VISUAL NARRATIVES OF CRIME ON INSTAGRAM:
Storytelling Strategies of the Main Chilean TV Channels in 2023-2024

PAZ CRISÓSTOMO FLORES[1]
[1] Finis Terrae University, Chile

KEYWORDS	SUMMARY
Visual narratives *Crimes* *Instagram* *Media* *Interaction* *Polarisation* *Storytelling*	*This research analyses the visual narratives and storytelling strategies in crime-related posts on Instagram by Chile's major free-to-air television media outlets (2023–2024). Employing a mixed-methods approach, it examines framing, visual formats, levels of interaction, and narrative tone. The findings reveal a tension between the need to inform and attract audiences, underscoring the impact of sensationalism, emotionality, and virality on crime perception. The study discusses how media practices in constructing criminal narratives pose challenges to the ethical and social implications of the media.*

1. Introduction

In Chile, the phenomenon of criminality has gained particular prominence in recent years as a result of an increase in violent crimes and a growing perception of insecurity among the public. Since 2022, the rate of crimes and offences against individuals has been on the rise, with this heightened criminality linked to the expansion of organised gangs (Erazo-Patiño et al., 2024), as well as the trafficking of illegal weapons in high-risk areas (González, 2020), among other situational factors.

In this context, the media assume a pivotal role, as they, as constructors of reality, prioritise certain information over other details and provide a specific framing to news stories (Entman, 1993). This is evident in the construction of information, where the representation of crimes is shaped through images and narratives that can either foster fear or elicit compassion from the audience. In this way, the media not only participate in representing criminality but also in shaping social narratives. Through framing, news items are selected for their striking nature, carrying significant emotional weight and particular appeal (Chomsky & Herman, 2002).

Likewise, digital platforms have transformed the ways in which events are narrated, prioritising visual formats designed to capture audience attention. In this context, social media platforms such as Instagram employ photographs and images to convey information effectively. According to Gomes et al. (2022), these new forms of communication serve not only an informative function but also contribute to the construction of collective perceptions. Thus, the impact of visual narratives in news can be decisive in shaping perceptions of justice and creating stereotypes about crimes (Nilsson, 2021).

This trend is noticeable on digital platforms, where the short and visual format tends to make narratives more powerful and direct (Kitzinger, 2000). Therefore, this research seeks to identify the visual narratives present on the Instagram platforms of traditional Chilean television media between 2023 and 2024, examining the formats used to report crime news, the primary framing employed, and the interaction generated with the audience to understand media practices.

1.1. Visual Culture and Storytelling in Social Networks

Visual culture is the prevalence of images in the construction of meaning in contemporary societies. Images are not merely representations of reality but are visual discourses that communicate values, emotions or feelings, and ideological perspectives (Mitchell, 2002). This has transformed digital technologies in the production, circulation, and consumption of images, intensifying the effects of visual storytelling in the criminal domain. Hyvönen et al. (2020) discuss how crime documentaries structure their narratives through emotional elements and dramatised accounts to generate audience impact. These principles can be extended to the digital environment, where social networks become spaces for the collective reconstruction of crime. Violent crimes are deliberately depicted through emotional narratives and sequential storytelling, conveying the informational and emotional intensity they bring to events (Nichols, 2016). These visual narratives not only directly influence the construction of visual narratives but also enhance storytelling as an emotional and persuasive communication tool, fostering a deeper connection with audiences. Storytelling thus becomes a key mechanism for dramatising events, humanising victims, and encouraging active audience participation (Lister et al., 2009).

Unlike traditional narratives, social media storytelling promotes decentralisation, enabling the co-construction of meanings through multiple voices. This enhances audience reflexivity, as they not only react to content but also reflect on how to interpret the narrative, its participants, or the context in which it is embedded, amplifying its emotional and persuasive impact (De Fina, 2016). This occurs because, unlike an image devoid of context or "narration," those with a distinct narrative structure favour narrative transport (narrative transport subordinated to the representation of the story) (Escalas, 2004) and,

consequently, the representation of an experience for the viewer. Furthermore, the concept of telepresence explains a similar process: users experience a sense of "presence" in the visual narrative when the combination of image and text enables them to imagine themselves within the staged frame, making the visual narrative feel "warmer" to them (Steuer, 1992). These mechanisms elucidate why images of crime on social media produce an immediate emotional impact: the images not only convey information but also aim to engage the audience in a sensory manner, simultaneously with the situations they depict (Lim & Childs, 2020).

The "visual spectacle," as Debord ([1967] 1999) termed it, has transformed violence into objects of consumption, turning it into a spectacle that evokes both shock and compassion. However, Fiske (1993) cautions that the oversaturation of violent images can desensitise audiences or fuel highly polarised, apocalyptic discourses. It is within this context that images of crime are argued to be powerful activators of the public's emotional responses, enabling audiences to connect with events in an immediate and visceral way (Zelizer, 2010).

In such circumstances, social networks not only facilitate the dissemination of photographs but, in combination with text, hashtags, or visual effects, transform photos into narrative media (Marwick, 2015). For Couldry (2012), interaction constitutes a new form of civic participation, as the emotions and perspectives of individual users are key to disseminating crime narratives. The most commonly used formats are: firstly, static images, which refer to photographs of the crime scene, the victim's face, or visual-symbolic elements. Their power is immediate and direct on the audience (Frosh, 2002). Secondly, carousels, i.e., sequences of images and videos that tell a story in a structured and gradual manner (Hand, 2012). Thirdly, reels and short videos, designed to capture attention within seconds, combining visual and audio elements to emotionalise the narrative (Jenkins, 2006). Algorithms and visuals tend to prioritise emotionally charged news (Van Dijck, 2013). Mediation not only heightens the visibility of events but also polarises how people perceive crime, particularly when texts are sensationalist or even alarmist (Chouliaraki & Orgad, 2011; Greer & Reiner, 2012).

1.2. Visual Strategies in Crime Media Coverage

The use of visual elements in media coverage of crime episodes is a key technique for shaping narratives that often influence the perception of the seriousness of the crime and elicit an emotional reaction from the audience (Becker, 1967). Images are not neutral elements; rather, they possess a semiotic power that enables them to generate new readings and reinterpretations by audiences (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

In this context, visual images in crime coverage aim to evoke specific emotions in the public. According to Higgins (2024), crime images also serve the purpose of narrating a visual event that reinforces fear and stigmatises certain populations. For these reasons, the most frequent crime images in news coverage include: crime pictures—graphic elements such as police tapes, covered bodies, and surveillance images that position us directly in front of the facts (Rafiee et al., 2023; Ristić, 2020); humanising elements—photographs of victims or testimonies from family members that seek to appeal to the empathetic sensibility of audiences (Higgins, 2024); and emotive spaces—graphic elements such as candles, tributes, or religious images that heighten the emotional character of media texts (Rafiee et al., 2023).

In the digital sphere, platforms such as Instagram have transformed the way these images impact the public. According to Murthy et al. (2016), Instagram combines visual content with short, direct text, which facilitates the viralisation of images. In turn, Neumayer and Rossi (2018) emphasise that visual narratives on social media not only inform but also polarise public opinion by eliciting instant and emotionalised reactions. Immersive narratives, integrating text and images, enhance the audience's sense of presence, thereby increasing empathy. The telepresence effect allows stories to be experienced more deeply (Cummings et al., 2022).

Greer and Reiner (2012), meanwhile, also identify three narrative approaches that media coverage of crime may adopt: the informative approach (which presents facts objectively and without value judgements), the sensationalist approach (which emphasises the visual and/or emotional elements of the crime), and the emotional approach (which focuses on the human experience, generating empathy towards victims or outrage towards perpetrators). Whilst the sensationalist approach tends to generate greater interaction on digital platforms due to its provocation of immediate emotional reactions, it should be noted that, particularly on Instagram, visual content (photos of crime scenes, highly emotive testimonies) is more readily viralised (Jewkes, 2015).

1.3. Instagram as a stage for the representation and viralisation of crime

Instagram, a platform that was born a social network specifically dedicated to the exchange and display of images on the Internet, has fully transformed into a hybrid medium of entertainment, information and development of social participation. Marwick (2015) characterises Instagram as a highly curated visual space, capable of creating narratives in short snippets of content that are also emotionally engaging and expressive, primarily through the use of images or short videos.

In the news context, 'aestheticisations of news' occur on social media, which aim to maximise both attraction and dissemination (Frosh, 2018). Georgakopoulou (2021) himself argues that Instagram, unlike traditional media, allows for disaggregated and cross-platform storytelling, where arguments or themes can be tailored through images and interaction with people. This is in line with Alonso-Muñoz (2023), who points out that the virality of content is established through the use of algorithms that favour the visibility of images with a greater affective and emotional charge.

The combination of visual and textual elements, arranged in such a way, creates a sequenced story with an emotional character. As Lister et al. (2009) point out, images make their way into the content as a means of meaning, with resources such as crime scene photographs, symbolic elements (candles, police tapes) and visual testimonies favouring the dramatisation of this content by the media.

Critically, Thompson (2018) warns that information about crime on social media tends to highlight morbidity and violence, making use of visual elements that serve to excite the indignation and fear of users. In this line, Jansson (2017), reflects that the criminal narratives that are deployed on networks, such as Instagram, can be seen as visual spectacles, where the spectacularisation of crime turns the structural explanation of the causes of crime into a failed attempt.

Papacharissi (2015) introduces the term "affective publics", i.e. digital communities that are mobilised by emotions, in deference to the existence of events or news. Comments on criminals are generally expressions of outrage, empathy for the victims or criticism of the institutions responsible, showing a strong polarisation of the discourse on violence or security, in one direction or another. Also, Marwick and Boyd (2011) reflect on the way in which social platforms favour "emotional visibilities", that is, content that provokes immediate affective reactions are those that achieve the highest number of comments and shares. Also, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) has developed the concept of "affective audiences", in which he highlights how digital communities encourage moving emotionally in relation to specific events.

Highfield and Leaver (2016) argue that Instagram's visual format enhances the virality of powerful images and videos, amplifying users' ability to reconfigure and energise media discourse through their interactions. Likes and shares constitute a form of social recognition that allows certain narratives to circulate more intensely in the digital sphere, and in this way, visual images provoke immediate emotional responses that not only inform but also polarise public opinion (Neumayer and Rossi, 2018).

2. Design and Method

2.1. Objectives of the Research

This research presents as its general objective: to analyse the visual narratives and storytelling strategies in crime-related posts disseminated on Instagram by Chile's major free-to-air television channels during 2023–2024. The specific objectives are as follows:
- To classify the approach of the headlines and the narrative tone.
- To identify the predominant visual elements, the types of posts (images, reels, or carousels), and the most commonly used visual formats.
- To determine the level of audience interaction.

2.2. Research Type

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods, with the aim of providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). The design is non-experimental, as the variables are not deliberately manipulated; instead, the data are observed and analysed within their natural context—in this case, the Instagram posts of Chile's major television channels during the period 2023–2024 (Kerlinger & Lee, 2002).

The quantitative approach focuses on the analysis of measurable variables, such as the number of posts, the types of visual formats used (images, reels, carousels), or the level of audience interaction (likes, comments, and shares). This approach enables the identification of patterns and trends in the use of visual resources in crime coverage (Bryman, 2012). In contrast, the qualitative component is directed towards an interpretive analysis of the content, such as the narrative tone or the predominant visual elements that stand out in the posts.

Given the intention to characterise and describe these narration strategies and visual representations of crime on Instagram, the focus is descriptive. This scope provides an opportunity to establish a descriptor of complex social phenomena without extending to the point of establishing a primary causal relationship (Hernández et al., 2014).

2.3. Scope of the study

The delimitation of the field of study pertains to posts made on the social network Instagram by the official accounts of news programmes belonging to Chile's major national free-to-air television channels. This review was conducted manually, covering the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024. In this review process, posts referring to the commission of crimes were selected, with crimes understood as those acts that, by definition, violate criminal laws and impact public or private safety (e.g., serious offences, minor offences, etc.), ranging from minor transgressions to highly severe acts such as homicides, robberies, drug trafficking, and human trafficking (Blackstone, 1967; Garland, 2002). This approach to the phenomenon enables the analysis to focus on content explicitly related to the commission of crimes and their media representation, particularly those that had a crime as their primary focus.

Table 1. Crime-related posts on Instagram

News	User (@)	2023	2024	Grand total
CHV News	@chvnoticias	213	177	390
Meganoticias	@meganoticiascl	37	38	75
Teletrece (T13)	@teletrece	103	152	255
24 Horas (TVN)	@24horascl	263	313	576
Grand total		616	680	**1296**

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

These accounts were selected due to their significant relevance among the primary sources of information in the country and their high level of activity on the social network under investigation. The analysis period was carefully defined, and it was decided to cover two full years. The rationale was to identify trends and dynamics, both current and recent, regarding the media handling of specific issues related to criminality.

2.4. Analysis Variables

Within the scope of the present research, the variables of analysis of the visual narrative and storytelling strategies of crime-related Instagram posts have been carefully designed. These variables of analysis consider the particularities of these publications on the accounts of the main television channels in Chile. In this sense, some of the main variables are described below, based on the categories defined in the coding document:

1. Focus on headlines: recognising the main storyline that characterises the news item as crime or the discovery of bodies. Content analysis makes it possible to interrogate the way in which messages are formulated, and certain issues are emphasised (Krippendorff, 2018).
2. Type of post: assessing the visual format on Instagram (images, reels, carousels). This aspect is highly significant, given that different post formats affect how the audience perceives content in varying ways (Van Dijck, 2013).
3. Narrative tone: quantifying the prevailing communicational mode in the posts (informative, sensationalist, or emotional). Narrative tone plays a crucial role in how audiences consume crime news (Greer & Reiner, 2012).
4. Visual and narrative elements: quantifying the graphic resources used (crime scenes, humanising, or symbolic of emotions), primarily following the principles of semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).
5. Level of audience interaction: quantifying metrics (likes, comments, and shares) of the impact of posts. It is argued that social networks amplify narratives through audience participation (Gibbs et al., 2015).

These variables, in alignment with the specific objectives of the research, are fundamental to enabling a systematised and comprehensive analysis of the content on Instagram, offering insights into the visual and narrative dynamics of news on crime stories.

2.5. Research Techniques Used

Content analysis constituted the primary methodology used to examine Instagram posts related to crimes, enabling the identification of patterns, categories, and meanings within visual and textual narratives (Krippendorff, 2018). In this research, a structured coding plan was applied, based on predetermined categories: narrative tone, type of post, and visual elements that emerge prominently. Additionally, a qualitative analysis was conducted, which facilitated a detailed understanding of the visual and narrative content of the posts, such as the symbols employed and the emotions elicited (Gibbs, 2018; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

To ensure both the validity and reliability of the coding system, Cronbach's Alpha was used as a statistical technique for assessing internal consistency. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), an alpha above 0.70 is acceptable, and an alpha above 0.80 is considered excellent. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was found to exceed 0.90, indicating a high level of consistency across the analysed categories.

Frequency analyses were conducted to categorise and compare themes, formats, visual elements, and other aspects. Additionally, the association between variables—such as the topic addressed and the narrative approach in relation to the selected publication years—was tested using Pearson's chi-square tests. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to assess the strength and direction of concave relationships between interaction metrics, including "Likes," "Comments," "Shares," and "Saves".

3. Results

Table 2. Distribution of headlines by thematic focus in Instagram posts (2023-2024)

Type of approach	Year	
	2023	2024
Crimes against children and young people	34	49
Crimes involving shootings or gun violence	100	121
Crimes due to family or close conflicts	32	42
Crimes in the context of robberies or assaults	70	63
Organised gang-related crimes	8	20
Finding of body or crime-related evidence	85	102
Crimes by location or media and social impact	31	33
Crimes by public officials	130	81
Crime trends and statistics	10	20
Arrests, indictments, prosecutions and tributes	70	112
Other crimes and isolated cases	46	37

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The results of the Pearson chi-square analysis (χ^2 = 35.484, df = 10, p = 0.000) indicate a statistically significant association between the orientation of headlines and the date they were published. This suggests that the themes emphasised in crime-related headlines varied significantly between 2023 and 2024. Indeed, notable increases are observed in headlines concerning crimes involving minors or youths (from 34 to 49), crimes involving shootings or armed violence (from 100 to 121), discoveries of bodies or evidence (from 85 to 102), and arrests, formalisations, trials, and tributes (from 70 to 112). Conversely, significant decreases are evident in headlines about crimes committed by public officials (from 130 to 81) and crimes in the context of robberies or assaults (from 70 to 63).

Upon conducting a comparative analysis between the media accounts, TVN emerges as the outlet with the greatest coverage across nearly all the most analysed categories, with particular emphasis on crimes involving shootings or armed violence and the discovery of bodies or evidence related to a crime. Meanwhile, CHV also records high figures across several categories, though with a significant shift between 2023 and 2024, moving from a focus on crimes involving shootings or those committed by public officials to an interest in cases of arrests and formalisations. T13 occupies an intermediate position, whilst MEGA demonstrates lower coverage across all categories.

Table 3. Distribution of narrative tone in headlines in 2023 and 2024

Narrative tone	Year	
	2023	2024
News	532	604
Sensationalist	11	16
Emotional	23	9
Empathetic/Respectful	26	22
Alarmist	24	29

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The results of the chi-square analysis (χ^2 = 9.281, df = 4, p = 0.054) do not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between narrative tone and the year of publication, based on the application of a 5% significance level. However, some variations in frequencies have been detected that are deemed relevant for consideration in a qualitative analysis. The informative tone is the most prevalent in both publication years, increasing from 532 in 2023 to 604 in 2024. The sensationalist tone rises from 11 to 16, whilst the emotional tone exhibits a notable decrease from 23 to 9. The empathetic/respectful and alarmist tones

show the least variation, with a slight decline in the former (from 26 to 22) and a small increase in the latter (from 24 to 29).

Table 4. Distribution of publication types

Type of publication	Year	
	2023	2024
Image	524	566
Reel **less than 60 seconds**	29	32
Reel **more than 60 seconds**	56	51
Carousel	7	31

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The frequency of post types indicates a strong dominance of images as the primary public format and a rise in carousels, suggesting a shift towards more interactive visual narratives. Short reels (under 60 seconds in duration) increase from 29 to 32, whilst long reels (over 60 seconds) decrease from 56 to 51, such that both formats maintain a stable presence. Ultimately, these data suggest shifts in content strategies that tend to prioritise formats emphasising diversity in capturing and engaging their audience.

TVN is the outlet with the greatest diversity and volume in the use of publication formats, leading in both images and carousels. Similarly, CHV stands out for its significant use of images and carousels, though with a declining trend in 2024. T13 exhibits an increase in images and carousels in 2024, whilst MEGA maintains a low and minimal participation, with no use of formats such as carousels or long reels.

Table 5. Visual elements in the images used

Type of publication	Year	
	2023	2024
Crime scene photograph	118	121
Graph	0	0
Archive photo	375	337
Illustration	123	222

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The table indicates that in 2023, media outlets primarily relied on stock photos, which constituted the majority of visual content, whilst crime scene photographs and illustrations had a moderate presence. In 2024, although stock photography remains the most used image type, its use decreases, with an increase in illustrations, which could suggest an effort to diversify visual formats and provide more engaging and innovative content. In the case of crime scene photographs, these remained consistent across both years, establishing themselves as a resource for documenting events.

Through the analysis of the media outlets considered in this study, it is observed that TVN is the most versatile, as it progresses in its investment in visual content in the first quarter of 2024. This is reflected in its use of crime scene photographs and visual content in general, alongside an advancement in the use of illustrations and a slight reduction in reliance on stock photos. CHV, which heavily depends on stock photos, also increases its use of illustrations, indicating an interest in diversifying its visual content for 2024. MEGA exhibits low but consistent participation across all image types, with a decline in crime scene photographs and only marginal progress in illustrations. T13, meanwhile, advances in both illustrations and crime scene photographs, suggesting an intent to diversify its visual storytelling strategy to reduce dependence on stock photos.

Table 6. Visual elements in the *reels* according to their format

Type of publication	Year	
	2023	2024
Replay of the newsreel without cutting or editing	13	26
Made especially for the social network	21	19
Video capsule briefing	55	62

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Between 2023 and 2024, the reels showcased by the media maintain the same trend in the distribution of their formats, albeit with certain fluctuations. It is observed that unedited news broadcast reels replicated without cuts increase from 13 to 26 posts, highlighting a more common strategy of reusing television content for social media. On the other hand, reels produced specifically for social media decrease from 21 to 19, suggesting that this production has not experienced a significant rise. Lastly, news capsules continue to be the most prevalent format (rising from 55 to 62), solidifying their position as the primary method in the subtle art of briefly conveying information. According to the chi-square analysis results: $\chi^2 = 3.226$; df = 2; p = 0.199, there is no statistically significant relationship between the type of reel and the year, indicating a continuity in editorial strategies.

According to the analysis, TVN and CHV are the outlets that most extensively employ the language of reels, incorporating digital approaches through a combination of news capsules, original content, and information replicated from news broadcasts. In contrast, T13 emphasises the use of new formats, alongside a growth in reels replicated from news programmes. In the case of MEGA, this channel appears not to follow this trend, as it barely produces reels, which could be linked to limitations in digital investment or a preference for older formats. Overall, the data illustrate how media outlets are responding differently to the demands of the digital environment, ranging from innovation and diversification to the preservation of more traditional strategies.

Table 7. Narrative elements in publications

Type of publication	Year	
	2023	2024
Elements of the crime scene	332	361
Humanising elements	8	26
Contextual elements	220	259
Emotional or memorial elements	56	34

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 16.175$; df = 3; p = 0.001) indicates a significant relationship between the type of symbol used and the year of the posts, suggesting that the observed changes in the categories are not random but clearly reflect transformations in the behaviour of editorial strategies. Furthermore, humanising elements show a notable increase; for instance, to illustrate this, photographs are presented featuring victims or their relatives holding or displaying symbolic objects from tributes, which, in any case, aim to signify the human dimension of the events.

The above confirms that contextual elements have also increased considerably. This type of imagery encompasses everything from maps to security camera angles or images of the locations or vehicles involved in the incident, thereby providing greater spatial and temporal understanding of the event. For example, by 2024, it had become common for some posts to combine interactive maps with timelines and video footage, enabling the audience to reconstruct the events themselves under certain conditions, thus facilitating this task. In contrast, emotional or memorial elements have declined. In 2023, images of mass funerals or public ceremonies that underscored loss were prevalent, where emotional impact was a common feature. This contrasts with 2024, where such representations have

become less frequent and could be interpreted as a deliberate choice by the media to maintain a less sensitive and more descriptive tone in their coverage.

Crime scene elements remain the most employed resource, rising from 332 posts in 2023 to 361 in 2024, an increase that can be considered significant, with a percentage variation approaching 8.7%. These include images such as "Do Not Cross" tape, evidence markers, police officers at the scene, and involved vehicles, reinforcing the immediacy and spectacle of the narrated events. A recurring example of this resource is the depiction of locations sealed off by various authorities, with elements that heighten the drama and severity of the crime, such as cars with bullet impacts or cordoned-off urban areas.

When examining the media outlets individually, the results reveal a heterogeneous landscape regarding the use of visual symbols among the main broadcasters. Thus, TVN maintains its role as a benchmark for crime scene and contextual elements, whilst T13 is characterised by a significant rise in the use of humanising elements. This appears to evidence a shift towards more complex and balanced narratives, striving to empathise with the audience without losing sight of contextualisation or realism.

Table 8. Pearson's correlation between social media interaction metrics

Variables	I like it	Comments	Shared	Saved
I like it	1.00	0.60**	0.11**	0.08**
Comments	0.60**	1.00	0.28**	0.23**
Shared	0.11**	0.28**	1.00	0.69**
Saved	0.08**	0.23**	0.69**	1.00

Note: Correlations marked with ** are significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral), indicating a probability of less than 1% that these relationships are the result of chance.
N: 1,296 observations.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Strong moderate relationships can be observed between "Likes" and "Comments," with r = 0.600, indicating that when there is a high volume of "Likes," there is also a high volume of "Comments." The results also reveal a strong positive relationship between "Shares" and "Saves," where r = 0.687 suggests that when many posts are shared, many are also saved. Some correlations are weak or negligible, such as between "Likes" and "Saves" (r = 0.083), suggesting little to no relationship between these interaction metrics.

The correlation enables the identification of relevant patterns in user behaviour, showing that "Comments" versus "Likes" is moderately correlated, whilst "Shares" versus "Saves" are strongly correlated. This may indicate which types of content prompt users to share and save more frequently.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The study of visual narratives on Instagram reveals that media outlets do not merely report on criminality; rather, they construct a narrative that is equally emotional and interpretive, impacting public perception. This finding aligns with Entman's (1993) concept of media framing, which highlighted how editorial choices select aspects of crime that tend to emphasise its emotional resonance with audiences. Whilst current practices balance information, empathy, and emotional impact in crime coverage, ethical dilemmas persist in its representation.

The use of visual elements such as police tape and cordoned-off areas remains central to drawing attention and legitimising media narratives (Zelizer, 2010). Although this repetition can reinforce stereotypes about criminality and desensitise audiences (Fiske, 1993), it shifts the audience from passive recipients to active participants in reinterpreting crime narratives (De Fina, 2016). Furthermore, the growing use of humanising elements, such as incorporating testimonies and photographs of victims, reflects a shift towards more empathetic storytelling. Whilst appealing to human stories connects audiences with crime

consumption, Chouliaraki and Orgad (2011) argue that this communicative strategy may perpetuate inequalities by prioritising certain cases or profiles over others.

In crime narration on social media, the decline of highly emotional elements, such as memorials or tributes to victims, may be interpreted as an attempt by media to distance themselves from sensationalism. In contrast, the use of contextual resources like interactive maps, digital reconstructions, and security camera footage suggests a transition towards descriptive-explanatory and analytical narratives aimed at interpreting and clarifying events (Hyvönen et al., 2020). This approach may be highly appropriate, though it depends on technology not all media possess (Van Dijck, 2013). The sense of telepresence in crime narration is enhanced by the combination of text and images, allowing users to experience greater immersion in the crime scene; integrating both elements heightens empathy, creating a more striking and vivid experience (Cummings et al., 2022; Steuer, 1992).

The dominant presence of static images and the rise of interactive formats, such as carousels, represent an attempt to combine the immediate impact of visuals with the potential for deeper narratives. Through narrative transport (Escalas, 2004), audience immersion is facilitated; storytelling becomes more effective when contextual backgrounds, characters, and a sense of progression are incorporated. Jenkins (2006) linked this to the logic of media convergence, adapting to digital platform characteristics with more accessible and interactive narratives.

The prevalence of an informative tone may reflect an attempt to convey professionalism and credibility, whilst the use of alarmist strategies suggests that sensationalism remains a tactic to attract audiences (Jewkes, 2015). This balance between informing and engaging audiences carries ethical implications (Zelizer, 2010), as the images employed in these practices can influence societal and public justice perceptions.

The moderate correlation between "Likes" and "Comments" (r = 0.60, p < 0.01) suggests that posts with highly impactful visual content not only captivate users but also encourage their participation (Gomes et al., 2022). The strong relationship between "Shares" and "Saves" (r = 0.687, p < 0.01) may indicate that users perceive certain content as highly relevant, whilst the weak correlation between "Likes" and "Saves" (r = 0.083, p < 0.01) suggests differing motivations for interacting with content (Frosh, 2018).

The results highlight the powerful balance media can achieve between striking visual resources and humanising, contextual narratives. Nevertheless, the competitive dynamics of the digital context underscore the tension between journalistic ethics and virality strategies. This is also evident in studies by Becker (1967) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), who noted that whilst images can generate meanings, they also have the potential to polarise public interpretations.

The media representation of crime on digital platforms like Instagram has a clear effect on discursive polarisation, as it prioritises certain crime types or narratives over others. Neumayer and Rossi (2018) caution that these narratives add emotional value to the content, shaping public perceptions of justice and safety. However, the results suggest a move towards more balanced narratives, with the persistence of sensational resources indicating a media-driven social view of criminality that warrants consideration.

The study underscores the complexity of visual and narrative strategies in media crime representation. Media outlets have implicitly and explicitly adopted practices that blend visual impact, narrative depth, and emotional connection based on anticipated audience responses, though the logic of spectacularisation remains prevalent. These dynamics present opportunities and challenges for future research, particularly regarding the impact of these representations on social perceptions and security policies.

The transition from static formats to carousels and interactive narratives on Instagram reflects how media have adopted visual strategies that reconcile immediate impact with greater narrative depth. These changes, as observed in the analysed posts, enable media to explore new storytelling methods that capture public attention whilst developing more elaborate contexts. However, the analysis also reveals that this approach is not uniform, as the adoption of formats like carousels or interactive narratives appears to depend more on

editorial priorities than on technological or resource constraints. This finding fundamentally highlights how media narrative decisions shape the presentation and perception of crime on digital platforms. It also raises the possibility of investigating how these narrative choices influence public perceptions of crime and user interactions with such content, offering potential guidelines to enhance media strategies in an increasingly competitive digital environment.

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