



WOMEN IN NEWS MEDIA ARTICLES: AN ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract:

In Philippine news media, women are represented in numerous ways, shaping perceptions of their roles and identities among the public. The study analyzed how women are represented in news media in fifty articles from the five most prominent online news platforms and utilized Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) Transitivity Analysis, which identifies six processes: material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral, and existential. The Social Actor framework developed by van Leeuwen (1996) was also employed, categorizing actions into deletion, role allocation, and substitution. The results revealed that women are ascribed to material, mental, verbal, relational, and behavioral processes. Furthermore, the social actions analysis revealed that women are often activated through participation and personalized through functionalization. Through the analysis, women are represented in media articles as victims, voices of empowerment, perpetrators of crimes, symbols of empowerment, and critics of themselves. This study implies sensitivity within our educational institutions regarding the learning materials provided to our students and raising awareness about gender equality to challenge biases, discrimination, and stereotypical practices within the classroom environment. Lastly, with women's implied identities uncovered, the pivotal role of media in shaping gender roles and identities, particularly evident in Philippine media portrayals of women, reflects the complex dynamics of gender representation in the media narrative.

Keywords: women, representation, news media, social action analysis, transitivity analysis

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1. Introduction

Women have historically made significant contributions in diverse roles such as household management, caregiving, farming, entrepreneurship, and education. Despite their impactful contributions, women still face unfavorable stereotypes, limiting their potential and perpetuating gender inequality (Council of Europe, 2023; Gran, 2023; Mojumder, 2020; Burton, 2019; Ellemers, 2018). Media representation further sustains gender inequality by reinforcing stereotypes and segregation, potentially shaping society's skewed perceptions and normalizing inequality, leading to long-term human rights violations and injustices against women as second-class citizens (Santoniccolo *et al.*, 2023; Hedegaard, 2020; Ward & Grower, 2020).

The main focus of this study is to determine women's representation in Philippine news media articles. Despite women making significant contributions across diverse fields in our society, they still face unfavorable stereotypes, particularly in media articles (Burton, 2019; Amalia *et al.*, 2019). Hence, the researchers seek to uncover the process types attributed to women and the social actions that reveal the representation of women's actions in Philippine media articles. The study aims to illuminate the broader social actions and implications, contributing to discussions on media representation in the Philippine context.

The findings of this study on women's representation in Philippine media hold significant potential benefits for the institution and society at large. This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women's representation in media, enhance the institution's research excellence, and contribute to curriculum development, enabling educators to design new ones incorporating diverse and inclusive media articles and materials as learning resources. In addition, the study supports the institution's sustainable development goal of reducing gender inequalities. Simultaneously, this study catalyzes societal change by raising awareness about gender equality and promoting initiatives to challenge biases, discrimination, and stereotypical practices that persist in society. This study can foster a more inclusive and fair society in the long run.

2. Literature Review

In the Philippine context, women in media are often portrayed as sexual objects and victims (Neri, 2018), characterized as soft and passive (Licudo *et al.*, 2022), idealized as submissive wives and homemakers (Rao & Taboada, 2022), or depicted with limited progress or improvement (Tabuena, 2021). Philippine advertisements from 2000 to 2020 reveal the consistent presence of gender stereotypes, depicting women as caregivers in suggestive clothing, revealing no significant changes in the storyline (Quinto *et al.*, 2022; Rao & Taboada, 2022; Prieler & Centeno, 2013).

Due to concerns about the high gender disparity index in Mindanao, studies have highlighted the persistent underrepresentation of women in newspapers, often portraying them as subservient, sexualized, and stereotyped. This information is substantiated by The Asia Foundation, who highlight cultural practices endangering

women, especially in the Muslim community. Their struggles, often overshadowed by mainstream media, are exacerbated as they bear the brunt of the armed conflict (Jopson, 2023; Viscarra, 2022; *Strategia et al.*, 2021; Arguillas, 2019; Dwyer & Cagoco-Guiam, 2012). This issue highlights how the media frequently perpetuates negative stereotypes about women, portraying them as uneducated, reckless, and anarchical (*Amalia et al.*, 2019). Additionally, women are often oversexualized (Nguyen, 2020) and stereotypically confined by patriarchal norms. This includes portraying women as aesthetically pleasing, subservient, dedicated to household roles, and sacrificial (Hedegaard, 2020).

Media's broad scope significantly affects people's insight that perceiving someone with the same experience will make them feel included in society and what they can contribute (Ballan, 2023; Ackerman, 2018). This research explores how the societal perception of women is depicted in an educational context in media on their cultural norms and expectancy. It is not just a matter of exploration but a call to action to mold an equitable and thriving future.

Numerous scholars have conducted research to determine women's representation in Philippine media. However, the researchers have yet to find studies that delve into women's representation in Philippine media articles using Transitivity Analysis and Social Action. Conducting the study by analyzing process types through Transitivity Analysis (Nwankwo, 2023) and Social Action (Leeuwen, 1995) examines more than the surface level. It adds significant information to the body of knowledge that we currently have.

3. Material and Methods

This corpus-driven research focuses on data from the Philippines' five most prominent online news platforms: ABS-CBN, Philstar, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Rappler, and GMA News Online. The researchers gather ten (10) recent articles for each platform, resulting in 50 news articles. Since the recent qualitative studies proposed a minimum of 12 sample sizes to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013), the sample size of 50 is more than enough to make this study viable for this study's qualitative analysis and scale. The researchers chose the latest news articles from these online news outlets dating from 2018 to the present about women, which may or may not have the same topic and subject. However, the researchers excluded personal blogs and journal posts that represented women.

This descriptive qualitative research uses the Transitivity Analysis and Social Actor framework. Descriptive qualitative research is used to explore and describe the characteristics of a phenomenon (Regoniel, 2023). In particular, it focuses on addressing questions related to what, where, when, and how in the research problem instead of delving into the why or conducting hypothesis testing. Furthermore, this study is supported by Theo van Leeuwen's Social Actors framework and Halliday and Matthiessen's Transitivity model.

The Social Actor framework developed by van Leeuwen (1996) pays attention to social aspects of language and the representation of social actors in text, emphasizing

how individuals or groups are portrayed and positioned in discourse. Van Leeuwen's framework divides the representation of social actors into three significant categories: Deletion, Role Allocation, and Substitution. The selected reading passages extracted from specific media articles are analyzed according to the social actor framework, and this can unravel questions about understanding how women are represented within media discourse and its meaning. The reason for adopting this method is rooted in the researchers' desire to emphasize the social aspects of language and consider the representation of social actors.

Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) transitivity theory is used to unravel layers of women's representation in literature by scrutinizing the linguistic structures and choices employed in the text. Transitivity is a system within a clause that encompasses the process, its participants, and the associated circumstances and human experiences, which inherently involve material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. Using this theory, it is possible to gain insight into the consciousness and experiences of women (Calubayan & Raymundo, 2022). This analytical framework enables the researchers to delve into complex narratives that shape women's feelings in the media.

The framework that the researchers used as the basis of the data collection, analysis, and presentation follows the study of Miles and Huberman (1994) in qualitative data collection analysis. Therefore, the researchers conducted the study with three activities: data collection, analysis, and presentation. As previously stated, the researchers gathered ten (10) recent online media articles from five of the most prominent online news outlets, which are the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philstar, ABS-CBN, Rappler, and GMA News Online, containing news related to women in general, dating from 2018 up to the present date, excluding personal blogs and journal posts.

In adherence to the process, the data analysis shall come after the data collection. This part of the process required the researchers to identify sentences and clauses from online media articles that refer to women as the subject matter of the news. The researchers appointed codes to the chosen sentences and clauses to organize the data collection. The data then underwent Transitivity Analysis; the researchers classified them according to their process types, which will either be material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational, or existential processes, as seen in Figure 1.

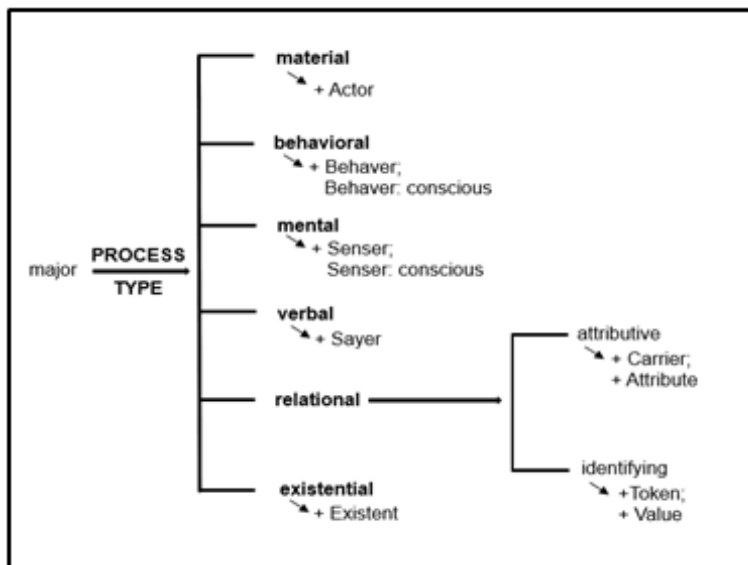


Figure 1: Transitivity System Process Types

For Social Action, the researchers classified them according to the framework, deletion, role allocation, and substitution criteria. The deletion refers to social factors that may be included or excluded to adjust specific purposes concerning the intended readers, role allocation is about roles given to social actors to play representations, and substitution is when social actors can be either personalized or impersonalized. Each subcategory further elaborates on this: inclusion, exclusion, activation and passivation, personalization, and impersonalization, respectively, as seen in Figure 2.

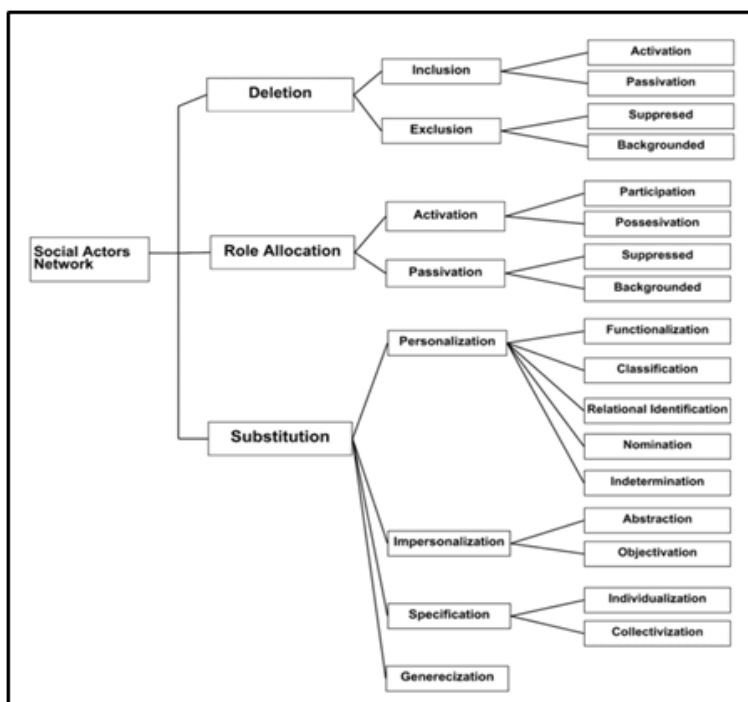


Figure 2: Social Action Framework

4. Results and Discussion

In analyzing the Transitivity and Social Action, the study uncovered the representations of women's identities in the news media. The study's findings thereby elucidate the ideations of the women's portrayals in public. The study established that the news media articles represent women as victims, voices of empowerment, symbols of empowerment, perpetrators, and critics of themselves. These representations are further discussed here on how women are represented in the news media through the different representations.

4.1 Women as Victims

The findings indicate that women are frequently represented as victims across various contexts, including violence, discrimination, and natural disasters. Transitivity analysis shows that women are often framed as recipients or "sensors" rather than active agents in these situations. Similarly, Social Action analysis reveals a shift toward acknowledging women's agency, although portrayals still emphasize their suffering.

Women are frequently portrayed as victims of physical violence in the media, with an increasing prevalence of such portrayals over the past five years, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic heightening the vulnerability of women to domestic violence. This trend indicates a significant focus on violence against women, emphasizing their vulnerability, fragility, and dependence (Musarat, 2021; Radak, 2019; De Mesquita, 2016). Furthermore, the media overlooks crucial details when covering women who have experienced sexual violence, leading readers to wrongly blame the victim for the harm endured. This adds to the social stigma they endure due to the media's relentless pursuit of engagement (Khan, 2022; Ramas, 2022).

Media articles continue to perpetuate biases, with men being quoted significantly more often across various participants. This reflects the enduring dominance of men in all fields, emphasizing the need for greater gender equity in media representation (Tshuma, & Ndlovu, 2022; Crenshaw, 2020; Radak, 2019; O'Connell, 2020; Kassova, 2020; Laura, 2020; Taboada, 2020). Overall, prominent media outlets represent women as victims of violence, harassment, abuse, discrimination, and natural catastrophes. This reveals that women's perceived helplessness and vulnerability appear to dominate their representation in the media, reinforcing traditional stereotypes of female fragility and dependency. This portrayal suggests that women are constantly in need of protection from the potential violence inflicted upon them.

Taken together, this indicates that victimhood occupies a more dominant discursive space than empowerment in Philippine media, reinforcing longstanding gendered hierarchies despite the growing visibility of empowered female figures.

4.2 Women as Symbols of Empowerment

According to the results analyzed, women are represented as symbols of empowerment. Symbol of empowerment is about being courageous in tackling unconventional matters and roles, especially women who are bold enough to make a stand of their own. Transitivity analysis revealed women as active actors in material, behavioral, and

relational processes portraying them as symbols of empowerment. It was prominent that the clauses used an accurate distinction to emphasize the women's active engagement in the community. Moreover, Social action reveals the same results, showing that in media discourse, women are active participants in symbolizing the empowerment of women in their roles and functions in society, opposing the typical image of a woman.

In media discourse, women are seen as having the ability to empower, reshape societal perspectives, provide opportunities for women, and raise awareness about oppression and injustices. In relation, women worldwide are breaking societal norms, which imparts confidence to women in achieving recognition and strengthening their societal roles (Agarwal, 2023; Amwik, 2023; Han, 2018). Women's involvement in historical moments has been a tool for empowerment, motivating more research and support, contributing to the country's overall well-being and ensuring that women achieve equal rights and visibility across sectors (Psychologos Magazine, 2024; Kumar, 2020; Singh, 2018)

However, when examined alongside the victimhood representations discussed in 4.1, it becomes evident that empowerment does not dominate the overall portrayal of women in Philippine news. While the articles highlight women's leadership, agency, and advocacy, these narratives appear less frequent and less detailed compared to portrayals emphasizing women's vulnerability and suffering. This imbalance aligns with Mojumder's (2020) assertion that the media tends to foreground women's victimization more prominently than their achievements. In our dataset, empowerment discourse tends to be symbolic and event-driven, whereas victimhood narratives are more sustained, emotionally charged, and given more spatial prominence in news coverage. Thus, despite the presence of empowering representations, victimization remains the more dominant frame in Philippine media.

Moreover, women as a Nation branding effectively represents women as symbols of change and modernity, exhibiting a wider narrative of modernization supporting women's involvement in crucial roles such as military and leadership positions, showing symbolic effects on making changes in society. This highlights the representation of women, which not only promotes awareness but also modernizes societal perspectives, showing how far-reaching the empowerment of women is (Allagui, I., & Al-Najjar, A., 2018; Alexander, A. C., & Jalalzai, F., 2018).

4.3 Women as Voices of Empowerment

The data suggests that women are being represented as voices of empowerment. The voice of empowerment is an action where individuals find their voice to make their own decisions while asserting their authority. The Transitivity Analysis results revealed that women are active actors in verbal and behavioral processes, representing them as active, influential voices in the depiction of empowerment. Showing prominent use of women as voices of change can be found in the clauses that show the participation of women. Meanwhile, Social Action analysis shows that in media discourse, women are active actors as voices of empowerment in showing positive impact through various activities in promoting empowerment in society.

Social media platforms heighten women's voices for their rights, challenge gender discrimination, and foster feminist communities, such as Turkish women opposing abortion bans, feminist bloggers on Facebook strengthening networks, supporting women of color in the filmmaking industry, and African women's rights activists for community action. Therefore, the media becomes a venue for women's voices in lawmaking, inclusivity, and improving social and economic effects. Hence, encouraging policymakers to recognize the impact of women and support empowerment through media (Istiqomah, 2024; Goswami, Balakrishnan, Vinotha, *et al.*, 2023; Dar & Debbarma 2023; Ren, Wu, & Zheng, 2022; Kumari, 2020).

This shows the essential role of women as voices of empowerment in the media encouraging societal change and raising awareness for gender equality. Women could call out for change and action against gender stereotypes in society and legislative views. Although women are portrayed as influential voices capable of shaping discourse and advocating for social change, the overall analysis of this paper reveals that such representation is less dominant than their portrayal as victims. Emphasizing women's active involvement and vocal advocacy in media representation not only promotes societal and legal changes but also a culture of resilience and inclusivity toward a fair society. Hence, women as voices of empowerment in media discourse do not just impact small clusters, but it has a contagion effect around the world.

4.4 Women as Perpetrators

Evidence from the sample article shows that women are represented as perpetrators. In general terms, a perpetrator is someone who has committed an illegal act, violence, or criminal behavior. The Transitivity Analysis also illustrates women as active actors in unlawful acts. They are ascribed to actions related to perpetuating, and it is notable that the clauses use specific identifying details to emphasize their responsibility for the crime. Subsequently, Social Action revealed that in media discourse, women are active participants in the act of perpetuating and challenging the traditional assumption of women.

Media portrayals of female offenders have evolved across various offense types. Often, women are depicted as less rational or out of control; such portrayals dehumanize and defeminize them. Furthermore, the media overrepresent them as perpetrators to attract readership. These cases are often sensationalized to reflect the public's expectation (Zimo, 2019; Collins, 2016; Huang, 2016). This tendency is evident in cases such as the 2022 Baguio murder, where several outlets published voyeuristic images of the victim's nude body, and the 2016 Manila Bulletin report that labeled a suspect as a "tomboy killer," both of which were condemned by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) for unethical and sexist reporting (Staff, 2016, 2022).

In media discourse, 'the female offender' is reported in terms of their stereotypical roles, which disrupts the notion of femininity, or motherhood that women are inherently gentle, nurturing, and angelic (Sandman, 2021; Musarat, 2021; Elias, 2018; Eastal, Bartels, Nelson, & Holland, 2015; Prat, Bertsch, Chudzik, & Réveillère, 2014). Therefore, media discourse tends to present female perpetrator categories: the bad, the mad, and the

victim. If a woman's actions are not attributed to mental instability or victimization, she may be labeled as the 'bad woman' which gives the media a chance to portray these female perpetrators as more blameworthy to the readers (Zimo, 2019; Weare, 2013).

In the Philippines, despite statistical data showing that women's involvement in violent crime remains significantly lower than that of men, the media often amplifies isolated cases of female violence to create a sense of moral panic and an inflated perception of women's criminality (Veloso, 2016; Bristol & Dones 2021; Yasmin, 2021). This disproportionate focus on exceptional cases distorts public understanding of actual crime rates and reinforces the notion that women who commit crimes are extraordinary or deviant. Furthermore, the continued use of male-generic terms like "policemen" and "gunmen" in crime reporting reinforces men as the default actors in both crime and law enforcement (Java, 2024). This linguistic bias erases women's visibility and upholds the patriarchal notion that criminality is inherently masculine, sustaining gendered hierarchies and obscuring women's real experiences in the justice system.

The analysis highlights the significant representation of women as perpetrators, challenging traditional assumptions of femininity and motherhood. They are often depicted in media as less rational, more out of control, defeminized, dehumanized, and overrepresented for commercial gain. This research explores how societal perceptions of women in the media impact educational contexts, specifically regarding cultural norms and expectations. Ultimately, the Philippine media does not portray women's criminality on equal terms with men's; rather, it amplifies women's transgressions through sensationalism, moral judgment, and patriarchal framing that distort public understanding of gender and justice.

4.5 Women as Critics of Themselves

The findings indicate that women are represented as critics of themselves. Despite celebrating femininity, this portrayal reflects their internalization of societal norms and expectations. The pervasive influence of meritocratic hegemony exacerbates challenges in navigating societal norms and asserting identity and worth. Transitivity analysis highlights women's critical roles in sensing, vocalizing, and valuing themselves, while Social Action analysis underscores their agency in critiquing various aspects of their lives, indicating internalized misogyny. This profoundly impacts women's self-perception, as the media often portrays them primarily based on appearance rather than intelligence or competence, perpetuating harmful stereotypes (Francis & Edwards, 2022; Seron, Silbey, Cech, & Rubineau, 2018).

Women often internalize and perpetuate biases against themselves, contributing to the negative stereotypes perpetuated by media agenda-setting. Particularly concerning is the acceptance of these biases as natural and inevitable, which aligns with the tendency of young women to internalize misogynistic expectations with the frequent association of Filipina identity with the Virgin Mary, a perception perpetuated by Roman Catholic and Christian denominations in the Philippines, with women being portrayed as sweet, passive, docile, compliant, obedient, virginal, and unattainable. This cycle of internalization and perpetuation of harmful norms further undermines efforts to

challenge and dismantle systems of oppression and inequality and influences women's self-perception (Mdhlela, 2023; Ren, Wu, and Zheng 2022; Marriot-Fabre, 2022; Francis & Edwards, 2022).

The Social and Transitivity Analysis highlights women's representation as self-critics, reflecting an internalization of social norms. The analysis demonstrates how women accept and internalize biases, while also emphasizing their frustration with their identity associated with socially constructed roles that reinforce unrealistic expectations. Thus, while women may vocalize their frustrations and critique societal norms, the ingrained biases pose significant barriers to achieving true liberation and empowerment.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study highlights the importance of careful curriculum development in educational institutions, emphasizing the use of diverse and accurate learning materials to promote media literacy. It also underscores the need for teacher training to enhance awareness of gender representation and foster inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, the findings reveal the multifaceted portrayal of women in media as victims, perpetrators, symbols of empowerment, and self-critics. By examining linguistic processes, the study demonstrates how media shapes gender roles and identities. Ultimately, it calls for collaborative efforts to promote more inclusive and empowering representations of women in media.

In terms of future research, this study provides a foundation for further exploration of women's representation in media using frameworks like Transitivity Analysis and Social Action. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the analysis beyond news media to include various discursive spaces such as literature, textbooks, magazines, and films. This will help ensure that portrayals of women's identities remain accurate and up to date, enriching the academic dialogue on gender dynamics across different media formats.

In conclusion, the research revealed the multifaceted roles of women in media narratives, identifying them as victims, perpetrators, symbols of empowerment, and self-critics. Through a comprehensive examination of mental, material, verbal, behavioral, and relational processes, the study illuminated how media shapes gender roles and identities. This paper may serve as a valuable tool for educators to teach critical media literacy, enabling students to decode and challenge gender stereotypes. Ultimately, this research calls for collaborative efforts to promote inclusive and empowering representations of women, to foster a media landscape that accurately reflects the diversity of women's experiences and supports gender equity.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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