

# Mapping Sensational Elements in HabariLeo and Mwananchi Newspapers Coverage of Parliament Sessions in Tanzania, June 2022

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## Abstract

This paper presents parts of the findings of the research titled: Exploring sensationalism in media coverage of parliament sessions in Tanzania: A comparative study of Habari Leo and Mwananchi newspapers. The main goal was to examine how and to what extent the two serious newspapers fall in sensational reporting. The paper is guided by the framing theory to examine sensational elements in the coverage of news in HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers during parliament sessions in June 2022. The purposive sampling technique was used to sample 60 copies (30 copies each) from HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Unit of analysis were photos, graphics, font size, and the use of colours. Content analysis was used to collect and analyse data and the findings were presented in words, tables, charts, and graphs based on the aforementioned goal of examining how the two serious newspapers can accommodate sensational elements.

The study found that sensational elements were mainly on front-page headlines, the use of colours, and language style. On the extent of sensational elements accommodated in HabariLeo and Mwananchi, the study found high levels and low levels of sensationalism in both newspapers. The study recommends that the application of sensationalism should not be entertained in serious news for credible and responsible journalism.

**Keywords:** Sensationalism • Serious newspaper • Framing • Headlines

## Introduction

Though the space between news and entertainment has been uniformed for centuries, the arrival of new media has brought about a complex encounter related to profit diminutions, concerns with trustworthiness, and audience detachment. News entities are said to react to such stresses by producing stories that are more sensational or have "tabloid-style" characteristics. In this perspective, understanding sensationalism's establishment in the news as well as how it affects viewers' trust in news organisations and participation in coverage is important.

Frye says sensationalism comprises an appeal to the emotions such as eagerness, shock, anxiety, and amazement [1]. Newspapers can craft those moods in the way they set their news articles over layout, illustrations, wording style, and even by opting and selecting the content that goes into the story. Sensationalism in today's world extends beyond yellow pages and headlines that don't relate to the content. Instead, it has evolved to the point where words are chosen

carefully, images are altered, loud headlines are used, eye-catching colours and screens are used, and the story is placed prominently in order to emphasise a particular story and influence the audience's perception of it, regardless of how the truth is. A story gains some value when it is less important but has dramatic headlines and altered photos.

The philosophy of 1846 gave rise to sensationalism, which postulated that sensation is the only source of knowledge. It developed in journalism in 1865, as journalists aimed to strongly appeal to their audience. This aspect of journalism has been around for years despite its increasing use in present society. Sensationalism first began as a way to make news more accessible to the lower class and to gain readership. Publishing houses and journalists realised that the news of the educated upper class could not relate to or be of little interest to the lower class [2]. Thus, issues pertaining to crime, sex, and other scandalous topics would grab the attention of this type of audience.

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Citing global publishers, a media company that has been selling yellow journalism, researchers have added the company to a list of major media companies that have stopped publishing in the face of economic instability. Global publishers mainly covers artificial value-added news events, scandal-mongering, or sensationalism through its weekly publications *Uwazi*, *Ijumaa*, and *Champion*—is joining another giant, *New Habari* to stop printing. The latter is the publisher of *Mtanzania*, *Rai*, and *Dimba* newspapers.

A strong democracy lies on free and autonomous media that acts in the public interest. Mostly, the rights to liberty of opinion and expression pledge that civilians can embrace views with no interference, and search for, obtain, and convey information and thoughts of all brands, subject only to very slight boundaries, defined by in-laws. Unrestricted and independent media are vital to ensure these human rights and self-determination.

When significant concerns arise, such as during parliamentary sessions, wars, or the outbreak of diseases, end users of news want to receive exciting free news. Nonetheless, news consumers have accused the media of sensationalising coverage of parliamentary proceedings, illnesses, and emerging events, sometimes distorting the significance and gravity of the stories. In the light of above background, this paper aimed to examine how and to what extent the two serious newspapers fall in sensational reporting taking the specific case on coverage of Parliament Sessions in Tanzania in June 2022.

## Literature Review

According to Guggenheim et al. in this universe, there is a connection between media and its participation in business [3]. Any form of media that is observed has the potential to either support a company's success or cause harm to all parties involved. The sponsor's side as well as the media outlet itself. Reporters and the media are responsible for accurately reporting news, issues, and events as they actually occur. Any falsifications can cause the communication being sent to be misjudged or wrong.

In this day of intense competition, journalists aim to increase their following and news viewers to turn a profit. News consumers today have options, are not as ignorant, and can decide which media outlet to trust and which not to. They have remote controls; they can anytime switch to their favourite channels. They don't have much time; they can any time dump the newspaper and do some other business. In this case, the audience will only consume the contents with emotional elements like fear, happiness, touching, and unusualness.

News organisations and nations have different standards for what constitutes newsworthy content. Rather than focusing on human interest stories, many broadcasts and print media are packed with material about death and devastation since it is simple to receive information about crime and violence from the police through press releases or statistical statistics. This raises the question of how this news will be presented such that viewers will be drawn to it and disregard similar content from other media outlets.

Furthermore, in order to retain their audience of readers, news producers have already modified their writing style in light of the current circumstances. The capacity of print media to employ garish images to go along with their already biased tales adds to the sensationalism of today's news, sometimes detracting from the written word because the viewer's attention is drawn to the image first.

In this case, reporters are adding a taste of sensationalism elements to their stories. A headline does not reflect what is in the contents so that it can capture news consumers' minds and gain profit. This is because the readers care or ignore stories once they look for the headline.

### Sensationalism in the media

Crisis mounting and the application of sensationalized headlines during news reporting on methamphetamine use could affect stigma, discrimination, and negative attitudes [4].

Lancaster et al. say that the mass media has four purposes: To influence public opinion (media effect), to set the agenda (choose subjects that think are important while quieting others), framing function (effects on what is said about the matter, so it would report of an epidemic of drug consuming crisis framing), and persuading insight, policy, and politics opinions [5].

According to Lancaster et al. mass media reporting can have a substantial benefit to health matters, by pinpointing areas of concern, picturing courtesy to matters that entail policy modification and government funding, and snowballing community awareness.

Published in on Turkish online journal of education and technology, Oztunc says media liberty and independence are the ladders of a certain democratic community. Because the media links between the political authority and the public point of view, its freedom is vital for the existence of democracy. However, there is a history of the media that is being paved with complications of different types.

Nevertheless, a drawback of media courtesy is that it can form public judgment, upsurge public alarm, and impress the development of stigma and bad insight [6]. The media plays a vital role in accent deviance and cheering audiences to advance specific comebacks and cognitive frames over which to point blame [7,8].

Similar to the outcomes of the dissemination of sensational news, viewer characters also appear to be limited in their enjoyment of it. According to Kamhawi and Grabe, males valued bad news more than good news, while women felt the opposite way. According to Kleemans et al. older viewers experienced lower levels of enjoyment when sensational characteristics aroused higher levels of excitement than younger audiences [9].

Generally, the research on information processing and satisfaction delivers comparable findings: Sensational features in newflash endorse remembrance and gratification. Nevertheless, large amounts of sensational stories may be disadvantageous.

## Sensationalism in Tanzania media

The well-known publications for sensationalism in Tanzania are tabloid newspapers and magazines such as *Ijumaa Wikienda* and *Kiu*.

For example, Sturmer argues that throughout the previous years, the regime has been more tolerant of critics, however this altered attitude in the legal system [10]. He says that the newspaper act is still in force, but the journalists know that they are permitted to tell the truth nowadays. Often, they even exceed the mark, as he quoted the business times reporter Jaston Binala admitting: "At times we even go overboard". We say things that are bullshit (Interview with Jaston Binala, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1996). This confirms that the media is practicing this unethical issue (sensationalism) with its five senses that prove that sensational storytelling is wrong.

The government began pursuing individuals who wrote immorally because of articles that were published that damaged the authority's reputation and in some cases caused fear and insecurity. This action negatively impacted the sales of many newspapers in Tanzania.

Certainly, the racing after scoops and sensational news led to a severe decline in the paper's quality. Many Tanzanian media specialists and officials are worried about this development. This shows that the sensationalism pays.

Kiswahili weekly publication was a Tanzania newspaper that was given a warning for publishing a front-page lead story saying 'Nyerere ni mtu wa kuchinjwa' (literally: Nyerere deserves to be slaughtered). It is during the same period that a Kiswahili weekly comes out with a headline like 'Ntimizi akampeni akiwa nusu uchi: Ajionyesha mfano halisi wa kiruka njia' (literally: Ntimizi campaigns while she is half naked: She portrays herself as a real hook). Ntimizi was a DC and a candidate for a parliamentary seat.

Eventually, the regime started to prohibit newspapers and arrest producers in accordance with the newspaper act of 1976.

Numerous articles have been published on the media and sensationalism around the globe studying how does sensationalism goes too far and how can it go as far as triggering fear in the views of its spectators.

There are studies that defend the sensational writing style and those that criticise it. Slattery, for instance, defends sensationalism in writing by suggesting that there might be an ethical bound to it that is, that chronicling dramatic events and taking advantage of people's suffering in the news might eventually work to the community's benefit [11]. He stressed that these kinds of news reports are supposed to warn locals to be cautious about what is happening in their neighbourhoods. Encouraging residents of the community to lead safer lifestyles and perhaps even eliminating the undesirable elements of the neighbourhood.

Sensationalism in the mass media serves a distinct purpose. It is based on the customer's sensory insights and frequently presents news that is irrelevant, contentious, or even unrelated as vital and relevant to the lives of large audiences, but in reality, it is far from the truth. Journalists will frequently apply sensationalism to capture the

attention of customers emotionally, seemingly so as to harvest a number of reads and a greater extent of listens while the truth is, the subject matter doesn't impact the public or lives of the people in general.

Slattery, writes that broadcasting newscasts started to be supplied from informational pieces to more sensationalistic pieces which were made to attract more emotion from the viewers and listeners. The study inspects if more sensationalistic news may inspire the news consumers negatively. Then the spectators may have a skewed opinion of the world around them. Slattery revolved around examining 60 broadcast networks from the giant three networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) from 1968 to 1996.

Sensational media stories of the terror attacks in Kenya in 2021 suggest that although Al-Shabaab rarely attacked Kenyan educational institutions, their strikes significantly decreased school admissions for communities beyond the reach of the mass media by at least 0.5%. The results demonstrate that this adverse consequence multiplied if these societies had access to media.

The report also suggests that Kenyan relatives with access to mass media were pointedly more frightened of terrorism than those out of range.

In particular, Kenyan caregivers with information in hand supposed that the danger of vanishing in a terrorist attack was twelve times greater than genuine rates. As a consequence, these caregivers were more expected to keep their families out of school.

The examination also demonstrates that communities without media coverage reacted largely to attacks near their homes. Nevertheless, communities with access to media set aside their children from schools in reaction to terrorist attacks that happened beyond 100 kilometres away.

The examples above demonstrate that, despite Slattery's backing, some people object to the sensational writing that caused admissions to schools and universities to be cancelled, such as the dramatic media article about terrorist acts in Kenya.

## Methodology

A number of studies have been conducted on the context of sensationalism and diverse findings still contradict whether it is fairer as far as the applicability of sensationalism is concerned. And according to available findings, the discussion on sensationalism seems to be contemporary.

The existing study has used a case study design whereas the researcher has used a variety of evidence from different sources, such as documents and observation, and this goes beyond the range of sources of evidence that are available in historical study. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, in which *HabariLeo* and *Mwananchi* newspapers published between June 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, were chosen for analysis. The study used a total of 30 newspapers

to review the front-page headlines. The current study has used interview and content analysis as a method of data collection. The researcher interviewed 8 respondents which are 2 news editors, 2 newspaper sellers, and 4 readers. Qualitative and Quantitative data analysis has been used. The researcher summarised, tabulated, and analysed qualitative data thematically and presented them in words by the aforementioned specific objectives; the researcher calculated the number of headlines published in both HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers and quantified them in terms of percentages of sensationalised headlines in both highly and lowly sensationalised levels; and the researcher used tables and graphs to quantify findings.

S/N	Headlines	Mwananchi	HabariLeo	Total
1	Front page headlines	151	172	323
2	Colours	21	45	66
3	Text behind Catchy screens	27	77	104
4	Sensational elements (Parliament)	14	11	25
5	Language style (Parliament)	14	11	25
6	Photos (Big photo)	9	6	15

**Table 1.** Number of reviewed headlines in sub-categories.

### Mwananchi communications Ltd

The sensational coverage in this paper covers all areas, from politics, and business to social issues. For the matter of increasing readership, they would add some words in a headline that are catchy. For example, an article headlined "Wabunge waitia kitanzi serikali" (literally: Members of parliament have put the government in the noose) published by Mwananchi on 25th June 2022 means the MPs put the government under pressure. The story was placed on the front page with bold black font biggest font size. The wording technique brings directly the sense of sensationalism.

Another sensational headline was printed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022, "Mafuta kilio" (literally means fuel is a cry), simply said, the goal is to depict the scenario of a gasoline crisis that leads to price increases on different products but the words used in the headline bring the direct sense of sensational writing. This frames the fuel situation and creates a way of how should the society think.

On August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 the Mwananchi's leading headline "NHIF yatupiwa mzigo wa dawa" (literally meaning NHIF is thrown with a weight of medicines) is sensational as well because the content carried is so light in comparison with how strong the headline is. The style of writing has given the heavyweight to the news.

"CAG naye alia NEC ifumuliwe" (literally: CAG demands for the reformation of the NEC) was published on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. The idea is to present the corrupted national electoral commission, but the wording would attract the reader to read. The information included in the content is not as shocking as is in the headline.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis starts from the collected findings from content analysis which includes a wide range review of relevant documents in HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers for 30 days from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

A total of 323 front-page headlines from HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> newspapers have been reviewed. The Table 1 elaborates in numbers the number of reviewed headlines in sub-categories.

"Polisi yahusishwa tena mauaji ya raia" (literally meaning yet again, the police are involved in killing civilians) is another sensational writing style published on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The post was followed by the deck headline coloured strong red which exposed the amount of money that led to the killing of the said citizens.

"Matriloni ya fedha kwenda sekta ya nishati" (literally means Trillions of money to be spent in the energy sector) is a headline published on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 explaining the Ministry of Energy's request for TZS 2.9 trillion as of the 2022/2023 budget. The way the headline is constructed is like the big amount of money was already granted but it is just a request.

It has been observed that covering a story on the front page, huge font size, appealing images, type of words used and colouring headline is a loved sensational technique.

### HabariLeo

HabariLeo is a Kiswahili language daily newspaper and a branch of Tanzania Standard Newspapers Limited (TSN). The newspaper was founded in 2006 by TSN. The government of the United Republic of Tanzania is the owner of the paper and the President of the United Republic of Tanzania is the editor in chief but the Managing Editor is the Chief Executive Officer and contact person.

Like any other print media, the HabariLeo tries to capture the attention of the readers by engaging in a sensational writing style to increase readership and to cover expenses from production to distribution.



Headlines like “Neema royal tour zamiminika” (literally: Royal tour is poured with grace) which was published on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022 have catchy wording, the idea is presenting President Samia H. Suluhu's idea of welcoming tourists to Tanzania. The catchy and appealing style of the headline easily teases readers' attention and a desire to go find the story inside.

On 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022, HabariLeo newspaper published an article with the headline “Kishindo gesi asilia” (literally meaning ‘A roar in natural gas’) explaining how the president of the United Republic of Tanzania tries to bring investors both foreign and domestic. The same article was published by Mwananchi and the headline was “Mradi wa Kihistoria” (literally: A historical project), the two headlines were constructed in a manner that will attract a great readership. The same article appeared in Jamvi la Habari newspaper and the headline is “Samia aandika historia mpya” (literally means history has been

been penned by Samia) and Mzalendo Newspaper, “Ni mradi mkubwa wa gesi” (Literally meaning ‘it is a large-scale gas project’). The other newspapers write in a manner of balancing the headline and the content, but Mwananchi and HabariLeo write in a manner of boosting sales.

“Mageuzi makubwa sekta ya nishati” (literally means the significant shift in the energy sector) on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 was the headline of a certain article explaining the government to invest 6.5 trillion Tanzania shillings to sell petrol in villages, the amount explained and the headline contradicts each other.

### Levels of sensationalism elements

The Table 2 exposes the levels of sensational elements covered in HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers

S/N	Sensational style	Mwananchi	HabariLeo
1	Sensational elements (Parliament)	14	11
2	Language style (Parliament)	14	11
3	Photos (Big photos)	9	6

**Table 2.** High level of sensationalism content in the news covered during the parliament session.

## Conclusion

The data collected and analysed in chapter four above denotes that sensationalism is a key to newspaper sales. This is following the observation from newspaper selling points and newspaper social networks.

The headlines used in HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers are majority sensational. For example, the news headlined “Bajeti ya wananchi” (Literally meaning ‘citizen's budget’) published by HabariLeo on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, has occupied the whole front page, with creatively edited images, coloured sub-headlines, and screens captioning the edited images.

This means the editors wanted to make it an agenda and design a way the audience should think about it. This is because the headline and the images included have been constructed in a way that won't exhaust the audience. This is different from when you read the Majira newspaper, the same news headlined “Haijawahi kutokea” (Literally means it has never happened) but the image is small and congested with many different pictures that capture the audience's attention impossible.

“Inang'ata, inapuliza”, (literally means it hurts and it comforts) the headline in Mwananchi newspaper on June 16, 2022, emphasises the same news as mentioned in HabariLeo newspaper above. In Mwananchi newspaper, the sensational element is also huge because it has taken ¾ of the whole front page with huge font sizes and big images.

As it has been explained in chapter one (p.1) classic formats for sensationalized news include minor news stories with huge, layouts, overly dramatic headlines, and the lavish use of attention-grabbing

pictures or drawings flashy colours, irrelevant and lurid photos that attract mass audiences like entertainment while downplaying information. The layout of the 2022/2023 budget news in HabariLeo and Mwananchi newspapers is much of dramatic and would flash out the hidden audience.

However, the treatment and angle of the news have slight differences. HabariLeo newspaper talks of only the positive side of the budget while Mwananchi newspaper reveals both sides positive and negative.

According to this, the study has found that the sensationalism elements of news sometimes are affected by the policy of the media house. HabariLeo acts as the mouthpiece of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, and so the headlines will likely favour the President who is the chief editor of the newspaper, and favour the government side while Mwananchi newspaper is an independent media house, the stand will be independent, favouring the state because it is the main regulator, in the meantime revealing the misleading of the government and non-government officials.

Headlines like “Rais asikiliza wabunge mapendekezo ya bajeti” (literally means parliamentarians' recommendations for the budget are heard by the President.) from HabariLeo front page and “Wabunge waitia kitanzi serikali” (literally meaning ‘Members of Parliament have put the government in the noose’) from Mwananchi front page, both published on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 speaks about the same incident but treatment of the headlines is quite different. HabariLeo has written soft language but sensational styled by font size and pictures while Mwananchi's headline is a punch, direct to attention. The words used are not in favour of the government in comparison to HabariLeo.

## Recommendations

This study recommends that sensationalism elements can be applied in any media house, however, it should not include news pertaining to war or disease outbreaks. War and disease outbreaks that are sensationalised can induce fear and social unrest, but politics, economics, and other social issues can cause panic and social unrest if published in the style of HabariLeo and Mwananchi publications.

To some extent, sensationalism is regarded as a fraud to journalism ethics, but as explained above, if sensationalism has included the element of deception is a sin to journalistic work, then journalists should not forget their ethics when crafting headlines. The sensationalism in this manner should include only the choice of punching words, emotional natural images, and sizing of headlines fonts, screens, and colours, but not deceptive words just to steal the mind of the audience.

Sensational headlines crafting for serious information should be used with carefulness, so as not to lose faith and reliability of certain media outlets. The other choice is to fine-tune the strategy of the sensational for the aim of not being noticeable to the general public.

Also, in an online world, there has been a debate about the systems for spreading information. This is because media autonomy has brought greater online competition which brings the massive sensationalized content. However, as far as sensationalism is concerned, distributing information with less integrity will decrease the overall trust in the platform. Therefore, for the channel used by content writers, it is significant to adjust the algorithms and systems for the distribution of news and information to preserve their trustworthiness.

The mass media has been critiqued on numerous occurring in the last few years because of the quantity of unfairness that can be found in written materials. This is critically subsidizing to sensationalist writing, with the cumulative uncertainty about what is advantageous or what is honest news, the media has increasingly lost its credibility.

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