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Audience Exposure to News Reports on Bobrisky's Arrest for Naira Abuse and Their Perception of Money Spraying: A Study of Emeka-Offor Plaza

Obiakor, Casmir Uchenna, PhD^{1*}, Obiora, Adanma Vivian, PhD², Okafor, Godwin Uchenna³

¹ Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus.

² Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria.

³ Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria.

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***Corresponding author:** Obiakor, Casmir Uchenna, PhD

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus

Abstract

Few months ago, during one of the occasions as attended by Bobrisky, he was seen spraying money which made the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria, to arrest him. The news of this incident was reported in the press. Whether these reports had any influence on the respondents is the major thrust of the study which sought to find out respondents' level of exposure to the news reports under study as well as the perception of the respondents about the news reports. Anchored on agenda setting and perception theories, the study made use of focus group discussion method to source information from 90 business persons from a population of 705 persons at Emeka-Offor Plaza in Onitsha. Interview guide served as the research instrument in this study. Findings revealed a high level of awareness of the news reports of the arrest of Bobrisky by the respondents. Though most of the respondents have negative perception of the reports, they still feel that the arrest is worthwhile so as to reduce the abuse of the naira notes; yet, the reports had little or no effect on them as many of the respondents believe it is a way of showing love to one another in a typical Nigerian society which will always make them to remain their brothers' keepers. It was recommended that the Government should critically evaluate certain policies that may be viewed as a form of punishment on the citizens who feel they have to show love to one another and should not be disallowed to avoid civil disobedience.

Keyword: Exposure, News report, Arrest, Naira abuse, Perception, Money spraying, Audience.

Introduction

The advent of the social media has revolutionized the way news is consumed, perceived and reacted to by the audiences (Adikuru & Obiora, 2021; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). News is information about events or happenings, typically reported in newspapers, magazines, online, or broadcast through various media channels (Harcup, 2015). News is the report of current events or information about important happenings; it is a cornerstone of human society. It plays a crucial role in informing the public, shaping opinions, and fostering communication. The concept and delivery of news have evolved significantly over centuries, influenced by technological advancements and societal changes. A news report is a written or broadcast account of news, typically including a summary of the key facts, quotes from relevant individuals, and background information to provide context (Mencher, 2011). News must be something definite, something dealing with events that are disruptive, and things to be covered as news must be new, current and eventful (Obiora & Kenekwue, 2023; Walter, 2020). News reports on social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, have become a significant source of information for many people (Newman, et al, 2020; Uche & Obiora, 2016). However, the credibility and reliability of news reports on social media have been questioned due to the prevalence of fake news and disinformation (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017); the traditional news media channels are not even exempted from distrust (Obiakor, 2024).

Broadcast and print media are two fundamental pillars of the news industry, each with distinct methods and characteristics in reporting news. Broadcast news reporting encompasses radio and television news. It relies on audio and visual elements to deliver news stories to a wide audience. Broadcast news is often focused on delivering real-time updates. Television and radio can quickly disseminate breaking news as it happens, making them primary sources for timely information with radio being more prevalent due to its accessible nature, (Obiora & Uche, 2022; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2020). Broadcast news is delivered by anchors in studios and field reporters. Anchors provide a sense of authority and continuity, while field reporters offer on-the-ground perspectives from the scene of events (Sambrook, 2021).

Meanwhile, Naira abuse refers to the misuse, mistreatment, or mishandling of the Nigerian currency, the Naira. This term encompasses various activities that degrade the physical condition of banknotes and coins, reduce their lifespan, or undermine their value. Naira abuse includes acts like defacing, mutilating, spraying, selling, or hoarding the currency. These are forms in which the Naira can be abused: **Defacement/Mutilation** involves writing on, tearing, or otherwise damaging banknotes. Such practices often occur in markets, during social events, and among transport operators, where banknotes are frequently exchanged and handled roughly (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2021). **Spraying/Stepping on Naira** is common cultures in Nigeria where people spray money at occasions such as weddings and birthdays. This practice, often seen as a show of wealth and generosity, can lead to banknotes being trampled, torn, or dirtied (Eze, 2017). **Hoarding** of currency by individuals and businesses leads to a shortage of cash in circulation, affecting economic activities. This is often driven by speculative motive of holding money or as a hedge against inflation (Adigwe, 2015). **Selling and Trading Naira**- Selling new or scarce denominations at a premium is another form of abuse. This illegal activity creates artificial

scarcity and exploits those in need of specific banknotes (Nwankwo, 2018).

Hence, regulating the Naira, Nigeria's official currency, is critical for maintaining economic stability, ensuring effective monetary policy, and fostering public confidence in the financial system. A well-regulated Naira contributes to stable exchange rates. Fluctuations in the value of the Naira against other currencies can create uncertainty in international trade and investment. Regulation helps mitigate volatility, making Nigeria's economy more predictable and attractive to foreign investors (Emefiele, 2020).

Recently, the EFCC's arrest of Bobrisky, a popular Nigerian cross dresser, has been widely reported on social media, sparking intense debate and discussion among audience. The news reports on Bobrisky's arrest have been accompanied by videos and images of people spraying money at parties and events, which has raised concerns about the promotion of lavish spending and materialism (Oyedade, 2023). Bobrisky, whose real name is Idris Okuneye, is a notable figure in Nigerian pop culture, known for defying traditional gender norms and openly embracing a cross dressing lifestyle. Bobrisky's prominence in social media and public life has made him a polarizing figure, eliciting both admiration and condemnation from different segments of Nigerian society. His activities, lifestyle choices, and public statements are frequently covered by Nigerian media, often leading to heated discussions on social media platforms and other public forums (Obiora & Nwafor, 2022; Adebayo, 2020).

Bobrisky's arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has been a significant media event, drawing widespread attention and sparking various public reactions. The reasons for his arrests, which have included allegations related to public decency, fraud, and other legal issues, often trigger discussions about morality, legality, and the boundaries of personal freedom in Nigeria. The media coverage of such events tends to amplify these discussions, shaping public perception and opinion (Ogunleye, 2019).

It was noted that Bobrisky "sprayed" banknotes, meaning that he threw them in the air in a sign of appreciation. "Spraying" is commonly done at Nigerian weddings and celebrations. This is technically an offence as the notes then fall to the ground where they can be trodden on. The maximum punishment is six months in jail; however, prosecutions are rare. Bobrisky allegedly sprayed money at the premiere of *Ajakaju*, a keenly awaited film by actress and producer Eniola Ajao, at Film One Circle Mall, in the upmarket Lagos district of Lekki. Videos of the event were widely shared on social media and this may have put pressure on the authorities (EFCC) to take action.

Meanwhile, Emeka-Offor plaza, a popular plaza in Onitsha, Anambra State is a hub of social and business activities, with many people frequenting the plaza to buy and sell. The plaza's proximity to residential areas and its popularity among young people make it an ideal location for studying audience perception of news reports on social media. This study aims to investigate audience perception of news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky and their perception of spraying of money at parties and events. Specifically, it seeks to explore the opinions and views of patrons of Emeka-Offor plaza on the news reports under study.

Statement of the Problem

In the vibrant and diverse media landscape of Nigeria, public perception is heavily influenced by the coverage of high-profile individuals and culturally significant practices. The arrest of

Bobrisky, a prominent social media personality and cross dresser, has garnered substantial media attention and elicited varied public reactions. Concurrently, the cultural practice of spraying money at social events remains a deeply ingrained tradition that also provokes a wide range of opinions. However, there is growing concern about the credibility and reliability of news reports on social media, as well as potential impact on audience perception and behaviour. This study focuses on Emeka-Offor Plaza, a bustling commercial center, to examine how these two distinct yet interrelated phenomena are perceived by the public.

Despite the extensive media coverage of Bobrisky's arrests and the pervasive practice of spraying money, there is a lack of comprehensive research exploring how these topics are perceived by specific local audiences. This gap is particularly pronounced in localized commercial hubs like Emeka-Offor Plaza, where diverse socio-economic backgrounds converge, potentially leading to varied interpretations and opinions. By addressing these concerns through research, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into how audiences perceive news reports on this issue, as well as their perception of spraying of money at parties and events.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to explore audience perception of news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky and their perception of spray of money. The specific objectives are to:

- Determine respondents' level of exposure to news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky.
- Examine the respondents' news channel of exposure to the news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky.
- Investigate respondents' perception/interpretation of money spraying in line with Bobrisky's arrest.
- Find out the influence of the news reports of Bobrisky's arrest on spraying of money on the respondents.

Significance of the Study

This research addresses a significant gap in current knowledge. With limited existing studies on this specific topic, the research will have contributed valuable insights into potential impact of spraying of money. Understanding the audience perception is very crucial as this can help media practitioners and researchers understand the complexities of audience perception. As an academic endeavor, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on media influence, cultural practices, and audience perception in Nigeria. By analyzing the impact of media framing on public opinion, journalists can refine their reporting practices to ensure accuracy, balance, and sensitivity. Additionally, insights from this study can inform ethical considerations in media coverage, guiding journalists in portraying diverse perspectives and challenging societal prejudices. Again, by exploring audience perception regarding news reports on Bobrisky's arrest and the practice of spraying money, the study offers valuable insights for stakeholders across various sectors, contributing to a more informed, inclusive, and equitable policy formation within the society.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory of the Media

An Agenda is issue or subject of discussion. It is a topical issue, which elicits positive or negative comments from the members of the public. Agenda setting on the other hand is the process of reflecting the events in our society. The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The

theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listened to or watched in different mass media; the media make us to think about certain issues, they make us think or feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society (Asemah, 2011). The theory was first developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their Chapel Hill study, in 1972. It posits that the agenda for public opinion emanate by highlighting certain issues; and that the media tell the audience not so much what to think as what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The agenda setting role of the media is expected to explain the mode of operation of the print and broadcast media in Nigeria. Agenda-setting, in its simplest form, says that media dictate what the people think about, not what the people think (Asemah, 2011). It maintains that the agenda of the media are basically the agenda of the people.

In studying the way Bobrisky's arrest was covered by the media, the theory maintains that the main effect of the news media was to set agenda; that is to tell people not what to think, but what to think about. The implication is that the way the media report or frame the issue of Bobrisky's arrest is the way the audience will perceive the matter under study. The essence is that what the media said about the event under study is what the audience at Emeka-Offor Plaza in Onitsha understand the issue to be.

Perception theory

Perception according to Bovee, Thil, Dovel & Wood (1995), is the process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree and then interpreting the received message by the individuals who are exposed to such contents. Thus, perception involves the process of exposure, attention and interpretation. In other words, for perception to take place there must be exposure to stimuli with certain level of attention paid to the stimuli and finally, the stimuli are interpreted by the audience (Ezinwa, 2014). Hence, people focus on certain features of their environment to the exclusion of the others. The audience automatically choose which information to notice and this kind of selection is dependent on different perceptual filters which are based on the consumer's earlier experiences (Smith, 2011, cited in Agbo & Chukwuma, 2015). This theory provides explanation on why a particular message is perceived differently by different individuals. This means that the way a particular individual views a given message may differ from the perception of the message by another individual; and this perception has some kind of effect on the attitude of the individuals. This theory is relevant to this study because of the way the audience at Emeka-Offor Plaza view or perceive the reports of the arrest of Bobrisky. Hence, their perception of the reports will definitely influence their attitude, their actions as well as their inactions.

The Review

The Media and Coverage of Events

Media coverage plays a critical role in shaping public's perception and understanding of events from local incidents to global phenomena. The media's ability to select, frame, and disseminate information has profound implications for public discourse, political processes, and societal norms. The study of media and event's coverage encompasses a wide range of theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches aiming to understand how news is produced, the factors influencing media contents, and the effects of media coverage on audiences. The study of media and event's coverage was primarily concerned with traditional

news outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television. However, the advent of digital media has transformed the landscape, introducing new dynamics on how events are covered and consumed. Digital platforms and social media have democratized information dissemination, allowing for a wider range of voices and perspectives but also posing challenges related to information overload, misinformation, and echo chambers (Ojiakor, Obiora, & Uche, 2016; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010).

One of the foundational concepts in the study of media coverage is gate-keeping, which is the process by which information is filtered for dissemination. Gate-keeping theory, developed by Kurt Lewin and further expanded by David Manning White, posits that editors and journalists act as gatekeepers, deciding which events are newsworthy and how they should be reported (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This process is influenced by various factors, including editorial policies, news values, organizational constraints, and journalists' personal biases. Media bias and the quest for objectivity are central concerns in the study of event's coverage. While traditional journalistic standards advocate for balanced and impartial reporting, media bias can manifest in various forms, including selection bias, presentation bias, and ideological bias (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). Scholars have debated the extent and impact of media bias, with some arguing that it skews public perception and undermines democratic processes. Efforts to ensure objectivity include adherence to journalistic ethics, fact-checking, and presenting multiple perspectives.

The rise of social media has transformed how events are covered and consumed. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable real-time reporting and citizen journalism, where ordinary individuals can share firsthand accounts of events (Hermida, 2010). While this democratization of news offers diverse perspectives, it also raises issues related to the accuracy and credibility of information. The speed at which news spreads on social media can lead to the rapid dissemination of misinformation, since there is no feasible and effective compliance to online communication laws by the youth who are termed heavy users of social media (Obiora & Onyeka, 2022; Onyeka & Obiora, 2021). This is evident in numerous instances where false information has gone viral before being corrected by traditional media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The media's coverage of events has a significant impact on public perception and behaviour. Extensive research has shown that media coverage can influence public opinion, political attitudes, and even policy decisions, (Obiora, 2022). For instance, extensive media coverage of natural disasters can lead to increased public awareness and charitable donations, while coverage of terrorist attacks can heighten fear and influence government's policy on security and immigration (Norris et al., 2003).

Bobrisky in a Flash

Bobrisky, born Okuneye Idris Olanrewaju, is a Nigerian internet personality, cross-dresser, and entrepreneur who has garnered significant attention and controversy in both local and global contexts. Bobrisky's rise to fame and the discourse surrounding her persona offer valuable insights into issues of gender identity, social norms, and the power of social media in shaping public perception. Bobrisky's visibility as a non-conforming gender figure in a conservative society like Nigeria challenges traditional gender roles and exposes the tensions between cultural norms and modernity. Additionally, his use of social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat underscores the transformative role of digital media in creating and sustaining celebrity status.

Bobrisky's journey to fame began on social media, where he showcased a lavish lifestyle, unique fashion sense, and unapologetic personality. His online presence quickly attracted a large followership, making him one of Nigeria's most talked-about internet celebrities. Bobrisky utilized social media to engage with followers, share personal stories, and promote his business ventures, such as skin-whitening products and beauty services (Olanrewaju, 2018). The self-branding and entrepreneurial spirit are central to his identity as a modern influencer. His public persona challenges traditional gender norms in Nigeria, a country where conservative views on gender and sexuality are prevalent. He identifies as a cross-dresser and has expressed a fluid approach to gender, often referring to himself with feminine pronouns and presenting in traditionally feminine ways (Fakoya, 2017). This visibility has sparked widespread debate and controversy, with reactions ranging from admiration and support to hostility and condemnation. Bobrisky's existence and popularity highlight the complexities of gender identity and the struggle for acceptance in a conservative society.

Bobrisky's influence extends beyond his immediate followers, impacting broader societal attitudes and conversations about gender and sexuality. His use of social media illustrates the power of digital platforms in shaping public discourse and creating spaces for marginalized voices. By sharing his life and experiences openly, Bobrisky has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of gender diversity and has provided a sense of visibility and representation for LGBTQ individuals in Nigeria and beyond (Abubakar, 2019). Social media also serve as tools for Bobrisky to navigate and negotiate his identity. The interactivity of platforms like Instagram allows him to respond to critics, engage with fans, and maintain control over his narrative. This dynamic interaction underscores the significance of social media in contemporary celebrity culture, where direct communication with the audience is a key component of personal branding and influence (Marwick, 2013).

Bobrisky's public life is not without challenges. He faces significant backlash from various quarters, including religious groups, conservative politicians, and sections of the public who view his lifestyle as contrary to Nigerian cultural and moral values (Obiora & Nwafor, 2022; Adewunmi, 2019). Legal and social hurdles also persist, as Nigeria's laws against same-sex relationships and public morality create a hostile environment for LGBTQ individuals including Bobrisky. Despite these challenges, Bobrisky's resilience and continued prominence reflect broader societal shifts and the potential for change. His ability to thrive in such a contentious environment speaks to the evolving nature of social norms and the role of media in fostering new forms of identity and expression. Bobrisky's prominence as a social media influencer and gender-nonconforming figure offers a rich area of study for understanding contemporary issues in media, gender, and society. Her journey underscores the transformative power of social media in shaping public perceptions, challenging traditional norms, and providing visibility for marginalized communities. Through the lens of Bobrisky, scholars can explore the intersections of celebrity culture, digital influence, and the ongoing struggle for gender and sexual diversity in conservative contexts.

Bobrisky and His Journey with EFCC

The relationship between celebrities and law enforcement agencies often provides significant insights into broader societal issues such as corruption, law enforcement practices, and the intersection of

public figures with legal and regulatory frameworks. In Nigeria, one of the most notable cases involves Bobrisky, a prominent social media influencer and entrepreneur as already noted, and his interactions with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). EFCC is Nigeria's law enforcement agency tasked with investigating and prosecuting financial crimes such as fraud, money laundering, and corruption. Bobrisky's journey with the EFCC highlights important themes in the study of celebrity culture, legal systems, and financial regulation in Nigeria. The Commission was established in 2003 as part of Nigeria's efforts to combat financial crimes and corruption, which have long plagued the country's economy and governance. EFCC operates under the EFCC Establishment Act and has broad powers to investigate and prosecute economic crimes and offenders. Its mandate includes investigating financial fraud, money laundering, advance fee fraud (commonly known as 419 fraud), and other related offenses.

Bobrisky's interactions with the EFCC are tied to broader issues of financial scrutiny and the legal challenges faced by public figures in Nigeria. In 2019, news surfaced that the EFCC had invited Bobrisky for questioning. The nature of the investigation was reportedly linked to allegations of financial impropriety, including money laundering and fraudulent business activities. This event drew significant media attention, highlighting the EFCC's role in scrutinizing high-profile individuals and the potential legal vulnerabilities of celebrities involved in various business ventures. The media coverage of Bobrisky's encounter with the EFCC was extensive, reflecting her high profile and the public's fascination with her persona. Media reports often framed the investigation in sensational terms, emphasizing the dramatic aspects of the story and the potential legal consequences for Bobrisky. This coverage influenced public perception, with opinions divided between those who saw Bobrisky as a victim of persecution due to her non-conformity and those who viewed her as deserving scrutiny for potential financial misconduct.

Bobrisky's case with the EFCC underscores several important legal and social implications. Firstly, it highlights the legal challenges faced by celebrities who engage in various business activities, especially in a regulatory environment that is increasingly vigilant against financial crimes; it reflects broader societal attitudes towards gender non-conformity and the extent to which public figures who challenge traditional norms are subject to different forms of scrutiny (Abubakar, 2019). The involvement of EFCC in investigating a figure like Bobrisky also raises questions about the agency's priorities and the transparency of its operations. Critics argue that the EFCC sometimes focuses on high-profile cases for publicity rather than systematically addressing endemic corruption and financial crimes that significantly impact Nigeria's economy (Nwogu, 2020).

Additionally, Bobrisky was arrested on March 24, 2024, after a video surfaced showing her "spraying" bank notes at a social event, which is technically an offense in Nigeria. He was subsequently charged with four counts of abusing the currency and two counts of money laundering by EFCC. On March 28, 2024, Bobrisky pleaded guilty to the four counts of abusing the currency and was sentenced to six months in jail by Justice Abimbola Awogboro at the Federal High Court in Lagos. The sentencing served as a deterrent to others who may engage in similar behavior and highlights the need for greater awareness and education about the proper handling of the Naira notes. Bobrisky's journey with the EFCC illustrates the complexities faced by public figures who

navigate the dual challenges of maintaining their public image while complying with legal and regulatory standards. The extensive media coverage and public discourse generated by this case underscore the role of the media in shaping public perception and the ongoing debates about gender, legality, and morality in contemporary Nigerian society.

Research Methodology

This research adopted the focus group discussion (FGD) method. FGD is a research method that brings together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting. It brings individuals from the study's population together in a specific setting in order to discuss an issue as a group, and provides insights into how people think, with a deeper understanding about the issue that prompted the discussion. The population of this study was made up of traders in Emeka-Offor Plaza whose population is given as 705 by the management of the plaza. It is not usually very possible to cover a large population with a single research endeavor; thus, the option is to do sampling. The purposive sampling technique was employed using 90 selected traders in the plaza who are exposed and knowledgeable of Bobrisky's arrest on the abuse of Naira. Hence, the figure was used as the sample size. Six (6) Focus group discussion sessions were held altogether at a particular spot around the plaza at Onitsha main market. The FGDs lasted for an average of an hour per session with a distribution of 15 participants in each session and it was carried out at hours in which the traders are free and able to join the sessions. An interview guide was used for this study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The researcher employed focus group discussion method of study and purposively selected 90 participants of 6 groups with 15 participants per group. An open ended question guide containing fifteen (15) items was used to elicit the needed information. Qualitative analysis process was used to analyze the information gathered during the group discussions. The researcher made use of a recorder and also took down important notes of information gathered during the discussion process. The data analysis was thematically done and discussants' names were also highlighted.

Demographic Data

The demographic factors considered relevant for this study are age and gender of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Age (yrs)	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	17	19
26-35	28	31
36 and above	45	50
Total	90	100
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	57	63
Female	33	37
Total	90	100

Source: Field Work, 2024

Out of the 90 participants, 57 are men while 33 are women; and they are aged between 18 and 36+ years old with most them aged 36 and above. This shows the age range of respondents reflected the fact that they are mainly older male traders.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the respondents' level of exposure to news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky?

The first research question was designed to ascertain the level of exposure to the news reports on Bobrisky's arrest for Naira abuse. A participant named Mr. Chibueze from group one stated:

"I came across the news about Bobrisky's arrest on various platforms, especially on WhatsApp. The news was trending, and it seemed like everyone was talking about it. I saw it multiple times a day, and it was shared in many of my groups".

Another participant, Mr. Kenneth from group three agreed to the statement from when he said:

"I first heard about Bobrisky's arrest through a video shared by a friend on WhatsApp. Since Bobrisky is a well-known figure, it caught my attention immediately. The news kept popping up on my social media feeds, and I saw updates about it constantly".

Similarly, Mrs. Chika from group four shared:

"You could see the news about Bobrisky's arrest everywhere on social media. It went viral quickly, and people kept discussing it. It was hard to miss, and it kept coming up in conversations both online and offline".

This indicates a high level of awareness and frequent exposure to the news among the respondents. It emphasizes the widespread nature of the news and its significant reach. These responses highlight the high level of exposure and the viral nature of the news about Bobrisky's arrest. The focus group discussion revealed that the respondents were frequently exposed to the news reports, indicating that the arrest was a major topic of interest and widely circulated across various social media platforms, especially WhatsApp.

Research Question Two: What is the news channel of exposure to the news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky?

Mr. Stanley from group one mentioned:

"I primarily came across the news about Bobrisky's arrest on WhatsApp. It was shared in multiple groups I'm part of, and many friends forwarded the news and related videos to me. WhatsApp was definitely the main source for me."

Another discussant, Mrs. Uju from group three added:

"I first saw the news on Facebook, where several pages I follow had posted updates about the arrest. Shortly after, I also received the news via WhatsApp from friends. So, for me, it was a combination of Facebook and WhatsApp".

Mrs. Chika from group four highlighted:

"Twitter was where I initially read about Bobrisky's arrest. It was trending, and many people were tweeting about it. The news spread quickly there, and I saw various opinions and updates. I later saw more detailed reports on WhatsApp and Instagram".

Mr. Uchenna from group two noted:

"I got the information at first through Instagram. Influencers and news pages I follow posted stories and updates about the arrest. Later, I saw the same news being discussed on WhatsApp groups".

Miss Ifeoma maintained:

"WhatsApp was my main source even though I saw the updates from other social media handles including Facebook and Instagram. The news was widely shared by popular accounts, and I kept seeing it in my feed and stories. I also saw discussions on Facebook but not as much as on Instagram".

Mr. Daniel from group five concluded:

"Initially, I got the news from a YouTube channel that I follow, which covers celebrity news. After that, I noticed the news circulating on WhatsApp and Twitter".

These responses illustrate that the primary channels of exposure to the news reports on Bobrisky's arrest were the social media ranging from WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. WhatsApp and Instagram emerged as the most frequently mentioned platforms, indicating their significant role in disseminating news among the respondents.

Research Question Three: What is the respondents' perception/interpretation of money spraying in line with Bobrisky's arrest?

To understand the respondents' perception of money spraying, particularly in the context of Bobrisky's arrest for Naira abuse, the focus group discussions revealed the participants' shared views on cultural perspectives of this practice in line with the arrest of Bobrisky. Hence, the interpretation of the news reports and opinions among the discussants varied. Some viewed the reports as sensational and primarily focused on the controversy, while others considered the coverage as part of a broader discussion on societal issues like money spraying and public behaviour. This diversity in perception/interpretation reflects the complex nature of media consumption and the varying perspectives of the audience.

Mr. Emmanuel from group one stated:

"Money spraying is a common practice at celebrations in our culture, and many people see it as a way to show happiness and success. However, Bobrisky's arrest highlighted the excesses and potential legal issues associated with it. Some people now think twice about how they spray money, who they spray the money on, and where they are spraying the money".

Mr. Chibuzor from group three added:

"Before Bobrisky's arrest, money spraying was generally viewed as a harmless tradition. But now, some of us feel that it can be misused and may attract unwanted attention from authorities. There's a growing awareness of the need to be more cautious and respectful of the law".

Mrs. Ifenyinwa from group six noted:

"While many still enjoy money spraying at events, there's a perception that it can be wasteful and ostentatious. Bobrisky's case has sparked conversations

about the responsible use of money and the importance of not overstepping legal boundaries”.

Mr. Caleb from group five shared:

“Money spraying is deeply ingrained in our social activities, especially at weddings and parties. However, the news about Bobrisky has made some of us to reconsider how we participate in this tradition. It’s a reminder that we need to balance cultural practices with legal considerations”.

Miss Sonia from group four supported this view by saying:

“Although money spraying is a sign of generosity and joy, the controversy around Bobrisky’s arrest has made it clear that we need to be more mindful and careful too. There’s a shift towards finding less extravagant ways to celebrate without violating any law”.

Mr. Chinedu from group five concluded:

“There’s definitely a mixed perception now. Some still see it as an essential part of our celebrations, while others view it as potentially problematic. The key takeaway from Bobrisky’s situation is that moderation and legal compliance are crucial”.

These responses reflect a nuanced perception and interpretation of money spraying among the respondents based on Bobrisky’s arrest. While it remains an important cultural practice, there is a growing awareness of the need for moderation and legal adherence, influenced significantly by the news of Bobrisky’s arrest.

Research Question Four: What is the influence of the news reports of the arrest of Bobrisky on spraying of money on the respondents?

During the focus group session in group 5, Mr. Emma had this to say, *“Spraying money is one of the hobbies of Ndigbo, that’s how we appreciate ourselves, help ourselves and show love to ourselves. We can’t just stop being our brothers’ keepers, that’s what we are known for and we’ll continue in that direction”.*

This particular opinion of his was upheld by every other person in that group. Hence, it could be deduced that the arrest of Bobrisky never had any influence on the people. The reason runs through the fact that people use this means to show support and solidarity towards the success of a fellow. This may have resulted from the statement of one of the discussants that, *“the government should stop chasing clout and work on themselves by improving the system, not harassing people; leaving the major thing and focusing on irrelevancies”.*

Discussion of Findings

The **first research question** investigated the level of exposure to news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky. The findings showed that an overwhelming population of the respondents agreed that they were frequently exposed to the news reports about Bobrisky’s arrest. This finding is supported by studies which show that youth rely on social media to satisfy their information needs and use these platforms to stay updated on global events, network, and maintain connections with friends without physical meetings (Adikuru & Obiora, 2021; Kusuma, 2020; Bergström & Belfrage, 2018; Ohlsson, Lindell, & Arkhede, 2017, Uche & Obiora, 2016). Furthermore, the finding aligns with the observation by Bergström

and Belfrage (2018) that visits to social media platforms for social connections often result in exposure to various news items in one’s feed. Similarly, the findings support the Agenda Setting Theory, which suggests that media play a significant role in shaping public’s perception of what is important by highlighting certain issues. In this context, the frequent exposure to news reports on WhatsApp about Bobrisky’s arrest indicates that social media platforms are effective in setting the agenda for what the youth perceive as significant news (Adikuru & Obiora, 2021; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This agrees with studies that show that social media content consumption is influenced by users’ age and social engagement (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2012; Putnam, 1993). It has to be noted that none of the respondents admitted getting exposed to the news reports through the traditional news media channels. This may be attributed to the fact that “When audience members in the society distrust the mainstream media, they have a tendency to withdraw from it and turn towards alternative sources (Müller & Schulz, 2021, in Obiakor, 2024). This high level of exposure to the news reports under study depicts an agreement to the fact that vibrant and active media is an indispensable tool for the execution of any election (Ezinwa, 2015, in Obiakor, Okelue & Okeke, 2024), in the sense that without access to the full range of information about their world, citizens cannot fulfil their roles, and democracy will wither (Kurfi, 2010, in Obiakor, Okelue & Okeke, 2024).

The **second research question** investigated respondents’ news channel of exposure to the news reports on the arrest of Bobrisky. The results showed that WhatsApp followed by Instagram dominated the source of exposure to the news reports on Bobrisky’s arrest. This further supports findings from studies that highlight the reliance of young people on social media for satisfying their information needs (Uche & Obiora, 2016; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2012; Putnam, 1993). The finding also aligns with research indicating that social media are popular among younger generations because they use these platforms to express opinions, share feelings, and engage in discussions, thereby providing news with a different dynamic and perspective (Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2014; Nielsen & Schroder, 2014). Furthermore, the finding is also in line with the findings of earlier studies, that social media platforms provide direct access to contents to an unprecedented number of people (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2021, in Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeumenwa, 2024), that social media is one of the most vibrant means of disseminating information to the masses (Obiakor, & Ikegbunam, 2021; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeja, 2024), that social media are one of the major sources of information on politics for users (Duru, 2019, in Obiakor & Adikuru, 2024), about a demonstration of the universality of the internet and its permeation ability (Obiakor, Adikuru & Agbakaj, 2022), that WhatsApp is one of the social networking sites where political issues are being discussed everyday by users (Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeaso, 2023) and that the role of the social media in projecting public information to the people is hereby acknowledged (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2023).

The **third research question** investigated the respondents’ perception/interpretation of money spraying in line with Bobrisky’s arrest. The perception of the respondents was evident in their interpretation towards the practice as some viewed money spraying as a cultural expression of celebration and social status, associated with celebrities and social influencers; hence, their overall perception is from a political perspective. Despite the fact that it is noted that certain social behaviours (like money spraying)

are in excess, the general perception is that money spraying is only a gesture that most people enjoy once in their lifetime especially during wedding and birthday parties. Hence, one can veritably conclude that the dominant perception of the arrest of Bobrisky in line with spraying money is simply negative. This finding supports studies which demonstrate that media content, including videos, can significantly shape perceptions and behaviours that are related to social practices and norms (Miranda & Claes, 2004; Wingood et al., 2003). Empirical research also indicates that exposure to media portraying certain behaviors, such as lavish spending, can influence audience attitudes and behaviors, particularly among youth and young adults (Miranda & Claes, 2004; Hitzler, 2002).

The **fourth objective** sought to find out the influence of news reports of the arrest of Bobrisky on the respondents. Result shows that the reports under study did not exert much influence on the respondents which is in disagreement with Obiora (2022) who noted the significant role information plays in social and behavioural changes. The point that the government should step up their leadership role by improving the system was the hit of this study. This is in line with the perception theory which hinges on the fact that people's perception of certain things affects their actions and inactions in the society (Bem, 1967).

Conclusion

The study examined audience exposure to news reports on Bobrisky's arrest for Naira abuse and their perception of money spraying. The study made use of Onitsha main market as its area of study focusing on the business people in Emeka-Offor plaza who are aware and knowledgeable of Bobrisky's arrest by the EFCC. The research data presentation and analysis was thematically done and it was found that greater percentage of the discussants are aware of Bobrisky's arrest. It was also found that the respondents have different interpretations of the news reports; while some of them view the reports in a negative light, the majority of the discussants interpret the reports positively, highlighting the varying perceptions of money spraying and its implications. It was also found that there is an attitude change prompted by these news reports, which may influence the future discourse on money spraying and its role in Nigerian culture; however, majority of the discussants still believe that the government should improve the system and allow people to show love to each other; hence, there is no influence of the reports on the respondents. Therefore, the study provides valuable insights into how media coverage influences public perceptions and attitudes towards cultural practices. The highlights from the diverse interpretations of the news reports under study among the respondents present the cultural expression and a symbol of generosity and celebration for the people. This divergence in perception underscores the complex nature of cultural practices and the influential role of media in framing public opinion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it recommends thus: that there is need to implement educational programmes to enhance media literacy among the public, especially among young people. These programmes should focus on helping individuals critically evaluate media content, understand the potential biases in news reporting, and recognize the influence of media framing on their perceptions and attitudes; that media organizations should commit to balanced and ethical journalism by providing fair and unbiased reports. Emphasizing the importance of context in reporting cultural

practices, such as money spraying, will help ensure that audiences receive a well-rounded perspective rather than sensationalized or biased views; that journalists and media men should approach cultural practices with sensitivity and respect. Reporting on practices like money spraying should include perspectives from cultural experts and community members to provide a more comprehensive and respectful portrayal; there is need to create platforms for public discussions and forums where community members can share their views and experiences related to cultural practices and media influence. These forums can help bridge the gap between different interpretations and promote a more nuanced understanding of cultural norms; there is need to encourage academic and independent research on the long-term effects of media exposure on cultural perceptions and behaviours. Such research can provide deeper insights into how media narratives shape societal norms and inform the development of strategies to mitigate any negative impacts; and that the government should critically evaluate certain policies that may be viewed as a form of punishment on the citizens who feel they have to show love to one another and should not be disallowed. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards fostering a more informed and culturally sensitive media environment that respects and accurately represents diverse cultural practices.

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