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Newspaper Visibility of Members of Parliament in Kenya*

Kioko Ireri
Indiana University, Bloomington, USA

This research investigates variables that predicted news coverage of 212 members of parliament (MPs) in Kenya by four national newspapers in 2009. The 10 variables examined are: ordinary MP, cabinet minister, powerful ministry, parliamentary committee chairmanship, seniority, big tribe identity, major party affiliation, presidential ambition, commenting on contentious issues, and criticizing government. Findings indicate that commenting on contentious issues, criticizing government, cabinet minister, ordinary MP, powerful ministry, and seniority significantly predicted visibility of the parliamentarians in newspaper news. However, a multiple regression analysis shows that the strongest predictors are commenting on contentious issues, cabinet minister, criticizing government, and big tribe identity. While commenting on controversial issues was the strongest predictor, major party identification and committee leadership were found not to predict MPs’ visibility.

Keywords: Kenya, members of parliament (MPs), newspapers, newspaper visibility, politicians, visibility, visibility predictor

Introduction

Today, the mass media have become important platforms for the interaction of elected representatives and constituents. Through the mass media, citizens learn what their leaders are doing for them and the nation. Similarly, politicians use the media to make their agendas known to people. It is, thus, rare to come across elected leaders ignorant about the importance of registering their views, thoughts, or activities in the news media. In Kenya, members of parliament have not hesitated to exploit the power of the mass media to its fullest in their re-election bids and in other agendas beneficial to them.

But which variables contribute to the appearance of politicians in the news? This study investigates variables that contributed to the visibility of 212 Kenyan members of parliament (MPs) in four national newspapers in 2009. Based on the concept of “visibility” in the mass media, the study used content analysis to examine whether 10 variables predicted the MPs’ coverage in the *Daily Nation*, *The Standard*, *The Star*, and *The People Daily*. These variables are: MPs, cabinet minister, powerful ministry, parliamentary committee chairmanship, seniority, big tribe identity, major party affiliation, and presidential ambition. The other two are commenting on contentious issues, and criticizing the government.

Most of studies about visibility of elected leaders have been conducted in the Western nations. There is no evidence that such studies have been undertaken in young democracies, especially in Africa. The lack of scholarship on visibility of politicians in Africa reinforces the importance of the present study, which will

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Kioko Ireri, Doctoral candidate, School of Journalism, Indiana University.
NEWSPAPER VISIBILITY OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN KENYA

bridge the existing research gap. Studies on politicians’ visibility in the media have heavily examined such variables as state size (e.g., Wilhoit & Sherrill, 1968), committee leadership (e.g., Squire, 1988; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974), seniority (e.g., Cook, 1986; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007), and party leadership (e.g., Tresch, 2009). While the present study explores some of these popular variables, it goes a notch higher to examine variables preferable in a culturally and socio-politically unique setting such as Kenya. These include big tribe identity, ordinary MP, cabinet minister, and powerful ministry. While creating more knowledge about the politician-journalist relationship in an African setting, the study will contribute to the growth of research on visibility of politicians in the news media. Findings from this study will help to draw comparisons whether seniority, committee leadership, topical issues, and criticizing government, as is the case in Western countries, do also predict newspaper visibility of Kenyan politicians.

The Press System in Kenya

The development of the press in Kenya can be classified into three phases: the press in the colonial era, the press in post-independence era (1963-1990), and the press in multi-partism era (1991-present). The missionaries and British settlers started the modern Kenyan press in 19th century (Ochilo, 1993). *Taveta Chronicle* published in 1885 by Rev. Robert Stegal of the Church Missionary Society was one of the early newspapers. By 1952, there were 50 newspapers in the country, but most of them folded up when Kenya attained independence in 1963 (Ainslie, 1966).

The pre-independence press was grouped into a three-tier system: European press, Indian press, and African press (Faringer, 1991). The European press was at the top, the Indian press was in the middle, and the African at the bottom. The objective of the European press was to provide information for the missionaries and settlers of the news coming from England, legitimize the rights of the colonial masters, and provide a channel for social communication among the settlers in Kenya (Ochilo, 1993). On the other hand, the African newspapers focused on the independence agenda.

In post-independence Kenya, the press remained dormant throughout the single-party era until the restoration of multi-partism in early 1990s. Before 1992, the media in Kenya “worked within an environment of extremely harsh political and legal environment” (Ailing’o, 2007, p. 110). During the 24-year reign of President Daniel arap Moi, Kenya’s second president, press freedom to criticize the government remained elusive. The regime restricted political expression through the press and criminalized some critical journalists and their media outlets through sedition trials (Kalyango, 2011). In 1983, then the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), bought Hilary Ng’weno’s *Nairobi Times* and named it *The Kenya Times* (Abuoga & Mutere, 1988). It became the mouthpiece of the ruling party and government. The publication, however, did not survive for long after the KANU government was voted out of power in 2002. It folded up in 2010.

However, since the ushering in of pluralistic politics in 1991, the media industry became more diverse and vibrant. Moggi and Tessier (2001) observed that there has been a positive growth of the media sector since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1992. Re-introduction of political pluralism in 1991 (Ogola, 2011) and liberalization of the media sector in 1990s (Ibelema, 2009) have contributed to the freedom of the press in Kenya. While Paasch (2009) noted that the ability to practice as a journalist in Kenya is unrestricted, Ismaïland Deane (2008) pointed out that “the Kenyan media is one of the most respected, thriving, sophisticated, and innovative media in Africa” (p. 320). In the same vein, Mbeke (2010) asserted that the Kenyan media had a
reputation as fierce defenders of good governance and democracy. Nationally and internationally, the media are seen as a “principal indicator of the democratic vitality of Kenya” (Ismail & Deane, 2008, p. 320).

Today, there are six daily newspapers in Kenya, plus several magazines and weekly publications. Though 66% of the Kenyan population is able to read text in English, only 55% of the urban dwellers read newspaper compared with 36% in rural areas (Media Council of Kenya, 2005). Kenyans are, however, known to consume news and information voraciously (Ismail & Deane, 2008). Obonyo (2003) categorized the Kenyan print media into four sectors: the regular daily newspapers, the magazines, the regional newspapers, and the printed sheets that also seek to pass for newspapers in urban centers. Though Kenyan newspapers have no any ideological leanings to differentiate them (Obonyo, 2003), the media political leanings are influenced by ownership, ethnic considerations, and business interests (Esipisu & Khaguli, 2009).

The Standard is the oldest newspaper in the country, established in 1902. Daily Nation is the most prestigious and influential newspaper in the region. Established in 1960, Daily Nation, an independent publication is “arguably The New York Times of Kenya’s newspaper industry” (Onyebadi, 2008, p. 20). It commands over 55% of the newspaper circulation in Kenya, with about a daily print run of 185,000 copies and 230,000 for its sister publication, Sunday Nation (Onyebadi, 2008).

Theoretical Perspectives on Determinants of Politicians’ Visibility in News

The present study is founded on the concept of “visibility” in news. Tresch (2009) defined visibility as “media appearances” or “media prominence”, measured by the “frequency with which a political actor appears in the news” (p. 75). According to Tresch (2009), communication scholars offer three theoretical perspectives that determine visibility of politicians in news: media coverage as a mirror of political reality (e.g., McQuail, 1992; Tresch, 2009), media coverage based on news factors (e.g., Cook, 1998; Danielian & Page, 1994; Gans, 2004; Kriesi, Tresch, & Jochum, 2007; Matthews, 1960; Tresch, 2009; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006), and media coverage based on “political parallelism” (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The first perspective also posits that the media cover elected representatives proportionately to their degree of parliamentary activity (Tresch, 2009). This perspective, according to Tresch (2009), assumes a passive and a high degree of uniformity in news decisions and coverage. The “uniformity” element is what McQuail (1992) referred to as the “balance norm”, which calls for “an equal or proportionate reference to sources of similar standing, on similar terms” (p. 229).

In parliamentary proceedings, the media are expected to perform the “balance norm” as “neutral chroniclers and impartial observers of the legislative process” (Tresch, 2009, p. 70). In doing so, Tresch (2009) argued that the media are expected to inform their audience about what happens in parliament and to provide a “mirror image of the legislative process” (p. 70). However, McQuail (1992) cautioned the conditions for the “balance norm”, which are supposed to reflect the “mirror of political reality” in covering politicians are rarely achieved. This is because of “varying power and status of groups in disputes” in which more attention goes to official or authoritative sources, or to “voices” with the best organization and resources (McQuail, 1992, p. 229). Taking McQuail’s view, it means in parliamentary proceedings, “media direct their attention to active members of parliament” (Tresch, 2009, p. 70). In a nutshell, politicians’ actions outweigh the balance norm practice in the coverage of the legislative process in parliament, or in other activities.

In addition to objectivity, balance, neutrality, plurality, and bias in the news production process, several
other factors also contribute to the newsworthiness of an event. These factors include organization of news production, the routines of news work, news values of an event, and journalists’ ability to transform events into meaningful narratives (Sobieraj, 2010).

The second theoretical approach focuses on media coverage based on news factors, which determines the news value of an event. Such factors include conflict, drama, interest, consequence, prominence, proximity, and timeliness. Thus, the more news factors an event displays, the greater its news values and the higher the likelihood it will make news (Tresch, 2009).

In relation to politics, this theoretical perspective argues that politicians depicted frequently in news are perceived important (Mathews, 1960). In the same vein, Tresch (2009) pointed out that the elite status of an actor has proven to be an important guideline for the selection of news by the media. While Cook (1998) said reporters are known to constantly gravitate towards “persons in a position to know” (p. 92), Gans (2004) asserted that powerful sources use their power to create suitable news. In Europe, Kriesi et al. (2007) analyzed how state actors, political parties, interest groups, and social movement organizations cope with the double challenge at both the national and supranational levels. They found that powerful actors have the most elaborate repertoires both at national and EU levels.

Danielian and Page (1994) did a study based on the work of Schattschneider (1960) that there are systematic biases or unrepresentativeness in the voices that interest groups contribute to public deliberation about policy. Findings from hundreds of television news stories concerning 80 diverse policy issues from 1969 to 1982 indicate that corporations and business groups predominated. Danielian and Page (1994) argued that the heavy presence of corporations and business associations seems to support theories of biased pluralism or capitalist influence. They also found that more stories came from government and political sources. This, they said, is consistent with previous findings that national news is drawn heavily from official sources (Sigal, 1973). The elite status of political actors was also found to be a central factor in competition for news exposure during political waves in Israel (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006).

Political parallelism is the “extent to which the different media reflect distinct political orientations in their news and current affairs reporting” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28). While this theoretical perspective is a characteristic of European media and politics, “the African media landscape has strong features of political parallelism, with media products, ownership, and audiences frequently reflecting ethnic, linguistic, racial, or clientelist features” (Hadland, 2012, p. 116). Specifically in Kenya, the media political leanings are influenced by ownership, ethnic considerations, and business interests (Esipisu & Khaguli, 2009).

In political parallelism, “the media tend to give disproportionate attention to the positions, issues, and actors that correspond to their own preferences” (Tresch, 2009, p. 73). This reflects the media bias theory. From a research perspective, political parallelism is associated with issue agendas, positions and arguments, and visibility and evaluation of political actors in the media (Tresch, 2009). In Germany, Hagen (1993) found that the stronger the journalists favored the controversial issue of census in 1987, the more their newspapers contained arguments in favor of the issue. Also, sources, which supported the newspapers’ views, were selected for publication regardless of the individual direction of their arguments. Kepplinger, Brosius, and Staab (1991) found that the influence of journalists’ issue position had practical relevance for the actual coverage in a mediated conflict.
News Media Visibility of Politicians

The above theoretical perspectives raise the question of why politicians enjoy appearing in the news. Can our politicians do without publicity in the mass media? The answer is they can not. The media provide a platform to which elected leaders and their constituents connect. Because media are transmitters of political communication, political actors use them to convey their messages to the desired audience (McNair, 1999). This makes citizens know where their leaders stand on important issues. In fact, Lazarsfeld and Merton (2002) were right to point out that the media confer status on public issues, persons, organizations, and social movements.

Fico (1984) noted that politicians’ visibility in the news media is “obviously crucial not only to their electoral and policy goals, but to the public image of the institution they serve” (p. 383). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argued that politicians “hope to prime voters’ choices to their own advantage” (p. 98). In doing so, they “can swing momentum to their side and exert pressure in the policy-making process” (Tresch, 2009, p. 68). They also spend a great deal of time and resources to exploit the news media as a tool for political influence (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). Tresch sees this as a political strategy for politicians to gain legitimacy and power in the political process.

One reason why elected officials seek media attention is rooted in their political survival. Politicians loathe losing their seats or becoming politically irrelevant. Therefore, ignoring the importance of their appearance in the news is tantamount to writing their political epitaphs. Getting media attention ensures visibility, because the public mostly gauges their performance by the amount of publicity they are accorded by the media (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1998). Others pursue media coverage as a means to become recognized leaders for particular issues of concern (Cook, 1988).

Politician-Journalist Relationship

Politicians’ quest for publicity begs for a close scrutiny of the politician-journalist relationship. It is therefore no surprise that debates in political communication frequently revolve around the question of who “drives” the news (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). The power-struggle between politicians and journalists explains why they enjoy a “love-hate” relationship, as it is commonly referred to in media circles. Political communication scholars describe the relationship as a “dance” (Gans, 1979; Stromback & Nord, 2006), a “tug-of-war” (Gans, 2004), “symbiotic” (Stromback & Nord, 2006), “dialectical” (McNair, 1999), and “back-scratching” (Matthews, 1960).

Gans (1979) explained that the relationship between sources and journalists “resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources” (p. 116). On the dance floor, political actors are doing what they can to invite the journalists to dance, but ultimately, it is the journalists who choose who they are going to dance with (Stromback & Nord, 2006). Journalists have the liberty to decide what angle to take in a news story, based on production values such as drama, novelty, timeliness, vividness, color, and terseness (Cook, 1998). More importantly, news media have a “carrying capacity” that limits the numbers of issues that can be discussed in news (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). This is so because these capacities are indexed by various measures such as column inches in newspapers and minutes for air time in television (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988).

Moreover, even if sources are available, it is the journalist who decides if they are suitable (Gans, 2004).
Gans (2004) highlighted four factors that shape sources’ access to journalists: incentives, power, ability to supply suitable information, and geographic or social proximity to journalists. In view of this, politicians and journalists engage in what Cook (1998) termed as “negotiation of newsworthiness” (p. 90).

**Literature Review**

The quest for publicity by elected leaders is a trend that happens in any kind of democracy—whether free or suppressed. Studies indicate that state size, seniority, committee assignments, and party leadership are the central determinants of politicians’ appearance in the news (e.g., Cook, 1986; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Tresch, 2009; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974; Wilhoit & Sherrill, 1968).

Wilhoit and Sherrill (1968) studied on wire service visibility of U.S. senators reported a correlation between visibility and state size. Weaver and Wilhoit (1974) examined the visibility of U.S. senators in *Time, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News and World Report.* They found that the population ranking of states represented by Republican senators produced a significant rank-order coefficient of 0.50 with total news magazine visibility, the strongest relationship found in the study.

Sellers and Schaffner (2007) examined the media coverage of U.S. senators from 1980 to 1986. They found that seniority appeared to attract greater interest and coverage. Compared with a senator with only two years of seniority, a senator with 10 years of service received 15% more stories for a solo event (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). In an analysis of mentions of individual U.S. House members in the nightly television news, Cook (1986) found seniority was a central determinant of media visibility before or after the introduction of television floor proceedings. However, the Weaver and Wilhoit’s (1974) study found that the seniority of both Republican and Democratic senators failed to correlate significantly with news magazine visibility.

In committee leadership, Weaver and Wilhoit (1974) found that the committee prestige for Republican senators produced a significant rank-order correlation of 0.27 with total news magazine visibility. Sellers and Schaffner (2007) reported that committee and party leaders largely won more stories, compared with non-leaders. Squire (1988) examined variables that determined the level of media attention senators got on television networks, Sunday interview shows, and national newspapers. He found that among the many variables that were responsible for the amount of publicity received, committee assignments and leadership positions were the leading determinants of senators’ publicity. Leadership was also a key determinant of media visibility in Cook (1986). But Weaver and Wilhoit (1980) reported that senators in positions of power were not necessarily getting the most frequent press coverage.

Tresch (2009) also established that the more a parliamentarian participated in the debate on the bilateral agreements with the EU, the higher his or her chances of being covered by a Swiss newspaper. Similarly, Wafai (1989) examined the role of the media coverage in providing legitimacy for U.S. senators. Findings suggested that “the more a senator spoke about the Middle East issue on the Senate floor, the more attention that senator was given in the media” (Wafai, 1989, p. 329).

Overall, this literature review shows that apart from the obvious variables such as seniority, party leadership, committee assignments, and state size, there are other criteria that contribute to the visibility of lawmakers. Tresch (2009) and Wafai (1989), for example, showed that the publicity of senators can be determined by their stand on issues of national importance. Indeed, part of this study’s agenda is to investigate
whether comments by Kenyan legislators on contentious issues of 2009 such as corruption predicted their visibility. This study investigates six research questions and two hypotheses:

- **RQ1:** Which types of characteristics are associated with the most covered MPs?
- **RQ2:** Which are the strongest predictors of MPs’ newspaper visibility?
- **RQ3:** Who between cabinet ministers and ordinary MPs are better predictors of MPs’ newspaper visibility?
- **RQ4:** Do MPs heading powerful ministries have significantly greater newspaper visibility than other cabinet colleagues?
- **RQ5:** Do MPs who comment on contentious issues have significantly greater newspaper visibility than MPs who criticize the government?
- **RQ6:** Do MPs harboring presidential ambitions for 2013 general election correlate strongly with MPs’ newspaper visibility?

- **H1:** Seniority significantly predicts MPs’ newspaper visibility;
- **H2:** Parliamentary committee leadership significantly predicts MPs’ newspaper visibility.

**Methods**

Content analysis was used to examine the visibility of 212 MPs in four Kenyan newspapers—*Daily Nation*, *The Standard*, *The People Daily*, and *The Star*. The publications were selected because they are the leading English dailies in the country—with high circulation numbers and readership. Several studies have successfully employed content analysis to investigate visibility of politicians in news media (e.g., Danielian & Page, 1994; Fico, 1984; Tresch, 2009; Wafai, 1989; Wilhoit & Sherrill, 1968; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.

The sampling period was defined from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009. From this time period, six constructed week samples were drawn for each newspaper. Six constructed week sampling was preferred in this study because Luke, Caburnay, and Cohen (2011) found that “sampling a minimum of six constructed weeks was most efficient” for both one-and-five-year populations in content analysis (p. 76). Constructed week samples “involve identifying all Mondays, and randomly selecting one Monday, then identifying all Tuesdays, and randomly selecting one Tuesday, etc., to ‘construct’ a week that ensures that each source of cyclic variation—each day of the week—is represented equally” (Lacy, Riffe, Stoddard, Martin, & Chang, 2001, p. 837). Because the *Star* and the *People* do not publish on Sundays, their constructed weeks covered only six days—Monday through Saturday. Constructed week sampling is more efficient than simple random sampling or consecutive day sampling (Hester & Dougall, 2007). It also creates “maximum sampling efficiency while controlling for cyclical biases” (Luke et al., 2011, p. 78).

The six weeks constructed samples resulted in a total number of 156 newspaper issues. The 156 issues yielded 1,465 news articles, with *Standard* contributing 468 (31.9%), *Star* 372 (25.4%), *Nation* 345 (23.6%), and *People* 280 (19.1%). The unit of analysis was the news article. As such, letters to the editor, advertisements, commentaries, editorials, and features were excluded. Visibility was operationalized as an MPs’ mention in a newspaper news article. If an MPs was mentioned more than once in a news story, the appearances were counted as one mention.

Two coders familiar with Kenyan politics were trained in the coding procedures and the definition of
visibility and 10 independent variables: cabinet minister, powerful ministry, ordinary MP, committee chairmanship, seniority, big tribe identity, major party affiliation, presidential ambition, commenting on contentious issues, and criticizing government.

Seniority, committee leadership, contentious issues, and criticizing government were selected for this study because they have been examined in other countries. Big tribe identity was selected to reflect the ethno-political factor in Kenyan politics. In fact, politics in Kenya have long been among the most “ethnic” in Africa (Orvis, 2001), and many Kenyans believe that tribalism is a cancer which is deeply lodged in the Kenyan body politic (Oyugi, 1997). Presidential ambition, ordinary MP, cabinet minister, and powerful ministry capture characteristics of Kenya’s political power structure. Major party affiliation reflects political divisions in the country after the 2007 general election.

A “cabinet minister” is a presidential appointee who serves as the political head of a specific ministry in the Government of Kenya. He or she is a member of the cabinet. A “powerful ministry” represents one of the following ministries in Kenya: Finance, Provincial Administration and Internal Security, Defense, Foreign Affairs, Local Government, Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Agriculture, Education, Roads, and Energy. To identify the 10 most powerful government ministries in Kenya, 51 Kenyan journalists working in various media houses ranked the 40 ministries, with the most powerful ranking first and the least powerful 40th. An “ordinary MP” refers to MPs holding no responsibilities such as cabinet positions or parliamentary committee chairmanship. In addition, all assistant ministers fall under this definition because their duties are ambiguous.

A “committee chairmanship” is defined as an MPs who chairs a parliamentary committee. “Seniority” refers to an MP who has served for three parliamentary terms. “Big tribe” refers to an MP who belongs to one of the five largest tribes in the country: Kikuyu (6.6 million), Luhya (5.3 million), Kalenjin (4.9 million), Luo (4.0 million), and Kamba (3.8 million) (Ndegwa, 2010). “Big party” refers to MPs who are elected on the ticket of the two major parties—the Party of National Unity (PNU) or the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). “Presidential ambition” refers to MPs who have declared their interest to run in the 2013 presidential race.

“Commenting on contentious issues” is defined as an MP’s comments on one of the four controversial issues of 2009—corruption, constitutional reforms, eviction of illegal settlers from the Mau forest, and the trial of the 2007 post-election violence ringleaders. “Criticizing government” indicates negative criticism directed at the government under the leadership of President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga. Criticizing the President or the Prime Minister on public issues (but not about their party affairs) also falls under this definition.

The coders conducted a pretest of the coding of two variables: commenting on contentious issues and criticizing the government. This was meant to ensure high inter-coder consistency. The pretest included 32 editions (eight for each newspaper), which roughly represents a fifth of all newspaper editions. The pretest yielded a mean Kappa’s inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.91. The coefficients for criticizing the government and commenting on contentious issues were 0.82 and 1.0, respectively.

Three MPs were excluded from this study because of the obvious coverage they receive daily, owing to their powerful positions in the government. They are President Mwai Kibaki (Othaya), Prime Minister Raila Odinga (Lang'ata), and Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka (Mwingi North). The three also represent the executive branch of government, while the rest of MPs represent the legislative arm. After the final coding,
seven more MPs were eliminated from further analysis because they received no mention in the newspapers. Thus, only the visibility of 212 MPs was subjected to the final analysis.

Cramer’s $V$ and Kendall’s tau-b were used to test the relationships between the politicians’ visibility and the 10 independent variables. MPs were ranked according to the number of appearances in the four newspapers—total newspaper visibility—from the highest to the lowest. The rankings were then collapsed into quartiles of four—high (1-53); moderately high (54-110); moderately low (111-161); and low (162-212). The Weaver and Wilhoit’s (1974) study ranked senators’ visibility in four quartiles. For the full list of MPs’ ranking, see Appendix A. Those appearing in the high and low quartiles received the most and least coverage. The cabinet minister variable was collapsed into a dummy variable (1 = cabinet minister, 0 = not a cabinet minister). The same process was repeated for seven other variables—powerful ministry, committee chair, seniority, major party affiliation, big tribe, ordinary MP, and presidential ambition. Commenting on contentious issues and criticizing the government were measured at the ordinal level: 0 comments = low; 1 comment = moderately low; 2-3 comments = moderately high; and 4-52 comments = high. For criticizing the government, the levels were: 0 criticisms = low; 1 criticism = moderately low; 2 criticisms = moderately high; and 3-20 criticisms = high.

**Results**

The sample of 156 newspaper issues produced 3,676 mentions of the 212 parliamentarians—1,225 (33.3%) in *Standard*, 866 (23.6%) in *Nation*, 803 (21.8%) in *Star*, and 782 (21.3%) in *People*. The mean mentions per newspaper were 919—translating to an average of 17.3 mentions for each MP. The number of MPs featuring in each variable was as follows: ordinary MPs = 150; cabinet ministers = 40; powerful ministry = 11; parliamentary committee chair = 24; senior MPs = 39; big tribe = 130; major parties = 151; presidential ambition = 5; commenting on contentious issues = 134; and criticizing the government = 50.

Research question 1 asked the types of characteristics associated with the most covered MPs. Based on the upper quartile (1-53) which comprises of the most-covered members, findings indicate that three characteristics were linked to the most-covered legislators. These characteristics are: belonging to big tribes, being a member of the cabinet, and being affiliated with major parties. Table 1 shows that of the 130 MPs from big tribes, 42 (32.3%) are in the upper quartile and 36 (27.7%) in the second division. Table 2 indicates that two thirds of the cabinet falls in the upper range of MPs’ total visibility. MPs affiliated with major parties appear evenly distributed, as Table 3 indicates. The major parties—PNU and ODM had a combined 151 MPs—of which 40 (26.5%) of them fall in the high quartile, 39 (25.9%) in the moderately high, and 36 (23.8%) apiece in third and fourth divisions.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total visibility (Quartiles)</th>
<th>Big tribes</th>
<th>Small tribes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High (1-53)</td>
<td>42 (32.3%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>53 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately high (54-110)</td>
<td>36 (27.7%)</td>
<td>21 (25.6%)</td>
<td>57 (26.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately low (111-161)</td>
<td>31 (23.8%)</td>
<td>20 (24.4%)</td>
<td>51 (24.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (162-212)</td>
<td>21 (16.2%)</td>
<td>30 (36.6%)</td>
<td>51 (24.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130 (100%)</td>
<td>82 (100%)</td>
<td>212 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Cramer’s $V = 0.28, \ell p = < 0.001.*

Table 2
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total visibility (Quartiles)</th>
<th>Major parties</th>
<th>Small parties</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High (1-53)</td>
<td>40 (26.5%)</td>
<td>13 (21.3%)</td>
<td>53 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately high (54-110)</td>
<td>39 (25.9%)</td>
<td>18 (29.5%)</td>
<td>57 (26.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately low (111-161)</td>
<td>36 (23.8%)</td>
<td>15 (24.6%)</td>
<td>51 (24.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (162-212)</td>
<td>36 (23.8%)</td>
<td>15 (24.6%)</td>
<td>51 (24.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151 (100%)</td>
<td>61 (100%)</td>
<td>212 (100%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cramer’s $V = 0.06, p = > 0.001.$

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commenting on contentious issue</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet minister</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticizing government</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big tribe</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In research question 2, it was asked about the strongest predictors of the MPs’ total visibility in the four newspapers. Table 4 shows results of a multiple regression analysis of which commenting on contentious issues, being a member of the cabinet, criticizing the government, and belonging to a big tribe are the strongest predictors.

Table 5 indicates that the cabinet minister ranking produced a significant rank-order coefficient of 0.50 ($p < 0.001$) with total newspaper visibility. The coefficient for ordinary MP (0.45) is also significant. Though the two variables have significant correlations with MPs’ total visibility, cabinet minister is a stronger predictor of visibility than ordinary MP. Research question 4 investigates whether cabinet ministers heading powerful ministries have significantly greater visibility than other ministers. Table 5 shows the powerful ministry produced a significant rank-order coefficient of 0.36 ($< 0.001$), while cabinet minister also produced a significant rank-order coefficient of 0.50 ($< 0.001$). It is, therefore, cabinet ministers who have significantly greater visibility than their colleagues in charge of powerful ministries.

Research question 5 examined whether MPs who comment on contentious issues have significantly greater visibility than their colleagues who criticize the government. Table 5 shows that the contentious issues rank-order coefficient is a significant Kendall’s tau-b of 0.58 ($p < 0.001$), the strongest relationship found in this study. The correlation for criticizing government is 0.36, ($p < 0.001$). Thus, MPs who
comment on contentious issues receive greater newspaper coverage than those who criticize the government.

Research question 6 investigates whether MPs harboring presidential ambitions correlate strongly with MPs’ total newspaper visibility. Table 5 indicates that the presidential ambition variable has a weak correlation of 0.27 ($p < 0.05$) with total newspaper visibility. Harboring presidential ambitions does not correlate strongly with newspaper visibility. It is not a strong predictor of MPs’ newspaper visibility.

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Cramer’s $\nu$</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet minister</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary MP</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful ministry</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential ambition</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenting on contentious issues</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticizing government</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 1 states that seniority significantly predicts MPs’ visibility. The seniority variable produced a significant rank-order coefficient of 0.34 ($< 0.001$)—a low correlation. The hypothesis is confirmed because the relationship between seniority and total visibility is statistically significant. Hypothesis 2 predicted that parliamentary committee leadership significantly predicts MPs’ newspaper visibility. The coefficient for committee leadership is weak (0.14, $p > 0.001$) and is not statistically significant. The hypothesis is not supported.

### Discussion

This study’s findings reveal that the most-covered MPs in the four newspapers are associated with three characteristics: big tribe, cabinet membership, and affiliation with the two major political parties—PNU and ODM. However, of the three characteristics, it is the big tribe factor, which requires a close scrutiny in as far as the newspapers’ coverage of the most visible MPs is concerned. It is not by coincidence that “big tribe” is one of the variables linked to MPs covered most. While ethnicity shapes Kenyan politics, findings from this study indicate that the tribal factor contributed to the newspaper coverage of the 212 MPs.

The three characteristics associated with the most-covered MPs, which is examined by research question 1, owe their prominence in the news to the tribal factor. Thus, MPs exhibiting the three salient features received more coverage—courtesy of being members of the big ethnic groups. As this study’s findings show, a majority of legislators from big tribes fall in the two upper-most quartiles of MPs’ visibility ranking. This means that lawmakers from the dominant communities received more coverage than their colleagues from the small tribes. For example, two thirds of cabinet members fall in the upper-most division—and of these cabinet ministers—78% are from the big tribes.

So, why are the two upper-most visibility divisions crowded by legislators from the five big ethnic groups in the country? First, the top-most division is populated by cabinet ministers, of who over three quarters are from the dominant tribes. This demonstrates a clear relationship between ethnicity and MPs’ visibility, where the latter depends on the former. It means those from big tribes stand a high chance of being cabinet ministers,
which ensures them high prominence in news, considering that “cabinet minister” is one of the strongest predictors of MPs’ visibility. This reflects tribal influence in local politics and the content of political news. Such an imbalance in favor of politicians from large tribes appears to violate what Danielian and Page (1994) called “norms of equal access, representativeness, balance, and diversity in the marketplace of ideas” (p. 1056).

By extension, MPs from big tribes control senior government positions such as ministerial dockets, which attract more attention from journalists. In covering politicians, the media is known to give more attention to official or authoritative sources (McQuail, 1992), who in the Kenyan case are politicians from the major ethnic communities. Similarly, in Israel, the elite status of political actors was reported to be central in competition for news exposure (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006).

The other explanation for the heavy presence of MPs from big tribes in the upper quartiles of visibility is their affiliation with PNU and ODM—the major parties, which form Kenya’s coalition government. The dominant ethnic communities form the bedrock of the two parties. For example, ODM is dominated by MPs from Luo, Luhy, and Kalenjin tribes, and majority of PNU MPs are from Kikuyu and Kamba communities. Orvis (2001) noted that in Africa ruling and opposition parties represent coalition of ethnic groups. In forming the government, it means MPs from the two parties are in charge of various ministerial portfolios—senior government positions which attract high media attention.

Theoretically, the newspapers’ coverage of politicians from dominant communities encapsulates “political parallelism” in which the African media products mirror ethnicity. In Kenya specifically, ethnicity is one of the factors, which influence media political leanings. Relatedly, O’Brien (1999) had put it clearly that ethnicity matters in Africa and reached deep into the media and into the state, often shaping the relationship between the two.

Results of the multiple regression analysis show the strongest predictors of MPs’ visibility, which is examined by research question 2. The four predictors are commenting on contentious issues, cabinet minister, criticizing government, and big tribe. Commenting on contentious issues was the strongest predictor of visibility, a similar finding to what Tresch (2009) and Wafai (1989) reported. The two found that politicians who participated on debates touching on topical issues received more attention in the media. This indicates how issues of national importance in any country catapult politicians commenting on them to the attention of the media.

In Kenya, issues of corruption, constitutional reforms, eviction of illegal settlers from Mau forest, and prosecution of the 2007 post-election violence perpetrators elicited intense public debates in 2009. The conflictual nature of these issues made them attract substantial media coverage. Corruption was contentious because of the financial scandals that rocked the ministries of Agriculture and Education. The prosecution of perpetrators of election violence was an issue which raised political temperatures across the country. Politicians were divided down the middle, with some pushing for the masterminds of the 2007 post-election violence to be prosecuted in the International Criminal Court at The Hague. Others opted for the suspects to be tried locally. Proponents and opponents of the draft constitution clashed publicly over contentious clauses such as the one on abortion. Thus, MPs who talked about these controversial issues got a free ticket to appear in newspaper news.

Based on this study’s findings, commenting on contentious issues and criticizing the government were intertwined in newspaper coverage. That explains why criticizing the government was also a predictor of MPs’ visibility. While some MPs commented on contentious issues, others criticized the government over the same
issues. However, commenting on controversial topics was a better predictor of MPs’ visibility than criticizing government—addressed in research question 5. This is so because all segments of MPs can comment on a contentious issue—but not all can criticize the government. That is the reason why those who aired their views on topical issues overwhelmed those who castigated the government—73% against 27%. For example, cabinet ministers can comment on contentious issues, but due to the oath of collective responsibility, they rarely criticize the government they serve. Criticizing the government is mostly done by ordinary MP who do not pay any loyalty to the appointing authority, or parliamentary committee leaders who act as the public watchdogs in parliament.

Cabinet minister was the other strong predictor. This is so because government ministers are presidential appointees. They are entrusted with providing leadership in their ministries. They also derive their power from the institution of presidency, whose hallmarks are power and authority. Their senior positions in government ensure them more publicity than ordinary MP. This explains why cabinet minister was a better predictor of MPs’ visibility than ordinary MP—examined by research question 3. Cabinet minister is also a better predictor of visibility than powerful ministry—which research question 4 addresses. Though most of ministers holding powerful docket dominate the top-10 list of the most-visible MPs in newspaper by 70%, findings here underscore that what matters most is being in the cabinet, not the prestige attached to some ministries. In other words, cabinet ministers occupy an elite status in society, and their actions affect many citizens. Tresch (2009) made it clear that the elite status of political actors has “consistently proven to be an important guideline for the selection of news by the media” (p. 71).

Those in the 2013 presidential race received a lot of coverage in the newspapers. William Ruto, Uhuru Kenyatta, Musalia Mudavadi, George Saitoti, and Martha Karua all had declared interest to run for the presidency. They are also in the list of the 10-most covered MPs. Presidential ambition failed to correlate strongly with MPs' newspaper visibility, however. Research question 6 examines whether MPs contesting for presidency have a strong correlation with newspaper visibility. Their high appearance in the news is not solely attributable to their intention to vie for presidency. It is occasioned by multiple factors—including their seniority in parliament, big tribe identity, and being members of the cabinet. The five presidential hopefuls enjoyed more than what Tresch (2009) called “double loyalties”, which describes legislators who perform other functions or duties in addition to their roles as elected representatives. This increases the power of such MPs—and it comes with more media publicity.

Seniority, examined by hypothesis 1, was a predictor of MPs’ newspaper visibility. This agrees with findings of Sellers and Schaffner (2007) and Cook (1986), but contrasts with findings of Weaver and Wilhoit (1974). Seniority emerged as a predictor of visibility because in reporting journalists tap the legislative experience of senior MPs. Tresch (2009) observed that the most experienced parliamentarians are considered more newsworthy by media because of established relationships with reporters or the presumption that greater seniority means more importance in the legislative process.

The finding that committee leadership was not a predictor of parliamentarians’ newspaper visibility contrasts with findings of previous studies in which committee leadership predicted senators’ visibility in the news (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Squire, 1988; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974). Unlike in the U.S. where senate committees are powerful, the Kenyan committees are feeble and toothless. In addition, the committees in the U.S. are prominently involved in the legislative process, but not so in Kenya where committees’ roles in parliament are overshadowed by the presence of cabinet ministers. It is ministers who emanate with important
bills for debate in the house, with little input from the relevant committees. These circumstances deny Kenyan committee leaders’ media attention—hence less visibility in the news.

**Conclusions**

This research examined 10 variables used in predicting the visibility of 212 Kenyan MPs in four national newspapers in 2009. The variables are ordinary MP, cabinet minister, powerful ministry, parliamentary committee chairmanship, seniority, big tribe identity, major party affiliation, presidential ambition, commenting on contentious issues, and criticizing government. The other two are commenting on contentious issues and criticizing government.

Findings show that commenting on contentious issues, criticizing government, cabinet minister, ordinary MP, powerful ministry, and seniority predicted MPs’ newspaper visibility. But a multiple regression analysis shows the strongest predictors were commenting on contentious issues, criticizing government, cabinet minister, and big tribe identity. The conflictual nature of the contentious issues made them newsworthy, and those who commented on them were more likely to appear in the news. The big tribe factor enjoys inherent influence in Kenyan politics. It indirectly determines the visibility of MPs through other variables dependent on it. For example, cabinet ministers receive high coverage in newspapers, but an appointment to the cabinet is highly dependent on whether one is from a major tribe.

Though this study provides useful insights regarding the coverage of politicians by newspaper journalists, it suffers some limitations, which should be addressed through future research. One of the limitations is that the study confines itself to print media, excluding electronic media—television and radio. As a result of this shortcoming, findings from this research cannot be generalized to other forms of media—television and radio. Thus, the results should be interpreted cautiously, and only within the daily newspapers.

To have a better understanding of the relationship between politicians and the journalists, future research should also incorporate the electronic media. In doing so, informed conclusions can be made on whether variables that predict MPs’ visibility in newspaper news are similar in television or radio news. Political communication scholarship indicates that visibility of politicians in television news has been studied in other countries (e.g., Cook, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Robinson & Appel, 1979; Squire, 1988). Because this study’s findings have shown that ethnicity has a bearing on the coverage of MPs in newspapers, it is important to find out whether the tribal factor also plays a similar role in electronic media news. In addition, including electronic media will help to see whether there are major shifts in variables examined and the overall ranking of MPs.

Still on electronic media, future research should target parliamentary proceedings, which unlike in previous years are now beamed live on the state-owned KBC TV. Radio is found and heard everywhere in Kenya, thus, the most influential form of media in the country. It is estimated that 86% of the population listen to radio (Media Council of Kenya, 2005), a good reason why it is important to study MPs’ visibility in radio news.

If at all the tribal factor influences newspaper coverage of MPs, understanding journalists’ perceptions about the relationship between ethnicity and publicity of politicians in news is also important. Therefore, in addition to conducting a content analysis to establish whether ethnicity predicts MPs’ visibility in news media, future research should examine journalists’ views about the place of ethnicity in the coverage of politicians. This can be achieved through quantitative (surveys) and qualitative methods (focus groups and in-depth
interviews). Some of the questions which can be posed to journalists are whether in reporting on politicians, Kenyan journalists give favorable coverage to legislators from their ethnic groups, or whether respondents perceive their colleagues to be ethically biased in political reporting. To achieve this, the starting point should be to know the ethnic composition of journalist population in the country, which can be done through a survey.

Journalists can also be interviewed about the criteria or factors they employ in covering politicians. In addition to doing a content analysis of stories written about the Senate during the 1982 session of the Indiana General Assembly, Fico (1984) also surveyed legislative reporters. Journalists were asked to gauge on a seven-point scale their reliance on a number of sources in covering the Senate.

Another limitation of this study is the neutral path it takes in examining reporting of MPs without analyzing valence coverage. Future research should investigate whether Kenyan politicians are reported in a positive or negative manner. Knowing the valence framing of MPs can help understand the nature of the relationship between politicians and reporters, or whether journalists are friendly or hostile toward the institution of parliament. How MPs are framed in news is likely to have implications in the evaluation of parliament by the public.

References


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### Appendix A

#### Table A1

**Number of Appearances for Each MP in the Newspapers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name of MP</th>
<th>Total Appearance</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name of MP</th>
<th>Total Appearance</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name of MP</th>
<th>Total Appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>William Ruto</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Njeru Githae</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>Danson Mwakulegua</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Uhuru Kenyatta</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Sammy Mwaita</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>David Njgunu</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bonny Khalwale</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Benjamin Langat</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>Francis Ganya</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Musalia Mudavadi</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Ekwe Ethuro</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Fred Kapondi</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Lina Kilimo</td>
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<td>148</td>
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<td>159</td>
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<td>Peter Kenneth</td>
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<td>Benjamin Washiali</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
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<td>165</td>
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Note. High quartile = 1-53, moderately high quartile = 54-110, moderately low quartile = 111-161, low quartile = 162-212.
The Swine Flu Pandemics in Portugal Through Newspaper Humour

Gonçalo Pereira Rosa
Portuguese Catholic University, Lisbon, Portugal

Using semiotic and discourse analysis methodologies to uncover denotative and connotative meanings in journalism production, following Roland Barthes’s work, our research analyzed newspaper humour published in one Portuguese newspaper about the global build-up of the swine flu (H1N1) scare of 2009-2010. Results demonstrate that humour was much quicker than traditional journalistic templates to assign responsibilities and depict failures in the crisis management system, precociously suggesting that the pandemic could be just another moral panic similar to the bird flu of 2005. Through humour, newspapers stressed the cyclic nature of health risks, reducing the impact of dramatic information on the audience. It is therefore suggested that the sociological analysis of a media outlet in the context of a complex and emotional case such as the 2009-2010 pandemic implies its deconstruction layer by layer in order to obtain a clear picture of the mechanisms of social construction of reality.

Keywords: editorial humour, risk society, news constraints, journalism

Introduction

Newspaper cartoons and other expressions of humour are valuable resources to study social trends and shared meanings, while providing information about the way social meaning is attached to specific risk events.

Simple and easy to interpret and decode, humour reaches a section of the audience usually not influenced by written news and therefore not included in the overall debate over the impacts of the risk society. Its study provides clues to design better communication strategies for events marked by uncertainty.

The headlines of two stories, published in the Portuguese newspaper Público during the global build-up, led the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the first pandemic of the 21st century on June 11, 2009. The Health Line 24 will encourage users to heal each other in a wikipedia logic and swine sue journalists for libel and damages. Despite the familiar template that resonates with a newspaper style, these fragments correspond to a discursive non-sense strictu sensu. They are only intelligible in the context of a humorous supplement, weekly published by this newspaper. Appropriately, its motto is: “It didn’t happen, but it could have.”

The Health Line 24 was the telephone service coordinated by the Ministry of Health to screen potential suspects of flu-like symptoms in order to alleviate pressure on the patient care units. At the peak of the pandemic in Portugal, in the second and third weeks of November 2009, the service could not respond in a satisfactory manner, thus justifying the joke about users being forced to heal each other.

Gonçalo Pereira Rosa, Master in Communication, Centre of Studies of Communication and Culture, Portuguese Catholic University.
In contrast, the second headline may be explained by the discursive battle waged between WHO and the newsrooms. Following the first reported cases in Mexico, the Portuguese media have designated the disease as “Mexican flu”, a label that sparked panic in the tourism industry of this Central America’s country. They were right. To this day, the 1918-1919 pneumonic is still widely known as the Spanish flu, although it was not an epidemic confined to the borders of any specific country. It was then argued that the disease should be classified as “swine flu”, since the H1N1 virus had originated in pigs. However, this label also displeased economic interests in livestock, as it motivated indiscriminate slaughter of pigs in countries like Egypt. WHO finally announced that the disease should be designated as influenza A virus (H1N1).

This discursive struggle waged to define a new social problem sparked the inspiration to create a humorous text about the possible discomfort of pigs with the lack of newspaper accuracy. From a broader perspective, the two jokes express the larger editorial freedom enjoyed by humorists, since professional constraints force journalists to look for balances. This article discusses the merits and the validity of editorial humour stories applied to the case of swine flu.

**Project**

Much research has been devoted to the communication of risk in the face of disasters or other unforeseen accidents—the most prolific expressions of what Beck (1992) called the risk society. However, communication through images, either photographic or humorous remains to be examined, just as there are few studies on the role of editorial humour in the collective sublimation of the issues that arouse public alarm.

We seek to demonstrate in this article that humour had a relief role during news coverage of the pandemic flu, putting the real risk of contagion into perspective, playing with the consequences, and blaming the authorities and the media for the panic. We shall discuss how this function was put in practice long before the media discourse did the same.

We argue that humour is a journalistic tool comparable to the editorial column, expressing opinions not bound by the standards of objectivity that govern journalism. Through layers of meaning and different stylistic features that construct the connotative content of each humorous expression, there is an accepted space within the publications to make judgments that would not be accepted in traditional news pages. We also note that the constraints that ensure the subordination of reporters to professional standards become blurred in the case of humorists, opening a grey area within which (almost) everything can be written or drawn, under freedom of expression.

**Social Functions of Humour**

Humour’s success derives from its ability to act as an inverted image of the seriousness of speech imposed by institutions like the media (Mulkay, 1988). However, even in its most distorted versions, the humorous discourse maintains the pretension of representing reality, because it is endowed with meaning associated with real persons, institutions, or events. Therefore, it reflects cultural attitudes and shared beliefs of a fraction of society within an historical context (Giarelli, 2006).

Smyth (1986) studied the rapid proliferation of jokes in spoken folklore about the Challenger shuttle disaster and suggested that one function of humour facing disaster is the ability to represent the abstract concept of death in a way that can be mocked. In doing so, it empties the collective anxiety by integrating the most morbid details in a humorous structure. By making fun of ideas, institutions, or events that may precipitate its
own mortality, society expresses inhibited impulses about the taboo subjects, drawing pleasure from this behaviour. We have selected answers for the second example to this logic. It was published at the same time, as it became known—through a public comment of the President of the Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine—that a pandemic could infect two to three millions Portuguese and cause 75,000 deaths in this country alone. The catastrophic scenario functioned as a spur for alarm and anxiety. The swine law suit helped to defuse it.

Smyth also drew attention to the impossibility of escaping the news representation of a catastrophic event in the contemporary society. He proposed that another function of humour in these circumstances is precisely the targeting of aggression towards the media and the power they wield over other social actors. Humour that places the media in the centre of mockery also acts as an implicit criticism of the devices that make a private universe—such as the case of the patient that desperately struggles to communicate his flu-like symptoms to a jammed telephone service—into a public event. Television shows, such as the widely known Daily Show, that mock real news through commentary represent an expression of this trend (Baumgartner and Morris, 2006).

Meyer (2000) systematized three additional features of humour—relief, incongruity, and superiority—usable in accordance with the purpose to unite or divide the audience. In stressful situations, humour can mock the threats and signal that they may not be as severe, producing collective relief in the audience; incongruity, in turn, is expressed when a society shares certain standards of reality and the use of humour can divert the audience’s attention from the problem to the standards themselves, thus pointing out that deviations from the standards are laughable. Ultimately, the function of humour may be an exacerbation of one group over the others, pointing out its superiority in the face of real or perceived ignorance of “the other”, like adults laughing at child’s follies or courtiers mocking the court jester.

**Cartoons and Other Humorous Styles**

Modern society operates through its texts. Symbolic representations that join text with image are therefore a useful mechanism to successfully reach the public. Editorial humour—in particular cartoons—provides cognitive maps to decode the everyday life, but sociology has devoted little attention to the visual discourse built on these supports (Greenberg, 2002). Morris (1993) argued that editorial cartoons present four advantages for the newspaper: They establish the source (the artist and newspaper) as an expert on the problem; they propose a frame by suggesting an interpretation and a course of action; they define a normative agenda that allows readers to evaluate the cartoon in moral terms; and they promote the desire for action, capitalizing symbolic resources to a particular cause.

In this context, we accept Gitlin’s (1980) definition of news frames as “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (p. 6). In other words, a frame is an organizing idea beneath each newspaper item, even if the author did not explicitly accept it.

The comedian on a newspaper has a similar role to the columnist, expressing opinions on a topic without pretensions of objectivity (Conners, 2005). He has fewer constraints because of the absence of direct relationship with news sources and therefore he is not subject to external pressures. Making use of myths, narratives, metaphors, or cultural and symbolic representations, the cartoonist helps to spread news frames,
simplifying them to its roots (Gamson & Stuart, 1992). Conners (2005) found that to achieve this objective the comedian can make analogies with sport, festive occasions, film, or literary references, the entertainment industry, advertising, or television programs (pp. 482-486). Another resource, as noted by Smyth (1986) points out that the recycling of narrative structures had already used in the past (p. 249).

One of the merits of editorial humour lies in the capacity to charm readers who believe not to be eligible to participate in a debate at the more sophisticated level of the hard news sections. Cartoons only require a “minimum cognitive strain” (Giarelli, 2006, p. 74). Concision increases the impact of editorial humour, as its most obvious meaning is captured in a few seconds and not after reading a dense text column (Caswell, 2004, p. 17).

There are of course limits to the comedian. He has a narrow space of intervention and is expected to comment on issues already defined by the media (Greenberg, 2002). The arguments should be condensed into mini-narratives, crudely personalizing problems and building idealizations of the world. Therefore, its legacy is less durable than the news texts. Moreover, the comedian is not completely autonomous, in that he must absorb the prejudices and the editorial line of his publication and his audience expectations (Hansen, 1997, p. 1799). Even so, the humorous expressions provide important clues about the familiarity of ordinary people with specialized topics.

**Methodology**

This study followed the methods of Petersen (2002) to study the portrayals of human cloning in the Australian press and Conrad (1997) in his approach to the historical frames of genetics. All issues of the newspaper during the sample period were read and coded according previously anticipated frames, although later we adjusted the model to include unforeseen categories. Following procedures of discourse analysis, we divided each article by one or more frames provided by the usage of expert sources, the tone of sentences, the usage of imagery, and the association of the swine flu to other risk scares.

In the context of images, Barthes (1977) pointed out that one also has to realize the informational, the symbolic (or obvious), and the obtuse meanings of each photography or cartoon (pp. 52-54). Procedures of semiotics were hence used to compile a list of meanings associated with the expressions of newspaper humour through image.

Following Pierre Bourdieu’s (1996) concept of journalistic field, we inscribed this project in a line of studies that define journalism practice as a symbolic struggle between sources with conflicting or converging interests, which have different amounts of symbolic capital, and as such, enjoy different possibilities to influence the agenda in each historical context.

We have identified four humorous techniques used by the newspaper (mostly in its humorous pages, but also found in other sections) from April 2009 (the first news of the deaths in Mexico) to August 2010, when WHO declared the end of the pandemic. The cartoon consists of a single caricatured image with a possible caption; the strip corresponds to a sequence of three or more vignettes, usually predefined by the author; the photomontage glues the face of a public figure to a bizarre body or scenario; and the humorous text by itself dismisses any image. In humorous expressions of a single image, the success of humour depends on the shared knowledge between artist and audience; in compound expressions, such as the strips, it is easier to establish the parameters of debate (Giarelli, 2006, p. 64).

We have also identified during the sample period, all relevant textual references to swine flu in newspaper,
quantifying the number of items per day, the number of times the subject was treated on the first page, and the number of times that made headlines. By item, we mean any autonomous block of the newspaper, textual, illustrative or mixed, visually identifiable, suggesting to the reader that this is an independent unit. We have outlined the moments of hegemony of seven major news frames in the news coverage and in the humorous production: (1) the description of the epidemiology of the virus (severity, causes, history); (2) the battles for the definition of the disease’s designation; (3) government statements appealing for normality; (4) impacts on economy and everyday life; (5) vaccination and resistance to vaccination; (6) accusations of media hysteria; and (7) accusations of poor risk management. Naturally, the definition of one or more frames in a news story or a humorous expression is a subjective exercise. This stage of the project is therefore more qualitative than quantitative, but we believe that the set of items accumulated over a given period allows us to identify the hegemonic frames of any given time, following Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989) approach to interpretive packages expressed by nuclear messages.

All image outlets have connotative and denotative meanings (Barthes, 1977). Meaning and, by extension, humour is produced in two semiotic ways—verbally and visually (Tsakona, 2009). Humour is normally produced through the interaction between drawing and text whether by juxtaposition of concepts or by contradiction between them. Through Barthes’ semiotics, an image can be decomposed by layers of meaning, from the most obvious to the most profound and unintended. The use of cultural resources should therefore be identified, as stigmatization, personalization, and other rhetorical figures provide clues about the author’s intention. For instance, Giarelli (2006) analyzed the use of Frankenstein’s metaphor in cartoons about cloning and concluded that cartoonists sometimes suggest an inference to their readers: If two subjects share some common characteristics, they may share all (p. 71).

We also interviewed two newspaper cartoonists, hoping to obtain additional information about the limits and objectives of the spaces of humour in the pages of Público.

Results and Discussion

The swine flu has killed 124 people in Portugal, in the autumn and winter of 2009-2010. The peak of flu-like symptoms occurred in November and December, months in which more than 10,000 people were infected each week and dozens were hospitalized (Direcção-Geral de Saúde, 2010). More than half of the deaths occurred in those two months, but the worsening of disease’s indicators does not reflect the emphasis the newspaper devoted to the case. Indeed, as Eldridge and Reilly (2003) noted on their analysis of media coverage of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in British media, the scientific story may occur in a different timeline regarding the news story. We believe that this have happened with the swine flu in Portugal.

Table 1 distributes the number of items, the number of cover mentions and occasions on which the swine flu was the headline. The newspaper produced 785 items about the flu. Sixty-nine references were made on the first page—18 of which as headlines. The peak of coverage occurred in July, as cases proliferated throughout the world, but the virus arrival to Portugal was slower. The newspaper anticipated the threat, although there were no clinical cases to justify alarm. Earlier, in May there was a period of intense news coverage, which served to define the new social problem. The third peak occurred in November in conjunction with the spread of symptoms and the first deaths.
In January and February 2010, months in which the WHO and the European Commission have been criticized for having yielded to lobbying from the pharmaceutical industry, the story was no longer interesting for the Portuguese press. It was followed at a distance, almost without first page references.

From a clinical standpoint, the periods of stress were quite different. The peak of infection occurred in the last fortnight of November, during which more than 20,000 people were infected each week. December and January were the months in which more people died of the disease.

As suggested, the predominant frameworks varied over news coverage. In April 2009, the newspaper echoed the interpretive packages that we have designated as “Description of the epidemiology of the virus” and “Battle for the definition of the disease’s designation”. From May to September, the newspaper reported under the frames of “Government statements appealing for normality”, “Impacts on the economy and everyday life”, and occasionally “Accusations of poor risk management”. In October and December, the frame of “Government statements appealing for normality” was still predominant but there were more information on the theme of “Vaccination and resistance to vaccination”.

From January to August 2010, one can easily find “Accusations of poor risk management” and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>First page</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Predominant frame</th>
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<td>42</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Government statements appealing for normality/Impacts on economy and everyday life</td>
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<td>140</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2009</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Government statements appealing for normality/Impacts on economy and everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2009</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Government statements appealing for normality/Vaccination and resistance to vaccination</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Accusations of poor risk management/Government statements appealing for normality</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Government statements appealing for normality</td>
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<td>June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Government statements appealing for normality/Accusations of poor risk management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Accusations of media hysteria”, although health officials struggled to broadcast how the government was in control. In August, WHO declared the end of the pandemic. By then, the predominant interpretive package was again the “Accusations of poor risk management”. In a way, the newspaper was slow to calling into question the assumptions that official authorities have chosen to define the issue, confirming yet again the decisive influence of officials with scientific authority in the initial framing of controversial health topics (Traquina, Cabrera, Ponte, & Santos, 2001). However, at least section of the newspaper has reported otherwise.

Table 2 represents the monthly publication of one humorous approaches to the subject of swine flu. Twenty cartoons (some of which purchased abroad), seven strips, 19 photomontages, and 60 texts were published during the sample period.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humorous Items and Predominant Frames in Público, From April 2009 to August 2010.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2009</td>
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<td>May 2009</td>
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<td>June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The treatment of swine flu in humorous items was as intense as in the news sections. After all, humour is generated by the mockery of current affairs. However, the use of comedy frames was different from the rest of the publication.

Humour as a place of rebellion is more effective as a device to critique. The absurd or the unreal allow claims that do not require auxiliary evidence, as required by professional standards of journalists. Thorough
factual checks, the search for witnesses or documents proving the allegations is exempted. Naturally, one runs the risk of libel or of injustice to public figures, but at the same time a healthy area of critique is fostered. One could assume that its value to the newspaper is precisely the indiscipline it resonates.

Since the beginning of the swine flu case, newspaper humorists downplayed the severity of the threat and compared it with the previous health panics like the outbreak of SARS in 2003 and the avian influenza in 2005. For instance, the last cartoon of our sample, published in late August 2010, fits the flu in a circular motion, on which every health threat is just a step on the way to the next big scare. The representation of the pandemic as just one more health problem denies its severity and places the debate on the level of the responsibilities of those involved in its public build-up.

In April 2009, almost simultaneously with the first reports on the situation in Mexico, the newspaper published texts and humorous cartoons that attacked the journalistic propensity for disaster. A good example is expressed in Figure 1.

Pig 1: I quote George Orwell: “The journalist serves the interests of no creature except himself.”

Pig 2: “If there is a guilty part, it should be the ducks!”

In this photomontage, published in April 2009, journalists are attacked by humorists on the account of their limited ability to challenge official positions. The dialogue represents one of the pigs in a higher level of consciousness, discussing the fragility of the journalistic process, while another, more naive, see nothing more than the finger of the ducks. The author hence produces comedy by exaggerating the Orwellian critique of journalists and by the incongruence of the new and unexpected culprit.

It is quite evident in this example the meta-referential power of humour, which is allowed to express
doubts over the merits of its own outlet. One can find examples of this meta-function on editorial columns and interviews with subjects who cast doubts on the media’s role. But humour is much more comfortable—and it is given a bigger latitude by the publication—in the critique of the newspaper itself.

Figure 2 is also representative.

Visibly unwell, the pig sneezes coins, which will enrich some external part. This cartoon uses a reminiscence of the childhood piggy bank, which is emptied with just one sneeze. The reader is left with the responsibility of guessing who will get the flying coins. It should also be noted the crack in the piggy bank, a blink to the already depleted Portuguese finances.

![Cartoon 1](image)

*Figure 2. Cartoon 1. Source: April 2009. António Jorge Gonçalves.*

The cartoon has a denotative meaning, as the pig was often used for designating the disease but is should be noted, at the connotative level, the association of the piggy bank to the money issue, as a symbol of economy and savings. The act of throwing money away is thus a metaphor for what the cartoonist thinks of official health politics. Importantly, in the first weeks of coverage, cartoons like this have sought to suggest vested interests in the pandemic’s origin. As the author explains:

> At this point—with the West at the brink of an economic crisis—I realized that we were seeing a media battle in which various parties were trying to get the better of the discussion using pragmatic arguments. Health authorities used the issue to reaffirm the importance of their decisions; the media (as usual) wanted to have larger audiences and played with the public's voyeurism (Interview with António Jorge Gonçalves, cartoonist, April 9, 2011).

Figure 3, published in May, exacerbates the previous two frames.

A little pig in the foreground sees his shadow amplified in the world’s map, suggesting a gross distortion of its real impact in benefit of others. This cartoon is part of the list of humorous work that the newspaper
bought to foreign authors.

Notice just two additional examples. Figure 4, published in October, during the critical phase of the vaccination programme, challenged the medical authorities that imposed the vaccine. Although every citizen was free to choose, a huge media campaign boosted the importance of being vaccinated, selecting risk, and age groups. In the cartoonist’s eyes, scientific evidence was not enough to urge the public to the vaccination needles but the free will was given very narrow latitude.

![Cartoon](image)


There is a clear association with Orwell’s *Big Brother* and its oppression, which subordinates individual freedom to the needs of the collective. The syringe, which intentionally emerges from the television, offers no alternative to the individual who feels compelled to get vaccinated. We identify in this cartoon the news frames of “resistance to vaccination” as well as “Accusations of media hysteria”.

I think we lived in a kind of ultimatum: In face of the (legitimate in my view) hesitation expressed by citizens at the lack of assurances from the vaccination program, authorities, in liaison with the media, used an offensive tone exploiting the fear. This patronizing attitude is recurrent in health authorities (Interview with António Jorge Gonçalves, cartoonist, April 9, 2011).

Figure 5, finally, represents the Minister of Health, which the humorous sections repeatedly addressed as “The Minister of Swine Flu”.

Minister Ana Jorge became famous for her daily appearances on television in connection with this case. In January 2010, the newspaper mocked her actual role, representing her with an evil look, washing her hands with all the precepts taught by the Ministry and wiping them to a roll of paper labeled as “false pandemic”.

No text of the news sections dared to personalize so much the responsibility of the case, pointing the finger at the minister and so clearly suggesting collusion with other interests.
It is also worth discussing the degree of autonomy within the comedian’s publication. *Público* is the daily newspaper with the longest and more successful humorous section. One of the comedians (António Jorge Gonçalves) recognized that there are discussions with the newspaper editor about the topic and the approach of each cartoon, but it remains as an artist’s decision. The other one (Luís Afonso) stressed that with the current software to access the newspaper back office, the editor sees only cartoons when they are already online. Hence the only constraints are organizational (when there are already too many pieces on the subject in one issue) or commercial (when the interest of a sponsor can be tweaked), within a framework of healthy autonomy.

They found their work more relatable to the columnist’s than to the journalistic function. They express free opinions, but the work still requires an analysis on the current affairs (to see which topics are broad enough to warrant treatment) and documentation (to know what to draw).

Both valued the advantage of not dealing with sources since it provides a safeguard against the sanctions and pressures from external sources. Both defined themselves as representatives of the audience, i.e., social agents halfway between the newspaper and its public, a sort of moral reserve or a reader’s ombudsman.

**Conclusions**

The role of humour in the journalistic construction of risk stories warrants further approaches. We believe that in this case, the humorous sections have embodied the relief role envisioned by Morris in the face of the information overload produced about a previously unknown threat. Cartoonists joke about what is important as the transformation of fearful subjects into current news proceeds.

At the same time, we find in humour a willingness to discuss news frames—even if not in an objective way—that is non-existent in the traditional news sections. Even the columnists or the interviewees who questioned the government’s risk management waited until late June 2009, two months after the case’s spur, to voice their concerns. One would expect the cartoonists to refrain from commenting on the most controversial issues, hoping thereby not alienating readers. But instead, we found a healthy trend of vigorous commentary about the controversial and serious instances of public life since the beginning of the affair.

The role of humour in the contemporary press justifies sociology’s attention. We therefore recommend additional studies seeking to gauge the scope of these sections on attitudes and behaviors about the risk society. Moreover, crisis managers should take into account these non-conventional spaces of intervention in the press,
realizing that a cartoon like Figure 5 has a tremendous impact on the audience, suggesting doubts on the merits of health officials plans at the worst possible timing.

References

Proximity and Framing in News Media: Effects on Credibility, Bias, Recall, and Reader Intentions

Joshua DeLung, Robert G. Magee, Rachel DeLauder, Roxana Maiorescu
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, USA

A writer’s decision to localize a news article and the valence of the frame the writer employs can affect readers’ perceptions of credibility and bias as well as readers’ factual recall and the likelihood that readers would want to read the newspaper further. A 2 (proximity: local, non-local) × 3 (frame valence: positive, neutral, negative) factorial experiment ($N = 136$) tested the effects of proximity and frame valence on credibility, perceived bias, recall, and reading intentions. Articles that localized enjoyed greater perceptions of credibility but not recall, while articles with either a positive or negative frame yielded greater recall than articles with a neutral frame. Neither factor exhibited a main effect in predicting perceived bias, but their interaction was a significant predictor. In addition, localization and frame valence also influence the likelihood that participants would want to read the source newspaper again. Implications for theory and media practice are discussed.

Keywords: journalism, news values, framing, proximity, credibility

Introduction

Most of the scholarship in news coverage has evaluated proximity as a recognized news value (Burns, 2002; Neveu, 2002), but less is known about the effect that localizing a news story might have on readers’ perceptions and behavior. Although framing research has been abundant, scholars have begun to examine the influence of frames on readers’ perceptions and attention to the interaction of news values and frames to offer promise for understanding the impact of news stories on reader perceptions. This factorial experiment ($N = 136$) examined the influence of proximity (local, non-local) and frame valence (positive, neutral, and negative) in their influence on perceived credibility, perceived bias, factual recall, and newspaper reading likelihood.

Although the influence of proximity on readers’ opinions may not receive less scholarly attention than other domains of media research, previous scholarship suggests that this news value plays many important roles, including its effect on the type and number of sources used in stories. Martin (1988) found that media organizations that are close to an event use a greater number of sources, while more distant outlets cite official sources more often. The proximity of the reporter involved in writing the story also influences source usage, with a greater variety of sources used associated with close proximity.

Similar research (Berkowitz & Beach, 1993) has supported these findings, positing that although sources often affect news content more than journalists themselves do, the usage of these sources differs based on
proximity of a journalist to an event. Just as Martin (1988) found that sources are more diverse when they are close to the journalist, Berkowitz and Beach (1993) found in their non-routine and conflict-based news research that the diversity of sources increases for proximate events because journalists must rely only on the most visible sources for less-proximate events. In other words, proximity to an event allows journalists to utilize pre-developed networks of sources in their communities.

Even in international election coverage, proximity influences how outlets such as newsmagazines cover these events. Buckman (1993) analyzed eight weekly newsmagazines covering elections in their own country and in other countries whose newsmagazines were surveyed. These sources routinely cover international elections, but seven of the eight newsmagazines from the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, France, Mexico, and Chile gave more salience to national elections than any elections outside their newsmagazine’s parent country.

Proximity in the news also affects the diffusion process. Researchers have found that proximate events cause consumers of news to be much more active in the information-seeking process than do non-local events (Grantz, Krendl, & Robertson, 1986). A local connection, even with a non-local event, can influence readers’ perceptions by causing the reader to become more active. Local journalists also can represent a uniquely local viewpoint that appeals to native readers. National news organizations have difficulty tapping into this hometown appeal because of a greater concern for larger societal interests than sensitivity toward the local community. Journalists’ proximity lends them credibility simply because of their perceived shared interests (Neveu, 2002). When national news outlets cover a story, they tend to start with individual and community frames but shift to societal frames once coverage of the story decreases in order to preserve readers’ interest for and relevance of the story (Chyi & McCombs, 2004).

Developing this relevance with audiences through proximity is one way the media develop news awareness among readers. Donnelly (2005) examined whether story format or proximity affects memory recall among readers. This research found that it was indeed proximity that improves news awareness, not story format. Donnelly’s (2005) research supports the premise that proximity to the event covered adds salience to a story because of its personal relevance to readers. However, the impact of a lone event can sometimes, if rarely, usurp the effect proximity has on news. In fact, research on U.S., British, and Dutch newspapers concerning their framing of global and local terrorist attacks found that although proximity did play a significant role in the coverage of these unfortunate events, the global event of Sept. 11 affected coverage of later similar events more than local considerations (Ruigrok & Van Atteveldt, 2007).

Though proximity is a news value taught to journalists, it may not always be an influencing factor for news worthiness, at least in print media perceived proximities may influence editors’ decisions more than actual proximities (Luttbeg, 1983). However, the rise in recent years of community/civic journalism coupled with the popularity of online virtual communities and blogging may have affected the views of editors and readers as to how important proximity is in consumption of news. The mass media seem to have an influence on perceived proximity between governments, events, and places (Couldry & Markham, 2008). News outlets mediate our connection with the rest of the public and dictate to an extent how we perceive our role as citizens, and much of this is attributable to an overlap of media. In other words, media personnel consume media just as everyone else does, and this therefore creates a paradox where perceived proximities are sometimes even subconsciously framed into news stories where the cycle of perception continues. Therefore, by taking local angles, one could argue that newspapers create a sense of closeness and connection to some events that may not really be present.
Even the idea of cultural proximity can affect news coverage. Research by Zaharopoulos (1990) shows that the cultural proximity of political candidates influences coverage, regardless of ideological differences between news sources. In fact, two Greek newspapers, one liberal and one conservative, both covered the more liberal candidate during the 1988 U.S. presidential election. The more liberal candidate was Democrat Michael Dukakis, a Greek-American, therefore lending support to the idea of cultural proximity affecting the way the media tells its stories.

A more recent advance comes in the idea of virtual proximity and how modern media have used live, proximate coverage to mean more than just having geographical proximity (Huxford, 2007). Because live reporting lends immediacy to a news item, covering events live may make them more salient than might be actually warranted. It is possible that the use of local angles for non-local events might, likewise, increase the immediacy of the topic.

Research on framing is more voluminous, but the bulk of framing scholarship which concerns an analysis of the ways stories are framed and set the agenda. The notion that the media are agenda-setters is nothing new, as McCombs and Shaw (1972) determined that the media do set the agenda for audiences in politics, an idea that has been expanded to include other topics as well. It is through that initial research that Cohen’s (1963) notion that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” was fully realized.

After all, agendas are built through the messages provided by information subsidies based on how those messages are framed. Entman (1993) discussed the power of framing as a communicative device in the sense that the practice has an uncanny ability to emphasize some attributes over others, therefore influencing how these issues are interpreted in the minds of audiences. The utilization of framing, as Entman puts it, involves two key aspects—selection and salience. Through framing, a perceived reality is created for audiences by what information is selected and what information is excluded and also by how much salience is placed with that information.

Other scholars have continued to further our understanding of framing coupled with effects of proximity in recent years. Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, and Trammell (2005) examined framing in the immediate coverage of the 2003 Iraq War announcement by George W. Bush on international news Web sites. This study demonstrated how U.S. sites focused on military conflict, human interest, and metacommunication frames, while foreign sites were more likely to emphasize a responsibility frame.

Only recently has experimental research begun to explore the nature of frames’ influence on the audience. As one would expect, a positive frame on a topic should yield a positive attitude toward the topic, while a negative frame should result in corresponding negative attitudes. However, it is possible that the valence of a frame might affect readers’ attitudes toward the article or toward the newspaper. It is possible, further, that the effect of proximity might interact with a positive, negative, or neutral portrayal of a central public figure in a news story.

The framing of a news story affects readers’ ability to recall information, their opinions of the issues covered, and the probability of their sharing the information with others (Aday, 2006). Aday found that a transfer of salience is more likely to occur among participants who read news stories with advocacy frames than among those who read news stories that present information more objectively. He also found that advocacy frames that employ more vivid language and exemplars have a more significant framesetting effect, suggesting that other factors beside positive representation may play a role. While the valence of a frame has an
effect on readers’ perceptions, it is possible that this effect will interact with the effect of proximity.

**Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Based on the previous discussion, this experiment examined how the presentation of news elements might influence how people perceive a news item. Therefore, the following hypotheses and research questions were developed:

- **H1**: Articles that localize will be perceived as more credible than articles that do not localize;
- **H2**: Articles that localize will have a higher rate of factual recall of facts than articles that do not localize;
- **H3**: Articles that feature a positive or a negative frame will have a higher rate of factual recall than articles that employ a neutral frame.
- **RQ1**: How will the news value of proximity (localization) and the frame valence influence perceptions of credibility in a news article?
- **RQ2**: How will the news value of proximity (localization) and the frame valence influence perceptions of bias in a news article?
- **RQ3**: How will the news value of proximity (localization) and the frame valence influence newspaper reading likelihood?

**Method**

**Experimental Design**

To examine the influence of proximity and frame on perceptions of credibility, bias and the attitude toward the newspaper, this study employed a 2 (proximity: local, non-local) × 3 (frame: positive, negative, and neutral) between-subjects factorial experiment. The factors were manipulated via newspaper articles constructed for this study. The dependent variables were credibility, bias, recall, and newspaper reading intentions.

**Participants**

Participants for this study ($N = 136$) were recruited from a research participation pool, and they received course credit in a communication course in exchange for their participation. Of the total, 69% were female, and 86% of the participants were white, with the remainder Asian (5%), African-American (4%), Hispanic (2%), or other (3%).

**Materials and Measures**

For the stimulus materials, two news articles were constructed. One article reported a teacher who was accused of sexually assaulting a student, and the other article featured a storyline in which a student fell from a balcony at his tutor’s private home under suspicious circumstances. Versions of these articles manipulated proximity and frame valence. The local angle involved an interview with the suspect’s former colleague who now teaches at a local school. The articles framed the public figure in the story (school administrator or tutor) positively, neutrally, or negatively.

Credibility was measured using five items taken from Gaziano and McGrath (1986) and Meyer (1988). Participants were asked to respond to the following items: “How important to you were the topics covered?”, “How informative was the article?”, “How much would you trust this newspaper to provide important news?”, “Rate the quality of the article’s information”, and “How trustworthy is this story?” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$).
Perceived bias was measured using two items: “How biased was the author’s treatment of the story?” and “How biased is the author of this article?” \( r = 0.69 \). To assess memory, three recall items asked participants to remember details specific to each article, such as the names and ages of persons and names of places featured. The number of correct answers was summed, with the total ranging from zero to three. Newspaper reading likelihood was assessed with the following item: “How likely would you be to read this newspaper again?”.

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bias</td>
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<td>1.336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading likelihood</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.692</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

Participants who volunteered for the study were sent an e-mail with a link that assigned them to one of the experimental conditions. Participants, who had been informed that the study was designed to test their perceptions of news articles: Read an article and then clicked on a link that took them to an online questionnaire. After completing the study, participants were debriefed and given a link for directing questions about the study. The experiment took about 30 minutes to complete.

Results

To test H1, that the news value of proximity would predict the article’s credibility, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run with proximity considering the factor and credibility as the dependent variables. The effect of proximity was significant, \( F(1, 134) = 10.231, p < 0.01 \), as articles that localized \( (M = 4.57, SE = 0.131) \) were perceived as more credible than articles that did not \( (M = 3.96, SE = 0.135) \).

To test H2, that proximity would have an effect on the recall of facts in the news article, a one-way ANOVA was run with proximity considering the factor and recall as the dependent variables. The effect of proximity was not significant, \( F(1, 134) = 0.465, p > 0.20 \), with no difference in recall between articles that localized \( (M = 1.63, SE = 0.116) \) and articles that did not \( (M = 1.72, SE = 0.120) \).

To test H3, that frame valence would have an effect on the recall of facts in the news article, a one-way ANOVA was run with frame valence considering the factor and recall as the dependent variables. The effect of frame valence was significant, \( F(2, 133) = 3.23, p < 0.05 \). Follow-up one-tailed t-tests demonstrated that, compared with articles with a neutral frame \( (M = 1.44) \), recall was higher for articles with either a positive frame \( (M = 1.93), t(133) = 2.47, p < 0.01 \), or a negative frame \( (M = 1.78), t(133) = 1.72, p < 0.05 \).

To determine if proximity and the valence of the frame influenced perceptions of the article’s credibility (RQ1), a two-way ANOVA was run with proximity and frame valence considering factors and credibility as the dependent variables. The model was significant, \( F(5, 130) = 2.73, p < 0.05 \), and the factor of proximity, as in the one-way ANOVA had a main effect on credibility, but the influence of frame valence was not significant, as was its interaction with proximity \( (ps > 0.20) \).
The same model was a significant predictor of perceived bias (RQ2) \( F(5, 130) = 2.95, p < 0.05 \). In this case, however, no main effect was detected for either proximity \( F(1, 130) = 0.95, p < 0.20 \), or frame valence \( F(2, 130) = 1.79, p = 0.17 \), but their interaction was a significant predictor of bias, \( F(2, 130) = 4.66, p < 0.05 \). A follow-up test of Tukey’s HSD revealed that, in articles that localized, the presence of a frame with a positive valence resulted in greater perceptions of bias than in articles with either a neutral or negative frame (see Table 2 for a comparison of the means and Figure 1 for a graph of the differences).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-local</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>( SE )</td>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>( SE )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.72(^a)</td>
<td>(0.258)</td>
<td>4.17(^{ab})</td>
<td>(0.304)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3.50(^b)</td>
<td>(0.275)</td>
<td>4.60(^a)</td>
<td>(0.304)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>3.89(^{ab})</td>
<td>(0.269)</td>
<td>4.00(^{ab})</td>
<td>(0.275)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different. The letters mean that the numbers (means) are statistically significantly different.

To determine if proximity and the frame valence influenced the likelihood that a person would want to read that newspaper again (RQ3), a two-way ANOVA was run with proximity and frame considering factors and reading likelihood as the dependent variables. The model was significant, \( F(5, 129) = 14.20, p < 0.001 \). Proximity exerted a significant main effect, \( F(1, 129) = 25.91, p < 0.001 \), with readers more likely to read a newspaper that localized (\( M = 3.97, SE = 0.167 \)) than one that did not (\( M = 2.76, SE = 0.172 \)). Frame valence also had a significant main effect, \( F(2, 129) = 5.56, p < 0.01 \), with participants who read a positive frame (\( M = 2.80, SE = 0.214 \)) less likely to read that newspaper again than those who read an article with a neutral (\( M = 3.69, SE = 0.200 \)) or negative frame (\( M = 3.61, SE = 0.209 \)). The interaction of proximity and frame valence was significant, as well, \( F(2, 129) = 21.37, p < 0.001 \), as readers of a non-localized article with a positive frame were less likely to read that newspaper again (see Table 3 for a comparison of the means and Figure 2 for a graph of the differences).

In sum, articles that localized were perceived as more credible than articles that did not localize, but the
valence of the article’s frame did not affect credibility and did not interact with proximity. With regard to perceptions of bias, neither proximity nor frame valence had a significant effect on bias, but localizing articles that also employed a positive frame were perceived as being more biased than those articles that employed either a neutral or negative frame. Frame valence had an effect on recall, as either positive frames or negative frames resulted in improved recall of article facts when compared with a neutral frame. Proximity had no effect on recall. Proximity and frame valence also affected reading likelihood. Readers reported being more likely to read the source newspaper again if the articles localized or if they employed either a neutral or negative frame. In addition, readers of a non-localized article that employed a positive frame were less likely to read that newspaper than were other readers.

Table 3
Means of Reading Likelihood by Proximity and Frame Valence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local M (SE)</th>
<th>Non-local M (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.48 (0.277)</td>
<td>1.11 (0.304)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3.50 (0.295)</td>
<td>3.88 (0.271)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>3.95 (0.295)</td>
<td>3.27 (0.295)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different.

Figure 2. Likelihood of reading this newspaper again by proximity and frame valence.

Discussion

This study yielded insight into the influence of proximity and frame valence as predictors of perceptions of credibility and bias in news articles. The results have implications for both the study and the practice of news. Improved circulation depends on readers’ intentions, which, this study suggests, depends in part on proximity and the type of frames that writers employ. Although the recall of facts is improved when a writer uses either a negative or positive frame of a subject, a positive frame of a subject might create a suspicion of bias, at least in stories dealing with criminal acts.

Readers’ perceptions of the article they read, and their interest in reading the article’s source newspaper, varied as a function of the news value of proximity. Articles that localized were perceived as more credible than articles that did not localize. If localizing a story increases readers’ involvement and attention, then greater
attention to the story, and perceptions of familiarity with it, might result in greater sense of credibility for the article. The valence of the article’s frame did not affect the article’s credibility. That is to say that the effect of proximity on credibility was not affected by whether the article employed a positive, negative, or neutral frame.

Perceptions of bias appeared not to be the direct result of either proximity or frame valence, but an interesting interaction emerged. Among articles that localized the story, narratives that featured a positive frame were perceived as being more biased than those articles that used either a neutral or negative frame. It is possible that localizing a story increases readers’ involvement, and the negativity bias, in which readers are predisposed to expect either a neutral or negative frame in stories involving possibly criminal acts, the appearance of a positive frame in such a story arouses critical suspicion.

The degree to which readers could remember facts in a story varied depending on the valence of the frame that was employed. Either positive frames or negative frames resulted in improved recall of article facts when compared with a neutral frame. The transmission and retention of information is important in news articles, and it seems that positive or negative frames can make the story more vivid to the reader, resulting in greater memory for an article’s facts. While recall can be improved, the effect of interaction of frame valence with proximity on perceived bias, discussed above, sounds a note of caution regarding multiple, and perhaps unintended, effects of the frames that writers might employ.

The items developed to assess recall involved remembering detailed facts such as character, place and author names and/or ages, as opposed to more general facts about the story. It is reasonable to suggest that even the most avid consumer of media probably does not take into account byline information all of the time, nor would he or she necessarily remember such detailed information as people’s names in the story. However, general facts about the story such as what actually happened, perhaps what the accused character was accused of doing wrong, and similar questions may have been a good indicator of memory recall, as well. Therefore, it is possible that more information that is commonly remembered in real-world scenarios might prove a better means through which to study memory recall in the future. No memory effect was found for proximity, but it might be that different types of recall measures could be utilized to determine if different types of news elements affect different types of memory.

From a practical standpoint, readers reported being more likely to read the source newspaper again if the articles localized or if they employed either a neutral or negative frame. Again, an interesting interaction emerged. Readers of a non-localized article that employed a positive frame were less likely to read that newspaper than readers of any other combination of factors. It is possible that lower involvement, caused by the absence of localization, coupled with perceptions of bias, caused by a positive frame in a crime story, led to less interest in the source newspaper. Readers knew nothing about the newspaper from which the article was purportedly taken. They could only surmise that the newspaper would provide stories similar to the one they had just read. By this token, then, their reported interest in reading the source newspaper reflected, in large part, their interest in the story they had read.

An implication of this research for communication scholars is that it opens the door for future research in this area greatly. Local angles seemed to have increased the readers’ involvement with the story, helping them to identify more with the story and therefore paying more attention to that article. Increased attention to a news article might contribute to perceptions of credibility. If localization does produce psychological reactions in
audiences that influence how they make decisions, whether consciously or subconsciously, then it could prove quite beneficial to discover how local angles create those connections and why. This would lend some insight deeper into psychological processes in how humans communicate and perceive mass media messages. Though this study did not attempt to identify exactly why or how audiences find local angles to be more credible, or why frame valences influence perceptions of bias, it opens the door for research in that area by showing that relationships exist between proximity and frame valences in their effect on the way media content is received.

This study has practical implications for media professionals as well. By knowing that audiences perceive stories with local angles to be more credible, media professionals might take greater strides in the direction of developing stories with local angles rather than running news wire stories and briefs from around the world with little or no local connection. In fact, a stronger focus on developing and reporting local news may arise if further research strengthens the results found here.

However, this study also highlights possibilities for media manipulation. If media professionals do want to attempt to make their stories appear more credible, they might choose to localize a story to the neglect of more weighty or balancing information. Further, editorial decisions to localize a story about a criminal suspect could have unintended effects. Experimental research in this vein might aid journalists in better understanding perhaps how to remain objective in reporting, and what the ramifications might be for the news elements they include in a story with regard to reader attention and recall.

One potential avenue for study might explore the effect of news medium on perceptions of credibility and bias. This study only included written news articles presented on a computer monitor. News presented in other modalities (e.g., TV or radio) might have resulted in differing effects to the extent that the way people process information varies among modalities.

Future research in this area should focus on increasing understanding about why and how the decision-making process works concerning perceptions of media content in relation to proximity and portrayals, especially in the sense of evaluating how and why localizing news content affects these areas psychologically in regards to human communication. Memory recall could be assessed in different areas (e.g., details, major figures, or implications) to see types of recall vary if stories do or do not localize. This study represents a small step toward further research that promises to yield insight for media professionals and scholars alike into further understanding of the perceptions and effects of media content.

References


The Coverage of Drug Trafficking: Peace and War Journalism in American, Mexican, and Spanish Online Newspapers

María Teresa Nicolás Gavilán
Panamerican University, Mexico City, Mexico

Galtung (1998a) held that there are two ways of covering a conflict: the low road and the high road; each road is different in focus. The first is called war journalism and the second is called peace journalism. Based on this, a specialized journalism model on conflict coverage was created: peace journalism. The principles and actions of this model could be used to analyze the making of news that responds to the criteria of peace journalism. In other words, they can be applied in two separate ways, either as tools for the analysis of information on conflicts or as guidelines to create new information. This article focuses on the first approach, the content analysis, to determine if the analyzed news is oriented to either war journalism or peace journalism, according to what peace journalism proposes. The author cares about how the ideology influence in this point. The author analyzed three major newspapers, on its online version: The New York Times, USA; La Jornada, México, and El Mundo, Spain. The first two could be considered left-wing newspapers and the last one is right-wing oriented. The issues covered by the newspapers were the Mexican government war against drugs principally, and issues related with the war against drugs in the world. The results show that the newspaper who scored best and was located within the standards of peace journalism is El Mundo.

Keywords: peace, conflict, journalism, drugs, coverage

Introduction

Johann Galtung is a Norwegian academic that has developed a long career in the field of peace studies; he is even considered by some as the founder of this discipline. In his seventies, he began to show interest in the role the media played in international conflict coverage. As a result of this, he published the famous article “The Structure of Foreign News” in 1965. There he analyzed the information coverage that four Norwegian newspapers had carried out of the Congo crisis (1960), Cuba (1962), and Cyprus (1964).

This research became the genesis of his proposition—peace journalism—that lead him to conclude, among other things, that although it is clear that communication media themselves do not generate violence, they contribute to polarizing it, particularly through certain linguistic orientations and from the topics on which they focus their attention.

Galtung (1998a) stated that there are two ways of covering a conflict: the low road and the high road, each road has a different focus. The first road deals with the conflictive aspect, whereas the second is oriented to the peaceful transformation of the conflict, by studying its roots.
The low road is called war journalism: This road shows four main characteristics: (1) it is oriented to violence and war; (2) it is very influenced by propaganda; (3) it presents an opinion of the elites; and (4) it visualizes peace as the victory of some over the others. It considers conflict as a battle, as a sport, specifically as a gladiator circle, and as such chronicles which refer to those who went forward, who surrendered, and who suffered more casualties or damages. It considers that its focus is called “zero-sum game”, where one part wins all and the other one loses all (Galtung, 2002).

On the contrary, peace journalism is oriented towards the transformation of conflict, it seeks to reflect the truth, pays attention to the opinion of the people suffering the conflict and understands peace as the solution of conflict in which all the parts involved receives a benefit.

This kind of journalism demands the journalist to adopt an interpretative approach, focused on stories that highlight peace initiatives, it diminishes ethnic and religious differences, avoids subsequent conflicts, focuses its attention on the structure of societies in conflict, and promotes the resolution, reconstitution, and reconciliation of conflict (Galtung, 1997, 1998b). In conclusion this is ethic journalism.

Peace journalism has been developing specially over the last 10 years. Some books about the topic have been published: The Peace Journalism Option (Galtung, 1997), Lynch and McGoldrick published the book Peace Journalism in 2005 (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005) and Galtung and Lynch published a new book: Reporting Conflict: New Directions in Peace Journalism (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). His promoters—Galtung, Lynch, and McGoldrick—have been carrying out a great work of practical and theoretical formation in peace journalism. In 1993 Galtung founded the Transcend Peace and Development Network, a non-profit organization that makes and publishes peace studies including peace journalism in different parts of the world, and in 1996 he created the Transcend Peace University (TPU).

In the book The Peace Journalism Option (Galtung, 1997), a comparative table between war journalism and peace journalism was presented. Such table is the same that some years later he included in the article “Peace Journalism—A Challenge” (2002).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peace/conflict journalism</th>
<th>War/violence journalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Peace/conflict-orientated</td>
<td>I. War/violence – orientated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, and z issues.</td>
<td>• Focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win) war general zero sum orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General win/win orientation.</td>
<td>• Closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture.</td>
<td>• Making wars opaque/secret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making conflicts transparent.</td>
<td>• “Us–them” journalism, propaganda, voice, for “us”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding.</td>
<td>• See “them” as the problem, focus on who prevails in war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• See conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity.</td>
<td>• Dehumanization of “them”; more so the worse the weapon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapon.</td>
<td>• Reactive: waiting for violence before reporting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs.</td>
<td>• Focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Galtung’s (1998a) classification of war/peace journalism was further explained by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005). Table1 has served as a basis to determine the indicators of the analysis code and to classify the news frame in terms of peace and war journalism.
Theoretically, peace journalism could be supported by the framing theory (Nicolas, 2008, 2009, 2011). According to Entman (1993), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Moreover, Entman said that to frame implies “selection and highlighting, and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation and/or solution”.

In this study, a news frame refers to an interpretative structure that sets specific events within a comprehensive context. In other words, news framing refers to the process of organizing thematically, stylistically, and factually a news story in order to convey a specific story line, as peace journalism suggests. For example, when faced to the fact that there is a bombing on a civil population, the “news” can be transmitted within different interpretation frames, for instance, some news can “justify” that this bombing is a preventive action against future attacks, or a punishment for previous attacks. In the meantime, another news has a different interpretation frame and presents the act as an unfair and non-desirable action by establishing what the possible actions would be in order to avoid such a bombing in the future.

The author’s interest is the actualization on war/peace journalism frames in news coverage. Based on Galtung’s (1998a) and Lynch and Galtung’s (2010) classifications the author posed two research questions:

1. Is the current coverage of drug trafficking in accordance with the peace journalism proposals?
2. How do the ideology and the style of a newspaper influence the frame of the news?

**Method**

The study is based on a content analysis of newspaper stories from three major newspapers, on its online version: *The New York Times*, USA; *La Jornada*, México, and *El Mundo*, Spain (see Appendix A). The first two newspapers could be considered left-winged and the last one is right-wing. The news covered by the newspaper was the Mexican government war against drugs and issues related to the war against drugs in the world.

The analysis unit was the individual story that includes news stories and feature stories. Five students of the BA in Communication analyzed the stories between May and June, 2011. These stories were published between the last weeks of April and the first of May. This analysis was made about the on-line version of the newspapers.

As the author said above the coding categories for frames, based on Galtung (1998a) and Lynch and Galtung (2010), these classifications involved eight indicators of peace or war journalism:

1. Exploring backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation, and presenting causes and options on every side so as to portray conflict in realistic terms, transparent to the audience; BKGD;
2. Giving voice to the views of all rival parties; VIEWS;
3. Offering creative ideas for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking, and peacekeeping; IDEA;
4. Exposing lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides, and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, peoples of all parties; PROP;
5. Paying attention to peace stories and post-war developments; PEACE;
6. The avoidance of emotive language; EMOT;
7. “Labeling” of conflict parties as good and bad; LABEL;
8. Partisan reporting; PART.
In the author's opinion, it is necessary to explain further the indicators mentioned above:

(1) BKGD—“Exploring backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation, and presenting causes and options on every side so as to portray conflict in realistic terms, transparent to the audience”—any reflection on background by the journalist or any of the speakers in the story gets a score of one or zero if it is not present. This answers the “why” question. It does not mean blaming someone or a group for the violence or the conflict, it means exploring a deeper explanation for behavior, which includes a person’s lifestyle, their diet, exercise, where they live, the pollution etc., in the way a doctor seeks a cause for cancer;

(2) VIEWS—“Giving voice to the views of all rival parties”. This does not mean simply hearing opposed politicians. “Rival parties” include non-elite groups, people who are neither in the military nor in the politics, just as non-governmental organizations;

(3) IDEA—“Offering creative ideas for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking, and peacekeeping”. Creative ideas and solutions here mean non-violent ways to improve physical, political, or psychological security or longer-term suggestions to resolve the conflict. Typical journalistic behavior would be to get references to stepping up security, “cracking down”, and removing and/or punishing people, using more weapons;

(4) PROP (for propaganda)—“Exposing lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides, and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, peoples of all parties”. This refers to propaganda and is intended to offer a score to those stories that go beyond the official version of events. If one party wants people to agree with their view and new information or images are presented that change the picture, and are not usually seen, this gets a score of one;

(5) PEACE—“Paying attention to peace stories and post-war developments”. This means stories “after” violent incidents; it usually refers to tracking some success in a community or an individual’s life after they have escaped a situation of violence;

The following refers to “passive” elements for the avoidance of emotive language, “labeling” of conflict parties as good and bad, and partisan reporting. To recognize the least important of these indicators, compared with the main characteristics, the incidence of each will result in the score for that particular item to be reduced by 0.5;

(6) EMOT—Emotive language, also known as sensationalist language. If the language is moderate then the score is zero. However, if the journalist is overexcited and overdramatizing the issue, then 0.5 is removed from the overall score;

(7) LABEL—“Labeling” of conflict parties as good and bad. It is very common for news stories to imply that the one side is “the baddies” and the other is “the goodies”, e.g., particularly the journalist referring to “terrorists” without attributing the term to a specific speaker;

(8) PART—Partisan reporting refers to the journalist using “we” language aligning himself and the viewer with the Government, or America, or another party in conflict.

A story which includes material satisfying criteria under any one of the first five headings will score a point. One that includes all five will score five points. So each individual story will be “scored” initially five.

To recognize that the last three indicators are the least important, compared with the main framing characteristics, each will be allocated the score of 0.5, to be subtracted from the initial score in which such uses of language occur. So the maximum “score” for any story is +1.5 and the minimum is -1.5. “Scores” for each media outlet and for each country will be expressed as mean averages.
To avoid any subjective influence that could affect the results, three different codifiers applied this code and decided if the indicator showed peace journalism or a war journalism trend.

Results

The New York Times

*The New York Times* provides the reader with a context to help with the understanding of news. This newspaper focuses on transmitting the facts not the opinions of the witness or the politicians (see Table 2).

In the articles read or analyzed, it does not show a particular interest for the people involved, or it only mentions them briefly. An important issue is the fact that *The NY Times* denounces and discovers government hidden facts and its connection with drug trafficking. It is not affiliated with any political Mexican ideology.

The drawbacks of this newspaper lie in the language used: the words are used in such a way that they allow the reader to affirm that the journalist is taking the side of one of the parties. Furthermore, the emotional language tends to enhance rather than inform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Nota</th>
<th>BKGD</th>
<th>VIEWS</th>
<th>IDEA</th>
<th>PROP</th>
<th>PEACE</th>
<th>EMOT</th>
<th>LABEL</th>
<th>PART</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>05/05/2012</td>
<td>Lessons of Iraq help U.S. fight a drug war in Honduras</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>05/05/2012</td>
<td>Mexico: 23 bodies discovered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>03/05/2012</td>
<td>Three photographers found dead in Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>02/05/2012</td>
<td>Mexico ex-president calls drug war “useless”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>01/05/2012</td>
<td>Mexican reporter killed in an other case unlikely to be solved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28/04/2012</td>
<td>Reporter for Mexican magazine killed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22/04/2012</td>
<td>Mexican ex-general once acused of narco ties is shot dead</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

La Jornada

*La Jornada* tries to be very objective regarding its notes on drug trafficking since it lets you know the two sides of the story. It is very desirable that all the notes comply with the feature give context. In the author opinion, this is because of the fact that Mexican readers get a great deal of news every day and they are informed about the context in which the drug dealing issue is developed.

Contrary to what peace journalism proposes, possible solutions to the problems are not given in their notes. People are only informed about that note. In other analyses, which this author has performed about *La Jornada*, the fact that this newspaper is left-winged and shown common people those who suffered the effects of a problem and presented solutions, which in many occasions implied some kind of criticism to capitalism and the government. In this analysis, the fact that in the articles, solutions, and/or proposals are not presented has drawn the author’s attention; only one of the articles analyzed presents a statement about a possible solution to the drug dealing problem: the legalization of drugs. There is a solution, which is quite controversial and accepted only by some sectors: the left-winged and the pragmatic (Chavat, 2010).

Regarding the language being used, it is striking and against the proposals of peace journalism, the good and bad parts almost always are labeled the government and the narco—consequently, sides are taken. This
issue is discussed below (see Table 3).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>News</th>
<th>BKGD</th>
<th>VIEWS</th>
<th>IDEA</th>
<th>PROP</th>
<th>PEACE</th>
<th>EMOT</th>
<th>LABEL</th>
<th>PART</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24/04/2012</td>
<td>Criminalizing drug use doesn’t work anymore, warns Jose Narro.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26/04/2012</td>
<td>The Government inflates results of their actions against drugs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28/04/2012</td>
<td>Failed anti-drug policy; nonsense, not to listen to other opinions: Narro.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>03/05/2012</td>
<td>Alleged henchmen face army and PF in Sinaloa and Zacatecas; 18 dead.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>04/05/2012</td>
<td>Arrested 52 people operating in the State of Mexico; they would be linked to the drug.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>04/05/2012</td>
<td>The bodies of three journalists and a young woman found in Boca del Rio.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>05/05/2012</td>
<td>By war between cartels, 23 executed in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>05/05/2012</td>
<td>Escalating war between cartels in Nuevo Laredo; yesterday, 23 dead</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*El Mundo*

*El Mundo* has a much more centered opinion on what it writes; tenacity and fairness are two of the characteristics found in this site showing no positions or opinions.

In the same way, a broad investigation of its subjects is shown (see Table 4). Esta característica del periódico es muy importante porque refleja que se hace un buen periodismo, más profundo: un periodismo de investigación. De hecho este diario español se preocupa de ser un medio que alienta a sus reporteros a que hagan periodismo de investigación (This characteristic of the newspaper is very remarkable because it shows that good journalism is practiced investigative journalism. As a matter of fact, *El Mundo* is proud of being one of the most investigative newspapers in Spain).

The relevance of this kind of journalism in the coverage is as complex as drugs themselves. The author consider that in the exercise of journalism, a journalist must more frequently tend to investigative journalism than to declarative journalism. If the means of communication which reach the most of the population not only build the social reality but also influence what the people know, then investigative journalism collaborates with this task by contributing new topics in the agenda—regarding the proposal of the agenda setting—and by further broadening the spectrum of news events.

As it can be seen, this is the newspaper that most meets the propositions of peace journalism.

It is relevant to mention that this paper does not use emotive language or describes parties as good or bad. This last category turns out to be very complicated and requires some nuances, which will further be
explained.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>BKGD</th>
<th>VIEWS</th>
<th>IDEA</th>
<th>PROP</th>
<th>PEACE</th>
<th>EMOT</th>
<th>LABEL</th>
<th>PART</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>03/05/2012</td>
<td>Two matrilineal clans engaged in drug trafficking and cockfighting were disarticulated.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>03/05/2012</td>
<td>10 people arrested in an antidrug operation in Alcalá de Guadaíra.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30/04/2012</td>
<td>Two tons of hashish seized between the coasts of Granada and Malaga. Was canceled the expulsion of the judge sanctioned for allegedly helping a drug trafficker.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>03/05/2012</td>
<td>Businessman arrested on suspicion of drug lived at full speed with his disability pension.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>04/05/2012</td>
<td>23 bodies found, nine hung from a bridge and 14 decapitated in Mexico.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>04/05/2012</td>
<td>Dismantling a booth that laundered more than 13 million drug trafficking.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>04/05/2012</td>
<td>Eight people arrested who allegedly distributed drugs from Alicante</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>04/05/2012</td>
<td>Caught 4.5 kilos of high purity cocaine at the airport in Loiu.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the Sites

The results obtained (landed) allow us to compare the news generated by the newspapers in two levels; the first one is a general level, and the second one is its degree of affinity with the proposals of peace journalism.

As for the first level, we realized that the only news found in the three newspapers is the death of 23 people linked to drug trafficking. The Spanish newspaper is the one, which uses the most sensationalist headline when describing in the headline how these people were murdered. In Spain, the newspaper El Mundo tends to be considered as a sensationalist paper. However, in the analysis of the body of the news, it is seen that the tone used by the journalists is not emotional, for which it seems to me that the very intention of the headline is to attract the reader, though the rest of the news has a more sober language. In previous research done by this author (Nicolas, 2009), the fact that that the headlines are set in the newsrooms and not exactly by the journalist has been confirmed, this appears to be true here again.

Along the 15 days analyzed, more murders, reported only by the New Continent newspapers, are reported. This seems to confirm a news practice related to the geographical distance and to the number of deaths, in order for news, which happened in a foreign country to be taken into consideration, the number of deaths has to be high. In order to know in detail the number of victims that this problem has left this issue, the following figure is presented (see Figure 1). It shows the number of homicides by the State in the Mexican Republic.
Another important data is that the Mexican newspaper only informs about news related to drug trafficking which have happened in the Mexican territory, whereas the Spanish newspaper gives news about drugs mainly in its territory does mention a news about Mexico: It is evident that both countries have a drug dealing problem; still, the difference between the problems is evident too. In Spain, the problem focuses on drug trafficking, while in Mexico the problem is causing insecurity, organized crime, and corruption. Each country has its own special problems, in the case of the Latin American country the social problem of drugs is not only an issue of addiction, but a security issue, which is further enhanced by poverty, corruption, and demand from neighboring countries (Guerrero, 2011). In regards to the United States, notes are focused on events that have occurred in Mexico and only a news report about another Latin American country, reflecting its readers is that those problems occur abroad.

Regarding the peace journalism scores, El Mundo was the highest, while the lowest was La Jornada. The New York Times ranges from a half to a low score on some reports. Generally speaking, the poorest performance reporting is La Jornada (see Figure 2). The next graph shows the scores by category, by average, and by newspaper.
El Mundo is the highest rated out in the first category; in the same way The New York Times highlighted in some reports and ratings, while others get very low scores. The one that has a poorest performance is La Jornada, despite the fact that it keeps a more linear score and does not hold as many peaks as the other two (see Figure 3).

As shown in Figure 3 we find that both the American and the Mexican newspapers agree to label as good and bad parts, while the Spanish does not. An analysis of each of the news of the world explains this issue. The 88.88% of the notes refers to arrests and seizure of drugs, not crimes caused by traffickers. The author think that the root is found here since the problem of drug trafficking in Mexico is different from that in Spain and therefore it is more difficult not to qualify it as evil, those who not only act illegally and cause physical harm but also seduce and involve vulnerable subjects of society and ally with the corrupt.

Discussion

Regarding the second question in the previously analyzed news from The New York Times, it is possible to appreciate how an ideology is always present, as controversial subjects are often mentioned. A clear example of this point is the complete article called “Ex-president of Mexico calls drug war ‘useless’”: “The country that imposed the prohibition, the country that applies punishments and considers drugs a crime is the country that uses the most drugs in the world”, said by ex-president Vicente Fox.

It is highly notorious that when the news talks about a foreign country, The New York Times shows more freedom of expression than the Mexican media. Nonetheless, we noticed that news in which the United States is mentioned are expressed superficially and lacking strong criticism against the country, e.g., “This new offensive, emerging just as the United States military winds down its conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and is moving to confront emerging threats…” from the article called: “Lessons of Iraq Help U.S. Fight a Drug War in Honduras”.

The New York Times is a newspaper which includes a context so that the reader gets informed quickly without having to follow the news too closely. We could see that The New York Times is a medium that
respects the public space in which the news emerge. It keeps neutral in both national and international situations.

Another point in favor of *The New York Times* is the fact that is a medium that denounces hidden and controversial events. It is clear as it shows information not normally spread in its country of origin. In our opinion *The New York Times* is a newspaper that does not hide the truth from the people for which we consider convenient to say that it is an ethical and objective medium.

Something that drew the author’s attention was the fact that on a regular basis in the coverage of events related to drugs, there is not a single story regarding the consumption of drugs, though the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) 2010 showed that the number of young people who consume drugs rose. In 2008, 19.6% of the people between 18-25 years old used drugs, but in the survey 2010 that number increased to 21.5%.

As president Obama said on September 20 in an interview held at Univision Town Hall Miami: “We make a mistake if we just say this is Mexico’s problem because we obviously generate a lot of demand for drugs in this country, and guns and cash flow south at the same time as drugs flow north” (Capbell, 2012). From the author’s very particular point of view, if the president himself is already accepting the connection of drug problem between Mexico and the United States, some American newspapers should take into consideration this connection in order to give a wider background in the coverage of drug stories.

On the other hand, the Mexican newspaper is not as objective as thought. Even though in the section on how to write notes (background, ideas, solutions...) there are some good aspects, when it comes to the sentimental, *La Jornada* is a newspaper, although not 100% explicit, which tends to show their positions or ideas.

In reading the notes, the reader appreciates that the “background” of what happened is explained, so you can better understand what is happening and have a much broader picture, so you can opt for a position in a much more objective way. Example of which can be found in the note: “The bodies of three journalists and a young woman found in Boca del Rio” on May 4.

The lifeless bodies of photojournalists Gabriel Huge, Guillermo Luna Varela, and Esteban Rodriguez, as well as the girlfriend of one of them, Irasema Becerra, secretary in another local newspaper, were found Friday morning in the channel La Zamorana, premises of the dwelling unit Las Vegas II, north of this city...

Gabriel Huge Córdoba, 37 years old, served until August of last year as a photojournalist with Notiver and he was currently working with police information for a radio station, La Max, in the Papaloapan basin, Guillermo Luna, about 20 years old, was currently working in the online news portal VeracruzNews.

With this example it can be seen that in *La Jornada*, although not including a large “background” of the news, it explains the most important and relevant facts, promoting the reader to understand the reason for the facts occurred in a much clearer way.

In terms of ideas proposed to solve the problem, *La Jornada* is a newspaper characterized for not giving the proper importance to facts. This means that only one of the notes of *La Jornada* mentions a solution to stop or end the drug trade. Thus, we can conclude that *La Jornada* seeks only to inform all the different scenarios that the drug trafficking issue can take.

The same goes for stories mentioning the appearance of peace or conflict occurring after violent events. Just a single note of *La Jornada* mentions this item.
On the subjectivity of the news, due to their language, the newspaper *La Jornada* is characterized by the failure to comply with all indicators that a note should have to be 100% objective.

Regarding emotions, in none of the notes analyzed in *La Jornada* are there phrases or words that show that they reject or approve the facts. As for this issue, it is quite objective; however, when the positions are taken, it is evident that *La Jornada* tends to take one of the sides. An example of this is the notes that have to do with the murders of journalists.

The author thinks that the analysis made above about *La Jornada* would be incomplete if we do not take into consideration the context in which journalism in Mexico is exercised. The scenario is really complicated, on the one hand, today journalists receive orders from members of organized crime networks, and particularly, from drug cartels, as noted by the Drug Enforcement Agency of the U.S. (Lara, 2007). On the other hand, not only do they receive orders, journalists are also “hunted” by the narcos, as it is showed in the article published in *La Jornada* on May 4, 2012: The bodies of three journalists and a Young woman found in Boca del Río.

To make it even worse, these murders are not correctly prosecuted and punished. According to the Red de Protección a Periodistas y Medios de Comunicación (RPMP), “Almost all of the crimes against communicators have gone unpunished, which affects not only the rule of law but the construction of a democratic society that all of us (Mexicans) aspire to” (Article 19, Oficina para México y Centroamérica & Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social, 2011).

All the information mentioned before has raised the potential danger for Mexican journalists, in the last years.

The third newspaper analyzed *El Mundo* is very focused on its journalism and it is appreciated that there are no personal opinions from the journalist. What is also worth noticing is the background used to present its reports which help us develop a clearer idea of what we are reading.

Having a central position, the readers are forced to know the propositions of both parties and not just one side of the “justice” or “good”. It is objective and unbiased which is reflected on its reports in which they present the ideas of both parties.

*El Mundo* does remarkable journalism particularly in the situation in which Mexico is living nowadays. And in the fact that staying out has nothing to do with the nationality of the newspaper, however, keeping its way of writing and the principles and values which build quality journalism is certainly something to value. It is one of the leading newspapers in Spain and when it is read it is appreciated that it considers Mexico as a country genuinely struggling with a problem called drug trafficking and not as many media do: a country that is “practically” at war and that simply going out to the street is enough to very possibly die in a shootout.

The aim of the study is to offer a quantitative contribution to topics that have especially been discussed from a traditional and story telling point of view. Therefore, the author considers that by using Galtung’s categories and classification of peace and war journalism, conflicts covered in news can be framed and hence help the mass media in the training for peace journalism programs and courses.

However, as discussed above, it seems that the application of the proposed analysis and model codes of peace journalism requires adaptation or at least a hint in regards to avoid categorizing into good parts and bad parts, since, in the case of organized crime, it can not be avoided to qualify as evil, those who act illegally and cause physical and moral evil to society; not only do they injure, or kill, they also entice many young in poverty.
and poor education to opt for the path of drug trafficking, a path that, as the so-called “narcocorridos” say: It is a short life but it is sure enjoyed.

With the objective of increasing the practice of peace journalism in the conflict coverage, American, Mexican, and Spanish newspapers must pay special attention to those categories in which a war journalism focus is shown. These are: giving voice to the views of all rival parties and mentioning the possible solutions to the conflict.

I want to acknowledge the work of the journalist who follows the principles of peace journalism when writing the news, since frightening and emotional terms are avoided.

For further research it is important to take into consideration this issue: writing on the drug trade is a sensitive issue, especially because journalists who are used to covering these events are in danger of being killed by drug traffickers, and on the other hand, they are prone to fall in tabloid sensationalism and mercantilism.

I consider that the quality standards proposed by the peace journalism model could improve the practice of journalism. Fostering investigative journalism, like peace journalism proposes, contributes to have a better-informed public and in the long run to strengthen the democratic process.

**References**


Appendix A: The Newspapers

The New York Times: It is a journal (daily) in a Broadsheet Format and its country of origin is the United States. The New York Times was founded on September 18, 1851, by journalist and politician Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones. It is owned by The New York Times Company and it is written in English. Its editor is Bill Keller. The New York Times is considered as a liberal diary biased to the “left”. It has a daily circulation of 1,039,031 and 1,451,233 on Sundays. The web site is: www.nytimes.com

La Jornada: It is a general information left-winged newspaper (daily), whose country of origin is Mexico. It was founded on September 19, 1984, by Carlos Payán. The current owner of La Jornada is Desarrollo de Medios de S. A. de C. V., the main written language is Spanish, the editor is Jorge de Esteban, the director is Carmen Lira Saade, and the ideology is left-winged. It has a daily circulation of 10,700. The web site is: www.jornada.unam.mx

El Mundo: It is Berliner format newspaper (daily), whose country of origin is Spain. Its headquarter is located in Avenida San Luis 25, Madrid, Spain. It was founded on October 23, 1989, by Alfonso de Salas, Pedro J. Ramírez, Balbino Fraga, Juan González, and Melchor Miralles. Its current owner is Unidad Editorial, S. A. Its main written language is Spanish. The editor is Jorge de Esteban. The director is Pedro J. Ramírez. Its ideology is liberal, right-centered. It has a daily circulation of 362,284. The web site is: www.elmundo.es
“They Are Kind of Like Magic”: Why U.S. Mothers Use Baby Videos With 12- to 24-Month-Olds

Erin L. Ryan
Kennesaw State University, Georgia, USA

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no “screen time” for children under age of two, parents in the US are ignoring this edict. Routinely, mothers are exposing their babies to media crafted specifically for this age group. This study seeks to ascertain the reason. What beliefs do mothers hold regarding the marketing of such media and the expected benefits to their young ones? How does the use of videos such as Baby Einstein benefit the mother? Although mothers reported that video creators want them to think the videos are educational, they are skeptical. However, they continue to let babies watch this “safe” content. Among the 28 mothers interviewed for this project, only four claimed to always watch with their child; the remainder used “video time” to do household chores. Overwhelmingly, mothers heard positive comments about videos from fellow parents, but rarely heard from their pediatricians about possible negative effects on the under-two’s.

Keywords: Baby Einstein/Mozart Effect, educational, first-person effect, baby videos

As has been well publicized, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended children under age of two receive no “screen time” (1999). However, the availability of media crafted specifically for the under-two’s makes it difficult for parents to follow this edict. For years, creators of children’s television programs have targeted this “diaper demographic” and now companies such as Baby Einstein, Brainy Baby, Nickelodeon, and even Sesame Workshop have capitalized on the infant DVD market. Even in the wake of Baby Einstein offering refunds to parents who “mistakenly” thought they were buying an educational product (Lewin, 2009) and the demise of the “Your Baby Can Read” company due to the high cost of fighting “false and deceptive” advertising claims in court (Crary, 2012), parents still appear to be fans of so-called educational baby videos.

The appeal of this industry is largely based on the widely-held belief in the so-called “Mozart Effect”. In 1993, Rauscher, Shaw, and Ky claimed that exposure to Mozart increased college students’ scores on a standardized test, although follow-up studies with children failed to replicate these findings, the notion that “Mozart makes you smarter” (Rauscher & Hinton, 2006, p. 233) permeated the media, and an entire “Mozart Effect” industry was born. The appearance of books, DVDs, and CDs, such Mozart for Mommies and Daddies—Jumpstart your Newborn’s IQ, have fed into the cultural myth of an exaggerated effect on infant cognition from listening to classical music.

As Gothie (2006) explained, either parents have not heard the Mozart Effect has been debunked or have simply chosen to ignore it, because the infant DVD market has virtually exploded. Such companies, termed the

Erin L. Ryan, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, Kennesaw State University.
“Baby Genius Edutainment Complex” (Quart, 2006), intimate they are providing parents with harmless entertainment with the potential to make children smarter. Indeed, one popular press article exclaimed:

> With primary colors and classical music, Baby Einstein swallowed my guilt as a new parent for feeling the need to plop my son—every once in a while, just for a little while—in front of a TV screen. It was, after all, educational. Look at the title! (Cramer, 2007, n. p.)

Additionally, beliefs in the potential to learn from such content may play a role in the decision to use videos. Many parents hold “projected illusions” about their children (Taylor & Brown, 1988), rating them as having fewer negative traits and more positive traits than other children (Cohen & Fowers, 2004). Parents also report third-person perceptions on behalf of their children, believing them less affected by harmful mediated messages than others (e.g., Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002). Meirick, Sims, Gilchrest, and Croucher (2009) had now extended this third-person perception and reversed it for desirable content, calling it a “first-person perception”. Parents in their study overestimated the educational effects of programs such as Sesame Street on their children. Thus, perhaps first-person perception leads parents to believe their children will benefit more than others from baby videos.

**Viewership and Attention to Television**

Parents are not taking the AAP’s “no TV under two” mandate to heart. Very young children are exposed to more than an hour of televised media per day (Pierroutsakos, Hanna, Self, Lewis, & Brewer, 2004; Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003). Pierroutsakos et al. (2004) also determined the average family owned six baby videos, with many parents believing they were beneficial because they taught social skills and language. Parents reported their babies were less fussy and more focused on the television when these programs were playing; Barr, Chavez, Fujimoto, Garcia, Muetener, and Strait (as cited in Anderson & Pempek, 2005) found when infant-geared programs are on television, babies spend 50%-75% of the time actively, overtly looking at the screen.

Whereas research has established quantity of exposure, little is known about how effects of early exposure will manifest. As Anderson and Pempek (2005) noted, research suggests too much time spent with media may be harmful to children over time (e.g., childhood obesity concerns), but the evidence is weak and open to multiple interpretations. However, they caution that parents are engaging in a vast and uncontrolled experiment by exposing young children to so much media without any knowledge of future effects.

**The Video Deficit**

Although children under two are indeed watching television and videos, and appear to be engaged with the content, one of the burning questions continues to be: Can babies learn from these products? Due to research by Anderson and colleagues (e.g., Anderson & Pempek, 2005) on the “video deficit effect,” the answer is that babies might learn some basics after repeated viewings, but will learn much more from real-world models. Research has investigated, documented, and supported this deficit, including studies of imitation (e.g., Hayne, Herbert, & Simcock, 2003), language learning (e.g., Kuhl, Tsao, & Liu, 2003), and learning from televised emotional responses (e.g., Mumme & Fernald, 2003). Time and again, studies reveal children under two have great difficulty learning from video, learning more readily from face-to-face educational scenarios.
Research Questions

Despite the video deficit, and no support for a Mozart Effect, parents continue to use “educational” baby videos. This study seeks to determine the reason. First, the marketing of baby media may factor into purchasing decisions. Ryan (2008) found that marketing by baby video industry leaders suggests their products are somehow educational, despite complaints to the Federal Trade Commission that such advertising is false and deceptive because the claims are based on parental anecdotes rather than research (Golin, 2008). In order to gauge parental response to such marketing, the following research questions were posed:

- RQ1: What impressions are parents getting about baby videos via marketing efforts by the baby video industry?
- RQ2: Do parents think that their purchasing decisions of baby videos—and decisions to expose their children to baby videos—are affected by the marketing of the products?

This study also sought to determine (as first-person perception research suggests) whether parents believe baby videos have positive effects on their children. Thus, the following questions were asked:

- RQ3: Do parents see baby videos as “educational” media products?
- RQ4: Why do parents choose to use/not use these videos? What do they think these products can “do” for their children?

Lastly, this study sought to determine if parents believe the industry has affected their parenting choices. Thus, two additional research questions were explored:

- RQ5: How do parents think the use of baby videos benefit the parent?
- RQ6: What kind of discussions do parents of under-two’s have with other parents and pediatricians about baby media use?

Methodology

Sample and Recruitment of Participants

Twenty-eight parents of children between 12 and 24 months were recruited (as part of a larger project) via electronic listservs and word-of-mouth snowball sampling, and each agreed to participate in an in-depth interview. These parents largely resided in a mid-sized southeastern town in the U.S. Twenty-six parents were interviewed at home and two at work in the spring of 2008.

Interview Format and Protocol

An “interview guide” was used, rather than the more formal “interview schedule” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Gordon (1969) explained that the interview guide “emphasizes the goals of the interview in terms of the topics to be explored and the criteria of a relevant and adequate response” (pp. 264-265). All interviews began with the “grand tour” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) question: Does your child watch television? If a participant answered “yes,” follow-up questions were asked such as “Does he/she watch every day?” and “What types of programs does he/she watch?”. If parents answered “no,” they were asked to explain why their child did not watch (p. 195).

Parents were allowed to elaborate on any topic. To address the research questions, additional key topics included whether the family owned baby videos, how their child behaved while watching, what impressions the parent was given from marketing and advertising, and how their pediatricians and other parents felt about such products. Demographic information on both mother and child was also collected via a short questionnaire.
WHY U.S. MOTHERS USE BABY VIDEOS

Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, and transcripts were analyzed via categorization of themes. Open coding, defined by Strauss (1987) as unrestricted coding of data line-by-line, as well as axial coding, or the relation of “subcategories to categories and the development of the properties and dimensions of the categories” was utilized (Morgan, 2006, p. 35). Thus, the data were continuously categorized and re-categorized as new themes emerged.

Every attempt was made to maintain standards of trustworthiness by emphasizing credibility, dependability, and confirmability throughout the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An additional validity check was completed via member validation. While the analysis was still in-progress, preliminary findings were taken back to two participating parents who were asked questions such as: “Is there anything you believe was misrepresented” and “Does this appear to be a fair assessment of your statements?”.

Results

Demographics and Use of Media

The mean age of parents was 33.87 years. All of the parents interviewed were female; 27 were Caucasian and one identified herself as African (see Table 1).

Most parents either watched television programs created primarily for adults (N = 9) or a mixture of adult and kid/baby programming (N = 11). Many (N = 17) said they would not purchase baby videos for themselves, nor would they purchase them for others in the future (N = 16). Parents were asked several questions regarding their children’s media use, and the resulting frequencies are presented in Table 2. Only six children did not regularly watch television. Among the 22 children who did watch, 15 professed a “favorite” show. The majority of parents believed content such as characters and music was the reasons why these shows were favorites. Two parents touted the interactive nature of the program (Sesame Street and Dora the Explorer) as the reason why it was a favorite. When questioned specifically about baby videos, 19 parents claimed to own them: some were given as gifts, some were bought for their child, and some were “hand-me-downs” from older siblings or friends, neighbors, and family.

Only four parents said they “always” watched television with their child, and others said they either “sometimes” watched with their children or the children primarily watched with siblings. Many children who watched with siblings saw programs that were not age-appropriate (e.g., Spiderman, Batman, and Spongebob Squarepants) because older siblings chose the programming. When asked about her children’s television use, one parent of 19-month-old female twins explained:

They probably see some television every day… but [their older sibling] tends to be more of a TV person than the babies are, and so when she gets up in the morning she wants the TV on while she’s getting ready, so as the babies get up the TV’s there… one of the things I’ve always been concerned about with them is having things on like their older sibling likes—things like Spongebob Squarepants—and I feel like there is too much going on, too much noise, too much stimulation, so I try to keep them away from that kind of stuff.

This mother is obviously concerned that her little ones might be exposed to age-inappropriate content, but when they watch with big sister it is a possibility. In any home with children of different ages, this could be the domestic reality.
Table 1

*Parental Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Faculty</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-at-home Mom</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professional</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales/Accounting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished a Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-19,999</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-29,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-39,999</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-69,999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000-79,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $100,000</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours/Week spent with TV:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 minutes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hours</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nine parents “sometimes” watch with their children, and were asked what types of duties they perform when they allow their child to watch alone. Seven parents used that time to “tidy up”, do dishes, vacuum, cook, and generally “get things done”. A mother of a 22-month-old male explained:

I so don’t approve as television as a babysitter, but if it’s Saturday and I need to get these floors vacuumed, that’ll keep him occupied without ripping toys out… I’m trying to vacuum and that’s obviously not going to be good, if he’s taking toys out, so that just lets him be in one place and he enjoys it, he asks for it.

Another parent of a 21-month-old male explained that sometimes safety is more important than
entertainment value:

I would say probably in the scheme of things I don’t think it’s as good as other activities that the child could be engaged in, but the reality is sometimes when you have to get dinner on the table, it might be a good thing to watch a *Barney* video as opposed to touching the oven door when it’s open.

Table 2

*Parental Interview Answers: Frequencies (N = 28)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Parental response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your child watch television?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, does he/she have a favorite television program?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorites include:</td>
<td><em>Curious George</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mickey Mouse Clubhouse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sesame Street</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wonder Pets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dora the Explorer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jack’s Big Music Show</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spongebob Squarepants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teletubbies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Wiggles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winnie the Pooh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baby First Channel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes this a favorite?</td>
<td>The music</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The character</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s the only thing she’ll watch</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you own any baby videos?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you come to own them?</td>
<td>It was a gift</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-me-down</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bought</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you watch TV/videos with your child?</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They watch with siblings</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What types of tasks do you perform while your child is watching?</td>
<td>Clean/Cook</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take a shower</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work/Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever discussed the use of baby videos with your pediatrician?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever discussed the use of baby videos with other parents?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tone of these conversations with other parents was primarily:</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Some parents gave more than one answer to this question, and not all parents responded to this question.

A third of the parents also specifically noted that they played baby videos so they could take showers. Lastly, three parents used videos to keep children occupied while they worked or studied. These parents appeared to believe that “baby” programming was safe enough to function as unsupervised entertainment. Most parents, however, were quick to explain that they only left their children alone to watch for 10-30 minutes; according to these parents, the children were not left alone in front of the TV all day. However, one parent of a 19-month-old male did say, “I wouldn’t get anything done if he didn’t watch TV!”.
Discussion of Media Use With Others

Given the AAP’s stance on television viewing before age of two, each parent was asked whether their children’s pediatrician asks about media use during regular check-ups. Twenty of the 28 parents have never been asked about such usage. Of the eight parents whose pediatricians do regularly ask about media habits, two of them explained their doctor asks about usage but does not necessarily tell them not to show televised media. One parent explained that her pediatrician says “less than 30 minutes a day” whereas other parents are told “zero television”; in fact, two parents mentioned the AAP by name, and three others quoted the organization’s “no television under age two” mantra. Only two parents indicated their pediatricians took the issue quite seriously, and yet both parents still allowed their children to watch. A mother of a 22-month-old male explained it in this way:

He [the pediatrician] pushes it pretty hard—that’s kind of his soapbox—but when it came down to we couldn’t cut his fingernails without my son’ screaming, or watching it for 10-15 minutes, I was just like “15 minutes isn’t going to do anything to hurt him.” But I know that part of the concern with younger kids is that they’re not learning, they’re just vegging, and they say that if you talk to them—you know, when dirt falls on Thomas [The Tank Engine], “oh, no!” you know “he’s stuck!” or whatever—and then it is less so that he can just completely zone out and veg.

Clearly this mother understood the risks, but found TV to be quite helpful when managing her child, regardless of her pediatrician’s strict anti-television policy.

Parents were also questioned about whether they talk to other parents about baby videos, and an overwhelming 26 parents reported doing so. Although four parents heard both positive and negative comments from other parents, 21 reported having heard only positive comments. In fact one parent of a 25-month-old male recalled having heard the Baby Einstein DVDs referred to as “magic”:

I have a friend whose son has to have asthma treatments, and that’s the only way they can get him to do [the treatments], like hold the stuff in front of his nose and breathe it in… put one of those [Baby Einstein DVDs] in, and he’ll just sit there for 20 minutes while they hold it in front of his face. So they are kind of like magic.

Many mothers also mentioned that other parents recommended baby videos—Baby Einstein in particular—when they were pregnant. A mother of an 18-month-old female explained: “I remember when I was pregnant people would say, ‘You’ve got to get some Baby Einsteins’ or ‘Make sure you register for Baby Einsteins’”.

Some parents reported that it was almost an assumption that “everyone” used baby videos. For example, one mother of a 12-month-old explained: “Actually, when I told someone that I used the Baby Signs or the Baby Einstein First Signs video, their comment to me was, ‘Oh, that’s not the one I use, I use Signing Time’.”

Another parent of a 19-month-old male explained: “I believe every parent I know owns them—owns several of them—and everybody registers for them and we all use them to get our child to sit and veg out for a few minutes.”

An interesting implication of the “everybody has Baby Einstein” mentality is what could be termed “the badge factor”. Showing baby videos seems to be viewed as an essential part of “good” parenting; if you do not have Baby Einstein, you are not a good parent or have inferior parenting skills. These videos have become part of the parenting self-concept. In the new millennium, it seems almost taken for granted that baby videos are part of parenting paraphernalia.
Overall, parents gave the impression that the Baby Einstein brand was viewed as “the gold standard” in the baby video market. Regarding Baby Einstein, one mother of a 12-month-old female said: “My impressions that I get from other people is that it’s sort of the industry leader—this is where you go if you want to educate your baby. It’s sort of a standard I guess.”

Obviously the Disney Company would be ecstatic to hear that parents view their product so positively, though the parents interviewed for this project do not necessarily buy into the educational usefulness of baby videos, as discussed below.

**Parent’s Impressions: Marketing**

When questioned about impressions from the marketing and advertising of baby videos, parents overwhelmingly believed companies want consumers to *think* the products are educational. One parent of a 12-month-old male directly addressed the name of the company as a metaphor for “genius”:

I feel like when the names say it all, like “Baby Einstein”, I feel like the promise they’re making is that your baby will be smarter or will learn quickly… you’ll be giving your baby some advantage because by the time they start preschool they’ll already know all these things.

Some parents specifically referenced the “classics” to which babies would be exposed. One mother of an 18-month-old female explained: “I know they try to say that the Einstein’s supposedly going to teach your child things and help them learn things, and they want to bring in classic type of things, like art.”

Another mother of a 19-month-old female noted: “Well, honestly the appeal to me is knowing that they’re watching something that has classical music—it’s not very highly stimulating… and they’re getting an introduction to objects and sounds and words.”

Many parents began their responses with “Supposedly…” , “They’re trying to…”, or “They say they are…” followed by an explanation of how these companies convince the parents that their products are educational. As a mother of a 22-month-old male explained: “I think they obviously purport to increase your child’s intelligence, not intelligence necessarily, but maybe to further their knowledge in basic things like letters, numbers, and shapes.”

Another mother of a 19-month-old male agreed:

Based on the advertisements I would say that they tell you that they are going to learn things and that they are going to be stimulated—that the music helps them and that… they’re going to give them higher thinking and things like that. I definitely think they’re pushing that they’re good for them and that they’re going to help them.

Although most parents believed these companies advertise their products as educational, they were quick to explain that they are not sure the videos they live up to expectations.

**Parent’s Impressions: Educational Benefits**

Parents who addressed educational benefits were split into two groups: Ten believed that no learning takes place from videos, and another 12 parents believed that learning is possible, but that videos are not a child’s only “teacher”. Some parents in the first group got straight to the point: one mother of a 21-month-old male explained, “I don’t think that he’ll know his ABCs from watching a video” and a mother of a 19-month-old male said, “I know on the previews for the Baby Einstein videos it says they’ll be smarter and do better in school, and I don’t think so.” These parents were straightforward in their disbelief of the advertising claims.
The “No Learning” Group

Interestingly, many parents in the “no learning” group regularly showed baby videos to their own children, expressing that the videos might be useful in some way, just not as teaching tools. Some of these parents did not see any negative effect from the videos, using them as a convenient tool to keep their children occupied. A parent of 19-month-old female twins explained:

Baby videos are more appropriate in that they only showed usually one thing at a time, they moved more slowly—that sort of thing. I think the advertising spin has been “use these as a way to talk to your child and introduce these concepts.” But I was like, “Well, I never really thought that they taught anything.” I mean honestly, truly they bought me 10 or 15 minutes to take a shower sometimes. And I felt that they were probably the least inappropriate things they were going to see on TV.

This mother was impressed with the basic nature of the videos, the slow pace, and the appropriate content, but was not convinced of any inherent educational benefit. The benefit, rather, was that she could keep her children occupied.

Although a second mother agreed that the pace and repetitive nature of the videos were ideal, and that there was no redeeming educational value, she was not a fan of the overall concept:

I can’t tell you that I love these DVDs. They’re kind of brainwashing! I mean, they’re using classical music to make us like it. I think they’re very smart because they use the repetitive—you know, kids like, at this age, I think they like things that keep coming. They’re taking advantage of us, and to a certain extent I feel myself giving up.

Although this mother believed there was no educational quality to the DVDs, she almost felt helpless to not use the videos. She appeared to grudgingly accept that her child was entertained by the product, and used the videos when she needed time to study. Again, the benefit was not to the child, but to the mother who needed some “quiet time”.

Some mothers in the “no learning” group explained their beliefs within the larger context of television use. One mother of a 25-month-old male explained:

I think they obviously try to make it seem like “oh, this is the greatest thing you could ever do for your child” and I know that no TV is the greatest thing you could do for your child… and they even have parents come on and talk about how “oh, my child,” she pointed to something and said “octagon” like they’re learning so much, but really they would be learning so much more from the parents. I know that they promote themselves as this great thing you can do for your child, but I kind of see through that.

Whereas this mother appeared a little more concerned than others about potential negative effects, only one mother expressed that the videos could actually be harmful in some way. This mother of a 19-month-old male explained why she used them with her older child, but not her current toddler:

At the beginning I thought that they were great, but I have read way too many things that say they’re not, and that they might even be hurting them, which may be part of why I haven’t shown them the second time around.

While these two parents appear concerned about the negative effects of television under age of two, they are the exception rather than the rule.

The “Learning” Group

The second group of parents believed that although baby videos should not be the only educational tool used by parents, perhaps the videos have some capacity to teach. One parent of a 22-month-old male explained
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it in this way: “I don’t believe that they can work magic or whatever on your child, but it’s part of a supplemental thing. Just as long as you’re reading to them at home and things like that I think they’re probably useful in some way.”

Another mother of a 21-month-old male agreed, and focused on the “additive” effect of using baby videos:

I’d guess that it can be entertaining, it can be interactive if you choose for it to be, and that there may be some residual value to your child—there’s some learning that takes place. But we have usually found that the child was interested in the subject matter before we bought the video. If it was an alphabet video, it was because intense interest had been shown about the alphabet recently, and so we thought it would be cool to get an alphabet video… and so it’s mostly been more like additive to whatever else we were doing, or just pure entertainment where we were like, “If you learn something, that’s great!”

Other parents agree with this apparent “it can’t hurt, but it might help” mentality, such as this mother of an 18-month-old female: “Well, I’ve seen the advertisements and I would go for ‘educational’ rather than just a cartoon [video], but I’m not like, “Ooh, that’s going to teach my child everything she needs to know.”

Some parents specifically mentioned that videos are no substitute for interacting with your child. Several of these parents were apprehensive of using such videos as “babysitters”, such as this mother of a 23-month-old male: “The advertising makes it seem like they would learn from [the videos], and I guess if they watched it all the time it might be something, but I also look at it as ‘that’s my babysitter’ and the author does not agree with that.”

Another parent of 24-month-old female twins said she believed that these videos were a useful tool to help her interact with her children: “I’ve always thought the Baby Einstein stuff was not necessarily teaching them any of the academic things, but the music—that’s just what I look at it as, like a music thing. It’s fun—I like to talk to them about it. It’s definitely interactive.”

Overall it appears that parents in this group believe that baby videos can be useful in some way even if they are not technically “educational”. The content is “safe” and age-appropriate, even if it is not teaching anything of value.

To Use or Not To Use?

Parents choose to either use or not use baby videos for several reasons. Of the nine parents who said they did not use baby videos, several referred to the personalities and temperaments of their own children—these children simply do not pay attention to televised media. One mother of a 21-month-old male explained the longest her son ever paid attention to the screen was five minutes of a football game, believing that it was “not a draw for him”, whereas another mother of a 23-month-old male said that when the television is on: “He runs around and plays but he might stop and look at it for two minutes or whatever… so I’d rather interact with him and teach him than use a video.”

Another mother of a 12-month-old male made a similar observation: “The beginning of Spongebob is the only thing that he ever pays attention to—that beginning song. He runs to the TV, he stands there, and as soon as that song is over he’s back doing what he’s doing.”

Rather than being disinterested in the TV itself, according to three parents, some children only watch television when older siblings watch. As the older children do not want to view content for “babies”, the
parents do not even purchase it. The mother of a 14-month-old female explained that her daughter “might see 20 minutes a week of something [the older siblings] are watching” but otherwise does not watch television. Only one mother of a 12-month-old male explained she does not own baby videos because her pediatrician advised against them.

Three parents did not use baby videos because they run a “no-TV” household. One parent did not own a television, whereas the others used it sparingly. One mother of a 12-month-old male explained that “he has been exposed to TV probably five times in his life”, whereas the mother of a 21-month-old male explained that: “From day one I’ve always wanted to limit his TV so he can be more active, like outside, than just sit and watch TV. My stepson, he plays video games all the time, so I didn’t want it to be the same for him.”

This mother seemed to be concerned about her child establishing a pattern of media usage early in life, limiting the amount he watches.

Parents who did use baby videos did so for several reasons, but the primary reason does not appear to be “because my baby will learn things”. As noted above, either parents believe children learn nothing from videos or they believe children might learn something, but not much of any consequence. In fact, only one parent of a 22-month-old male claimed to buy a baby DVD with the specific intent of using it as a teaching tool: “I think I got Baby Einstein at a year because I was trying to teach him sign language, so every once in a while we’d use it just to let him see other kids use signs, because that seemed to help him a lot.”

Most parents, however, used the videos in order to get things done around the house. In addition, several parents were given videos as gifts or had them from older children, and simply put them on to see if their baby reacted to them. The mother of 24-month-old female twins explained that she originally bought videos for her oldest son and put them on “when they [the twins] were little” and since they loved the music, she continued to use them.

Some parents used videos because they witnessed positive reactions from their children, and a few even reported believing their child was actively learning from videos. A mother of a 16-month-old male explained that the Signing Time video was her son’s favorite:

He’s learned a lot of signs. We do them with him, but every now and then he’ll start to do a sign that I’ve never seen him do before. I’ve never taught him, and he’s doing it… or we’ll be doing it and I’ll see him signing along and I’m like, “I’ve never seen you do that sign before!”

One mother of a 19-month-old female gave several examples of her child interacting with and learning from educational media:

One of the reasons I do allow her to watch it as much as she does is she interacts with it the entire time. When they say “stand up and do this” she’s doing it, she’s talking back to the TV, she’s pointing out who people are, when they do the letter of the day, she says the letter, she counts with them, she does everything. Very interactive… a lot of things she’s learned, she’s learned from TV… I find it very funny that she watches the Around the House video with Marlee Matlin signing everything… and she knows about 40 or 50 words in sign language… But what I keep telling myself is that if I didn’t feel she was learning from it—and I feel that she is learning from it—that’s the reason I allow it. If she sat with a daze and the jaw hanging down, and was a couch potato [I wouldn’t allow it].

This mother’s account provides a clear example of why many parents do indeed use baby videos. Alternately, perhaps the reason why parents use the videos is simply because they exist; they are available,
and the perception is that “everybody’s doing it”. One of the most interesting comments on this subject came from a mother of a 12-month-old female, who summed up her thoughts on baby videos in this way:

We’re in a culture now where it’s the way you educate your baby. Because they’re going to be watching TV anyway, so you might as well have them watching something that’s going to develop their brain—assuming that the videos actually do develop their brain. Now I don’t think that should be a substitute for interacting with your baby or teaching them on your own—showing them this rectangle or whatever fits into this rectangle and this color matches this color or whatever—but generally I feel like it’s sort of “this is how we educate our kids now.”

Indeed, one might also wonder if the seeming lack of interest on the subject from the majority of pediatricians might lead parents to assume that exposing children to baby videos is just part of today’s culture, with no foreseeable negative consequences. However, perhaps this obsession with educating kids from birth does have some negative implications, as one mother of a 15-month-old male noted: “All I really know about the marketing is the names they’ve chosen and that emphasis [on learning], rather than ‘The Happiest Baby on the Block’ or ‘The Friendliest Baby on the Block’.”

Perhaps the Baby Genius Edutainment Complex has encouraged a culture of educating children from birth via the media, with an exaggerated emphasis placed upon learning skills rather than developing socially.

Discussion

This project approached the uncertainty surrounding the baby video industry by talking with parents about their first-hand experiences. Many parents were left with the impression that baby videos are meant to be educational. However, several parents believed no such learning actually takes place. Instead, they viewed the content as harmless and engaging, but not necessarily educational. These parents did not appear to use videos based on marketing alone. The overall parental opinion was summed up nicely by one mother who stated, “I felt that they were probably the least inappropriate things they were going to see on TV”. As noted above, many parents appeared to believe the products feature safe, guilt-free content, but not necessarily content that inspires learning.

An interesting finding is that parents are aware that videos are meant to be co-viewed with children, but very few actually followed such guidelines. In fact, only four parents reported “always” watching with their children. Parents tended to use the products as a way to keep their children occupied, allowing them to accomplish household chores.

In the past, parents might have felt more guilt about plopping a child in front of television in order to get things done around the house. As Seiter (1998) explained, once the issue of “children and television” became a controversial topic.

Experts assigned mothers the job of censoring, monitoring, and accompanying the child’s viewing. If a mother heeded the experts’ advice, she lost the free time the television provided; if she did not, she used television as a babysitter only at the cost of feeling guilty about it. (p. 311)

But no longer do parents have to feel such guilt—they have “educational” baby videos to keep their child occupied. Even if a parent does not necessarily believe a video can educate her baby, she might be tempted to use one to take a shower in peace, telling herself that it is not harmful. So despite claims made by baby video producers that the products are meant to be viewed by both parent and child, the reality is that children are most
likely watching alone.

The interviews tapped into a very odd belief system: many parents called these videos educational but did not appear to believe they actually were educational. Perhaps the term “educational”, when associated with baby videos, is culturally defined differently from when applied to traditionally educational items. Parental reference to them as educational was more tongue-in-cheek; they did not expect their child to become an “Einstein” after watching them, but at the same time they could alleviate any guilt by knowing their child was watching something “educational”. Whereas the first-person effect research suggested that parents would have claimed their children were learning from the baby videos, many parents in this study did not make such claims. However, rather than focusing on the effects on their children, perhaps parents were engaging in self-enhancing judgments about their own parental effectiveness and education-enhancing mediation (Meirick et al., 2009), while at the same time not truly expecting learning to occur. This possibility invites further study.

Parents heard mostly positive comments from fellow parents about baby videos, with the Baby Einstein name featuring prominently as the industry standard. Despite the AAP’s recommendation, however, the majority of pediatricians (as reported by these mothers) have not addressed the use of screen media before the age of two. Nevertheless, parents in this study seemed to be aware of the “no screen time” edict, which was apparent when they were pressed to put a number on the amount of time their baby spent with TV. Not one parent volunteered a specific amount, which may speak to the “guilt” factor—they know they should not put their child in front of the television, but for one reason or another, they do it anyway. Thus, perhaps they were wary of “telling on themselves” when asked.

Limitations

All research suffers from limitations. Typically, in-depth interview projects contain smaller samples sizes than, for example, experimental quantitative research, however this study may have benefitted from more parental interviews. Additionally, the sample included a homogenous group of mothers; a more diverse sample (including interviews with fathers) and one not so biased toward upper-middle class families may have yielded different results.

Conclusions and Post Script

The results of these interviews do give considerable insight into parental beliefs about television in general, and baby videos in particular. Parents can take the comments from their peers to heart, realizing that the majority of parents interviewed did let their under-two watch television and videos, and many admitted using videos as a babysitter to have some “grown-up” time to themselves. Perhaps this will lessen any feelings of guilt or inadequacy as a parent for those readers.

Overall, the label of “educational” as applied to baby videos endures, despite opposing evidence. Beginning with the all-but debunked idea of the “Mozart Effect” that continues to permeate the industry, there is almost a collective amnesia surrounding these products: mothers called the videos “educational”, and even though some reported not believing such claims they used the products anyway, all the while telling themselves that perhaps there was some educational benefits. If a parent alleviates guilt by exposing her child to something “safe” that might have some residual benefits, perhaps she can take a shower without anxiety.
The bottom line is that this industry exists to capitalize on the national preoccupation with creating intelligent children as early as possible, and it has become a multi-million dollar enterprise. Even after the publication of the Zimmerman, Christakis, and Meltzoff’s (2007) study suggesting a link between viewing Baby Einstein videos and a decrease in language development, and the Baby Einstein Company itself admitting its products are not educational, Baby Einstein products continue to fly off of the shelves. This speaks to a continued societal belief in the merits of the baby video industry, despite research demonstrating potential harm to young children. Clearly, further research is warranted in this area, particularly as new data emerges concerning the effects of baby video viewership.

References


Inclusion or Exclusion of Roma Children From the Serbian Educational System?

Barbara Jovanović
University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Yugoslavia

The Roma represents one of the major ethnolinguistic minorities in Serbia. According to the last census, 108,193 Roma citizens live in the Republic of Serbia, and they represent 1.44% of the total population. Because of the frequent migrations and unreported places of residence, it may be considered that this data do not demonstrate the real situation. According to the unofficial data of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, it is considered that there are between 400 to 500 thousand Roma citizens in Serbia. Due to a number of economic and social reasons less than 40% of Roma children become part of the overall formal education system. Even though many Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) programs try to include Roma children into educational system, segregation and discrimination are still present. The causes for exclusion of the Roma children from the Serbian educational system are numerous: poor economic situation of Roma families, complicated bureaucracy, and low level of competence in language of education, etc.. This paper examines the main reasons for exclusion of the Roma children from the Serbian educational system, and offers some ideas for programs that could change the present situation and help Roma children integrate in educational system and society.

Keywords: exclusion, inclusion, poverty, academic achievements, language of education

Introduction

The Roma people represent one of the major ethnolinguistic minorities in Serbia. According to the 2002 census, “108,193 Roma citizens lived in the Republic of Serbia (excluding Kosovo), and they represent 1.44% of the total population” (Penev, 2006, p. 84). Due to a number of economic and social reasons, only 2% of Roma children enter preschools, and less than 40% become part of the overall formal education system. Furthermore, different studies have shown that academic achievements of this ethno-linguistic community are significantly lower than those of other majority or minority communities in Serbia. Because of the frequent migrations and unreported places of residence, it may be considered that this data do not demonstrate the real situation. According to the unofficial data of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, it is considered that there are between 400 to 500 thousand Roma citizens in Serbia, which means that they represent the largest national minority in Serbia, or about 6% of the total population. “The average age of a Roma people is 27.5 and the proportion of those 65 years old or older is only 4.3%” (Penev, 2006, p. 130). This age structure is the result of high birth and death rates among Roma—four times higher than that of the majority population. In addition to being one of the largest minorities not only in Serbia but also in Europe, the Roma are also one of the most
vulnerable minorities. “If we take into account the unofficial data of the Roma population, primary education should be covered for around 82,000 Roma children, but 65,500 of them do not attend school” (Macura-Milovanović, 2008a, p. 2). Exclusion of Roma children from the educational system denies one of the basic human rights to education (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b).

Specific Problems of Exclusion of Roma Children

From the Educational System

The causes for exclusion of the Roma children from the Serbian educational system are numerous. Two of the main reasons are finances and bureaucracy. Insufficient means for the essentials of life, and the poor economic situation in which a large number of Roma families are found, is one of the reasons why the parents can not provide what is necessary for their children’s education. “Children who do not go to school are usually engaged in some kind of economic activity” (Bodewing & Sethi, 2005, p. 22). “Some of them help elders, other beg, or collect secondary materials and trash” (Bodewing & Sethi, 2005, p. 22). An additional reason for the exclusion of the Roma children from the educational system is a complicated bureaucratic procedure of enrollment in the elementary school. Many of the parents lack valid personal identification, and this alone prevents them from providing necessary paperwork for their children in school enrollment. There is also a problem of internally displaced Roma citizens. Due to unreported residence, many of the Roma children do not receive an invitation for school enrollment in their location, and their parents’ lack of interest results in many children not enrolling in the first grade with their own age group. A large number of returnees arrive in the country under very stressful conditions without any personal identification or documents, and even when they have these, the translation process by the authorized court interpreters, notaries, and the like, frequently exceeds their financial abilities (Filipović, 2009, p. 7).

Discrimination

One of the most difficult types of discrimination is institutional discrimination to which the Roma children are exposed in the educational system and it is almost always concealed. Discriminations in education could be emphasized as a system failure by not including Roma children because it has mostly dealt with discrimination recognition rather than breaking stereotypes of the Roma pupils (Simić, 2008). Concealed discrimination is mostly present in schools that do not wish to have Roma children in their classrooms, or if they have them, they are rather uninterested in keeping them. Non-Roma parents, because of their prejudices, are many times opposing school enrollments of the Roma children, and with their position, initiate discrimination in their children. Rejection and discrimination by non-Roma children and their parents sometimes lead to institutional discrimination. The data are very disturbing that 70%-90% of Roma children suffer harassment, disrespect, and other manifestations of racism, which results in social exclusion and isolation of Romani students (Simić, 2008). Ten percent to 30% of the Romani students who are enrolled in regular schools as part of compulsory education and attend classes in mix classrooms, are exposed to the lower quality of teaching (the teachers are challenging and supporting to a lesser extent than other students; the absences of Roma children are ignored; the curriculum for Roma children is being reduced; expectations and objectives of education are lower; and Roma students are rarely included in extracurricular activities) (Simić, 2008). Teachers’ lack of professional competence for teaching Roma children can also lead to discrimination. It is common for teachers to give the children topics for homework such as: “A view from my room”, or “My holiday…” it is not difficult to imagine that many Roma
children live in shacks without windows, and they rarely go outside their settlement, so because of homework topics like these a child could feel hurt and different from others in so many ways (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b). In the past, we had examples of open discrimination shown against Roma people and Roma children. When 40 Roma children from Deponija were enrolled into first-grade at the local school the parents of non-Roma children organized protest against such numerous enrollment of Roma children at their local school (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b). As a result of all this processes 20 Roma students were expelled from school. These children were aged from nine to 13 years, and the explanation was that they are too old for first-grade (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b). The mainstream society often expect the full assimilation of minority ethnic groups not only their integration.

Low education, early marriage, and economic and social dependence of Roma women reinforce discrimination of women, and limit women’s possibilities to make important decisions related to their own life and to that of their children. “The degree of success of children at school is related to the level of education of their mother” (UNICEF, 2007, p. 35).

**Low Academic Achievements**

One of the major objective problems that the Roma people face when entering the formal educational system in any European country is low level of competence in the dominant language, normally used as the language of formal education, in our case Serbian (Filipović, Vučo, & Djurić, 2010). Lower language performance may be caused by less than full proficiency in the Serbian language and the fact that Serbian is not being spoken at home (Bodewing & Sethi, 2005, p. 24).

We should find a way to develop Roma children’s competences in Serbian as the language of education, and to integrate the already existing linguistic and cultural competences of Roma children into the Serbian formal educational system (Filipović et al., 2010).

In some Roma settlements in Serbia, within the community, Roma people speak only Romani. Children who grow up there, learn exclusively Romani as they do not even have an opportunity to hear Serbian, except on television, and during rare visits to their relatives. These children find themselves in great difficulty when they start school. They are forced to learn Serbian only when they started school. It is difficult to follow classes that are completely in Serbian. Most of them overcame the language barrier only after completing second or third grade, in order to be able to follow the lessons. By then it is already very difficult to compensate what was omitted, so that a very small number of children are able to follow and master the assigned material. Children who found themselves in such a predicament were constantly falling behind compared with the children who had Serbian as their primary language. It is not surprising then that these children have the worst grades precisely in Serbian.

**Irregular School Attendance and Dropouts**

In addition to insufficient knowledge of the language of education, irregular school attendance is one of the most frequent causes of poor academic achievements of the Roma children.

Many children are left without grades because they do not attend a sufficient number of classes, which often leads to repetition of the same school grade (5% of all Roma students) before they reach the third grade, have already repeated a grade. (Macura-Milovanović, 2008a, p. 5)

Their parents often do not know why their children are absent from school but it seems that it does not really matter to them. Many of the parents never completed elementary school themselves, and they do not see
a need for their children to complete it either. Children are left to decide whether or not they want to complete
school. Insufficient parental supervision and lack of awareness of the importance of education often lead to a
complete exit from the educational system.

It is also known that Roma join in marriage at a very early age, and when they begin a family, it is more
difficult, almost impossible, to return to school. A small number of those who find themselves in such
situations opt for a sort of distance learning.

Segregation

High poverty rates, high unemployment rate, low levels of parental formal education, and traditional cultural models,
etc., within minority communities are all to be blamed for unsuccessful integration of minority children into a larger
community (stereotypes and negative attitudes of the members within the majority communities are often related to the
above factors). (Filipovic et al., 2010, p. 267)

According to the existing data, 50%-80% of the Roma children attend school for children with special
needs (Annual Report League for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2007). The presence of so many members of
one ethnic community in such institutions is alarming, because statistically, it is not probable or possible for
such a large percentage of any ethnic or other group to have a systematic need for special education (Open
Society Institute, 2010). A large number of these children are unjustly enrolled in such schools due to their lack
of knowledge of Serbian as the language of education.

Also the so-called “ghetto schools” exist and they consist solely or mainly of Roma children. Since the
children are not enrolled in school according to the territory in which they live, and the parents have the right to
choose which school to enroll their child to schools which attended by almost exclusively Roma children.
Parents of the non-Roma children avoid enrolling their children in such schools. Although they are required to
offer the same education as all of the other schools, in such schools education is of extremely low quality.
Professors and teaching staff who work in these schools appear as if they are less motivated to give their best
effort and frequently they do not even possess the basic supplies for school work.

Conclusions

The social consequences of Roma exclusion are the ongoing replication of poverty and a lack of any
opportunities for a better future (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b). Key reasons for the poor academic
accomplishments of Roma children are: low educational expectations among parents, leading to a formation of
a cultural model in which children are not encouraged to stay in school, low levels of competence in Serbian as
the language of education, and negative attitudes toward Romani as a language of education and financial
reasons. Educating the Roma children presents a huge problem, not only for this ethnolinguistic community,
but also for the rest of the population of this country.

“Minority children’s low levels of competence in the majority language (a minority’s L2), as well as
limited proficiency in their own L1 (which further inhibits their progress in L2 acquisition) is often believed to
be the main reason for their academic failure” (Filipović et al., 2010, p. 264). Preschool education is very
important because it minimizes the consequences of initial complete or partial lack of competence in Serbian,
which makes it difficult for Romani children to do well in school. Knowledge of the language of education is of
great significance for the children whose educational language is not their first language. We need a large
number of pre-school education institutions in which members of ethno-linguistic minorities could acquire
necessary competence in a language of education, in order to help ethnic minorities integrate into the mainstream educational system. This would greatly help improve their academic achievements, as well as open up a new perspective for their social and financial mobility, normally associated with higher levels of formal education. Existing attendance of Roma children in pre-schools is 3.9% in Serbia. With an increase of 5% coverage per year, due to Roma inclusion program, it will take almost 15 years until 80% of Roma children are able to attend pre-school (UNICEF, 2007, p. 49).

The fact that Roma children have few role models in their own community and have higher education and well paid jobs, is also one of the reasons for their poor academic achievement. As a consequence they have no high ambitions when education is concerned.

“The Roma children culture is often seen as negative and of less value by teachers, school personnel and by non-Roma children and their parents. Diversity is not seen as an advantage; to be different is negative” (UNICEF, 2007, p. 45). The poverty and social exclusion is transported from generation to generation, therefore reducing child poverty is fundamental for reducing overall poverty, and investment in children today is the key determinant of the success of poverty reducing programmes (UNICEF, 2007, p. 12). Education system in South East Europe has failed Roma minorities, resulting in the widespread poverty and exclusion experienced by most Roma today (UNICEF, 2007, p. 59). Improving the access to education and raising its quality are the most effective strategies for breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion for Roma (UNICEF, 2010, p. 68).

References


