The Role of Social Media Activism in Setting the Agenda of Egyptian News Sites: A Case Study of VAW Issues

Nourhan Moustafa El-Sherbiny

¹College of Language and Communication, Arab Academy for Science and Technology, Alexandria Headquarter, Egypt.

Abstract

This study investigates the inter-media agenda-setting relationship between Instagram activism and Egyptian online news coverage of violence against women (VAW). It explores whether social media activism influences journalists' news agendas and how they uphold professional ethics when reporting on VAW. Guided by agenda-setting, inter-media agenda-setting, and social responsibility theories, the study employs a mixed-methods design: quantitative content analysis of 418 Instagram posts and online articles from *Bawbat Al-Ahram*, *Bawbat Al-Wafad*, and *Al-Watan* (August 9–31, 2022), alongside in-depth interviews with five journalists. Findings reveal a limited but notable influence of Instagram activism on news agendas, particularly in stories about femicide, rape, and human trafficking. Journalists acknowledged Instagram's role in reflecting public concern but emphasized editorial control, verification, and legal constraints as primary agenda determinants. While Instagram serves as a source of ideas, traditional gatekeeping and ethical standards still dominate content selection. The study concludes that Instagram activism enhances public awareness of VAW but remains secondary in shaping Egyptian news agendas.

Keywords: Agenda setting, Case study, Egypt, Egyptian News sites, Media agenda, Online activism, Social media Activism, Violence against women (VAW).

1. Introduction

Since the fourteen types of violence against women (VAW) issues, which are categorized by the UN, have existed a long time ago until nowadays, social media activism has evolved to encounter these issues. Social media activism functions as a communicative process that brings together a broader audience rapidly to advocate for political or social changes due to its interactive nature. When it comes to Egypt, one of the most used social media platforms is Instagram. In early 2023, Instagram users reached 15.35 million (Kemp, 2023). It has also been noticed that Instagram, considered as one of the main platforms, started exposing VAW in Egypt, such as in the case of the Assault Police account & many other activism hashtags. In 2020, AlYum AlSabaa newsite highlighted that social media activism tackling one of the main VAW cases in terms of sexual harassment, blackmailing & rape that took place in Egypt, Ahmed Bassem Zaki's case, started on Instagram (Ragheb, 2020). Furthermore, the widespread impacts of Instagram activism addressing different instances of VAW like Naira Ashraf, Abdallah Roushdy, Salma Bahgat, Medusa, etc… in 2022 resulted in shaping public agendas, and Egyptian youth anticipated that the media would prioritize the same issues that mattered to them despite the fact that reporting social media activism content can lead to professional and ethical concerns. Thus, these research questions are:

RQ1: Is there an inter-media agenda-setting effect between Instagram activism and Egyptian news sites while reporting about VAW issues?

RQ3: What are Instagram activism roles towards VAW issues that can affect Egyptian journalists' news selections?

RQ3: How do Egyptian journalists ensure applying professional standards while reporting VAW activism on Instagram?

2. Research Problem

Despite the fact that there is significant attention from Egyptian society, media, and social media to VAW issues and how social media activism especially Instagram platform, which has a significant role to play in these issues recently, that may affect the setting of the Egyptian media agenda, there is a lack of investigation in this context. Whereas many of the previous studies were more concerned with examining the effect of traditional media agendas on the public agenda or on digital media agendas, or vice versa, or how external news sources influence setting the agenda of traditional media. Furthermore, most of the studies investigated the effect of Twitter activism, which is not the most used application in Egypt during activism, on setting the agenda of the media, which are more concerned with political issues only. Moreover, there is no enough investigation for how journalists ensure following professional and ethical standards while dealing with VAW issues trending by Instagram activism.

1

3. Previous Studies

This section is divided two subsections that review literature on prior research:

3.1. Social Media Agenda Impact on Newspapers Agenda-Setting:

An Egyptian study examined the first level of agenda-setting regarding VAW issues between social media activism and Egyptian news sites and identified the types of news sources that news sites use. One of its methods was a content analysis that was conducted over almost a month in 2022, with high social media activism regarding VAW. The analysis included posts from three well-known news sites as well as a purposeful sample of posts on Facebook and Instagram. It used the Rozelle-Campell baseline in conjunction with rank-order and cross-lagged correlation analyses. The findings indicate a degree of similarity among the rankings of issue agendas across the platforms and news sites. However, there is limited influence from social media activism on the agendas of Egyptian news sites regarding VAW issues (El-Sherbiny et al., 2023).

A study in the USA examined if social media users' posts are influenced by media agendas. It used a purposive sample of #MeToo hashtag activism tweets and articles from three most visited online newspapers in 2021. Results showed newspaper agendas influenced Twitter agendas, with sexual harassment issues not being discussed on Twitter before being reported on news sites. However, news sites included some trending stories on Twitter after they started, which played a role in how long news sites reported this issue (Gibbs, 2021).

A Ghanaian study explored inter-media agenda-setting theory between Instagram, Twitter, and five Ghanaian news sites over two weeks. It applied content analysis to a simple sample of viral topics on Twitter and Instagram posts and news articles on news websites. It conducted in-depth interviews with two news editors. Findings of cross-lagged correlation analysis using the Rozelle-Campbell baseline showed that Twitter agendas have an influence on Instagram and news websites agendas, and editors were asked by their newspapers to monitor Instagram and Twitter regularly to get breaking news stories since these latter are spaces where many sources exist. Findings indicated that the platforms have a great role in journalists' decisions regarding news selection (Agyei, 2019).

An Egyptian study explored the extent to which social media affected newspapers agendas regarding terrorism topics over 2 years and the sources used. It used agenda-setting theory, conducted interviews with journalists from AlWatan, AlAhram, and AlWafad, and conducted a content analysis on news from these newspapers and hashtags on Twitter about the same issue. Findings showed that the different factors that affect setting newspaper agendas are: editorial policy, ownership type, professional and ethical codes, political regimes, news sources, and laws. Ownership type and political regimes were found to be more effective in setting the agenda. Focusing on which sources affected setting the agenda, it was found that official sources were the main news sources, not social media (Saleh, 2018).

3.2. Social Media Activism Roles towards VAW

A study conducted interviews with a purposive sample of activists, writers, researchers, and public educators to analyse how conversations on Facebook and Twitter played a role in stopping VAW. Findings showed that these platforms provided an opportunity to reach a wider audience and raise awareness about VAW, changing societal norms of supporting male superiority, allowing mobilisation around high-profile news stories, and giving space for activists to express their ideas away from traditional media, where some journalists have a limited understanding of VAW that might affect message delivery (Fairbairn, 2020).

A Saudi Arabian study examined the role of Twitter in VAW-raising awareness campaigns in KSA. The study applied media richness theory and situational theory to the public's behaviors. It conducted a survey with a purposive sample of university students using Twitter. Findings revealed that Twitter campaigns regarding VAW played a role in reflecting important issues in society, providing access to information, and reaching different credible opinions about VAW. Moreover, they enabled women to know their rights and duties and raised the level of societal awareness of the negative aspects of VAW (AlJaid & Ajaj, 2020).

One of the studies that used one of the VAW cases as its case study investigated the role of social media activism in the Ni Una Menos feminist movement in Argentina and Chile to end VAW. The study used cyber-feminism and networked social movement theories. It conducted interviews with a purposive sample of activists who engaged in this movement. Findings showed that social media activism is an effective information and dissemination channel compared to traditional media, as it acts like a megaphone. This leads social media to have a significant role in setting public agendas and creating public opinion against any form of VAW. It was an efficient tool for enabling victims to get support and take legal action (Sjoberg, 2018).

4. Theoretical Framework

Since the study's main aims are to identify Instagram activism role regarding VAW in setting online Egyptian newspapers agendas and to identify how journalists deal professionally and responsibly regarding trending VAW issues on Instagram, agenda-setting theory is utilized with a subsection about inter-media agenda setting also social responsibility theory is utilized.

4.1. Agenda-Setting Theory:

The theory assumes that media has the capability of influencing the salience of issues from the media agenda to the public one; in other words, media doesn't show reality but shapes it for the public. The theory assumes that there are three types of agendas: media agendas, public agendas, and policy agendas (McCombs, 2004).

Concerning the level of salience transfer, the theory assumes that there are two levels: the first level is the transfer of issue salience, and the second level is the transfer of attribute salience. The issue of salience transmission means that the media can influence the public agenda by making specific issues more salient within its agenda, which means that the media suggests to the public that these topics are the most important ones to think about. The theory also suggests that there are three independent variables that can be considered as a way to measure

salience in the agenda: attention, prominence, and valence. Attention means publishing a number of news stories about a certain event more than others (Kiousis, 2004, pp. 74–75).

A fundamental question in this theory is: What are the factors that can set media agenda? According to McCombs & Reynolds (2009), there are external and internal news factors. They stated that internal news factors are other media outlets, while external news factors are like public officials, or any other traditional news sources. According to Griffin (2006), editorial policy and ownership type are other factors to be added. In fact, researchers shifted from perceiving media as the central power in setting the agenda for the public to trying to investigate how media agendas are set, taking into consideration the effects of social media.

4.2. Inter-Media Agenda-Setting Theory:

The transfer of issue and attribute salience in the context of inter-media agenda setting means that one media agenda can influence another by transferring salient issues and characteristics of an issue from one agenda to another. According to McCombs (2004), media professionals usually check what others write as a kind of affirmation for their own assessments of what makes news. This drives journalists to take similar decisions as they always have a desire to maintain professional norms and values that they tend to have in common (Naser, 2014, p.63).

With the diffusion of new technologies, especially the Internet, which gave rise to social media, McCombs (2005, pp.543-557) argued that studying the mutual influence of different media agendas on each other in the media landscape created by the Internet is critical. In the last decade, this has led researchers to focus attention on the mutual effect between traditional media and social media agendas in an attempt to find which agenda can affect the other.

4.3. Social Responsibility Theory

The assumption proposed by the theory is that media have obligations towards the societies that they serve where they have to follow professional standards and codes of ethics (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). Moreover, it assumed that one of the main media roles is to be a place for voiceless citizens to have the right to express their opinions as well as being a tool for social development (Ineji, et al., 2015, pp.244-246).

The theory stated some basic standards that media should follow. They are summarized as following (Uzuegbunam, 2013):

- Media has fundamental obligations for the society that it serves which it has to fulfill like objectivity, balance, accuracy, etc… These obligations that media have to seek are as following:
- Work within framework of the law.
- Avoid content that urges any violence.
- Reflect different points of views in the society by acting as a forum for exchanging different comments on any issue.
- Be accountable to the society they serve in terms of giving truthful contexts of what is happening in it. Enable the audience to know.
- Take the responsibility of prioritizing the societies' goals, causes and values.
- Take into consideration that the society has the right to look forward to media to meet professional standards and to give justification for any intervention.

5. Methodology

This section is divided into three subsections which are research methods & data collection tools, universe & sample and data analysis.

5.1. Research Methods & Data Collection Tools:

This study applied a mixed-methods approach. In the context of the qualitative method approach, the study conducts in-depth interviews. The study developed an interview guide that consists of 10 structured questions. The interviews are recorded and transcribed. In the context of the quantitative method, the study conducts a comparative content analysis by developing a content sheet. The news sites sections related to crime and women issues are visited, and news is coded. Concerning Instagram, the inclusion criterion is already set as posts used with certain VAW hashtags, which are mentioned in the universe and sample subsection, are gathered by monitoring procedures and are coded according to the content sheet.

5.2. Universe & Sample

Non-probability purposive sampling is adopted based on the efficiency of its usage in other previous inter-media agenda-setting studies. A purposive sample of five Egyptian journalists for the in-depth interviews—one journalist works in private newspapers, two in a partisan newspaper, and the other two in a national-owned newspaper—all of them are working in the newspapers sampled in this study. Moreover, all of them have published a great number of VAW news stories during the study timeframe.

Concerning the universe and sample of the content analysis, this study has two universes and samples. The first universe is online Egyptian newspapers, with a purposive sampling as follows: There are 3 online news websites of Egyptian newspapers, which are Bawbat AlAhram (BA), Bawbt Al-Wafad AlElectonia (BW), and AlWatan (W). They are selected because they have a good online presence and publish a high rate of VAW news compared to other online newspapers. They also have sections on their websites that focus on women's issues. The second universe is social media platforms, with purposive sampling on Instagram such as four comprehensive Arabic hashtags that are frequently used and connected to various and different VAW cases. The study analyzes posts that used these hashtags only from Egyptian accounts excluding media institutions accounts. The hashtags are (AlOnaf_Ded_ElMaraa, #La_LlOnaf_Ded_ElMaraa, #Awkfo_AlOnaf_Ded_ElNasaa,

#La_LlOnaf_Ded_ElNasaa). The study utilises news articles as its unit of analysis in the purposefully selected newspapers and the posts uses the mentioned hashtags on Instagram.

5.3. Data Analysis
    Concerning the in-depth interview analysis, there is a thematic analysis of what was said. Concerning measuring media salience, the study uses one of the agenda-setting variables, which is attention, mentioned in the theoretical framework section. In order to identify the type of transfer through content analysis, the study uses SPSS. The first level of the analysis is the rank order of issues across different online newspapers and Instagram. In the second level, in order to analyze media salience transfer across time, cross-lagged correlation with the Rozelle-Campbell baseline is applied. Since this type of analysis depends mainly on dividing the timeframe, The research established its timeframe as follows: from 9 till 31 August, 2022. The selection of this timeframe is based on observing high social media activism towards VAW cases & campaigns, like Salma Bahgat, Abdallah Roushdy, Shaimaa Gamal, Medusa, and others that took place. This study timeframe is divided into four time spans of 5 days each, with a time lag of one day. Some studies have approved that the minimum time lag is one day (Gibbs, 2021; Agyie, 2019). The daily timeframe is all hours of the day because of the online media nature, where publishing happens throughout the day. The time spans are as follows:

6. Findings
    The study findings are divided into two subsections as follow:

6.1. Quantitative Findings
    This subsection illustrates the findings of the comparative content analysis. The unit of analysis total number reaches 418, distributed between news articles on news sites and posts on Instagram.

Table 1. The Rank Order of Issue Categories across the study sample.

Medium/ Issues	Instagram (Frequency)	Rank	Bawbat Al-Wafad (Frequency)	Rank	Bawbat Al-Ahram (Frequency)	Rank	Al-Watan (Frequency)	Rank
Economic violence	0	0	1	5	0	0	5	4
Emotional violence	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	5
Physical violence	0	0	0	0	7	3	3	6
Psychological violence	1	5	5	3	0	0	9	2
Femicide	39	3	34	1	35	1	67	1
Honor killing	0	0	0	0	4	5	0	0
Sexual harassment	1	5	2	4	8	2	3	0
Rape	73	1	18	2	2	6	0	0
Rape culture	64	2	1	5	0	0	0	0
Human trafficking	1	5	1	5	6	4	8	3
Female genital mutilation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Child marriage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Digital violence	0	0	0	0	1	7	1	7
General VAW issues	12	4	0	0	0	0	1	7
Total	192		62		63		101	

    Table 1 shows that the total number of posts and news articles is as follows: posts on Instagram (N= 192) and news from Bawbat AlAhram (N= 63), Bawbt Al-Wafad AlElectonia (N= 62), and AlWatan (N= 101). This table indicates that there is a kind of similarity in terms of the issues that are covered and neglected in the coverage between Instagram and the news sites agendas, but to a limited extent. However, there is a difference in the rank orders of them from Instagram to the news sites. This contradiction leads to more investigation, as illustrated in tables 2 and 3, to determine if the similarity takes place in the same or different time spans, following one another, so one agenda can affect the other or not.

4

Table 2. The Rank Order of Issue Categories across Instagram & (BA) over the timeframe.

Issues	Instagram (timeframe)				Bawbat Al-Ahram (timeframe)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Economic violence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional violence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physical violence	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	2
Psychological violence	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Femicide	1	3	0	0	1	1	1	1
Honor killing	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	3
Sexual harassment	3	0	0	0	2	3	0	2
Rape	0	1	1	2	4	0	0	3
Rape culture	3	4	2	1	0	0	0	0
Human trafficking	0	4	0	0	4	4	1	3
Female genital mutilation	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Child marriage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Digital violence	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
General VAW issues	2	2	2	3	0	0	0	0

Table 2 shows that, on Instagram, 'Rape Culture' and 'General VAW Issues' existence remain constant over the timeframe. In time span 1, 'Rape culture' ranked 3rd, 'General violence against women' ranked 2nd, and 'feminicide' ranked 1st. In time span 2, 'Rape' ranked as 1st, 'General violence against women' as 2nd, 'Femicide' as 3rd, 'Human trafficking' and 'Psychological violence' as 4th, while in time span 3, 'Rape' ranked as 1st, and 'General VAW issues' and 'Rape culture' as 2nd. Furthermore, table 2 shows that on (BA), there is a kind of constant existence for 'Femicide', 'Human trafficking', and 'Honor killing' issues. The first issue ranked 1st throughout the whole timeframe; the second one is ranked 4th in time spans 1 and 2, the 1st in time span 3, and the 4th in time span 4, while 'Honour killing' is ranked 4th in time span 1, 2nd in time span 3, and 3rd in time span 4. Also, 'Physical violence' is ranked 2nd throughout this timeframe except for time span 2, and 'Sexual harassment' is ranked 2nd in time spans 1 and 4, and 3rd in time span 2.

The previous description of this table indicates there is a similarity between Instagram in time span 2 and (W) in time span 3, which can suggest an effect of Instagram agenda on their agendas. Moreover, it illustrates that there are many differences in issues existence and ranking order on (BA) from one time span to another compared to Instagram, but similarities can exist between issues that are in the same time spans.

Table 3. The Rank Order of Issue Categories across (BW) & (W) over the timeframe.

Issues	Bawbat Al-Wafad (timeframe)				Al-Watan (timeframe)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Economic violence	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Emotional violence	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
Physical violence	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	0
Psychological violence	0	3	0	2	3	4	3	1
Femicide	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	2
Honor killing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual harassment	0	3	0	4	3	3	0	0
Rape	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Rape culture	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Human trafficking	0	3	0	0	3	3	2	3
Female genital mutilation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Child marriage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Digital violence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
General VAW issues	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4

Table 3 shows that, on (BW), 'Femicide' issue existence remains constant in different time spans. In time span 1, it is ranked 1st, while 'Economic Violence' is ranked 2nd. In time span 2, 'Femicide' ranked as the 1st, 'Rape' as the 2nd, and 'Human Trafficking' ranked 3rd, along with the other two issues. In time span 3, the ranking is as follows: 'Rape' ranked 1st, 'Femicide' ranked 2nd, and 'Rape Culture' ranked 3rd. Moreover, table 3 illustrates, on (W), that 'Femicide' issue existence remains constant where it takes the 1st rank in time spans 1, 2, and 3, while the 2nd rank in time span 4. 'Psychological violence' and 'Human trafficking' issues remain constant over the whole time, with variance in high ranks. It is also noted that in time span 2, 'Emotional violence' and 'Economic violence' are ranked 2nd.

The previous description for this table indicates there is indication for having an influence of Instagram in time span 2 on (BW) in time span 3 due to the common issues between the two time spans. Moreover, it illustrates that there is a kind of similarity of issues in the same time spans between Instagram and (W), but not in one time span to another one after it, except for rare cases. The rare cases are between Instagram in time span 2 and (W) in time span 3.

6.1.1. Cross-lagged Correlations with Rozelle-Campbell Baseline Findings
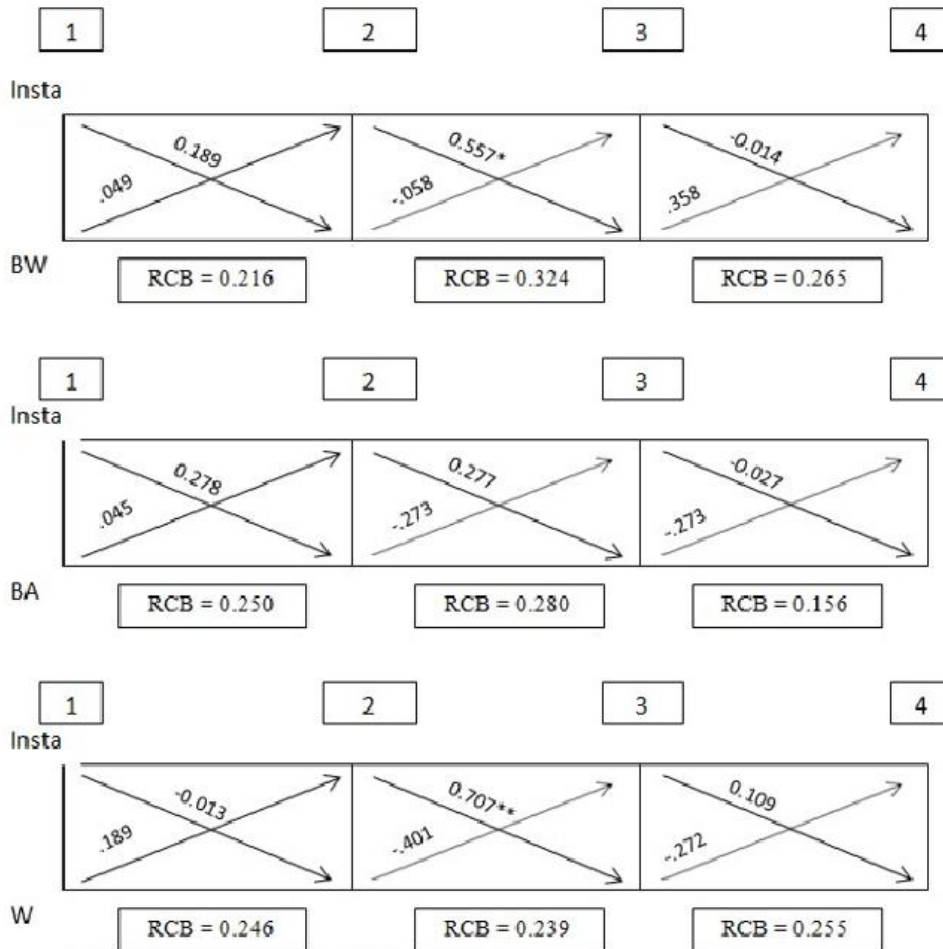
Figure 1. Cross-lagged Correlations between Instagram & News Sites Agendas over the timeframe.
Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1 shows there are only two significant effects that take place where Instagram agenda, in time span 2, affects (W) and (BW) issue agendas in time span 3. The cross-lagged correlation (time spans 2–3) value (r=0.707, p>0.05) shows a significant effect of Instagram agenda on (W). It is illustrated by the existence of three common issues that rank highly in Al-Watan agenda as an effect of Instagram. On Instagram in time span 2, 'Femicide' ranked 3rd, 'Human trafficking' and 'Psychological violence' ranked 4th, and on (W) in time span 3, they ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, respectively. Regarding the effect of Instagram agenda on (BW) agenda, the cross-lagged correlation value is (r=0.557, p>0.05). This can be illustrated by the common issues. 'Rape' which is ranked as 1st on Instagram in time span 2 and (BW) in time span 3, 'Femicide' that is ranked as 3rd Instagram in time span 2 and as 2nd (BW) in time span 3, and 'Rape Culture' that is ranked as 4th on Instagram in time span 2 and as 3rd (BW) in time span 3. In terms of case, both have focused on 'Abdallah Roushdy', which is neglected by other newspapers.

Regarding the no-effect that took place in the rest of the cross-lagged correlations, there is a difference in the ranking of issues in the different time spans between Instagram and the online newspapers. In terms of cases discussed in the issues, even with the common cases, the number of times in which these cases are discussed is different from Instagram to the online newspapers like the 'Salma Bahgat' case. In addition, there are two cases that Instagram focuses on but is neglected by the newspapers: the 'Abdallah Roushdy' rape case and the 'Medusa' campaign.

6.1.2. Qualitative Findings

This subsection reveals the in-depth interviews findings with the five journalists. Findings are divided into three main themes:

6.1.3. Social Media Activism Roles towards VAW Issues & its Effect on Journalists' News Selections

(BW) journalists, Mohamed Tohamy and Wagdy Sabr, believe that social media is a space for women to speak up and call for action, while (BA) journalists, Sherif AbouElFadal and Mona Basha, believe that social media activism is used as a way to raise awareness, create social responsibility sense and mobilise citizens. Unlike the previous belief that social media activism plays an plays an effective role in combating VAW, Rafik Nasef, (W) journalist, believes that its effect is limited as it still needs offline activism to reach its goals.

All journalists affirmed that social media activism is used more as an indicator to know the public agenda about VAW issues, as it shows trending issues made by Egyptians. Regarding its effect on news selections, all journalists believe that it has a role in their selections as it acts as "competitors and motivators for traditional media that lead it to report about VAW trending topics," as Basha and AbouElFadal mentioned. Being a tool to create trends that increase views and readership of online newspapers is considered a crucial reason for journalists to monitor them while reporting.

6.1.4. Impact of Social Media Agenda Regarding VAW issues on Egyptian News sites Agendas:

All journalists state that there are some reasons that can lead their newspapers to be affected by social media activism on the VAW issue agenda, as it reflects what is important for the readers that the newspaper is targeting. Thus, it focuses on issues that they want to read, as in the end, the newspaper needs readership, views, ads, and income.

However, all journalists state some conditions that can affect reporting or not reporting about VAW issues, such as the editorial policy and legal decisions that prohibit publishing for investigational benefit even if they are trending on social media platforms. Another condition is the existence of evidence about VAW.

Regarding the transfer of VAW campaign issues, all journalists, except (BW) journalists, agreed on the fact that there is a weak transfer of unofficial VAW campaigns from social media issue agendas to newspapers agendas. One reason for this is that there are no authentic sources for them, and they don't show the readers the government's role in ending VAW in Egypt.

One of the reasons that show why Instagram activism agendas effect on Egyptian news sites agendas is weak is that journalists' responses affirm that sources have a significant role in setting newspapers' agendas, with external sources, especially security sources, being more powerful. However, editorial policy is considered the most effective factor in setting agendas. Egyptian journalists rely more on Facebook for news ideas, but verify content from official sources before using it. They prefer to check official pages and accounts for accurate news, as other pages can negatively impact professional standards.

6.1.5. Meeting Professional Standards While Using Social Media as Source of VAW News

All journalists agree that social media usage as a news source is a challenge in terms of accuracy, objectivity, and balance. Thus, they provided their own ways to overcome them and be socially responsible towards Egyptian society, where journalists suggest using it as inspiration for ideas and reaching other news sources. Moreover, all journalists agree on double-checking social media ideas from external news sources and not using digital verification tools. An additional way that all journalists agree on is to follow news values and codes of ethics, not just users' opinions.

One of the important ways that all journalists agree on is acting in a socially responsible way. This can be achieved by showing legal actions and adjudications regarding any VAW case to threaten anyone who thinks to commit any violence against any woman, which will help in eradicating VAW in Egyptian society. Another important way that all journalists agree on that helps them act in a socially responsible way is to put societal values, which don't accept any kind of content that urges towards increasing VAW, above anything like increasing views, being trending, being the first in a search engine by publishing first, etc.

7. Discussion

RQ1: Is there an inter-media agenda-setting effect between Instagram activism and Egyptian news sites while reporting about VAW issues?

The findings prove a weak effect of inter-media agenda-setting in terms of Instagram activism agenda influencing online newspapers' agendas, despite a kind of similarity in rank orders of issues between them. This can be shown by the statistical analysis, which proves that out of the nine cross-correlations that were conducted, only two proved the presence of an effect, while six proved the absence of an effect. This main finding of the study is contrary to the majority of previous studies findings (Nkrumah & Hassan, 2021, p.244; Agyei, 2019, p.36-92).

The study tries to interpret this finding from the journalists' words, in which they state that the reason behind this is that social media activism can affect their choice of news ideas, not the agendas of online newspapers as a whole, because the editorial policy factor is still the main factor in setting the agenda. Also, they state that the reason behind this finding is that the reliance on Instagram activism can have a negative effect on their professional standards. Thus, journalists mentioned some conditions for letting social media affect their agendas, which are the existence of "evidence" about the issue and having no legal decisions that prohibit publishing for a certain period of time about certain cases for investigation purposes. Moreover, they mentioned that the social media platform that they depend on to get news ideas is Facebook, not Instagram.

In the context of the previous studies, the main finding of this study is also approved by another study's findings that show that the inter-media agenda effect between different platforms is indicated by cross-lagged correlation numbers that proved the effect compared to the number of those that didn't prove this effect, even though there is similarity in rank orders because the similarity in rank orders takes place in the same time spans, not one following the other (El-Sherbiny et al., 2023, pp.100-117; Towner and Munoz, 2018).

Similar to this study's finding, other studies have shown that the effect of Instagram is limited on news websites' agendas. It is explained by the fact that Instagram is still in its early stages compared to other platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Agyei, 2019). This can be justified by the journalists' responses that illustrate that they depend on traditional news sources more than social media, and if they depend on it, the most used platform is Facebook. Regarding the finding that shows that one of the main conditions raised by the journalists as justification that can't enable the transfer of issue salience from Instagram to online newspapers' agendas, which is the lack of evidence about an issue, is interpreted by other studies in terms of the unethical problems that exist because of the dependence on inaccurate social media agendas (Nkrumah & Hassan, 2021).

Contrary to the inter-media agenda-setting theory's assumption that states that a homogeneous agenda can be the result of the effect of one's agenda on the other's agenda, this study's findings show this assumption is weak and can't be supported to a great extent. In the context of agenda-setting theory, it states that one of the factors that can affect agenda-setting is the editorial policy, which is also found in this study.

RQ2: What are Instagram activism roles towards VAW issues that can affect Egyptian journalists' news selections?

The finding of this research question, which shows that social media in terms of Instagram activism has played some roles towards VAW issues, is approved by some previous studies. Regarding the finding, which shows that journalists believe that social media activism becomes a competitor and motivator for them in reporting about

VAW issues, this can be interpreted by previous studies' findings that showed social media becomes the main information tool about VAW issues by enabling live and up-to-date content to the extent that it can be described as "a megaphone" compared to mainstream media. Also, the platforms provide high-profile news stories about VAW issues better than those written by journalists, some of whom have limited understanding of VAW (Fairbairn, 2020, pp.1-51; Sjoberg, 2018).

Regarding the finding, which shows that journalists believe that social media activism acts as an indicator of public agendas about VAW issues, it is similar to other previous studies' findings (El-Sherbiny et al., 2023, pp.100-117; Darwish, 2018, pp.305-344). It can also be interpreted by the findings of previous studies that show social media campaigns regarding VAW played a role in reflecting important issues in society and reaching different credible opinions (AlJaid and Ajaj, 2020, pp.345-394). Having a role as a space to speak up and call for action because the platforms' features enable the victims to have support from others and expose perpetrators' crimes that can lead to legal action is also approved by other previous studies (Sjoberg, 2018; Saleh, 2018).

Regarding the finding, which shows that journalists believe that Instagram activism raises awareness, creates social responsibility sense and mobilises citizens towards ending VAW, where this role has an impact on all agencies in society to take affirmative actions towards VAW issues, it is similar to other previous studies' findings (Fairbairn, 2020, pp.1-51; AlJaid & Ajaj, 2020, pp.345-394; Saleh, 2018). Contrary to this study's finding, which shows that Instagram activism can't make a real effective improvement in Egyptian society without the help of VAW offline activism initiatives made by the government and the National Council for Women, whose roles are more effective from journalists' perspectives, other previous studies show that social media activism can lead to social and political improvements in reality because of its great effect (Darwish, 2018, pp.305-344).

Contrary to the inter-media agenda-setting theory, the finding of the study proves that part of the theory's assumption can't be verified in terms of the assumption that a homogeneous agenda can exist between different media. The main reason behind this is that media professionals usually check what others write as a kind of affirmation for their own assessments of what makes news, but this study's findings show that now the main reason for journalists to check what others write is to cope with trending issues to increase views and readerships, which will increase the online newspapers' incomes.

RQ3: How do Egyptian journalists ensure applying professional standards while reporting VAW activism on Instagram?

Findings show some individual ways adopted by the majority of journalists to enable them to apply professional standards. The first way is social media usage as a source of inspiration for news ideas because breaking news can be first revealed on its platform, not as a source of information. The second way is to double-check the content from reliable traditional news sources without using digital verification tools. The third way is to always evaluate any VAW case found on social media based on the news values and codes of ethics before publishing it, rather than having the only evaluation be following social media users' trends to increase views.

In the context of social responsibility theory, findings prove that online newspapers apply some of the obligations illustrated by the theory, which are: being accurate, which is shown by journalists' double-checking information; giving a truthful context of what is happening; and providing objective and balanced content, which is shown by their usage of different sources as illustrated. Moreover, findings show that journalists have the intention of making their online newspapers act as a tool for social development by prioritising VAW issues in a way that can help in eradicating VAW in Egyptian society by focusing on societal values rather than reporting what can attract the society to read the news that can urge more violence.

In the context of previous studies, some of them prove similar to this study's finding, which shows that there is a daily challenge that journalists encounter while using social media as news sources (Nkrumah & Hassan, 2021; El-Sherbiny, 2023). Finding of this study, which shows that choosing VAW cases from Instagram is based on meeting any of the news values and prioritising the society's benefit in terms of following the societal values that want to eradicate VAW, declines the concern raised by previous study that shows that media report about any social media trends and prioritise them in its agenda as an act to be socially responsible towards the society (Astito, 2021).

Contrary to one of the findings of this study and other mentioned previous studies that reached the same finding, another previous study shows that social media itself is a channel through which journalists can verify information that traditional news sources gave them, not vice versa (Brandtzaeg, 2015, pp.323-342). Contrary to the way used by the journalists, which evaluates any VAW case found on social media based on the news values and codes of ethics rather than having the only evaluation be following social media users' trends to increase views, previous studies stated that viral topics on social media influence journalists' decisions to write news about them even though this topic doesn't have news values (Pan, 2022, pp.1-8).

8. Conclusion

This study examines whether Instagram activism roles regarding VAW issues can lead to influencing Egyptian online newspapers agendas and how Egyptian journalists ensure applying professional standards in this context. The study shows that while some issues overlap, journalists prioritise editorial policy and accurate information over following social media trends, which leads to weak influence. Instagram activism plays many roles towards VAW that can affect journalists' news selections, but traditional sources are used more. Journalists strive for social responsibility but face challenges verifying social media information and balancing reader interest with ethical reporting. Thus, this study recommends further research on inter-media agenda-setting between different medium by taking a specific trending VAW case on other emerging platforms in Egypt like Tiktok.

References

Agyei, E. (2019). *The intermedia agenda-setting among Twitter, Instagram, and online news websites in Ghana* [Master's thesis, University of Ghana]. University of Ghana Digital Collections. http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/handle/123456789/35849

AlJaid, B., & Ajaj, N. (2020). Twitter's effectiveness in awareness-raising media campaigns against violence facing women in Saudi Arabia. *Egyptian Journal of Public Opinion Research, 19*(4), 345–394. https://doi.org/10.21608/joa.2020.147778

Astito, A. (2021, June 22). The relation between digital journalism and social media. *Lakome.* https://lakome2.com/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%B1/235895/

Brandtzaeg, P. B., Lüders, M., Spangenberg, J., Rath-Wiggins, L., & Følstad, A. (2015). Emerging journalistic verification practices concerning social media. *Journalism Practice, 10*(3), 323–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1020331

Darwish, F. (2018). The role of social networking sites in enhancing the participation of academics in the Egyptian mass movement. *Al-Magala Al-Ilmiya li-Buhuth al-ʿAlaqāt al-ʿĀma wa al-Iʿlān, 13,* 305–344. https://doi.org/10.21608/sjocs.2018.88153

El-Sherbiny, N., Youssef, H., & Essam, E. (2023). The inter-media agenda-setting influence of social media activism on Egyptian news sites: A case study of violence against women (VAW). *Insights Into Language, Culture and Communication, 3*(1), 100–117. https://doi.org/10.21622/ilcc.2023.03.1.100

Fairbairn, J. (2020). Before #MeToo: Violence against women social media work, bystander intervention, and social change. *Societies, 10*(3), 51. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10030051

Gibbs, M. (2021). *Agenda setting in the digital age: The impact of mass media and social media on the topic of sexual harassment* [Master's thesis, Brigham Young University]. Brigham Young University ScholarsArchive. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/9284/

Griffin, E. (2006). *A first look at communication theory* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Ineji, P., Nanku, E., & Okoi, P. (2015). Social responsibility media theory and its implication for media professionalism in Nigeria. *Journal of Media, Communication and Language, 6*(1), 244–246.

Kemp, S. (2023, February 13). *Digital 2023: Egypt.* DataReportal. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-egypt

Kiousis, S. (2004). Explicating media salience: A factor analysis of *New York Times* issue coverage during the 2000 presidential election. *Journal of Communication, 54*(1), 71–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02617.x

McCombs, M. (2004). *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

McCombs, M. (2005). A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future. *Journalism Studies, 6*(4), 543–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500250438

McCombs, M., & Reynolds, A. (2009). How the news shapes our civic agenda. In J. Bryant & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 1–16). Routledge.

Naser, A. (2014). *Inter-media agenda-setting relationships between political blogs and legacy news media: A study of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor* [Master's thesis, Southern Illinois University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Nkrumah, D., & Hassan, S. (2021). Unlocking the gates and setting the agenda: New media brings new life to media culture in Ghana. *Global Media Journal, 19*(40). https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/unlocking-the-gates-and-setting-the-agenda-new-media-brings-new-life-to-media-culture-in-ghana.php?aid=89484

Okunna, S., & Omenugha, A. (2012). *Introduction to mass communication* (3rd ed.). New Generation Books.

Pan, Z. (2022). Impact of journalists' reliance on social media for news writing and reporting. *Media and Communication Research, 3*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.23977/mediacr.2022.030101

Ragheb, M. (2020, July 4). The National Women Council files a complaint with the public prosecutor accusing a young man of rape and sexual harassment of girls. *Al-Yum Al-Sabaa.* https://www.youm7.com/story/2020/7/4/%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9/4860356

Saleh, A. (2018). The influence of new media on shaping the agenda of the traditional media: An applied study on the most important issues to public opinion after the January 25, 2011 revolution. *Arab Journal of Media and Communication Research, 21,* 154–181. https://doi.org/10.21608/jkom.2018.108415

Sjoberg, C. (2018). *Social media activism to end violence against women: The case of the feminist movement "Ni Una Menos"* [Master's thesis, Malmö University]. DiVA Portal. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1483305/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Uzuegbunam, E. (2013). *Social responsibility theory: A contemporary review* [Paper presentation]. Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria. https://www.academia.edu/11187397/The_social_responsibility_theory_A_contemporary_review