

Media Framing of MohBad's Death and Posthumous Stardom

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Abstract

Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba, popularly known as MohBad, was relatively unpopular during his lifetime. The news of his tragic death on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, was widely covered by the Nigerian media. News stories interviews with friends and family and retrospectives created a buzz of enduring grief and nostalgia. After his demise, MohBad's fame and popularity soared more than when he lived. Using different framing choices, the media successfully turned the tragedy into a national and even international issue. While some media outlets chose to sensationalize the issue, some indulged in speculation, rumours, or invasive details. Thoughts, memories, images, and videos of the deceased singer reintroducing his life and struggles frequented the media. Long after his passing, there is still no consensus reached about the cause of his death but diverse public opinions and views. Therefore, this study investigated how MohBad's death and posthumous celebrity status were framed by the media. The study adopted content analysis of the research method. 115 newspaper stories (mostly digital) and 115 YouTube videos from September 12th to October 25th, 2023 were analyzed. Findings revealed that 67 newspaper stories representing (58.3%) used suspicious killing frames while YouTube videos had 60 representing (52.2%). There was no statistically significant difference between the media frames used in the YouTube videos and the newspapers. The media should be

encouraged to deeply investigate topics of interest as there was a huge gap of information in the reportage of MohBad's death.

Keywords: Media Framing, MohBad's death, Posthumous Stardom

Word Count: 239

Introduction

Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba, widely recognized by his stage name, MohBad, was born on the 8th of June, 1996. He is an exceptionally talented singer, rapper, songwriter, and performing artist. He was born and raised in Ikorodu, a suburb of Lagos, Nigeria. His passion for music started at a young age, having been influenced by the likes of Olamide and Li Kesh. His style of music was a fusion of Afrobeat and hip-hop. His unique voice and captivating lyrics gave him a brand identity that set him apart from his peers and propelled him to the forefront of the music industry. MohBad was a product of a broken home. He grew up under the tutelage of his stepmother. He completed his secondary and gained admission into a Polytechnic. His passion for music was everywhere visible to him. He was brought to the limelight by Naira Marley's Marlian Records Label.

MohBad's music career came into the limelight a few years ago after the release of numerous freestyles on various social media platforms, particularly his freestyle of Kiss Daniel's song which contributed to his fame. He signed up with Naira Marley's record label and made his debut during the Malian feast held at Eko Hotel and Suites, Lagos, Nigeria on December 31, 2019.

MohBad released his debut album "Light" in the first quarters of 2020 as a follow-up to his viral song "Ponmo" which featured Naira Marley and Li Kesh. He was listed in Audiomack's top 21 Afrobeat artists of 2021. In 2022, he released "Peace" produced by REXXIE. He peaked on the Turntable Charts top 50 in 2021 and top 100 in 2022. Peace record also

peaked at number one on Apple Chart Nigeria. MohBad's EP 'Blessed' was his first album after he left the Marlian Records label, and it was released in June 2023. According to unconfirmed media sources, MohBad left the record label in 2022 citing several unresolved grievances among which was his unpaid royalties for three years. Although not much was known about MohBad before his demise many sources described him as a calm person.

Before his demise, videos of MohBad indicating he was under serious attacks from members of the Naira Marley's Records label were posted on social media by the late artiste. In June 2023, MohBad was alleged to have written a petition to the police that music promoter, Samson Balogun, known as Sam Larry, and 15 others, stormed the venue of a video shoot where he and another artiste Omoniyi Temidayo, known as Zlatan Ibile, were working. It was reported that equipment worth over N5 million was destroyed at the place and MohBad was also assaulted. MohBad died at the age of 27 after a tetanus vaccine was administered to him by an unqualified nurse. He was laid to rest in Ikorodu, Lagos, on Wednesday, 13th September 2023 but questions surrounding the circumstances of his death remained unanswered.

To a large extent, stardom is understood to mean a state of being widely known or recognized and celebrated within the spheres of entertainment, sports, or other forms of public performance. It is also seen as achieving a level of fame, influence, and public adoration. Visible signs of stardom can include media attention, public recognition, social media presence, endorsement and sponsorships, high earnings, award recognition, fan base, and influence and impact.

In those days, popular individuals were used to be revered as renowned before the advent of celebrity. There is a need to make a distinction between renown which is governed by and attributed to individuals based on position or achievement, and the more recent phenomenon of celebrity

which is more transitory (Inglis, 2010, pp. 4–5). The fact that celebrity may be disconnected from professional success in a field is further stressed by Graeme Turner who argues that 'the modern celebrity may claim no special achievements other than the attraction of public attention' (Turner, 2014, p. 3). The term 'star' is continuously used to describe 'those known for a public role in a particular profession' (Redmond and Holmes, 2007, p. 9). According to (Boorstin, 1971, p. 58), a "celebrity" is one who is 'well-known for his well-knownness'. Despite these particulars of definition, the word 'celebrity' has taken over other definitions of a star. Indeed, the development of academic disciplines around stardom and celebrity reflects the diversity of approaches that may be taken to its investigation

While a star can refer to someone who is widely recognized and admired for their talent and achievements in a particular field such as entertainment, sports, or even in academia or scientific circles, a celebrity is equally a person who is famous and widely recognized by the public for his involvement in entertainment, sports, politics or other high-profile activities, but unlike like a star may not necessarily be acclaimed for their talent or achievements; instead he may gain fame through his public appearances, media coverage or association with popular trends and events. Celebrities are known to have a large following on social media platforms and are frequently featured in newspapers, gossip columns, and entertainment news. A renowned person is also a respectable person who is well-admired in society for his significant contributions, expertise, and achievements in his field. They can include scientists, scholars, activists, leaders, and entrepreneurs who have made a notable impact and earned recognition for their work. Unlike stars and celebrities, renowned persons are not interested in seeking or achieving widespread fame or public attention. Their reputation and influence are often premised on their professional accomplishments, expertise, and contributions to society. Todd Gitlin (1980) was one of the first scholars who studied news media

content using the framing approach. He explained "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (pp. 6-7). He said further, "Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual. 'Understanding the framing approach involves the consideration of the notion that journalists write (frame) news stories from perspectives that are biased towards certain issues, and that this practice influences the public's interpretation of events. (Luther & Miller, 2005; Tankard, 2001).

Entman's (1993) study identified four components of how controversial issues can be framed in news stories: (a) how the problem is defined, (b) how the cause of the problem is interpreted, (c) how the moral issues are evaluated, and (d) how the treatment of the problem is recommended. Tankard (2001) defined a media frame as "a central organizing idea for news content that applies content and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration" (100-101). Tankard's 2001 study revolutionised the framing approach by adding quantitative characteristics which never featured in previous studies. He incorporated more quantitative elements into the framing approach by declaring that a news article's frame should not be determined by a scholar's subjective analysis of it, but also by the presence of empirically verifiable characteristics (e.g. language and wording patterns) in that news article.

The use of frames in journalism plays a role in shaping public perception and understanding of news events. By selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of a story while downplaying others, media outlets can influence how audiences interpret and respond to the news.

Posthumous Stardom

Posthumous Stardom is regarded as a phenomenon where an artist achieves greater fame and recognition after his death than he did when he was alive. MohBad was relatively unknown to many Nigerians until his unfortunate passing. Although some may have heard his songs unknowingly, his demise doubtlessly garnered unprecedented attention towards his person and music. He was bigger in death than when he was alive. There is no gainsaying the fact that the media, especially social media, played a significant role in making the deceased a posthumous celebrity. Long after he was gone, the internet remained the site of pilgrimage for information about the deceased star. Social media users and online communities were engaged in discussions about his death and shared information and images of his lifetime and circumstances leading to his death. The news, images, and dreams of MohBad as captured by the media came with great emotional appeal.

MohBad's songs represent inescapable sadness, pain, bright sparks of joy, moments of excitement, and all the emotions in between. Since his death, his songs gained renewed attention and had the airwaves dominated. This led to increased sales, chart success, and a huge following. His song 'Peace' claimed the number two position on Billboard's trending songs global chart, only trailing Cravity's track 'Ready or Not' and surpassing American rapper Nick Minaj's 'Big Difference'. His song also occupied the top three places on the Apple Music Top 100 in Nigeria. Released in September 2022, Peace peaked at number 23 on the Top Songs chart, an enviable feat worthy of accolades. His EP 'Blessed' entered the top Albums chart in Nigeria. This posthumous landslide success speaks to the impression MohBad left on Afropop music during his short but promising career. His tracks "Feel Good" and "Ask About Me" equally secured the 5th and 6th positions respectively. Six of his songs currently occupy the top 10 spots. "Ask About Me" held the top spot, followed by "Beast & Peace" at number 2, "Sabi" at number 5, "Feel Good" at number 6 and "Pariwo"

featuring Bella Shmurda at number 8. Some of MohBad's songs were discovered after his death allowing his fans to experience new music and reignite their interest in his music.

Protests and Candlelight Procession

A social media campaign for justice is an organized effort to raise awareness, promote dialogue, and mobilize support for a particular cause related to justice issues. These campaigns leverage social media platforms to reach a wider audience, share information, and advocate for change. They created and shared content such as articles, videos, infographics, and hashtags to engage the public and generate discussions. Following MohBad's death, there was a huge social media campaign for justice aimed at creating a sense of solidarity among like-minded individuals, encouraging them to take action, sign petitions, and participate in protests.

Youths in Oyo Taraba, Abuja, Enugu, Delta, Cross Rivers, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, and Ekiti witnessed youth protests and candlelight processions to register their grief and solidarity for the late MohBad. At Muri Okunola Park, Lagos, Davido, Zlatan, Falz spearheaded the candlelight procession in honour of the late artiste.

Processions also took place in London, UK, New York, Nairobi, Canada and Spain. Due to the controversy and unpleasant narratives surrounding the demise of the singer, the youths called for a sincere probe into the cause of the death of MohBad and justice served on whoever was found culpable. Many of those who trooped out and demanded justice for MohBad had never met him or listened to any of his songs but believed there was foul play in his death. The question now is: why all of these accolades and outpouring of love for MohBad who was no more? It became curious to see young people who did not protest the fuel increase, biting inflation and plummeting of the naira, increase in tuition fees, and

kidnapping of youth corps members taking to the streets to seek justice for the late singer. This undoubtedly had to do with One, the youths identified with his troubled upbringing and life travails MohBad, and Two, the frame techniques considered by the media which included highlighting MohBad's humble beginning from want and deprivation, surviving a broken home, emerging from the streets and striving to build a future with street music despite alleged attacks and torture by his former manager. MohBad's death was no doubt a catalyst for the expression of youth anger and despair about the state of the nation.

Media Framing Theory

Media Framing Theory is a communication theory that examines how information is presented and perceived. It refers to the way the media frames news and events by emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others. It functions to shape public opinions through the presentation of specific aspects of a situation, issue, or individual in a particular way, making it more noticeable and meaningful while leaving out other aspects.

Framing theory, rooted both in sociology and psychology, was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1974 in his book *Framing Analysis*. The theory was later expanded upon by sociologists Todd Gitlin and Herbert Gans. The work of Gitlin in the 1980s laid the groundwork for understanding media frames as interpretative packages that influence audience perception.

Framing is used here to explain how the media promote a particular definition of an issue through emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Scheufele & Iyengar 2010). It posits that how information is presented influences the way it is understood and interpreted.

According to an article written by Donald H. Weaver, framing selects certain aspects of an issue and makes them more prominent to elicit certain interpretations and evaluations of the issue. The media's use of certain words and images to cover a story draws the public's eye to the reported topics, thereby setting the agenda.

Framing of MohBad's Death and Stardom

In the case of MohBad, the media employed different framing techniques to present the death of the singer and the issues surrounding it. Apart from focusing on his achievements and contributions to the music industry, the media dwells more on the cause of his death and stardom after death. The controversial nature of the death of MohBad saw the media emphasizing the sadness and shock felt by his fans and the public. His personal life, struggles, and controversies were also delved into to create a lasting impact and shape the public perception of the incident. Emotional reactions of wife, family, friends, and fans were not left out, showcasing how the singer's death had affected them. Elements such as sensationalism, sentimentality, biases, and agenda-setting were used in the news coverage. All of these are reflected in the way and how the media presented the death and post-death events of MohBad.

Looking at the framing of MohBad's death, the role of sensationalism was prominent. One example is this headline found in Vanguard Newspaper "Police reveal what killed MohBad" (October 7, 2023). The extract from the paper reads:

"Lagos State Police Command which investigated the circumstances leading to the death of the late Nigerian rapper, Ilerioluwa Aloba, popularly known as MohBad, yesterday came up with an interim report on what the command believed caused the singer's death on September 12. The investigation by detectives of the Special Investigation Team set up five days after MohBad's death, took them two weeks to complete.

According to the police **interim** report, the management of an injury inflicted on late MohBad during a fight with his childhood friend, Prime Boy, resulted in his death...." This paper has already passed judgment on what killed the late singer whereas the report of the police was only based on interim findings.

Another Online headline reads: "MohBad: When The Highly-Connected Can Kill And Go" (VMTNews, October 26, 2023).

An extract from the news story reads:

"..Sam Larry is one. This music promoter and Lagos socialite flaunted his connection with the high and mighty, climaxing in him posting a selfie with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu recently in Dubai. ***Far from that being a chance meeting.*** Sam Larry's video intended to show he belongs to the good books and inner sanctum of Nigeria's President and Commander-in-Chief."

This is another online news platform with a conspiracy theory that cannot be proven. The unfortunate death of MohBad triggered widely-held suspicion on the circumstances of his death and allegations of complicity of some personalities in the process. The above headline had concluded that the 'killers' of MohBad would go unpunished.

Category of Frames Used in MohBad's Death and Stardom

As media framing continues to evolve with ongoing studies, exploring new dimensions, methodologies, and applications, this study adopted part of the main primary frames, but to avoid dualistic content analysis, additional frames were included. Researchers have identified different types of frames which include:

1. **Episodic Frames:** This type of frame centres on specific incidents or individual cases. They present events as isolated cases without providing broader views. It is a frame that emphasizes personal stories, specific examples, or individual

experiences. Episodic frames appeal to emotions and human interest, often presenting complex issues into relatable narratives before the readers.

2. **Thematic Frames:** This type of frame provides a broader context and emphasises salient points, trends, or issues that relate to the events or topics being discussed. Unlike episodic frames, thematic frames delve deeply into the causes, consequences, and visible implications of the issue at hand. They present the topic holistically, focusing on the societal, political, or economic factors that contributed to the events being discussed.
3. **Gained and Lost Frames:** While the gained frame portrays the positive aspects, achievements, and benefits of the reported story, lost frames focus on the negative aspects, risks, or drawbacks of the event, policy, or decision. This frame is most applicable to government policy or programme.
4. **Conflict Frame:** This frame highlights disagreements, disputes, or confrontations between individuals, groups, or institutions. It presents issues as battles between opposing forces, emphasising tension and controversy. News stories about political debates, social controversies, or legal battles often make use of this frame.
5. **Human Interest Frame:** The human Interest Frame focuses on the emotional, personal, and human aspects of a story. This frame highlights individual experiences, emotions, and struggles to engage the audience emotionally. It appeals to empathy and compassion, making the story more resonating relatable, and engaging for the audience.

Having studied the 115 (digital and non-digital) newspapers and 115 YouTube videos that featured the death of MohBad and stardom, three keyframes were identified and these are:

1. **Posthumous Stardom:** This frame focuses on how the death of the singer elevated his status to iconic or legendary proportions. The newspapers and YouTube videos that used

this frame celebrated his works, his artistic legacy, and his lasting resonance. They dwell more on his songs doing well on the chart and protests and processions carried out on his behalf.

2. **Suspicious Killing:** This frame implies that the circumstances surrounding the death of MohBad were dubious, fuelling speculation, investigation, and conspiracy theories. The newspapers and YouTube videos that used this frame promote unanswered questions, involvement of external parties in the death of the artist, and prompting calls for a thorough investigation into his death. It delves into discrepancies in official accounts of his death, features prominently testimonies from witnesses or potential motives behind the death of the artist, and thereby casts doubt on the official narrative.
3. **Consequence:** This frame emphasizes the aftermath and repercussions of MohBad's death with a focus on its impact on society and the music industry. The newspapers and YouTube videos that used this frame discuss how the death of MohBad catalyzes conversations about relevant issues such as insecurity, substance abuse, depression and our policing system not being proactive enough.

Statement of the Problem

The news of the death of Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba, popularly known as MohBad, was received with shock and sadness. Events after his tragic exit were continually and widely covered by the Nigerian media. After his demise, MohBad became more famous and popular than when he lived. Viral images, posts, and videos of the late singer laden with strong emotions blazed the social media. The controversial circumstances surrounding his death and the emotional reactions of the well-wishers turned the incident into a topic of national importance. Media outlets chose different framing choices of sensationalism, speculation, and

evasiveness. Therefore, this study investigates the kinds of frames used by the media in the reportage of MohBad's death and posthumous celebrity status.

Research Questions

- 1. What are the media frames used in the newspaper coverage of MohBad's death and stardom?
- 2. What are the media frames used in the YouTube video content of MohBad's death and stardom?

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to present an analysis of newspaper and YouTube video content in a selected group of national newspapers and YouTube videos with special emphasis on materials dealing with MohBad's death and posthumous stardom. 115 newspapers (digital & non-digital) and 115 YouTube video content were examined from September 12th to October 25th, 2023 were analyzed Purposive sampling was used to derive the newspaper stories and YouTube video content. The study adopted content analysis of the research method. Data was analyzed using percentages and tables.

Research Question One: What are the media frames used in the newspaper's coverage of MohBad's death and stardom?

Table 1: Newspapers’ Story Frame (Digital & Non-digital)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Posthumous Stardom	26	22.6
Suspicious Killing	67	58.3
Consequence	22	19.1
Total	115	100.0

Research Question Two: What are the media frames used in the YouTube video content of MohBad's death and stardom?

Table 2: YouTube Video Content Frame

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Posthumous Stardom	28	24.3
Suspicious Killing	60	52.2
Consequence	27	23.5
Total	115	100.0

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that 67 newspaper stories representing (58.3%) used suspicious killing frames while YouTube videos had 60 representing (52.2%). There were no statistically significant differences between the media frames used in the YouTube videos and the newspapers. The media should be encouraged to deeply investigate topics of interest as there was a huge gap of information in the report of Mohbad's death.

Conclusion

Within the prism of this study, MohBad's death was reported in a "Suspicious Killing" frame in both news and video coverage of his death.

Recommendations

1. Media practitioners should refrain from biased or sensational reporting.
2. There is a necessity for future studies on the perception of the public on the death of MohBad.
3. Students of mass communication in tertiary institutions should be adequately exposed to a curriculum on framing communication.

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