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The **East African Journal of Communication Studies (EAJoCS)** is a peer-reviewed, open-access academic journal dedicated to advancing scholarship in communication across diverse social, cultural, political, and technological contexts. Established by the Centre for Communication Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, the journal provides a platform for rigorous theoretical, empirical, and interdisciplinary research in communication studies and related fields.

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Quality of Mental Health Information amongst University Students in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Approximately one in four people worldwide are living with mental disorders, prompting Zimbabwe to initiate awareness and education campaigns targeting young people. This study assesses the quality of mental health information among university students in Zimbabwe, focusing on its impact on literacy and help-seeking behaviours. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining an online questionnaire survey with university students and content analysis of conveniently selected mental health fact sheets. The findings reveal that while mental health information in Zimbabwe demonstrates strengths in areas such as completeness, validity, and timeliness, it falls short in terms of perceived accuracy, uniqueness, and consistency, with a limited impact on behaviour change. The study also shows that mental health information has a positive impact on literacy among university students, emphasizing the importance of quality information in promoting mental health awareness. Highlighted is the need for collaborative efforts among mental health experts, researchers, and health information designers to develop creative, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive interventions that inform, motivate and empower individuals to prioritize their mental health. To improve the quality and impact of mental health information, recommendations include building credibility, prioritizing creative content design, developing national messaging guidelines, and creating interventions that promote health-seeking behaviours and action.

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Introduction

Mental health challenges have since become a public health concern, affecting individuals in both industrialized and developing worlds (Rudd & Beidas, 2020; Batada & Solano, 2019). Approximately one in four people worldwide are living with mental disorders (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). This is alarming given the structural imbalance between the incapacitation by many governments to support affected individuals and the escalating rates of people requiring care (Batada, & Solano, 2019). Available studies progressively link the global increase in mental health problems to economic challenges, with the impact more concentrated in economically disadvantaged societies (Marazziti, Avella & Mucci, 2021; Wang & Fattore, 2020; Ng & Shanks, 2020). Unemployment, financial burdens, and increased workload constitute stress that has led to mental disorders and eventual suicides among middle-aged people (WHO, 2022). The mental health crisis in young people in Zimbabwe is particularly dire, threatening the well-being and potential of this demographic (Doyle, Bandason, Dauya McHugh, Grundy, Simms & Ferrand, 2023). As a proactive response, Zimbabwe has since taken an initiative to address this menace through awareness and education campaigns targeting the youth (Saruchera & Chidarikire, 2025).

As mental health awareness campaigns gain momentum, the significance of high-quality information becomes increasingly evident. According to Alshikhi and Abdullah (2018), information quality refers to "useful data that have been processed in such a way as to increase the knowledge of the person who uses the data" (p. 39). Thus far, limited studies have focused on mental health information quality in the African context, with previous research primarily conducted in developed countries, mainly evaluating online information quality in response to the emergence of digital health information. This leaves a significant knowledge gap in developing countries. For instance, Reavley & Jorm (2011) assessed the quality of mental disorder information on websites, concluding that limited understanding of this topic necessitates further investigation. Similarly,

Grohol, Slimowicz, & Granda (2014) investigated the quality of online mental health information retrieved through selected search engines, finding that while most health information online is of good quality, improving site readability is essential. More recently, Guo, Guo, Wang, & Hu (2022) examined the factors influencing the quality and helpfulness of online mental health information, determining that factors such as length, readability, and timeliness significantly impact information quality. Given the scarcity of research on mental health information quality in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, the effectiveness of such information in this context remains uncertain.

This study bridges this research gap by assessing the quality of mental health information among university students in Zimbabwe, examining its specific impact on mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviours. The research question guiding this study is: "What is the perceived quality of mental health information among university students in Zimbabwe, and how does it influence their mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviours?" 'Help-seeking behaviours' are understood through the lens of Cornally and McCarthy's (2011) definition, which emphasizes the ability to recognize a problem, articulate it, and actively seek assistance from healthcare professionals. University students are the focus of this study due to their vulnerability to mental health problems, which disproportionately affect young people, and may have a significant impact on their academic performance and overall well-being (Doyle et al., 2023). It is therefore imperative to understand the specific challenges and needs of this population, and to develop effective communication strategies for promoting mental health awareness, literacy, and support.

To achieve its aim, the study adopts a well-established model of information quality, comprising six essential dimensions: accuracy (the extent to which the information is correct and free from errors), validity (the degree to which the information is supported by evidence and reflects the reality it intends to represent), completeness (the extent to which the

information provides a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the topic), timeliness (the degree to which the information is up-to-date and relevant to the current context), consistency (the extent to which the information is consistent with other credible sources and internal logic), and uniqueness (the degree to which the information offers a distinct perspective or value) (Eronen, 2024). Several scholars have employed this model to evaluate information quality in the fields of organizational communication (Kluitmans, 2013; Arazy & Kopak, 2011; Lee & Haider, 2013; Eronen, 2024) and public health promotion (Juddoo, S., George, Duquenoy, & Windridge, 2018; Chen, Hailey, Wang, & Yu, 2014; Alipour & Ahmadi, 2017; Zhang, Sun, & Xie, 2015; Declerck, Kalra, Vander & Coorevits, 2024), demonstrating its applicability and effectiveness in assessing information quality across diverse contexts, including the current study's focus on mental health information.

Methods

This section highlights the research methods employed in this study, focusing on the research design, materials and sampling procedures, data collection and analysis methods, and ethical considerations, which collectively provide a comprehensive framework for investigating the study's research question.

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative-qualitative mixed-methods approach, utilizing an online questionnaire survey and content analysis to investigate the quality of print mental health information among university students in Zimbabwe.

Materials and Sampling Procedure

This study analyzed the quality of four mental health fact sheets produced by Zvandiri (As I am), a Zimbabwe-based community youth organization, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Childcare, PEPFAR, and USAID (see Appendix 2). These fact sheets address mental health awareness,

threats (depression, anxiety, trauma), and solution strategies. Due to the limited availability of mental health materials in Zimbabwe, convenience sampling was employed. An internet search identified Zvandiri's materials, including posters, comics, fact sheets, and videos. The fact sheets were selected for their detailed content, enabling an in-depth analysis of information quality, which aligned with the study's objectives. While convenience sampling proved efficient, cost-effective, and facilitated quick data collection, it is acknowledged that this method had limitations, including potential biases in sample selection, which may impact the study's overall validity (Golzar, Noor & Tajik, 2022). To strengthen the study's validity, the researcher supported the fact sheet data with existing literature, providing a more comprehensive discussion of findings.

To select the respondents for the online survey that evaluated the quality of the selected mental health materials, a random sampling approach was used, where the survey link was shared through various university students' social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups, Facebook and Instagram pages, and university online forums for students across Zimbabwe. This allowed any student who met the criteria to participate. The sampling criteria included being a university student in Zimbabwe, with no age or gender restrictions, or other social attributes, thereby ensuring a broad and inclusive pool of potential respondents. To ensure that only university students participated in the survey, the shared link was accompanied by an instruction that participation was voluntary and exclusively for university students in Zimbabwe, effectively minimizing the inclusion of non-target populations. Random sampling offered advantages such as reducing selection bias and increasing the generalizability of the findings to the broader university student population. However, it also presented challenges in reaching out to the total population of students in the country. Despite this limitation, the random sampling approach was deemed suitable for this study, given its aim to gather diverse perspectives from university students across Zimbabwe.

Data Collection Methods

To collect data to assess the information quality of the selected mental health Fact Sheets, two primary methods were employed; e-questionnaire survey and content analysis.

E-Questionnaire Administration

An online structured questionnaire was hosted on the Google Forms platform, assessing the respondents' demographics, perceived quality of mental health information (accuracy, validity, completeness, timeliness, consistency, uniqueness), impact on mental health literacy, and influence on help-seeking behaviours (see Appendix 1). A brief introduction was used to explain the study's purpose and importance, providing context for the research, and establishing transparency and trust. Prospective respondents were invited to complete the survey anonymously, which remained open for six weeks to allow sufficient time for responses and to boost response rates. Before answering the survey questions, respondents were prompted to review the attached mental health fact sheets (Appendix 2). The questionnaire was designed to enforce complete responses by requiring all questions to be answered before submission. A total of 568 questionnaires were successfully completed and submitted, yielding a substantial dataset that captures university students' perspectives on mental health information quality. The e-questionnaire enhanced flexibility of data capture, accessibility, convenience, and reduction of bias (Pitura, 2023).

Content Analysis Procedure

Secondary data was collected to support the e-questionnaire using a qualitative content analysis method to explore the content of the studied mental health fact sheets. A step-by-step content analysis procedure involved systematically coding and categorizing the written text and visual elements of the messages, to identify key messaging strategies and gaps. This process included: (1) familiarization with the Fact Sheets content, (2) identification of initial codes (in relation to messaging strategies), (3) categorization of codes into broader predetermined information quality themes (accuracy, validity, completeness, timeliness, consistency,

uniqueness), (4) analysis of the thematic data to determine how it contributed to the overall message quality, and (5) interpretation of findings to understand the effectiveness of the Fact Sheets in promoting mental health awareness.

Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative Data

Data from the questionnaire survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine the frequency distributions of the respondents' views on mental health information quality, its impact on literacy, and influence on health-seeking behaviours. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate frequencies and percentages, providing a numerical description of the data. The results were subjected to a comprehensive interpretative analysis. This analysis examined the perceived quality of mental health information, its impact and dynamics associated with influence on attitudes toward seeking help, the type of help sought, and the urgency with which help is acquired. Grounded in existing literature, interpretive analysis yielded rich insights into the dynamics underlying the quality and impact of mental health materials in Zimbabwe.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative content analysis findings were thematically interpreted under six information quality categories (accuracy, validity, completeness, timeliness, consistency, and uniqueness). This analysis assessed the effectiveness of messaging strategies, identified gaps, and explored more effective communication strategies. The findings were then compared with survey outcomes to reveal convergence and discrepancies, validating the study's conclusions. Integrating both datasets provided a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Zimbabwe Research Ethics Committee (ZREC) with approval number [ZREC/ MH/2024/008]. The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary participation of university students and implementation of data storage and security measures. In addition, the survey instrument was young people friendly and culturally appropriate.

Further, permission was granted by Zvandiri Organization to use their fact sheets for research purposes, falling under the category of non-commercial use, as stipulated on their website (link: <https://zvandiri.org/website-terms-of-use/>), which specifies that materials and tools can be used for "non-commercial or personal use" by the public. By adhering to these terms of use, the study ensures compliance and enhances its ethical integrity.

Results

This section presents the findings from a mixed-methods study, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The survey responses, collected from 568 participants, provide rich insights into the perceptions and experiences of university students regarding the quality of mental health messages circulated in Zimbabwe. Additionally, a content analysis of four mental health fact sheets thoroughly examines the messaging strategies and themes employed. Together, these two complementary datasets offer a comprehensive understanding of the quality and impact of mental health messages, shedding light on areas for improvement and opportunities for enhanced mental health promotion.

Quantitative Findings

Sociodemographic Information

The sample of 568 respondents who completed the online survey comprised male and female students, with various levels of education, age categories, and ethnicities, as captured in Table 1. Analysing the sample's

demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, level of education, and ethnicity, allowed for an assessment of the representativeness of the sample and facilitated the identification of potential differences in perceptions and experiences related to mental health information quality across these subgroups, thereby enhancing the study's generalizability and depth of insight.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Information

Demographic Traits	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20 years and below	336	59.2%
	21 years and above	232	40.8%
Gender	Female	355	62.5%
	Male	213	37.5%
Ethnicity	Shona	426	75%
	Ndebele	74	13%
	English, Indian, Coloured	51	8.9%
	Other	17	2.9%
Level of Education	Undergraduate Degree (Associate, Bachelor's)	279	49.1%
	Postgraduate Degree (Masters', Doctoral)	192	33.8%
	Other Postgraduate Qualifications (Certificates, Diplomas)	97	17.1%

Quality of Mental Health Information

The respondents had varied perceptions of the mental health information disseminated in Zimbabwe, with some finding it complete, accurate, and valid, while others had reservations. Figure 1 presents a statistical overview of the respondents' views about the quality of mental health information.

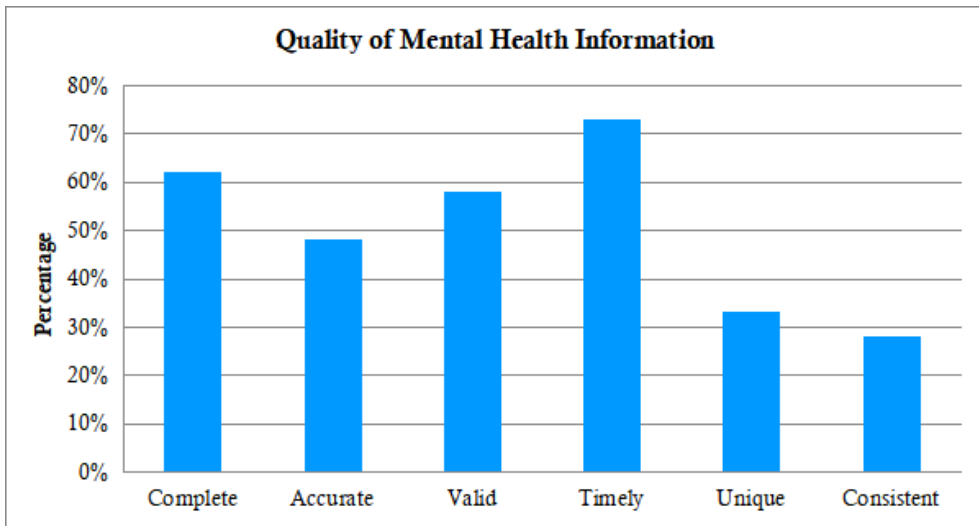


Figure 1: *Respondents' Views about the Quality of Mental Health Information Impact on Mental Health Literacy*

Scale-based questions were used to solicit the respondents' perceptions about the impact of mental health campaign materials on literacy (see section C of the questionnaire). The respondents generally believed that mental health campaign materials had a positive impact on literacy among university students. The majority felt that the information had a significant or extremely significant impact, while a minority thought it had minimal or no influence. Overall, the results suggest that mental health information is widely recognized as having the potential to educate and raise awareness. See Figure 2 for the snapshot of the results.

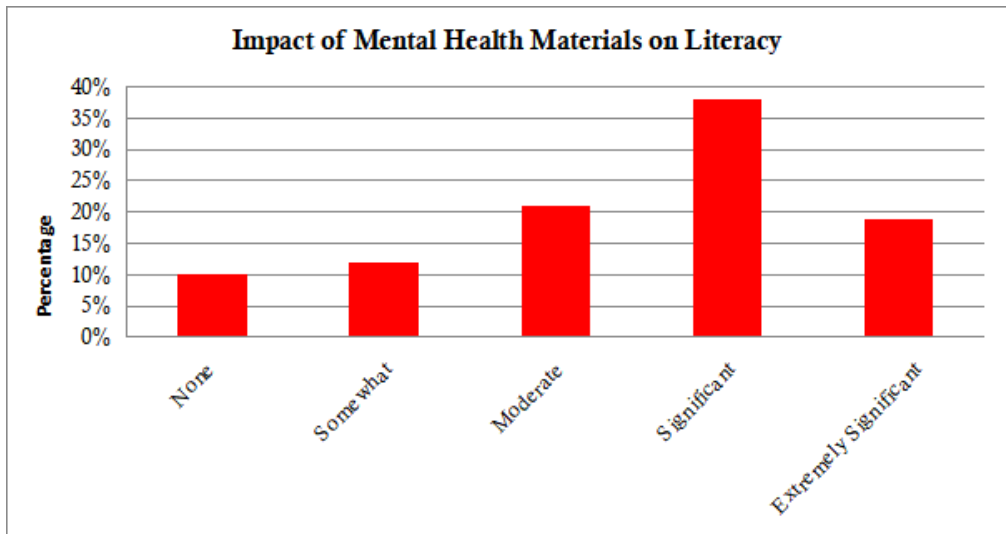


Figure 2: Respondents' Views about the Impact of Mental Health Materials on Literacy

Influence on Help-seeking Behaviours

The respondents had mixed feelings about the impact of mental health information on help-seeking behaviours. While some saw value in seeking help, others expressed no desire to take immediate action or any action at all. The findings reveal a notable disparity in perceptions, with some respondents indicating they would seek professional help or talk to someone, while others would consider future action or take no action. This highlights the complexity of how mental health information influences help-seeking behaviours.

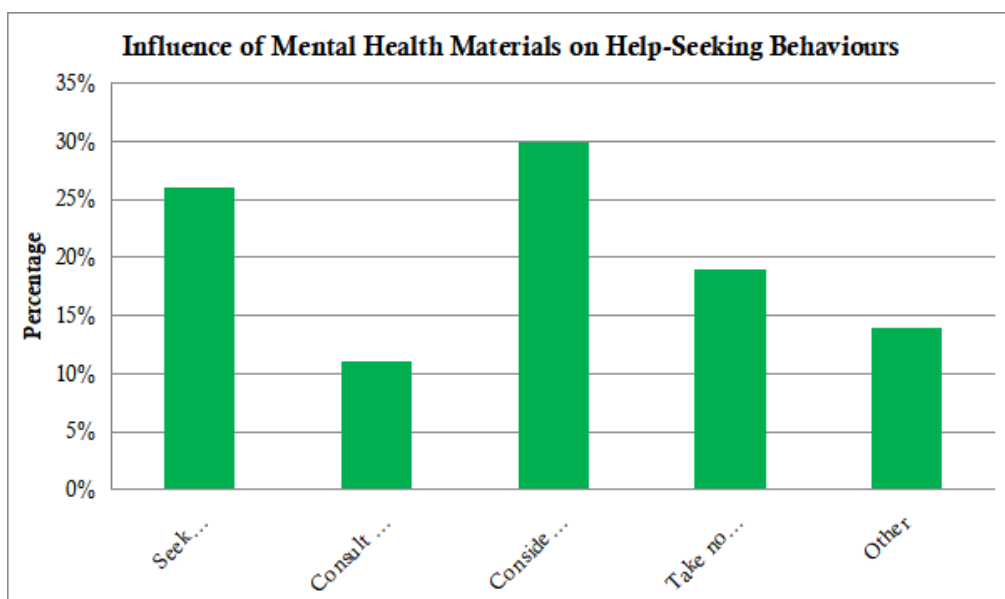


Figure 3: Perceptions about the Influence of Mental Health Materials on Help-Seeking Behaviours

Qualitative Findings

The researcher conducted a qualitative content analysis of the selected fact sheets to complement the quantitative data, specifically examining the communication strategies employed to enhance the quality of mental health information presented. Data revealed an alignment between the six information quality indicators and the messaging strategies used, citing communication gaps, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Information Quality Indicators, Corresponding Messaging Strategies, and Gaps

Information Quality Indicators	Messaging Strategies	Communication Gaps
Accuracy	Clear language, Factual tone, Simple definitions, Avoidance of jargon, logical structure.	Technical ambiguity (lack of clarity on technical content).
Validity	Research-based evidence; Authoritative perspectives, Expert endorsements.	Overreliance on emotional appeals, and use of fear tactics

Completeness	In-depth and comprehensive explanations, Engaging resources (colours, images, infographics), Innovative presentation techniques (counselling, question and answer, storytelling)	Limited solution diversity (messages provide similar solutions for various situations and demographics)
Timeliness	Time-sensitive calls-to-action (awareness calls and calls for help-seeking behaviours)	Limited message scope (not in sync with global treatment and eradication efforts)
Consistency	Repetition of information presentation styles, Branding consistency (logos, colour schemes, typography), Unified visual elements	Culturally inconsistent messages (reference to the taboo concept of mental illness in the public domain)
Uniqueness	context-specific experiences through storytelling narratives	Homogenous messaging (use of similar messaging frameworks), Limited visual engagement

Accuracy

The analysis of mental health fact sheets revealed that, to a large extent, the materials presented high-quality, accurate information. Specifically, the fact sheets used clear language, simplified definitions, and a logical message structure, including the use of headings, subheadings, bullet points and dialogue boxes to organize information, enhancing clarity and accuracy, and ensuring that the information is conveyed in a precise and understandable manner. For example, there was use of simplified definitions of key terms such as anxiety and depression:

Anxiety is worrying that something bad will happen or that something that matter will go wrong or not happen as you want it to. (fact sheet 3) Depression is having feelings of sadness, loss of hope, courage and being low in spirit. (fact sheet 4)

Subheadings in fact sheet 3 functioned to separate and effectively present ‘what’ information about anxiety disorder (“*What’s wrong with me? / What is it? / What causes it? / What can I do about it?*”). Similarly, fact sheet 4 engaged five subheadings to breakdown and accurately depict information about depression (*What’s wrong with me? / What is it? / What causes it? / What can’t I just get over it? / What can I do about it?*). Another example is fact sheet 1, where approaches to mental health were holistically presented in three dialogue boxes, each capturing facts about physical, psychological, and emotional strategies for mental wellness.

Despite the identified messaging strengths, data also revealed communication limitations on accuracy. The key accuracy limitation was technical ambiguity resulting from a lack of clarity on technical content such as medical and psychological concepts and processes. For example, the definitions of key terms such as mental health (fact sheet 1), grief (fact sheet 2), anxiety (fact sheet 3), and depression (fact sheet 4) were simplified for clarity, however, this simplification may compromise the accuracy and depth of these complex concepts.

Validity

The fact sheets presented information from an authoritative perspective, supported by research-based evidence on mental health issues. The information is factual and evidence-based, drawing on credible research to provide a reliable and trustworthy foundation for understanding mental health matters. In addition, guidelines on symptoms, behaviour and solutions to mental health challenges are provided, enhancing validity and credibility. Further, the fact sheets feature logos from reputable health organisations, including the Ministry of Health and Childcare, Zimbabwe, USAID, and U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) (fact sheets 3 and 4). These expert endorsements help reinforce credibility and build trust in the information presented.

However, the fact sheets revealed overreliance on emotional appeals to drive behavioural change messages, rather than logical reasoning, compromising validity. The designers of the materials arouse the audience's emotions through vivid imagery of mentally distraught patients and personal narratives to incite action. For example, fact sheet 4 depicts a young woman overcome with depression, fact sheet 3 shows a worried young woman in deep thought, and fact sheet 2 portrays a bereaved young man, all presenting stark and evocative representations of mental health issues. The materials also employ fear tactics by highlighting the severity of mental illness, aiming to evoke strong negative emotions such as fear and anxiety, to motivate behaviour change. This approach is associated with manipulative communication and can compromise information validity. For example, fact sheet 3 states that *“Serious anxiety can get in the way of everyday functioning / Anxiety can lead to a lack of self-confidence / It can interfere with relationships”*. Similarly, fact sheet 4 evokes fear by stating states that *“Depression is a real condition. You can’t just wish it away. Depression causes changes in the brain which affects how you feel and how you see things.”*

Completeness

In-depth explanations and comprehensive information on mental health was provided in the fact sheets to enhance completeness, covering awareness messages and support services. For example, the anxiety and depression fact sheets (3 and 4), cover key topics such as definition of concepts, symptoms, causes, treatment and approaches to therapy. This structured approach likely aims to educate readers about the conditions, their effects, and available support. The materials utilized engaging resources (images, infographics, colours) and effective presentation techniques (storytelling, question and answer, and counselling approaches) to effectively convey complete information, enhancing understanding and accessibility for the target audience. While the fact sheets were complete in terms of sufficient information, there was limited solution diversity, with messages often providing similar solutions, failing to account for individual

differences, unique circumstances, and diverse needs, creating an information needs gap within certain demographics, populations, and contexts.

Timeliness

The mental health fact sheets are timely, given research findings that mental disorders are an ongoing health crisis in Africa and globally, with increasing prevalence and significant impact on individuals, communities. In addition, time-sensitive calls-to-action, such as awareness prompts and encouragement for help-seeking behaviours were incorporated in the fact sheets. For example:

It is important to get into the habit of routinely practicing good self-care... (fact sheet 1)

Get support! Find someone to talk with who understands depression... (fact sheet 4)

This approach enabled the audience to engage with the information promptly, facilitating timely action and support. The timeliness of the information is in some way hindered by a limited scope, with a primary focus on public awareness and treatment efforts, overlooking prevention strategies. This is inconsistent with global trends, which are shifting towards mental health promotion and disease prevention, indicating a need to address this gap.

Consistency

The fact sheets employed consistent communicative strategies, including recurrent information presentation styles such as narration and storytelling, to enhance message consistency. Branding uniformity, for example, consistent logos, vibrant colour schemes, and typography, also contributed to a cohesive visual identity. The fact sheets also employed unified visual elements such as images featuring young people in various emotional states, to reinforce messages specifically targeting this demographic. For instance, fact sheet 1 depicts happy young people representing mental

wellness; fact sheet 2 shows a grieving young person being consoled by another; fact sheet 3 features a seemingly anxious young woman; and fact sheet 4 portrays a depressed young woman. This consistent visual approach was likely aimed at making the content more relatable and engaging for young audiences.

Despite the fact sheets' consistency in linguistic and visual elements, they exhibit notable contextual discrepancies that reflect cultural inconsistencies. Specifically, the materials openly discuss mental disorders and instability, which are culturally taboo topics in Zimbabwe. Publicly addressing these sensitive issues can be perceived as face-threatening and contradicts societal norms and expectations, potentially undermining the effectiveness of the messaging.

Uniqueness

The consistent narrative approach used in the fact sheets to discuss mental health issues added uniqueness by sharing context-specific experiences relevant to Zimbabwe, potentially enhancing relatability and memorability of the information. However, the materials' reliance on similar messaging frameworks, visual identities, and narrative structures as indicated earlier, limited their uniqueness. The repeated use of narrative strategies, while potentially effective, paradoxically restricted creativity and uniqueness by lacking diversity in presentation. Similarly, the lengthy and descriptive explanations of mental health issues came across as ordinary, unappealing, and less engaging, highlighting the need for more innovative, concise, and tailored communication strategies to capture the public's attention and interest.

Discussion

The survey results indicate a gap in the perceived accuracy of mental health messages, with below half 48% (n=273) of the respondents viewing the information as accurate, highlighting a need for improved credibility and trustworthiness in mental health messaging. Nonetheless, despite the

respondents' dominant view of mental health information in Zimbabwe as inaccurate, and technical ambiguity in some materials, textual analysis suggests that these messages demonstrate accuracy indicators through the use of clear language, factual tone, expert endorsements, and research-based evidence, highlighting that the campaigns prioritize credibility to establish public trust. This discrepancy points to a potential gap between intention and reception, where campaign creators may intend to convey accurate information, while the audience may fail to interpret or receive it as intended. In light of the above, Duplaga (2019) posits that message misinterpretation may stem from a mismatch between the audience's perceptions and reality, with personal experiences, biases, or preconceived notions influencing their evaluations of its accuracy. Aleksina, Akulenska, & Lubl6y (2019) add that such information interpretation gaps can lead to poor engagement and ineffective outcomes in public health campaigns, as audiences may not relate to, or act upon messages that are not reflective of their lived realities.

Another negative outcome of the study is the dominant view that mental health information lacks uniqueness, a significant trait of information quality. Only 33% (n=188) of the respondents reported that mental health messages are unique, implying a significant degree of lack of a distinct perspective or value, in alignment with Eronen's (2024) model of information quality. Similarly, qualitative analyses revealed that, although mental health materials use effective message strategies, the narrative approach across all materials without variation results in a lack of diversity and redundancy. Further, mental health information displays a limited use of innovative visuals, relying heavily on text-based content and static images, with a notable absence of interactive graphics, animations, infographics, and immersive multimedia elements, which could help to convey complex mental health concepts in a more engaging and memorable manner. This absence of uniqueness of mental health messages may lead to audience fatigue, decreased engagement, and demotivation to seek help.

Skliarenko, Gryshchenko, Kolosnichenko, Ostapenko, & Kolosnichenko (2023) emphasize, the impact of public health campaigns depends on creativity and innovation, highlighting the importance of innovative and creative messaging strategies in mental health campaigns, to better resonate with their target audience and promote positive mental health outcomes. To enhance uniqueness, campaigns should prioritize distinctive storytelling, diverse narratives, and visually engaging content to capture the public's attention and foster meaningful connections (Kechagia, Tsourvakas, & Piha, 2025). Thus, addressing lack of uniqueness in mental health information can increase its impact, resonance, and effectiveness among university students in Zimbabwe. It can lead to improved mental health awareness and increased help-seeking behaviours.

Further, the study's findings reveal a concerning uniformity between the survey outcome and the qualitative data, indicating inconsistencies in the content of mental health materials disseminated in Zimbabwe. Specifically, only 28% of survey participants perceived these materials as consistent, suggesting information discrepancies, contradictions, and lack of clarity. In relation to the information quality model which states that information should be consistent with internal logic, this outcome is particularly concerning, as it suggests that the fact sheets do not meet a fundamental standard of information quality. Similarly, the qualitative data revealed cultural inconsistencies in messaging, marked by visible contradictions stemming from public discussions of mental disorders, which are conventionally taboo topics in the Zimbabwean society. This inconsistency may lead to message mistrust and decreased audience engagement, potentially hindering the overall impact of mental health initiatives (Su, McDonnell, Wen, Kozak, Abbas, Šegalo, & Xiang, 2021).

Despite the negative outcomes, the findings of this study reveal a positive alignment between the survey results and qualitative data, indicating that mental health information consumed in Zimbabwe excels in three key areas of quality; completeness, validity, and timeliness. University students

generally reported high satisfaction with these information quality indicators, with 62% finding the messages complete, 58% perceiving them as valid, and 73% considering them timely. The qualitative findings echoed this sentiment, highlighting that the materials provided comprehensive information, in-depth explanations, and expert endorsements, and addressed contemporary health challenges. However, the analysis also revealed concerning trends; a reliance on emotional appeals and fear tactics that can undermine message validity, and a limited focus on awareness that overlooks ongoing global prevention efforts, limiting information timeliness. This suggests a need to re-evaluate these approaches in future mental health communications.

The positive outcome on information completeness, validity, and timeliness highlights that mental health campaigns in Zimbabwe are effectively disseminating quality information. It validates the information quality model which indicates that quality information provides a thorough understanding of the topic, is supported by evidence, and is up-to-date and relevant to the current context. Concurringly, Borah & Xiao (2018) posit that using expert endorsements and credible sources enhances the validity and trustworthiness of public health information, while regular updates ensure that the information remains relevant and effective. Consequently, the target audiences are likely to be more engaged and motivated to prioritize their mental health (Borah & Xiao, *ibid*). These findings highlight the importance of collaborations between mental health experts, researchers, and health information designers, which enhances information quality (Donovan, Furber, Cothren, Andrew, & Gwilt, 2022).

The study also revealed a promising outcome regarding the impact of mental health information on literacy among university students, with 78% of participants holding a predominantly positive view. Exposure to mental health information was found to significantly improve students' understanding of mental health concepts and increase awareness of available resources and services. This suggests that mental health

information plays a crucial role in enhancing mental health literacy among university students, empowering them to recognize signs and symptoms, and fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment. This outcome aligns with existing research highlighting the potential benefits of mental health information for young people. For instance, Nakarada-Kordic, Hayes, Reay, Corbet, & Chan (2017) emphasize the importance of engaging young people through creative activities and online resources, such as social media, to support their education and mental wellbeing. Similarly, Lee, Goh, & Yeo (2023), support the benefits of digital health interventions and online mental health information in improving mental health outcomes.

However, a somewhat paradoxical finding emerged regarding the impact of mental health information on health-seeking behaviours. Despite increased literacy, the study revealed a relatively low impact on encouraging audiences to seek help or engage in health-promoting behaviours, with only 31% indicating that they would immediately seek help after exposure to the materials. This discrepancy suggests that while the public is gaining knowledge and awareness, it may not necessarily be translating this understanding into action. Several factors may contribute to this gap, including persistent stigma, inadequate access to resources, or insufficient motivation, as highlighted by Foscolos (2024) and McKenzie, Oliffe, Black & Collings (2022). These findings are not unique, they are consistent with Yamaguchi's et al. (2011) study whose results show that despite improved awareness and knowledge, the actual utilization of mental health services and help-seeking behaviours among young people remained limited, signalling the complexity of bridging the gap between knowledge and action. Further, the study highlights the importance of moving beyond mere information dissemination and focusing on strategies that facilitate behaviour change.

Implications for Future Design of Mental Health Information

The findings of this study reveal critical areas requiring attention to enhance the quality of mental health information in Zimbabwe. To address

the gap between perceived and actual accuracy, mental health communication interventions should incorporate feedback mechanisms, ensuring that messages are relatable and resonate with audience experiences while remaining evidence-based and transparent. The lack of originality in mental health messaging highlights the need for creative approaches to content design. Incorporating diverse storytelling, culturally relevant narratives, and visually engaging formats can significantly improve audience engagement and mitigate the monotony of repetitive messages. Moreover, consistency emerges as a key area of improvement. Cultural inconsistencies in message design indicate the need for standardized national guidelines for mental health communication. Finally, since the study revealed that mental health information increases awareness and literacy, with limited impact on promoting health-seeking behaviours, future campaigns should prioritize interventions that motivate action, such as peer support programs, interactive workshops, and accessible counselling services.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that while mental health information in Zimbabwe demonstrates strengths in areas such as completeness, validity, and timeliness, it falls short in addressing perceived accuracy, uniqueness, consistency, and behaviour change. These gaps underline the need for a shift towards audience-centred, innovative, and cohesive approaches in campaign design and delivery. Despite these challenges, the study highlights the potential of mental health information to significantly improve literacy among university students, laying a foundation for further enhancement of public health initiatives. It underscores the need for collaborative efforts among mental health experts, researchers, and health information designers to develop creative, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive interventions that not only inform but also motivate and empower individuals to prioritize their mental health.

To improve the quality and impact of mental health information, several recommendations can be made. First, focus should be on building credibility by using relatable testimonials, and ensuring transparency in message creation. Second, innovative messaging techniques, culturally resonant narratives, and engaging visual content should be prioritized to foster uniqueness and engagement. Third, national messaging guidelines should be developed to standardize content and address inconsistencies, alongside fostering stakeholder collaboration for cohesive communication strategies. Lastly, regular updates and evaluations of information will ensure that it remains relevant, credible, and effective in meeting the mental health needs of the target audience.

Study Limitations

The major limitation of this study rests in its limited focus on a specific set of mental health fact sheets, which may not be representative of all mental health communication materials in Zimbabwe, as the fact sheets' content, design, and target audience may differ significantly from other materials. This limitation highlights the need for further research to validate the findings and explore the effectiveness of diverse mental health communication strategies across various platforms and audiences in Zimbabwe.

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Moral justification for online shaming

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Abstract

It is ever more common nowadays, since the onset of digitalized socializing, for people to censure those who fall short of established moral standards by publicly shaming them. The traditional aim of shaming *wrongdoers* has been to awaken in the victim a feeling of embarrassment, exposure, or guilt and remorse in the hope that these feelings would inspire a change in their behavior. Yet overall, the ease and ubiquity of online bullying and humiliation has significantly altered the overall impact of public shaming as a force for good. What used to be a reliable means of enforcing positive change has now evolved into an unprecedented genre in its own right. Thus 'online shaming' opens the forum of behavioral evaluation to a completely anonymous terrain of interchange, eliminating cultural and geographical barriers, whereby anyone is free to shame promptly and ubiquitously. The result is that the degree of shaming is often *disproportionate* to the targeted offense, raising serious moral risks that require *accountability*. Should there be technical mechanisms by which to simply do away with online shaming altogether? I propose candidates for a possible register of objective desiderata to guide our thinking about whether online shaming might ever be morally justified.

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1. Introduction

It is ever more common nowadays, since the onset of digitalized socializing, for people to censure those who fall short of established moral standards by publicly shaming¹ them. The prevalence of online platforms has made it intolerable for people not to impose their moral judgments on others, following shaming anywhere it goes. Most people blame it on the internet. That it has made it ever easier to express disapproval or to condemn others, especially via its designated social media. In other words, it is not hard to see that developments in digital communication have not only transformed us into beings whose daily lives are reliant on the internet but also seekers of new friends who sympathize with us through the social media (Sedighimornani, 2018). It is now easy to come across videos, photos, audios or text messages of the [perceived] wrongdoers posted almost fashionably online, for any reason whatsoever. We often hope that whatever shameful thing we post online does not only stay long but goes viral. Indeed, we are more and more sinking into an ocean where there is nowhere to turn in order to run away from taking part in shaming or being shamed.

Whether as a punishment, a form of revenge, a means of disgracing or ridiculing, or as a disciplinary measure, or merely bullying, the eminent aim of shaming wrongdoers has been to inspire a change in their behavior. For this reason, many people do not find it strange to shame wrongdoers. And we would often find it odd when anyone is disturbed by the event of shaming those who have committed acts that we generally consider unacceptable. Unsurprisingly, proponents of public shaming as a useful

¹ 'Shaming' is often viewed broadly, as Thomason (2011: 1) puts it, as a concept that includes feelings, practices, and even offenses which encompasses: "*feelings of shame, shaming practices, and stigmatizing*" but it need not be. I argue that, for online shaming to be morally justified, it is important to draw distinctions between shaming and other practices that can occur online such as bullying, harassment, and vigilantism. I will also show that the act of shaming need not arise the feelings of shame: you can be shamed without necessarily thereby feeling shame. The latter is the "*feeling you get as a result of doing or thinking something you believe to be bad or immoral. It can also come from a fear of others finding out what you've done*" (Sedighimornani, 2018:76).

moral tool have argued that the technology involved in online shaming has made it an ever more just way of enforcing the good. As Thomason (2021:1) puts it that “it is an important tool in helping to make social media and online communities safer and more welcoming to traditionally marginalized groups.”

Yet, the internet has increased both the severity of shaming as a punishment and the numbers of those who criticize shaming as a moral instrument. This implies that digital platforms have significantly impacted the way we habitually viewed shaming. Thus, the ‘traditional shaming’ that was seen as a worth retentive tool for improving moral conduct has been altered drastically by technology into a nasty ‘online shaming’. The latter cares less about the proportion of the targeted offense, punishing both wrongdoers and innocent third parties (Billingham & Parr, 2019; 2020). Fear is immanent that online shaming is a morally backpedal because it provides platforms for vigilantism, immoral revenge, harassment, and it is home to mere bullies, leaving many in agony. No wonder online shaming has increasingly engrossed many guiltless victims, triggering some serious consequences.

Perhaps one may wonder, why must we shame anyone? Scholars have quickly dismissed this question as irrelevant in moral deliberation. They find it plausible that we shame others because we believe that “it would be *wrong* to allow racist, sexist, dangerous, and disrespectful [among other immoral] conduct to go unchallenged” (Billingham & Parr, 2019:3). Online shaming has become such a strong and necessary factor in moral deliberation, and in determining whether something should attract social disapproval. However, while it might be *wrong* not to intervene in resolving immoralities when we could, it is unclear whether the intervention must involve shaming. And, if it must, whether and in which scenarios it would be morally justifiable to shame others. As we have seen, online shaming comes with *disproportionate* pervasive effects to the extent that critics have expressed the need to drop the concept from moral lexicon

altogether. Klonick (2016) sees the need to establish (legal) interventions to regulate our ways of enforcing social norms that constrain certain behaviour.

Many have attacked the practice of online shaming, especially for the nature – form and accuracy – of its punishment. For example, scholars have argued that the severity of its punishment might harm both wrongdoers and other less concerned third parties; and also, that there are no set limits to shamers who can ubiquitously and anonymously engage with this moral tool with little monetary setbacks and at rare costs of self-exposure² (Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia, 2021; Thomason, 2021; Barron et al., 2023; Norlock, 2017). This paper takes on the delicate question: is there a possibility for online shaming to ever be morally justifiable? To answer this question, I will propose a plausible objective set of desiderata that determines how and when online shaming *should* be morally justified. First, I look into the question of whether online shaming could ever be a good thing.³

1. The Moral Significance of Online Shaming

Shaming is not a new practice. Since ancient times, people have almost naturally participated in shaming practices in various forms that include pillories, flogging and scarlet letters. Ever since, people have continually treated shaming others as a good thing. It is the technology used in communication that has created an almost unavoidable way of enforcing the good, ‘online shaming’, which Gallardo (2017: 725) has described as

² Among the basic moral risks of online shaming is the fact that it is generally considered a good thing to do while at the same time people are seriously harmed, with no cost of being held accountable on the part of the shamers.

³ Many people take for granted that online shaming and cyber bullying or harassment are intertwined given how often the former falls into the traps of the latter concepts. If these concepts are not distinguished, linking the concept of online shaming with moral goodness will be utterly *cul-de-sac*. I am aware that distinctions must be drawn between cyber bullying or harassment and the concept of online shaming. Generally, these concepts are closely linked in that they all often involve “repeated verbal aggression over time” (Klonick, 2016:1034). Yet, the intention to enforce social norms by addressing some (perceived) violation of a social norm is what is often missing from cyber bullying or harassment, which makes online shaming unique.

traditional shaming's "fierce comeback in the digital age." On social media, people almost intuitively practice shaming through following, posting, messaging, liking, or commenting about – or to – the shamed individual (Zabielski, 2020; Gallardo, 2017; Klonick, 2016). When explaining how technological progress has impacted on shaming, Thomason (2021:1) reiterates that:

Given shaming's long history, the prevalence of online shaming should not be surprising. The technology involved has shifted quickly and sometimes dramatically, but online shaming seems to follow it wherever it goes. Chatrooms, fan forums, blogs, and social media platforms can all provide examples of shaming. It seems that as long as we have been online, we have been finding ways to digitally shame each other.

Literature has brought moral risks of online shaming into spotlight, claiming that it is impossible to have morally justifiable online shaming. But its positive role in enforcing the good cannot be undermined. We often think for example that individuals who are truly responsible for committing certain immoral acts must always be made to suffer feelings of regret, failure of which is a bad thing. Thus, *a fortiori*, these feelings are expected to lead to the deterrence of future wrongdoing. It is not surprising that there is huge consensus in the literature that despite its challenges, online shaming has notable positive moral outcomes (Koivukari & Korpisaari, 2021; Norlock, 2017). And it is commonly agreed that it is a good thing for anyone to feel shame.

Being shamed can be quite a good thing for its victims in many ways, even if sometimes not 'good' in the ethical sense. It is expected that the act of shame awakens in the victim a feeling of embarrassment, exposure, or guilt and remorse, which might inspire a change in their behavior. This means that online shaming can inspire self-consciousness or self-awareness (Muir et al., 2023). In other words, shaming is capable of changing an individual's behaviour for good or having good things happen to its victim. Conversely,

experience shows that there are people who might pragmatically take advantage of the event of their being shamed. Someone who wants to further their business in pornographic content, for example, might consider their leaked nude-photos quite a good thing for their business. Likewise, politicians who want to lead by fear, might consider their being branded as ‘murderers’ online as an opportunity to create more terror. Notwithstanding its impact on others, or its moral valuation, online shaming can therefore be quite good to the one who is shamed.

It is also widely acknowledged that online shaming effectively censures wrongdoing. Given the number of people who participate in online shaming, and the many more who believe that it is a force for good, it is clear that we cannot just naively criticize or dismiss it in our moral deliberations. Morally, people who participate in shaming proudly think of themselves as upholding valuable codes of conduct (Zabielski; Crockett, 2017; Gallardo, 2017). People tend to almost naturally believe it to be justifiable to censure those who behave in ways that violate conventional standards. We all suppose that certain wrongdoings must be met with strong disapprovals or criticisms. And the belief is growing that, if we want to effectively and sternly blame – or firmly condemn – wrongdoers, we should shame them online. In such an era, the idea of doing away with online shaming might prove to be either too difficult or impossible to implement, provided the ubiquity of its practice in censoring wrongdoing. Online shaming has been instrumental in deterring future wrongdoers, with the assumption that hopefully the wrongdoers and others with similar ambitions will never do it again.

One of the impacts of the shift to online shaming from its traditional-local settings is that shaming has ceased “to be a temporary mark of disgrace and becomes a lasting inscription of stigma” (Solove, 2007:96). No one would rationally want to be branded with such a mark. For this reason, scholars have argued that online shaming has been effective in provoking social change through its mechanism of sending a message of

condemnation on behalf of (and to) the community (Norlock, 2017; Thomason, 2018; Billingham and Parr, 2019). It is not surprising that recently governments and other authorities have increasingly employed online shaming as a means to address chronic wrongs in the society. For example, the Tanzania Police Force, in collaboration with the ITV, have a televised and social media program named “*Aibu Yako Hata Wewe!!*” – A Kiswahili phrase literally translating to “Shame on you for doing that too!” The program aims at publicly exposing drivers for failure to adhere to road traffic signs, rules and regulations by covertly recording videos of their recklessness in driving and later televising and posting those videos online. Such a program has been applauded as having provoked social change through sending a message to the drivers at fault and those drivers who act likewise. The hope is that such shaming will create a society of individuals who want to avoid being similarly shamed, even if that may not always be the case.

Online shaming also draws attention to social ills such as sexism, racism, corruption, and exploitation. Recently online shaming has been defended as an effective tool for identifying bad practices and maintaining social order. Koivukari & Korpisaari (2021) have argued that it would be challenging and impossible to criminalise online shaming given that its practice is embedded in fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression. It is also widely acknowledged that online shaming gives imaginable powers to the traditionally disadvantaged and marginalized to have a voice that can be heard (Crockett, 2017). This has a further positive impact in reducing state or legal interventions on the fights against crime and injustices (Zabielski, 2020:12). As Oravec (2020) would argue that this is a performative online shaming move from rule of law to rule of shame. On the other hand, organizations can be brought in the spotlight by online shaming for poor services, unfair competitions, exploitations, etc. which can bolster socio-economic change (Billingham & Parr, 2019; 2020). Whatever this means is that online shaming’s moral value is something worth retaining.

2. The Moral Issues of Online Shaming

It has been shown that online shaming can save right moral purposes, especially when it is practiced with good intensions. Yet scholars have raised alarming concerns about online shaming, with accusations that we may not simply ignore as irrelevant. Let us first consider Kate Klonick's three primary allegations about online shaming that it is "an over-determined punishment with indeterminate social meaning; [...] not a calibrated or measured form of punishment; and [...] of little or questionable accuracy in who and what it punishes." (2016:1029-30). In fact, such accusations were already predicted nine years earlier when Solove (2007:96) argued, "Permanent shame can be unproductive. It punishes people for longer than necessary and it prevents them from building new lives." Surely, we naturally take it to be wrong to punish someone infinitely, or to disproportionately punish both the wrongdoers and those who have done nothing wrong. In fact, these long-lasting effects of online shaming might as well cause wrongdoers to see no use of reforming.

The above accusations already suggest that online shaming can be quite vicious. One of the vices of online shaming is that it is uncontrollably subjectivism in its moral deliberation. This results into different individuals being punished unevenly for committing the same heinous crime, depending on who participates in the act of shaming (Laidlaw, 2017; Goldman, 2015). As a result, individuals practice doxing by seeking from online platforms private information about others in order to have something to expose publicly.⁴ It is not surprising therefore that online shaming has often fallen into the traps of new forms of moral and legal violations, which include: cyber harassment, cyber bullying, and other various forms of violence (Gallardo, 2016). Moreover, shame's stigma is a difficult one to escape, regardless of how good one can be. Our mere association with those who commit shameful acts could turn us into victims of shame as well (Billingham & Parr, 2019; 2020).

⁴ Zabielski (2020:9) describes this doxing practice as "online practice whereby personal information is sought and made publicly available in order to violate someone's privacy and enable harassment."

While olden times show that shaming used to merely target its victims and a few people around them, online shaming is trendy. Unfortunately, it is the bad news that spreads quicker and wider than the good ones. Both simple and complex wrongs that are posted online can go viral depending on who is being shamed and who it is that is shaming. Merely because it is online, and on the internet that does not forget, it will stay long and it must trend (Gallardo, 2017). As a result, online shaming can punish someone infinitely (Laidlaw, 2017; Klonick, 2016). This has caused online shaming to be considered a highly *disproportionate* punishment if and when weighed against the violations committed (Zabielski, 2020; Basak et al. 2019). Moreover, participants of online shaming often do it for fun, lacking proper facts about the context of the committed wrong, which results into lack of due processes of persecution. For this reason, unlike in the courts of law, online shaming is against both the principle of presumption of innocence and the desire for natural justice or precisely *audi alteram partem* (Zabielski, 2020; Basak et al. 2019, Gallardo, 2017; Solove, 2007).

Needless to say, the consequence of being attacked through online shaming is that serious danger can be caused to the shamed. Online shaming has often caused far reaching negative effects to people's lives and carriers including: severe distress, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, ostracism, isolation, loss of jobs and occasionally people being forced into suicide (Zabielski, 2020; Billingham & Par, 2019). It might be true that the aim of punishing wrongdoers is not to inflict harm on them, but to help them reform, deter others from copying the same wrongful acts, and keep the society safe from the wrongdoers. It might even be wrong to intentionally harm people in the disguise of punishing them. But, of course, a counter-argument can be raised that it would be hard to come up with a form of punishment for gross violations of social norms that did not have any harmful effects. We therefore cannot fail to punish those who skew their behaviour from acceptable norms for fear that the punishments would then harm them. It appears, therefore, that online shaming as a practice is

prima facie something that we may want to embrace. But it has a lot of pitfalls. For example, people have been caught by surprise as victims of shaming in scenarios such as revenge porn or nonconsensual pornography that they knew nothing about (Pinto & Seidman, 2023). Others are just third parties in the shameful acts, being shamed only on virtue of their close relations with the wrongdoers. Thus, the dangers of online shaming must be addressed if it is to be morally justified.

Online shaming has also been accused of being complaisant to moral risks that generally endanger the need to retain the lexicon in moral deliberations. It seems, for example, implausible to shame someone politely and respectfully. Subsequently, those who vouch for civility have rational grounds to dismiss any form of shaming whatsoever. To that effect, Thomason (2021:1) has argued that “shaming threatens to undermine our commitment to the co-deliberative practices of morality.” She argues so because she believes that shaming is a backward-looking reaction, a retroactive assessment of wrongs, that neither addresses the causes of the wrongs nor is it reflective of creating the society in which we desire to live. In proposing the reasons for doing away with online shaming, Aitchison & Meckled-Garcia (2021:1) summed up that this is a practice that involves some informal collective punishment that is presumptively morally wrong in itself for anyone to think of doing to others. They then went ahead and thought that online shaming should be equated to ostracism simply because it does not respect equal basic rights to its targets, having some unlimited imaginable mass power that has serious punitive consequences, and that it is “incompatible with due process values”. In line with those who think that compliance approaches of enforcing morality such as shaming are bad, Thomason (2021) also thinks that the best approach would be the integrity one, whereby values are upheld by encouraging good behaviour.

While we may agree with the above claim that, in enforcing morality, we should encourage good behaviour than wait to punish wrongdoers, this

proposition could be fatal to the practice of online shaming. As we have previously seen, online shaming could be used to encourage good behaviour as well. Furthermore, it would be impossible to criminalize or ban online shaming without thereby violating fundamental legal and human right principles such as freedom of expression (Koivukari & Korpisaari, 2021). Therefore, we must find possible ways to rescue online shaming from these apparent moral dilemmas. In what follows, I propose a list of desiderata that may be helpful in developing a conception of ‘online shaming’ that could avoid its currently associated moral issues, and therefore be morally justified.

3. Desiderata for the Moral Justification of Online Shaming

As we have seen, some scholars have thought that online shaming is an important tool in enforcing morality. Contrary arguments have associated online shaming with too much ethical problems, which suggests that we should do away with shaming altogether. I show below that the raised worries can be overcome, if and when the practice of online shaming can meet the following desiderata:

3.1. Extensional Adequacy

There is so far no consensus in the literature as to what the concept of ‘online shaming’ actually entails (de Vries, 2015; Zabielski, 2020). All we know to be true is that, as Billingham & Parr (2019:1) argues, online shaming has provided us with an “unprecedented opportunities to criticize those we consider to have done wrong”. But we also know that it is possible for someone who has done nothing wrong or illegal to be shamed online (Gallardo, 2017). It is not surprising that some people believe that online shaming is a metaphysical universal: a term that must include a broad of lists of different forms of practices that happen online including bullying, doxing or vigilantism, and harassment (Laidlaw, 2017).⁵

⁵ Scholars such as Klonick (2016) have viewed online shaming as synonymous to such concepts as cyberbullying, and cyber-harassment merely because they all have a common element elongated verbal aggression. But it would be difficult to have a morally justified shaming if there were no

But surely online shaming must be different from these other concepts. It is not startling therefore that many scholars have proposed a narrower conception that must distinguish online shaming from those other concepts (Billingham & Parr, 2020; Basak et al., 2019; Klonick, 2016). It has thus been a pressing issue in the literature to determine this uniqueness of online shaming. This is due to the fact that concepts such as online bullying and online harassment have an intrinsic negative moral connotation. One would be hard-pressed to agree with the claim that one can be rightly and justly bullied or harassed. If these concepts are treated as synonymous with online shaming, therefore, the risk is that online shaming will equally never be morally justified.

The question now is: what distinguishes online shaming from those concepts that have wrongness embedded in them? It is firstly worth noting that what these concepts have in common is the fact that practicing them involves a prolonged verbal aggression (Zabielski, 2020). But it is also widely acknowledged that what makes online shaming *sui generis* is the fact that it must aim at enforcing a moral norm. Scholars have argued that the concept of online shaming must meet such a condition: that it must be (a) directed towards those who have violated society's pre-established moral norms and (b) acceptable in the eyes of the public as opposed to legal or authoritative systems (Zabielski, 2020; Basak et al., 2019; Billingham & Parr, 2019; 2020; de Vries, 2015). This still begs the question: to what extent then can the concept of online shaming be extended for the practice of shaming to be justified?

Various conclusions can be drawn from the above arguments. The central is that there are qualities that cannot deny online shaming of its moral justification. As such, online shaming can be as prolongedly aggressive as possible, provided that: it aims at enforcing a moral norm; it *fairly* and

distinction between shaming and these other morally perverted concepts. However, the target of shaming is not to bully or harass anyone but to address violations of perceived or real social norms.

factually targets those who have violated the norms; and it is endorsed by the public as acceptable.⁶ Such a shaming can be performed offline or online. And it is essentially *alegal* in the sense that first it can be triggered or elicited by both legal or illegal acts, and second it cannot be justified on legal grounds. As such, online shaming must be distinguished from such other defamatory practices as cyber bullying, cyber harassment and online vigilantism or doxing. To effectively do this, it is important to ensure that the shaming is directed towards those who have violated social norms, the aim is to enforce morality and that the public generally acknowledges both that norms have been violated and that the wrongdoers deserve to be shamed.

3.2. Shamefacedness

I definitely do not want to be publicly shamed. Many people do not plausibly want to be subjected to such situations where they are being shamed or even stigmatized. In fact, some people in Africa would prefer dying to being subjected to shame or disgrace (Wiredu 2003:319). Oftentimes, we believe that if and when we shame someone, we are equivalently telling them: *'you ought to feel bad for the awful thing you have done'*. Subsequently, we would be enforcing in them good behaviour. But it is important to remember that not everyone has an ability to feel shame or be shamed. States of affairs that could be very shameful to us might be extremely comfortable to others who remain unshamed by them, which may even result in what Adkins (2019) calls 'online shame backlashes.'⁷ As pointed earlier, a courtesan who wants to gain more fame and popularity in her obscene business might consider a scenario of her

⁶ Various questions might be raised such as: who establishes this fairness and the fact that the violation was by this shamed person? Or, how do we make sure that the shaming is proportional to the violation? And that we are not shaming an innocent person? To these and similar questions, I show below that those who participate in online shaming ought to know that they can be held responsible for any shaming that goes beyond fair margins.

⁷ Adkins (2019: 1) argues that online shaming might require "the assertion of social and epistemic authority on behalf of a larger community, and is dependent upon an audience that will be receptive to the shaming testimony."

leaked nude photos on social media – or any other form of slut-shaming – as a good thing.

In fact, it might be the case that the event of our shaming someone is more of advertising and promoting her indecent behaviour than addressing her wrongs. Scholars have argued that it is not necessarily the case that when we shame someone then the feelings of shame are induced to them. In many occasions, someone might be shamed without thereby being made to feel shame (Thomason 2015, 2018). Surely, many people dismiss certain scenarios of being shamed as ridiculous.⁸ And quite often, people who are stigmatized – as those who form membership of stigmatized groups do – embrace and celebrate it (Thomason, 2021).

There is no doubt that shaming is widely used as a shaping instrument, a form of punishment against wrongdoing. However, the question of whether it is a morally justifiable tool is still a tricky one. We have seen that one must be hard-pressed to agree that it would be morally justifiable to shame someone who wants to thereby take advantage of her being shamed, or else when the shaming is quite good for her. We have seen that the goal of shaming is to sanction those who violate social standards. Equally, since those who participate in shaming think of themselves as upholding moral standards, it is primarily imperative that this goal is attained. But we know that some people are not always shamefaced for obvious reasons, which hinder the attainment of the goal of shaming. Even so, it would be wrong to allow racist, dangerous, disrespectful or sexist practices, for example, to continue to be unchecked (Billingham & Parr, 2019), simply because those who practice them do not feel shamed by them. As noted earlier, it is possible for the society to generally view a certain act as bad, even-while there is one famous person who does it for popularity. It would be strange to argue that shaming the famous person is wrong simply because the person is not shamefaced. Shaming, in such occasions, may not only make

⁸ While some people might consider being called 'fat' quite offensive, for example, others might consider this ridiculous because being fat does not harm anyone's reputation.

the person more famous but the wrongful act too. Still, shaming such individuals might as well deter future wrongdoers. Whatever this prima facie means is that online shaming would be more morally justified if those that are being shamed, and/or the community that is made aware of the wrongful acts committed, have an ability to feel shame. This does not necessarily require that the direct victims of the consequences of shame be shamefaced. Even so, *a fortiori*, shaming would be morally justified if its consequences do not further escalate the wrongs committed.

3.3. Proportionality

We have seen that the moral problems associated with online shaming include the fact that shaming's punishment is unproductive and overdetermined; the punishment's social meaning can hardly be determined; its form of punishment is not only too long but also not calibrated; and that, generally, online shaming cares less about what or who it is that it punishes (Klonick, 2016; Solove, 2007). It appears that online shaming is incapable of being proportional and its punishment has spillover effects to individuals such as the relatives of the shamed person, who had nothing to do with the wrongful act.⁹ While we may agree, however, that it would be morally wrong to punish someone disproportionately, it is almost impossible to describe what "*proportional punishment*" should include. What would be a proportional punishment for someone who has committed serious offenses such as murder or rape, for example? At face value, it looks like shaming is wrong because it includes in its punishment those who have not taken part in wrongdoing. But, should we not shame someone for being outside the pool of morally acceptable behaviors just because her mother would be equally shamed if the daughter was subjected to shaming? In fact, some scholars (e.g. Aitchson &

⁹ Billingham & Parr (2020) distinguish between narrow proportionality where the burden of shaming befalls those who are culpable for an offense, and wide proportionality where third parties incur some psychological or reputational harms for an offense committed by those close to them. In the cases of wide proportionality, an act of shaming can be morally justified provided that its positive effects, such as the created fear for committing similar wrongs among members of the public, outweigh its negative effects.

Meckled-Garcia, 2021) would think of anyone who thinks that someone who has violated a social norm should not be shamed as conniving with – or being complicit in – wrongs.

All that is required is that the mass is made aware that the dangers of online shaming being *disproportionate* are almost inevitable. For as long as this danger is existent, the implication is that online shaming is almost always morally unjustified. Such awareness, and of course extra measures such as legal restrictions, as Billingham & Parr (2020; 2019) argue, can reduce individuals who engage themselves in online shaming, slow their judgements, and increase more rational reflections on how to shame anyone, and the impact of doing so. In summing up the need to observe proportionality as key in moral justification of online shaming, Billingham & Parr (2019:28) argue:

[...] the punishment of those who violate the law of nature must be proportionate to the aims of that punishment. The same applies with respect to the public shaming of those who violate social norms. An instance of public shaming is justifiable only if it is proportionate. This requires that its negative consequences are not excessive in comparison with its positive consequences. The positive consequences here are those that we identified in the previous section – causing remorse, deterring future violations, strengthening our commitment to and compliance with valuable social norms, and so on.

3.4. Accountability

Why do people engage in acts of shaming others? Scholars such as Barron et al. (2023) have argued that participation in online shaming is motivated by either of the two desires: hedonic desires (i.e., the desire to feel good or the pleasure of witnessing other people's misfortunes) and/or justice desires (i.e., the need to do good by seeing to it that wrongdoers receive deserving punishments). Shamers, as norm enforcers, must also be willing to be responsible for – in the sense of *justify* – their actions. As Billingham

& Parr (2019:25) establishes, “It is highly desirable that those who shame others can themselves be held to account, taking responsibility for their criticism and its effects, and being open to responses, discussion, and correction.” This means that shamers too must take into account the principles of natural justice and presumption of innocence, allowing the target of shaming the right to effectively reply in order to do away with inaccuracy of criticisms and enhance impartiality. Since online shaming can easily fall into practices that are morally wrong in and of themselves such as harassment or bullying, shamers must realize that they can be held accountable for taking part in these wrongs. It is equally important to note that, legally, distinctions have been made between shaming and such torts as defamation.¹⁰ Thus, while online shaming does harm its victims by collective actions of the shamers, each individual shamer stands a chance of being held personally responsible for her actions.

In formal systems of enforcing norms, it is expected that: the enforcers be impartial; those accused of violating the norms have a chance to defend themselves; and when they are condemned, they still have a chance to appeal. However, online shaming is an informal method of enforcing the social norms where such an articulate process of justice is often not available. For online shaming to be justified, it would be crucial that those who sanction others be somewhat responsible and those being sanctioned have a chance to defend themselves. Billingham & Parr add that:

[There is a need] to create a culture in which those who engage in public shaming make themselves accountable to others. In other words, they should recognize and respect others’ right of reply, and especially that of the target of their criticism. Those who accuse others of violating social norms should be willing to listen to the other side of the story and consider whether their criticisms might be misplaced (2019:28-29).

¹⁰ It is argued that defamation “extends liability beyond the original deformer. Individuals who repeat or otherwise republish defamatory communications are subject to the same degree of liability as the original speaker of such content” (Gallardo, 2017:730)

What is required is that new social norms are established to the shamers about how to conduct themselves while shaming others. Such norms could be that shamers cannot do so anonymously¹¹ and that each individual shamer should be ready to take remedial responsibility for the collective harm caused to the shamed. Failure to hold to account those who unfairly shame others may create a dangerous circle of what Muir et al. (2023) refer to as ‘hurt people hurt people’, a circle of people shaming others as a form of entertainment or simply because they too had been shamed in the past.

4. Conclusion

Disputes in the literature are not on whether online shaming does have negative or positive impacts to its victims and their close ones, morally speaking. Arguments are instead that the indefiniteness of the consequences of online shaming block our cognitive capacity to determine the morality of shaming. It was therefore important to look into the extent to which online shaming could be both virtuous and vicious in order to determine whether or not it can ever be justified. I have shown that online shaming is a valuable tool in moral deliberations. Yet, it has serious harmful consequences to deserving wrongdoers, those who have been unfairly accused, and innocent third parties. These negative consequences are partly due to our tendency to overextend the concept of online shaming to include such other moral wrongs as online bullying, online harassment, doxing, and even defamations. I have therefore argued that, for online shaming to be morally justified, the following desiderata must be met. First, that the concept of online shaming must be distinguished from other inherently bad practices such as online bullying and harassment. In this regard, I established that the uniqueness of online shaming is in the fact that its primary target is to solely emphasize on enforcing moral norms. Then it is important that the shaming is not used as a footprint for

¹¹ Billingham & Parr (2020:28) has shown that it is important allow as morally justified certain amounts of anonymity for members of marginalized groups in order to increase freedom of expression and reducing the risks of “shame backlashes”.

escalating further immoralities. It is also crucial that the extent of shaming is narrowly and widely *proportionate* to the wrongs committed, and that it must be possible for the shamers to be held *accountable* for taking part in the act of shaming.

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Radio broadcasting as a catalyst for intercultural communication and dialogue: A case study of CRTV Mount Cameroon FM Radio

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Abstract

Radio broadcasting continues to serve as an important medium for facilitating intercultural communication by overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers. This study examines the role of radio broadcasting as a catalyst for intercultural dialogue and interaction. It uses CRTV Mount Cameroon FM (CRTV MCFM) (98.6) as a case study. The research employs a qualitative design, with key data collection methods including participant observation and content analysis, to explore how CRTV MCFM's programming structure, production processes, and audience engagement promote cross-cultural exchanges. Main themes identified are linguistic diversity, cultural representation, and audience participation. The theoretical framework includes Media Richness Theory (MRT), Dialogic Communication Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory. These theories collectively offer a framework for understanding how radio fosters intercultural dialogue and influences public discourse. Findings indicate that CRTV MCFM significantly advocates for cultural inclusivity through interactive programmes, multilingual content, and community-oriented discussions. Challenges such as language barriers, political constraints, and limited audience involvement restrict its full potential. The study also suggests strategic interventions like expanding multilingual programming, digital integration, and culturally sensitive content. While focused on CRTV MCFM, the insights gained provide valuable understanding of how radio can promote cross-cultural understanding and dialogue on a broader scale.

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Introduction

Intercultural communication and dialogue are vital concepts in the modern world characterised by globalisation and significant advances in science and technology. These concepts are essential for fostering mutual understanding, social cohesion at various levels, and peaceful coexistence among individuals from different backgrounds, alongside diversity and multiculturalism (Aguilar, 2024). As a result, various media, whether social or public, have the potential to promote both intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural interactions. They achieve this by providing platforms with diverse voices, languages, and cultural narratives. Radio broadcasting, in particular, is one of the most accessible and influential medium since then. Radio overcomes geographical and literacy barriers as it is inexpensive and can be accessed simply with frequencies (Davison, 2025). Therefore, it remains a powerful tool for public discourse across social classes and influences both cultural diversity and social integration.

In Cameroon, radio broadcasting remains a valuable medium for intercultural communication because the country is characterised by both linguistic and cultural diversity, with over 200 ethnic groups, each with its own language and cultural practices (Kindzeka, 2023; Veranso & Chibaka, 2022). Among many private and public broadcasting organisations, Mount Cameroon FM radio, owned by the government (counterpart of the main CRTV, dedicated to the south-west region of Cameroon), has been highly effective in shaping public perceptions and engaging diverse ethnic and linguistic communities. It features on-air discussions, interviews, and interactive sessions, among others. Nationwide, it holds significant potential, as it addresses issues related to cultural identity, national unity, peace, harmony, solidarity, linguistic diversity and multiculturalism. However, the extent to which these radio broadcasts facilitate intercultural communication remains an area of concern that warrants further investigation.

Generally, this paper aims to explore how radio broadcasting serves as a tool for intercultural communication and dialogue, focusing on CRTV Mount Cameroon FM. The study was based on unbiased observation and analysis of daily programmes. It is also examined the strategies and techniques used to facilitate cultural exchanges and interactions, the impacts of the programmes on audience perceptions, and the challenges faced in using radio as a medium for intercultural dialogue.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is a field of study that examines how people from different cultural backgrounds communicate, interact, and understand one another. It includes various aspects such as language, non-verbal communication, cultural norms, and values. Intercultural communication is the process by which individuals from different cultures exchange information, ideas, and meanings through various forms of communication, including verbal, nonverbal, and written. Scholars like Gudykunst and Kim (2021) emphasise that it involves not only transmitting messages but also interpreting and negotiating cultural meanings. Studies by Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) and Chen and Starosta (1996) further examine how intercultural communication is influenced by factors such as cultural identity, power dynamics, and context. Overall, intercultural communication is what keeps people connected despite multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

Intercultural Dialogue

The idea of intercultural dialogue refers to openness and respect in exchanging views among individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds. According to UNESCO (2001), this idea aims to foster understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse cultures. Dialogue is beneficial in a globalised world, where cultural interactions are unavoidable. It is used to promote peace and social cohesion (Bhabha, 2012). Intercultural dialogue can occur in various contexts, including education, community engagement, and international relations.

Huntington (1996) asserts that intercultural dialogue involves addressing stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings resulting from inter- or cross-cultural exchanges and interactions. During conflict mitigation and efforts to enhance social integration, intercultural dialogue is considered highly promising. For example, the Council of Europe (2008) states that creating a more inclusive and resilient society depends entirely on intercultural dialogue, which encourages individuals to appreciate cultural diversity and engage in constructive conversations. Furthermore, intercultural dialogue is not just about tolerance; it also involves actively seeking to understand and learn from one another (Giddens, 2002). In educational, political, regional, and economic contexts, intercultural dialogue enhances students' and business people's global competencies, preparing them for a multicultural world (Banks, 2008). It thereby encourages critical thinking and empathy. Consequently, educators, economists, and political practitioners increasingly incorporate intercultural dialogue into their daily practices to promote understanding and global citizenship (Deardorff, 2006).

Radio Broadcasting

One of the oldest methods of communication was audio, where individuals interacted and transmitted messages through sound. According to Riederer (2024), radio broadcasting is basically the transmission of audio content from a single source to a large audience. This could include music, news, live events or spoken word content. Traditionally, radio broadcasts used AM and FM signals (more on that later) to transmit information via radio waves. In the modern era, transmitting oral or audio content is achieved through the dissemination of radio waves to reach audiences (Kumar, 2025; Rowe, 2023). Radio is one of the earliest forms of mass communication (over 100 years, in fact), especially for sharing information, entertainment, and educational content with a broad audience. The distinctive feature of radio broadcasting is its accessibility and cost-efficiency compared to other print or television media (Rowe, 2023). This makes it a crucial

communication tool, particularly in regions with limited technological infrastructure (McLeish, 2005).

Radio performs various functions, including news reporting, cultural programming, music dissemination, entertainment, and public service announcements. In radio broadcasting, content can be customised in multiple languages to serve different communities. Therefore, it is especially effective in reaching diverse linguistic and cultural groups (Kuyucu, 2016 p. 2224). Additionally, modern radios are characterised by their interactive features, such as phone-ins, on-air presentations, live discussions, and audience participation. This enhances radio's important role as a platform for intercultural communication and dialogue. Thanks to advances in digitalisation, radio broadcasting has significantly evolved, now offering online streaming, podcasts, and satellite radio. This has extended its reach beyond traditional geographical boundaries (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023). Consequently, this transformation has further reinforced its role in global cultural exchange and cross-border communication.

Media and Intercultural Communication

Among many fields, media is a vital area of study for analysing the factors that shape interactions between cultures. This area encompasses the study of various media forms, ranging from online and digital to analogue formats such as television, film, social media, newspapers, and other print media. It should be noted that these media can either facilitate or hinder intercultural dialogue and understanding. Moreover, this field can be categorised into subthemes such as representation, identity, and the overall impact of globalisation on cross-cultural exchanges. Representation in the media is essential, as it shapes how diverse cultures perceive one another and influences prejudices and stereotypes. Studies have shown that media portrayals may intentionally or unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and promote a controversial understanding of different cultures. For instance, Chen (2024) highlights the importance of media representation in shaping cultural identities and perceptions. Additionally,

Wheatley (2024), in his work on media representation and cultural identity, emphasises that Western media constructs a skewed view of Eastern cultures, often resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts.

Identity, conversely, remains a central theme in media and intercultural communication. Media are valuable because they act as platforms where individuals can not only express their ideas and cultural identities but also negotiate their roles within the globalised environment. According to Chen (2024) and Wheatley (2024), the advent of participatory media such as social media has empowered marginalised individuals and groups to have their voices heard. This, in one way or another, nurtures a stronger sense of intercultural belonging. Moreover, this transition also influences how cultures interact and comprehend each other.

Furthermore, media and intercultural communication have experienced a major shift due to globalisation and its driving forces, especially the free movement of people, science, and technology. In other words, the growth of digital and virtual media has facilitated the ongoing exchange of cultural practices and ideas. This directly impacts phenomena such as both cultural hybridisation and cultural homogenisation (Kuang 2024). As Wibowo et al. (2023) observe, the flow of cross-border media generates new cultural forms while also presenting multiple challenges to local or indigenous traditions and identities. In summary, understanding the complexities of cultural interactions in this globalised context makes the relationship between media and intercultural communication highly significant.

Theoretical Framework

This article is guided by theories: Media Richness Theory (MRT), Dialogic Communication Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory. All of these theories form the foundation for analysing CRTV MCFM broadcasting as a tool for intercultural communication and dialogue. Firstly, Media Richness Theory (MRT), formulated by Daft and Lengel (1986), centres on the idea that media differ in their capacity to communicate information. It also argues that, despite radio's non-visual nature, its depth of sound, tonal variations,

and interactivity make it a rich medium for cultural exchange. In this case, CRTV utilises this richness through live discussions, interviews, and audience call-ins. This provides feedback mechanisms, thereby facilitating intercultural understanding. Secondly, Freire's (1970) Dialogic Communication Theory posits that communication is a two-way process that encourages mutual interaction and social transformation. CRTV radio, as a case in point, supports this principle by serving as a platform for interactive debates, interviews, and listener feedback, where diverse voices can share opinions, contest stereotypes, and engage in inclusive dialogue on cultural identity and national unity. Additionally, Agenda-Setting Theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972) emphasises the media's role in shaping public debate by highlighting certain issues. As a national broadcaster, CRTV influences societal attitudes towards intercultural relations through the selection, framing, and prioritisation of cultural topics—either fostering cultural inclusiveness or, alternatively, deepening divisions. This study explores, through these three theories, how CRTV radio programmes promote intercultural dialogue, analyse the effectiveness of its communication strategies, and assess the extent to which they influence public opinion on national unity and cultural diversity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach. It emphasises content analysis and participant/researcher observation to examine how CRTV radio broadcasts promote intercultural communication and dialogue.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection method for this study involves participant and researcher observation of radio production processes, programme structures, content development, and audience engagement. Key aspects observed include, but are not limited to: programme formatting (talk shows, interviews, debates, music, etc.); language use, translation, and interpretation; interactions among colleagues, hosts, and guests; and

audience participation (call-ins, messages, social media, etc.). The supplementary method used was content analysis of CRTV MCFM's programmes. This entailed analysing recorded broadcasts from CRTV MCFM, focusing on themes related to intercultural communication, linguistic diversity in radio programmes, and the portrayal of cultures in discussions, music selection, and audience engagement across regions.

Data Analysis and Presentation Techniques

The analysed data were presented using a thematic approach and aligned with the study's core objectives. The tables, visuals, and descriptive narratives were employed to organise the key themes and patterns identified through qualitative content analysis and participant observation. The tables were used to categorise and summarise observed elements, including programme formats, language use, cultural representations, and modes of audience participation. Alongside the tables, detailed textual descriptions explain and interpret the data within context. This combination of presentation formats ensures that both the depth and breadth of intercultural dynamics in CRTV MCFM radio broadcasts are communicated effectively to the reader.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study relies on public broadcasts and observations, it is important to clarify that there was no breach of confidentiality, as the focus was solely on publicly available content. Additionally, CRTV MCFM data were handled ethically, in accordance with journalistic integrity and media ethics.

Limitations to the Study

This study was limited by restricted access to internal decision-making processes at CRTV MCFM. Additionally, due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research and its inherent limitations, a triangulation strategy was employed, utilising multiple data sources (participant observation and content analysis) to cross-validate findings. Observational insights were

corroborated by programme contents, ensuring that interpretations were not based on isolated impressions.

Results

Overview of CRTV Mount Cameroon FM

CRTV Mount Cameroon FM (CRTV MCFM), broadcasting on 98.6 FM, is a branch of Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV), a major government-controlled radio and television broadcaster in Cameroon. CRTV broadcasts radio and TV programmes throughout all ten regions of the country and is seen as pro-government. CRTV MCFM began test broadcasting with music only in March 2000; later, a dedicated team of 17 broadcasters joined the management team, and full broadcasting started in April 2000. Its launch was revolutionary, quickly attracting a large audience, with the novelty being 'Tory Time' (the news in Pidgin English). Among its popular programmes are Comedy Show, Hot Connection, CheckPoint Machine, a Café, Lunch Flavours, Whispers, Debunscha Drops, Yesterday, and others.

Regarding the Vision and Mission of the station, CRTV MCFM is a commercial station within the state-owned CRTV network. It performs a similar role to a community radio station by prioritising community-focused content. This is evident through programmes like Debunscha Drops, Campus Train, Youth Empowerment, Kwata to Kwata, and others. Generally, CRTV MCFM aims to reclaim lost broadcast territories while consolidating controlled areas through the three broadcast approaches mentioned earlier. Additionally, CRTV MCFM has a dual goal of providing information and engagement alongside entertainment, featuring diverse musical genres. In line with CRTV's national objectives, it is committed to raising citizens' awareness, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing peace during crises.

Regarding services, CRTV MCFM operates with three main departments: the Unit of Programme and Local News (UPLN), the Music Programming and On-Air Talent (animation), and the Registry Unit. The primary aim of Entertainment and Music Programming is to attract and engage a diverse

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national audience by developing both entertainment programmes and musical playlists. The UPLN oversees the creation and production of various programmes, including quizzes (game shows), microprogrammes (short, focused programmes), and documentaries. The Registry Unit is responsible for news broadcasting and coverage, as well as editorial and resource management.

CRTV MCFM as a Medium for Intercultural Communication

Table 1: CRTV MCFM Programmes and Their Role in Enhancing Intercultural Communication and Dialogue

Day	Time	Programme	Observation
Monday	5:00-8:00 a.m.	BUEA BOULEVARD	6 a.m. news relayed from Yaoundé
	8:00-9:00 a.m.	MACHINE A CAFÉ	
	9:00-10:30 a.m.	MUSIC	
	10:30-noon	HOT CONNECTION	
	12:00-12:30 p.m.	MOUNTAIN NEWS	
	12:30-2:00 p.m.	LUNCH FLAVOUR	1 p.m. news relayed from Yaoundé
	2:00-3:00 p.m.	CHECKPOINT	
	3:00-3:30 p.m.		3 p.m. news relayed from Yaoundé
	3:30-4:00 p.m.	PROFILE	
	4:00-5:00 p.m.	TORY TIME	
	5:00-6:00 p.m.		5–6 p.m. news relayed from Yaoundé
	6:00-8:00 p.m.	DEBUNSCHA DROPS	7 p.m. news relayed from Yaoundé
	8:00-9:00 p.m.	MUSIC	
	9:00-10:00 p.m.	REBROADCAST	
10:00-midnight	BEDTIME MELODIES		

The schedule follows a similar pattern for Tuesday through Friday, with slight variations such as *Road Users’ Drivers* (Tuesday 9:00-10:00 a.m.), *Youth Empowerment* (Wednesday and Friday 9:00-10:30 a.m.), *Kwata to*

Kwata (Thursday 9:00-10:30 a.m.), and *Confusion* (Wednesday 3:30-4:00 p.m.).

For Saturday and Sunday, the schedule is more diverse, including:

Day	Time	Programme
Sunday	5:00-7:00 a.m.	JESUS REIGNS
	7:00-8:30 a.m.	Cameroon Calling (Yaoundé)
	8:00-10:00 a.m.	VARIOUS MEDITATIONS
	2:00-3:00 p.m.	CULTURAL RENDEZ-VOUS
	3:30-6:00 p.m.	Sport et rythme (Yaoundé)
	9:00-10:30 p.m.	JAZZ/SALSA ON MCFM
	10:30-12:00 a.m.	LIVE GOSPEL ON MCFM

Day	Time	Programme
Saturday	8:00-9:00 a.m.	ISSUES
	9:00-10:30 a.m.	COMEDY SHOW
	10:30-12:00 p.m.	SPORTS PAVILION
	1:30-3:00 p.m.	MUSIC
	3:30-5:00 p.m.	CAMPUS TRAIN
	7:30-9:00 p.m.	REGGAE ON MCFM
	10:00-12:00 a.m.	YESTERDAY ON MCFM

In the above rosters, most of the programmes focus on intercultural communication and reflect their role in fostering intercultural dialogue and exchange. Referring to the tables (Tables 1, 2, and 3) above, it is clear that CRTV MCFM offers diverse content that highlights the cultural, linguistic diversity, and social situations within Cameroon and beyond. Firstly, CRTV MCFM exposes audiences to different musical traditions, demonstrating an appreciation for various cultures. For example, programmes like Cultural Rendezvous, Reggae on MCFM, and Jazz/Salsa showcase entertainment and musical traditions from around the world. Additionally, CRTV MCFM features local, regional, and international music in its programming. By doing so, CRTV MCFM bridges cultural gaps, allowing the audience to engage with global artistic expressions while maintaining a connection to their own heritage.

CRTV MCFM is a platform for broadcasting news and information both nationally and internationally. For example, the radio station airs news programmes from the national station in Yaoundé and Mountain News, along with various scheduled news bulletins. Through this, CRTV MCFM ensures that audiences stay informed across all areas, including social, political, and economic issues. This is achieved because MCFM incorporates news from diverse perspectives to promote dialogue, mutual understanding, awareness, and overall connectivity within societies.

CRTV MCFM provides a well-established platform for discussion on contemporary social issues, education, youth, and community concerns. To achieve this, CRTV MCFM features talk shows such as Buea Boulevard, Machine à Café, Hot Connection, Checkpoint, Lunch Flavour, among others. Through these programmes, participants from diverse backgrounds share experiences, exchange perspectives, and sometimes find common ground on matters affecting their daily well-being. CRTV MCFM also promotes intercultural communication by using oral traditions and linguistic diversity. This is evident in programmes like Tory Time and Kwata to Kwata, which incorporate storytelling and other forms of live, informal on-air discussions.

Moreover, CRTV MCFM promotes religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue by offering programmes such as Jesus Reigns and Various Meditations to cater to diverse faith communities. Being sensitive to religious differences, CRTV MCFM creates a space for audiences from diverse religious backgrounds to understand and respect one another's beliefs, thereby reducing cultural and religious barriers. Similarly, sports programmes such as Carrefour de Sport and Sport et Rythme bring together listeners from various communities who share a common passion for sport. This fosters unity and cross-cultural interactions. Overall, CRTV MCFM cultivates an environment where diverse cultural expressions are celebrated, different viewpoints are exchanged, and communities are engaged in meaningful dialogue. It remains a powerful tool for promoting

intercultural communication and social cohesion in Cameroon and beyond through music, news, discussions, sports, and religious content.

Multilingualism, Translation and Interpretation in CRTV MCFM Broadcast

Table 2: Language of Communication and Associated Programme(s)

Language of Communication	Programme(s)
English	<i>Buea Boulevard, Hot Connection, Mountain News, Lunch Flavour, Checkpoint, Profile, Road Users' Drivers, Issues, Sports Pavilion, Campus Train, Jesus Reigns,</i>
Pidgin	<i>Buea Boulevard, Tory Time, Confusion, Kwata to Kwata, Comedy Show</i>
French	<i>Sport et Rythme ; Machine a Café, Carrefour de Sports, News Relay from Yaoundé</i>
English, Pidgin	<i>Buea Boulevard; Comedy Show; Youth Empowerment</i>
English, French	<i>Cultural Rendez-Vous</i>
Multilingual	<i>Music; Debunsha Drops; Bedtime Melodies; Reggae on MCFM; Jazz/Salsa on MCFM; Live Gospel on MCFM; Various Meditations</i>

CRTV MCFM functions as a vibrant platform for intercultural communication and dialogue through its multilingual programming. It ensures access to Cameroon's diverse linguistic communities by broadcasting in English, Pidgin, and French. CRTV MCFM also incorporates supplementary bilingual and multilingual content. For Anglophone listeners, there are programmes like Buea Boulevard, Hot Connection, and Mountain News. Pidgin-based shows include Tory Time and Kwata to Kwata, among others. CRTV MCFM aims to connect with audiences using an informal yet widely spoken lingua franca. For Francophones, French programmes, although fewer in number, include Sport et Rythme, Carrefour de Sports, and News Relays from Yaoundé's main station. This provides linguistic balance for Francophone, Anglophone, and local listeners. CRTV MCFM has also made deliberate efforts to promote linguistic inclusivity and cultural mediation through bilingual and cross-linguistic content such as Cultural Rendez-Vous (English and French) and Comedy Show (English and Pidgin).

It overcomes language barriers by leveraging the universal appeal of music to create shared cultural experiences through programmes such as Reggae on MCFM, Jazz/Salsa on MCFM, and Live Gospel on MCFM. Additionally, CRTV MCFM fosters moral and spiritual unity among listeners of different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds through religious and educational programmes such as Jesus Reigns and Various Meditations. Through this diverse range of programming, CRTV MCFM demonstrates how radio broadcasting can serve as a catalyst for intercultural dialogue, social cohesion, and linguistic diversity. Consequently, it reinforces the media's role as a tool for cultural diplomacy and social integration in multilingual societies.

Cultural Representation and Diversity in CRTV MCFM Radio Content

CRT V MCFM programmes reflect the interests of different cultural groups and highlight diversity. This can be effectively examined by focusing on key time slots in its weekly schedule to see how cultural identities are represented. For example, Buea Boulevard concentrates on local issues in the South-west region where Francophone and Anglophone communities coexist. Similarly, Cultural Rendezvous features discussions of cultural practices and Cameroon's rich cultural diversity across urban and rural areas. Sports programming also plays a unifying role in cultural representation since it showcases events like football and other games that cross ethnic boundaries. The presence of religious programming offers insights into faith and cultural identity within Cameroon's diverse religious landscape.

Inclusivity in Representation of Gender and Age Groups

CRTV MCFM encourages gender and age diversity. This is clear in programmes like Youth Empowerment, which focus on young people's aspirations, concerns, and development opportunities. These programmes position youth as a key demographic in the station's cultural representation strategy. Similarly, programmes like Tory Time aim to connect with different generations, helping to preserve cultural heritage

and appeal to both young and older audiences. Gender representation is another vital aspect of CRTV MCFM's inclusivity efforts. The station ensures a balanced participation of men and women as hosts, panellists, or discussion subjects. It is also notable that some programmes actively address gender-related issues. Furthermore, MCFM as an organisation is dedicated to gender equality by fostering an environment that promotes gender sensitivity. This includes encouraging active participation and covering women's events within their community.

Inclusivity in Content Focusing on Ethnic Groups

Cameroon boasts a highly diverse ethnic tapestry. With groups such as the Bamiléké, Bassa, Fang, Beti, and Douala, CRTV MCFM programming emphasises cultural values, history, and music; thus, serving as a vital platform for representation. Regional programmes like Debunscha Drops (Monday to Friday, 6:00-8:00 p.m.) offer insights into local cultural narratives and issues affecting specific ethnic communities. Additionally, CRTV's dedication to diverse music programming strengthens cultural inclusivity. The presence of multiple music genres, such as Reggae on MCFM and Jazz/Salsa on MCFM, showcases both traditional and contemporary cultural expressions. These programmes not only entertain but also honour Cameroon's rich cultural heritage by integrating musical influences from various regions and ethnic backgrounds.

Strategies Used by CRTV MCFM to Promote Intercultural Dialogue

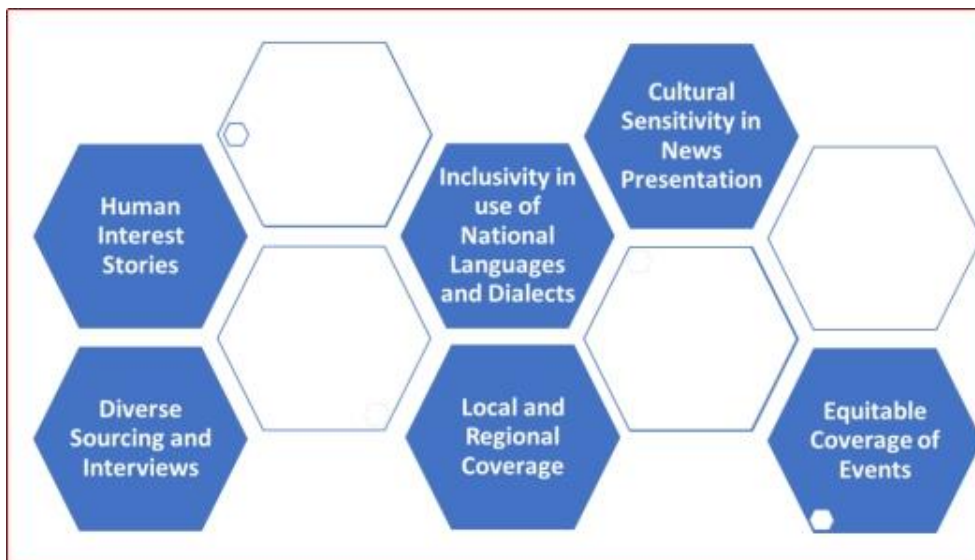


Figure 1: Strategies used by CRTV MCFM

CRTV MCFM employs various strategies to promote intercultural interactions and dialogue. Among these, it uses diverse sourcing and interviews in programme preparation. These interviews involve a wide range of individuals to ensure inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives, and diversified information-gathering adds depth to the content and narratives. By including voices from different walks of life, CRTV MCFM reflects the diversity of societies and their respective issues. During news production, CRTV MCFM ensures that local and regional news are well covered with regard to geographic relevance. Through this focused local and regional coverage, MCFM prioritises stories that are significant at the local and regional levels. This approach helps ensure that the content resonates with the cultural identities and concerns of various communities.

Considering the role of each human being, CRTV MCFM focuses on human-interest stories, including but not limited to living standards, cost of living, education, and health. It also provides a platform to showcase the diversity of cultural experiences. These stories often highlight the struggles and

triumphs of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This supports the idea that news touching on people's daily lives, regardless of their ethnic origin, can foster a sense of shared experience among listeners. Furthermore, fair coverage of events is essential at MCFM, guided by its process of selecting news based on relevance to the audience to ensure issues affecting various cultural groups are not overlooked. This is achieved by adhering to criteria such as news currency, geographic relevance, and shared human experience.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of national languages and dialects is one of the strategies employed by the station. CRTV MCFM incorporates content in various national languages, such as French and English, to reach different ethnic groups. Additionally, local music in some indigenous languages is broadcast. Broadcasting in multiple languages ensures that diverse cultural groups are not excluded. This is particularly important in Cameroon, where many indigenous languages are spoken. Similarly, cultural sensitivity is vital for news presentation. CRTV MCFM follows established culturally sensitive interview techniques and guidelines. These are designed with neutrality and active listening in mind to ensure cultural nuances are respected during interviews. Such an approach helps prevent marginalisation of certain cultural groups by enabling each interviewee to speak freely, without bias or cultural insensitivity.

Challenges facing Radio broadcasting

There are several challenges associated with using radio for intercultural dialogue and communication. It is essential to address them to maximise its effectiveness. First is the issue of language barriers, including differences in accents and dialects, as well as varying levels of language proficiency among both journalists and audiences. For example, radios often use technical jargon and idiomatic expressions, which can exclude non-native speakers. Another critical issue is the limited representation of diverse perspectives; in this, certain cultural groups are underrepresented in radio programmes and broadcasts. This often results in biased narratives

and, due to the underrepresentation of diverse voices and experts, hinders meaningful intercultural dialogue and exchange. Furthermore, stereotyping, prejudice, and cultural misinterpretation occur when programmes unintentionally reinforce stereotypes rather than foster understanding. This frequently happens because of inadequate research into cultural practices, values, and beliefs.

In some contexts, radios face political and ideological restrictions, which pose challenges for open discussions. Government regulations and censorship can suppress conversations on sensitive and controversial intercultural topics. Additionally, media ownership bias can influence how different cultures are portrayed and discussed on a radio station. Conversely, traditional one-way broadcasting limits real-time feedback and discussion, reducing audience engagement and hindering the effectiveness of intercultural dialogue. CRTV MCFM also has limited presence on digital interactive platforms such as social media and call-ins, restricting audience participation. Moreover, technological and accessibility barriers, especially in rural and underprivileged communities where radio signals are weak and digital radio or streaming services are not widespread, exacerbate the problem. For instance, CRTV MCFM's signal is strong in urban areas like Bamenda, Buea, and Limbe, but weaker in interior regions such as Koumba, Muea, and Tiko, where interference and glitches occur. This situation highlights the need for technical optimisation to improve radio efficiency. Finally, the complex nature of cultural issues often requires more time than the short segments typically allocated in radio programmes. These time constraints hinder in-depth discussions on intercultural topics. Addressing these challenges is essential to transforming radio into a more effective medium for fostering intercultural understanding and dialogue.

Theoretical Implications of the Findings

This study employed four theories. The theoretical implications of analysing CRTV MCFM's radio programmes are discussed below to explore how they align with, extend, or challenge these theories' assumptions.

Firstly, there is media richness theory (MRT), which asserts that media vary in their ability to convey rich information. According to MRT, radio is a relatively rich medium because of its auditory nature, tone variations, and interactive features (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The findings confirm that CRTV MCFM utilises these attributes through programmes such as Buea Boulevard, Hot Connection, and Tory Time, which include live discussions, interviews, and audience call-ins. These elements enable immediate feedback; this aligns well with MRT, as it emphasises feedback mechanisms to improve communication effectiveness. Examples also include multilingual coding and the use of diverse voices on radio programmes and musical shows such as Reggae on MCFM and Jazz/Salsa on MCFM, which create distinctive sound cues that transcend cultural differences. However, evidence also reveals challenges, such as limited digital interactivity (for example, weak social media support), which restricts real-time back-channel feedback and reduces the medium's richness in certain contexts. This suggests that MRT's hypotheses about media richness may need modification in situations where technological barriers, such as poor radio reception in rural towns like Koumba or Tiko, limit access and use. In multilingual, geographically diverse settings, this study extends MRT by highlighting the significance of integrating digital platforms to enhance radio's richness for intercultural communication.

Secondly, the Dialogic Communication Theory states that communication is two-way, encouraging mutual engagement and social change (Freire, 1970). CRTV MCFM reflects this through programmes like Cultural Rendezvous, Youth Empowerment, and Kwata to Kwata, which promote interactive debates and listener involvement. These programmes offer platforms for diverse voices to share opinions, challenge stereotypes, and foster inclusive discussions on cultural identity and national unity. Evidence shows that CRTV MCFM's multilingual approach—broadcasting in English, Pidgin, and French—and its focus on inclusive programming, such as religious tolerance in *Jesus Reigns* and *Various Meditations*, follow dialogic principles by ensuring mutual understanding despite linguistic and cultural

differences. However, issues like limited representation of some ethnic groups and the use of technical vocabulary or idiomatic expressions reveal shortcomings in achieving genuine dialogic engagement. These obstacles demonstrate that although CRTV MCFM encourages dialogue, reciprocal interaction remains restricted by linguistic and cultural barriers. This emphasises the importance of linguistic openness and cultural awareness for equal participation, particularly in multilingual societies like Cameroon. It also underlines the need to address underrepresentation to fully realise the transformative potential of dialogic communication.

Third, the Agenda-Setting Theory states that the media influence public discourse by emphasising some issues over others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). CRTV MCFM's programming, such as news briefs like Mountain News and culture-focused programmes like Cultural Rendezvous and Debunsha Drops, illustrates its effort to promote cultural diversity and national unity as key concerns. CRTV MCFM fosters inclusivity and shapes positive social attitudes towards intercultural relations by concentrating on local and regional content, such as stories reflecting the cultures of groups like the Bamiléké or Douala. Conversely, the research also highlights challenges, including the risk of biased narratives resulting from the underrepresentation of certain cultural groups and the influence of political or ideological pressures. These issues suggest that CRTV MCFM's role in agenda-setting could unintentionally reinforce divisions unless properly managed. This challenges the Agenda-Setting Theory by highlighting the complex nature of media influence in a multicultural context, where bias in media ownership and state control can distort the framing of cultural issues. The study broadens the theory by emphasising the importance of fair representation and culturally sensitive reporting to ensure media agendas foster unity rather than division.

Lastly, integrating the three theories offers a comprehensive understanding of CRTV MCFM's role in intercultural communication. MRT describes radio's interactive and hearable nature as features that support

rich cultural exchanges, although technological and accessibility barriers limit performances. Dialogic Communication Theory highlights CRTV MCFM's ability to create spaces for mutually inclusive interactions, but language barriers and underrepresentation reveal areas that need improvement for genuine dialogic change. Agenda-Setting Theory demonstrates CRTV MCFM's power in shaping public perceptions of diversity, yet biases and external influences complicate ongoing efforts to build diverse narratives. Collectively, these insights suggest that although CRTV MCFM aligns with the core principles of these theories, practical challenges encourage a rethinking of assumptions in the context of multilingual, multicultural radio broadcasting. The study advances the theory by proposing a hybrid model that combines media richness, dialogic engagement, and inclusive agenda-setting to improve radio's role as a tool for intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from analysing CRTV MCFM's radio programmes and the challenges identified in using radio as a tool for intercultural communication and dialogue, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance its effectiveness. These recommendations directly address the issues observed in the findings to ensure alignment with the study's insights.

i. *Improve Multilingual Programming to Tackle Language Barriers*

The findings suggest that language barriers, including differences in accents, dialects, and technical terms, can exclude non-native speakers. To enhance accessibility, CRTV MCFM should expand multilingual programming by offering more programmes in Pidgin, French, and local languages, as demonstrated in Tory Time and Cultural Rendezvous programmes (Section 1.3). Additionally, incorporating translation or interpreting services in news bulletins and talk shows, such as Mountain News or Buea Boulevard, can promote inclusivity for diverse linguistic communities. Presenting

programmes in clear and simple language will also improve understanding and engagement among different audiences.

ii. *Increase Representation of Underrepresented Cultural Groups*

The study shows limited representation of some cultural groups, which can lead to unbalanced discussions and hinder effective intercultural dialogue. CRTV MCFM should therefore actively include the perspectives of underrepresented ethnic minorities, such as smaller groups beyond the Bamiléké and Douala, in programmes like Debunscha Drops and Cultural Rendezvous (Section 1.4.2). This can be done by inviting guests, community leaders, and specialists from diverse backgrounds to participate in interviews and debates, ensuring fair representation that reflects Cameroon's rich ethnic diversity.

iii. *Promote Culturally Sensitive Content to Mitigate Stereotyping*

The findings further suggest that inadequate research into cultural practices can lead to stereotyping and misunderstandings. To tackle this, CRTV MCFM should develop comprehensive research protocols for sensitive cultural topics covered in programmes such as Cultural Rendezvous and Various Meditations. Training journalists and presenters on cultural sensitivity, especially for programmes like Kwata to Kwata and Hot Connection, will help reduce stereotypes and encourage respectful representation of cultural and religious identities, thereby fostering mutual understanding.

iv. *Enhance Interactive Platforms to Increase Audience Participation*

The study highlights the weakness of limited audience participation due to poor visibility on digital interactive platforms and minimal real-time feedback. CRTV MCFM should focus on more interactive methods, such as increasing call-in sessions on programmes like Buea Boulevard and Checkpoint, and integrating social media platforms to foster listener contributions. Future content will become more dialogue-focused by utilising audience reactions from these websites, aligning with the principles of Dialogic Communication Theory.

v. *Increase Technological Accessibility to Reach Rural Populations*

Access and technological constraints, such as weak radio signals in rural areas like Koumba, Muea, and Tiko, restrict the coverage of CRTV MCFM. To address this, the station needs to invest in technical optimisation to improve radio signal coverage in underserved regions. Furthermore, improving digital access to programmes like Reggae on MCFM and Jazz/Salsa on MCFM through online streaming and podcasting will increase audience engagement, fostering inclusivity for both urban and rural listeners.

Conclusion

Radio remains a highly influential medium for promoting cross-cultural and intercultural communication, dialogue, and exchange. Various challenges and opportunities shape its effectiveness. This article examines the role of radio in intercultural communication, focusing on how CRTV MCFM has fostered intercultural dialogue. It also provides strategic recommendations on how radio can be utilised to enhance intercultural understanding. For example, initiatives such as multilingual programming, diverse-voice inclusion, culturally sensitive content, interactive engagement strategies, unbiased reporting, digital integration, and partnerships with educational institutions are key to increasing its impact. Furthermore, strengthening technical infrastructure and expanding digital access are essential to ensuring wider audience participation, particularly in underserved communities. Overall, this study highlights the importance of proactively adapting radio to meet contemporary intercultural communication needs. The experience at CRTV Mount Cameroon FM demonstrates that, with the right strategies, radio can remain a vital tool for education, dialogue, and social cohesion in an increasingly diverse world.

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Religion as an Untapped Resource for Ethical Journalism in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study explores the potential role of religion in shaping ethical journalism practices in Tanzania. Given its pervasive influence on social, political, and economic life, religion remains a powerful force in society—particularly during times of crisis. The persistent concerns surrounding unethical journalism and declining media credibility in Tanzania have prompted renewed interest in whether religious values can reinforce journalistic ethics. Most Tanzanian journalists identify with major faith traditions—African Religions, Christianity, and Islam—all of which emphasise truth and justice. Through the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews with media stakeholders, this study investigates the central question: *How does the integration of religious values into journalism influence ethical journalism practices in Tanzania?* Using a mixed-methods approach, the article combines interviews and questionnaires with 84 respondents. Findings reveal that stakeholders are generally well-versed in journalism ethics and recognize the potential role of religion in reinforcing ethical standards. However, responses varied—some participants advocated for incorporating religious values into journalism, while others emphasised adherence to secular professional ethics. The study concludes by recommending the inclusion of religious ethics in journalism education, the promotion of religious dialogue within newsrooms, and the development of journalism practices that are both ethically sound and religiously sensitive.

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Introduction

Journalism in Tanzania is facing a profound ethical crisis. Persistent violations of professional codes of ethics have significantly tarnished the credibility of the media. These violations manifest in various forms, including praise-singing (Media Council of Tanzania, 2024), single-source reporting (Tagalile, 2019; Katunzi & Spurk, 2020; Spurk & Katunzi, 2018), partisanship, biased reporting, misleading headlines (Tagalile, 2015; Meena, 2012), character assassination (Rioba, 2012), and corrupt practices such as bribery and conflict of interest (Bilau, 2022; Kothari, 2018). Furthermore, the principle of presumption of innocence is routinely ignored in court and police coverage (MCT, 2024). Newsrooms in Tanzania are also affected by poor editorial standards, a lack of qualified personnel, insufficient quality control mechanisms, and an overreliance on inexperienced editors (Katunzi & Spurk, 2020). Journalistic content increasingly relies on press releases, shallow business stories, and superficial reporting, rather than investigative journalism and critical analysis (Powell, 2017). This erosion in quality has contributed to a public loss of confidence in the media. As Kerunga et al., (2020) observe, unethical practices have undermined the credibility of media, particularly affecting newspapers (Katunzi & Spurk, 2020).

Bribery, Corruption, and the Rise of 'Makanjanja'

Bribery and corruption are rampant in Tanzanian journalism and have been normalized within the profession. The terms *mshiko* (grip) and *bahasha* (envelope) are commonly used to describe kickbacks, tips, transport money, and other informal payments given to journalists (Mfumbusa, 2006; 2008). It is now common to see journalists soliciting money from newsmakers and event organizers at the end of media events.

This culture of inducements has birthed the phenomenon of *makanjanja*—individuals who pose as journalists to earn these incentives without professional training (Kothari, 2018). Alarming, some of those implicated in brown envelope journalism are highly educated, including holders of MA and PhD degrees. The rise of *makanjanja* is exacerbated by exploitative labour practices, the use of untrained freelancers, and economic hardships

that push journalists to depend on income from published stories. Consequently, distinguishing legitimate journalists from imposters becomes increasingly difficult. Kothari (2018) warns that if this trend continues, it will further erode public trust and render ethical codes unenforceable. Recent findings by the Media Council of Tanzania (2024) indicate a dangerous shift: younger journalists no longer view brown envelopes as bribes but as legitimate consultation fees—akin to those received by doctors and lawyers. This normalisation of corruption severely threatens the profession's integrity.

Partisanship and Political Involvement

Another ethical challenge emerges from journalists' increasing involvement in partisan politics. Active political affiliations among journalists undermine objectivity and impartiality—core tenets of ethical journalism. During the 2020 general elections, several senior journalists openly vied for political positions while continuing to work in the media, contravening MCT guidelines requiring journalists with political ambitions to resign permanently from the profession (The Citizen, 2022). Tagalile (2015) lamented that some of these politically involved journalists were among the most experienced, whose departure left a gap in mentoring younger professionals.

The 2012 East Arumeru by-election saw blatant ethical violations, with journalists donning party attire, using party vehicles, and engaging in smear campaigns (Meena, 2012). Such actions not only compromised journalism's neutrality but also posed a threat to democratic processes. Despite awareness campaigns and training efforts—such as the 2015 UNDP–Editors' Forum workshops for 170 journalists—bias persists. Post-election media monitoring revealed that government-aligned dailies such as *The Daily News*, *Habari Leo*, and *Uhuru* prioritized ruling party coverage, often relegating opposition stories to inner pages or framing them negatively (Election Monitor, 2015). In contrast, newspapers like *The Citizen*, *Mwananchi*, and *Nipashe* demonstrated more balanced reporting.

Ethics Enforcement and Systemic Challenges

While the Media Council of Tanzania has established self-regulatory frameworks, including an Ethics Committee, enforcement remains weak. The Committee lacks legal authority to enforce its decisions, and some editors refuse to recognize its legitimacy, especially when members are not journalists themselves (Media Watch, 2005). For example, the editor of *Dira ya Mtanzania* ignored repeated summons to respond to defamation allegations in 2012. Although, the Ethics Committee ruled in favour of the complainant, the ruling was not enforced by the erring paper (Barazani, 2015). This lack of compliance is particularly concerning given that editors and media houses were involved in crafting the codes of ethics they now disregard (Rioba, 2012).

The Cultural Relevance of Ethical Frameworks

Another pressing issue is the perceived disconnect between imported codes of ethics and local realities. Numerous scholars argue that dominant media ethics frameworks—largely Eurocentric—are ill-suited for African contexts (Mohammed, 2021; Mabweazara, 2018; Shaw, 2018; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017; Skjerdal, 2015; Wasserman, 2014). As such, African scholars have called for a hybridization of journalism ethics (Umejei, 2018), cross-cultural dialogue (Banda, 2009), and the de-Westernization of media standards (Ward, 2008). These approaches argue that journalism ethics should consider contextual realities—such as job insecurity, political pressure, limited press freedom, and sociocultural values, including religion (Pintak, 2013; Bilau, 2022). Wasserman (2014) underscores this by asserting that “dominant northern perspectives in media theory and ethics are themselves rooted in specific cultural conditions, despite occasional claims to universal validity” (p. 785). While journalism cultures share some global characteristics, significant differences remain, influenced by diverse political, economic, technological, and cultural conditions (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017).

Toward Contextual and Ethical Journalism in Tanzania

Given these multifaceted challenges, solutions must go beyond traditional codes of conduct. A pluralistic approach that incorporates various ethical frameworks, including religious values, may offer a more viable path forward. Mfumbusa (2004), echoing Boeyink's (1994) critique of ethics implementation in the U.S., argued that the necessary conditions for enforcing ethical codes did not exist in Tanzania. He proposed the inclusion of religious ethics in journalism as a complementary solution. Ward (2008) also emphasised the need for cross-cultural dialogue to expand and diversify ethical journalism globally. Similarly, Omojola (2008, as cited in Kothari, 2018) highlights the importance of structural support, job security, and respect from news sources as prerequisites for ethical journalism in Africa.

Religion as a Source of Ethical Renewal

Religion plays a vital role in the social, moral, and spiritual lives of Tanzanians but remains marginalized in journalism discourse. Values drawn from African Traditional Religions, Christianity, and Islam could serve as powerful tools in revitalizing ethical journalism. These religious traditions, which emphasize truth, justice, compassion, and responsibility, have historically shaped Tanzanian social welfare. If meaningfully integrated into journalistic practice, they could help foster a more ethical media environment. This study therefore argues for a re-evaluation of the role of religion in journalism. Rather than viewing religion as incompatible with professional standards, it can be seen as a complementary ethical framework that aligns with the cultural and moral foundations of Tanzanian society. Religion, when thoughtfully applied, may offer a powerful alternative to the dominant Western ethical paradigms and contribute to restoring credibility, professionalism, and public trust in Tanzanian journalism.

Religion in Tanzania: A Conceptual Framework

Religion holds a central place in the lives of most Tanzanians, shaping their moral outlook, cultural practices, and daily interactions. It manifests in

multiple forms and influences both individual behavior and broader societal norms. As John S. Mbiti, a renowned scholar of African religion and philosophy, aptly observed, “Africans are notoriously religious,” adding that “religion permeates all departments of life to such an extent that it is not easy or possible to isolate it” (Mbiti, 1991, p. 1). Religion serves not only as a spiritual anchor but also as a powerful moral compass for individuals and communities. Aderibigbe (2015) highlights that due to Africa’s deep religiosity; people have evolved into religiously conscious communities, adhering to African Religions (AR), Christianity, or Islam. In the same view, Westerlund (1980) contends that Africans are both religious and collectivist. Meanwhile, Gomez (2013) asserts that indigenous spirituality functioned effectively prior to the introduction of foreign religions. The arrival of Christianity and Islam through colonial and missionary movements led to significant religious transformations, with conversions largely determined by which religion arrived first in a given locality.

This article focuses on the three dominant religious traditions in Tanzania: African Religions (AR), Christianity, and Islam. These are the most widely practiced belief systems among indigenous Tanzanians. However, there is no recent official religious demographic data. The last national census to include religion was in 1967, which reported Christians at 32 per cent, Muslims at 30 per cent, and AR adherents at 37 per cent (Omari, 1984; Mfumbusa, 2014; Sundqvist, 2017). Since then, religious statistics have been omitted from national censuses to avoid conflict and preserve national unity, following disputes between Christians and Muslims over population claims (Omari, 1984; Tanner, 2012; Becker, 2007).

Tanzania is a home to more than 120 ethnic groups, most of who adhere to the three aforementioned religions. Notably, African Traditional Religions continue to influence both Christianity and Islam, resulting in a form of syncretism. Tanner (2012) notes that AR has been absorbed into both religions, influencing beliefs and practices, and blurring the lines between ‘pure’ Christianity or Islam. This syncretism is visible not only in community

life but even within households, where members of different faiths coexist. As Omari (1984) suggests, this integration renders Christianity and Islam effectively 'indigenous' to Tanzanian society.

Religious Expressions in Tanzanian Life

Tanzanians' religiosity is reflected in both symbolic artifacts and daily behavior. Physical expressions include churches, mosques, shrines, and religious dress such as Islamic robes, *buibui* (veils), and skull caps—although the latter are less commonly worn in public institutions. Religion also pervades civic life. Mesaki (2011) provides a comprehensive account of this:

Not only on a personal level but there are numerous illustrations demonstrating how religion has become part and parcel of Tanzanian society. These include the national anthem, the opening prayers of parliamentary sessions, the swearing-in of public officials using the Bible, Quran, or Constitution, religious broadcasts on national radio (TBC), the existence of a ministerial portfolio for religious affairs, the inclusion of religious education in school curricula, and recognition of Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays (p. 249).

Although the Tanzanian government maintains a secular stance—proclaiming that "the government has no religion"—religion remains integral to public life. Government involvement in religious matters often emerges when national unity or values are perceived to be at risk. For instance, Ng'atigwa (2020) observes that after the collapse of Ujamaa in the 1980s, a period marked by economic hardship, people increasingly turned to religion and religious gatherings (*mihadhara*) for consolation. Similarly, religion was instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the government urged citizens to return to their faiths and encouraged religious leaders to disseminate health information in spiritually trusted ways. As Ndaluka et al. (2021) state, "religion slowed the spread of COVID-19 when it had been used as an instrument to provide credible health information in a theologically trusted manner" (p. 120). Religion is also a

key agent of socialisation, especially in family and community settings. Through Sunday schools, madrassas, and initiation rituals, children are introduced to religious teachings and social norms. As Okon (2012) notes that parental faith often becomes the faith of the children, who are then socialised into rites of passage and moral behavior (p. 138).

Religion and Journalism Ethics

Given the religious orientation of most Tanzanians, it is reasonable to assume that many journalists were socialised within these religious frameworks long before entering the profession. Accordingly, they would have internalised religious values such as honesty, justice, and accountability—principles that resonate with journalistic ethics. As Chioma & Johnson (2014) observe, “there is no doubt that in many situations religious ethics are important elements in building a solid foundation for mass communication and journalism practice” (p. 31).

Religious teachings emphasize moral responsibility and accountability, both essential to ethical journalism. Shao (2023) argues that “journalists who uphold their religious values are more likely to practice ethical journalism and serve the public with integrity” (p. 46). From a Christian perspective, Oosthuizen (2014) proposes that journalists guided by the principle of *agape*—selfless love—should strive to produce news that is timely, truthful, reliable, and engaging. This aligns with the journalistic principle of truth-telling, where any distortion of information is considered unethical. In Islam, journalists are urged to maintain professional integrity and follow a “decent style” in their reporting. They are expected to “avoid offensive language, obscenity, slander, gossip, and *fitna* (provocation or incitement), and to uphold the reputation of both the profession and the Islamic tradition” (Oosthuizen, 2014, p. 29).

African Religions, though largely oral in nature, also uphold a rich set of moral principles relevant to journalism. These include truthfulness, honesty, accountability, social responsibility, and the protection of public trust (Chioma & Johnson, 2014, p. 32). African Religions also discourage

unethical practices such as sensationalism, gossip, misinformation, and manipulation. It promotes confidentiality, especially concerning sources, and encourages journalists to contribute to social harmony. In all three religions, the role of the journalist is implicitly that of a truth-bearer and a defender of justice and fairness. By aligning journalistic ethics with religious values, it becomes possible to enrich and reinforce professional conduct in a culturally grounded way.

Methodology

Research design

This study was prompted by the apparent failure of self-regulation mechanisms to sustain ethical journalism in Tanzania. It is an exploratory study that examined the perspectives of journalists and media stakeholders on the integration and influence of religion in journalism practice. The research was conducted in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, two major urban centres that host significant media houses, journalism training institutions, and a large population of practicing journalists. Dar es Salaam, being the commercial capital, is the country's primary hub of news production, accounting for at least 20 per cent of all news coverage (Spurk & Katunzi, 2022). Mwanza, the second-largest commercial city, also hosts numerous regional offices of national media outlets. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for the triangulation of findings and the mitigation of limitations associated with relying solely on a single method (Creswell, 2014, cited in Kayungi, 2021). This approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), mixed methods enable researchers to explore complex issues from multiple angles and enhance the richness of insights.

Sample size

The study involved 84 media stakeholders, comprised of 75 journalists, selected through convenience sampling from their respective newsrooms to complete self-administered questionnaires. It also involved nine key

informants, selected through purposive sampling for in-depth interviews comprising of editors, religious leaders, and officials from media institutions such as the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) and the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA).

Sampling technique

Due to restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists were working remotely, and physical access to newsrooms was limited in accordance with WHO guidelines. To address this, questionnaires were distributed to respondents to complete at their convenience, and were collected at a later date. The questionnaire data was primarily used to capture general trends and perceptions among journalists on the role of religion in ethical journalism.

Data analysis

The qualitative interviews were used to gain deeper insights from media leaders and stakeholders, and to complement and validate the questionnaire findings. The media houses represented in this study included Sahara Media Group, BBC Swahili (Tanzania), The Guardian Limited, and Tanzania Standard (Newspapers) Limited. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The researcher identified recurring themes and categories based on the theoretical framework and data collected. A process of pattern matching was applied to determine consistencies and deviations across different data sources. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Descriptive statistics were employed to generate frequencies that reveal common perspectives among respondents.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conduct this scientific inquiry, the researcher observed all the required research ethics issues including acquiring needed research permit and keep abreast with the credibility of the study. The researcher ensured

confidentiality of data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires. Since this study involved personal beliefs, the researcher did not force participants to comment on matters that they were unwilling to talk about. The researcher informed participants that the interviews and filling the questionnaires exercises would not attract any payments and interviewees had the chance to decide at any time they wished to discontinue. Moreover, during the data collection, the researcher ensured that data from interviewees were well captured and asked for clarification on matters for better understanding.

In this study, the interviewees were made to understand that recorded audio during the interviews would be used for verbatim quotations but would be kept anonymous. In order to get information at the conducive atmosphere, the researcher requested the institutions and respondents for their most convenient times and places, prior to the start of this entire research. For those reasons, the findings of this study are compiled and printed as a research report to be stored at the UDSM library to be used as a reference material for students and researcher in the fields of religion and media ethics and training in the country and the world.

Findings and Discussion

Perspectives on the Role of Religion in Journalism

The findings indicate that a majority of respondents recognise religion as having a functional role in promoting ethical journalism in Tanzania. All questionnaire respondents acknowledged that religious values influence various aspects of journalism practice.

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of the Functions of Religion in Journalism Practice

No.	Function of Religion	Frequency	Percentage
i.	Urges hard work	16	8.9%
ii.	Enhances honesty	23	12.9%
iii.	Influences discipline	22	12.3%
iv.	Influences objectivity	27	15.2%
v.	Promotes unity among journalists	13	7.3%
vi.	Emphasises coverage of development issues	15	8.4%
vii.	Encourages compliance with professional ethics	28	15.7%
viii.	Supports unity, stability and peace in the country	34	19.1%
Total		178	100%

Source: Field data, 2022

The most frequently cited function was the role of religion in promoting unity, stability, and peace in society (19.1 per cent), followed by its influence on compliance with professional ethics (15.7 per cent) and objectivity in reporting (15.2 per cent). These results suggest that journalists perceive religion not just as a personal belief system but as a framework that reinforces core journalistic values.

Qualitative Insights

Interview data aligned with the questionnaire findings, highlighting religion's role as a moral compass that shapes individual behaviour and professional conduct. Respondents frequently referenced the concept of "fear of God" as a deterrent against unethical practices such as misinformation, sensationalism, or accepting bribes. An editor with *The Daily News* said that:

If a journalist is a God fearing person then it is easier for them to comply with the guiding principles of our profession. Justice, for instance, is central to both religion and journalism. Justice is everywhere; it is even stated in the Bible. When you have a fear of God, you will not report information that damages someone's personality. It also gives you an understanding of

many worldly issues and thus enables us to live well by complying with the principles of the society around us.

Religious principles were seen to support accountability, fairness, truthfulness, and social responsibility, all of which align with established journalistic ethics. An editor from Mwanza noted:

Religion reminds journalists to adhere to the existing codes of conduct, for example, by balancing stories. It is a constant ethical checkpoint. Therefore, before a journalist reports a story he or she should seek guidance from his or her religion and then weigh its impact the society. I say this because when a journalist wants to report an issue, needs to evaluate its ethical implication or if it is worth reporting. Do not report for sake of reporting, otherwise you may be causing harm to people.

Moreover, media stakeholders asserted that religions universally condemn falsehood and injustice, framing unethical reporting as a form of moral transgression. Editor of Nipashe narrates:

Religion should guide journalists in evaluating the ethical implications of a story before publishing. It's not just about reporting; it's about doing no harm.

Challenges to Ethical Journalism

Respondents attributed the persistence of ethical violations to several factors, including: technological disruption and social media pressures, economic hardships and low journalist remuneration, negligence by editors and media managers and influx of inadequately trained graduates from journalism schools. An official from MCT explains:

Ethical compliance must be consistently reinforced. Just as religions remind their followers daily to avoid sin, journalists also need constant ethical reminders. There are new entrants in the field from journalism schools every day who need to be

sensitised regularly. There is no way it will reach a time we can say that 'we have stabilised on ethics'.

Religion as a Moral Foundation for Journalism

The findings support the proposition that religious values can complement journalistic codes of ethics, offering a secondary layer of moral guidance. Religion was perceived not only as a source of ethical grounding but also as a mechanism for self-regulation when institutional mechanisms fall short. These conclusions resonate with Rioba (2012), who noted:

Religion helps in guiding morality. Someone who is not religious may lack concern for public consequences, but religious journalists often feel personally accountable to a higher power (p. 146).

Similarly, Okon (2012) argued that religion promotes social cohesion and moral discipline, both of which are critical to responsible journalism. Religious teachings whether from the Bible, Qur'an, or African belief systems promote justice, truth, and fairness, which are also foundational to journalism practice. Studies by Tittle & Welch (1983), and Weaver & Agle (2002), as cited in Parboteeah et al., (2008), affirm a strong correlation between religion and ethics. Religious systems often define societal norms and shape the ethical frameworks through which professions like journalism are practiced.

The Use of Religion in Journalism Practice

Journalists who responded to the questionnaires indicated that they often draw upon religious values as a source of ethical guidance in their journalism practice in Tanzania. The findings reveal that religion plays a significant role in helping journalists uphold professional standards, particularly in promoting objectivity, fairness, and responsibility in their work. Table 2 presents the specific ways in which religion is applied in journalism practice.

Table 2: The Use of Religion in Journalism Practice

No.	Use of Religion in Journalism Practice	Frequency	Percentage
i.	Communal approach to issues	5	7%
ii.	Objectivity, fairness, and balance	31	41%
iii.	Good human relations with sources	13	17%
iv.	Use of acceptable language and content	5	7%
v.	Truthfulness in writing and presentation	26	35%
vi.	Prioritising human-interest stories	17	23%
vii.	Respect for authority in news sourcing	15	14%
viii.	Avoiding character and business assassination	8	11%
ix.	Avoiding incitement and harm in reporting	11	15%
Total		120	100%

Source: Field data, 2022

From these results, objectivity, fairness, and balance emerged as the most cited applications of religion in journalism (41 per cent), followed by truthfulness (35 per cent) and a focus on human-interest stories (23 per cent). These results affirm the perceived alignment between religious morality and journalistic ethics. Several interview respondents noted that their religious beliefs influenced their editorial decision-making and journalistic performance. For example, some stated that they used their religious convictions to determine whether a story was ethical, newsworthy, or in the public interest. Editor in Mwanza narrates:

I do not allow a story to air if it contradicts journalism ethics. If the story is newsworthy and can be improved ethically, I may allow it. For example, a school owner in Mwanza wanted publicity for supporting poor students. To me, it wasn't a matter of public interest—it was for self-promotion—so I ignored it.

The findings suggest that journalists who incorporate religious teachings into their work tend to exercise greater responsibility and editorial discretion. This reflects a broader observation that religious values such as truthfulness, justice, and service to the public mirror the professional standards of journalism.

From an Islamic perspective, journalistic ethics are grounded in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and broader human experience, all of which emphasize truth-telling, justice, and commitment to the public good (Hamada, 2016).

Similarly, in Christianity, journalistic principles are derived from Biblical teachings. For instance, the Ten Commandments—particularly the commandment against bearing false witness—serve as ethical imperatives. Oosthuizen (2014: 23) asserts that “The ninth commandment, which states ‘you shall not give false testimony against your neighbour,’ has specific implications for media professionals.” The New Testament further promotes the concept of *agape*—unconditional love and care—which implies that journalists should publish news that is timely, accurate, understandable, and uplifting (Froneman, 1997). Thus, religious teachings, whether Islamic or Christian, can serve as supplementary frameworks for ethical decision-making in journalism.

The Adoption of Religion in Journalism Practice and Ethical Challenges

To assess whether religion has positively influenced ethical journalism in Tanzania, respondents were asked if they believed religious values had helped improve media standards. Approximately 74 per cent answered “yes”, 10 per cent disagreed, and another 10 per cent said they “did not know”, while 7 per cent did not respond. The detailed insights are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Influence of Religion on Ethical Journalism Practice

No.	Influence of Religion on Ethical Journalism Practice	Frequency	Percentage
i.	Encourages balanced reporting	14	11.3%
ii.	Avoids presumption of guilt	1	0.8%
iii.	Integrate religion into journalism codes	6	4.8%
iv.	Include religion in journalism curriculum	5	4.0%
v.	Emphasize development and peace in reporting	30	24.2%
vi.	Promote objective reporting on public interest issues	25	20.2%
vii.	Strengthen the media's bridge role with the public	15	12.1%
viii.	Support truth-telling without fear or bias	17	13.7%
ix.	Give voice to the marginalised (e.g., elderly, women, PWDs)	11	8.9%
Total		124	100%

Source: Field Data, 2022

Interview data revealed mixed views. Some media stakeholders believed that religion could help restore ethical journalism, especially in the face of contemporary moral dilemmas. Senior editor argued that:

There are things considered human rights today that contradict religious values—for example, same-sex marriages. Our religions define marriage differently. Also, labeling certain religious groups as terrorists is harmful. We need to use religion ethically and positively to uphold journalism values—not to promote discrimination.

Others, however, maintained a more cautious view. A journalism scholar, trainer, and former newsroom manager noted that religion alone cannot change unethical practices unless individual journalists are personally committed to ethical conduct. A media researcher and scholar in Dar es Salaam contended that:

Religion can remind journalists of their principles, but it cannot force them to change. Ethical commitment is personal. Just like in religion—going to church does not mean one believes. Ethics is a moral obligation, not a legal one.

Integrating Religion in Journalism Education

The study found divergent views on whether religion should be integrated into journalism education. Some respondents expressed concern that selecting one religion might lead to discrimination in a multi-faith society like Tanzania. Others argued that the time is not yet ripe and that deeper national dialogue is needed before such a step can be taken. However, a significant number of interviewees supported the idea that religious education—starting from childhood—could help shape ethically grounded professionals. An editor in Mwanza said:

Teaching religion from early childhood differs from teaching it at 29. Those who grow up with religious values are more likely to internalise

them in their professions. That's how we produce professionals who fear God.

Additionally, respondents proposed special forums or dialogue platforms between journalists and religious leaders to collectively address unethical practices. Religion has historically provided support in times of crisis—whether economic, political, or social—but is rarely consulted when journalism faces a crisis of credibility.

The study also confirms that Tanzanian journalists continue to face challenges such as low pay, economic instability, and professional insecurity, which contribute to ethical violations. As Schiffrin (2010) observes “many African journalists suffer from the devaluation of their profession, which has left them vulnerable and isolated.” (p. 100). Yet, as McMullen (2001) argues “Journalism is more than a satisfying career and essential public service; it is a calling—a vocation—and its thoughtful practice is a way of serving both humankind and God.” (p. 21).

Towards a Synthesis of Faith and Professionalism

In the African context, where religion plays a central role in daily life (Mbiti, 1969), it is imperative to reconsider how religious values—drawn from Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Beliefs—can be synthesized into a framework that supports ethical journalism.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the persistent violation of journalism ethics—leading to the erosion of media credibility in Tanzania—can be meaningfully addressed through the integration of religious values into journalistic practice. Findings from both the survey and interviews support the long-standing assertion by Mfumbusa (2004) that personal values, particularly those rooted in religious teachings, often have a greater influence on newsroom behavior than codified professional ethics. This view remains relevant today, as the data indicates that religion offers a

reservoir of ethical principles—such as truthfulness, justice, responsibility, and respect—that align closely with the core tenets of ethical journalism. Although religion has traditionally played a critical role in addressing social, political, economic, and health challenges—especially during times of crisis—its potential contribution to journalism practice remains underutilized. This study makes a novel contribution to journalism discourse by offering a clearer understanding of how religion can be deployed to enhance ethical standards and professionalism among Tanzanian journalists. There is, therefore, a pressing need for theoretical and practical exploration of how religious discourses can be integrated into journalism. Scholars, educators, and media stakeholders should work collaboratively to define relevant methodologies, content frameworks, and implementation strategies that align with contemporary journalism in Tanzania. This does not imply a wholesale rejection of Western theories that currently shape journalism education and practice. Rather, it suggests a critical reassessment of these paradigms to accommodate indigenous knowledge systems—including religious and traditional African values—that may be better suited to the local ethical realities of journalism in Tanzania.

Given the centrality of religion in the everyday lives of Tanzanians, the call to integrate religious values into journalism practice is both timely and contextually appropriate. A return to core religious principles—such as honesty, fairness, truth, accountability, and respect—signals a potential renaissance in African journalism, grounded in values that resonate more deeply with local realities. The inadequacy of dominant Western ethical codes in non-Western settings further reinforces the need to revisit, adapt, or reconstruct these codes to reflect indigenous values and ethical expectations. To restore public trust and make journalism more meaningful, coordinated and deliberate efforts must be undertaken. Media stakeholders should ensure that journalists are not only aware of their religious heritage but are also encouraged to embody and apply those values in their professional conduct. One way to facilitate this is by integrating religious ethics into the curriculum of journalism and mass communication programs

in Tanzanian institutions. Furthermore, targeted re-training initiatives—such as workshops, seminars, and short courses—should be designed for practicing journalists to reinforce ethical and religious values in the context of their work.

Equally important is the need to reorient Tanzanians and Africans more broadly toward the enduring relevance of African traditional values, which are often dismissed as outdated or uncivilized. These indigenous belief systems also promote ethical virtues such as truth-telling, communal responsibility, respect for authority, and moral conduct. Recognizing and revitalizing these traditions can help build a journalism culture that is both ethical and culturally grounded. This article not only proposes practical interventions for media practitioners and educators but also lays a theoretical foundation for ongoing dialogue on the role of religion in journalism in Tanzania. In doing so, it positions the country as a potential pilot case for the broader African continent in exploring the intersection of religion, ethics, and journalism practice. The study concludes that the moral teachings embedded in these faith traditions offer valuable foundations for ethical decision-making and professional integrity in journalism practice in Tanzania.

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Organisational leadership style and its influence on the ability to undertake strategic public relations practice in Tanzania's commercial banks

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ABSTRACT

This study, conducted in selected banking institutions in Tanzania, examined how transformational and transactional organisational leadership styles influence the ability of public relations (PR) personnel to undertake strategic public relations practice. Guided by an interpretivist research philosophy, the study used a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews involving chief executive officers, PR officers, human resource directors, and marketing directors selected purposively. Findings revealed that organisational leaders relied mainly on transactional leadership behaviours to enhance PR personnel's day-to-day performance. However, these behaviours provided limited motivation for PR practitioners aiming to develop and apply strategic communication competencies. Heavy dependence on directives, reward mechanisms, and task-centred supervision constrained opportunities for PR personnel to participate meaningfully in strategic planning and decision-making processes. The paper recommends that bank leaders adopt more positive and participatory leadership behaviours, particularly by engaging PR personnel in planning and implementing strategic communication tasks. It further proposes that leaders strike a balance between transactional and transformational leadership approaches to reduce the negative consequences of overreliance on either style. Such a balance would strengthen strategic public relations practice, support professional growth, and enhance overall organisational effectiveness.

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Introduction

Strategic public relations (henceforth PR) practice refers to proactive, purposeful, and planned communication programmes and campaigns designed to help the organisation meet its overall strategy (Tench & Yeomans, 2017). The PR personnel should demonstrate certain abilities to succeed in performing job-related tasks when demonstrating strategic PR practice in organisational settings. Without exhibiting these abilities, it becomes impractical for the PR personnel to communicate activities in the overall vision at both organisational and departmental levels (Harrison & Mühlberg, 2014). The literature recommends such abilities as the capacity to own the organisational communication vision, the ability to improve PR work performance, the ability to attain job innovation and creative attitudes in PR, the ability to realise good communication interrelationship with the top leaders, and the ability to demonstrate all levels of work place commitment (Men & Stacks, 2013). To realise these abilities, however, depends on, among other factors, the existing organisational leadership style, namely transformational and transactional, as well as the related leadership style behaviours (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Backing up this is an argument that strategic PR practice is a complex and dynamic process of building good relationships between the organisation and its strategic stakeholders (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015).

Organisational leadership style refers to the purposeful means by which a leader influences subordinates to pursue the future organisational state that intends to change the present one (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017). Organisational leadership style subdivides into two categories: transactional and transformational leadership styles. As Amirul and Daud (2012, p. 193) point out, these two leadership styles: “form a new paradigm for understanding both the lower and higher order effects of leadership styles”, hence shaping earlier leadership types that have existed for the past half a century. The transactional leadership style is the one in which a leader promotes compliance of his or her followers, in this case, the PR personnel, through rewards and punishments. The style embraces *command-and-*

control and *empower-and-track* leadership models (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017). According to Kark, Dijk, and Vashdi (2017), the followers' motivation in this leadership style relies on doing as per the leader's expectations to avoid punishment or disciplinary actions, focusing on gaining praise or reward. The transactional leadership style behaviours are contingent rewards and contingent punishments (Birasnav, 2013). In contrast, the transformational leadership style is the one in which the leader raises the followers' awareness of the importance of desired organisational outcomes and how to reach such outcomes (McCleskey, 2014). Different from transactional leaders who emphasise the role of rules, standards, and power in organisations, the transformational leader embraces the *connect-and-nurture* leadership model (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017) because he or she is "relationship-oriented, interactive, visionary, passionate, caring, and empowering" (Yue, 2019, p. 4). The transformational leadership style behaviours are, namely, idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (personalised attention) (Garg and Ramjee, 2013).

While much PR research has underscored the importance of organisational leader-PR personnel fit in affecting organisational outcomes (Heath, 2013; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018; Seitel, 2017; Yue, 2019), the specific empirical literature that explains how organisational leadership style shapes or affects the abilities of the PR personnel to undertake strategic PR practice in the context of Tanzania are not addressed. Anani-Bossman (2020) accurately asserts that, though PR has grown remarkably since the early 2000s in the African continent (of which Tanzania is a part), there are few scholarly studies regarding PR practice. To fill this gap, this paper investigated the extent to which the organisational leadership style influenced the ability of the PR personnel to undertake strategic PR practice in the context of selected banking institutions in Tanzania.

Thus, the following question guided the study:

To what extent does the organisational leadership style influence the ability of the PR personnel to undertake strategic PR practice in the context of commercial banks in Tanzania? This main question had five sub-questions that formed the content of the study. These questions were as follows:

- (i) What is the influence of idealised influence on the PR personnel’s ability to own the organisational communication vision?
- (ii) What is the influence of inspirational motivation on the PR personnel’s ability to improve PR work performance?
- (iii) What is the influence of intellectual stimulation on the PR personnel’s ability to attain job innovation and creative attitudes in PR?
- (iv) What is the influence of personalised attention in connection to Leader-PR personnel interrelationship in communication?
- (v) What is the influence of rewards and punishments on the PR personnel’s ability to achieve workplace commitment?

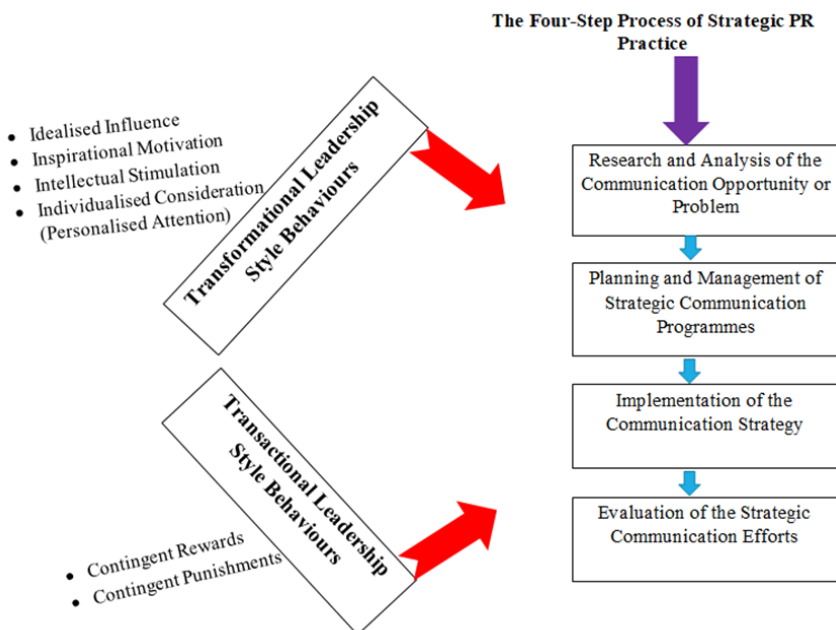


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework: Leadership Behaviour and Strategic PR Performance

Source: Field Data (2024)

Methodology

Theoretical Foundation

The paper is based on the Path-Goal Theory of Motivation and the Excellence Theory. On the one hand, the Path-Goal Theory of Motivation developed by Robert House in 1971 posits that the leader's main objective should be to provide guidance, support, and help for subordinates to effectively achieve individual and organisational goals (Ratyan, Khalaf, & Rasli, 2013). This paper employed the Path-Goal Theory of Motivation to test how the motivation that is elicited by the leadership behaviours of both transactional and transformational leadership styles empowers or restricts the ability of the PR personnel to undertake strategic PR practice in the context of selected commercial banks in Tanzania. On the other hand, the Excellence Theory by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984 and then advanced by James E. Grunig, Larrisa A. Grunig and David M. Dozier in 2002 resonates that communication is valuable to an organisation (Heath, 2013). This is because it enables the organisation to build good long-term relationships with strategic stakeholders, enabling it to save money by avoiding problems such as lawsuits, boycotts, and strikes that may result from unsatisfied groups of stakeholders (Anani-Bossman, 2020). The paper applied this theory, aiming to examine the extent to which the top leaders value strategic PR by instituting an enabling environment for the PR personnel to demonstrate their abilities in assuming strategic PR practice.

Study Scope, Population, Area, Design, and Sample

This study paid attention to three banking organisations in Tanzania, namely, the National Bank of Commerce (NBC), the National Micro-finance Bank (NMB plc), and CRDB Bank plc. The choice of the three banks was because they mirrored well the characteristics of high-profile commercial banks compared to others in the country. According to (<https://priceintanzania.com/best-banks-in-tanzania#>), NBC is Tanzania's oldest serving bank that was established in 1967, while NMB plc received several multi-international and national awards in recognition of its outstanding performance in the year 2021 with a "total assets of TZS. 8.7 trillion" (NMB Annual Report, 2021, p. 8). In the same year, CRDB bank plc

was “the largest bank in Tanzania with an asset base of TZS 8.8 trillion” (CRDB Annual Report, 2021, p. 10). The target population involved chief executive officers (CEOs), human resource directors (HRDs), PR personnel, and marketing directors in the Tanzanian banking sector. The organisations under study are located in the Ilala municipality in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The reason for the choice of Ilala municipality as the location for the present study was that it is the headquarters of several banking institutions including the commercial banks under investigation. Therefore, it offered a huge possibility of accessing the right, information-rich participants to ensure the relevant data inclusion criteria (Yin, 2016).

The researchers employed a case study design relying on NBC, NMB plc, and CRDB bank plc in order to undertake a detailed exploration of how their specific leadership styles interrelated with strategic PR practice. Eventually, the case study design enabled the researcher to provide a rich portrayal of the aforementioned variables from the standpoint of study participants in their real-life contexts. The sample size was 12 participants by which each bank had one CEO, one PR personnel, one HRD, and one Marketing Director to participate in the study. The researchers considered the 12 participants a good sample size for a face-to-face semi-structured interview because they only dealt with the dominant coalition (top management team) of the banking institutions under this study, excluding the non-management employees. Besides, according to Daymon and Holloway (2011), 4 to 40-sample size in qualitative studies is an adequate number. To fulfil the eligibility criteria for data inclusion, that is, accessing the right participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021), the study used a purposive sampling technique to select the mentioned participants (CEOs, HRDs, PR personnel, and Marketing Directors) in the banks. This is because one would expect such members in any organisation to influence the nature of strategic PR practice (Heath, 2013).

Measurement

According to Gunasekare (2021), different authors have measured organisational leadership styles and strategic PR practice in a variety of ways. Such ways include the use of qualitative case studies, a well-established approach to measuring these variables. Therefore, this paper used qualitative modes of inquiry, hence semi-structured interviews to collect data. The semi-structured interview technique enabled the researchers to discuss in-depth questions on organisational leadership style and the ability of the PR personnel to undertake strategic PR practice, and ask follow-up questions on unclear areas. This aligns with Leavy (2014, p. 286), who elucidates that “semi-structured interviews give the interviewer much more leeway for following up on whatever angles... deemed important.”

Data Analysis

Based on the nature of this study (the interpretivism philosophical research paradigm), the researchers applied thematic analysis that involved searching across the data set to find repeated patterns of meanings. Nevertheless, to achieve thematic analysis, the researchers observed the advice of Rossman and Rallis (2017) by transferring data from the voice recorder to computer folders, and storing each interview file according to a given sample group. After that, the researchers transcribed the audio files, proofread them, and assigned code names for anonymity purposes of the participants' real names. After the aforesaid, the researchers observed the following three steps to analyse and present the data: first, they identified data themes prevailing within the data set, and second, they analysed and presented the data that aligned with such themes. Lastly, the researchers offered a brief commentary (characterisation) on such data, based on theoretical lenses chosen to provide insights about them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021, p. 380).

Ethical Clearance

In the current study, firstly, the researchers selected a study site without having stakes in the study outcomes and then identified the study problem

that benefited the participants. Secondly, the researchers sought permission to conduct research from the responsible authorities, namely Ilala municipality, Dar es Salaam region authorities, and the commercial banks under study. Thirdly, the researchers informed the participants of their rights to participate in the study, recording the interviews, and lastly, sought and obtained their consent. Besides, since some participants revealed their real names during the interview sessions, the researcher assigned code names for anonymity. Fourthly, during the reporting and sharing of data, the researchers straightforwardly used clear language to ensure both unbiasedness and appropriateness for the audiences of the study.

Results

The paper examined whether transformational and transactional leadership styles motivated or hindered the PR personnel's ability to undertake strategic PR practice in selected commercial banks in Tanzania. As mentioned earlier, demonstrating the PR personnel's abilities to undertake strategic PR practice depends on, among other factors, the existing organisational leadership style and the related leader's behaviours. On this note, and in line with the previously indicated five questions that the article set to answer, in this section, we present results organised into five themes here under.

Idealised Influence in Relation to the PR Personnel's Ownership of Organisational Communication Vision

As indicated earlier, idealised influence (charisma) is one of the four behaviours of the transformational leadership style. Its main postulate is that the leader should formulate ideas and articulate the vision clearly in order to equip the followers with a sense of purpose, encouraging them to work beyond their self-interests to achieve the vision.

Thus, with regard to the question that intended to examine the extent to which the top leaders employ idealised influence to accelerate the PR personnel's ability to own the banks' communication visions, the study's

participants offered numerous opinions. With the exception of one PR personnel who said that she had no problem regarding the aspect in question, the remaining two PR personnel said the following:

Everything done about embracing communication of the bank's overall vision and the PR vision speaks for itself in the communication policy. In this case, I do not depend on the top leaders' encouragement to understand the communication needs of the bank (PR personnel B).

In this bank, everything designed for communicating PR strategies embeds its elements in the big picture (the vision), which, because it is clearly understood, it is not necessary for the bank's leaders to articulate or encourage it (PR personnel C).

Inferring from the foregoing two statements, the findings from the statements of the two PR personnel indicate that the top leaders played a lesser role in fostering shared overall visions and values to empower their PR personnel to own the communication visions.

Similarly, the findings from the analysis of the following representative comments of the CEOs, HRDs, and Marketing Directors were closely associated with the preceding findings of the two PR personnel:

There are well-established communication guidelines already in place. These clearly pronounce the desired bank's values for upholding and communicating (CEO A).

Upon employment, all employees in this financial organisation receive an orientation of operational visions, missions, and philosophies. These are proper write-ups in themselves. Therefore, they offer enough guidance regarding what to communicate (CEO B). The vision statement and related documents have clearly stated everything that the PR personnel need to know about the communication of the vision and associated values. Therefore, the PR

personnel can quickly know the communication requirements of the HR directorate through such documents (HRD B).

The articulation of communication objectives and activities under the marketing directorate starts from the bank's primary philosophy. It is from the primary philosophy where the PR personnel can draw PR plans associated with marketing issues (Marketing Director B).

The PR personnel adopt all the communication plans of activities and values falling under marketing from the overall communication guidance of the bank (Marketing Director C).

These statements testify the extent to which the CEOs, HRDs, and Marketing Directors expected the PR personnel to rely only on the specifications of the communication policies and vision statements to own the banks' communication visions. This means that the PR personnel lacked another side in their struggles to own the banks' communication visions: the leaders' actual mobilisation.

Inspirational Motivation in Relation to the PR Personnel's Work Performance

Inspirational motivation refers to the ability of the organisational leader to stimulate enthusiasm among the followers for them to perform assignments that aim to achieve goals at the team or organisational level. Inspirational motivation exhibits such behaviours of the organisational leader as motivating employees, imparting enthusiasm, and modelling appropriate behaviours. The study's results indicate that, with the exception of one PR personnel, others pointed out the reliance on standing orders, communication circulars, and communication policies rather than personal involvement and engagement by the top leaders. Similarly, the opinions of the top leaders show that they could not personally demonstrate the required communication motivations with the PR personnel for improved PR work performance except by giving directives through the known banks' documents.

The following are examples of some of the comments from the participants:

The top leadership is excellent at acting as a model. It inspires and motivates the corporate affairs and PR office to carry out quality PR tasks because the executive committee has placed the bank's detailed formalities, policies, and standing orders as guidance. The most important thing, therefore, is to play by the rules and communication norms, which inspire and make it easy for the PR staff to avoid technical errors (PR personnel B).

Of course, the bank's bosses are excellent in this aspect. The senior leaders continuously release well-documented communication circulars, which define procedures for preparing quality PR plans in a manner that safeguards the bank's identity and protects its internal and external reputation (PR personnel C).

There are stipulated standing orders, which cover PR issues as well. However, sometimes the CEO's office undertakes face-to-face talks with the PR director (CEO A).

The PR personnel's job description is categorical in terms of the expected communication behaviours or conducts from him. Hence, it does not require one to depend on coaching from specific individuals or leaders. This is the safest way to address PR issues (HRD B).

The PR staff have a better understanding of the motivations and the expected communication behaviours of their work. That should be enough to provide communication guidance (Marketing Director B).

Considering these comments, the PR personnel mentioned that their top leaders were excellent in providing a model of appropriate communication behaviours personally as a way of inspiring and motivating their enthusiasm in performing the PR tasks better. However, looking at the reasons for excellence as given by the PR personnel, the top leaders restricted them to relying on directives such as the banks' detailed formalities, policies, standing orders, and circulars to gain the required passion during the planning and implementation of PR tasks. Similarly, the top leaders clearly

stated their reliance on such directive documents, not personally demonstrating the required communication motivations with the PR personnel for improved PR work performance.

Intellectual Stimulation in Relation to Job Innovation and Creative Attitudes of the PR Personnel

Intellectual stimulation is yet another transformational leadership style behaviour. It constitutes the organisational leaders' propensity to enable the PR personnel with the ability to challenge the organisational communication-held assumptions on problem-solving procedures by suggesting new approaches to doing things. This means the PR personnel demonstrate the ability to be innovative or creative, presenting novel PR strategies that aim to challenge communication normality or the status quo. He or she digs into the rapidly shifting competitive information of the audiences, adjusting communication strategies according to their expectations, demands, and response requirements. Thus, the results indicate that only a minority of the comments of the study's participants attest that the top leadership's environment was accommodative, in this respect. On this account, the representative responses of the study's participants read as follows:

In a way, the top leadership's climate fosters an opportunity for PR innovation because it allows the PR staff to employ relevant communication skills. However, the PR staff keeps the PR or communication innovation and creativity efforts within the atmosphere of the top leadership's directives and communication policies to ensure it does not harm the bank's image and other foreseen business plans (PR personnel B).

Innovation and creativity is the prime movers of the banking business. However, since the commercial banks in Tanzania operate under very challenging and competitive environmental work pressures, any new proposal to suggest changes to the bank's communication or PR strategy is subject to the approval of the bank's top management (PR personnel C).

The creativity of the bank's workforce (including those in the PR department) is essential as it helps to achieve a return on investment (ROI). However, proper scrutiny of all these efforts by the bank's leadership is necessary (CEO C).

Communication, innovation, and creativity in the PR department are good, though they depend on consensus within the management team (HRD A).

There are clear top leadership standing procedures and detailed documents prescribing the limits of innovation and creativity in all departments. The corporate affairs and PR section is no exception (Marketing Director B).

Considering the opinions of the PR personnel, they were not very comfortable regarding the top leadership's environment on enhancing the ability to be innovative or creative, presenting novel PR strategies. Such opinions suggest the top leadership's transactional directive behaviours that restrict the PR personnel's ability to be creative. In addition, the opinions of the CEOs, HRDs, and Marketing Directors demonstrate that they were too strict, demanding that the creativity efforts of the PR personnel tally with the existing communication status quo or normality of the banks. This implies a limitation on the PR personnel's ability to dig creatively into the rapidly shifting competitive information of the banks' stakeholders and adjust communication strategies according to the stakeholders' expectations.

3.1 Personalised Attention in Connection to Leader-PR Personnel Interrelationship in Communication

In essence, personalised attention (individualised consideration) as one of the behaviours of transformational leadership style defines the attention rendered by the organisational leadership to the needs of an individual follower; in this case, the PR personnel. This leadership behaviour enables both parties to receive constructive feedback from each other and mentorship aspects on the side of the PR personnel. Leader-PR personnel interrelationship in communication necessitates understanding, dialogue,

and cooperation for timely and accurate communication. This help to attain the goals of both the organisation and its stakeholders. The organisational leader's ability to interrelate in communication with the PR personnel cultivates a participatory attitude between them—an idea attached to the symmetric communication worldview that values dialogue and teamwork. This study aimed to determine the extent to which individualised consideration as an element of transformational leadership style related to strategic PR practice. In this regard, the results demonstrate that one PR personnel was comfortable and expressed her opinion in the following manner:

The CEO is a good listener and provides instant feedback. Thus, even when the PR department experiences poor cooperation from other top managers in securing appropriate PR interactions with them, the CEO's engagement with the PR department provides a remedy. I therefore feel welcome to interact with him on business communication matters (PR personnel A).

The extracts from the other two PR personnel and two representative CEOs read as follows:

The CEO's representation is usually through the marketing director because the corporate affairs and PR office is under the marketing directorate. However, the CEO's door is open if the corporate affairs and PR office has something substantial on strategic PR initiatives to dialogue with her, yet frequent or direct engagement is hard to achieve (PR personnel B).

The CEO is available for engagement in open-thought communication dialogue with the PR department. However, the basis of interactions between us depends on how the department has succeeded or failed to succeed in meeting the measurable PR KPIs prescribed in the undertaken communication programmes. Thus, since the regulation of communication efforts in this kind of business setting is hierarchical, the PR department mostly relies on the regulatory

communication policies that exist to access the offices of the top leaders when the need arises (PR personnel C).

Engagement in an open-thought communication dialogue between the office of the CEO and the corporate affairs and PR section depends on some hierarchical factors. In many instances, dialogues between the marketing director and the chief of corporate affairs and PR can result in better solutions for many of the communication issues, rather than with the CEO's office (CEO B).

The CEO's office welcomes communication interactions with the PR personnel on PR issues, especially for critical challenges, because all the leaders (directors, managers. . .) are busy chasing important commitments and deadlines with crucial stakeholders. Thus, the bank's management has explicitly documented all possible communication dilemmas to quickly tackle such issues in cases when the CEO is not reachable (CEO C).

These evidential statements show that one of the three PR personnel was comfortable with the level of engagement in open and thoughtful communication dialogue on strategic PR initiatives with the CEO. The statements of the other two PR personnel regarding the same aspect indicate negative feelings, apparently demonstrating that their ability to interrelate in communication with the CEOs was shallow or somewhat limited. In addition, the statements from the CEOs further authenticate the extent of limitation to the PR personnel, thwarting the personnel's ability to provide timely and accurate communication feedback to the CEOs.

Rewards and Punishments in Relation to the PR Personnel's Workplace Commitment

A peculiar feature of transactional leadership style is the use of contingent rewards and contingent punishments. These two behaviours of an organisational leader aim to keep up the status quo and ensure compliance of the followers. In the contingent rewards behaviour, the leader exchanges a reward to a follower, say, the PR personnel, for performing within specified limits. In contrast, in the contingent punishment behaviour, the

leader punishes the PR personnel for non-compliance (performing outside the specified key performance indicators—KPIs). Implicitly, like the transformational leadership style, the transactional leadership style links to either positive or negative employee workplace commitment. The examples of workplace commitment attributes include emotional attachment and involvement with the goals of the bank; desire to remain a member of the bank; exerting extra efforts in assignments; and loyalty to the top leaders. The study's results, on the one hand, reveal that although the PR personnel acknowledged the value of reward-and-punishment indicators on the performance of PR tasks, they did not consider them as the primary basis for making crucial strategic PR practice decisions and commitments. On the other hand, the findings signify that the top leaders praised the implementation of reward-and-punishment indicators aligned with the transactional leadership orientation, culminating to a set of clear directives to the PR personnel. The participant's representative quotes read as follows:

Corporate banks are always in competition to attract more customers and make them happy. Therefore, although the bank leaders involve us through meetings, they are very categorical that any deviation from the set PR goals (KPIs) will attract some form of sanctions according to the existing policies. Therefore, I would prefer the freedom to plan and produce PR results to be able to exercise PR duties professionally (PR personnel C).

It is a common management practice to drive the workforce's commitment through rewards and punishments. Therefore, in communicating the bank's goals, we use reward-and-punishment outcomes to ensure appropriate communication behaviours or conduct of the PR personnel (CEO A).

This bank uses reward-and-punishment indicators to influence compliance of its workforce, including the staff in the corporate affairs and PR department (HRD A).

Rewards-and-punishment indicators are essential because they stimulate the communication aptitude of the PR personnel when working to address the bank's overall communication goals and the specific marketing activities (Marketing Director B).

These substantiations indicate generally the negative contribution of transactional leadership's reward-and-punishment behaviours to the PR personnel's workplace commitment. As the PR personnel's statements suggest, the banks' top leaders relied on various forms of reward-and-punishment indicators through various forms, such as the KPIs, in boosting the PR personnel's ability to achieve workplace commitment. The statements show that the PR personnel discredited the top leaders' overreliance on such indicators because they reduced the PR personnel's commitment and freedom to exercise professionalism. In addition, the above sentiments establish that the CEOs, HRDs, and Marketing Directors were positive regarding the reward-and-punishment indicators intended to achieve the commitment of the PR personnel. This reflects the leaders' reliance on transactional leadership practices, hindering the PR personnel's mindset for creativity and long-term planning of PR strategies in the banks, which is not a recommended practice.

Discussion

One of the aspects presented in the preceding section was the opinions of the study's participants about idealised influence in relation to the PR personnel's ability to own the organisational communication vision. In this aspect, the top leaders in one of the three banks set an excellent example by aligning actions with the shared bank's values in communication undertakings. This scenario positively corroborates several leadership scholars (e.g. Birasnav, 2013; Garg & Ramjee, 2013; McCleskey, 2014; Yahya & Ebrahim, 2016) who insist that an organisational leader should use idealised influence to promote shared values and vision to empower the followers with an aptitude to fulfil the organisational vision. For instance, Birasnav (2013) argues that the leader who uses idealised influence develops a vision and then invokes and supports employees to perform

effectively. Then, McCleskey (2014, p. 120) concurs with that when he notices that, by leading the way towards vision fulfilment, the leader who uses idealised influence entices the followers to emulate him or her as they “attribute the leader with certain qualities.” As shown in the preceding section, the findings from the other two banks indicated that the top leaders played a lesser role in fostering shared overall visions and values to empower the PR personnel to own the communication visions. Thus, the CEOs, HRDs, and Marketing Directors expected the PR personnel to rely only on the specifications of the communication policies, KPIs, and general vision statements to acquire the ability to own the banks’ communication visions. This means that the PR personnel lacked another side in their struggles to own the banks’ communication visions, which is the idealised influence or actual mobilisation of the leader in imparting a sense of communication purpose. However, the top leadership’s mobilisation in imparting a sense of communication purpose leads to the PR personnel’s strong belief in and acceptance of the organisational communication goals and willingness to exert considerable PR efforts on behalf of the organisation. It also leads to a sense of the PR personnel’s loyalty, obligation and duty to the idealised influence leader (Garg & Ramjee, 2013), boosting the zeal to pursue PR strategies. Thus, in a business such as banking, communicating the overall vision to the stakeholders requires the PR personnel to act as a link between the bank and its strategic stakeholders. However, for the PR practitioner to succeed in providing the link, the bank’s leaders should enlist the PR personnel in the overall vision and appeal to shared communication ambitions.

In the same thinking, Macnamara and Gregory (2018) believe that even though reporting against agreed KPIs is a common management requirement, organisational leaders should adopt a holistic approach that considers all outcomes and impacts of communication as part of a learning and informing strategy. In other words, apart from the existing KPIs and communication policies, the principles of transformational leadership style and Path-Goal Theory of Motivation underscore the need for a leader who

uses idealised influence to instil within employees a sense of purpose and obligation to pursue strategies that focus energy and resources (Garg & Ramjee, 2013). Similarly, Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) posit that top leaders, as role models, should reinforce the subordinates' image of competence and high self-confidence for enhanced effectiveness in planning and executing duties. Therefore, in the context of the current study, the top leaders should adopt idealised influence attributes by imparting a sense of communication purpose that sensitises the PR personnel to own the overall visions of the banks, hence focusing on the needs of communication. This sensitisation could accelerate the alignment of PR efforts with the overall corporate communication strategies of the banks.

On inspirational motivation in relation to the PR personnel's work performance, the results of this study showed that the banks' PR personnel relied on the existing formalities, such as banks' detailed formalities, policies, standing orders, and circulars as stimuli for their ability to improve PR work performance. This suggests that the top leadership lacked the aptitude to demonstrate personally the desired PR actions that could motivate the PR personnel to mobilise their communication competence for improved PR work performance. However, one of the significant characteristics of an inspirational motivational leader is to model the way personally and show openness and support to followers. This means that he or she demonstrates the desired behaviours to the followers (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017). In return, the leaders' demonstration of such behaviours entices the PR personnel to exhibit the willingness to engage with their leaders and improve PR work performance. This means that the PR personnel offer task-related ideas and opinions, and perform quality PR duties that add value to organisational goals (Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017). Meng and Berger (2018) argue that open and supportive organisational leadership enables efficient PR practice by shaping the PR personnel's behaviours.

Moreover, continuously releasing communication circulars and orders by the banks' top leadership, as revealed by the preceding findings, equates to

the transactional leadership style of giving directives to the PR personnel rather than involving and engaging them during the planning and performance of PR tasks. Involving and engaging the PR personnel could translate into a good feature of the transformational leadership style. That is, since involving and engaging is motivational, it moves the PR personnel to produce better communication results. This is the main idea of the Path-Goal Theory of Motivation, which, as clarified by Ratyan et al. (2013, p. 49), underscores that “effective leadership must be able to motivate their subordinates to do their best and exploit all their potential to contribute to the development of the organisation.” In addition, to minimise the tension between transactional and transformational leadership styles, leadership scholars (e.g., Gandolfi & Stone, 2017; Gunasekare, 2021; Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016) deduce that transformational leadership should augment the weaknesses of transactional leadership behaviours. This means that the top leadership of the banking organisations in the current study may combine both transformational motivation leadership traits and transactional leadership traits at the same time. This could result in a synergy that could help forge better relationship outcomes with the banks’ strategic stakeholders. This study invites the banks’ top leaders to understand that it is not enough to offer circulars, job descriptions, and standing orders to the PR personnel as the main basis of motivation but also demonstrate the desired PR actions that motivate the practitioners to go an extra mile in performing communication roles.

Regarding intellectual stimulation in relation to job innovation and creative attitudes of the PR personnel, the study results notably established that the PR personnel could hardly propose any significant creativity to address the pressing challenges confronting the banks outside the usual guidelines of the communication policies and the transactional directives of the top leadership. However, one of the limitations of the transactional leadership style behaviours is that it hinders the innovativeness attitude of employees (Kark et al., 2017) because the employees do what the leader expects in order to avoid punishment. According to the principles of the Excellence

Theory, organisations should deliver quality communication service to their stakeholders (Godam et al., 2019). However, for quality communication services to happen, the organisations and their PR personnel should demonstrate job innovation and creative attitudes in PR strategies because they understand that the numerous groups that PR deals with have different characteristics and needs. In that case, PR personnel should have the opportunity to address communication problems creatively by thinking outside the existing status quo. Thinking outside the existing status quo accelerates the capacity to address future communication problems that might be unforeseen by the top leadership.

Therefore, in this paper, we argue that, although it is correct for the top leaders to emphasise sticking to the bank's communication norms when implementing strategic PR initiatives, it is also important to be aware of the limitations attached to that rigidity. Rigidity, in this regard, undermines the PR personnel's creative ability to manage the banks' reputation. It is important to be aware that flexibility through allowing new ways of communicating the banks' philosophies and services demonstrates the value of the transformational leadership style. That is, flexibility would allow the PR personnel, "a risk manager who is familiar with stakeholders' opinion" (Harrison & Mühlberg, 2014, p. 16), to assist the bank's CEO in understanding information related to such stakeholders, address the contextual risks, and attain the best communication outcomes. In the context of the current study, therefore, the top leadership of the banks should nurture an environment of support that hastens the PR personnel's creative attitudes to accelerate the communication agenda. This would help beat the external challenges confronting the banks, such as competition and unpredictable communication technologies.

Another aspect indicated in this study's results was personalised attention in connection to Leader-PR personnel's interrelationship in communication. Regarding this aspect, the findings revealed that the PR practitioners' ability to engage in open and thoughtful communication dialogue on strategic PR initiatives with the CEOs was somewhat limited due to hierarchical

bureaucracy. Such difficulty could mean thwarting the PR personnel's ability to gain chances of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation with the banks' CEOs in the process of providing accurate communication on different PR initiatives. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Garg and Ramjee (2013) explain that the organisational leader who demonstrates the personalised attention leadership behaviour should be attentive to the individual needs of the followers and act as a mentor. This view corresponds with the Path-Goal Theory of Motivation, which calls for organisational leaders to guide the employees to perform in the right way, accelerating the achievement of overall organisational goals (Ratyan et al., 2013). As Gill (2015) notices, communication interrelationships between the top leadership and the PR personnel help to improve the PR strategy of storytelling (corporate narratives) between the two parties. In turn, the PR personnel can use the leader's perspective from such stories to assign meaning related to organisational practices, policies, and events. Further, Lipsik (2020) argues that communication interrelationships are advantageous to top leaders because they can use them to generate the untapped collective wisdom in the organisation that helps accelerate the development of new ideas, processes, and solutions. It is crucial to strengthen communication interrelationship between the CEOs and PR personnel to galvanise a committed internal reputation that could also accelerate a stronger external reputation. Training for the banks' top leaders would reinforce their comprehension of the value of strategic communication agenda, steering the PR profession's propensity amongst the leaders.

Regarding the aspect of rewards and punishments as related to the PR personnel's ability to achieve workplace commitment, the results indicated that the reward-and-punishment indicators denied the PR personnel the power to make important strategic PR practice decisions and commitments. This means that the banks' top leaders gave more weight on directives to the PR personnel rather than engagement and dialogue in undertaking

communication tasks. Although the reward-and-punishment indicators may be helpful, the overreliance on such indicators results in shallow communication strategies. The indicators may lead to the PR personnel's inability to think further, driven by uncertainties about whether the banks' superiors will accept the proposed strategies or not. Thus, transactional leadership's behaviours tend to limit dialogues between the leader and the followers because of the "temporary exchanges of gratification" (McCleskey (2014, p. 122). The limitation of dialogues, the author argues, is detrimental to the organisation's mission because it creates the followers' resentment, and makes them utilise a one-size-fits-all universal approach to leadership theory. Such temporary gratification disregards situational and contextual factors related to organisational challenges. Moreover, transactional leadership style behaviours conform to the Excellence Theory's description of "the asymmetrical concept of power [that] involves leaders trying to control and make others dependent on them" (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 175).

Therefore, the authors of this study argue that, engaging the banks' PR personnel in the planning and implementation of PR tasks rather than sticking to the rewards-and-punishments indicators is essential. Engagement enables the PR personnel to think outside the box by proposing sound PR strategies beneficial to the communication aims of the banks. At the policy level, engagement entails the creation of a participatory PR communication strategy and specific sub-strategies at all leadership levels of the banks as an essential element of their visions or philosophies. This would help sensitize the PR communication culture, which is specific to a particular bank. The banks would then recognise strategic PR as a crucial element that assists them to achieve vision through effective communication, bearing in mind that there is no leadership without communication.

Conclusion

In light of this study, it is evident that the success of strategic PR in Tanzania's commercial banks largely depends on the leadership approach

adopted by top executives. Leaders who demonstrate idealised influence by promoting a strong sense of communication purpose can inspire PR personnel to align with the banks' overall vision. This sense of ownership fosters a focus on communication priorities and strengthens the alignment between PR activities and corporate communication strategies. Merely issuing circulars, job descriptions, and standing orders is insufficient; bank leaders must lead by example, modelling the desired PR behaviours that inspire the PR personnel to go the extra mile in executing their communication roles.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of cultivating a supportive organisational environment that nurtures creativity and responsiveness among PR personnel. Engaging the PR personnel in both the planning and implementation of communication strategies rather than relying solely on reward-and-punishment mechanisms encourages innovative thinking and strengthens internal communication bonds, particularly between CEOs and PR teams. This internal cohesion can, in turn, reinforce external reputation. Commitment in this context entails emotional attachment to organisational goals, willingness to remain a member, going beyond assigned duties, and demonstrating loyalty. By empowering PR personnel to think critically and proactively, banks stand a better chance of overcoming external challenges such as competition and evolving communication technologies.

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