

Journalistic treatment of news on violence against women: Design of a style guide

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to develop a style guide for reporting news related to violence against women. A basic qualitative methodology was employed, with a hermeneutic interpretative approach and a phenomenological and descriptive design. Interviews were conducted with four specialists in the field, five readers, and a content analysis of three Peruvian newspapers (Correo, La República, and Ojo Norte) was carried out. The findings reveal that participants agree on the lack of a clear and coherent regulatory framework in the media for addressing these issues. As a result, there is no style guide in Peru that regulates the treatment of gender-based violence, leaving journalists subject to their own ethical and deontological criteria. The research concludes that the informational treatment faces significant ethical dilemmas, such as revictimization and sensationalism, and although some media outlets attempt to adopt a more professional approach, the absence of clear ethical guidelines undermines the representation of victims and the public's awareness.

Keywords: *Journalistic, News, Violence, style guide.*

1. Introduction

The treatment given to news is essential, as it involves gathering, verifying, and presenting facts in a fair and contextualized manner, always with a deep respect for ethical and professional principles [1]. This means carefully choosing reliable sources, validating information, and providing a balanced view of different perspectives on a topic [2]. When it comes to variables in studies, it is vital to approach the subject with sensitivity and responsibility, demonstrating a genuine social commitment. News should be presented with empathy towards victims, avoiding falling into revictimization or sensationalism. It is also crucial to contextualize the problem, analyze its causes and effects, and highlight the prevention and protection measures that exist. Thus, this way of disseminating news can help raise awareness, foster change, and contribute to building a more equitable and just society [3].

Within the Style Guide, the aim is to find a balance between the need to report on these cases responsibly and the risk of revictimizing the affected individuals [4]. Often, media coverage of this type of violence can reinforce harmful stereotypes, reveal intimate details about the victims, or even blame them, which can have devastating consequences for their emotional well-being and safety [5]. It is crucial to emphasize that the insensitive and unethical information that some media outlets provide about this violence directly impacts how society understands the phenomenon; however, numerous violations have been documented in reports that inadequately handle news about cases of violence [6, 7].

At the national level, the media play a fundamental role in reflecting and shaping public perception of gender-based violence and the associated roles [8]. However, both newspapers and television often opt for sensationalist and victimizing narratives, perpetuating stereotypes and morbid approaches that not only distort reality but can also reinforce structures of power and discrimination [9]. It is vital that the media, following a style guide on gender-based violence, prioritize the rights and dignity of victims,

as well as accuracy and sensitivity in their coverage, avoiding the normalization of violence [10]. This involves deeply understanding regional dynamics and being willing to act proactively against this type of violence. The press must go beyond merely documenting cases, seeking to educate and promote a cultural change towards gender equity [11].

The general problem posed is: What is the structure of the style guide that allows for the appropriate treatment of news about violence against women?

The main objective is: To develop a style guide that ensures the proper treatment of news about violence against women. The specific objectives are: (a) To examine the regulations that should be considered for the appropriate development of this type of news, (b) To describe how the treatment of news related to violence against women is approached, (c) To evaluate the ethical principles that should be taken into account when reporting on this topic, and (d) To identify the perception of readers after consuming this type of news.

Studies on media coverage of gender-based violence reveal a diversity of approaches and results in different contexts. Ortiz [12] highlights that Swedish channels initially present violence against women episodically but evolve towards a thematic approach, identifying types of victimization and aggressors that reflect racial influences in the coverage. Angelelli, et al. [13] analyzed guidelines for journalists in Argentina, noting tensions in the definition of gender-based violence and an increase in the promotion of gender-sensitive journalistic practices between 2015 and 2020.

In Bolivia, Matienzo [14] studies the coverage of the newspaper *Correo del Sur* regarding violence perpetrated by women against men, finding a lack of diversity in sources and limited in-depth coverage. Silva and Bertasso [15] propose a coverage protocol for femicides that incorporates intersectionality, suggesting that a style guide is necessary to adequately address the complexities of these cases. In Ecuador, Marín, et al. [16] analyze the coverage of a femicide, concluding that it is superficial and lacks a deep analysis of the structural causes of violence.

Other studies, such as that of Mejía, et al. [17] criticize the limited presence of gender-based violence in the news agenda of *Noticias Caracol* in Colombia, while Oparinde and Matsha [18] advocate for the use of counter-discourse in South Africa to challenge myths about gender-based violence. In Peru, research by Paredes [19] and Hurtado [20] shows significant differences in the treatment of violence in media outlets such as *El Comercio* and *Karibeña*, highlighting the need for a more ethical and responsible approach to coverage. Overall, these studies underscore the importance of sensitive and critical media treatment that makes gender-based violence visible and promotes meaningful social change.

2. Method

This study is considered basic research because it seeks to understand the fundamental principles and mechanisms underlying different phenomena. This approach is key to enriching knowledge in a specific area [21]. A qualitative method was used, where interviews were the main tool to explore the categories of interest with the participants [22]. Furthermore, the study design is phenomenological, meaning it focuses on describing in detail the conscious experiences to capture the essence of the phenomena [23].

In terms of scope, the research is descriptive, which helps establish a solid foundation by detailing the most relevant characteristics and variables of the topic. This provides a comprehensive and detailed view [24].

To carry out this study, four experts in the field, five news readers on gender-based violence, and three newspapers (*Correo*, *La República*, and *Ojo Norte*) with national coverage were selected. The news collection focused on the period from October to December 2024. According to Carrasco [25] the population is defined as a group of people or events that share characteristics useful for the study. Thus, the sample included the four experts, five readers, and the three mentioned newspapers, representing a segment of the population selected to meet the research objectives [26].

Inclusion criteria were established requiring that experts have more than two years of experience and specific knowledge on the topic. In the case of readers, it was sought that they regularly read newspapers from the region, were aware of issues related to gender-based violence, and provided their informed consent. Exclusion criteria included those who did not read local newspapers or had interests unrelated to gender-based violence. Each reader and expert was considered a unit of analysis.

The main technique used was the interview, which involves a dialogue between two people. In this context, the interviewer asks questions to the interviewee to obtain relevant information and experiences about a specific topic [26]. Document analysis was also used, which consists of systematically reviewing existing documents to extract information and recognize patterns [21].

A semi-structured interview guide was employed, which contains questions formulated by the researcher to obtain relevant information. This allows for a deeper exploration of areas of interest that arise spontaneously during the conversation [27]. Additionally, a document analysis sheet was used to organize and summarize the important information extracted from the reviewed documents, including data such as the newspaper title and the publication date [25]. The validity of these instruments was confirmed by the course advisor.

For data collection, specific days and times were coordinated with the participants for the interviews, explaining that the study was for academic purposes. The necessary time was dedicated to gathering the information, and the responses were recorded in audio. The responses were then transcribed into a Word document, assigning codes to each interviewee: E1, E2, E3, and E4 for the experts, and L1 to L5 for the readers.

Regarding ethical aspects, informed consent was requested from the experts and readers. They were asked to sign a document detailing the study's objective and the ethical principles to be followed. It was ensured that participation was voluntary, allowing participants to express their concerns before deciding to participate and ensuring their right to withdraw at any time.

Concerning risk, participants were informed that they would not be exposed to harm and that if any question felt uncomfortable, they could choose not to answer. In terms of benefits, they were informed that the results would be shared with the institution at the end of the study, which was purely academic and without financial compensation.

Regarding confidentiality, it was ensured that the collected information would remain anonymous and that no data that could identify the participants would be included. It was guaranteed that the information would be handled with complete confidentiality and not used for other purposes. The principal investigator was responsible for protecting the data, which would be securely deleted after a specified period. During the processing of the data, the results were respected without alterations, and proper citations were made to uphold copyright rights.

3. Results

(a) Examine the regulations that must be considered for the appropriate development of this type of news

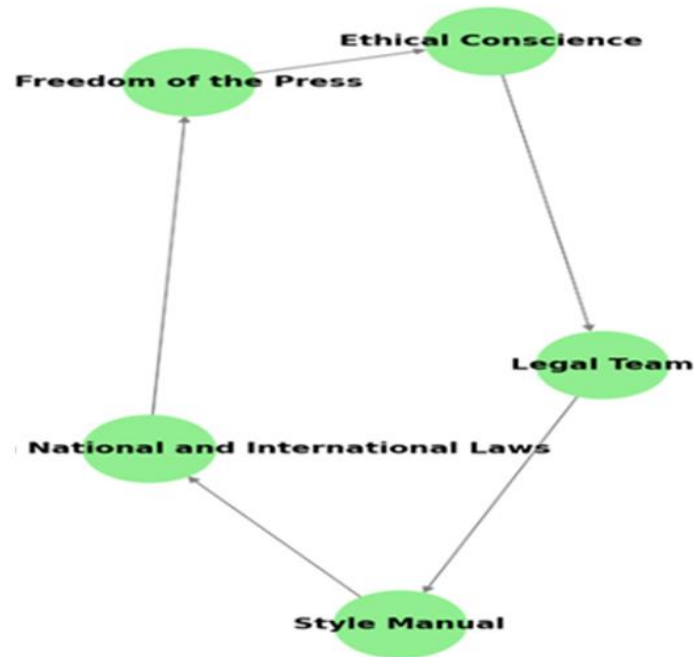


Figure 1.
Analysis of the regulations.

Interpretation: The analysis of the data shows an interconnection between regulations, ethical implications, and internal policies in the media regarding the treatment of news about violence against women. The regulatory framework establishes the foundation on which news coverage should be built, but the absence of clear and uniform regulations creates gaps that leave journalists dependent on personal and ethical criteria. The ethical implications arising from this lack of regulation include the normalization of violence and the perpetuation of stereotypes, which complicates responsible and respectful coverage of victims.

Furthermore, the internal policies of the media play a key role in how these issues are addressed. Although some media outlets have implemented guidelines related to journalistic ethics, the lack of clear directives and the influence of editorial lines and conflicts of interest cause the treatment to vary considerably. In some cases, media prioritize their commercial or political interests, limiting coverage of gender-based violence cases that could affect business relationships with clients or the government, creating an environment of self-censorship and lack of transparency.

Finally, the lack of transparency in managing conflicts of interest is a decisive factor that negatively impacts the quality of information. Self-censorship and political or commercial interests influence the decision not to cover certain topics or to do so superficially, affecting the credibility of the media and the fair representation of victims. The analysis highlights the need to create clearer internal policies and a more ethical editorial approach that allows for responsible and transformative coverage of violence against women, aimed at raising awareness and promoting respect and social justice.

(b) Describe how the treatment of news related to violence against women is addressed.

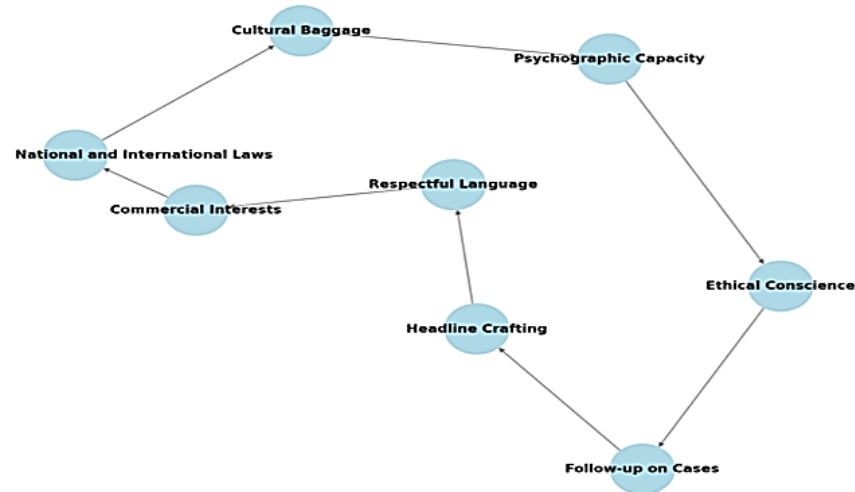


Figure 2.
Treatment of news related to violence against women.

Interpretation: The network of connections reflects how various factors influence the treatment of news about violence against women, with an emphasis on the use of non-sexist and non-revictimizing language. Firstly, the cultural background and psychographic capacity of journalists are highlighted as essential elements for constructing a respectful informative discourse. Cultural background refers to the ethical and social training of the journalist, enabling them to make informed and responsible decisions when writing news about gender-based violence. Psychographic capacity, on the other hand, involves mastering clear and direct language that allows for the accurate transmission of facts without falling into stereotypes or biases.

The analysis also reveals the importance of following up on cases and creating appropriate headlines. The lack of follow-up and superficial coverage of cases of violence against women limits the impact of the news, as it does not delve into the causes or context of each incident. In this regard, creating headlines, while crucial for capturing the public's attention, must be done with extreme caution to avoid falling into sensationalism or revictimizing the affected individuals. A well-crafted headline can raise public awareness and generate empathy, but a morbid approach can perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatize victims.

Finally, commercial interests play a fundamental role in news coverage. The network highlights how media outlets, especially those with commercial interests, may prioritize profitability over journalistic ethics, affecting the depth and treatment of issues. This is seen in the fear of losing audience or advertising revenue, which can lead to minimizing or distorting information about femicides or gender-based violence. These factors underscore the need to establish clear policies and ongoing training for journalists that enable them to responsibly and ethically address news related to violence against women.

(c) Evaluate the ethical principles that should be considered when addressing news on this topic.

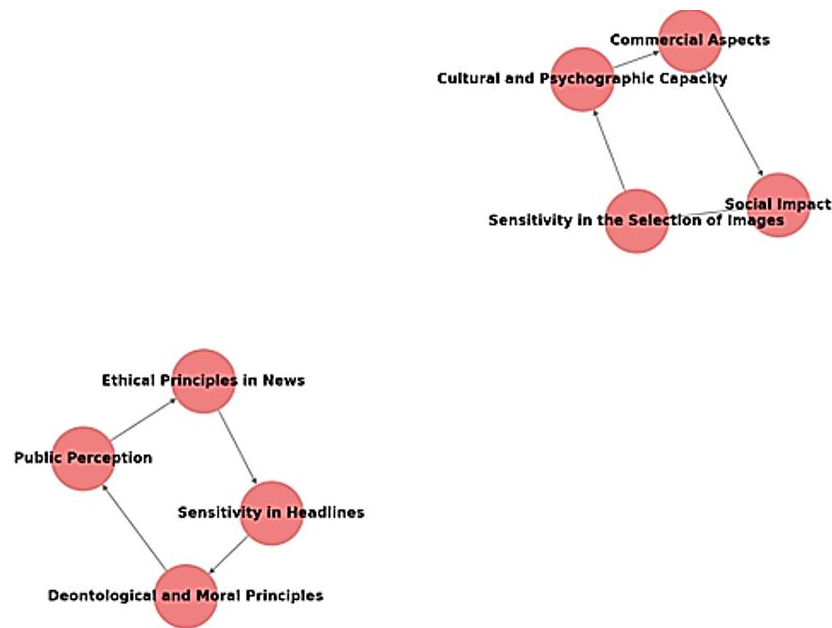


Figure 3.
Ethical principles when dealing with news on this topic.

Interpretation: The network of connections shows how various factors influence the sensitivity of the media when selecting images and headlines in news about violence against women. Firstly, the cultural and psychographic capacity of journalists is crucial for constructing an ethical and responsible narrative. This means that journalists must not only have a good command of language but also a deep understanding of the social and cultural dynamics surrounding cases of violence. This training allows journalists to be more careful when choosing images and crafting headlines that do not perpetuate stereotypes or revictimize victims, but rather present them with respect and dignity.

On the other hand, sensitivity in headlines and image selection is directly related to the deontological and moral principles that guide journalistic practice. The network underscores how media can be pressured by commercial aspects, seeking to generate revenue through sensationalist news that prioritizes visual and emotional impact over ethics. This approach can have a negative effect on public perception, as the normalization of violence and the presentation of victims in a stereotypical or sensationalist manner can contribute to the desensitization of the audience to this serious social issue.

Finally, the network highlights the importance of social impact and public perception in how the media treats news about gender-based violence. The media not only informs but also educates and shapes public opinions. The way images are selected and headlines are crafted has a direct impact on how victims and perpetrators are perceived in society. If headlines justify violence, as in the case of phrases like "he killed her out of jealousy," there is a risk of perpetuating a narrative that minimizes the seriousness of abuse and reinforces the idea that certain behaviors are excusable. Therefore, it is essential for the media to adopt an ethical stance that not only meets professional standards but also promotes a cultural shift towards respect and gender equality.

(d) Identify the perception of readers after consuming this type of news.

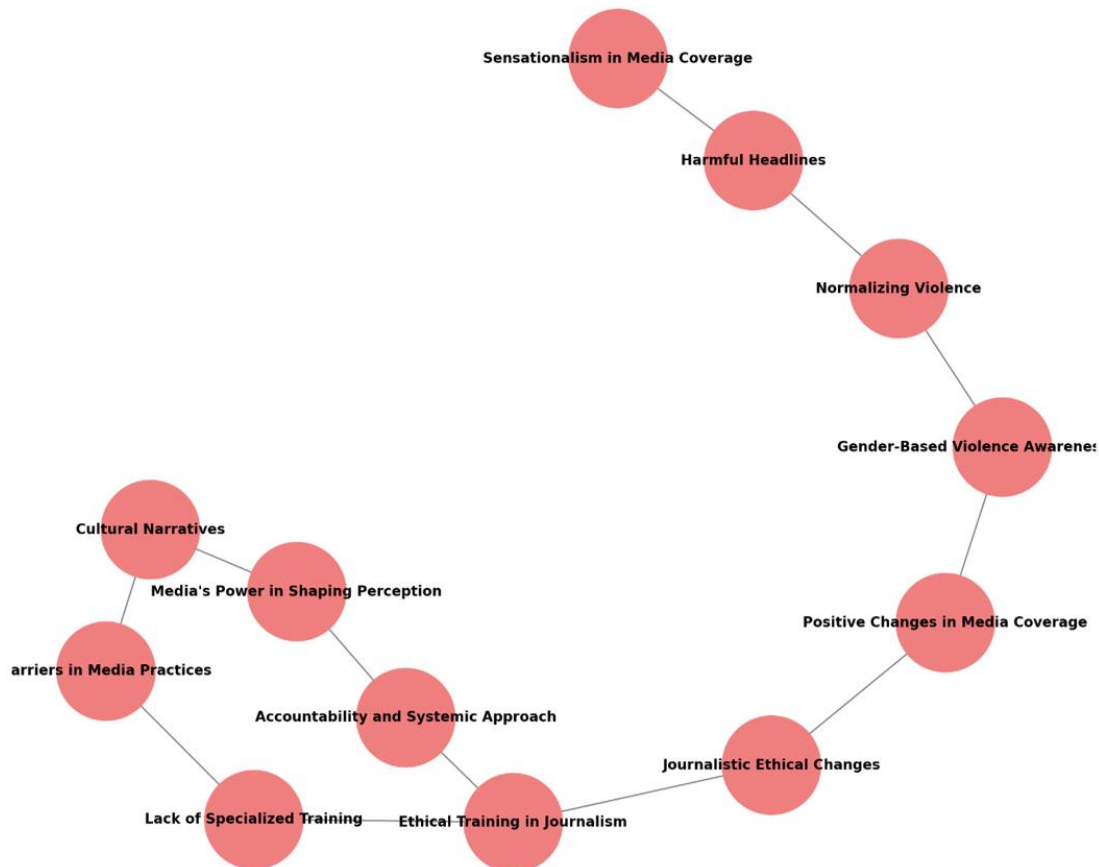


Figure 4.
Readers' perception after consuming this type of news.

The hermeneutic analysis highlights that the media often sensationalizes stories of gender-based violence to attract attention, sometimes prioritizing audience engagement over ethical considerations. Experts point out that, while the media has made efforts to raise awareness about these issues, much of the coverage remains problematic, particularly in the way headlines and images are selected. For example, sensationalist headlines like "He killed her out of jealousy" not only trivialize violence but also offer implicit justifications for the perpetrator's actions, perpetuating harmful stereotypes. This approach reinforces the normalization of violence and can negatively influence public perception of gender relations, making violent behavior seem justifiable or inevitable.

In terms of journalistic ethics, there is a clear need for specialized training in gender-based violence, which is currently lacking in many media outlets. While some initiatives, such as workshops and guidelines, have been launched by organizations like the Ministry of Women, they are sporadic and not always directed at key figures within media organizations—editors and directors—who have the final say over content. This lack of structured and consistent training leaves a gap in the ethical handling of such sensitive issues, leading to coverage that can dehumanize victims or reinforce harmful cultural narratives. Experts emphasize that while journalists may be willing to make ethical changes in their coverage, structural barriers in the media, such as editorial decisions driven by sensationalism or commercial interests, limit the impact of these individual efforts.

Despite these challenges, it is recognized that certain positive changes are being achieved. Some media outlets are adopting more sensitive approaches regarding image selection and avoiding sensationalist language; however, this is often not enough to overcome the prevailing sensationalist culture. The power of the media to shape public perception is undeniable, and experts argue that greater accountability and a systemic approach to training are needed to ensure that violence against women is reported with the dignity and respect it deserves. Strengthening ethical journalism practices is essential to create a more informed public that views gender-based violence as a social issue, not just an individual problem, and that fosters a culture of respect and non-violence.

General objective: Develop a style guide that ensures appropriate coverage of news about violence against women.

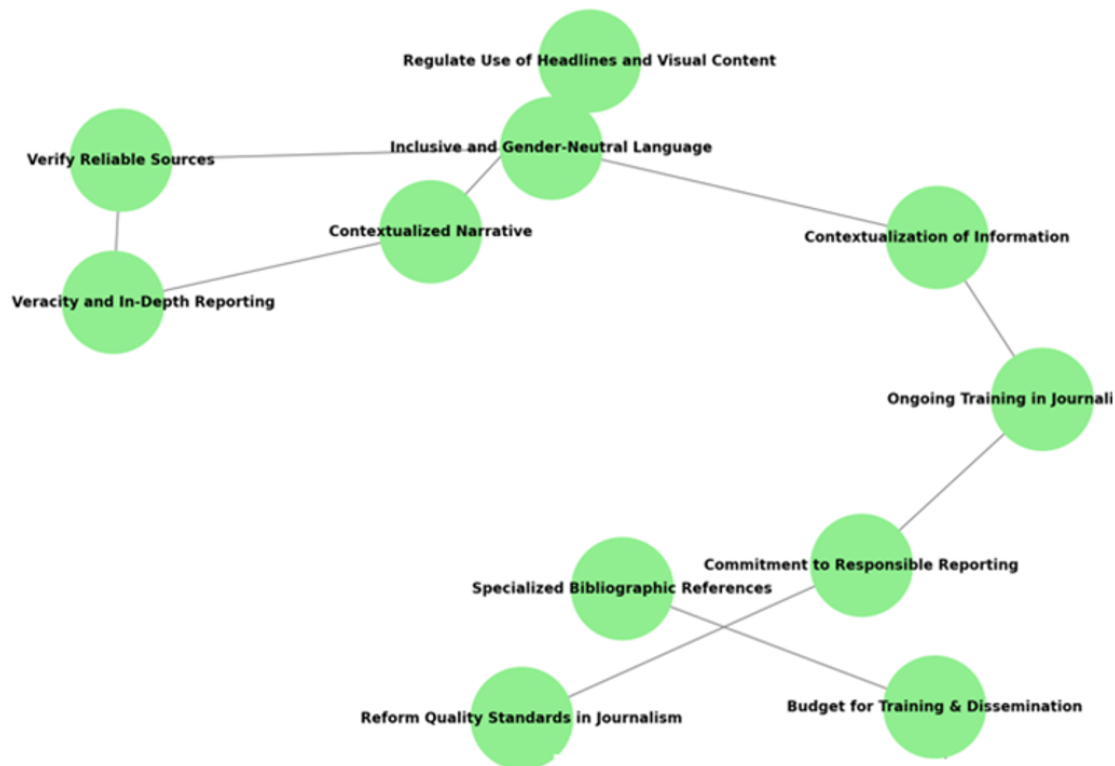


Figure 5.
Style manual for appropriate treatment of news about violence against women.

Interpretation: The situational diagnosis reveals a structural problem in the way the media presents violence against women. Three priority actions are identified to reverse this situation: 1) Regulate the use of headlines and visual content, avoiding sensationalism and the morbid exposure of victims; 2) Incorporate a contextualized narrative that analyzes the causes and consequences of violence instead of merely recounting isolated incidents; and 3) Ensure the truthfulness and depth of the information, eliminating the use of unverified or biased sources. Through these action axes, the manual seeks to transform media coverage into an instrument of social awareness rather than reinforcing stereotypes and feeding morbid curiosity.

For the implementation of the manual, four key actions are established that journalists must apply in their daily practice: 1) Verification of reliable sources, ensuring that data comes from specialists, research, or credible institutions; 2) Use of inclusive and non-sexist language, avoiding terms that blame or downplay the situation of the victims; 3) Contextualization of information, relating cases to statistics, regulations, and social backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive picture; and 4) Ongoing training

in journalistic ethics and gender perspective, promoting professional updating and commitment to responsible reporting. These measures seek to reform quality standards in journalism, eliminating practices that perpetuate symbolic violence in the media.

Finally, the proposal includes a structured action plan in two phases: a first stage of training and socialization of the manual with journalists and media outlets over six months, and a second phase of monitoring and evaluation, in which the impact of the manual on information production will be analyzed. Additionally, a specific budget allocation is proposed for staff training and dissemination of the material on digital platforms. With the integration of specialized bibliographic references and complementary resources, the manual not only becomes a practical guide but also a tool for media transformation that promotes more just, professional, and committed journalistic coverage in the eradication of gender-based violence.

4. Discussion

The discussion of the results shows that the triangulation of empirical data, background, and theory allows for a more robust analysis of the media treatment of violence against women. In normative terms, the absence of a clear regulatory framework in Peru is highlighted, leaving journalists without specific guidelines and exposed to subjective criteria in the coverage of these cases. Lloyd and Ramon [28] point out that, although international media present divergent approaches, some have advanced in more respectful practices towards victims, which contrasts with the Peruvian context, where the lack of a national style guide creates a regulatory void. Prieto-Campos and Navarro-García [11] reinforce this idea by demonstrating that editorial lines significantly condition the focus of news, which can lead to sensationalist treatments that perpetuate stereotypes and minimize structural violence.

Regarding the internal policies of the media, the findings indicate that these are inconsistent and depend on individual criteria, allowing for the continuation of revictimizing practices. Oparinde and Matsha [18] argue that counter-discourses within the media are essential to dismantle myths and harmful narratives about gender-based violence, evidencing those internal policies must go beyond mere regulation and focus on the cultural transformation of journalism. Sutherland, et al. [29] emphasize that, although prescriptive guidelines are necessary, their impact is limited if not accompanied by ongoing training in journalistic ethics and gender. Ghosh [7] stresses that the internal norms of the media should ensure source verification and the use of appropriate language; however, the results of the analysis show that these norms, while implicit in some contexts, are not systematized or applied uniformly.

Conflicts of interest and the influence of economic and political factors on journalistic coverage also condition the media representation of violence against women in Peru. Ortiz [12] describes how in Sweden, the media have evolved towards more structured coverage with follow-up articles, which has increased the visibility of the problem and generated a stronger commitment to the cause. However, this approach contrasts with the media treatment in Peru, where findings show that commercial and political dynamics limit the depth of coverage. Oluchukwu, et al. [30] highlight the need for ethical media coverage, noting that in Africa, awareness campaigns have been implemented to strengthen the media representation of gender-based violence, a strategy not observed in the Peruvian context. These results underscore the importance of adopting editorial policies that prioritize the public interest over commercial interests.

Regarding the development of news treatment, advances in the use of more inclusive language are identified, although practices that reinforce stereotypes and minimize the complexity of gender-based violence persist. Matienzo [14] warns that coverage in some media, such as *Correo del Sur*, lacks structural analysis and diversity in sources, which restricts the impact of the information. Pinero Pinero and Bonachera Alvarez [31] observe that in Spain, gender-based violence has consolidated as a priority social issue on the media agenda, while in Peru, coverage resembles that of the German press, where these cases are treated as violent crimes without a clear structural framework. Abanto and Zegarra [32] argue that the lack of specialization among journalists affects social perception, which is reflected in

Peruvian coverage, where the absence of follow-up on cases and lack of in-depth analysis weaken journalism's role as an awareness agent.

Finally, the impact of the media on public awareness is undeniable, but findings show that current coverage still faces significant challenges. Marín, et al. [16] warn that the superficial presentation of news limits journalism's ability to question and deconstruct violence against women, while Vitis [33] points out that new media platforms, such as podcasts, can offer more detailed and reflective narratives. Novo, et al. [34] highlight that the lack of specialized training among journalists contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes, limiting the coverage's ability to generate a positive impact. Angelelli, et al. [13] emphasize that the implementation of guides and manuals for journalists has promoted more structured approaches, but their application is still not uniform in Peruvian media. In this context, the lack of ethical and gender training remains an obstacle to improving journalistic quality. In conclusion, the media have the responsibility to strengthen their ethical and professional standards to ensure that their coverage contributes to the eradication of gender-based violence rather than perpetuating it.

5. Conclusions

The current regulation regarding the journalistic approach to violence against women is imprecise and fragmented, leaving communicators without a clear and uniform guide. This lack of specific guidelines forces journalists to rely on their own ethical judgment, resulting in disparities in how these news stories are presented. The absence of a national style guide or specialized regulations not only highlights a regulatory deficiency but also underscores the need to adopt ethical and deontological criteria that ensure more coherent and respectful news coverage.

Although the use of inclusive language and the elimination of sexist expressions have improved in the media coverage of gender-based violence, problematic practices still persist. The tendency towards sensationalist and superficial approaches in certain publications perpetuates stereotypes and undermines the seriousness of the issue. Furthermore, the lack of continuity in investigating cases and the pressure from economic interests affect the depth of information, reinforcing the need to establish more precise regulations and to train journalists in rigorous and specialized treatment.

The handling of news about violence against women continues to face key ethical dilemmas, such as revictimization and the prioritization of media impact over informative responsibility. Although some media outlets have attempted to adopt a more ethical and professional perspective, the absence of clear guidelines continues to affect how victims are represented.

This highlights the need to promote journalism that prioritizes sensitivity, informative rigor, and social commitment in constructing narratives about this issue. News consumers perceive a lack of coherence in the approach that media adopt to report on violence against women, which negatively impacts public trust and the media's ability to generate social awareness.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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