SUMMARY REPORT ON UGANDAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF ROAD SAFETY

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AFRICAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA EXCELLENCE

GLOBAL ROAD SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

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Introduction

This is a summarised report of a study on Ugandan news media coverage of road safety, focusing on the country's three main daily newspapers, three television stations and two online platforms. The study explored the attention and the nature of coverage these newspapers, television stations and online platforms paid to road safety from 1 March 2023 to 31 November 2023. The publications studied were Bukedde (a Luganda-language daily), *Daily Monitor,* and *New Vision* (the only two English-language dailies). The television stations were NBS, NTV Uganda, and UBC while the online platforms were *ChimpReports* and *Uganda Radio Network (URN).*

Relying mainly on quantitative content analysis, the study explores the quantity of stories on road safety, the types of articles published, the reporting formats employed, the topics covered, and sourcing of the stories. The analysis also covers the use of background and context in stories and the attention paid to the key behavioural risk factors of drink-driving, speed, use of seat-belts, and use of motorcycle crash helmets. Operation of vehicles in "dangerous mechanical condition" also features.

Findings

Volume of Coverage

Between March and November 2023, a combined total of 766 articles related to road safety were identified across the three media types monitored.

Newspapers produced the highest volume of stories followed by television.

When considering all media platforms, there's a varied landscape with no single platform dominating the coverage.

This underscores the importance of a multi-channel approach to road safety advocacy, information and other interventions.

Coverage by Month

Fig. 1: Trend in coverage of road safety issues by month

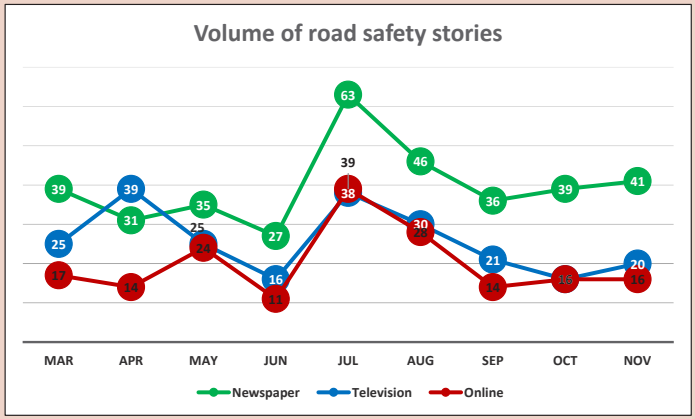


Fig. 1 reveals a concerning dependence on prominent crashes for media attention.

The spike in July following the high-profile crash of Apollo Nyegamahe highlights a reactive coverage pattern, potentially neglecting sustained public education and prevention messaging throughout the year.

This reactive approach risks limiting public awareness and engagement with road safety beyond sensational events.

To enhance the impact of media coverage, a shift towards proactive, multifaceted reporting is crucial.

By diversifying and broadening the narrative, media outlets can foster deeper understanding, sustained concern, and ultimately, more effective advocacy for improved road safety in Uganda.

Prominence of stories

Only 27 stories (representing 7.6%) on road safety were on the front page in the nine months monitored.

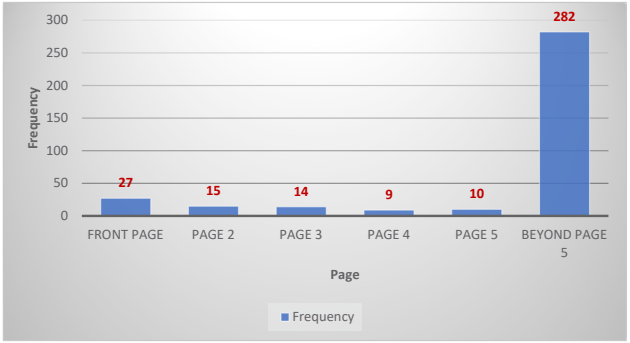
Bukedde (16) published the highest number of front-page stories compared to *Daily Monitor* (seven) and *New Vision* (four).

The number of front-page stories seen in this monitoring period was much higher than what was identified in the previous ACME report.

While the increase in front-page coverage for road safety stories is encouraging, the data reveals that overall prominence remains limited.

Achieving a more visible and impactful media landscape for road safety issues requires not just a quantitative increase in coverage, but also a strategic shift towards prominent and diverse placements that can truly capture public attention and drive meaningful change.

Fig. 2 : Page location of road safety stories

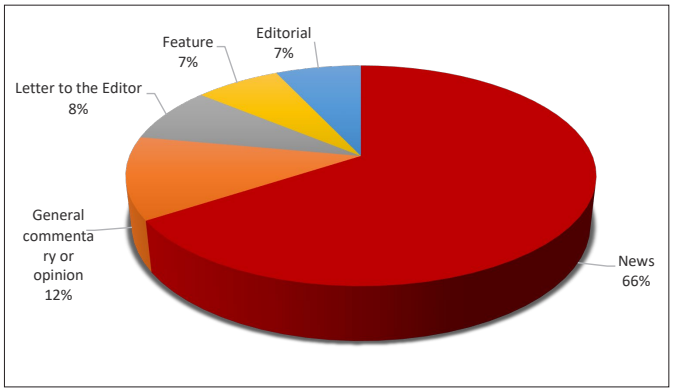


Type of newspaper article

News dominated the newspaper stories on road safety, but lacked depth. Most stories are simple 'he-said-she-said' reports, failing to provide deeper analysis or report the root causes of crashes.

This approach limits the potential impact of media coverage on public education and prevention efforts.

Fig 3: Frequency of different types of road safety articles



Reporting formats of road safety stories

Overall, stories lack diversity. This limits the reach and impact of road safety messaging, potentially failing to capture the attention of a wider outlets and audience.

Conventional hard news reporting (he-said-she-said) continued to dominate the coverage on road safety across the three media types accounting for eight in every 10 newspaper and television stories and nine in 10 online stories.

Newspapers carried more enterprise stories (14.2%) on road safety than television (11.4%) and online platforms (0.6%). It is notable that investigative reporting on road safety has remained at zero across platforms.

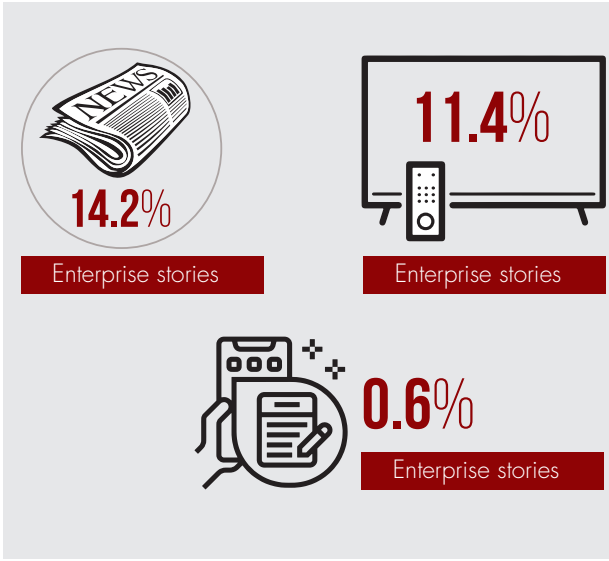
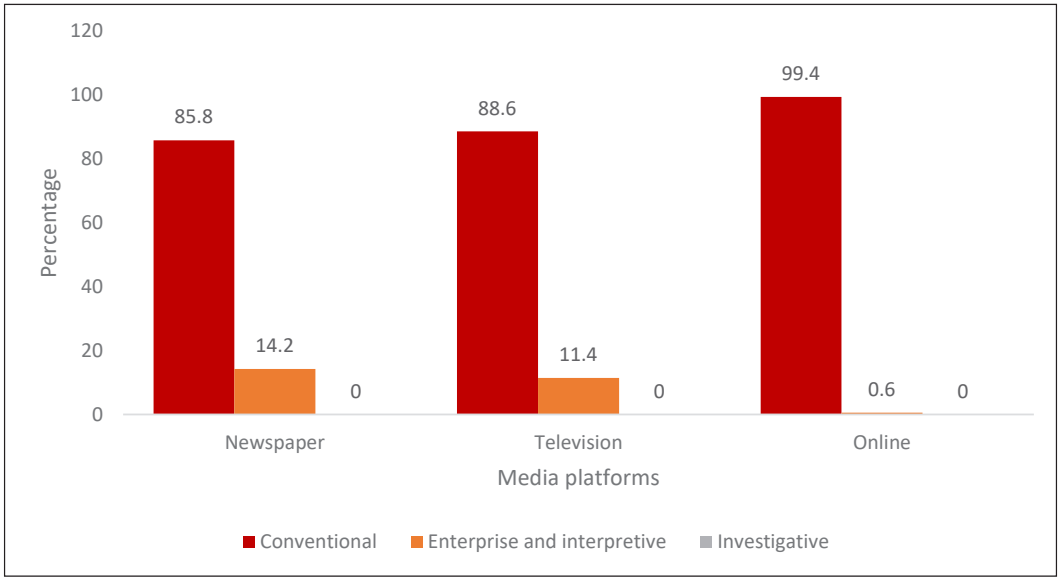


Fig. 4: Reporting formats across the three media platforms



Event-vs issue-based reporting

All three media platforms monitored continued to rely heavily on event-based reporting and much less on issue-based coverage.

Out of every 10 stories in newspapers and television, eight were event-based. For online media outlets nine out of 10 stories were also based on events.

Newspapers carried more issue-based stories (14.6%) than television (11.4%) and online platforms (0.6%).

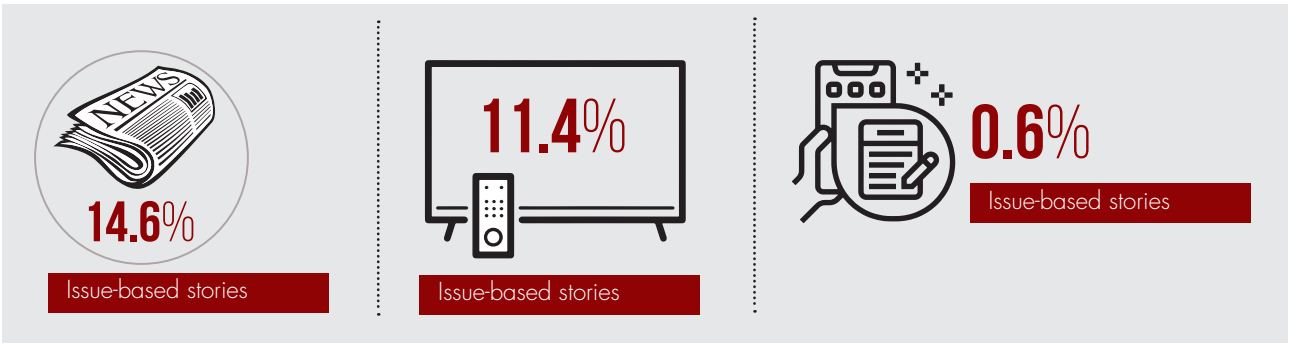
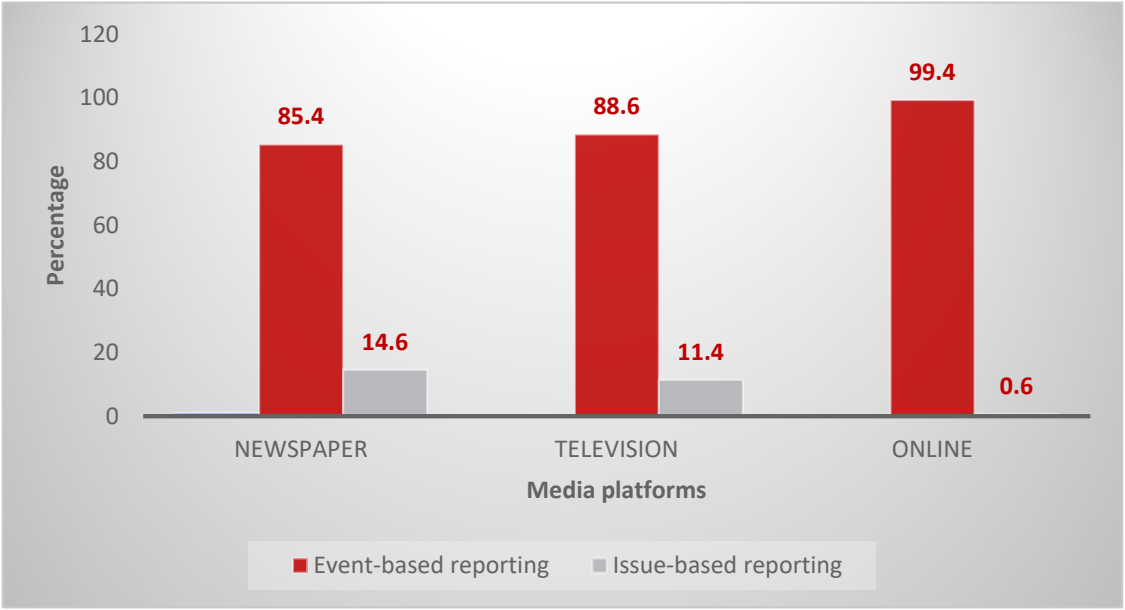


Fig. 5: Event-vs issue-based reporting across the three media platforms



These findings point to a lack of analysis and independent interest on road safety reporting by the media houses.

This limits the amount of information available on road safety to the audience, as well as the ability to push for policy changes, and attract public attention to it.

Topics/focus in road safety stories

While the quantity of road safety coverage is encouraging, the data reveals a concerning over-reliance on crash reporting across platforms.

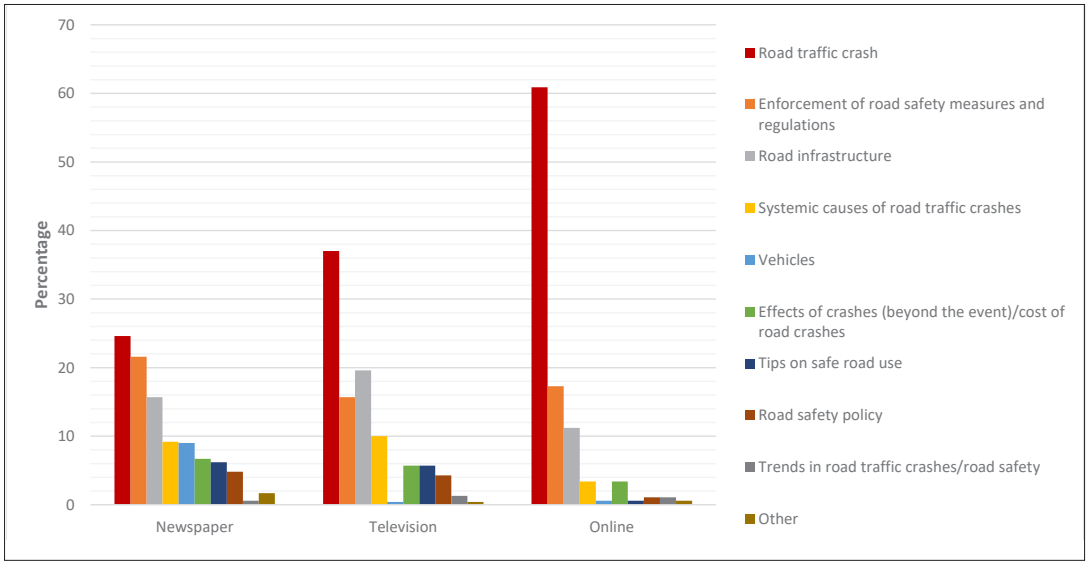
This narrow focus, particularly on motor vehicle crashes, fails to address the broader causes, contexts and solutions behind road safety challenges.

Focusing solely on crash events provides fleeting snapshots and sensationalised content, but lacks deeper analysis and prevention messaging for the public.

Road traffic crashes continued to dominate reporting of road safety in Ugandan media.

Road infrastructure received a higher proportion of stories in the nine months monitored. The increased coverage of road safety stories focusing on road infrastructure was informed by a Twitter campaign that started on April 17, 2023 titled #KampalaPotholeExhibition.

Fig 6: Topics/focus of road safety stories across the three media platforms



Entebbe Express high way

Focus of road traffic crash stories

The majority of stories about road traffic crashes from all the three media types focused on motor vehicles, taking up six out of every 10 newspapers and online stories and eight in 10 television stories.

Motorcycles and pedestrians were the second and third highest focus of road traffic crashes respectively in newspaper coverage.

On television and online platforms, pedestrians came in second place as the focus of road crashes followed by motorcycles.

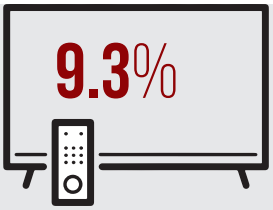
Comparatively, online media covered pedestrians more (15.8%) than television (9.3%) and newspapers (9.8%). This sees an increased attention in reporting compared to last year.

15.8%

Road traffic crashes

9.8%

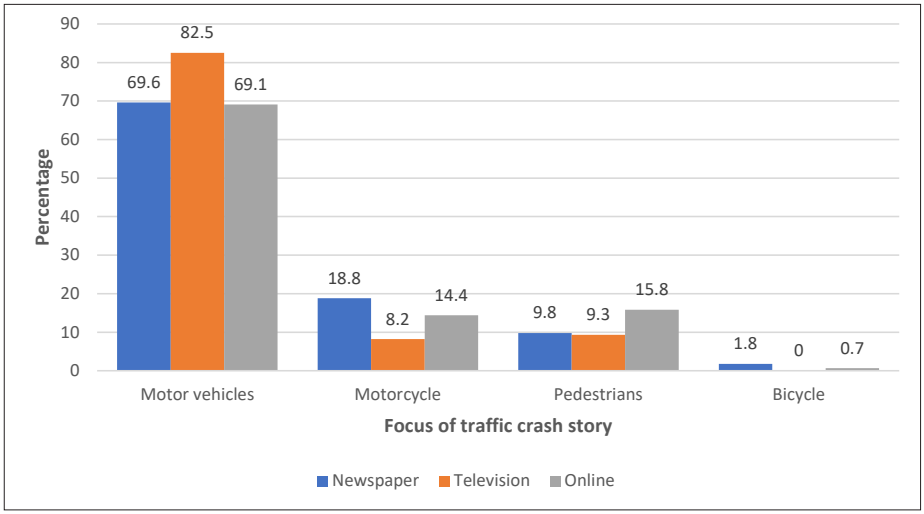
Road traffic crashes



9.3%

Road traffic crashes

Fig 7: Focus of road traffic crash stories across the three media platforms



Risk factors in road traffic crash stories

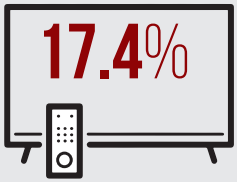
Speeding remained the most frequent road safety risk factor mentioned in the coverage, accounting for seven in every 10 newspaper, television and online stories.

The data reveals a concerning overreliance on speeding as the primary explanation for road traffic crashes across all media platforms. This may imply:

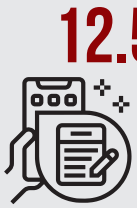
- A limited understanding of all risk factors.
- Neglecting other key risk factors like vehicle conditions, drunk driving, or distracted driving hinders efforts to promote comprehensive safety measures and address specific vulnerabilities.
- Moving beyond a singular focus on speeding requires a conscious and deliberate effort to contextualise crashes.

Vehicles in dangerous mechanical condition came second across all the three media platforms, accounted for 15.7% of newspaper, 17.4% of television and 12.5% of online crash stories.

Vehicles in dangerous mechanical condition

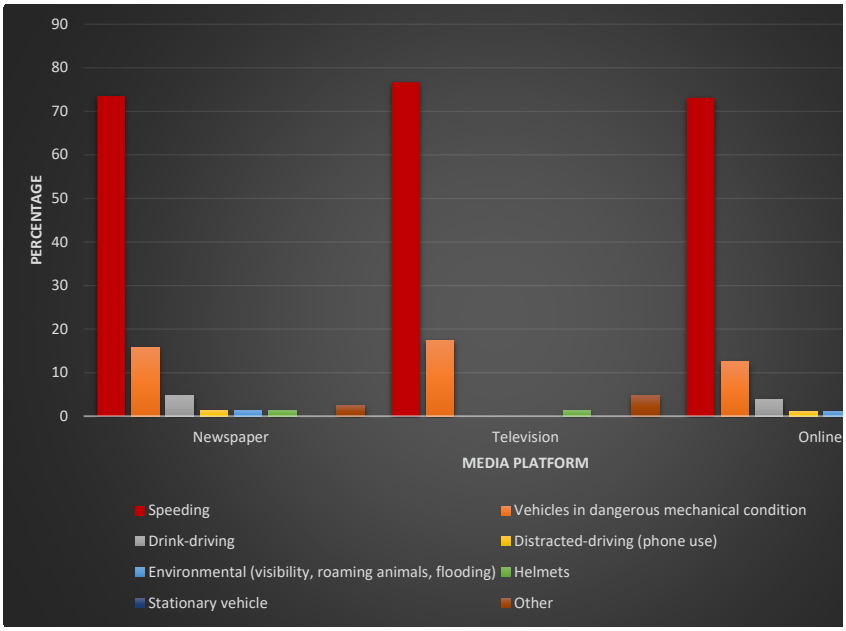


Vehicles in dangerous mechanical condition



Vehicles in dangerous mechanical condition

Fig 8: Risk factors mentioned in road traffic crash stories



Use of background and context

Just four out of every 10 newspaper and television stories and three in every 10 online articles contained background and context that could help the reader put developments in perspective.

More than half of stories from all the three media platforms did not contain background and context.

If we want safer roads in Uganda, it's crucial to go beyond crash reporting and understand the broader context.

For journalists, the context void limits their ability to perform their fundamental role of informing and empowering the public.

Consuming news devoid of context leaves audiences with a distorted picture, vulnerable to misinterpretations and oversimplifications.

Story origins/Prompts

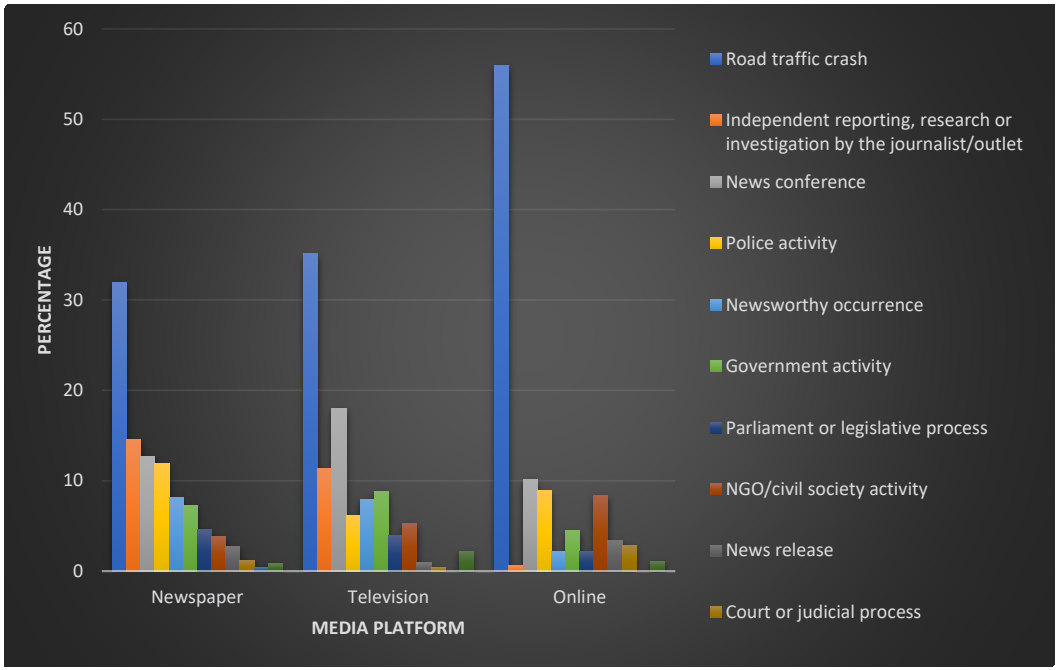
Most of the stories on road safety from all the three media platforms were prompted by a road traffic crash, and accounted for three out of every 10 newspaper and television stories and 55.9% of online stories.

News conferences came in second place in television and online media while independent reporting was second in newspaper coverage.

Online media depended more on road crashes as a source of news compared to newspaper and television.

Newspapers and television carried more stories (compared to last year) originating from independent reporting compared to online media.

Fig. 9: Origin of the story



Sources

The data on Ugandan road safety reporting shows who speaks and how it affects public understanding. We see patterns and variations between platforms, which offer insights into current practices' strengths and weaknesses.

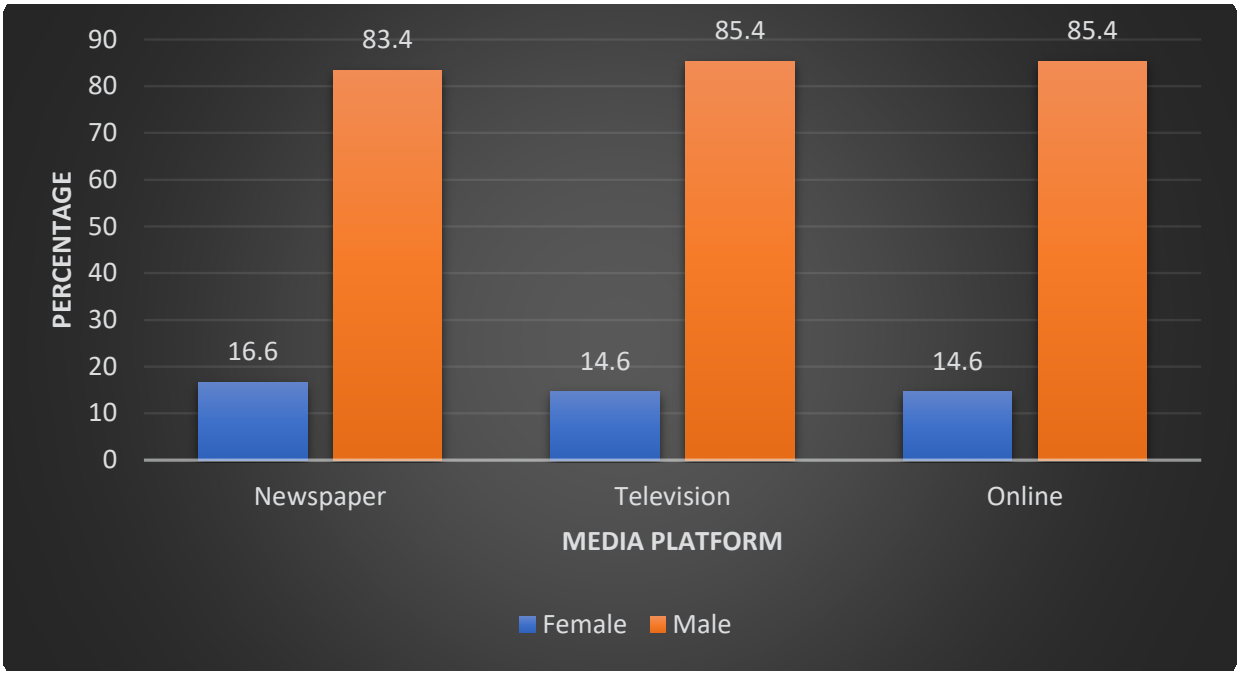
- The reliance on police officers as primary sources, particularly online, presents a challenge. A singular focus on official pronouncements risks overlooking crucial perspectives to reporting road safety.
- The prevalence of single-sourced stories, especially online, raises concerns about depth and credibility of reporting.
- While eyewitness accounts add a valuable element of immediacy in television coverage, they require careful verification and contextualisation to avoid sensationalism and misinformation.

Gender of sources

Men continued to dominate coverage of road safety.

However, the proportion of female sources seen in this report fell.

Fig. 10: Gender of sources across the three media platforms

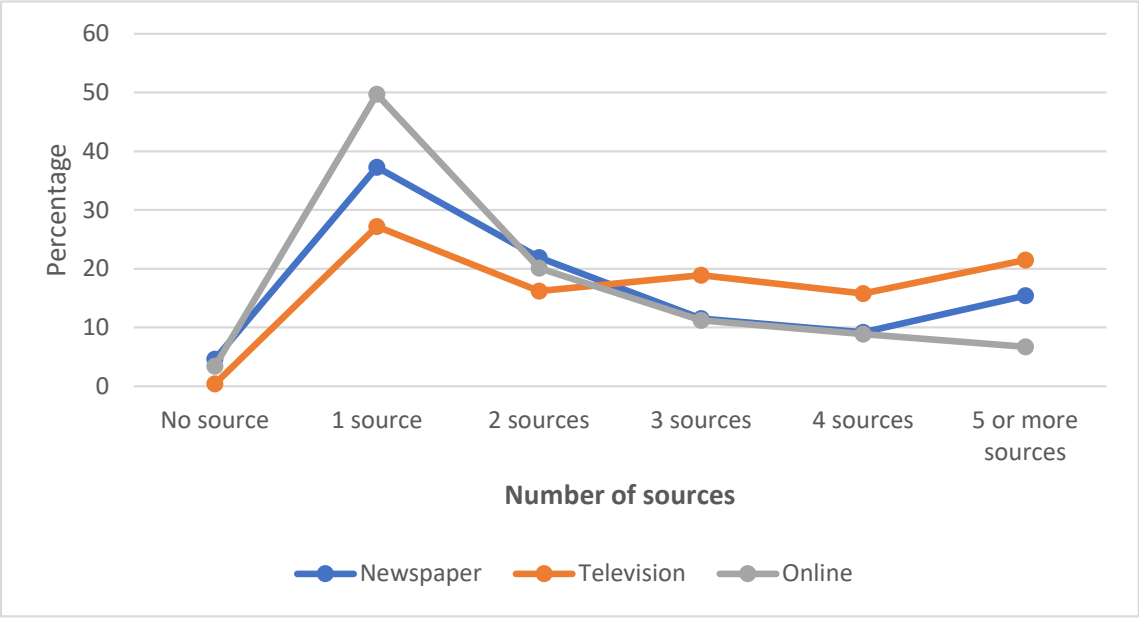


Multiplicity of sources

Reporting on road safety continued to use single sources especially among online stories. 53.1% of online stories had either one source or no source at all.

Television stories were more likely to have three or more sources (56.2%) compared to newspapers (36.1%) and online platforms (26.8%).

Fig.11: Number of sources in road safety stories across three media platforms



Conclusion

The findings of this study show that there is lack of appreciation of the importance of road safety stories to society.

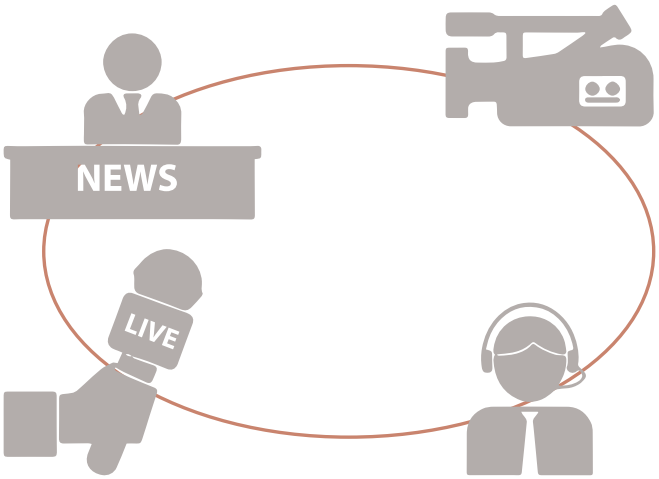
The findings of this study also show that the nature and quality of coverage of road safety issues has not significantly changed from what was observed in the 2022 report.

The report as well demonstrates the enduring challenges facing journalism in Uganda, in terms of allocation of resources for enterprise and investigative journalism, the lack of expertise in the newsrooms, among others.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations suffice:

1. Journalists, editors and media organisations should deliberately make efforts to prioritize the coverage and prominent publication of road safety stories.
2. Continued on-job professional training for journalists to appreciate issues about road safety.
3. Media organisations need to commit more resources to boost the coverage of road safety.
4. Journalists and media houses should make deliberate efforts to include female sources in their stories so that the media coverage of road safety reflects both male and female perspectives.
5. Journalists and media houses should employ a wider range of reporting formats, including investigative pieces, in-depth features, and opinion pieces, to provide context and offer informed analysis of road safety challenges.
6. Road safety reporting should go beyond relying solely on official pronouncements and police perspectives.
7. Journalists and media houses should engage with a broader range of experts beyond police officers and official pronouncements.



Appendix 1: Summary of Methodology

The study focused on Ugandan newspapers, television and online coverage of road safety issues. The study was designed to cover all articles related to road safety published in *Bukedde, Daily Monitor* and *New Vision* from 1 March 2023 to 30 November 2023. These included all articles that fell under news, commentary/opinion, features, letters, Q & A, and profiles. A total of 357 newspaper articles were analysed. A total of 230 stories from the three television stations, namely: NBS, NTV Uganda, and UBC were analysed. Another 179 stories from the two online platforms – *ChimpReports* and URN were also analysed along the same dimensions.

The study relied mainly on quantitative content analysis of coverage of road safety issues by the selected publications, television stations and online platforms. Content analysis was used to get an all-round sense of the nature of coverage in terms of both quantity and quality. Stories were coded and analysed based on a detailed coding sheet that contained a number of variables that were necessary to answer the set research questions.

The content analysis was conducted by three research assistants who coded the data after attending a training workshop. Samples of the preliminary data entered were analysed to test intercoder reliability (or the level of agreement between the different assistants doing the coding).

Acknowledgment

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