

"If It Bleeds It Leads" the Visual Witnessing Trauma Phenomenon among Journalists: An Analysis of Various Media Images from East Africa

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Abstract : The paradox of documenting history through visuals that objectify gruesome images to depict the prominence of stories intrigues media researchers. In East Africa, the topic has been captured in a variety of media frames, but scantily in scholarly work. This paper adopts Visual Rhetoric and Framing Theories to tease out the drivers behind the criteria for the selection of violent visuals. The paper projects that quantitative and qualitative literature regarding journalists' personal and work-related exposure to PTSD will give insights into the concept of trauma journalism - reporting of horrific events, e.g., violent crime and terror. The data will be collected through methods such as document analysis (photographs and videos) and in-depth interviews to summarize the informational contents with respect to the research objectives and questions. The study is hinged on the background that the criterion for news production is constructed from the idea that 'if there's violence, conflict, and death involved, the story gets top priority.' The anticipated outcome is to establish trauma experiences of visual rhetors, suggest mitigations, and address gaps in academic research. The findings of the study will sustain the critical role of visual rhetors. Further, media practitioners may find the study useful in assessing the effects and values of visual witnessing. Historically, the criterion for visual news production has been that if there's violence, conflict, and death involved, the story gets top priority. To capture the goriness of the images, media theorists and sociologists have used the expression: "If it bleeds, it leads." The statement assumes that audiences are attracted to pictures that show violent images. Further, research on visual aspects of Television news has shown its ability to hold viewers' attention and cause aggression. This paper samples images and narratives from Journalists who have covered trauma-related events. The samples are indicative of the problem under study, which depicts journalists exposed to traumatic events as not receiving any Psycho-social support within newsrooms. It is hoped that the study could inform policy and practice within developing countries through the interpretations of theoretical and empirical explanations of existing trauma phenomena among journalists.

Keywords : visual-witnessing, media culture, visual rhetoric, imaging violence in East Africa

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