud.com/jaduportal/poslouch-te-r-dio-stalin-sie?in=jaduportal/sets/radiostalin. City officials said in the press that one of the president's advisers even helped install the station's antenna. Radio Stalin refuted this information ((oč), 1990, p. 12).

least from 19 to 22 October 1990 at the festival.[11] After the permit expired, Radio Stalin was visited by officials representing Prague 7, which is where the event had taken place. The officials pronounced the broadcast illegal and demanded it be terminated. The request was accommodated, but the radio resumed broadcasting as early as 24 October (Heidenreichová, 1990). The station kicked off with a statement from which it is clear that, at least from this moment on, it was partially abandoning its original exclusive focus on music in favour of political activism:

> You're listening to an independent radio, you're listening to Radio Stalin. After a short two-day break you can tune in to us at 92.6. We were shut down by the authorities and the threat is still there. We are asking you, our listeners, who enjoy this broadcast, to help us in any way you can. Call us at [...] or call the public media, or your MPs who alone could perhaps help us. From now on, our broadcast is a manifestation against the monopoly of Czechoslovak Radio and the Radiocommunications Administration.[12]

The foretold intervention by the authorities took place very soon: the following morning, the police, in cooperation with the authorities and the Radiocommunications Administration, confiscated Radio Stalin's broadcasting equipment. This was the end of the station. Although the station had broadcast for less than a week and could only be tuned into in part of Prague, it was widely supported by the public, particularly after the police intervention. Its popularity was enhanced by intense media coverage. This trend culminated in a petition in support of independent radio and television, initiated by members of the station, which collected 30,000 signatures within a few weeks, including those of a number of members of Charter 77 and KAN (Club of Committed Non-Party Members), the editorial boards of the magazines *Revolver Revue* and *Respekt*, the dailies *Lidové noviny* and *Studentské listy*, as well as the artists Mikuláš Chadima, Marta Kubišová, Filip Topol, Michal Pavlíček, and Joska Skalník (Reilly, 1990).

The participation of famous people associated with long-term anti-communist resistance provoked a broader discussion – a discussion in which the original understanding that the existence of unofficial organizational structures independent of the establishment was an unquestionable principle or value was confronted with ethical norms and respect for the legislature of the new democratic state. The ambivalent attitude to Radio Stalin was illustrated in, for example, the article "The Case of Radio Stalin" published in the weekly *Rozhlas* in December 1990, in which the author admitted that the station had trespassed, yet tried to justify this by the absence of legislation (Krupička, 1990, p. 48). In addition, the dramatic conditions of emerging

11 Similarly, FM Plus had been allowed to broadcast throughout the celebrations of the anniversary of the liberation of Pilsen by the US Army (Milota, 2007, pp. 8–9).

12 The Radio Stalin broadcast record: https://soundcloud.com/jaduportal/poslouch-te-r-dio-stalin-sie-h?in=jaduportal/sets/radiostalin.

capitalism fostered conspiracy theories: one of them was introduced by a *Mladý svět* journalist, according to whom Radio Stalin was part of a well thought-out plan of the French commercial station NRJ (which had provided Stalin with broadcasting equipment) to enter the Czechoslovak radio market (Vondráček, 1990, p. 19).

The case in a way illustrated the following phase of the Velvet Revolution: it flared up in the November 1989 student demonstrations, only to transition eventually onto a purely institutional and legal level, a level where, for example, decisions about the future of the domestic media were made. A brand new perspective gained attention, too: protection of the Czech radio space against massive private interests coming from the West. After the police intervention, Radio Stalin announced in the media that the confiscation of their transmitter would not stop their efforts to disrupt the monopoly of Czechoslovak Radio. They issued a press release on 28 October, which said:

> We would like to assure our listeners and supporters that we will start broadcasting again as soon as technology allows us, as we cannot condone what is happening: friends of the old order hampering the adoption of new laws on independent radio and television, and the Radiocommunications administration allocating vacant frequencies to western radios in order to maintain its position. We shall therefore continue to broadcast to draw attention to the fact that, once the relevant laws have been adopted, there will no longer be free frequencies for domestic applicants. (Reilly, 1990)

President Václav Havel, criticized for giving an interview to the illegal station, also joined the discussion on Radio Stalin. When asked about it on the regular Czechoslovak Radio programme Hovory v Lánech on 28 October 1990, he answered by pointing to the need for media pluralism:

> It never crossed my mind to ask if the station was legal or illegal, and now I have read in the papers that it is actually illegal as it did not get official approval to broadcast on its frequencies, even though it had applied. I may end up having to go to court as a witness. I think that the micro affair it has caused is good, because it highlights the need for a plurality of those transmitters and the need to look for ways for the government to grant frequencies, if there are any available, to independent stations or private stations, so that the monopoly of our venerable radio is broken, to some extent. (Prágrová, 2017, p. 47)

When the technology was returned to the radio based on a court decision in February 1991, the station immediately started broadcasting on the same frequency under the name Ultra (or "Radio 92.6" at one point). This time the radio based itself in the Bunkr rock club, which had been founded by Richard Němčok. The broadcasting, once again, lacked proper permission. The Radiocommunications Administration issued a decision for the radio to cease operation the very day the broadcasting was launched (15 February 1990), but after several hours of forced silence the radio resumed broadcasting (*Lidové noviny*, 1991, p. 2). The new station granted space to other parties interested in private radio: licence applicants such as the Prague-based Trans, Independent and Collegium, as well as other radio stations from Brno and Ostrava, carried out test broadcasts from here free of charge (Prágrová & Wienerová, 2017, p. 3).

Ultra only broadcast for a few weeks before the administration finally granted all Prague licences on 22 March, with Ultra gaining one. After winning the licence, the radio began to broadcast under the new name of Radio 1. The station still operates today, now as part of the Media Club network. Radio 1 is one of the few traditional radio stations to have kept to the original concept of primarily non-mainstream alternative music.

## 4. RADIO PODZEMÍ

The other, less publicized, case of pirate radio in early post-socialist Czechoslovakia was Podzemí. This station broadcast from the cellar of its founder Ladislav Faktor in České Budějovice, a town of 100,000 inhabitants in southern Bohemia. The station was launched on 31 December 1990. Rather than being the primary goal of its initiators, its illegal status was, once again, the result of the dismal legal situation of the time.

Ladislav Faktor, having trained as a solicitor, began his career in the mid-1980s as a freelance musician, composer of film and stage music, and producer (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). He took part in recordings made in the České Budějovice studio of Czechoslovakia Radio, and built a recording studio in the cellar of his house in Jírovcova Street, where he made records for the České Budějovice band Oceán before November 1989.[13]

In August 1990, together with other jazz and rock musicians from České Budějovice, he requested a licence for "Radio F – Regional Broadcast of Dr. Faktor for České Budějovice" (Řežábek, 1990, p. 1). Other people involved in the project included producer Bohuslav Čtveráček and technician Antonín Couf. Due to delays in licensing and the long-term inaction of the authorities, the team decided to broadcast outside any legal framework (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). This step was directly inspired by Radio Stalin, in which Ladislav Faktor had also participated, and where he made contacts. These contacts later helped him to find broadcasting technology, which was otherwise hard to obtain in Czechoslovakia at that time (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

The pirate radio was based in the cellar recording studio of Ladislav Faktor, whose equipment allowed for elementary broadcasting. In addition to microphones, the

13 The Oceán's YouTube channel features record-making videos which show the premises and equipment of the future Radio Podzemí: https://youtu.be/TUFopuAt34o.

equipment included a basic mixer, a tape recorder, and two turntables from which music was played. The "home-made" transmitter itself was provided by Antonín Couf, a guitarist of the České Budějovice band Boule and a radio communications worker.

The easy-to-remember frequency of 100.0 FM was selected from the relatively free radio spectrum, and on this frequency the new Radio Podzemí (Underground), aptly named given the nature and location of its broadcasting, aired for the first time on New Year's Eve 1990. A journalist of *Jihočeská pravda* commented on the premiere in her article titled Air Under Attack:

> Whisper had me tune in at 100.0 on the afternoon of the thirty-first, and there it was in the CCIR band, RADIO PODZEMÍ! The stale environment of the state-sanctioned radio was at last ruptured also in České Budějovice and the surrounding area by a private pirate radio station, which, housed in a cellar in the city centre, brought a stimulating three hours of mainly current music, delivered with a lively (and humorous) presentation underlined by a constant and truly iconic jingle of RADIO PODZEMÍ. ((akl), 1991a, p. 2)

In addition to the music, the article mentions interviews with musicians and an unnamed MP; the initiators of the broadcast ((akl), 1991a, p. 2) also remained anonymous. As for the MP, it could have been the then minister of finance and main advocate for economic change towards a market economy (later the president), Václav Klaus. The fact that he featured in one of the first broadcasts by the radio is referenced by Faktor himself, who recalls a statement of Klaus, which differed somewhat from the previously quoted subtle call for the support of pluralistic media from Václav Havel: "That ticked me off, Klaus went live and said he did not think radio stations would be the most important thing to create, right at the beginning. I was upset and I still remember his words" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

The New Year's Eve debut of Radio Podzemí did not mean the radio would begin to broadcast regularly. It was not until more than a month later that the station went on air again ((akl), 1991b, p. 1). The first broadcast was primarily demonstrative; the aim was to draw attention to the deficient legislation and to put pressure on the relevant authorities, to provoke discussion.

The broadcasting by the illegal station did not escape the attention of the authorities either: "Sure I was prosecuted by the authorities, [...] twenty radiocommunications guys were there, yelling at me that planes would crash, they made a lot of threats. But our technology was too good for us not to know that it was nonsense" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). In the end the threats proved to be vain: the management of Radio Podzemí were never fined, nor was their broadcasting equipment confiscated, unlike what happened to Radio Stalin. According to Faktor, the reason could be the geographical distance from the capital. Local radiocommunications workers were mostly fans of Radio Podzemí, and new "post-revolutionary" city officials took part in radio interviews (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

Radio Podzemí went on air again on Friday 15 February 1991. This time it ran from 6pm to 10pm at the slightly different frequency of 99.7 MHz. The date of the broadcast had been agreed at the founding congress of the Union for Independent Television and Radio Broadcasting. The plan was to broadcast illegally in other parts of the country on this one day, to drive the acceleration of the licensing process forward ((akl), 1991b, p. 1). This is evident from an interview for *Jihočeská pravda*: "We would like to stop our illegal broadcast for now. If things with our licence application don't move forward, you'll be hearing from us again. And this time it won't take a full two months" ((akl), 1991b, p. 1). Podzemí indeed went back on air sooner than that, namely after a week, and retained its weekly periodicity for the following months.

Soon the radio was airing ads made in Faktor's recording studio (Neradová, 1991, p.1). He initially recorded these free of charge for regional entrepreneurs who were friends of his, to convince them that this form of promotion worked. "There was next to zero advertising back then, and entrepreneurs needed to get their products to people, to promote them. And so we shot a set of ads, which were sung by our musician friends and which were pretty funny. Entrepreneurs began to turn up, and once they started making a profit, they started bringing cash. And this set the wheel spinning" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

Musically, Radio Podzemí focused mainly on rock music such as that of Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, and Deep Purple, and the music of the sixties, in particular The Beatles and The Rolling Stones; and yet they also incorporated current hits. "We also played Zappa and special gigs you won't hear on radio anymore, because it was something we liked. And people loved it as well since they hadn't heard it before" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). Podzemí also began to put on programmes. In addition to a very popular "songs on request", there was the Something Different show, a 30-minute jazz session prepared by Bohuslav Čtveráček (B. Čtveráček, personal communication, 13 January 2021).

The playlists were selected by the DJs themselves. The first DJs were, almost without exception, experienced south Bohemian disc jockeys, who simply transformed their original club plays into a radio format. They included, for example, Vojtěch Vít, Petr Jungmann, and Vladimír Kostínek, who had started playing in discotheques in the late 1960s (V. Kostínek, personal communication, 17 September 2020). Hiring DJs was advantageous for the station in a number of ways: "The first year guys came over who had heaps of vinyls because they did disco nights and that was the source of music. They were in touch with the audience, with regular folks, they knew how to pick a track that people would love. That's because they did dance gigs every Saturday night and knew what the crowd wanted" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). Another advantage of working with disc jockeys was their knowledge of sound technology and their ability to speak into a microphone. Disc jockeying in Czechoslovakia had been given a standardized instructional and qualification framework in the mid-1970s (Blüml, 2019).

The Podzemí playlists were subject to a single unwritten rule, which was the "ban on the Gotts and Vondráčkovás" – pop stars who had reigned in Czechoslovak popular music for the preceding twenty years (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). The station in general avoided domestic production, namely socialist pop music and other genres. The exception was new wave and rock bands such as Precedens, Pražský výběr, Oceán, and local bands.

The founders of Podzemí did not advertise the station at all, and news about it quickly spread by word of mouth. Although no listening figures are available for this period, naturally, the popularity of the illegal station is illustrated by the fact that, once a telephone line was installed in the studio, the DJs answered eighty calls during a single show (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). However, the station's signal did not even cover the whole of České Budějovice. The then fifteen-year-old radio fan Jiří Tichý was living in the Máj housing estate, three kilometres from the transmitter, and he says that reception was borderline: "I was living with my parents on the eighth floor of a block of flats. I found a broom and fixed the antennae up above the roof to hear well 'cos the signal was weak in [České Budějovice]. You could tune in only if you were an enthusiast or lived close by. Outside [České Budějovice] or on the edge of the town was just too far for the signal." (J. Tichý, personal communication, 14 January 2021).

The station planned, after being licensed, to change its name to Radio Faktor, as the original name implied illegal activities (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). Its licence entered into force on Friday 17 May 1991 (kolektiv autorů, 2003, p. 99), and the station began to broadcast under its new name two weeks later ((akl), 1991c, p. 2). The new station took over from the pirate Podzemí its staff, equipment, broadcasting premises, 99.7 frequency, and initially also the weekly mode. A month later, on Monday 1 July, Faktor began broadcasting every weekday from 7am to 7pm, while the weekends were dedicated to technical maintenance ((akl), 1991d, p. 1). Radio Faktor continues to broadcast (as Hitrádio Faktor), nowadays as part of the Radiohouse network. In this respect, it is the longest running private Czech radio station outside Prague.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As the cases of Stalin and Podzemí illustrate, pirate radio stations were the last resort in Czechoslovakia in 1990 and 1991 for those interested in running a private radio station, as they were not allowed to do so even after several months of trying due to the absence of legislative support. The broadcasts, with their dominant popular music content, were largely demonstrative in nature. The aim was to point out the reluctance of the new legislators to demonopolize radio and television. Similar activities would, under different circumstances, provoke significant legal recourse, but in the transformation period the authorities were extremely liberal. As the authors of *Dějiny českých médií* (History of Czech Media) aptly say: "Developments in the media industry [after 1989] often raced ahead of the emerging media legislation, outside the existing legal framework, although in a favourable social climate. The epoch was highly tolerant to not entirely legal practices in private media formation, as the process was viewed as part of privatization, of building a system of state-independent media." (Bednařík et al., 2019, p. 400).

The two stations introduced here had slightly different starting points and visions. Radio Stalin was basically a student radio station: its initiators were in their twenties with an interest in alternative art. Radio Podzemí was made up of people who were ten years older and were mostly active musicians or disc jockeys with a vision of radio as a commercial product (remember that the station was already running commercials for local entrepreneurs while it was broadcasting illegally). The output of the two stations had several elements in common: both stations gave a lot of space to alternative, experimental music, but also to political issues. In some respects, the dramaturgy of Stalin and Podzemí followed the "horizon-expanding" function of public radio rather than anticipating the approach of commercial radio stations. A similarly idealistic approach was also a characteristic of the first wave of radio licensees.

In contrast to the importance given to these pirate stations, both had a low real range, as well as a short duration. Radio Stalin broadcast for about a week, mostly as an accompaniment to the festival. Podzemí aired about sixteen times, with a periodicity of one evening a week. It is likely that the pirate broadcasting of many other stations was only one-off and was part of the aforementioned "coercive action" of the licence applicants' organization, the Union for Independent Television and Radio Broadcasting.

The favourable public response, specifically in the case of Radio Stalin, and the fear of more and more similar cases, prompted the Czechoslovak government in the first months of 1991 to allow the (experimental) licensing of private radio, even though the draft Media Act, which would legally define the area and its stakeholders, had not been approved. Interestingly, Vladimír Vintr, one of the founders of Radio Stalin, was a member of the first commission in charge of licensing Prague-based radios (Prágrová, 2017, p. 57). Pirate radio thus achieved its goal in this respect. This is probably why Czechoslovakia did not see such a boom in illegal stations as, for example, occurred in neighbouring Poland, where about a hundred pirate radio stations were set up in larger cities but also in villages (Doliwa, 2019, p. 88; Sagan, 2014b). It is important to add here that Poland had a certain tradition of pirate radio stations even before 1989, when, in addition to several purely illegal stations, there were also many student radio stations that represented the grey zone. So, unlike in Czechoslovakia, there was something to build on (Doliwa, 2019, pp. 85–86).

Speaking of neighbouring countries, it can be said that although the legislative process in Czechoslovakia was much criticized in the press reports of the period for being long, private radio licences began to be granted here earlier than in any other post-socialist country. Poland, for example, did not start licensing private radio stations until the end of 1993 or the beginning of 1994 (Beliczyński, 2009), and Hungary adopted media legislation abolishing the then moratorium on radio frequency rental as late as 1996 (Gosztonyi, 2010).

Although private radio was considered by its proponents to be a natural part of democratic pluralism and the market economy in Czechoslovakia, the phenomenon had not long been in existence in Western Europe itself by the early 1990s. Private commercial stations, often local only, began to emerge in greater numbers as late as the early 1980s. The Netherlands, for example, welcomed its first private radio and television stations in 1989 (Brants, 2004, p. 146). The first Swedish private commercial radio station was established in 1993 (Hulten, 2004, p. 242). RTL in Luxembourg had a monopoly until 1991 (Hirsch, 2004, p. 142), and the public ORF in Austria until 1995 (Trappel, 2004, p. 7).

Running more on enthusiasm than knowledge or professionalism, the amateur programmes of Stalin and Podzemí, without a clear format, foreshadowed the atmosphere of the following months, when new official stations cropped up across the country whose staff learned how to radio broadcast “on the go”. In 1995, there were as many as 87 private radio stations in the Czech Republic (Moravec, 2000, p. 27). The Czech market was too small for so many broadcasters, and so minor radio stations were grouped under several larger networks, which is the model applied even today by the private radio industry in the Czech Republic.

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# CORRECTIONS AS INDICATORS OF MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY: THE CASE OF CROATIAN ONLINE MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the extent to which media accountability practices have been developed in the Croatian online media. It is based on the content analysis of correction texts (n=330). The findings show that the accountability values in Croatian online media corrections were limited, and the Croatian online media were implementing only those accountability values that help them to create the illusion of ethical conduct. The Croatian online media published corrections faster than newspapers did and marked responsibility in both the headlines (43.75% n=140) and in the bodies of texts (61% n=198). On the other hand, the Croatian online media were not improving their transparency and the accessibility corrections by, e.g., tagging (18.12% n=58), sharing on social media (6.4% n=17), not recognising the perpetrators of the errors (79.69% n=255), and by not disclosing erroneous procedures (86.88% n=278). The research has shown that Croatian online media were generally not providing accurate information in the correction texts (82.6% n=264), did not link corrections to the original articles (43.44% n=139), and did not have a formal correction policy/routines.*

Keywords: Online journalism ▪ media accountability ▪ errors ▪ corrections ▪ correction text ▪ Croatia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The media play an important role in democracies because they are the (only) institutions that can control the powers of governments, politicians and corporations (Muller, 2014). Consequently, the freedom of expression has an important role in doability and in the realization of democratic societies (Frankel Paul et al., 2004). However, with freedom comes responsibility. To carry out their watchdog function, the media need to be responsible to the public for their journalistic practices and outputs (Fengler et al., 2015).

Three concepts from journalism and media studies describe the responsible behaviour of the media: media self-regulation, media transparency, and media accountability (Eberwein & Porlezza, 2014; Eberwein et al., 2019). Media self-regulation represents journalistic practices that have the goal of securing the media's societal function. It involves practices like codes of ethics, news ombudsmen, press and media councils, or complaints commissions (Martin, 2009; OSCE, 2021). Similarly, media transparency represents ways to monitor and criticize journalism (Deuze, 2005). Media transparency gives insights into the journalistic process, especially into how journalists present truth, explain facts, and make mistakes (Koliska, 2015). with the aim of holding the media to be responsible to the public (Xie, 2014). The third concept, media accountability, involves all stakeholders (journalists, public, society in general) (Eberwein & Porlezza, 2014) and enables the media to be responsible to the society for the quality of their content (McQuail, 2010). All three approaches contain certain overlapping journalistic routines and practices that aim to demonstrate the responsibility of the media to the public, and, for this paper, we have used these concepts interchangeably.

Bertrand (2000) divided accountability in journalistic routines and practices on the basis of who is undertaking them, and how they are using them as internal, external, and cooperative accountability tools. Internal tools are those that are under the full control of the journalists or editors, external tools are those employed by outside organizations, while cooperative tools are based on cooperation between journalists and non-journalists (Keith, 2004, p. 180). Based on Bertrand's taxonomy, Susan Keith (2004) created a list of accountability tools. Internal accountability tools are organizational ethics codes, corrections and clarifications, ombudsmen or readers' representatives, and the internal memos that set the routines of journalism (Keith, 2004, p. 181). Among external tools, she has listed the codes of ethics of professional organizations, the media's coverage of the media, journalism reviews, non-profit media organizations, government regulatory agencies, and research done by journalism schools or scholars (Keith, 2004, pp. 181-182). The cooperative tools are news councils and letters to the editors (Keith, 2004, p. 182).

Internal tools are to be found in their entirety only in the domain of journalists, and corrections stand out as a prime indicator of the actual practice of media accountability. As opposed to other tools, an acknowledgement in the corrections is immediate, or is carried as soon as the newsroom becomes aware of an error. Corrections also indicate who caused the error, and what the newsroom will do to avoid such errors in the future. Furthermore, newsrooms apologize for any damage that they may have caused and they take responsibility for the error. On the other hand, ethics codes and internal memos tell us only about intention, but not about actual practice. Hence, for this study, we have proposed that the analysis of corrections might be used to detect how the media and journalists are really accountable to the public. Arguments for this claim can be found in the fact that ethics codes and internal documents are only reflections of good intentions, while corrections demonstrate the reality of journalistic routines and practices.

The content of corrections has been poorly researched and, generally, researchers have covered the frequency/types of errors (Charnley, 1936; Silverman, 2007; Maier, 2007, Hettinga & Appelman, 2014; Appelman & Hettinga, 2019), and the quality of corrections (Martin & Martins, 2016). Only Zohar Kampf and Efrat Daskal (2014) have tried to examine the accountability values in corrections' texts. They developed a theoretical framework for understanding media accountability in corrections, and they developed an empirical model for assessing the accountability that is demonstrated in corrections.

The purpose of this study is to assess how the Croatian online media fulfil their media accountability function, and this is done by analyzing the correction texts, with the hypothesis that Croatian online media are using corrections in such a way that they are not fully disclosing the values of media accountability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Accountability and professionalism

According to Denis McQuail and Mark Deuze (2020, p. 221), the concept of accountability relies on two concepts: freedom of expression and responsibility. Freedom of expression is a universal human right which, historically, can be traced back to the Code of Hammurabi (Smith, 2018), and its contemporary form, which is settled in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN Human Rights, 2021). Article 19 states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, regardless of the type of media used. Freedom doesn't come without responsibility, so the Covenant has determined that the right is limited to special duties and responsibilities, and it may be subject to certain restrictions.

The responsibility (accountability) comes from a normative theory perspective that asserts society's expectations of media activities (McQuail & Deuze, 2020):

- They should respect the rights to free publications.
- They should prevent or limit harm to individuals, as well as society, arising from publication.
- They should promote the positive aspects of publication, rather than merely being restrictive.
- They should be public and transparent. (p. 222)

This normative concept anticipates that the media are free, but that they are obliged to serve the public good through professional or public agency, in the form of apologies or corrections. However, it should be remembered that public accountability is not the only aim of accountability. According to Claude-Jean Bertrand (2000, p. 151), other aims are to: improve the service provided by media, restore media credibility, protect the freedom of speech, and improve the position of the media in a democracy.

Although there are four frames (regulatory, professionalism, market and public responsibility) (McQuail & Deuze, 2020) that can be used to examine the accountability of the media, only professionalism can explain it from the positions of journalists. The professionalism frame defines accountability as emerging from the ethical maturing of media professionals (Ibid., p. 229), in which the standards of ethical behavior are defined in the form of the codes of conduct at the organizational and professional association levels. For journalism to be professional, it must be ethically accountable for its failings and it must act in an ethically permissible manner. Such practice is voluntary, grounded on a social basis, and doesn't presume material penalties, but it is also transparent and based on dialog (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p. 230).

### 2.2. Accountability in online media

The online environment can improve the accountability of the media through the ways in which they bring more transparency and responsiveness (Heikkilä et al., 2012). McQuail (2013, p. 170) insisted that media accountability should be transferred to the online environment, because that environment enables journalists to better listen and answer to the audience's complaints.

Susanne Fengler (2012) additionally confirmed previous claims that, in the digital age, media accountability must involve professionals (journalists) and an active audience:

Today, technological development – the advent of the Internet and the Social Web – has lowered the cost of monitoring and 'punishing' the media for the individual media user to almost zero, for the first time in the history. An infinite 'crowd' of users can share the burden of media monitoring online, and in the Web 2.0. era, suddenly there is a plethora of fast, low-cost options to (if you wish, anonymously) 'voice' criticism and protest – via email, chats, commentary functions, Twitter, Facebook, and the like. (p. 184)

David Domingo and Heikki Heikkilä (2012) see online media accountability as being made up of processes that depend on the phases of news production. They consider online accountability tools to be tools that make actor transparency (the profiles of journalists, published mission statements, published codes of ethics, news policy documents, in-house codes of ethics, and public information on company ownership), production transparency (links to original sources, newsroom blogs, collaborative news production, and citizen journalism), and responsiveness (online news comments, correction buttons, and responding to users through social media) (Domingo & Heikkilä, 2012, p. 276). Their research has shown that online media do not prioritize the media accountability practices, and that online media do not use technological advancements to facilitate the transparency and responsiveness of journalism (Domingo & Heikkilä, 2012, p. 286).

The practice of online media accountability is unevenly developed around the world due to the level of economic and technological development with best practice in the Western Europe and the USA (Heikkilä et al., 2012, p. 69). On the other hand, many of the traditional media in the USA have abandoned the traditional approaches in favor of online accountability tools. *The New York Times* explained its removal of the public editor position by replacing it with participatory online tools (Vore, 2017):

The public editor position, created in the aftermath of a grave journalistic scandal, played a crucial part in rebuilding our readers' trusts by acting as our in-house watchdog. We welcomed that criticism, even when it stung. But today, our followers on social media and our readers across the internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be. Our responsibility is to empower all of those watchdogs, and to listen to them, rather than to channel their voice through a single office.

Eberwein and Porlezza (2014, p. 432) researched the significance of participatory online accountability tools, like user comments, social media and citizen's blogs, and found that online accountability tools are not a solution for all of the problems. Similarly, Jose A. García-Avilés (2019, p. 281) found that online accountability does not automatically improve the level of media accountability. To improve media accountability, the media need to implement new online tools, but also to adjust the traditional ones (Benson et al., 2017).

## 2.3. Online corrections and accountability

The corrections are an important tool in journalistic accountability (Karlsson et al., 2017) and they are published in the form of textual notes when journalists mislead their audience(s).

Corrections are a form of accountability that ensures that when journalism fails in delivering truthful information to the public it should be equally truthful about these failings or otherwise risk losing the public's trust. (Karlsson et al., 2017, p. 154)

Corrections have advanced very little through the years (Silverman, 2007), and the standard form of a correction text in newspapers consisted of a title (usually 'Corrections') and an explanatory text, in no more than a few sentences, that was published alongside the corrected information in a dedicated place (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). This standardized information in correction texts is used to demonstrate media accountability.

The corrections should identify the error, correct the record, explain why the error happened and how such an error could be avoided, and apologized to those who have been damaged (Bugeja, 2007, p. 50). Online corrections have the same media accountability function, but with a wider reach and a more timely influence (Gillmor, 2019).

In the age of analog traditional media, the process was flawed by definition, because corrections in newspapers were typically published on Page 2, days or even weeks after the original error … [In online] we can fix the error right in the news article (or video or audio) and append an explanation, thereby limiting the damage, because people new to the article will get the correct information.

Online corrections have three forms: correcting the article with the error, writing the correction note, and placing it in the article with an error, or creating a webpage with a persistent URL that gathers all correction notes (Thornburg, 2011). Brautović (2021) found that Croatian online media invented a fourth form, which uses independently published correction notes that are, or are not, linked to the corrected or uncorrected article.

The limitations of online corrections practice can be summarized in the practice of deleting incorrect articles, the practice of the non-correction of articles, and the practice of not linking corrections to the articles to which they refer. The practice of deleting incorrect articles arguably obstructs transparency (Joseph, 2011), while the practices of the non-correction of articles and of not linking such corrections to the original articles, neglect the goals of media accountability, which are to inform the public about their mistakes and to (re)build trust.

### 2.4. Croatian media and correction practices

The Croatian media infrequently correct errors. and the journalists "do not believe that regularly published corrections were increasing the level of newspaper credibility" (Vilović, 2010, p. 75). According to Gordana Vilović (2010: 75-76), in May, 2010, the daily newspaper, *Vecernji list*, had an average of two corrections per day, while the daily newspaper, Jutarnji list, published corrections only when outraged readers invoked *The Media Act* (2004). Similarly, Vladimira Hebrang (2010) found that Croatian publishers avoid publishing corrections, and that correction procedures have "a high degree of deviation in the application of legal rules" (p.61). Hebrang found that, in the first six months of 2009, the political newspapers and magazines (*Večernji list*, *Jutarnji list*, *Nacional* and *Globus*) were publishing corrections under headings like 'letters to the editors' (pisma uredništvu), 'corrections and clarifications' (ispravci i objašnjenja), 'responses' (reagiranja), and 'letters from readers' (pisma čitatelja), and that two daily newspapers and two magazines published a total of 72 corrections in the first six months of 2009 (Hebrang, 2010, p. 55-57).

As a result of insufficient media accountability practices, e.g., corrections in which the Croatian government became involved through political intervention (Fengler, 2012), the government tried to solve the problem by forming sanction rules as part of the Media Act (2004; 2013), especially by using its 2013 amendments. Up to February, 2019, 1163 lawsuits were filed against leading Croatian media: *Hanza Media* (459), *Styria* (420), *Slobodna Dalmacija* (100), *index.hr* (71), *nacional.hr* (22), *telegram.hr* (21), etc. (Wiesner, 2019)

### 2.5. Assessing accountability values in correction texts

The publication of a correction does not mean that it fulfils its accountability function, viz, the correction text must communicate with the public on the way that the correction text contains the values of media accountability, so that they do not cause the media to lose public trust. Kampf and Daskal (2014, p. 173) proposed the method of assessing the values of accountability in correction text through four textual dimensions of corrections: (a) the corrective marker; (b) the offender; (c) the offense, and (d) the offended party. The corrective marker is realized through the locus and the chronos. The locus, in newspapers, represents display of symbolic responsibility and measurable connection between the locations of the error and the correction (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, pp. 175-176). The chronos represents the timespan between publishing the error and its correction. The locus and the chronos are indicators of the severity of the error, in the way that better placement of a correction and the immediacy of publishing it, shows a higher level of importance for the corrections (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 174). The locus must be converted to the online environment through adding different internet features that enable users to access the correction – the equivalent of the newspaper page number/position in the newspapers.

The offender demonstrates the transparency of those organizational procedures that caused an error and the identification of the people who were involved in producing it. The offense dimension provides readers with information about the error and the context of the error. The offence dimension also provides information about where the error was published (section and page numbers in newspapers) (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). The last dimension should identify the offended party, and the use of a predefined procedure (policy) for the publication of a correction (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). An ideal correction text should contain all four of these dimensions.

### 2.5.1. The online locus

The locus in an online environment is a complex and technical dimension, because of the nonlinear way in which users access web content. In general, users access web pages via three paths: directly (by typing the URL address of a news organization), via search engines (searching for keywords) and through social media. Direct access is hard to study, because of the fluidity of online media content. During the life-cycle of a news story it changes its placement from the homepage to the subpages, and it either ends up in an archive or is deleted. Later access to the story makes it impossible to determine what its original position was, as one can in newspapers. Hence, we can determine the efforts that are made by the newsroom to help users to access content.

According to Statista (Armstrong, 2017), the social media, like Facebook, are responsible for 40% of traffic, and Google searches for 37% of the traffic to news websites. While sharing on social media depends on both the users' and journalists' willingness to share some content, placing it on Google, and other less important search engines, results in search engine optimization (SEO) that is made only by the journalist. Although SEO is not scientifically proven, there are general rules that can be used to determine how content is better optimised for the Google search. For example, using target keywords, internal links, adding proper keywords to headlines, formatting the URL with keywords, categorizing or organizing content around keywords, etc. Paul Bradshaw and Liisa Rohumaa (2013) recommended to journalists that they adopt SEO techniques, because that is how an article will be found by readers through their usage of a search engine (Bradshaw & Rohumaa, 2013, p. 36). An ideal correction text should have the word "correction" in the headline, in the body of its text, and in the URL; it should betagged with the word "correction", and it should be categorized (listed) on a page that is dedicated to corrections. The SEO application of keywords can also be used as a marker of responsibility in the corrective marker dimension.

## 3. METHODS

For this study, a content analysis was used with a codebook that was developed based on a model that was proposed by Kampf and Daskal (2014), and which was adjusted for the online environment. For the first dimension, the "corrective markers" were the coded dates of the publication of the incorrect article, the dates of the publication of the correction text, the distribution on social media, the use of the keyword "correction." and the linking practice. The category "distribution on social media" contained the number of shares of the correction text URL on Facebook. The data for this part of the study were collected using the tool www.sharedcount.com.

The category "use of keywords 'correction'" consisted of subcategories: headline (1), introduction (2), URL (3), tagging (4), subscript headline (5), not present (6), and other (5). The category "linking practice" had subcategories: internal link to the original article (1) and non-linking (2).

The "offender" dimension was coded with the categories "disclosure of the person responsible for the error", and the "disclosure of procedures leading to the transgression". The "disclosure of the person responsible for the error" had subcategories: online medium (name of the medium, title or reference) (1), a person (name or title/position) (2), and other (3). The "disclosure of procedures leading to the transgression" contained the categories: disclosure of procedure (1), and no disclosure (2).

The "offense" dimension had two subcategories: the comprehensibility of the information provided, and "the information on error placement". The category "the comprehensibility of information provided" had these subcategories: unclear (1) and "both erroneous and correct information were explicitly and clearly provided" (2) (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). "The information on error placement" had subcategories: clearly stated location with link (1), only link (2), clearly stated location without a link or with a broken link (3), refers to print outlet (4), and, not clear (5).

The "offended party" dimension had two subcategories: a "correction policy" and an "identity of the offended party". The "correction policy" had categories: fixed format (1) and free format (2). The "identity of the offended party" had subcategories: organization (name, title or reference) (1), a person (name or title/position) (2), both organizational and person (3), and, other (4).

The units of analysis were the correction's text and links. In a case where the correction text contained a correction request that had been written by a lawyer, or by the offended party, only the part of the text written by a journalist or by the editor was analyzed. Due to the limited sample, coding was carried out by one coder, so there was no need for the calculation of the intercoding reliability which is used (only) when the content analysis is conducted by two or more coders, in order to assess their agreement (consistency and validity) (Lombard et al., 2017, p. 722).

### 3.1. Sample

The sample list of corrections was taken from an earlier study by one of the authors (Brautović, 2021), which dealt with the problem of differences in correction practice between the online outlets of traditional media and the online-only media in Croatia. The analyzed sample contained 320 correction texts (n=320) which were extracted from *vecernji.hr* (n=32), *jutarnji.hr* (n=119) and *24sata.hr* (n=13), *index.hr* (n=57), *net.hr* (n=31) and *tportal.hr* (n=68). The initial list was created from the Google Search results on the keywords "ispravak site:URL" ('corrections' without quotation marks; URL of analyzed media). The search was limited to the period from January 1, 2008, until December 31, 2018, and excludes duplicates, user comments, broken links, and other non-related content.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As previously noted, the corrective marker is determined through three components: the marker of responsibility, the commensurability of the published locations of correction and error, and the timespan between the publishing of the error and its correction.

The data show that the marker of responsibility (Table 1) is primarily present in the body of texts (61.88%, n=198), the superscript headlines (54.69%, n=175), and the headlines (43.75%, n=140). The difference in marking responsibility was documented among the media analyzed, with the dominance of headlines in *net.hr* (90.32%, n=28), the body of texts in *index.hr* (94.74%, n=26), superscript headlines in *vecernji.hr* (90.63%, n=29) and *tportal.hr* (89.71%, n=61). With the exception of index.hr and vecernji.hr, who failed to state whose responsibility the errors in the body of texts were, and using headlines to mark responsibility, shows the inclination of the Croatian online media to create the mirage of ethical conduct, and to disguise the responsibility for the error (Kampf, 2009; Kampf & Daskal, 2014).

*Table 1. Use of the markers of responsibility*

| | *jutarnji.hr* (n=119) | *24sata.hr* (n=13) | *index.hr* (n=57) | *tportal.hr* (n=68) | *net.hr* (n=31) | *vecernji.hr* (n=32) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Headline** | 65 | 7 | 26 | 10 | 28 | 4 |
| **Body of text** | 54 | 4 | 54 | 62 | 16 | 8 |
| **URL** | 66 | 7 | 24 | 6 | 26 | 5 |
| **Tagging** | 0 | 7 | 4 | 32 | 14 | 1 |
| **Other** | 18 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Superscript headline** | 76 | 0 | 0 | 61 | 9 | 29 |
| **None** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Further, the use of a marker of responsibility (key)word "correction" in a URL follows the pattern of the headlines (41/88%, n=134), because in all of the analyzed media, the part of the URL after the domain name is generated automatically by the content management system. So, if a headline contained the word "correction", the URL had it too. A smaller difference in use persists only due to the subsequent editing of the headlines.

Tagging is periodically used to show the responsibility for the error and was used in 18.12% (n=58) of cases, while, in *24sata.hr* (53.85%, n=7), they were used more frequently, *tportal.hr* (47.06%, n=32), and *net.hr* (45.16%, n=14). Tagging is missing in the cases of *jutarnji.hr*, *index.hr* and *vecernji.hr*. A possible explanation for this kind of performance can be used as another proof of the creation of the appearance of ethical conduct. By non-tagging corrections, they will be harder to find via search engines, and are not collectively published on a dedicated page (correction box or section).

An analysis of the linking practice which further enhances accessibility to correction texts and improves accountability, showed that Croatian online media frequently do not link corrections with the original article that had contained the error. From the analyzed sample, 43.44% (n=139) of the correction texts were not linked to the original articles. *24sata.hr* (84.62%, n=11), *index.hr* (73.68%, n=42) and *jutarnji.hr* (56.3%, n=67) had more non-linked corrections, while *net.hr* (32.26%, n=10), *tportal.hr* (36.76, n=25, and *vecernji.hr* (34.8, n=11) had fewer.

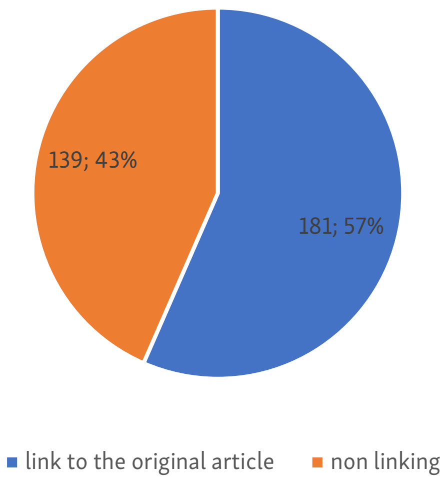


*Figure 1. The linking practice*

The non-linking practice is another proof of the creation of the appearance of ethical conduct, especially when the practice of linking corrections with the original articles is dominantly present only in cases where a link is provided after a request for such corrections by either a lawyer or the offended party. The offended sides are aware of this journalistic practice, so they request that the media link the corrections with the original articles: "I ask that the correction be marked and linked with the article "Dismissed Director of NP Kornati reported for brokering" (*index.hr*, 2018).

Perhaps one of the strongest pieces of evidence about questionable ethical practice in the Croatian online media was found in the sharing of corrections on social media (Facebook). While only 6.4% (n=17) of correction texts were shared on Facebook at the same time 28.4% (n=75) of the original articles were shared. Consequently, erroneous articles were shared 2,471 times (not only by the media), with 6,250 comments and 16,292 reactions, while corrections were shared 120 times, with 91 comments and 166 reactions. We also recorded a case (Figure 2) in which an erroneous article was deleted from the website, but not from Facebook, and the correction was later published on the web page, but not on Facebook. The erroneous post was still accessible in January 2022.


*Figure 2. An example in which an erroneous article was deleted from the website, but is still accessible on Facebook*

The chronos, or timespan, that passed between the publishing of the error and the correction was, in the analyzed sample, an average of 39 days. The analyzed sample contains several cases in which a correction was published after several years: *index.hr* (3,664 days), *24sata.hr* (1,282 days), and *vecernji.hr* (1,169 days) in cases when the offended parties were waiting for court decisions so as to be found innocent or to be liberated from charges. After removing these cases from the sample, on average, it took the Croatian online media 19 days to publish corrections. The fastest was *tportal.hr*, who needed 9 days, on average, and the slowest was *24sata.hr*, which needed 60 days to publish corrections (*vecernji.hr* – 12 days, *net.hr* – 16 days, *jutarnji.hr* – 19 days, and *index.hr* – 22 days). In 43.75% (n=140) of the corrections it took less than a week to publish corrections. In 8 cases (2.5%), it was not clear when the error was published, and this result demonstrates the higher level of the importance given to corrections in online media than in the newspapers (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). The small number of cases, if compared to newspapers, can be justified by the way that content management systems work. They automatically add date stamps to an article.

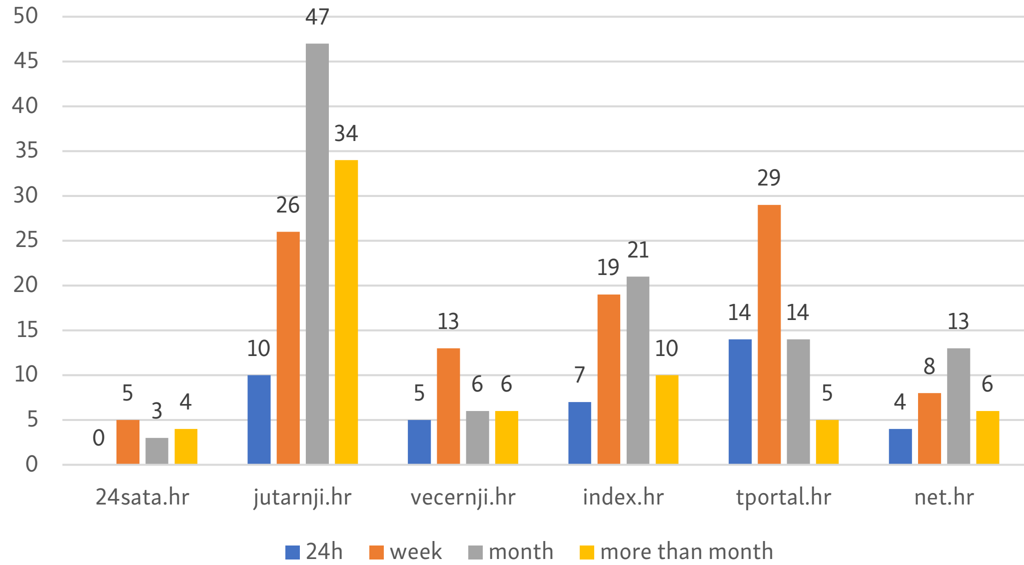


*Figure 3. The timespan between errors and corrections*

The second textual dimensions of the corrections - the offender, was intended in order to show if online media are associating themselves with errors and the procedures that caused them. The analyzed data showed that only 14.38% (n=46) of errors were associated with media, and 5.94% (n=19) with journalists. In 79.69% (n=255) of cases, the analyzed media abstained from recognizing the perpetrator of the errors.

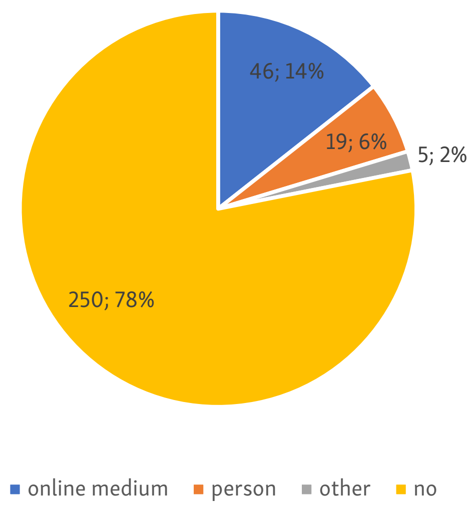


*Figure 4. Information about the side that was responsible for the errors*

*Vecernji.hr* published corrections and named the journalists as being the actors who were responsible for the error in the following example:

"The article "Constitutional Court Decides on Sex Education in Schools," was published on the portal on May 22, 2013, and, by an inadvertent mistake of the author, announced that the procedure for the constitutional assessment of the health education curriculum was initiated by "HSP", amongst others. We should have written that it was initiated by "HSP 1861", led by Dobroslav Paraga." (*vecernji.hr*, 2013a)

Similarly, in cases relating to the transparency of procedure, which had produced the error, this was stated in 13.13% (n=42) of the analyzed corrections, while, in 86.88% (n=278) of cases, the presence of the disclosure of the erroneous procedure was not recorded. For example, *net.hr* disclosed the procedure that caused the error in this example (*net.hr*, 2017):

On October 16, we published a text stating that two days before her arrest, Martina Todorić was photographed in Serbia. Following information that we received from Jasmina Bagarić, the owner of the Instagram profile on which the photo was posted, it was determined that it was not a photo of Martina Todorić. We hereby apologize for publishing the error in the article in question.

These results are similar to findings in newspapers, where a failure to name those responsible for the errors, and the avoidance of "disclosure of behind-the-scenes procedures leading to errors may result from the fact that transparency is a relatively new value in journalistic ethical conduct."(Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 177)

The third dimension, the offence, provides information on the context of the error/correction and the location of the error. The findings documented that 50.94% (n=163) of the analyzed corrections clearly stated the location of the error by using a link leading to the original text while, in 27.19% (n=87) of cases, it was textually explained, but the link was either missing or broken. In 3.13% (n=10), the media provided only the link to a story, and in 6.25% (n=20) they published corrections that referred to errors in the print outlets of the medium. Concurrently, in 12.19% (n=39) of cases, it was not clear to what the correction text referred.

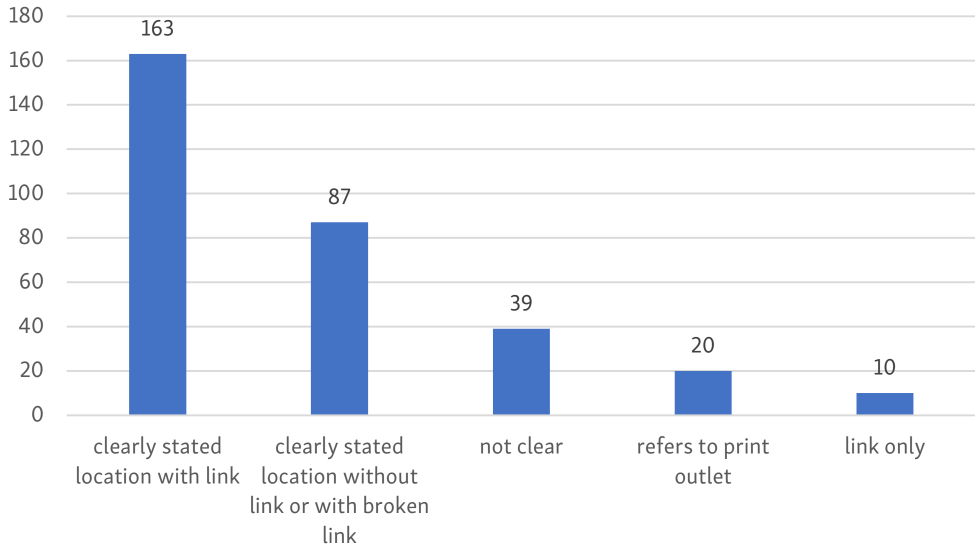


*Figure 5. The information on error placement*

Regarding the second component of the offence, 15.6% (n=41) of the corrections explicitly and clearly provide both the erroneous and the correct information, while, in 84.4% (n=222) of the corrections it was unclear. As was the case with newspapers, the Croatian online media "only partially adhere to the principle of accuracy in their corrections, providing varying degrees of information regarding the error and other features crucial for contextualizing the accurate information." (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 178)

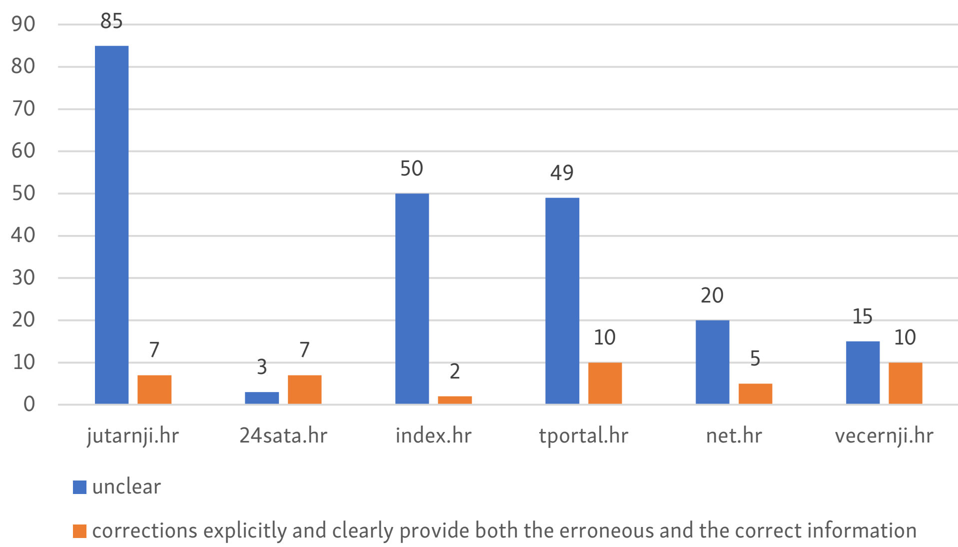


*Figure 6. The comprehensibility of the information provided*

In achieving accountability in correction texts, the last dimension gives information about the offended party and identifies the presence of the policy of publishing corrections in a fixed format and location. The findings show that correction texts provided the identity of the offended party in 98.75% (n=316) of the analyzed cases. This practice can be explained as being similar to that of the newspaper case, as the medium's "desire [is] to satisfy the injured person or organization" (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 179). The opposite case was evidenced in another case: "A photo posted on the Vecernji list portal, on January 16, 2013, with an article entitled "This is a fraudster and a forgery, have you seen it?" does not refer to the suspect who is referred to in the title, but, respectively, to the person the police are looking for." (*vecernji.hr*, 2013b)

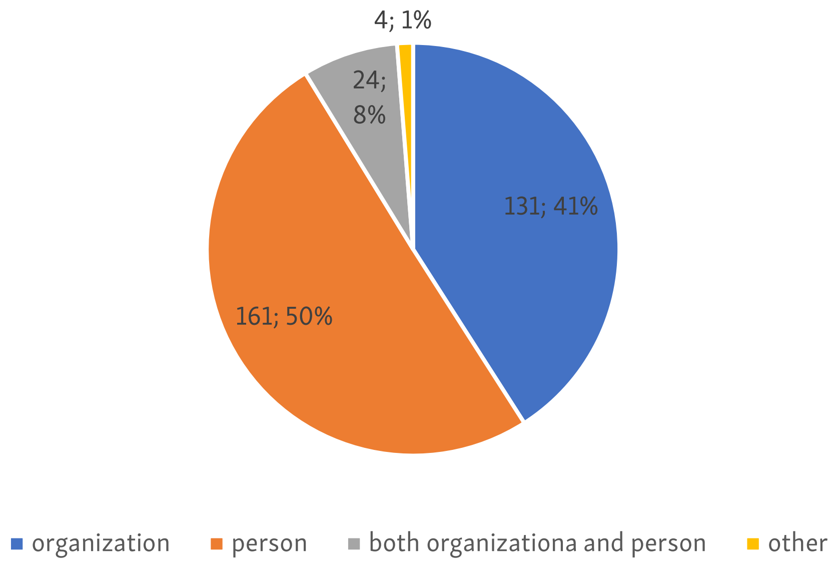


*Figure 7. The information about the offended party*

On the other hand, a formal correction policy could be identified in only 28% (n=74) of cases, because analyzed media were changing the format of corrections during that time. For example, during the period analyzed (2008-2018), *jutarnji.hr* changed the format for correction texts several times. A partial explanation for this kind of behavior can be found in the length of the analyzed time period and adjustments in their editorial policy during that period.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned data, we can conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed. Croatian online media are not fully demonstrating the values of media accountability in corrections. Similarly to the newspapers (Kampf & Daskal, 2014), the utilization of accountability values in corrections is limited to a certain (minor) extent. Further, the Croatian online media are implementing only those accountability values that help them not to be liable for errors. For example, they publish corrections faster than newspapers, and they are willing to name the offended party, regardless of whether it is an organization or an individual.

On the other hand, the Croatian online media place the responsibility for errors mainly in the headlines and in the body of texts, and they do not provide means to help users find corrections independently, in the form of a correction box/permanent section, or by using search engines. For instance, tagging is only periodically used, corrections are not linked to the original article that contained the error, corrections are not shared on social media, and the erroneous articles are not deleted from the social media. The Croatian online media are providing limited information about errors, and the accurate information in the correction texts. They rarely name those responsible for the errors and avoid disclosing the procedures that lead to them.

Based on what we have previously said, we can speculate that the Croatian journalism correction practice are the result of the synergy of journalism culture, in which journalists do not want to be accountable for their work in any professional or legal way and through regulatory practice that comes from the Media Act (2004; 2013). In the long term, that approach will further affect the credibility of the journalism profession in Croatia and will undermine the position of the media in Croatian society, as they are the only institutions that can control the powers of government and elites.

Additionally, as Croatian online media correction practices show, a possible solution for the accountability problems in journalism (Kampf & Daskal, 2014) cannot be “the publishing of the faulty procedures on the newspapers’ official Websites and the related social media” *per se*. Instead, we must change journalism culture so that it is more transparent and accountable, in order to meet its role in a democracy. The alternative is the failure of media freedom and the handing over of control to politicians and regulators. As Denis McQuail (2003) noticed, when media accountability and self-regulation fail - the enforcement of judgments takes over to ensure that the media meet the demands of the public for quality and accountability.

## 5.1. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was limited by the way that the sample was collected, because it was impossible to determine how the correction texts and original articles were displayed on the home pages or the subpages, indicating that the commensurability of the published location of the correction was only partially examined. Further, as there was no previous research on corrections in online journalism, the codebook was adopted from one for newspapers, and the results couldn’t be compared with similar research. Correction practices in social media are only briefly examined.

The findings of the study should be further clarified through observation in newsrooms, and by in-depth interviews with journalists and the editors of online media.

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# TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS AND TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA: ESTONIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

*Nine focus group interviews with Estonian primary - (N= 25) and secondary school (N=20) students who had "friended" their teachers on social media, were carried out to study their experiences with teacher-student interactions on social media. We aimed to explore how teachers' self-disclosure on social media affected teacher credibility and professionalism in the eyes of the students and the impact the students believed social media interactions had on the overall teacher-student relations.*
*Our findings indicate that although teacher-student interactions on social media were mainly school-related, students had also become accustomed to lurking on teachers' social media profiles to gain additional information about their private life. Students in our sample had rather positive views about teachers who somewhat disclosed their personal lives on social media and believed that interacting with one's teachers on social media would also lead to more enjoyable and relaxed teacher-student relations in the school context.*

Keywords: Teacher-student interaction ▪ social media ▪ self-disclosure ▪ teacher credibility ▪ school ▪ Estonia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the area of "public surveillance" (Nissenbaum, 2004) and due to the "context collapse" (Marwick & boyd, 2010) in networked publics, students and teachers have gained access to each other's information, which previously was considered private. In fact, as suggested by Fox and Bird (2015, p. 22) "an unspoken tension has emerged between whether, how, when and with whom to engage using social media and on what basis these connections and interactions are being made – whether as an individual (personally) or as a teacher (professionally)." Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015) even argue that teacher-student interactions on social media have helped to blur different boundaries and (un)written rules about student-teacher relationships, for example in the context of privacy-publicity, authority-friendship, and availability-responsibility. The blurring of such boundaries has not only led to various professional, ethical, and legal dilemmas amongst teachers (Russo, Squelch, & Varnham, 2010), but has also triggered questions about teacher credibility (Wang et al., 2015; Coffelt, Strayhorn & Tillson, 2014; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2009).

Credibility, however, is crucial as teachers play a unique role in shaping the minds of students and are "expected to act as role model citizens and educators" (Wang et al. 2015, p. 8). Furthermore, previous research suggests that teachers are usually held to higher standards of professionalism, as "uprightness of character" (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 46) is expected of them even when they are not teaching (Foulger et al., 2009). At the same time, there is no unanimous agreement about what appropriate or inappropriate teacher conduct is, especially outside of the classroom (Estrada, 2010). In fact, as argued by Wang et al. (2015), the term "professionalism" is ambiguous and open to individual interpretations in relation to interactions outside of school hours.

Gaining information about students' experiences and opinions about teacher-student interactions and friendships on social media is thus particularly important. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to explore how teachers' self-disclosure on social media affected teacher credibility and professionalism in the eyes of the students. Furthermore, we aimed to study the impact the students believed such social media interactions had on the overall teacher-student relations.

Previous research (e.g. Cayanus & Martin, 2004; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2009) has documented the importance of self-disclosure in teacher-student relationships both in the classroom setting, as well as in social media (cf. Froment, Garcia Gonzalez & Bohorquez, 2017; and Camas Garrido, Valero Moya & Vendrell Morancho, 2021 for systematic review). However, most of the research on teacher-student interactions on social media has studied teachers' perceptions and experiences on the topic (Murumaa-Mengel & Siibak, 2014; Sumuer, Esfer & Soner Yildirm, 2014; Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2018; Keasberry, 2018), while students' views have been less often explored (Hershkovitz & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017; Hershkovitz & Baruch, 2013).

In Estonia, where the current study is carried out, there has been no public discussions about teacher-student interactions on social media, nor have schools developed any guidelines or recommendations to guide teachers' social media behaviour. At the same time, previous research (Murumaa-Mengel & Siibak, Räim & Siibak, 2014) has indicated that Estonian teachers value their privacy highly and try not to disclose information on social media that could reveal aspects of their private lives, e.g. information about their families and relationships. Estonian teachers' self-assessment suggests that they have developed a good sense of audience-awareness literacy (Murumaa-Mengel, 2017) and they are well aware of the potential of having students and other "nightmare readers" (Marwick & boyd, 2010) i.e. members of the audience that the information disclosed on social media is not originally meant for, lurking on their profiles. However, we lack information about students' views and opinions on the topic.

Thus, in spring 2018, in order to provide the students with an opportunity to share their experiences about teacher-student interactions on social media and to voice their opinions about its potential impact on teacher credibility, professionalism, and teacher-student relations in general, we conducted nine focus group interviews with primary-, (N=25) and secondary school students (N=20). We set out to find answers to the following research questions: 1) What are the main motivations and reasons for teacher-student "friendships" on social media?; and 2) What kind of role do the students envision such online self-disclosure to have on teacher credibility, professionalism, and teacher-student relations?

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Teacher-student "friendships" and interactions on social media

Although many teachers use social media for school-related and teaching purposes (e.g. Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Asterhan et al., 2013), most of them use social media not as a professional outlet but rather so as to build and to maintain personal social networks (Räim & Siibak, 2014; Sheldon, 2015; Fox & Bird, 2015). In fact, there is still no consensus among scholars as to whether teachers and students should even be able to "friend" each other on social media (Acar, 2013). For instance, in some countries, such as Israel (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2018), or in some states and school districts in the US (di Marzo, 2012), teacher-student interactions on social media have been banned. At the same time, findings by Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015) suggest that many teachers see real value in establishing connections with their students on social media. For example, despite the official ban, 59 percent of the Israeli teachers (N=178) reported having past or current interactions with their students on Facebook (ibid., p. 8).

The findings by Frokosh-Baruch, Hershkovitz and Ang (2015) indicate that teachers who are willing to connect with their students on social media tend to be younger, with less teaching experience and longer Facebook usage experience in comparison to those who are unwilling to interact with their students on social media. Furthermore, Frokosh-Baruch, Hershkovitz & Ang (2015, p. 282) claim that Facebook-mediated communication might serve as another platform to support students' "relationships with teachers with whom they already have good relationships". Studies with Estonian teachers (Murumaa-Mengel & Siibak, 2014) also reveal that teachers are more likely to accept friend requests from students they know personally (i.e. have taught or co-organised some events with) rather than students who just happen to attend the same school. In the latter case, teachers are more likely to ignore such friend requests (*ibid*). The initiation of such teacher-student "friendships" on social media should still mainly come from the students, while teachers sending "friend" requests to their students is considered inappropriate (cf. Techlehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

In fact, teachers are often concerned about the blurring of boundaries between their personal and professional lives, especially when interacting with their students on social media (Asterhan et al, 2013; Murumaa-Mengel & Siibak, 2014). According to Asterhan et al. (2013, p. 3), teachers tend to have three kinds of concerns: 1) boundaries of privacy, i.e. concerns about students gaining access to teachers' private lives, and teacher's gaining access to unwanted aspects of students' private lives and the responsibility this might trigger; 2) boundaries of authority vs. intimacy, i.e. on the one hand, becoming "friends" with students on social media enables teachers to establish closer and friendlier relationships with their students but, on the other hand, the students might interpret the notions of "friendship" in the social media context; and 3) boundaries between personal and professional leisure, i.e. teachers can offer their help and be more easily available to students on social media, however such availability again starts to invade private life and leisure time.

Such blurring of boundaries as described above is also one of the reasons why various social media policies and guidelines for teachers "strongly advise against the use of blended personal and professional accounts" (Graham et al., 2018, p. 37) and encourage teachers to create professional social media accounts. Although "friending" students through a separate "teacher profile" and communicating with students in closed discussion groups have been encouraged as potential ways to interact on social media (Frokosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2018; Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Räim & Siibak, 2014; Asterhan et al., 2013), "friending" students through a personal account has remained one of the most popular means of teacher-student interactions on social media. For instance, 74 percent of the teachers in the Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015, p. 8) sample (N=178) had experience with this type of communication format.

The main reason why students interact with their teachers on social media in the first place is pragmatic: social media platforms enable students to ask school-related questions e.g. about schedules, dates of exams or assignments, or about class content (Draskovic et al., 2013; Gunnulfsen, 2016) more easily. Teachers, however, primarily contact their students on social media for issues related to logistics and class organisation but also tend to intervene on social media when they notice students' psychosocial problems (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015), and offer emotional support (Ophir et al., 2016). In general, there is consensus amongst scholars who argue that teacher-student interactions on social media should be professional and mainly focused on issues related to school (Hart & Steinbrecher, 2011).

### 2.2. Teachers' self-disclosure on social media

Sheldon, (2009) suggests that a moderate amount of self-disclosure on social media is crucial for relationship development between online friends, as by disclosing information on social media "users not only find other individuals socially more attractive, but they can predict their attitudes, values, and beliefs". Thus, in the context of teacher-student interactions, research suggests that both the nature and amount of self-disclosure are critical factors and are relevant not only to class behaviour but also in teacher-student relationships on social media (Begovic, 2011).

Many countries (e.g. Australia, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, etc.) have published various policies and guidebooks with the aim of providing guidance to teachers on how to interact with their students on social media and how to preserve their privacy when doing so (Graham et al., 2018). For example, "Social Media Policy" (2018) launched in Australia, states that even in the case of personal social media use, teachers "should not post about their work, colleagues, students or official information for work-related purposes" (p. 6) and the profile images of teachers should "reflect role specific-appropriate clothing" (p. 13).

Such guidelines have appeared to be necessary as there have been cases, e.g. in the USA, where teachers have been suspended or even fired for their posts on their personal profiles (Carter, Foulger, & Ewbank, 2008). In such cases, the teachers have had misperceptions about the size of their social media audience and have forgotten the potential "nightmare readers" (Marwick & boyd, 2010) lurking on their profiles. Problems have occurred mainly when teachers have posted "lurid comments or photographs involving sex or alcohol on social media sites" or had inappropriate contact with students (Akiti 2012, p. 124). For example, an analysis of the social media accounts of 153 pre-service teachers revealed that more than half of them had uploaded controversial or potentially controversial material to their accounts (Olson, Clough & Penning, 2009). In the eyes of the students, for example, teachers' comments about piercing or tattoos, photos about alcohol consumption, negative comments about colleagues, and comments of a political, racial, or religious nature are found to be highly inappropriate to post on social media (Nemetz, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to note that the more accepting the students were about teachers using Facebook in general, the less they considered teacher self-disclosure on social media to be problematic (Wang et al., 2015).

Teachers themselves considered mocking and harassing students, using unauthorised information, sharing false and disruptive information, creating fake profiles, and insulting national values to be the most inappropriate teacher behaviours on social media (Deveci & Kolburan, 2015). In short, four main categories have been identified as related to teachers' problematic social media use: 1) making statements that reflect poorly on their professional judgement, 2) revealing reckless or illegal activities, 3) giving inappropriate attention to students, and 4) documenting activities that, though legal, are imprudent and set a questionable example for students (Warnick et al., 2016).

All the above suggests that teachers need to manage their privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002) carefully when interacting with students on social media and disclosing information about themselves, as finding a healthy balance between representing themselves as teachers and as human beings with personal lives outside their workplaces is important (Atay, 2009). Furthermore, teachers should not only strategically evaluate what kind of information they disclose on social media to preserve their credibility in the eyes of their students, but their self-disclosure on social media should also be consistent with their teaching style in the classroom (Mazer et al., 2007).

### 2.3. Student-teacher relations and teacher credibility

Teacher-student relationships play an important role in changing the child's educational path (e.g. Baker, 2006), as strong teacher-student relationships may positively impact a child's academic and social outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Beutel, 2010). In fact, students often name their favourite teachers as some of the most important adults in their lives besides their parents (Beutel, 2010).

One of the most important variables affecting teacher-student relationships is teacher credibility (see Finn et al., 2009 for a meta-analysis of the literature), which is defined as a combination of teacher competence, trustworthiness and caring for students (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). In fact, Killian (2017) suggests that when students find their teachers credible, they are more likely to be successful in school. As perceived teacher credibility can be positively or negatively affected by many behaviours or personality traits of teachers, it is also closely connected with aspects of teacher self-disclosure.

The importance of self-disclosure and open communication in teacher-student relationships has been explored by many (cf. Cayanus, Martin 2004; Dobransky, Frymier, 2004). In this context, self-disclosure is defined as "statements in the classroom about the self that may or may not be related to subject content but reveal information about the teacher that students are unlikely to learn from other sources" (Sorensen, 1989, p. 260). In short, teacher self-disclosure suggests a personal investment in teacher-student interaction and helps to reduce the distance in such relations (Cayanus, Martin & Goodboy, 2009).

Although each teacher makes a personal decision as to what kind of information about oneself to disclose, this decision is still guided by social expectations of appropriate self-disclosure (Wang et al., 2015). Overall, scholars agree that most teachers are aware of what kind of information about themselves to disclose to their students (Fusani, 1994; Zhang et al., 2009). For example, sharing information about one's family (Zhang et al., 2009), telling stories and revealing personal beliefs (Nussbaum et al., 1987), or using humour and showing enthusiasm while teaching are not only considered to be appropriate means of self-disclosure, but have also proven to be effective ways for increasing students' enjoyment of learning (Sorensen, 1989), and leading to positive evaluations by students (Nussbaum et al., 1987). In fact, students expect their teachers to reveal positive information about themselves (Sorenson, 1989). Inappropriate self-disclosure, however, e.g. information about intimate family problems or alcohol consumption (Hosek & Thompson, 2009), or revealing one's political or religious beliefs (Rahimi & Bigdeli, 2016), could lead to negative student outcomes and negative teacher evaluations (Coffelt, Strayhorn & Tillson, 2014). Hosek and Thompson (2009) identified three main types of risks, i.e. role, face and stigma risks, that teachers perceived when disclosing information about themselves. In the case of role risks, the teachers tried not to reveal personal information that might jeopardise their professional standing, e.g. information that might threaten their teacher credibility or lead to sanctions by their school. In the context of face risks, the teacher tried to avoid revealing information that would cause embarrassment or discomfort in their students, or in their personal network, e.g. in their families. In fear of stigma risks, teachers tried not to disclose information that would have negative consequences on their identities (*ibid*).

Teachers usually have a good understanding of the expected behaviours they must adhere to maintain professionalism in the classroom (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). However, when teacher-student interaction moves beyond the classroom, e.g. to social media platforms, professional boundaries are more easily blurred (Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Wang et al., 2015). In fact, Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2009) propose that teacher credibility can be jeopardised by teachers' social media practices, especially when their online content creation and behaviour are inconsistent with students' expectations.

As empirical research about students' views on the topic is still lacking, we wanted to contribute to the existing scholarship by exploring the opinions primary and secondary school students who all interacted with their teachers on social media had on the topic. We set out to answer the following research questions: 1) Why do the students interact with their teachers on social media?; and 2) What kind of role do the students envision teachers' social media self-disclosure has on teacher credibility, professionalism, and teacher-student relations in general?

## 3. METHOD AND DATA

### 3.1. Method

Since the purpose of our research was to explore personal experiences of the participants, we decided to carry out a qualitative study with the help of the focus group method. We believed the interaction between the participants and hence the opportunity to gain valuable input would provide us with interesting and rich data that we would not be able to gather through any other means. Furthermore, the focus group method also enabled us to explore similarities and differences in the views of the participants (Lobe, et al., 2008). At the same time, we were aware of the main challenges related to the method, e.g. establishing trust between the moderator and the participants might take time, the participants might find it hard to concentrate on the topic, etc. (Lobe, et al., 2008). Regardless of the potential limitations, we considered the method to be most suitable for finding answers to the research questions we had set.

The interview style for all the focus groups was based on a qualitative interviewing technique, which involved a flexible outline of topics and questions (Patton, 2002). A prepared interview schedule with open-ended questions was used to help to guide the interviews. In the first part of the interview, the students mentioned which social media platforms they used, named the platforms where they had friended their teachers and described the reasoning and the initiative behind these relationships. The purpose of this part was to create an open and casual environment, to get the young used to the focus group and to direct their thoughts to the upcoming thematic blocks through simple questions.

As our participants mentioned Facebook as the primary platform where teacher-student interaction occurred, the second block of questions centred on students' perceptions of teacher's Facebook use, in particular teacher's content creation and self-presentation practices on the site. Furthermore, students also discussed what kind of content they considered to be appropriate and inappropriate for a teacher to disclose on social media.

The last block of questions set out to explore aspects related to teacher credibility. In short, we were interested in finding out how teacher self-disclosure on social media affected teacher credibility and teacher-student relationships in the school context. Furthermore, we set out to explore how student perceptions of their teachers had changed and developed after becoming friends with them on social media.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the interviews, as this method provides an overview of the text being studied as a whole and focuses on the main and important meanings of the text, while also supporting hidden-line analysis (Kalmus, Masso, & Linno, 2015). In the first round of analysis, both authors used an inductive approach and highlighted parts of the text which captured key topics: 'reasons for 'friending' teachers on social media', 'main interaction topics', 'teacher self-presentation on social media', etc. were created to illustrate the main meanings derived from the text. After close readings and initial open coding, we discussed the key topics which had emerged. In the second round of analysis, theoretical and selective coding (Lonkila, 2004) was used to analyse the data gathered.

### 3.2. Sample

Our strategic sample (N=45) consisted of 20 secondary school students (8 boys and 12 girls) and 25 primary school students (9 boys and 16 girls). The students came from different schools located in the cities of Tallinn, Tartu, and Rakvere and some more rural areas within the Harju County. The secondary school students were 16-18 years old (attending classes 10-12) and the primary school students were 13-16 years old (attending classes 7-9). All the students in our sample were daily social media users, and they all had different experiences with interacting with their teachers on social media as they all had at least one (usually more) teacher amongst their social media "friends".

We combined convenience sampling with snowball sampling to find participants for our study. First, we decided to send emails to the general e-mail accounts of different schools in Estonia so that they would share the invite to participate in our study with their students. Such a method however, proved to be inefficient, as only two schools agreed to forward our interview requests. Then we decided to contact potential participants through Facebook and got in contact with personal acquaintances who matched the criteria for the study. Those young people who wanted to participate in the focus groups were encouraged to name friends who might also be interested in taking part in the study. In comparison to boys, slightly more girls volunteered to participate in the study. However, as we did not aim at assessing gender-based differences in the students' social media experiences, we were pleased to be able to discuss the topic with the most information-rich participants.

After the potential sample was formed, we prepared a consent letter informing the participants about the aims of the study, the methods of data collection and analysis, etc.; and the young were requested to get their parents to sign the forms. The consent forms were signed both by the parents of the underage participants and all the young participants themselves.

All but one of the nine interviews took place on school property, either in the school library, the youth centre, in a black-box studio or in some of the classrooms depending on the preference of the participants; one interview took place in a café. The interviews lasted 30-90 minutes each. All the focus group interviews were recorded and later transcribed, producing a total of 164 pages of data (on average, each focus group produced 18 pages of data).

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Teacher-student "friendship" and interaction on social media

Although the students participating in our interviews viewed teacher-student interactions on social media as a normal and quite common thing on multiple platforms, e.g. Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp, they believed such interactions mainly resulted from necessity. The students explained that social media platforms provided them with easy and quick ways to reach out to their teachers (and vice versa) in case there was a need to ask for additional information about home assignments, issues related to logistics or class organisation, as well as to discuss absences. In short, our focus groups revealed that teacher-student interactions on social media were focused on issues related to school and the interactions were triggered by concrete and often urgent needs that required quick responses. Only on a few occasions did our participants mention that they had "friended" their teachers just for fun or out of curiosity.

Our focus groups revealed that teacher-student "friendships" on social media where oftentimes initiated by the teachers, rather than the students. Our participants claimed that if their relationship with the teacher was positive and supportive, they had no objections to becoming "friends" on social media. However, if the student considered one's relationship with the teacher to be rocky, a "friend request" by the teacher was viewed in less favourable light and caused discomfort in the student.

> **[When a teacher sends you a "friend request", what kind of emotions does it trigger?]**
> **Boy2**: It depends on the teacher. I did not get along well with my previous class teacher and when she sent me a "follow" request on Instagram, it was quite unpleasant. I did not like her at all, and I did not want to have anything to do with her after graduating from primary school. But then again, one social studies teacher is really cool and uploads some funny photos and some weird comments. These are quite fun to follow. It depends on how good relations you have with a teacher. It's nice to have good relations with a teacher (Focus group 3_secondary school).

Relying on the experiences of our study participants we can claim that the teachers who were willing to connect with their students on social media usually tended to be younger and thus perhaps also more similar in their communication style. The above might also help to explain why "friending" such teachers on social media did not trigger any additional discomfort or negative feelings in students.

Although some of the participants in our study had used closed class or school discussion groups to interact with their teachers on social media, communicating through teachers' professional social media accounts was still rare. At the same time, it was evident that "friending" students through one's personal accounts had enabled students to gain access to the more private aspects leading to the blurring of boundaries between teachers' professional and personal lives.

### 4.2. Teachers' self-disclosure on social media

Our focus groups revealed that students were quite frequently lurking on the profiles of teachers. In fact, focus group interviews with primary school students suggested that lurking on one's teachers' profiles had become quite a routine practice for the young and was even considered mandatory when new teacher came to school or when a student changed schools. In particular, the students were intrigued to find out more about their teachers' personal lives, e.g. about their families, hobbies, the kind of memes they shared, the kind of news they read, the kind of pages they followed and the groups and communities they were involved in. Students' experiences revealed that oftentimes their teachers were quite active in sharing bits and pieces of their private lives, especially photos of different family and work-related events, or their hobbies as well as selfies. All these posts provided the students with additional information about their teachers they had not learnt through their interactions in school.

Our focus groups with primary school students indicated that students had developed quite a clear standard regarding what kind of information was appropriate for a teacher to disclose on social media and what not. Furthermore, younger participants of our focus groups also believed that such inappropriate sharing could start to affect teacher's credibility in the eyes of the students.

> **Boy 14**: If a teacher has photos where they are smoking or something like that then this might start to change students' opinions of the teacher (Focus group 1_primary school).

All in all, we were able to identify four main types of content that the students considered to be inappropriate for a teacher to post on social media. Firstly, our participants believed that teachers should not share photos representing activities that could set a questionable example for students, e.g. drinking alcohol, smoking, or posing in revealing clothing. Secondly, students considered posts which would reflect poorly on teachers' professional judgement to be inappropriate. For example, students in our focus groups also believed that teachers should avoid making comments that are political, racial, or religious in nature. Furthermore, they also believed that sharing detailed information about one's personal life on social media was also inappropriate.

> **Girl 4**: Or something personal about one's… I don't know… Girl 5:"I broke up with my husband" or something (Focus group 2_secondary school).

Thirdly, students stated that posts which focussed inappropriate attention on one's students or colleagues should also be avoided on social media. In short, students in our sample were not only against teachers mocking, belittling, or harassing students on social media, but also looked down upon the (inter)actions of those teachers who were carefully monitoring and reacting on students' social media usage.

> **Boy 2**: Well, if she writes to her students at 3AM and asks why they are still up and online on Facebook and they should go to sleep and… (Focus group 3_secondary school).

Our focus groups suggest that in comparison to primary school students, secondary school students were more understanding and open about teacher disclosures on social media. Although the secondary school students in our sample emphasised that teachers, just like all adults, should only post such content on social media that was in accordance with the overall netiquette and behaviour standards, they believed that it was not fair to hold teachers to higher standards of professionalism.

> **Girl 1**: I think that it's every person's own choice; if you're a teacher, there shouldn't be any prohibitions about what not to post. **Girl 2**: The teacher should not be in a box: "you are a teacher, and therefore you cannot do this or that". **Boy 3**: Just follow common behavioural standards. Boy 1: There are some things that one [the teacher] shouldn't do in public, because they are like a role model. **Boy 3**: This is every adult's responsibility to represent oneself. **Girl 2**: Yes, I also do not think that it is only expected from teachers. *(Focus group 1_secondary school).*

### 4.3. The impact of social media self-disclosure on teacher credibility

Our focus groups revealed only three instances when teacher self-disclosure and interactions on social media had led to student evaluations that were consciously negative. The first two instances were related to the general annoyance the students felt when noticing the teachers engaged in caring dataveillance. Students' descriptions of those two cases reveal that the students considered their privacy to be fringed upon and believed it was not the right place, time nor teachers' duty to take any action. In the third case, negative student evaluations were triggered by the fact that the student considered the nature of the teachers' posts to be inconsistent with her character and behaviour in school.

> **Girl 5**: If, during a lesson, you start thinking about the photos or selfies and the captions she uploads, then you think, like, okay then. This doesn't make me think really positively of her, when you see these photos. Moderator: What kind of photos were they? **Girl 4**: Different selfies, well basically selfies, which had a negative effect. Girl 1: Leaves this kind of impression that she takes a photo of herself when she has made herself look really good and tries to be, like, really sexy on social media. **Girl 4**: Trying to be someone else, like, she doesn't act accordingly.
> *(Focus-group 2_secondary school).*

Despite the above instances, all the students in our sample believed that teacher-student interactions on social media have had positive effects on teacher-student relations and their classroom climate.

> **Girl 2**: Maybe yes, if you have social media contact, then you also have more contact in school, and this makes you feel connected and closer. You know more about the person and have the courage to approach them. **Girl 3**: I think that thanks to social media, the image of the teacher as being just

> a teacher is fading and students realise that they also have private lives, and they are also individuals. **Girl 2**: It kind of brings them to the same level as us. **Girl** 1: We see that the teacher is not a higher being whom we must worship.
> *(Focus group 3_secondary school).*

As indicated in the extract above, students believed that teacher-student interactions on social media have enabled them to gain a closer and more personal look into the lives of teachers outside of school hours and brought them closer to the students. Thus, having access to each other on more informal communication platforms has enabled to relieve the pressures students otherwise oftentimes felt when interacting with their teachers in schools.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this article was to study Estonian primary and secondary school students' opinions and experiences with teacher-student interactions on social media providing thus voice to the students whose views on the topic have only rarely been explored.

The findings of our nine focus groups with 13-18-year-old students (N=45) indicate that teacher-student interactions on social media have become commonplace. However, not every student or teacher is interested in forming such "friendships". Rather, as also pointed out by Forkosh-Baruch, Hershkovitz, and Ang (2015), interactions on social media tend to support those teacher-student relationships that are formed upon well-functioning face-to-face relationships. In fact, the experiences of the students in our sample reveal that younger teachers are more likely to engage in social media communication with their students as they tend to appreciate similar style of communication. In short, mutual appreciation of social media tends to be built upon sharing similar generational understandings and backgrounds.

Shared generational consciousness about the affordances of social media can also be visible in the fact that such teacher-student interactions were mainly in line with previous research (e.g. Hart & Steinbrecher, 2011; Draskovic et al., 2013; Gunnulfsen, 2016), the experiences of our participants revealed that both teachers and students appreciate the quick and easy communication opportunity social media platforms offer for micro-managing their daily errands and exchanging school related information. Contrary to Techlehaimanot and Hickman (2011) who claimed that the initiation of social media "friendships" should come from students, our findings indicate that teachers are also prone to initiate the contact with students if there are concrete school-related issues that need students' immediate reactions.

Most of such exchanges however were carried out via teachers' personal social media accounts. Thus, even though different social media guidelines for teachers strongly advise against "friending" students through personal accounts (Graham et al., 2018), only a few students in our sample had used closed class or school discussion groups or had interacted through a teachers' "professional account". Our findings thus reaffirm the understanding that the blurring of boundaries between teacher's personal and professional lives, as noted by Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015), is unavoidable.

Our focus-groups also revealed that students had become "nightmare readers" (Marwich & boyd, 2010) on their teachers' social media profiles. Our participants believed that young people engage in such monitoring mainly in the hopes of finding additional information about the personal lives, hobbies, and interests of their teachers. In comparison to the previous views suggesting that teachers should always be held to higher standards of professionalism (cf. Lumpkin, 2008), secondary school students in our sample were much more at ease. At the same time, they still had concrete opinions about the things teachers should not be sharing on social media. For example, consistent with the findings of Nemetz (2012), our participants believed that teachers should avoid making comments of political, racial or religious nature, as well as mock, belittle and harass one's students on social media (cf. Devic & Kolburan, 2015). In short, students warned teachers against disclosing information that could later potentially lead to role-, face-, and stigma risks, as identified by Hosek and Thompson (2009). Furthermore, students in our sample shared the views previously expressed by Mazer et al. (2007), when stating that teachers' self-disclosure on social media should be consistent with their teaching style and the general character they present in the classroom. The findings of the present study thus contribute additional evidence to suggest how crucial it is that teachers develop and accommodate their own privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002) when disclosing information about themselves on social media to find a healthy balance between representing themselves as professionals and as human beings with personal lives, hobbies, and interests outside the workplace (Atay, 2009).

It is noteworthy that a common view shared amongst our participants was that teacher-student interactions on social media have positive effect on the overall teacher-student relationships. For example, students in our sample claimed that such social media "friendships" have had a positive effect on their class climate as social media has enabled them to form warmer, and friendlier relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, students believed that interacting with one's teachers on social media provided them with a unique opportunity to see teachers as individuals rather than mere professionals standing in front of the class. In summary, our findings provide important evidence to illustrate that social media could be used to much greater extent for building more meaningful relationships between teachers and students, especially at the times of the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face communication is scarce.

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# VISUALIZING COVID-19: AN ANALYTICAL MODEL TO UNDERSTAND AND COMPOSE CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVING DATA VISUALIZATION PROJECTS

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## ABSTRACT

*The increased demand for information during the Covid-19 pandemic inspired projects to describe the pandemic's progress via data visualization. Critically analyzing the published data visualization projects (DVPs) contributes to establishing a framework that supports both understanding and composing DVPs that evolve over time. Drawing upon constructed grounded theory, we develop an analytical model for creating DVPs in a journalistic or public communication context. For our analysis, we selected Covid-19 public service media DVPs in the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden and Estonia as well as DVPs created by global and local data activists. The analysis of these examples provides an understanding of (1) the implied agency standing of the authors of the visualizations, (2) the kinds of editorial layer (data, visual representation, annotation or interactivity) that inform the creation process and (3) what newsrooms and data visualizers can learn from this practice to create understandable, meaningful and engaging DVPs of (critical) events that evolve over an extended period. Our model supports data visualization practitioners in making informed choices when creating data stories.*

Keywords: data visualization ▪ data journalism ▪ data activism ▪ data literacy ▪ digital journalism ▪ Covid-19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Continuous data reporting on Covid-19 became part of the fight against the pandemic, and 'Flatten the curve' became the mantra of various early initiatives to control or combat the coronavirus. Questions remained, however: Where is the curve? What does it consist of? Moreover, will the curve predict the outcome for us? For our country? What does the curve even mean? Countless data journalists, public officials and data activists put effort into illustrating the curve.

The visualizations predicted the bell-shaped curve to become flat again after the pandemic evolved and peaked, but retrospective analysis showed the shortcomings of such visuals. For example, they tended to be short-sighted, inaccurate and unconnected to scientific data (Pentzold et al., 2021). Critical voices argued that the inaccuracy of data visualizations merely contributed to an 'infodemic' (Mooney & Juhász, 2020). The aims of Covid-19 data visualizations have changed over time from awareness-raising to calls for responsible behavior, from fear-mongering to fostering public discussions. The intended readers, their skills and knowledge at understanding and interpreting the data visualization have been challenged a lot. Covid-19 and many similar crises (e.g. the war in Ukraine or the heatwaves emerging over a long period) offer case studies to inform a variety of global and national journalistic data visualizations of pandemic development and, as such, an excellent opportunity to learn about visualizations as part of continually evolving DVPs.

When the curve did not flatten as initially predicted, news organizations and public health institutions were tasked with creating information visualizations that acknowledged the uncertainty caused by the evolving situation, were continuously updated and were intended to be functional for diverse target groups. This made us ask how research could contribute to establishing data visualization projects (DVPs) that need to continue over time and contribute to disseminating meaningful data-based knowledge.

This paper investigates Covid-19–related DVPs from public service media websites, international data activist initiatives and public health authorities in Estonia, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. We use the term *data visualization project* to embrace all the diverse types, from stories illustrated by data visualizations to DVPs supplemented with some text. By analyzing the Covid-19 visualizations' authorial agency, editorial layers and communicative functions, we establish a heuristic model that supports the creation of continually evolving DVPs. We take inspiration from Hullman and Diakopoulus (2011), who argue that investigating data visualizations on the basis on the evidence in their visuals allows us to understand some of the editorial judgements underlying their rhetorical techniques. In developing our model, we drew upon the theoretical understandings of several journalistic theories in conducting reflexive iterations of qualitative analysis.

The specific case of Covid-19 DVPs allows us to analyze data visualizations beyond the traditional data stories in which visuals support journalistic storytelling; in this case, the visualizations were available and used by audiences without the narratives that would contextualize them. Our analysis takes these 'context-poor' visuals as the starting point for our model building. Our heuristic model is usable in journalism and many other fields in which creating continually evolving DVPs is necessary.

Our qualitative analysis based on reflexive iterations—repeatedly visiting the data and theoretical approaches—enabled us to identify three dimensions that constitute the basis of the heuristic model. **The analysis of examples of various international DVPs shows (1) that variations in the *agency* of diverse actors explain their positions and role-taking, (2) that the *editorial layer* reflects a balance between automation, time budgets and journalistic freedom and (3) that the overall *communicative function* supports the receiver in interpreting a visualization**. By looking at the complexity of the data stories, we learn from continuing Covid-19 reporting practices how to create understandable, meaningful and engaging DVPs of (critical) events that develop over an extended period.

## 2. VISUALIZING DATA IN TIMES OF CRISES

With the advent of data journalism, the need to visualize vast amounts of data and an increased attention to automation have become journalistic norms. In using data in stories, however, journalists may also choose pre-packaged news angles that interest the audience, and the choices of interactive data presentation may be relatively limited to fulfil their paternalistic perspective (Appelgren, 2018). In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, the actors who engaged in visualization were journalists, public health authorities and data activists who rushed to fill the information vacuum and satisfy doomscrolling audiences (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2020). The daily reporting of pandemic data forced many news organizations to establish continually (self-) updating forms of DVP. The various actors who contributed to their data stories had diverse interests and focuses, resulting in a diversity of visualization approaches (Pelizza, 2020).

Due to the social constructionist nature of data visualizations, the notion of objectivity is inapplicable in data journalism (Tong & Zuo, 2021). Masullo et al. (2021) detected a *crisis coverage gap*, showing that the media did not consistently deliver what the public really needed during the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating a misalignment of journalists' roles and audience expectations. Journalists' agency significantly stems from their role perception, and that perception informs their published stories as is shown in several works on journalistic role performance (e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2011, 2019; Mellado, 2015). Nevertheless, as an important starting point of any communication act, the significance of role performance in editorial processes is often underestimated or not discussed or described.

Overall, data journalism expands the possibilities for informative storytelling at the intersection of the fields of informatics (e.g., programmers and data analysts) and communication (e.g., journalists). Data/computational journalism is rooted in professional journalism and open-source culture (Coddington, 2015), the latter of which somewhat relates to the recently emerging phenomenon of data activism. On the one hand, Wu et al. (2019b) show that the technological firms that provide technical automation and data-related services to newsrooms distance themselves from data storytelling, responsibilities and consequences. On the other, Örnebring and Ferrer-Conill (2016) look at this process from the newsroom's perspective and conclude that the outsourcing of information and data (visualization) services means that potential skills and competencies in the newsroom remain underdeveloped. Additionally, Örnebring and Ferrer-Conill (2016, p. 4) show that information and data services are outsourced by news agencies mainly for automated financial data processing. They also point out that newsrooms have to deal with increasing amounts of data while coping with growing pressure to make news production more efficient. At the same time, news workers see machines as cocreators of news alongside humans in the automated newsroom (Primo & Sago, 2014). Automated journalism may mean anything from machine aggregation of content to data scraping and auto-publication (Wu et al., 2019a). The diverse understanding of automatization also sets conditions for establishing newsroom routines, where continually evolving DVPs demand a balanced and carefully considered allocation of machine and human labor.

Outsourcing data services for specific stories is uncommon, and economic pressures support the use and publishing of already 'packaged' data, meaning that almost no effort is invested in the innovation of data visualization in house (Örnebring & Ferrer-Conill, 2016). As Örnebring and Ferrer-Conill discuss, outsourcing also means that outside actors (freelancers) determine the frame of the news and may even neglect some journalistic norms. Our analysis allows us to challenge this claim to a certain extent. Although the data underlying Covid-19 data 'packages' was the same in several of our examples, we identified a diversity of visualization possibilities due to the differences in agency, editorial layer and communicative function attributed to the visualization.

Matters related to the source, limitations and data interpretation are essential to data visualization's transparency, so it is essential that skilled, trustworthy actors make the visualizations. Kõuts-Klemm (2019, p. 311) has argued that journalists who possess more in-depth experience of sociological methods or statistical concepts use that experience in evaluating the quality of information more often than those who do not. Tong and Zuo (2021) concur and argue that data processing is an arena of subjectivity and decision-making. Nevertheless, most data literacy studies conducted among journalists do not discuss their ability to assess the media and/or data literacy of the receiver (the audience) (Kennedy et al., 2016). As the Covid-19 pandemic started, several outside actors assumed the role of trustworthy, authoritative actors (e.g., Johns Hopkins University), reducing the need to address the (possible) lack of journalistic skills in data processing.

The inaccuracy of data visualizations was criticized during the pandemic for contributing to the infodemic (Mooney & Juhász, 2020). Differences between public authorities that collected and reported Covid-19–related data meant that apples were often compared with oranges in visualizations, contributing to mistrust and confusion. Journalists who use pre-framed data without analyzing its limitations are just one problematic side of data storytelling along with questions regarding the transparency and credibility of the data and the source.

Presenting the data source may function to establish trust and increase the overall transparency of the news and its production process, but a profusion of source links can also create an illusion of trustworthiness (Phillips, 2010; Rupar, 2006). Audiences appreciate transparency disclosures, such as hyperlinks to the original content or other sites as well as the acknowledgement of errors in reporting (Karlsson & Clerwall, 2018, p. 1927–1928). Therefore, linking directly to the initial source of the data in a data set, explaining the methodology and disclosing possible controversies in the data and visualization increase a data story's credibility (Kennedy et al., 2016; Potter, 2004). Awareness of the value of such practices helps journalists and other data mediators make choices that support the audience's data literacy.

Instead of normatively evaluating Covid-19 visualizations, our approach pinpoints how three distinct processual elements—agency, editorial layer and communicative function—provide a heuristic for data visualizations.

## 3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO DATA VISUALIZATION

We used the inductive approach of reflexive iteration, which involved visiting and revisiting the collected DVPs and comparing the reflections to the theoretical concepts and extant scholarly knowledge. This led to refined insights into the domains of the model. For these insights to make sense, it was essential that links be established to existing theoretical perspectives. Due to the situation's complexity, we drew upon multiple theoretical perspectives in building the heuristic model to determine agency, editorial layers and the communicative functions of the DVPs.

### 3.1. Agency

In this paper, we rely on existing research on journalistic roles to understand the agency of authors, because, while diverse social actors made Covid-19 visualizations, their positionality resembled that of a journalistic role even if they were not journalists. Previous studies have used diverse methods (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Mellado, 2015) and identified journalistic roles in three domains, each of which contains several specific roles.

The first, the *power relation* domain, includes the watchdog role, in which the journalist monitors actors and institutions, as well as the loyal facilitator role, in which the journalist cooperates with those in power or expresses blind loyalty to institutional elites and the nation-state. The second, the *journalistic voice* domain, embraces the disseminator role, in which journalists distance themselves from the content, and the interventionist role, which involves journalists' interpretations, opinions or other elements. The third, the *audience approach* domain, contains three professional roles: the civic role (audiences are seen as citizens), service role (audiences as consumers) and infotainment role (audiences as spectators).

In making the Covid-19 data stories, the authors—regardless of who they were—took on roles identified in previous research, and thus their agency positions may be identified in the visualizations they produced.

### 3.2. Editorial layer

The concept of editorial layers was introduced by Hullman and Diakopoulus (2011, p. 2233). In their understanding, the concept embraces four layers—data, visual representation, textual annotation and interactivity—which allow one to look at visualizations to understand their authors' rhetorical choices. Editorial layers are strongly linked to the elements of journalistic storytelling, such as news value and framing, and we endorse the argument that they reveal the choices made by the maker of the visualization. Therefore, the concept provides a frame that lets us trace the choices made in creating visualizations. In journalism, some of these choices have been extensively studied and outlined, so we build our reading of the editorial layer on existing theories of news values, and we extend them to the discussion of automatization, a key element in building data visualizations of continually updated data.

Data visualization requires editorial decision-making that is largely based on **news values**. Many of the news values identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2017) are present in DVPs. The news values selection in Galtung and Ruge's (1965) chain of news communication occurs in the three domains of the chain: media perception, selection distortion and media image. This is an essential part of the editorial layer, as that which is accentuated is evident in the outcome (e.g. the story or visualization) serving the communicative function. Not to delve into the details of all the news values proposed by several authors, we underline some that are significant in Covid-19 DVPs.

Personification as a news value means setting individual actions or people in the foreground of reporting and it is relevant in identifying the event, as people can feel empathy for other persons more easily (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). In data visualizations, however, personification in graphs and tables must be achieved using other means, but which means? While the audio-visual element itself can function as a news value (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017), the question arises of whether this news value has a central or secondary position in DVPs. Frequency and continuity as news values refer to events' continuous or regular occurrence (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017). In continually evolving DVPs, the pace of updates (which may diverge from the overall news cycle) sets the frequency factor. In evolving DVPs, the frequency factor can be closely related to the news values of exclusivity (exclusive access to information) and conflict (confrontation between counterparts), as the information may be available only to the DVP author, and every update may conflict with the previous data presentation (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Conflict is sometimes united with the value of bad news to visualize unexpected, tragic and morbid events as constituents of the group of news values arousing negativity. The

Covid-19 pandemic by its nature meets the criterion of bad news. However, as the pandemic evolved, the criterion of good news began to gain relevance. Therefore, the accentuation of these two values played a role in evolving DVPs. The Covid-19 crisis was simultaneously geographically close and globally distant, incorporating geographical proximity as a news value. The extent of accentuating proximity depends on the author's agenda, which, conversely, depends on ethnocentrism or cultural proximity (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The crisis involved select countries and elite people; it was personal, meaningful and relevant, but in diverse ways depending on the DVPs' position and the agenda of the outreach.

When an event evolves over a long time (as did the Covid-19 pandemic), DVPs must make the process of continual updating routine; in other words, they must rely on **automatization**. Tuchman's (1973) questions on routinising the unexpected ask how news organizations process unexpected events and how news workers decrease the variability of events in the news. Covid-19 coverage would generally be classified as developing news, but, because developing news, according to Tuchman (1973, 117), must be unscheduled, the daily updated data visualizations count as continuing news, as they imply the existence of prescheduled change. Regional and international Covid-19 data publication was prescheduled by the data collectors, and journalists, public authorities and data activists developed routines for updating their data stories. However, the Covid-19 DVPs did not merely persist but also evolved over time. Therefore, we prefer the term *evolving DVPs*, as it describes both the continuity and evolving nature of the projects.

The automation of journalistic processes can have the objective of replacing journalistic work (e.g., Carlson, 2015) or can free journalists' time for reporting (Wu et al., 2019b). Tuchman (1973) sees the routinisation of work processes and resource allocation as part of managerial decision-making in the newsroom. Automating and outsourcing some activities in evolving news reporting enables journalists to engage in storytelling or in covering other news (Coddington, 2015).

Caswell and Dörr (2018) highlight the dichotomy between automatization and the editorial challenges of expressing narrative structure in a grammatically and structurally coherent manner in automatically generated news. Therefore, the dimensions of automatization and author autonomy are interdependent. Drawing from previous conceptualizations, we bring together the intersecting axes of automatization, time and author autonomy under the editorial layer.

Regardless of the agency behind editorial decisions, visualizations are also related to resource allocation. The editorial layer reveals the homogeneity or diversity of news values and determines the process of updating information. Manual updating of data demands human labour and is time consuming. At the same time, it gives journalists and other actors more autonomy to adjust the story (e.g., by covering the topic in light of the event's current focus, by changing news values or by simultaneously covering different data sources). Since the time spent on a story is an expensive commodity and journalists' or data activists' input can be more valuable elsewhere, it is cost effective to automate data stories. However, when left unattended, the visualization may become detached from the actual conditions of the situation. Therefore, we see that the interrelations between time, author autonomy and automatization are critical dimensions of the editorial layer and are directly related to the diversity or homogeneity in the chosen news values.

### 3.3. Communicative function

We draw from the concepts of visual framing and engagement to define communicative function, which, according to Weber's (2020) characteristics of a data story, embraces visual framing and engagement specific to data storytelling (Engebretsen et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2016). As several aspects of the communicative function are closely related to the editorial layer, our understanding also draws upon Hullman and Diakopoulos's (2011) narrative visualization characteristics, including data provenance strategies, representation of uncertainties and individualization.

Data visualizations derive their communicative functions from **visual framing**: the selected graph types, colors, symbols, icons, etc. As choices must be made to create the visualization, it can be argued that decision-making bias is unavoidable, and choices subsequently influence how the visualization is perceived and interpreted. Data constitute the foundation of DVPs, and, in our case, it is vital that data are regularly updated and represent, first and foremost, the number of people diagnosed with Covid-19 and the number who died or recovered from the disease. Both purpose and annotation both include keywords indicating the communicative intent of the producers (e.g., to tell, to explain, to argue visually) (Weber, 2020). Hullmann and Diakopoulos (2011) limit *annotation* to explicitly labelling parts of the visualization or text to represent uncertainty or expressions of doubt regarding potential conclusions. The textual-visual relationship links the visualizations to the text and is best represented in 'scrollytelling' techniques (i.e. a type of story in which the continuous scrolling of the page creates the story experience and engages the user with various media). Visual design frames the emotions, morbidity and stereotypes explicitly or implicitly represented in the DVP. The information structure has several forms, including author-driven/linear/explanatory and reader-driven/nonlinear/exploratory narratives. By selecting some and neglecting others of these characteristics, DVP authors frame the message conveyed to the audience.

Information literacy requires the knowledge and ability to use the technological features of data storytelling (Engebretsen et al., 2018), which is inseparable from what attracts the user and can be summed up as **engagement**. Kennedy et al. (2016) identify six factors that affect engagement, which we incorporated in the heuristic model through the contextual interpretation of the Covid-19–related data visualizations:

1. Subject matter: determines the user's possible interest in the subject of the story. In the Covid-19 case, timely actual coverage could be part of audiences' coping strategies.

2. Source/media location: refers to the publisher (e.g. news organization). For the heuristic analysis, we looked at Covid-19 data visualizations from diverse agents.
3. Beliefs and opinions: visualizations may intensify the user's beliefs and/or opinions on the information. Data visualizations have the power to confirm or contest users' beliefs and opinions on the spread of Covid-19.
4. Time: visualizations offer the possibility of spending time through interactive usage or may require time to understand. Covid-19 data provide complex data sets that may take time to interpret and understand.
5. Emotions: when users have engaged with the subject matter and given time to the data story, the visualization may inspire strong emotional responses, which are evoked by visual design elements (e.g., signs, colors, icons).
6. Confidence and skills: users need to feel that they have the necessary skills to decode visualizations. For users to understand complex Covid-19 DVPs, the visualizations required an intuitive user interface and guidelines to help viewers interpret and use the data.

To understand the audience's perspective on data stories, it is essential to consider ideas of data and information literacy. *Data literacy* describes the capacity to use and interpret data, and it emerges in the overlapping areas of statistical literacy, information literacy and technical skills in working with data (Gray et al., 2018, p. 3). The data and information literacy aspects of Covid-19 DVPs can be interpreted using Potter's (2004) media literacy axioms; specifically, the *interpretation* axiom (how people make sense of the DVP), *shared meaning* axiom (matching meanings to designated symbols, i.e. word, graphic or photo), *power* axiom (awareness of the media functions in order to be empowered by the knowledge) and *purpose* axiom (users' empowerment to shift control from the media functionality to themselves). These aspects—along with questions related to agency and (journalistic) roles, news values, visual framing, the engagement factors of data stories and the editorial layer relating to time, automation and autonomy—constituted the starting point of data investigation stories about Covid-19.

## 4. METHOD

As scholars in the fields of audience and journalism studies, we noticed specific patterns while exploring data visualizations of Covid-19. First, we identified agencies (similar to the journalistic role concept of Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Mellado, 2015); these were also visible when the authors of the visualizations were not journalists. Second, we could see traces of the editorial decision-making processes (editorial layer) in the evolving visualizations. Several factors and actions influence the decision-making of what becomes news. We drew on news values (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017), as they are considered the primary determinant in 'becoming news', but combined them with questions about automatization, as the allocation of resources related to data processing, time and author autonomy varied significantly across various actors. Third, we observed a series of patterns in what we call communicative function, which constitutes the meeting place of expectations regarding audience literacy levels, engagement with visualizations and framing. Next, we introduce the three key clusters of patterns that form the three pillars of our theoretical structure for the proposed heuristic model.

There are many Covid-19 visualization platforms all over the world, making it difficult, if not impossible, to collect a comprehensive sample. Pászto et al. (2020) attempted to systematically categories and critically evaluate and map sources of information and data, but, as our aim was to understand the various actors and their agency roles in the data visualizations, we made a targeted selection and included in our analysis data from three types of source: official sources (such as health boards), public service media (in Great Britain, Sweden, Norway and Estonia) and global data initiatives' online pages based in the US (N=11; see Table 1). The selection was guided by the objective of including visualizations from small transitional democracy media environments (e.g., Estonia), medium-size advanced democracy media environments (e.g. Sweden and Norway) and significant, established democracy media environments (e.g. the UK) as well as sources that positioned themselves as global (e.g. Estonian and US cases). Most of the online pages in our sample were in the local national language except in the case of Estonian Public Broadcasting, whose overview of Covid-19 was in English, as this was the only page that used visualizations systematically and consistently.

*Table 1. Selection of data visualizations used in the iterative analysis*

| Country | Public Service Media | Public health authority | Data initiatives |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Estonia** | Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) https://news.err.ee/1061575/coronavirus-in-estonia-all-you-need-to-know | Health Board of Estonia* https://www.terviseamet.ee/et | Koroonakaart.ee www.koroonakaart.ee |
| **United Kingdom** | BBC https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51235105 | Department of Health and Social Care https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/ | |
| **Norway** | Norwegian Public Broadcasting (NRK) https://www.nrk.no/korona/ | Norwegian Institute of Public health (FHI) https://www.fhi.no/sv/smittsomme-sykdommer/corona/dags--og-ukerapporter/dags--og-ukerapporter-om-koronavirus/ | |

| Country | Public Service Media | Public health authority | Data initiatives |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sweden** | Swedish Public Broadcasting: (SVT) https://www.svt.se/datajournalistik/har-sprider-sig-coronaviruset/ | The Public Health Agency of Sweden (FHM) https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/smittskydd-beredskap/utbrott/aktuella-utbrott/covid-19/ | |
| **Global/US** | | | The Johns Hopkins University (JHU) https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html Worldometer https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/ |

* Initially Estonian Health Board did not have their own visualisations and referred to the activist initiative site Koroonakaart.ee. In the second wave of the pandemic, the Health Board adapted their own visualisation which looked very similar to the activists' visualisation.

We gathered data by downloading full-length screen captures of data visualizations that mediated Covid-19 information on May 15, July 15 and September 1, 2020. The time periods were selected because May was three months after the pandemic started and was when various DVPs were gaining popularity. We selected July because summertime in the Northern hemisphere usually brings a decline in viral diseases. September was selected as the third time-point, as it could show potential changes and developments in the DVPs. The pages consisted of information on Covid-19 in written form and graphs. We looked at the information's overall presentation and the possible aim or focus of the presented data. As screen captures were made, all the authors had the same data to analyze and code.

We developed our model through reflexive iterations, in which the categories emerge in the process of going back and forth between empirical material and theoretical readings. In qualitative analysis, this method relies on the inductive approach, in which the categories of analysis emerge from the data (Neale, 2016; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Reflexive iteration is a systematic, repetitive and recursive process in which the researcher repeatedly asks questions that serve as the framework for the data analysis; this task is carried out in precisely the same manner each time and executed multiple times (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There are several frameworks for iterative coding, but they are all based on questions for reflexive inquiry. We combined the reflexive questions of two iterative coding frameworks (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009) with the three dimensions of our operational model derived from the scholarly literature. Personification as a news value contributed to understanding the means by which DVPs can create empathy and a level of personal identification with data.

For iterative coding, we visited and revisited the DVPs with, altogether, 49 questions under the following categories (presented with example questions):

- editorial decision-making on automatization, autonomy and news values (How is cultural proximity/relevance/consonance/unexpectedness, etc. expressed? Are data updated regularly and automatically, and is this explained to the user? What is the balance between automated data presentation and journalistic storytelling?)
- topical framing (What does the storytelling of this DVP emphasize? What tone does the composition of the story express?)
- visual framing (What is the textual-visual content relationship? How are animations, multimodality, colors and the like presented?)
- practical and technical usability (Is numeric information explained to the user? Are technical guidelines (and what sort) given to the user?)
- information literacy (What kinds of technical and mathematical/statistical skill and knowledge are expected of the user?)

The domains were then augmented with categories from theoretical perspectives. In several cases, these studies take the audience's perspective (see Engebretsen et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2016) or that of data journalists (see Kõuts-Klemm, 2019; Weber, 2020; van Wisten, 2020), but, in our discussions, we turned to these categories to identify traces of decisions apparent in texts. We also employed news values, which are usually not discussed in studies on data storytelling. The present study aims to fill this gap by using the conventional news values approach (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017), as it has a strong role in explaining the framings of both journalistic and data activists' data stories. In the iterative analysis, observations from the websites and the literature reading were systematized under three main domains: agency of the author of the visualizations, editorial layer and communicative function (Table 2).

*Table 2. Domains and categories for analyzing data visualizations*

| Domain | Category group and reference | Categories |
|---|---|---|
| **Agency** | Journalistic roles (Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Hanitzsch and Vos 2018; Mellado 2015) | Agency represented through roles (disseminator, interventionist, investigator, loyal facilitator, watchdog, infotainment, civic service) |
| **Editorial layer** | News values (Harcup and O'Neill 2001; 2017; Galtung and Ruge 1965; Pelizza 2020) | News values*<br>Communicative function |
| | Automatisation (Tuchman 1973) | Manual / semi-automated / automated updating |

| Domain | Category group and reference | Categories |
|---|---|---|
| **Communicative function** | Data literacy (Kõuts-Klemm 2019; Gray et al. 2018; Potter 2004) | Visual-numeric literacy (knowledge of mathematics, statistical literacy, understanding of visualisations)<br>Source transparency (source/media location), methodological transparency, synthesis, and abstraction.<br>Media literacy axioms. |
| | Visual framing, and storytelling (Weber et al. 2018; Potter 2004) | Grouping and textual-visual relationship, visual design (interactivity, animations, multimediality, etc.), (visual) data framing, the structure of information, technical usability. |
| | Data-vis engagement (Engebretsen et al. 2018; Kennedy et al. 2018) | The subject matter (beliefs, and opinions, time, emotions, confidence, and skills) |

* Complete list on news values follows the news values presented by (Harcup and O'Neill 2001; 2017; Galtung and Ruge 1965)

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1. Agency in data visualizations

Although we investigated our sample DVPs at three points in time, we saw little change. Only visual framing showed moderate change, which we explain in more detail in the relevant section. However, we begin by describing the findings on agency.

Any DVP is an interpretation that requires taking a position—an *agency*. The authors' agency in our study samples exhibited various roles that had characteristics in common with the journalistic roles outlined by Hanitzsch et al. (2011) and Mellado (2015). Iterative coding distributed the data visualizations into agency categories of *advocacy*, *power relations* and *audience perspective*. Agency, therefore, reflects roles that are somewhat similar in their dimensions to journalistic roles. Agency influences the editorial layer by establishing priorities among selected news values and assigning resources between automation, time and autonomy; it find its outlet in the communicative function, where data literacy, engagement and visual framing are found.

Public service media (PSM) Covid-19 DVPs expressed diverse journalistic roles and formed two groups diverging from the agency domain. The first group, NRK (*Norsk rikskringkasting*) and SVT (*Sveriges Television*), focused purely on visualizing data, and the textual narrative is almost absent (Figure 1). Thus, they fall under the category of the advocacy/disseminator role. The second group, BBC (*British Broadcasting Corporation*) and ERR (*Eesti Rahvusringhääling*), had pages with a much stronger reliance on journalistic techniques, and their data elements take a backseat, serving as illustrations to the main story. Although they also take an advocacy position, the BBC and ERR play a more interventionist role, due mainly to preserving a robust journalistic presence in the textual narrative.

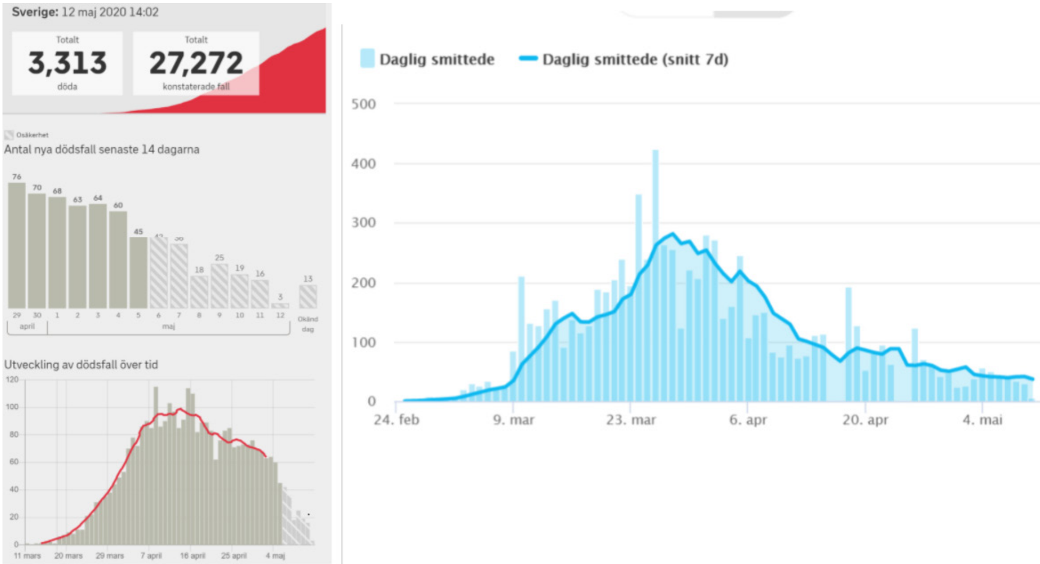


*Figure 1. Example of SVT's (left) visualisation of death cases, identified cases, no. of deaths in the last 14 days, change of death cases over time. NRK's (above) bar graph shows the no. of infected, and no. of infected over the last 7 days. (May 12, 2020)*

Assessing the content of the PSM DVPs made evident the service and loyal facilitator roles. All the PSM pages were based on official Covid-19 statistics provided by governmental administrations, as this data source is most reliable in these countries. Advice is given in the data visualizations, and the texts follow the official pandemic guidance and do not contest or criticize the guidelines.

Agency in administrative DVPs is strongly influenced by their function, purpose and communicative aims while agency in the data activists' DVPs is expressed in an overview of data without intervention. Koroonakaart.ee and Worldometer provided DVPs without a clear statement of purpose regarding at whom they were aimed or why they were deemed necessary. JHU's (*Johns Hopkins University*) clear interventionist agency can be determined by its statement that the information is 'to help the public, policymakers and healthcare professionals worldwide'. Judging from the targeting of the audience and the presentation of the information, we conclude that public authorities' and data activists' DVPs express the neutral disseminator's role without elements of intervention. The exception is JHU, which states the aim of providing help to the public and fulfils this aim by explaining various media literacy abilities to users.

The agency domain becomes explicit through how it works in conjunction with the editorial layer and communicative function. The DVPs' authors do not actively express agency as is evident from the sample of public authorities' and data activists' visualizations. By simply providing visualizations, they take a detached, disseminator position, but, as our iterative coding in the editorial layer and communicative function domains shows, adopting this role has its shortcomings.

### 5.2. Editorial layer

Journalistic and data activist DVPs differ in the news values they adopt. News values help to interest the audience in the story, which makes the selection of news values a central element in the editorial layer. The journalistic DVPs relied on negativity to catch the audience's attention, often representing bad news by the use of contrasting, stereotypical red and black colors to designate deaths or infected cases. By contrast, the Koroonakaart.ee, SVT, and NRK DVPs chose colors that were neither stereotypically gendered nor connotatively loaded (e.g., blue-white) or switched to them over time.

The news value of personification helps to explain the elements by which DVPs create empathy and a level of personal identification with data. Personification, which often appears in company with several other news values, was explicitly present in DVPs that had greater autonomy to change their focus and framing and that must have required more human labor to update. The ERR and BBC DVPs provide examples that strongly emphasize conveying the message by using photos of real people as well as textual supplements that explain the data or emphasize their human impact. However, in the DVPs whose updating was fully automated with no changes in the news values, focus or visual framing, personification was absent as were other news values (such as proximity, meaningfulness and relevance) that often accompany it. Hence, the more automated the DVP, the fewer news values and personification factors were included. Figure 2 provides an example of personification in which ERR included a picture of police officers demonstrating the 2+2 rule. The picture was attached to the story in the early months of the pandemic and remained part of the DVP.

**Public spaces**

- Restriction change: From June 19, the **2+2** restriction is a recommendation and not a rule.
- Restriction change: **Public events**: 1,500 spectators can attend indoor events and 2,000 at outdoor events from July 15. But capacity must be limited to 50 percent at indoor events
- Restriction change: **Public meetings** can be held from May 18.
- Restriction change: **Playground**s and **sports areas**, such as **outdoor gyms**, will be reopened from May 2 but must be disinfected every four hours.
- Restriction change: Tallinn will reopen **playgrounds** from May 11.
- Restriction change: Tallinn will reopen **public beaches** on June 1.
- RMK is asking **hikers** to avoid popular trails to limit the spread of the virus.


The PPA demonstrate the 2+2 rule in force during the emergency situation. Source: PPA

*Figure 2: Example of personification in ERR's DVP: DVP contains text that is manually updated and the picture of the police demonstrating 2+2 rule, personalising the DVP (Screenshot from September 1, 2020)*

SVT's DVP, however, evolved over the examined time, and the news value of proximity became more evident, as users could explore the spread of the virus at the regional level. This shows that the visualizations were re-evaluated in the editorial layer, and changes were made even though most of the story remained automated; we discuss the changes of focus in the DVP below.

Audio-visual elements or, more broadly, multimodality as a news value was emphasized in various ways. All the PSM DVPs emphasized the value of interactive data visualizations as supplements to help the user to understand the situation. However, the interactivity was limited mostly to animation in the presentation of the data and the ability to highlight by selecting one country or a specific variable. This made the message of the PSM visualizations rather unidirectional, aligning with the paternalistic perspective as described by Appelgren (2018). In comparison, independent DVPs, such as Koroonakaart.ee and Worldometer, also emphasized the importance of visualizations but with the purpose of offering an overview and input for other stakeholders to use their visualizations. In addition to graphics, multimodality was present in the ERR and BBC visualizations in the form of videos and photos, which enabled newsrooms to update the DVP and shift its focus in response to journalistically timely emerging topics. This was the main distinction from the other DVPs in our selection, whose purpose was to provide up-to-date numerical Covid-19 data.

Regarding the frequency or continuity of the DVPs, most did not disclose the time of the update at the very beginning. Nevertheless, the update time was clarified according to the data sources' updates. Explaining the regularity of updates clarified the frequency news factor for users, and the practice was present in all the DVPs. The analysis of news values enables us to highlight the relationship between automatization, author autonomy and news values. This is graphically depicted in Figure 3 and explained below.

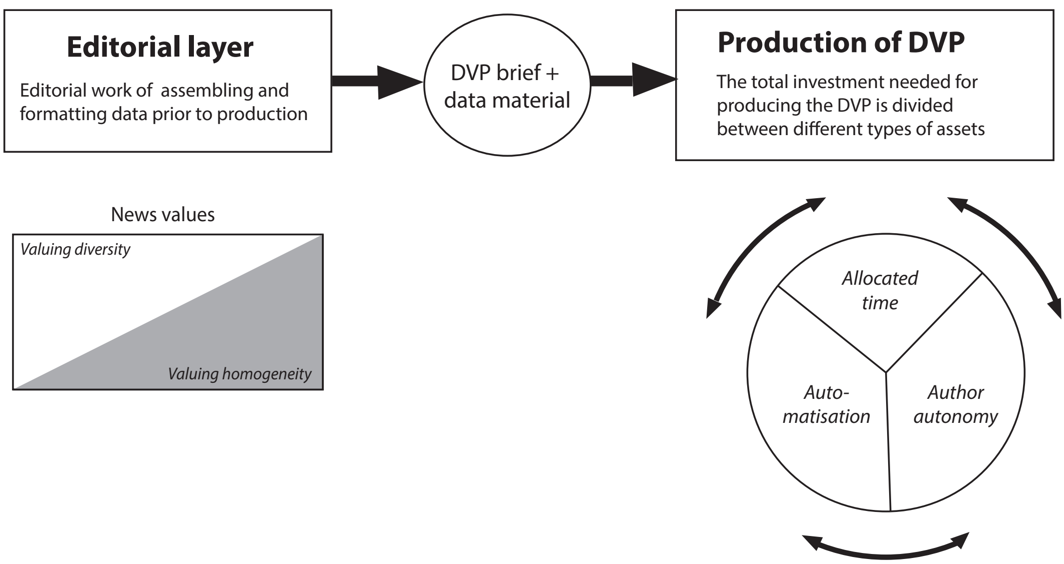


*Figure 3. The editorial layer of continually evolving data visualizations*

The highly automated updating of DVPs allowed less author autonomy as seen in the static focus and framing of the visualizations. By contrast, greater author autonomy was seen in DVPs that were less automated and more dynamic in changing their focus and framing. The autonomy was explicit in the diversity of news values and in the changes in focus and news values that characterized those DVPs.

In public authorities' and data activists' visualizations, the data in graphs were updated automatically. The text accompanying the graphs was kept to a minimum to minimize the necessity of manual updating. As a result, we deduce that the time spent on the daily updating of the visualization was minimal, giving the authors the freedom to engage in other activities or, in the case of public authorities, to fulfil their primary duties.

The BBC and ERR DVPs with embedded visualizations (including from third parties) seem to have been manually updated and focused on written news texts, prioritizing journalistic autonomy. The BBC changed the volume of the text as the pandemic evolved; ERR updated its textual information in response to changing pandemic conditions and governmental regulations (e.g., advice on wearing masks). The SVT and NRK DVPs were similar in having more automated updating that required less authorial intervention.

These observations suggest that the automation of specific processes—seemingly a matter of simple resource allocation—directly impacts the outcome. Therefore, the balance of autonomy, automation and time as well as the intertextual link between visualization, multimodal content and text are essential editorial decisions that ultimately affect the communicative function. Additionally, changes in focus and the choice of news values partly affect the automation of processes, as they may hinder or support these editorial choices and influence the communicative function.

## 5.3. Communicative function

The digital form of information presentation embraces several categories that foster or hinder the use and understanding of visualization. Categories such data literacy, visual framing, storytelling and engagement make up the communicative function domain. Graphs, tables, and charts must explain what is presented, and users require guidance on the principles by which the data have been chosen, collected and framed. This increases transparency and credibility.

### 5.3.1. Data literacy

When graphs are used, the audience is expected to know how to interpret the types of chart and graph that present the data. Users, especially those with limited data literacy, may be misled by the wrong type of graph (or manipulation of the visualization), rare or specific graph types or data presentations whose interpretation demands mathematical and statistical sophistication. Most of the graphs and charts in our analysis presented limited data in a few types of graph, which were largely comprehensible to people with lower levels of data literacy. However, data activist DVPs presented data without framing, creating the potential for multiple (mis)interpretations. Approaching the graphs of our DVP samples from the perspective of Potter's (2004) *interpretation* and *shared meaning* axioms, we found Potter's conditions to be mostly fulfilled. However, this was true only narrowly of individual graphs. The whole DVPs with various types of graph left significant room for interpretation. The DVPs also had shortcomings related to Potter's *power* and *purpose* axioms, generally presenting little or no information on the media functionality that would empower users to benefit from the presented knowledge. Similarly, the purpose axiom was unfulfilled in most of the DVPs (except those of ERR and the BBC), as the users were left to figure out how to shift control from the media to themselves.

Users may expect sources to be transparent for verification purposes, but efforts at transparency may backfire by creating the 'illusion of transparency'. This became evident in Worldometer's data activist DVP, which aggregated numerous databases of uneven quality and reliability. The data sources also changed over time. The links and references to the sources seemed to provide transparency but instead revealed patchy data and outdated information, thus increasing distrust of the whole data visualization, as misleading data and untrustworthy sources reduce credibility. Data and other information sources need to be regularly monitored for timeliness, even if the visualization is automatically updated. Our analysis suggests that the creators of data visualizations should assess the target audience's data literacy or add complementary material to support the learning of new skills and the gaining of knowledge from the DVP.

### 5.3.2. Visual framing

Deciding how to tell the story begins with selecting news values and focus in the editorial layer. This manifests in the visual framing through colors, figures, symbols and graphs and inspires emotions, opinions, facts, education and entertainment. In the first round of collection (May 15, 2020), our selected DVPs highlighted morbidity, danger and negativity. Visual framing in DVPs may combine several elements, but, in our sample, the main element for characterizing the message was color. Hence, we focus on the use of color in the sample DPVs.

Most of the data visualizations used a stereotypical color palette—black for deaths, red for new cases, green for the number of recovered people. The exceptions were Koroonakaart.ee and NRK, which used pastel colors in various shades of blue and green. In the second round of data collection (July 15, 2020), most of the visualizations had changed their colors to less dramatic ones or softened the colors' tones. This shows that the creators recognized how to dramatize the topic through visual framing. From the journalistic point of view, this sort of accentuation helps to deliver the news message. Nevertheless, in the context of continually evolving events and their data, visualizations may inspire panic by sensationalizing morbidity or may quickly induce fatigue as the audience becomes inured to over-dramatization. As in the fairy tale of the boy who cried wolf, the 'first wave' coronavirus visualizations tended to over-dramatize the situation while the statistically very similar situation in the autumn inspired much less dramatic visualizations.

Data visualizations have not developed conventional genres or other format-related attributes that guide and support recipients in understanding the message. Stories with more text than graphs can employ classic news or feature genres, but relying on traditional narrative types does not mean that the text must dominate over visualizations. In our selection, SVT and NRK (as examples of PSM) and JHU (representing data activist DVPs) stood out by reason of their strong intertextuality between the visualization and the text.

Nevertheless, these DVPs' fragmented nature presented multiple focal points and did not send one clear message. In comparison, the BBC and ERR combined conventional news and feature narratives that focused more on the text's central message. However, the text was rather loosely related to the data visualization. Although the BBC and ERR communicated a more transparent and focused message, the intertextuality between text and visualization was modest and obfuscated the communicative function of the data visualization. All the PSM data visualizations had the potential to employ scrollytelling (i.e., engaging users through the interactive navigation of media), but none fully exploited this technique.

The data activist DVPs Koroonakaart.ee and Worldometer as well as the public authorities' DVPs offered visualizations that could be described in the phrase 'do what you want with the data', as the creation and interpretation of the narrative and message were left to the user. These DVPs were presented without much explanation or any detectable story type. The examined data activist DVPs seemed intentionally to avoid structuring. The graphs often included the technical asset of an embedding code for presentation on other web pages. Hence, the user stood in the midst of various data piles requiring analysis and interpretation. Personal observations indicate that such open data sets were simultaneously used for doomsday predictions and arguments that there was nothing to worry about.

The presentation of charts and graphs without explanatory information enables the creation of new and distorted contexts and interpretations of the data, suggesting a need to consider the interpretation and shared meaning axioms of media literacy. In this light, the activists' initiatives of presenting the data for users to interact with as they pleased led to potentially hazardous examples of mis-, mal- and disinformation. It is crucial to achieve a balanced intertextuality between the visualization and text, which strengthens the communicative function.

### 5.3.3. Engagement

We divided engagement with the data visualization into practical and technical usability, as the engagement takes place on two levels. The level of *practical usability* is by its nature more closely related to content (the substantive element) and involves the information's relevance to the user. *Technical usability* describes the means of technical interactivity that influence the user experience. The analysis of the DVPs shows that authors attempted to achieve practical usability through the news values emphasized in the visualization, which also affected the possible emotional engagement with the visualization. The DVPs presented the number of deaths and infected cases at the top of the page, prioritizing *morbidity* and the *frequency* that is important to show the evolution of the event. Later, the mainly journalistic DVPs added regional information that emphasized *geographic proximity*. The analysis of engagement at the technical usability level shows that there were sometimes explanations on the graphs of what a particular symbol or element meant (primarily on the PSM DVPs). However, except for those of NRK and SVT, all the DVPs lacked instructions on the technical use of interactive visualizations, which are essential for less digitally advanced users.

## 6. A HEURISTIC MODEL OF CREATING A DATA VISUALIZATION

We integrated various concepts, previous studies and the results of the iterative coding process in devising our heuristic model, an analytical framework that enables journalists and data visualizers to better understand and create DVPs that consider the user perspective. The model presented in Figure 4 summarizes the three domains affecting the creation of the DVP.

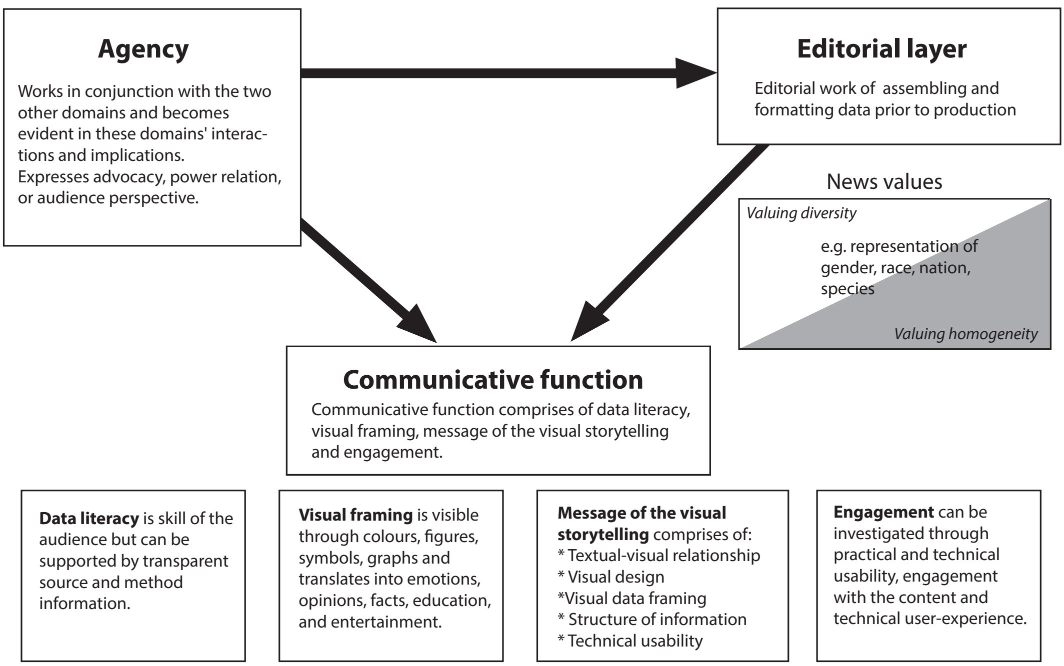


*Figure 4. Interrelation of domains in the heuristic model of continually evolving DVPs*

In Figure 4, the *agency* domain represents the element related to the dimensions of advocacy, power relations and audience perspective. Agency works in conjunction with the two other domains and becomes evident in those domains' interactions and implications.

The *editorial layer* domain determines the production process, which strongly influences the outcomes of the communicative function domain by focusing on specific news values. The editorial layer also includes decisions about the level of automation of routine processes. In the case of continuous coverage, automation decreases the workload and human errors and frees time that the DVP's authors can use for more intellectually stimulating tasks. The message is framed on one side by the communicative function and on the other by the news values emphasized in the narrative. In this sense, news values act as the criteria that the author(s) highlight in addressing the user; this attribute is relevant not only to journalists but also to data activists and other data storytellers.

The *communicative function* domain embraces the tacit knowledge, skills and competencies for understanding the presented information and judging its credibility. It reflects the message of the visualization and storytelling, which embraces aspects of the visual framing of the data, engagement, technical usability and the storytelling aspects that influence the use of the data and the reception of the message. Knowledge, skills and competencies related to data literacy are characteristics of users, but, in this mode, we use them to indicate what a DVP's creators must consider and how they can support the audience. They describe what the DVP requires from the user and the extent of support offered to interpret the data (e.g., its limitations, biases, frames and the transparency of its sources). Visual framing and storytelling embrace elements related to understanding the visual presentation of the data (e.g., the textual-visual relationship, framing the data with visual signifiers and the structure in which the information is presented). As the data can be visualized at several levels of complexity, it is relevant to assess the visualization's technical usability (e.g., technical guidelines and explanations for the user).

While the *communicative function* domain deals with aspects that are more dependent on the audience's side, the *agency* and *editorial layer* domains involve newsroom practices, which is why 'automation' is an essential subcategory domain.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This article deals with how events that evolve over time are expressed in DVPs that eventually create the event's image for an audience. Covid-19 inspired (and continues to inspire) various global and national journalistic DVPs of the pandemic's development. Beyond the pandemic, similar reporting may emerge in wars or catastrophes that evolve over time. Our analysis shows (1) how variations in diverse actors' agency explain their position and role-taking, (2) how the editorial layer reflects the balance between automation, time budgets and author autonomy and (3) that the overall communicative function of the DVP supports the receiver in interpreting the visualization. The heuristic model developed in this study can be used by practitioners, e.g. reporters and editors in newsrooms, government officials, data activists, NGOs and others who create continually evolving DVPs to cover datafied events. As a tool, the model would be most beneficial as a guideline in the preliminary stages of planning and developing a DVP. It would also serve well as a framework in further research on data visualization practices (e.g., in comparing newsrooms' and data activists' initiatives).

The author's *agency* plays a crucial role but may often be unrecognized in the creative process. Public authorities perform the roles of service providers and loyal facilitators of power while data activists, who claim to act as neutral disseminators, also take an advocacy or watchdog role. Journalists who mediate the data visualizations of public authorities and data activists also assume the actor roles of the visualizations' initial authors. Our results indicate that it is crucial to discuss agency in the initial stages of creating a DVP, as agency seldom changes during the process. Future studies can potentially ask how agency and (journalistic) roles are negotiated in the work processes.

Agency's function cannot be undermined, as it partly determines the angle, focus and the selection of the story's news values as well as the *editorial layer*. The analysis of the editorial layer shows that the selection of news values directly influences how the data are presented (e.g., emphasizing geographical or emotional proximity, conflict or morbidity). Choices related to the representation of gender, race, nationality or even species are also based on the editorial layer. The editorial layer determines the balance between automating updates and the author's autonomy to change the visualization's message, and this balance influences the variety of news values presented in the story. While balancing autonomy and resources may be a familiar challenge in newsrooms, data activist initiatives and public authorities are only now discovering it. The data activists' and public authorities' DVPs in our sample indicate that they may create data visualizations for third parties without fully considering the media literacy aspect, which leads to potential misinterpretation of the data in a false context. We underscore that data visualizations are today often digital products that require usability testing, like any other digital service, especially if created by agents who have no previous professional experience in creating content for the public.

In analyzing the communicative functions of DVPs, we see that practical and technical usability are crucial factors that support the receiver in engaging with and interpreting the visualizations. The key to the clear, focused communicative function of a DVP is a balanced intertextuality between the visualization and text. If this link is weak, it obfuscates the message. Paying attention to the potential pitfalls in the communicative function must be the responsibility of the data visualizer.

Taking into consideration the categories of the three domains, the authors of any

DVP put themselves in the position of the user, and this enables them to detect and rectify potential shortcomings of the DVP as well as take decisions in the production process that make the DVP sustainable in the long term.

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# *"THEY ARE SEXUAL OBJECTS"*: CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE RAPE VICTIMS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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## ABSTRACT

*Following the assumption that there is a particular way newspapers often use language to represent female rape victims (FRVs) and the insufficiency of existing studies on the linguistic representation of FRVs in Nigerian newspapers, this study critically discusses the linguistic and discursive tools that are deployed by selected Nigerian newspapers to represent FRVs in their reports. Aspects of Halliday's transitivity system and Lazar's notion of feminist critical discourse analysis served as framework. The framework was complemented with the use of Voyant tools to determine the preponderance of word choice in news reports. Rape reports published between January, 2020 and December, 2020 by The Punch, The Guardian, Vanguard and Daily Trust were purposively retrieved and constituted the data for this study. Data engagement revealed that FRVs were imbued with five representations: patriarchal preys, object of sexual gratification, anonymized and pseudonymized victims, objects of pity and victims of dual jeopardy. The social implications of these representations aligned with patriarchal practices such as androcentrism, incest, mental abuse and sexual assault while the gender biases implicated in the representation included the projection of female as inferior, powerless and emotional beings.*

Keywords: Rape discourse ▪ sexual objects ▪ violence against women ▪ female rape victims ▪ Nigerian newspapers ▪ discourse analysis

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been identified as one of the social ills that continue to pervade the human society, including Nigeria. At the forefront of the many dimensions of GBV, 'a world-wide phenomenon' (Oparinde & Matsha 2021, p.1), is rape. Rape, defined as a form of sexual intercourse that disregards the consent of the victim, has been a common phenomenon in Nigeria and the world over. Rape is also seen as a prevalent feature in a patriarchal society like Nigeria. What is a patriarchal society or tradition? Patriarchal tradition is a practice in which a male becomes *Subject*, while the female becomes *Object*. The patriarchal nature of Africa, therefore, explains why gender is binarized – man is seen as the core, while woman is the *other* (Ncube & Moyo, 2011); thus, women are relegated and subjected to abjection in different spheres of life (Kehinde, 2006); women are marginalized and deprived certain privileges that men enjoy (Parpart, 1986). Hence, patriarchy fosters tyranny, injustice, inequality, subjectification of the male gender and objectification of the female gender.

As reported on the world population review website accurate statistics on rape are notoriously difficult to obtain since most victims of sexual violence choose not to report it in order to forestall embarrassment, stigmatization, reprisal attack from the rapist, and so forth. Hence, GBV is grossly underreported in many countries, especially in Nigeria. The world population review website further reports that:

> approximately 35% of women worldwide have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime. However, in most countries with data available on rape (including the U.S.), fewer than 40% of those women seek help—and fewer than 10% seek assistance from law enforcement. As a result, most rapists escape punishment. In the U.S., for instance, it is estimated that only 9% of rapists are prosecuted, and only 3% spend time in prison. 97% of rapists walk free.

The issue of rape in Nigeria, according to the United Nations, has taken a worrisome dimension. Yet, statistics on GBV in Nigeria is hard to obtain. According to the United Nations (UN), as reported in the *Punch* newspaper of November 17, 2020, the spate of GBV in Nigeria, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, is estimated at over 3,600 rape cases nationwide. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) states that 2,279 cases of rape and indecent assault were reported to the police in 2017, while the Nigerian Correctional Service said 4,436 people were jailed for sex-related crimes in 2014. According to Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Dame Pauline Tallen, as contested on the website of International Centre for Investigative Reporting on December 3, 2019, two (2) million Nigerians are raped every year, but there is no reliable public data to support or disprove this claim. Similarly, in 2011, a human rights lawyer, Caroline Ajie, also claimed that "at least 2 million Nigerian girls experience sexual abuse annually and that only 28 per cent of rape cases are reported" (The African Report). While the current study doubts the correctness of the two million figures, it aligns with the view that Nigeria is one of the countries with the highest cases of rape in the world. There is hardly a day that such reports are not covered in newspapers. The challenge, however, in Nigeria is that data sources on GBV cases are hard to come by. Corroborating the view that Nigeria lacks actual statistics of rape cases, the UN promised to cooperate with the Ministry of Women Affairs to strengthen the availability of data on violence against women and girls. In the November 17, 2020 report by Punch, "the main existing data sources are fragmented with poor coordination of the data collection process, often lack disaggregated data for vulnerable groups and disaggregation beyond state level, have small samples and are not widely disseminated" (Author? Or Punch, 2020, p. ??)

Studies on rape have established that both male and female can be victims of rape (Benedict, 1993; Smith, 2004; Agaba, 2013; Oduah, 2014). Becoming a victim of rape is not gender-specific; however, females as rape victims are more reported in newspapers and even more studied than males as rape victims. The several reasons alluded to this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study; nevertheless, this study focuses specifically on the female rape victims (hereafter, FRVs), especially as represented by the media. Both the media and the law usually report rape issues. Benedict (1993) maintains that both agencies do very little to support FRVs who consequently "become trapped in a cycle of injustice: having fallen victim to a violent crime through no fault of their own, they are blamed for it, sometimes mocked for it by neighbors, friends, family, and the law" (p. 5). This scenario can be extended as being representative of the universal attitude against FRVs. In Nigeria, Chiazor et.al (2016) submits that 90% of victims of rape are female, and "they are usually ashamed, humiliated, afraid, and there is little or no law to protect them. Even the law enforcement officers that are meant to protect these victims also assault them in different ways, even sexually" (p. 7765)

The foregoing aptly demonstrates the unpalatable climate in which females live their lives. It can be submitted that their lives are constantly on the margin in such climates. Apart from the issues of their vulnerability to sexual predators, it appears there is no institutional support to secure them or get justice for them in cases of sexual violations. There is no doubt that neither the media nor the law provides safe haven for the female folks in a patriarchal society. Following other studies such as Ehrlich (2001) who argued that rape trials are often problematic because they engender re-victimization of FRVs, this study analyses the linguistic tools deployed in the reports in selected Nigerian newspapers with a view to identifying how FRVs are represented.

### 1.1. Language, gender and social relation in Nigeria

Gender and sex have been given different conceptualizations by scholars in feminist linguistics and literature. While gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, sex is a biologically constructed one. However, gender relations and practices in patriarchal society, like Nigeria, are often frequently disputed. This dispute keeps the field of language and gender interesting to scholars. A common issue that has enjoyed attention from scholars is the way language functions as a major means for subjugation of women (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980; Cameron, 1992). The recurring finding from these studies is that language creates and sustains gender inequalities and there is a need for linguistic change that will necessitate social change (Litosseliti, 2006; Lazar, 2007).

Besides the various traditional proverbs about gender (Yusuf, 1995; 1997; Arua & Yusuf, 2010), a clear indication of how language is often deployed to sustain gender inequalities is the representation of women in newspaper, especially when they are victims of any form of violence against women (VAW) such as rape. It has been revealed by previous research that there is a great variability in the representation of men and women, and such variability often favors women and disfavors men. To confirm this, studies (like Eshiet, 2013) on the use of gendered English expression in Nigerian newspapers have found out that Nigerian newspapers still portray high degree of the use of gender-bias expressions. Although feminist scholars have stated that gender relation varies according to time and space, it has been observed that the nature of social relation in Nigeria operates along the biological categorization of male and female, and it is "based on hierarchical relation of domination and subordination respectively" (Lazar 2005, p. 7). The relation of dominance and subordination is continually reinforced and justified by institutional instruments of patriarchy such as customary laws, religion and cultural practices, and even the media. Recurring gender issues that have been emerging from this form of social relation are repressive male domination, widespread domestic violence where females are victims, negative mental health for women, constant sexual assault, among others. It is in this vein that this study seeks to explore indications of gender bias in Nigerian newspapers' reports in relation to gender issues in general and representation of FRVs in particular.

### 1.2. Gender issues in Nigerian newspapers

Gender issues are a recurrent feature in Nigerian newspapers. This can be attributed to two factors: women being integral social actors (Santaemilia & Maruenda, 2014) in the Nigerian society, and Nigerian society being intensively patriarchal. Women are social actors in Nigerian society because they are cherished symbols of care, tenderness and compassion, and issues about them in the newspaper usually stir up emotion in the readers (Dare, 2016). The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society is evident in the unequal distribution of socio-political and economic benefits between male and female. Hence, it is not erroneous to conclude that there is reciprocal influence between these two factors. In a clear term, the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society makes women social actors in the Nigerian society because women are usually the victims of patriarchal practices.

Violence against women (VAW) is a recurring gender issue in every androcentric society and it hardly goes unnoticed by the media. The UN defines it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"

(World Bank, 2019, p 1). Thus, it entails violent circumstances where females are the victims. It involves instances of family violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment, some of which have led to cases of divorce between couples… and common gender issues in Nigerian newspapers are domestic violence, divorce and rape (Osisanwo & Oluwayemi, 2018). As maintained earlier, victims of rape can be male or female. However, there are different dimensions of rape with female as the victim: rape as a revenge for female refusal of male sexual advances, rape as a tool to satisfy male sexual urge, rape as an expression of misogyny and so on. Each of these dimensions often features in Nigerian newspapers' reports on rape. However, reporting rape cases places a heavy responsibility on these newspapers with respect to representation of women; words must be carefully selected to forestall any accusation of sexism. "The Nigerian journalist is extremely sensitive to feminine issues and seizes every opportunity to convey 'something' of significance about women" (Dare 2016, p. 317). Therefore, the linguistic framing of gender issues by the media has insidious power to sustain social inequality and injustice that feminist critical discourse analysts disapprove of. It is in recognition of the gender issues raised above that this study sets out to critically investigate and analyze how female victims of rape are constructed by Nigerian newspapers in their news reports on rape.

### 1.3. Rape discourse

Discourse analysis is a term which accounts for a variety of methods for studying how language is used in text and contexts (Gee, 2010). Thus, the use of language in the context of rape is rape discourse. Rape discourse, then, is one of the domains of discourse studies, and it is theoretically situated among the common issues in gender discourse. It is conceptually different from rape which is one of the domains of gender studies. However, gender discourse and gender studies are intrinsically associated. More specifically, rape discourse is concerned with the use of language in the discussion of rape. It is concerned with how language is used to describe and discuss rape myths, rape victims, perpetrators and circumstances of rape. Rape myths are stereotyped beliefs about rape, rape victims and the perpetrators. Donaldson (2017), in agreement with Payne et al (1999), lists seven types of female rape myths: "that the woman was asking for it, it was not really rape, he did not mean to rape her, she wanted it, she is a liar, rape is a trivial event and rape is a deviant event" (p. 3). In sum, rape myths are stories that usually lead to victim-blaming and give a narrower understanding of rape. They are "general stereotypic beliefs that exonerate rapists and blame victims of sexual violence" (Bohner 2001, p. 515). Studies in rape discourse are often quick to implicate the media in the propagation and reinforcement of rape myths. This is because "the constant reporting of stereotypical rapes also negatively influences the general public's opinion" (Donaldson 2017, p. 5).

Rape discourse also involves linguistic discussion and description of rape victims. In this regard, particular attention is often focused on how language is used to describe FRVs. The core belief shared by studies in this regard is that language has constitutive roles which "may exert hidden power in the way we talk and write about the fact that a man rapes a woman" (Bohner 2001, p. 515). Passivation is often used as a linguistic strategy in the descriptions of FRVs and their responsibilities. Bohner (2001) rightly observes that "the 'get'-passive seems to be especially well suited to suggest direct responsibility of the victim. The sentence 'the woman got raped', for example, may invoke the completion 'got herself raped' and may thus indicate the woman's active participation" (p. 517). The present study is another attempt on the examination of the linguistic description of FRVs.

### 1.4. Problem Statement

Representation of gender issues within and without media reportage of gender-based violence, sexual violence and domestic violence has been given attention by existing studies beyond the Nigerian space (Berns, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017; Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2018; Eaton, 2019; Quinn, Prendergast, Galvin. 2019; Royal, 2019; Schwark & Bohner, 2019; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021; Prendergast & Quinn, 2021). Similarly, representation practices and gender issues in Nigerian newspapers have been studied extensively by scholars using different ideological perspectives. Representational practices such as ideology and power have been examined by, Osisanwo (2011, 2016) and Oyeleye & Osisanwo (2013) while various gender issues such as gendered language, sexist language, and homosexuality have been examined by Eshiet (2013), Animasahun (2015), Okon et.al (2018), Ahmed (2018), Osisanwo & Ajibade (2019, 2020) among others. In spite of these works, not much critical investigation on the linguistic tools often used to represent FRVs in Nigerian newspapers appears to have been done. This is a gap that this study intends to fill. Oduah (2014) and Nwabueze & Oduah (2015) are two studies that are closely related works to this gap. However, they used non-linguistic approach to examine framing and coverage of rape cases in Nigerian dailies; they did not specifically examine how FRVs are linguistically represented in the dailies. Therefore, this study focuses on how, within the Nigerian context, FRVs are linguistically represented in 40 news reports from *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*. The following questions guided the operation of this paper.

i. What linguistic tools are deployed in selected Nigerian Newspapers to construct news reports on rape?
ii. In what ways do the deployed linguistic tools influence the construction of FRVs in the reports?
iii. To what extent have the underlying gender biases in the selected Nigerian newspapers' conditioned the reports on rape?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Analytic Framework

The analysis in this paper is guided by insights from Lazar's (2005) notion of feminist critical discourse analysis and Halliday's (1994) transitivity aspect of systemic functional linguistics. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is a complementary field of feminist linguistics and an approach to discourse analysis which combines feminism and tenets of critical discourse analysis. Popularized by Michelle M. Lazar in 2005 and 2007, the central concern of FCDA is "critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systemically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group" (Lazar 2007, p. 5). Thus, it is a subfield of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which "theorize and analyze from a critical feminist perspective the particularly insidious and oppressive nature of gender as an omni-relevant category in most social practices" (Lazar 2007, p. 3). Following the prime concern of FCDA as outlined above, its aim as Lazar (2007) explains "is to show up the complex, subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle way in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated and challenged in different contexts and communities" (p. 142). Through this, gender-sensitive practices and assumptions which are often implicitly or explicitly enacted in different discourses but are often glossed over by mainstream CDA will be sufficiently interrogated by FCDA. Thus, the "actual material and phenomenological consequences" of these practices and assumptions "for groups of women and women in specific societies" (Lazar 2007, p. 2) will be justifiably revealed. As further revealed by Lazar (2007), "this entails mobilizing theory in order to create critical awareness and develop feminist strategies for resistance and change" (p. 6). To sum it all, findings from feminist linguistics/FCDA are not made for mere face value but are ultimately aimed at engendering social transformation of the fate of women (Lazar, 2005; Litosseliti, 2006). In this vein, there are high expectations that findings of this study will necessitate the long-needed change in the way linguistic resources are deployed by Nigerian newspapers to represent FRVs. Data for analysis for FCDA includes multifaceted instances where representations in text and talk are formed from particular perspectives with the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance between men and women (Lazar 2007, p. 6). Thus, "the analysis of data includes meanings expressed overtly; it is especially attentive to the less obvious, nuanced and implicit meanings for the subtle and complex renderings of ideological assumptions and power relations in contemporary societies" (Lazar 2007, p. 13). And following Lazar's (2007) charge that "the task of feminist CDA is to examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or resisted in a variety of ways through textual representation of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk" (p. 10), the analysis of the data for this study will focus on both social and linguistic aspects of representation of FRVs in the selected Nigerian newspapers. The overall analysis was conducted on the basis of discursive analysis made by the text producers of the selected texts. For clarity of analysis, Halliday's transitivity system was used to identify the formal linguistic properties of the selected news reports. This effort is in consonance with the first level of analysis postulated in Fairclough's CDA (Fairclough 1995), which was built upon in the FCDA. For the critical explanation of the social implications of the linguistic choices and the uncovering of underlying gender bias in the texts, feminist critical discourse analysis was used.

### 2.2. Data collection

Data for the study were sourced from the online archives of four widely circulated Nigerian national newspapers: *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*. Specifically, the data were news items on rape that were reported by these national dailies between January 2020 and December 2020. The period covers the months of national lockdown declared by the Federal Government of Nigeria in response to Covid-19. During these months, there was spike in the rate of rape reports and other domestic abuse in the country. Purposive sampling method was adopted to collect data from the online archives of these newspapers, where a total of 40 news items were selected. Seventeen representative texts are used in the analysis. The quantitative and qualitative analytical procedures are combined in this study. For the quantitative aspect of the analysis, Voyant Tools, a web-based text reading and analysis environment, is deployed to facilitate reading and interpretive practices for digital humanities-based studies, like the current one. In this paper, retrieved news stories on rape cases were culled out of the selected newspapers. The 10,234-word corpus with 790 unique word forms, which generated 0.077 vocabulary density and 40.5 average words per sentence, were run using Voyant Tools in order to generate the statistical information on the word cloud in the reportage. The word cloud analysis helps to identify the thematic foci in the retrieved data. The qualitative aspect of the analysis was guided by insights from Lazar's (2005) notion of feminist critical discourse analysis and Halliday's transitivity system. The quantitative and qualitative tools provide a unified framework through which the analysis proceeds consistently and rhythmically.

## 3. ANALYSIS

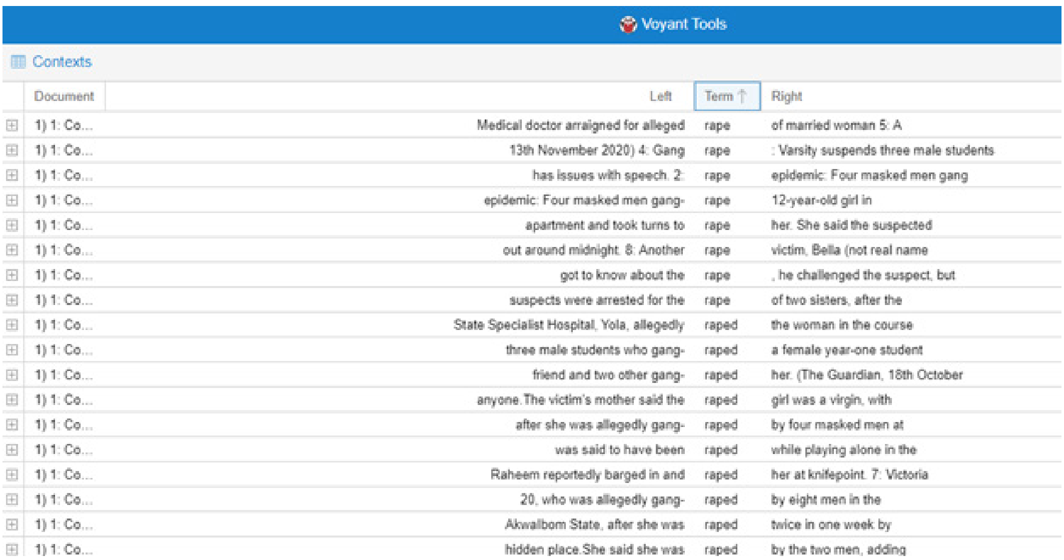
The analysis revealed that the selected Nigerian newspapers deployed Halliday's material, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential processes along with their participants and circumstances as linguistic tools to represent FRVs in different ways in their news reports on rape. Ultimately, five major representations emerge in the news stories: FRVs as patriarchal preys, object of sexual gratification, anonymized and pseudonymized victims, objects of pity and victims of dual jeopardy. The word cloud analysis, as presented in Figure 1, helps to identify the thematic foci in the retrieved data, giving the statistical details on the preponderance of word choice. Figure 1 gives sufficient word representation to call readers' attention to the reported news item. The reported news item here is rape. Other words which corroborate this are raped, raping, rape, girl, victim and so forth.


*Figure 1: The word cloud analysis on news reports on rape*

### 3.1. Female rape victims as patriarchal preys

The arrangement of discursive choices by the text producers especially material and relational processes as well as their participants and circumstances in texts 1 – 2 indicates that FRVs are represented as patriarchal preys. Patriarchal prey is conceived in this study to mean the consistent subjugation of women by patriarchal practices – practices to support masculine recognition and dominance over feminine. Sexual assault, which often manifests as rape in the main patriarchal practice in this representation, is often perpetrated through tools such as force, luring, deception and blackmailing. This representation shows that the text producers further enacted the gender bias against women as a physically disadvantaged social group in the face of prevailing patriarchal practices.

Material process involves the use of action verb which shows a participant (the actor) doing something to another participant (goal) in the same clause. In the sampled texts, the female victims are linguistically represented as goals in the clauses. Goals in this transitivity framework are sufferers of actions of the actors in the clause. Representing the victims as goals in these clauses indicates that they are negatively affected by the action of the actors. They are usually "constructed as being impacted by the actor's performance of the process" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:334). In addition, goals do not remain the same after being impacted on by the actors. This feature distinguishes goals from scopes which often remain unaffected after the actions of the actors. This change in the state of the goals after undergoing actions of the actors can be related to the physical distress and psychological trauma rape victims often have to cope with after suffering rape from male perpetrators. Figure 2, called Context in Voyant Tools environment, displays the connection between the rape and the rapist. In the context of the representations, the words 'rape' and 'raped' are the material process action verbs which show the relationship between the actor and the goal. While words and phrases like 'gang', 'men', 'male students' represented the masculine figures who carried out the act, other words and phrases like 'married woman', '12-year-old girl', 'her', 'girl' represented the feminine figures as goals. The representations constructed using either the active or passive voice uses the victimhood to womanhood strategy to implicate the female gender as patriarchal prey to the male gender, which either way privileges the men as a social group who physically subverts the female gender.


Voyant Tools

Contexts

| Document | Left | Term | Right |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 1: Co... | Medical doctor arraigned for alleged | rape | of married woman 5: A |
| 1) 1: Co... | 13th November 2020) 4: Gang | rape | : Varsity suspends three male students |
| 1) 1: Co... | has issues with speech. 2: | rape | epidemic: Four masked men gang |
| 1) 1: Co... | epidemic: Four masked men gang- | rape | 12-year-old girl in |
| 1) 1: Co... | apartment and took turns to | rape | her. She said the suspected |
| 1) 1: Co... | out around midnight. 8: Another | rape | victim, Bella (not real name |
| 1) 1: Co... | got to know about the | rape | , he challenged the suspect, but |
| 1) 1: Co... | suspects were arrested for the | rape | of two sisters, after the |
| 1) 1: Co... | State Specialist Hospital, Yola, allegedly | raped | the woman in the course |
| 1) 1: Co... | three male students who gang- | raped | a female year-one student |
| 1) 1: Co... | friend and two other gang- | raped | her. (The Guardian, 18th October |
| 1) 1: Co... | anyone. The victim's mother said the | raped | girl was a virgin, with |
| 1) 1: Co... | after she was allegedly gang- | raped | by four masked men at |
| 1) 1: Co... | was said to have been | raped | while playing alone in the |
| 1) 1: Co... | Raheem reportedly barged in and | raped | her at knifepoint. 7: Victoria |
| 1) 1: Co... | 20, who was allegedly gang- | raped | by eight men in the |
| 1) 1: Co... | Akwaibom State, after she was | raped | twice in one week by |
| 1) 1: Co... | hidden place.She said she was | raped | by the two men, adding |

*Figure 2 – Connection between the rape and the rapist*

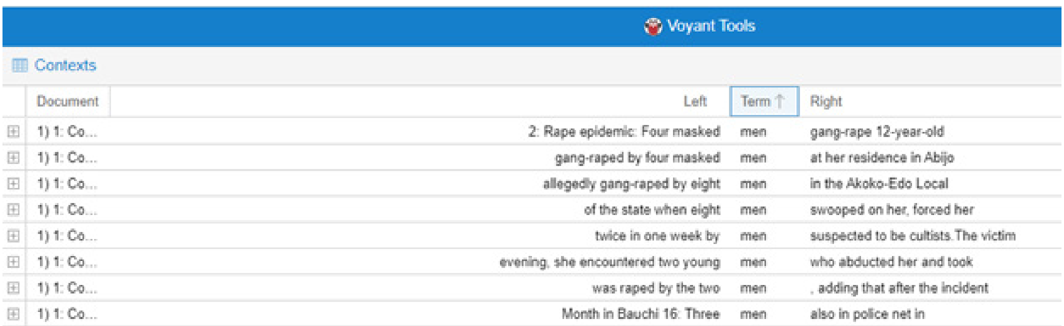
Texts 1 and 2 further exemplify this representation.

> **Text 1: Cobbler rapes graduate, shares nude video with friends**
> A 25-year-old cobbler, Olamide Babayemi, has been arrested for raping a 22-year-old Microbiology graduate and sharing the victim's nude video with his friends. Babayemi was alleged to have invited the victim, whom he claimed was his girlfriend, to come and collect the phone she asked him to

buy in Mowe, Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area of Ogun State. (*The Punch*, 13 January, 2020)

**Text 2: Welder Nabbed in Ondo for Allegedly Defiling 2 Daughters**
The Ondo State Commandant of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), on Sunday, announced that operatives of the command had arrested a welder, Femi Onifade, for allegedly defiling his two daughters. He said that Onifade, 48, defiled his two daughters, aged six and nine years. (*Daily Trust*, 24 May, 2020)

The actor is usually the subject that operates on itself or others which can be animate or inanimate. In texts 1 and 2, material process is used to represent FRVs 'a 22-year-old Microbiology graduate' in text 1 and 'two daughters' in text 2 as goals of the actions of the actors. Both 'a 22-year-old Microbiology graduate' and 'two daughters' are represented as FRVs who suffer the actions performed by the actors, while 'a welder, Femi Onifade' in text 1 and '25-year-old cobbler, Olamide Babayemi' in text 2 are the male rapists who are the performers of the action. Thus, FRVs are socially framed as preys in the texts. As preys, they are constantly susceptible to attenuating patriarchal practices that are constantly bent on harming them. Thus, it confirms the gender bias that they are sexual objects which are open to patriarchal practices such as sexual assault. This representation is generic to every text in our data corpus where material process manifests.


Voyant Tools

Contexts

| Document | Left | Term ↑ | Right |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 1: Co... | 2: Rape epidemic: Four masked | men | gang-rape 12-year-old |
| 1) 1: Co... | gang-raped by four masked | men | at her residence in Abijo |
| 1) 1: Co... | allegedly gang-raped by eight | men | in the Akoko-Edo Local |
| 1) 1: Co... | of the state when eight | men | swooped on her, forced her |
| 1) 1: Co... | twice in one week by | men | suspected to be cultists. The victim |
| 1) 1: Co... | evening, she encountered two young | men | who abducted her and took |
| 1) 1: Co... | was raped by the two | men | , adding that after the incident |
| 1) 1: Co... | Month in Bauchi 16: Three | men | also in police net in |

*Figure 3 – Masculine influence in rape*

Figure 3 further depicts masculine activity in female rape, and this also incriminates the masculine gender as perpetrators of the dehumanization of the female gender, while it associates the feminine gender with prey. The consistent repetition of men as the active agent behind the rape further underscores patriarchal dominance of women. Expressions such as 'four masked MEN gang-rape…,' 'allegedly gang-raped by eight MEN in the Akoko-Edo…,' 'when eight MEN swooped on her, forced her,' and 'was raped by the two MEN adding that after the …' further accentuates the victimhood of womanhood with manhood.

A correspondingly similar representation which further depicts FRVs as patriarchal preys is the description of FRVs as helpless and defenseless sufferers. In essence, FRVs are humans who are violated, subjected to suffering, usually against their wish. Defenseless humans often lack the physical strength and power required to protect themselves from physical, and in this sense, sexual attack. Material, verbal and existential processes were deployed in our data as linguistic tools used by text producers to represent FRVs. The emerging representation from the combination of these processes as explicated in texts 3 and 4 is that FRVs are defenseless sufferers; and this confirms the gender biases that females are inferior and powerless beings who suffer sexual assault from their male counterparts as a result of patriarchal practices, as exemplified in texts 3 and 4.

> **Text 3: Man nabbed for allegedly raping daughter, stepdaughter in Ogun**
> A 48-year-old man, simply identified as Akile, has been arrested by neighbours for allegedly raping his daughter and a 14-year-old stepdaughter (names withheld) in his residence at Elere, ItoriEwekoro Local Government Area of Ogun State. The suspect's daughter, who confirmed the rape, said: "My father usually threatens us with a knife that if we tell anybody, he will kill us." Also, a medical test carried out on the stepdaughter confirmed she had been abused for a long time. (*The Guardian*, 11 December, 2020)

> **Text 4: I was violently attacked, raped by our family driver, woman tells court**
> A 23-year-old woman (name withheld) on Tuesday at an Ikeja Special Offences Court, said that she was violently attacked and raped as a teenager by one Francis Apai, a 33-year-old driver to her family. The witness said that he forcefully undressed her, undressed himself and continually punched, strangled her and raped her. She told the court that she had tried escaping from her attacker but could not. The father said that there were bruises all over his daughter's body which were allegedly inflicted by Apai during the attack. (*Vanguard*, 7 January, 2020)

The material processes are deployed to indicate the action of the actor on the goal. The use of verbs such as 'threaten, kill, attack, punched, strangled, armed' in texts 3 and 4 represent the action of the male rapists on the FRVs which lays credence to the representation of FRVs as defenseless and helpless preys to their male counterparts, due to the masculine strength which often renders an average female defenseless and powerless. Even where some males may not be so powerful, they are armed for the sexual battle since the attack is often planned. Hence, FRVs are socially framed as inferior beings in the texts. The patriarchal society has made females of different ages susceptible to rape attacks from libidinous men. The social implication of this representation is that FRVs are defenseless against patriarchal practices such as incest and sexual assault. It also brings to the fore the gender biases that females are inferior beings and defenseless sexual objects. The social implication of the involvement of daughter in text 3 highlights the animalistic tendencies in male-rapists who for sexual pleasure normalize the patriarchal practice of incest and sexual assault; thus, projecting a picture of sexual assault on victims and the defenselessness of the victims.

### 3.2. Female rape victims as objects of sexual gratification

The representations in the news stories and the discursive choices also indicate that the male gender use the female gender as objects of sexual gratification. Sexual gratification is conceived in this paper as sexual pleasure. The representation views men as people in vantage position because they are more advanced in age and strength and perceive their victims as powerless objects. Such men see their victims as worthless beings or objects who could be used for sexual pleasure at their own will, that is for their enjoyment. This is another way that the female gender is subjugated, dominated, trampled upon, relegated and perceived as omni-relevant, provided the needs of the men in question are met. The consistent subjugation of women by patriarchal practices as objects of sexual assault for sexual satisfaction against the will of the females often manifests in rape reports in Nigerian newspapers as evident in texts 5-6.

> **Text 5: Court remands trader for allegedly raping seven-year-old girl**
> An Ikeja Magistrates' Court in Lagos yesterday ordered that a 44-year-old trader, Seye Garuba, who allegedly raped a seven-year-old girl, be remanded in a Correctional Centre. He said the defendant unlawfully had sexual intercourse with his neighbour's daughter. (*The Guardian* ,16 December, 2020)
>
> **Text 6:**
> The police also paraded a 46-year-old Umar Mohammed in Azare town of Bauchi State who used N50 note to lure his mentally ill 15-year-old daughter into her mother's room where he raped her. (*Daily Trust*, 23 September, 2020)
>
> **Text 7: Man, 29, arrested for allegedly defiling Down syndrome minor**
> The Police in Oyo State have arrested one Timothy Abijo, 29, for allegedly defiling a 13-year-old minor with Down syndrome. The suspect, who was on visitation to his cousin, residing in the same house as the victim was alleged to have lured the girl with N500.The mother of the victim said that the suspect lured the girl into his host's room and gagged her before raping her.

> Abijo was alleged to have given the minor N500 after warning her not to tell anyone. The victim's mother said the raped girl was a virgin, with Down syndrome, which implies that she has special needs, and also has issues with speech. (*Vanguard,* 17 April, 2020)

The active agents behind the inhuman action of rape in texts 5, 6 and 7 are 'a 44-year-old trader, Seye Garuba', 'a 46-year-old Umar Mohammed' and 'Timothy Abijo, 29' respectively.' On the other hand, the recipients who suffer the actions are 'neighbor's daughter' (text 5), 'his mentally ill 15-year-old daughter' (text 6), and 'a 13-year-old minor with Down syndrome' (text 7). The relational process, which is a process of being, often used to indicate the relationship between an entity and another entity, is used in describing the FRV in text 7. While the relationship in identifying clauses is reversible, it is irreversible in attributive clauses. Through the attributive clause of relational process in text 7, the female rape victim is represented as a person with special feature, that is, 'a virgin, with Down Syndrome'. Through this representation, the news report further accentuates the victim's helplessness and purity. The representations of the recipients or goals of the dastardly acts as daughter, mentally-ill daughter, minor, girl, underage, and so forth evince that the perpetrators often target easy-to-get, unhealthy, unsuspecting and possibly naïve young women as their objects of sexual gratification. The choice of the word 'daughter' in the text underlies that incest, the sexual relationship among blood relations, is one of the patriarchal practices for preying on women in androcentric society. It further confirms the bias that females, their age or relation to their assaulters notwithstanding, are sexual objects. In each of the reports, there is sufficient evidence of age gap between the male perpetrator and the female victim. The males are usually quite older than the females, thereby suggesting that such men prey on younger humans. The younger female humans are easily susceptible to attenuating patriarchal strength, while the men see them as almost inanimate objects used to satisfy their sexual urge. Thus, FRVs are socially framed as objects of sexual gratification; and confirm the gender bias that they are sexual objects which are open to patriarchal sexual assault.


Voyant Tools

Contexts

| Document | Left | Term ↑ | Right |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 1: Co... | anytime they wanted to have | sex | with her, threatening to kill |
| 1) 1: Co... | held my legs and had | sex | with me. I begged him |
| 1) 1: Co... | the same age, to have | sex | with his sister against her |
| 1) 1: Co... | for refusing to begin a | sexual | relationship with one of the |
| 1) 1: Co... | said the defendant unlawfully had | sexual | intercourse with his neighbour's daughter |
| 1) 1: Co... | absence to harass the minors | sexually | ."It was revealed that few |
| 1) 1: Co... | son of his neighbour and | sexually | assaulted. 20: Four other suspects |

*Figure 4 – representation of sex-related terms*

Figure 4 further adduces masculine involvement in perceiving females as objects of sexual gratification through assault. The male-female power relations in the representations demonstrate power hierarchy, where men are portrayed to possess more physical power than women. This is what is relied upon in the subjugation of their female counterpart as their object of sex. The repetition of the words sex, sexual and sexually in figure 4 shows how the FRVs are portrayed as sex objects. Expressions such as 'they wanted to have SEX with her, threatening to kill her…', '…unlawfully had SEXUAL intercourse with his neighbor's daughter', and '…harass the minors SEXUALLY…' further heighten the objectification of womanhood in the hands of rapists, representing the view that the FRVs have no say or opinion on their 'pride'. They are often forced outside their wish to satisfy rapists who see them as their semen containing object. They see them as containers for offloading their excess fluid.

### 3.3. Female rape victims as anonymized and pseudonymized victims

Newspaper reports on women issues usually stir up emotional appeal in the readers. The identities of the victims are, therefore, often anonymized or pseudonymized. By anonymization, such identities are completely veiled or removed – not traceable; however, pseudonymized identities are often still identifiable through indirect and additional information. A close study of the representation of rape victims in our data present a curios finding – the protection of the victims' identities through substitution of their real names with fictitious names. The representation of FRVs in the newspapers, therefore, is traditionally expected to be done with modicum of compassion and secrecy. This is often in a bid to avoiding subjecting FRVs to re-victimization through the power of the media. The social implication of this strategy is the need to avoid double victimization of rape victims by veiling their true identity; thus, they are anonymized. The phrase 'not real name' in texts 8 and 9, and some others, exemplify this representation.

In all the texts in our data, the real identities of FRVs were anonymized through the adoption of pseudo name (texts 8 and 9), characterizing them (texts 8 and 9) or making reference to them just as rape victims (text 10 and Figure 5). The assumption behind this strategy is to minimize possible stigmatization and the shame the victims may suffer. Such veiling, therefore, often holds back the true identity of the victims. Furthermore, such strategy also demonstrates the moral responsibilities of the newspapers towards reporting violence against women. However, the only exception to this anonymization of FRVs is when dead rape victims are involved, as exemplified in text 13.

> **Text 8: Rape epidemic: Four masked men gang-rape 12-year-old girl in Lagos**
> A 12-year-old girl, Blessing (not real name), is said to be experiencing trauma after she was allegedly gang-raped by four masked men at her

residence in Abijo area of Ajah, Lagos State. She was said to have been raped while playing alone in the compound around 2pm on Thursday. Saturday PUNCH learnt that the victim, a secondary school pupil, was left bleeding from injuries she sustained in her private parts. When our correspondent called Anthonia back on Friday evening, the victim was said to be suffering from trauma and could not speak on the incident. (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020)

**Text 9:**
Another rape victim, Bella (not real name) has had to leave her home in Egor, Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State, for Uyo, AkwaIbom State, after she was raped twice in one week by men suspected to be cultists (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020)

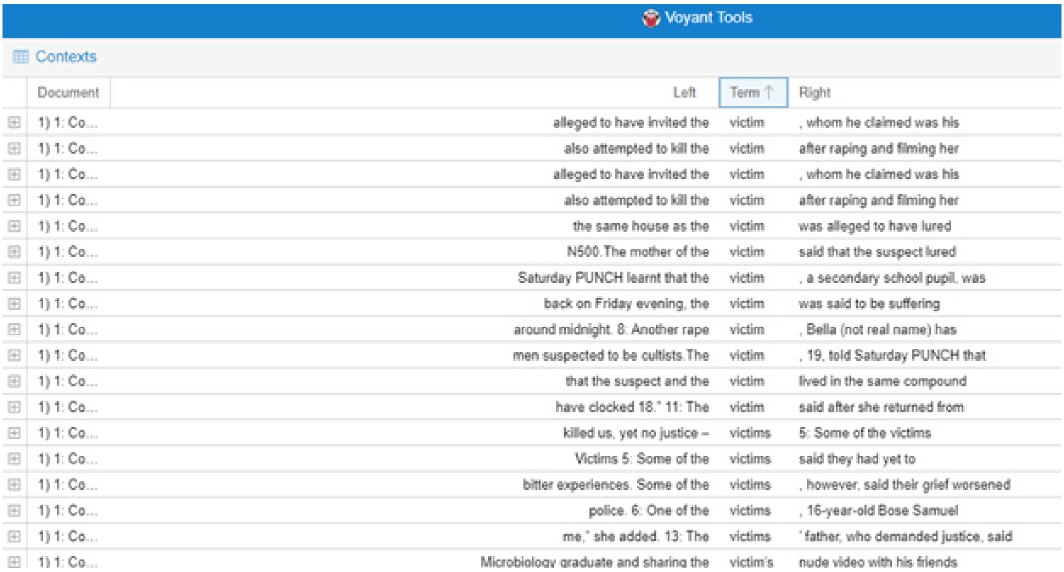
The use of the names 'Blessing' in text 8 and 'Bella' in text 9 in place of the real identities of the FRVs attests to the social support that the feminine gender and rape victims, in general, often receive from newspapers. In texts 10 and 11, the characteristics of the FRVs were just used in describing them to the news consumers to ensure believability and substantiate that the victims are real humans and are females, using expressions such as 'nine-year-old girl' (text 10) and 'his sister' (text 11). The use of 'girl' and 'sister' creates a picture in the consumer's mind. However, for the sanity, ego and pride of the victims, their names are withheld.

**Text 10:**
Three men also in police net in Bauchi were accused of repeatedly gang-raping a nine-year-old girl inside a public toilet at a market in Gamawa Local Government Area of the state. They are: Abdullahi Adamu, 25, Abdullahi Abubakar 23, and Auwalu Haruna, 22- who all confessed upon arrest. (*Daily Trust*, 16 September, 2020)

**Text 11:**
In another incident, Mustapha Usman, 32, conspired with Dahiru Aliyu of the same age, to have sex with his sister against her wish in their car. (*Daily Trust,* 16 September, 2020)

**Text 12:**
The suspect was reported to have soaked the victim's clothes in water when she got to the agreed location and used his phone to record her nudeness before sending the video to some of his friends. The PPRO said the suspect also attempted to kill the victim after raping and filming her in a nude posture in order to cover up his crime. (*The Punch*, 13 January, 2020)

The third strategy through which anonymization is sustained in news reports on FRVs is through the use of the word 'victim' as naming strategy. For example, in text 10, the word 'victim' is used to represent the victim in question. In addition, words associated with victim are used up to 81 times, as shown in figure 5, in our data to further adduce to the reporters' intent to key into the moral responsibilities of preserving the victims' faces in their reports on violence against women. Hence, we have the use of expressions such as 'attempted to kill the victim,', 'the victim, 19…,' and 'sharing the victim's nude video.'



Voyant Tools

Contexts

| Document | Left | Term ↑ | Right |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 1: Co... | alleged to have invited the | victim | , whom he claimed was his |
| 1) 1: Co... | also attempted to kill the | victim | after raping and filming her |
| 1) 1: Co... | alleged to have invited the | victim | , whom he claimed was his |
| 1) 1: Co... | also attempted to kill the | victim | after raping and filming her |
| 1) 1: Co... | the same house as the | victim | was alleged to have lured |
| 1) 1: Co... | N500.The mother of the | victim | said that the suspect lured |
| 1) 1: Co... | Saturday PUNCH learnt that the | victim | , a secondary school pupil, was |
| 1) 1: Co... | back on Friday evening, the | victim | was said to be suffering |
| 1) 1: Co... | around midnight. 8: Another rape | victim | , Bella (not real name) has |
| 1) 1: Co... | men suspected to be cultists.The | victim | , 19, told Saturday PUNCH that |
| 1) 1: Co... | that the suspect and the | victim | lived in the same compound |
| 1) 1: Co... | have clocked 18." 11: The | victim | said after she returned from |
| 1) 1: Co... | killed us, yet no justice – | victims | 5: Some of the victims |
| 1) 1: Co... | Victims 5: Some of the | victims | said they had yet to |
| 1) 1: Co... | bitter experiences. Some of the | victims | , however, said their grief worsened |
| 1) 1: Co... | police. 6: One of the | victims | , 16-year-old Bose Samuel |
| 1) 1: Co... | me," she added. 13: The | victims | ' father, who demanded justice, said |
| 1) 1: Co... | Microbiology graduate and sharing the | victim's | nude video with his friends |

*Figure 5 – Anonymization of rape victims*

> **Text 13: Example 14: How 13-Year-Old Girl Was Raped to Death in Lagos**
> A 24-year old man, Ajom Brimcewil Tabi, has been arrested for allegedly abducting and raping a 13-year old girl, Favour Ikechukwu to death in Ejigbo, Lagos State. It was gathered that Tabi carried out the act alongside his friends. The police said the suspect along with two others, now at large, gang-raped the girl in a room and left her to bleed to death. The body was found stark naked with blood flowing out of her private part. (*Daily Trust*, 5 October, 2020)

Text 13 exemplifies the earlier identified exception to this anonymization of FRVs. This is often considered not entirely offensive in the case of the death of the victim. In text 13, it was reported that the raped victim was 'a 13-year old girl, Favor Ikechukwu,' who was raped 'to death in Ejigbo, Lagos State.' Although there is no identity veiling, anonymization or pseudonymization in the report since the victim is dead; however, there is the need to be socially responsible to the victim's family, who are believed to have suffered a man-induced and avoidable death. The unprecedented emanating shame and stigmatization often affect the family members and friends. This can, thus, be seen as family-relegation, relatives-victimization and associates-victimhood.

### 3.4. Female rape victims as object of pity

Female rape victims are represented as objects of pity using different processes in the reportage. As noted earlier, women are cherished symbols of care, tenderness and compassion, and issues about them in the newspaper usually stir up emotional reactions in the readers (Dare, 2016). The text producers used these linguistic tools to strategically evoke pity in the reader when reading about FRVs. However, the representation allows the identification of a gender bias that females are emotional being. (see KAFA 2010; Rached, Hankir & Zaman, 2021). And the social implication of this bias is that mental abuse is a major patriarchal practice. Rape experience often leaves huge mental trail on the victims. In the description of the victims, the reporters often deploy the attributive and identifier strands of relational process in order to give appropriate representation of the victims so as to evoke pity in the reader by showing the special features of the rape victims. This process is strategically deployed to show the callousness of the rapist to the readers. A closer look at texts 14 and 15, for example, shows the helplessness of the victims in the hands of their rapists. The description of the victim's special attributes is mentioned to draw sympathy from the readers that despite their innocence (the virginity), disability (down syndrome) and age (13-year-old minor/ three-year-old child), they still underwent the harrowing experience of rape. The combination of the identified linguistic process alongside their participants and circumstance projects a representation of FRVs as objects of pity. Recurring themes in the texts are the different ages of the victims, their special biological and physical features, the duration and the aftermaths of their ordeal. Such features often evoke pity on the FRVs whose conditions show they possess observable behavioral and physiological emotional components.

> **Text 14: Man, 29, arrested for allegedly defiling Down syndrome minor**
> The Police in Oyo State have arrested one Timothy Abijo, 29, for allegedly defiling a 13-year-old minor with Down syndrome. The suspect, who was on visitation to his cousin, residing in the same house as the victim was alleged to have lured the girl with N500. The mother of the victim said that the suspect lured the girl into his host's room and gagged her before raping her. Abijo was alleged to have given the minor N500 after warning her not to tell anyone. The victim's mother said the raped girl was a virgin, with Down syndrome, which implies that she has special needs, and also has issues with speech. (*Vanguard*, 17 April, 2020)

> **Text 15: Man arrested for defiling 3yr old girl**
> A 23-year-old man, old Badmus Quadri, has been arrested for defiling one of his neighbours three-year-old child in Owode community, Ogun State. However, on arrival, she noticed blood in her vagina and upon interrogation, her child mentioned the suspect's name and describes how he allegedly defiled her in his room. (*Vanguard*, 12 June, 2020)

The representation suggests the level of moral decadence in the society the victims find themselves. This decadence is indicative of the fact that feminine ability or disability does not preclude them from being devoured by male devourers. This kind of representation desires certain expectations from the readers to acknowledge the victims as subordinated entity which deserve pity. Such representations pose to evoke pity in the readers towards the victims. Thus, the representation produces a more persuasive insight into the complex and distressing place females are given in a patriarchal society like Nigeria. Females in Nigeria are thought of as second-class citizens who must operate under the jackboot of their male counterparts who are the de-facto master (see Emecheta 1989). It goes without saying that their lives in such patriarchal atmosphere will definitely evoke pity in the mind of the outsiders because it portrays them as victims of circumstance. However, Talbot (2007) cautions that "if women increasingly view themselves as victims through the lens of the oppressors and allow themselves to be viewed that way by others, they become enfeebled and miserable" (p. 167).

### 3.5. Female rape victims as victims of dual jeopardy

Female rape victims are also represented as victims of dual jeopardy in the reportage. Since the FRVs had suffered sexual violation, serving a timely justice to punish their violators would have given them some form of succor. The reportage casts aspersion on the judiciary system which characterizes rape evidence as something which supports the patriarchal urge to fester the inhumane action. This is due to the fact that justice for the raped often lasts over a protracted period, if not an entirely difficult thing to get. The expression, 'some of the victims, however, said their grief worsened when they did not get justice after reporting to the police' (text 16) and 'one of the victims, … has seemingly lost hope in getting justice six months after she was allegedly defiled …' (text 17) from the victim's account lay credence to the representation of suffering double jeopardy as a result of no justice.

> **Text 16: Example 3: How rapists choked, nearly killed us, yet no justice – Victims**
> Some of the victims said they had yet to heal from their grief, saying they were subjected to untold trauma following their bitter experiences. Some

of the victims, however, said their grief worsened when they did not get justice after reporting to the police (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020).

**Text 17:**
One of the victims, 16-year-old Bose Samuel (not real name), has seemingly lost hope in getting justice six months after she was allegedly defiled by her neighbour, one MakindeRaheem. The girl was having a bath in one of the two bathrooms in her residence in the Oko Oba area of Lagos when Raheem reportedly barged in and raped her at knifepoint (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020).


Voyant Tools

Contexts

| Document | Left | Term | Right |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 1: Co... | nearly killed us, yet no | justice | – Victims 5: Some of the |
| 1) 1: Co... | when they did not get | justice | after reporting to the police |
| 1) 1: Co... | seemingly lost hope in getting | justice | six months after she was |
| 1) 1: Co... | The victims' father, who demanded | justice | , said when he got to |
| 1) 1: Co... | the devil's work. I want | justice | because my daughter is traumatised |

*Figure 6 – representation of justice*

Figure 6 also adduces that the Nigerian judicial system seemingly slams rape victims with double jeopardy. This suggests the need for an overhaul of the criminal code on rape cases. Such judicial delays or denials have the tendency to increase victims' traumatic experiences and hopelessness in their country, which may seem to have privileged patriarchy on all sides, seem to continue the subjugation of the feminine gender, raping them of the much desired justice. The repetition of the word 'justice' in figure 6 shows how the FRVs are portrayed. Expressions such as 'nearly killed us, yet no JUSTICE – victims,' 'when they did not get JUSTICE after reporting...,' and '...lost hope in getting JUSTICE six months after ...' further accentuate the victimization of womanhood both in the hands of rapists and the judicial system, thereby heightening stigmatization. Rape victims hardly summon courage to report rape cases. When the few that summon courage to do so, thereby self-revealing their identities, are even denied, then the justice system, government or society has collaborated with rapists to rape the victims again, subjecting them to dual jeopardy or secondary victimization. Therefore, FRVs are raped physically, mentally and judicially. Again, the representation also advocates the level of dehumanization and decadence that the society and the state have ignorantly reduced womanhood to. Hence, this is in agreement with Benedict's (1993:5) claim that FRVs consequently "become trapped in a cycle of injustice: having fallen victim to a violent crime through no fault of their own..."

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall analysis has been conducted on the basis of linguistic choices made by the text producers, the gender biases enacted in the texts and the emerging socio-cultural assumptions. With insights from Halliday's transitivity system used in explaining the linguistic properties and Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis used in examining the socio-cultural assumptions enacted through identified linguistic tools, excerpts revealed that the selected Nigerian newspapers are imbued with representing FRVs as patriarchal preys, object of sexual gratification, anonymized and pseudonymized victims, objects of pity and victims of dual jeopardy. The men-rapists carry out their inhumane actions and the dehumanization of the feminine gender by sexually violating powerless women, underage girls, mentally retarded and physically challenged females and unsuspecting girls. The findings revealed that material, relational, verbal, behavioral and existential processes are the linguistic tools that are deployed by Nigerian newspapers in the representation of female victims in their rape news reports. The newspaper reports constantly used material process to represent the female rape victims as goals. Goals in transitivity system are sufferers of the actions of the actor in clauses in material process. Relational, verbal, behavioral and existential processes are used to show possession of certain features. Relational and existential processes are specifically deployed in the news reports to indicate the outstanding features that are possessed by the female rape victims. The transitivity processes along their respective participants and circumstances as identified in the analysis, and the actor-goal rendition portray FRVs as preys, who are constantly susceptible to attenuating patriarchal practices, thus confirming the gender bias that women are sexual objects which are open to patriarchal practices such as sexual assault; thus, accentuating the victimhood of womanhood. The social implications of these representations align with patriarchal practices such as androcentrism, incest, mental abuse and sexual assault while the gender biases implicated in the representation included the projection of FRVs as inferior beings, powerless ones and emotional beings.

Some of the representations align with existing studies, for example, Worell (2002) which submits that media's representation of relationship is that women are usually being portrayed in submissive positions to men. This portrayal rids women of their dignity and right to self. Their wishes and wants are subject to acceptance or refutation by men. They are subverted, coerced and forced to satisfy the men, who deny them any self-right. This is further corroborated by Wood (2008) who avers that women are sex objects for men's pleasure. The findings align with Chiazor et.al (2016) who submit that 90% of victims of rape are female, and they "are usually ashamed, humiliated, afraid, and there is little or no law to protect them. Even the law enforcement officers that are meant to protect these victims also assault them in different ways, even sexually" (p. 7765).

Rather than creating a society which balances the perception of both genders, where one is not superior or inferior to the other, but seen as complementing the other, patriarchal society has consistently encouraged women to take the back seat, encouraging them to develop some qualities like beauty, sexiness, passivity, and powerlessness in order to meet cultural ideals of femininity (Wood, 2008); and this has contributed to objectifying and dehumanizing them. The development of only those qualities has continued to put men in the vantage position of preying on women, and subjecting them to sexual aggression since the qualities that are linked to abuse of women (aggressiveness, sexuality, and strength) are the same qualities that men are urged to exemplify (Wood, 2008). Women in the hands of men, therefore, continue to be subjected to violent imagery (Worell, 2002). Thus, the issues of sexual dominance due to powerlessness by the feminine gender; subversion and subjection to sexual object for masculine sexual gratification and so forth, and the continued reportage of such in newspaper reports with delayed or denied justice in case where law suits are engaged seem to continue to empower and encourage patriarchal and feminine relegation, while the FRVs are practically re-victimized. Hence, Ehrlich (2001) argues that rape trials are often problematic because they engender re-victimization of FRVs. In addition, the space allotted to the report seems to continue to empower rapists' rampage. Therefore, contrary to the claim by (Dare, 2016) that "the Nigerian journalist is extremely sensitive to feminine issues and seizes every opportunity to convey 'something' of significance about women" (p. 317), and in agreement with the advocacy by feminist critical discourse analysts, the linguistic framing of gender issues and slant reportage of rape by the media has continued to put men at more vantage position over women, thereby sustaining social inequality and injustice.

Findings from this study will be of great benefit to scholars and media analysts on the various linguistic features that are often deployed by Nigerian newspapers to frame female rape victims. It hopes to stimulate the linguistic change that will engender the social change in the circumstances of female lives that feminist linguists have long been canvassing. It will benefit media discourse analysts, feminist critical discourse analysts, gender advocate groups and newspaper reporters among others because rape is a sensitive issue that needs to be discussed with utmost care. Violence against women is a feature that often evidences the place of women in patriarchal society. This study joined existing body of knowledge on spate of gender-based violence in Nigeria, albeit, through a critical examination of representation practices in Nigerian newspapers. Significantly, it aligned with approaches from linguistic and gender studies to understand how sensitive gender issues are linguistically handled in Nigerian newspapers. The recurring finding is that language creates and sustains gender inequalities and there is a need for linguistic change that will necessitate social change (Litosseliti, 2006; Lazar, 2007), such that women and girls will not be seen as ordinary sexual objects.

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# OUR SOCIETY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

VICTORIA NAINOVÁ

Morelock, J., & Narita, F. Z. (2021). *The Society of the Selfie*. Amsterdam University Press. ISBN 9781914386268, 190 pages.

Nowadays, it is challenging to imagine the visual communication without the genre of selfie. The publication provides an insight into the concept of the social aspects of the "selfie" and applies (not exclusively) Debord's (1992) theory of the society of the spectacle in relation to our current digital environment. The authors use the critical paradigm in the reviewed book as in their other studies (see Morelock, 2018; 2021a; Narita & Morelock, 2021) and attempt to demonstrate how the social aspects of this phenomenon have had a (rather negative) impact on our democracy through neoliberal capitalist ideology. This review presents some of the theoretical concepts examined in the book.

The book is divided into seven chapters in which the authors explain their motivations through suitable theoretical concepts and provide practical examples for the reader to compare them. In Chapter One, 'Introduction: Information Technology and Authoritarian Populism', the authors familiarize the reader with the applied methodology, stating the theoretical constellations associated with the concepts of theorists of the Frankfurt school (p. 5) followed in the chapters below.

The Chapter Two, 'Communication Technologies and the History of the Spectacle', offers a historical overview of the development of media and communication channels as they have impacted our current society, e.g., telegraph, cinema, radio and television broadcasting, and of course, the emergence of Web 2.0. In this chapter, the authors discuss mainly the concepts of Debord's spectacle in relation to images, commodity fetishism, and Flusser's theory of surfaces (Ströhl, 2004). Applying these theories, the authors demonstrate e.g., the absence of a relationship between consumers and producers since consumers do not seek knowledge of the production of the commodity they purchase and use. In this case, the 'production is invisible' (p. 23). Using the theory of surfaces, the authors claim that individuals do not tend to think about images in great depth and that the image has no trajectory. In an online world, it is easier for individuals to use social media as a tool to present the best version of themselves as a type of performance. This is also connected to the need to draw attention and make a good impression to get likes, shares, etc.

Chapter Three introduces 'Neoliberal Impression Management' and a description of co-presence (Goffman, 1963). The authors discuss the division into embodied and disembodied social presence, where the further is happening in a physical space and latter in the virtual one. The authors continue with a discussion of COVID-19 and the increased acceptance of online contact. The need for attention and presentation of the best version of self is something which can be applied in marketing, where individuals see themselves as a commodity to generate profit (Fromm, 1947). This is closely associated with impression management. Individuals feel the need to impress their audience, even though it might be invisible (discussed in Chapter Four). In addition, people who seek attention in the digital market may become involved in personal branding, which is actually an act of consumption and may lead to narcissistic behaviour. It seems easier to do so in the digital world where the audience stays mostly invisible.

The Chapter Four, 'Invisible Audience and Echo Chamber Effects', deals with Mead's (1934) theory of the generalized other; the concept used to describe the opinion of the social group in relation to the individuals which belong to the group. The authors expand on terms such as *newsfeed* and *invisible audience*, which relate to the generalized other and the communication channels individuals use in their presentation of a spectacular self. To describe the echo chamber effect, the authors apply Sunstein's explanation (Sunstein, 2009, 2017), which is very similar to the term *social bubble*, where individuals are more inclined to accept the opinions of other people who are somehow in consensus with their own ones. This is also closely associated with polarization of public e.g., by the use of propaganda by authoritarian political agents (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six). Nevertheless, individuals could be also excluded from their close communities e.g., because of their abnormal behaviour.

In Chapter Five 'Dialectics of Alienation and Abnormality', we can find alongside Fromm's (1955) theory of alienation and Durkheim's theory of anomie (Durkheim et al., 2014). These concepts are examined in relation to individuals in modern society and digital environment, where many find it challenging to adapt to the technological developments and societal changes which have occurred, thus leading to exclusion and deviant behaviour in the use of social media (among others). An explanation of Foucault's (2003) theory of abnormality comes with examples of contemporary popular series and movies like *You* (2018) or *Friend Request* (2016).

The Chapter Six, 'Authoritarianism and Resistance', is dedicated to the concepts discussed earlier by the book, but here, they are seen from a political perspective of the contemporary crisis in liberal democracies and the society of selfie. Ideologies as authoritarianism and radicalism may thrive using digital media, as its political actors can reach broader audience and disseminate it with propagandistic content. The authors offer examples such as the protests in Iran, the Capitol intrusion of 2021 in the US, and the presidential elections of 2018 in Brazil to show how social media were used for sharing the ideology with attempts to have an impact on the audience. Following the accounts by Adorno and Horkheimer (2008), the authors deal with the issues of narcissism and socio-political psychology of political actors who have fascist tendencies and may lack the fundamental morals.

In the final chapter, 'Conclusion: A Turning Point for Liberal Democracy', the authors summarize the content of the book and emphasize that the concepts and methods discussed in the book could be further investigated and do not necessarily have distinct boundaries or no overlap.

The book provides the powerful overview of interwoven theoretical concepts with actual empirical events, and as such, it is an important contribution into the field and the highly recommended title for inclusion into the critical reading on media studies. Readers who are out of the critical theory scope should obtain more insight through the publications listed in the references of the authors' work.

The authors have included many theoretical concepts complemented by examples that effectively conceptualize the examined phenomena. In addition, the authors efficiently interweave these concepts with the functions of digital technologies in the contemporary world. While I appreciate the authors' attempt to present an overview of the historical and technological developments of the media and digital media, the methodology sub-chapter seems to be underdeveloped. This weaker point of the book could be balanced by the content of the book 'How to Critique Authoritarian Populism Methodologies of the Frankfurt School' (Morelock, 2021b) which can help readers in understanding the selected methodology that some may find challenging to comprehend.

In conclusion, the authors fulfil their aims and deliver the highly complex overview of contemporary topic. It assists with the applied terminology and broadens understanding of theoretical concepts alongside current technological developments. The structure might be challenging for the readers with no additional knowledge, nevertheless the book can help get a fresh perspective on the topic so dominant in the contemporary digital world of social media.

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1 In their list of references, the authors also refer to non-English titles, drawing on works originally published in languages such as German and French. I list the references for the concepts of those in English.

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# AUDIENCES CHANGE NEWS VALUES

MIROSLAV LANGER

Temmerman, M., & Mast, J. (Eds.). (2021). *News Values from an Audience Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan. 973-3-030-45045-8, 189 pp.

Since the first newspapers appeared, the selection of events in the news has been one of the fundamental tasks of journalism. It is still true today, although the editors have a slightly easier role in fulfilling this duty considering the seemingly shoreless ocean of the Internet. The selection process continues, but its core has moved from the newsrooms into the sphere of audience activities.

Journalists and journalism textbooks discussed the news selection criteria before they were regularly named news values. The seminal study of Galtung and Ruge (1965) definitively established the term and transferred the subject to media studies. There it became as important as the selection process itself, examined through the prism of gatekeeping studies. More than a half-century later – and despite occasional voices saying the concept of news values has already been exhausted – the theory has been getting new interest. After Harcup and O'Neil (2001, 2017) made significant contributions to the modernization of the theory for the era of digital media, a discursive approach by Caple and Bednarek (2017) followed with a massive response.

And here comes another promising development: the orientation to how the audience applies news values in its selection process. A summary book, *News Values from an Audience Perspective* edited by Martina Temmerman and Jelle Mast, proves this direction has the potential to be fruitful. The volume offers an accurate summary of the theory and a wide and varied scale of individual studies focused on the relationship between the audience and news values. The book postulates that this relation constructs only one side of a triangle, whose third vertex is the journalists with their subjective opinions and experiences, professional routines, and the media's institutional influence.

The new volume consists of nine chapters divided into three sections. In the first section, general topics are discussed in chapters by Harcup (pp. 17–36), Paulussen and Van Aelst (pp. 37–56), and Wilkinson, Grant, Zhu, and Guerrazzi (pp. 57–78). The second section is devoted to audience metrics and shareability with studies by Tandoc, Cheng, and Maitra (pp. 81–94), Lagerwerf and Govaert (pp. 95–120), and Opgenhaffen (pp. 121–138). The final section is based on the ideas of the previous two parts and applies them specifically to local and social media in the analyses by Boesman, Meijer, and Kuijpers (pp. 141–164) and Turner (pp. 165–186). Relying on the context of earlier research and theory, I will comment on the book in reverse order from applied analyses to more general introductory passages. Then I will return to the most inspiring findings related to the changes that audiences force in the news values image and newsrooms' and journalists' routines and attitudes.

The question of what audiences or media audiences are has no easy answer. Sullivan (2019) shows how audiences can be defined, described, and understood differently. He concludes that an audience is a theoretical abstraction and that "the audience" in any specific context is always a construct provided by theory or history. Moreover, the audience is not a stable phenomenon; it changes in time – Napoli (2010) writes about the ongoing audience evolution. The idea of audiences develops through time from passive audiences to active audiences (see Ross & Nightingale, 2003) and participatory or interactive audiences (Sullivan, 2019, pp. 265–302).

The topic of news values from the audience's perspective is not new. In the reviewed book, Tandoc, Chang, and Maitra quote Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 53) who said that news values are "based, in part, on assumptions about the audience". This describes how the audiences have always been present in the thinking of news values, but only as their imagined representation in the journalists' minds and mostly in the practice-related sense. At the turn of the century, Eilders (Eilders & Wirth, 1999; Eilders, 2000) introduced the actual perspective of the audience into the theory. Nevertheless, only the arrival of online and social media brought available and robust data suitable for researching audience preferences in news selection. After all, the shareability was only added to the news values almost two decades later, just five years ago, by Harcup and O'Neil (2017). At the same time, the term shareworthiness was introduced (see Trilling, Tolochko, & Burscher, 2017).

In his ethnographic study, Turner

(pp. 165–186) analyses this topic and finds both analogies and fundamental differences between shareworthiness and newsworthiness. The newsworthiness – how much the story is vital for audience members as a piece of news – is much less important in further sharing of online news stories than whether the story provides information or provokes an emotion that is, according to the recipient, suitable to be shared with other members of the community. In some cases, the sharing is also motivated by an effort to find a solution to a real problem, like help with finding lost people, animals, or objects.

Although sharing news stories is a welcome form of natural advertising for the media, the readership or viewership remains the primary goal. Social media analytics and web analytics data have a growing practical significance, as proved by Tandoc, Cheng, and Maitra (pp. 81–93). In many cases, the web analytics results replace the discussion about editorial criteria in the newsrooms. The process is strengthened by the relationship between discursively constructed news values and rates – in the online media, the intentional discursive highlighting of specific news values can bring higher rates, Laagerwerf and Govaert write (pp. 95–119). Opgenhaffen (pp. 121–138) shows that social media are a unique peculiar environment in this respect and the editors should modify their content to reach higher share rates instead of simply using the original content of their traditional media outlets. It summarizes the findings of the research section of the book that excels in the novelty of knowledge and methodological variability, from in-depth interviews and a questionary survey to quantitative content analysis and ethnographic research.

The general topics-focused first opening section of the book deserves long-lasting attention. The impressive scale of compiled materials gathered by Wilkinson, Grant, Zhu, and Guerrazzi's (pp. 57–77) comparative study of audience news values and news consuming habits, which included fifteen countries, far surpassed previous studies in the literature to date. The results prove that the notions of the universality of news values are misleading in the field of reception. Various authors (comp. Harcup & O'Neill, 2009) have already challenged this idea of universality in the news selection processes on the side of news production.

Following the change in his interest (Harcup, 2020), in which his thoughts are "turning from what news *is* to what news *could* be" (p. 26 in the reviewed book), Tony Harcup joined with his essayistic text (pp. 17–35). He steps out of the sphere of academic theory of news values and makes a unique contribution to the normative sphere. One would expect that for a phenomenon named "value", there would be a lively discussion about which specific news values should be applied in quality journalism if it is to produce news beneficial to society. Surprisingly, this discussion is lacking. In addition, it is worth repeating that Galtung and Ruge (1965, p. 84) already encouraged journalists to challenge these values in their jobs. It does not mean that further authors have not been discussing individual news values as beneficial or harmful for the news production; the values of negativity and violence have been the most criticized. Still, few of these critics place their objections within a framework of a more comprehensive social theory, which Harcup eventually does.

The third chapter by Paulussen and Van Aelst (pp. 37–55) is an overview of a news values theory. It describes the differences among constructivist, discursive, and cognitive approaches. Its value also lies in the fact that it at least partially bridges the gap between the English-language (Anglo-American) and German-language tradition of the theory. The German tradition derived from authors like Schulz, Staab or Kepplinger with a strong theoretical core based on the relationship between reality and media reality and the role of news values as the tools to construct a media reality. From a methodological perspective, quantitative research was promoted as the main tool to research the news values (the German tradition is best summarized in Maier, Retzbach, Glogger, & Stengel, 2018). On the contrary, in the Anglo-American world, the research direction was more practically driven and newsroom-oriented and the methodological apparatus more varied. The communication between both traditions was weak, so having a volume that cites sources from both traditions seems satisfactory.

Despite being useful for any reader in this synthesizing approach, this theoretic chapter has two essential issues. Very little of the theoretical discussion is related directly to the main topic of the book, the news values from an audience perspective. As the only partial substitution, the authors introduce Singer's (2014) concept of secondary gatekeeping. They do not even mention the theoretical input available in the past works of Eilders that are grounded in discussing the psychological nature of news selection, explained through concepts of selective attention and selective retention. Unfortunately, this contribution of Eilders to the theory remained without reflection in the chapter as well as by the book's other authors, who included only period empirical data from her texts.

Another essential omission in the chapter – and the volume as a whole – is the lack of discussion about what the audience is. Nowhere in the book can we read any definition of audience or reference to audience studies. Calls for such precision are not just for the sake of the love of theorizing. As said before, the media audience is a construct (Sullivan, 2019), and as Turnbull shows, the audience construction is the important side effect of any audience research or audience-related research, which has substantial methodological consequences: "In many, if not most, instances of media audience research, the audience is a function of the design of the researcher's project." (Turnbull, 2020, p. 46) This strong objection requires any author working within the field of audience research to consider this issue and define the boundaries of how the content of the term audience is understood. In the end, the reader is left to evaluate the implications of the fact that the authors did nothing similar in this volume. In the future, this is the area where the audience-oriented news values research shall precisely explain its position and the constraints of its study.

Only the introductory section focuses on theory in the reviewed book. In contrast, the second and third sections follow the prevailing trend in news values research oriented to the practical use of new analytical data resources for media studies and editorial practice. Nevertheless, it does not stop describing how the news production and news selection in newsrooms affect the audience or how the audience actively selects the news. A further step in the considerations of the book's authors is truly inspiring: the findings that the audience's specific preferences of news values are changing the editorial processes. And it is not an uncontroversial influence; quite the contrary. The journalists must cope with the fact that their image of what the audience's characteristics are, what its own interests are, and what the news should bring to the audience partly do not coincide with the actual preferences of the audience. Therefore, an effort to satisfy the audience on one side and the professional standards and editorial autonomy on the other are contradictory. This has been confirmed by Tandoc, Cheng, and Maitra (pp. 81–93), based on a literature review, as well as Boesman, Costera Meijer, and Kuipers (pp. 141–163) from data obtained from in-depth interviews with journalists.

While it can be a traumatizing experience for the journalists, the authors of the volume see it as a potentially positive impulse for a change in the news and media production. Boesman et al. conclude their study with recommendations regarding higher audience engagement, whether community building or audience participation in news production (p. 159). In the path of the discursive approach to news values, the authors in several places support the efforts to stress news values in framing the stories and their headlines or social media summaries, thus leaving the discursive theory of news values valid. However, the journalists shall question the selection of the specific news values and follow the audience's wishes. And then, Harcup's chapter comes to the fore with its description of what works best among the audiences with a conclusion that: "The very best news resonates by engaging imaginative empathy and encouraging us to express our own agency." (p. 33)

How new perspectives open ahead of journalists when including audience feedback and how they undermine journalists' deep-rooted ideas of their job should be the subject of a careful interest in media studies. Theory and research of news values, traditionally connecting the news selection with journalistic routines, definitely have not said their last word on this topic.

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# MEDIA LITERACY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION EDUCATION ARE A GOOD MATCH

An Interview with Maria José Brites

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*Maria José Brites is an Associate Professor at the Lusófona University, the Vice-President of the Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture, and New Technologies (CICANT), the coordinator of the MeLCi Lab — Media Literacy and Civic Cultures Lab, and the coordinator of the Publics and Audiences section of the Portuguese Association for Communication (SOPCOM). She is the principal investigator of the Youth, News and Digital Citizenship — YouNDigital project (PTDC/COM-OUT/0243/2021). She was the Portuguese coordinator of the European Media in Action and the RadioActive Europe projects, as well as the principal investigator of two research projects: the Social Media Resilience Toolkit — SMaRT-EU and DiCi-Educa. She was awarded the Prize for Inclusion and Digital Citizenship for good practices in the implementation of the RadioActive Europe project. Maria José Brites earned her PhD in Communication Sciences (2013) at the NOVA University in Lisbon, with a thesis focused on young people, the news and civic participation. She did a post-doctoral course (2014-2017) at the CECS/Minho University on the news as an educational tool for youth. Her research interests include youth, journalism, and civic participation; audience and reception studies; news and civic literacy; participatory methodologies; civic cultures; hate speech; and media resistance.*

**You have just finished an experimental media literacy research project on institutions for educating youth and children who have committed crimes. Could you introduce it to us, please?**

The project (DiCi-Educa) was conducted by the Lusófona University/CICANT with the cooperation of the Directorate-General for Reintegration and Prison Services of Portugal and was financed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. We worked with young people who were institutionalized in education centres (EC), which are used in Portugal to house youths and children who have committed an act that is a crime under the penal law. We introduced the EC students to digital photography (teaching them to take technically and thematically good photos and to create photo essays), podcasts (a radio show), and 360-degree videos about their daily life at the ECs. Then, at the next stage, we worked with them on the critical thinking process, talking about digital citizenship, civic participation, and otherness. These issues were chosen by the members of the research team and the staff who worked with the young people. We adapted them to the ideas and views of the institutionalised youth.

**Were you allowed to use the internet in these centres?**

No. We had to prepare the project knowing that we wanted to talk about digital literacy and digital citizenship, but that we would have no permission to get online. This led us to believe that institutionalized youth are among the most excluded of citizens in terms of digital skills. However, we cannot forget that one day, they will leave the educational centres and will be using the internet again, although it has been forbidden to them for one, two, or three years. This can happen for instance to the 13- to 17-year-olds. Their experience is even harder because they face multiple kinds of exclusion — social, economic, and cultural.

**What topics did the youth choose to cover in their work?**

The topics included mainly the ideas of freedom, friendship, family, and nature — often some small aspect of their daily life, such as playing football, a tree, a plant, or a flower. We tried to encourage them to think in a deeper way through the lens of the camera, in a 360-degree video, or in a podcast, not in the rush of everyday reality. Their reflection on their experience was also part of the process, both during and after their engagement with media.

**You started the DiCi-Educa before the pandemic. How was your research in such a setting affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?**

We had to interrupt the project for a year beginning in March 2019 because the educational centres were among the first institutions in Portugal to be locked down — and we could not work on-line. So, we waited one year and then started again in January 2021, this time on-line. As the students were already taking their school classes on-line, the institution was more receptive for this project also being on-line.

**What were the findings of your project?**

Besides improving the students' critical digital literacy skills, the project enhanced the confidence of these young people. In one of the centres, we were allowed to invite the students' families and friends to listen to their podcasts, and that was appreciated a lot by the youth.

**What was the youths' vision of civic participation?**

We did not tell them our own views about participation, but we discussed theirs with them. We asked them to reflect on what they understood by their participation. Sometimes, they said at first that they had had no experience with such activities, but as the discussion proceeded, we realised together that they did indeed have some experiences which could be labelled as civic participation, but they just had not realised it. Once, there was a small riot inside the educational centre. When the research team came in again, the students themselves started a debate about the riot. Some of them considered it a form of civic participation. In their way of thinking, they really understood it as a tool for fighting for something.

**How did you react to that?**

Well, if we label the riot as an act of civic participation, it was a negative one. In

such situations, we can discuss the context, the ideas behind the act, and the consequences for other involved people. To think about what could have been different, to widen the students' perspectives. We often do not consider or discuss negative options for civic participation, and yet even a Nazi or racist protest is a form of participation as well.
The results of the DiCi-Educa project were not published but stayed behind the walls of the centre. Still, did you have to conduct some censorship, for example, of the students' criticism of the conditions prevailing in the centre?
No, they said what they wanted, and we tried to discuss rather than censor.

**Was it difficult to convince the institutions to collaborate on this project? What arguments did you use?**

To enter the institutions, we first reached an agreement with the Directorate-General for Reintegration and Prison Services. Our research team was very diverse. One member had worked on issues of juvenile delinquency before, so she already knew the institutional staff. That was important for establishing the initial connections.

**The children and youth detained in these centres are often traumatised and have a difficult family background. What helped you to gain their trust?**

I have been researching youth and the media for the past ten years. I would say that with all kinds of people — not only the disadvantaged ones — the crucial thing is to be honest. Being transparent and honest is the first step. I would not say that disadvantaged youth are the only group in which challenges should automatically be expected, because working with middle- and upper-class youth also poses challenges. My experience is that young people simply appreciate having a chance to talk freely about unexpected themes like journalism, digital citizenship, and other things. They like to be questioned and have their views considered regarding themes that are often associated with adults only.

**There is a big debate within media literacy education (MLE) about whether MLE should promote active citizenship. Julian McDougal (Mc Dougal et al. 2015), Marketa Supa and Annemária Neag (2020), and some others are rather against that. Paul Mihailidis (Mihailidis &Thevenin, 2013) and Rennee Hobbs (2010) represent the academic stream that is more supportive of it. Where do you position yourself?**

When we are addressing any issues in the field of media literacy, I think that it is important to contextualize them in everyday life. Why not do so in relation to issues connected with politics, civic life and civic participation? From my experience, it all works very well together.
That is true, however the critics of that approach say — among other things — that it is too ambitious to attempt to teach all parts of media literacy education, and that in reality, there is often too little time for such projects in schools. So, when one is trying to do so, it is not possible to tackle the non-core components of media literacy deeply enough.

That is a relevant point, but I think it is important to mix both media literacy and civic participation, because when we do, we can better explore the everyday context of citizenship with students.

**Perhaps it is easier to acquire more time for MLE classes when one mixes the MLE and Civic Participation concepts. That is one more argument for convincing schools to dedicate more time to the MLE. In the end, is preventing people from sharing fake news purely an issue of media literacy or is it civics and citizen participation education?**

Yes, exactly.

**Your PhD thesis dealt with young people, the news, and civic participation. You have chosen the theme of the news as an educational tool for youth for your postdoctoral research. To what extent is the news a relevant topic for working with youth, when according to numerous studies young people do not follow the news very much?**

I have also pursued this theme in another project called "RadioActive Europe." We presented on-line radio to at-risk youth clubs. First, we provided the youth with some journalistic know-how (being journalist in the past myself helped). Despite the studies you mention indicating the distraction of young people from the news, the students found it appealing to express themselves on a news channel. For example, they appreciated doing interviews. At first it was challenging for them, but they really enjoyed it. Recording devices were the most interesting piece of equipment for most of them. The same thing happened in the educational centres in our latest project.

**Really? I suppose all of them have a recorder in their smartphones anyway….**

Maybe, but they probably had never thought about using them this way. The smartphone is a very versatile tool; you can record your voice, a song, you can interview someone. There are so many options. The students did interviews, went out into streets, did reports. We also explored their organizational skills and tried to improve their use of their mother tongue.

**For the RadioActive project, you have been awarded the Inclusion and Digital Citizenship Prize. What benefits did you discover when using reporting the news as an MLE tool?**

In RadioActive, the participants stated that their school performance improved after participating in the project because they learned how to work in groups. They were better organised and knew better how to express themselves. According to some of them, their presentation skills improved. The great majority of the topics for the radio (90%) were chosen and produced by the youth. We adults — meaning the youth clubs' staffs and the research team — were often astonished by their selection of topics, which included racism, civic participation, education, and gentrification.

**How did their perception of the news change during the project, based on**

**their experience in the news production process?**

They realised that the final product of, for example, a three-minute report requires a lot of work. They discovered that a lot of content they gathered was excluded in the final editing process. They had a somewhat romanticised view of journalistic work but got a more realistic picture of it.

**Is media literacy education compulsory in Portugal?**

It is not required as a separate subject in schools, but when one finishes his or her compulsory school education, it is now required that he or she have mastered some media literacy competences. In practice, it is a transversal topic.

**What project are you planning in the near future?**

In 2022, I am starting a project funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology that deals with young people, the news, and digital citizenship. We will take a mixed methods approach, although the project will still rely mostly on qualitative methods like media diaries and semi-structured interviews. We will have a digital newsroom (for the young people) and training for journalists. The YouNDigital project seeks to understand how the digital generation relates to the news. It does so by studying the links between young people, the news, and digital citizenship, seeking to understand the emerging dynamics of a deeply digitized society and to facilitate training in the area. The challenges of this pressing area have gained relevance in today's democracies because of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the main challenges of the YouNDigital project is researching the influence of the news and the connection between the news and gender, which is an understudied dimension of the problem.

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