



# An In-depth Analysis of Online News Coverage of Inxeba (The Wound): Putting the Lens on the Daily Dispatch and News24

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## Abstract

This study seeks to analyse the patterns of media coverage of the South African movie Inxeba (The Wound) pre and after its release on local cinemas. The film created a media frenzy just after reports of it collecting numerous international awards. The film revolves around the sacred male rite of passage known as ukwaluka (traditional male circumcision). For the purpose of this research, we opted to analyse two online publications that reported extensively on the movie and the controversy surrounding it. The publications analysed are; Daily Dispatch Online and News24. The Daily Dispatch Online is an East London based daily publication, whereas News24 is an online national publication. The analysis of News24 gives a broad picture of the movie's media coverage on a national level, while the analysis of the Daily Dispatch gives a location-based picture of the movie's coverage. Multiple articles were chosen and analysed with the analysis aiming to uncover recurring themes found in the coverage of these publications, and in addition to find out what agenda these publications were pursuing through their coverage if any.

research paper focuses on two publications namely Daily Dispatch (DD) and News24 (N24). These two publications are amongst the leading online publications that provided sufficient coverage of the movie [2].

The release of the film stirred anger and inspired protests, particularly amongst people of the Eastern Cape region where the ritual of ulwaluko is still very much prominent. This research was prompted by media reports of skirmishes and threats outside cinema houses in East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town on the day the film was set to be released to the local public for viewing. The controversial film had to be pulled out of cinemas as the protests started to intensify [3,4].

Protestors were mobilised using social media platforms such as twitter under the hashtags: #BoycottInxeba, #NoToInxeba and #BurnInxeba [5]. These mobilisations were later bolstered with threats aimed at anyone involved in the film [4]. Members of various civil organisations such as Contralesa Youth League, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and members of Man and Boy Foundation camped outside Eastern Cape cinemas on the 2nd of February 2018, threatening those who came to watch the movie. The Daily Dispatch Online reported on the cancellation of the film screening at East London's Hemingways Mall on the 2nd of February 2018, and News 24 reported on the national outrage on the 5th of February 2018.

Eastern Cape's online daily publication the Daily Dispatch Online first reported on the issue on the 17th August 2017 before its official release, were King Mpendulo Sigcawu called for the film to be banned and for people to boycott cinemas that will be showing it. Our interest in this study was sparked by the uproar that the release of the movie had caused throughout the country. In our views, we feel that this was a missed opportunity of discussing relevant issues pertaining to the culture of ulwaluko such as the escalating number of dying initiates and other related matters.

**Keywords:** Online news; Media coverage; Inxeba (The Wound); Content analysis; In-depth analysis

## Introduction and Background to the Study

This study seeks to analyse the online media coverage of the "multi-award winning film Inxeba: The Wound" [1]. The interest in the film became evident on the very same day the film trailer appeared on YouTube, and lasted until the day it was banned from various South African cinemas and by the Film and Publication Board of South Africa. The film caused a media frenzy, with some reports calling the banning of the movie "the return to dark days of apartheid" as this resembled the way the media was censored during apartheid. This

## Social Context

Ulwaluko (traditional male initiation) or male circumcision is one of the oldest rituals practiced worldwide. Mogotlane states that, about a sixth of the world's male population is

circumcised and that the ritual is widespread amongst the world's different tribes as well as races. Some races perform the ritual at birth, others at neonatal stage, childhood and at early adolescent. Amongst the AmaXhosa tribe, male initiation (ulwaluko) is also a prerequisite for all male children at adolescent stage to undergo in order to be recognised as "men".

### Gay initiates

Gay men also undergo this ritual if they are part of a tribe that practices it, and they have to go through all the processes in order to be classified as "real men". Those who choose otherwise are ridiculed and marginalised and will forever be referred to as boys (amakhwenkwe). They will not get the same respect accorded to other men of their age and will not be allowed to participate in certain family or tribal rituals as they would be regarded as boys. Young gay men are propelled by societal pressure, and at times by their own will, to go to initiation school where they are required to prove their masculinity in order to be accepted as amadoda "real men". Those participating in this initiation practice, especially the elders, have a belief that the custom can help convert gay men to heterosexuality and that they will wean off their gay sexual tendencies. They are usually not expected to return to homosexuality after initiation, as initiation is believed to be able to mould them to become "proper men" and desist from homosexual tendencies [6-8].

### Botched circumcision and dying initiates

The integrity of the custom has been brought to scrutiny due to the rise in the number of botched circumcision and deaths of initiates [9]. Due to socio-cultural shifts, this ancient custom has changed in an instance and this has culminated into use of the initiation schools as criminal bases by initiates amongst other things, as well as rampant drug and alcohol abuse both by initiates and their traditional nurses [10].

Recently the alarming death rate and horrific injuries amongst initiates has led to unwarranted media scrutiny of the custom. Whilst many of the physical components of the custom have been altered in centuries, its cultural and social meanings have not changed, instead they have evolved with time [9].

## Literature Review

### Stereotyping

Stereotyping is a fixed over generalized belief about a particular group or class. These beliefs are constructed to support dominant factors or races in order to retain power and control of resources in society [11]. There are different kinds of stereotypes such as sexual stereotyping, cultural, gender as well as group profiling. Sexual profiling are stereotypes involving perceptions around masculinity and femininity of a person, whereas racial stereotype tend to involve the beliefs that certain races are more superior or clever than the other.

Gender profiling usually involves ideas that a certain sex/gender is more superior to the opposite sex. In most cases, homosexuals are viewed as weak people who often cannot withstand the challenges that come with the custom of ulwaluko. This is a stereotypical view that forms bases of the movie.

### Gays representations in South African films

South African cinematic images of gay men and women are limited and still at the margin of the film industry. According to Botha there are less than 20 short films, a few documentaries ranging at less than 10 features with openly gay and lesbian characters in the past 114 years of South African cinema. Botha goes on to state that during apartheid years, stories about gays and lesbians were non-existent on television or theatre.

### Representation of alienated groups in films

Benshoff shows the misrepresentation of black people in Hollywood films by analysing the film Lion King which is set in an African society but using white artist as voice-overs, while black artists only appear in lesser important roles. All main roles were allocated to white actors and one of the few black voices was that of Rafiki who is played by a black actor and is portrayed as half-crazy and foolish. Two other black actors play characters that are also poorly presented and possessing anti-social behaviour and stupidity. This according to Benshoff shows superiority complex of one race over other races. He also dabbles on representation of homosexuality in the film as the character Scar is perceived to be weak, limp-wristed and possessing a feminine swish when he walks. That led to other characters not liking him and preferring Simba to lead them [12].

## Methodology

### Adopted method

The researchers have adopted 2 qualitative research methods. This is because this method is good for content analysis as it captures what people say and how they interpret the complexity of their living world in the real sense [13,14]. Qualitative methods take into account what has been learned throughout the research period as well what was achieved through the outcomes, meaning that the researcher learns a lot by using this method as opposed to quantitative method [15]. This method will allow the researchers to come up with a detailed description of events, situations and discussions relating to the lived realities of the participants of the study. A qualitative method will afford us the opportunity to look at the themes, agenda setting and media framing that is evident in the media coverage of the film.

### Content analysis

According to Elo and Kyngas, when using content analysis, the aim is to build a model that describes the circumstances in

an applied way and both the deductive and inductive processes are included and represented as in three phases of the analysis. These are the preparation, organising and reporting processes of data. For this research paper, we analysed content in a form of online articles as a method of collecting information relating to how these two publications reported on Inxeba (The Wound). Content analysis method is detailed and has external validity as a goal. It focuses on human communication and offers practical applicability. Content analysis comes in two forms, inductive and deductive. The inductive method focuses on qualitative data and its speciality is to decode content and interpret it in a way that makes sense. Deductive method is labelled as available data that is being re-examined by the researcher in order to come to a certain conclusion. Both these forms will be employed in order to make sure that the data in examined is all its entirety in order to find meaning that is embedded in the text [16,17].

### Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of a phenomenon [18]. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. The process involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data". It is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes the data set in rich detail. It illustrates the themes that are found in the articles. The analysis will also indicate whether the writers of the articles were fuelling the furor around the release of the film or they had a different agenda. The researchers will use these themes to establish the objectivity of journalists from Daily Dispatch and News24 when they covered the stories relating to the release of the film Inxeba (the Wound) [19].

### Agenda setting

Agenda setting is when the writer wants the readers to understand a certain topic in a particular manner or be able to formulate a narrative about a subject. It refers to the traditional paradigm of persuasion and attitude change research including the counterintuitive findings of generally low correlations between media exposure measures and attitude change. When choosing stories, news editors or newsroom staff tend to play an important role in shaping or recreating real life stories. Readers not only learn about things, but they also learn about how to attach importance to stories through the amount of information they get. Media gets to set up agendas usually in political campaigns [20].

Mass media can influence the opinions of audiences or public at large, and this can be done through agenda setting of the media on certain issues. The speed at which the media carries information to the public, the more influential it is. Zain goes on to say that, agenda setting can be set up either by government policy or through politician's statements. There are three types of agendas used by media namely public agenda, media agenda and policy agenda. Because the release of the film was surrounded by protests, it is important for this

research to establish whether or not news writers had an effect on the reactions the film received from the public that resulted in it being targeted and banned in numerous cinemas [21].

### Framing

Framing deals with how something is presented to the public and what influences the choices editors make about how to process that information [22]. He goes on further to state that frames are abstractions that work to organise or structure message meanings. Media tend to focus the public attention to certain events and then places them in a field of meaning. Media is influential in shaping public opinion by framing events and issues in a particular way [23]. Framing in news stories can be examined and identified by the presence or absence of conflict between parties that is prioritised, as opposed to the actual decision made.

News is framed in five different ways, which are conflict, human interest/personalisation, consequence, morality and responsibility according to Arowolo. Arowolo goes on further to state that framing in the media draws the public's eye to specific topics. Creating frames for stories is the job of editors, news journalist and even sources. Framing of stories justifies media as gatekeepers, who mindfully collect, select, organise and present ideas as well as topics they cover. The editorial influence, selection, and organisation of the stories in a form of news articles could be presented in a manner that is meant to drive a public to think a certain way. This study will therefore carefully look at the agenda setting evident in the news articles being analysed [22].

### Preliminary findings

After careful considerations and reading all the selected articles from Daily Dispatch and News24 reporting on Inxeba (The Wound). The themes vary with each article. The articles were judged according to whether they fuelled the animosity around the release of the film by siding with the protestors and complainants or sympathises with producers of Inxeba (The Wound).

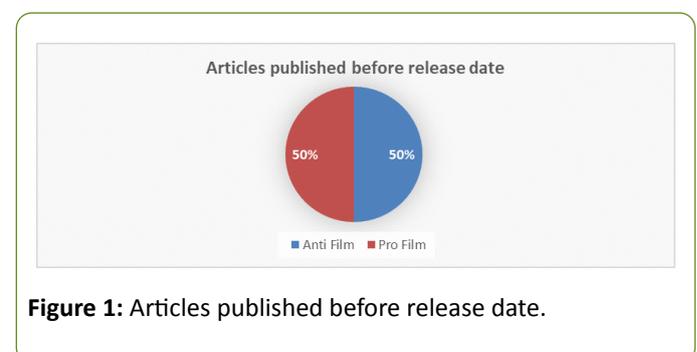
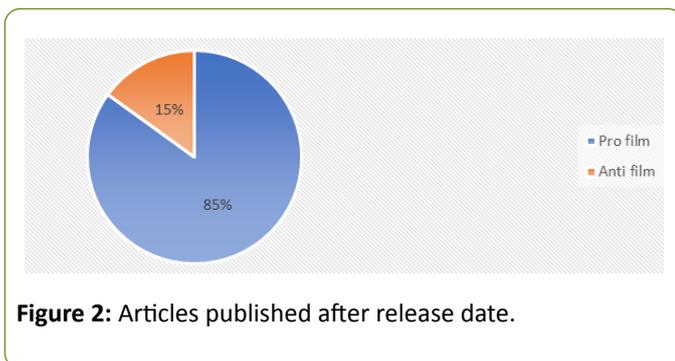


Figure 1: Articles published before release date.

Out of the ten articles that were analysed, four of them were published before the film was released on local cinemas while the other six were published after the release date. From those published before the release date, two were anti the film and another two were pro the film. Two of these articles portrayed anger towards the movie's release while the other

two were appraising and celebrating the movie. **Figure 1** below displays the percentage of articles that were published before the release of the movie, where fifty percentage of the news articles were against the movie's release with another fifty per cent advocating for the release [24-26].

In the six articles that were published after the release, five of them were pro film and only one was anti film. Their percentages stood at 85% pro film and 15% was anti film. **Figure 2** indicates the percentage of articles that were for the film after it was released and the number of articles that were still against the film.



**Figure 2:** Articles published after release date.

News24 provides majority of the stories that were published after the release of the movie. About five of the six articles are pro the film and this is shown through the sympathetic writings seemingly biased in support of *Inxeba (The Wound)*. The majority of the articles give a positive response to the film as oppose to the criticism it received before it was released. These articles put a spotlight on the actors and the rest of the film's crew. That means the journalists reflected positively on the film, giving readers a positive picture about it thus in a way promoting it. They interviewed actors, producers and directors of *Inxeba* and in the interviews, little is said about the antagonists or the protestors who were against the movie. They talk about the awards the film has accumulated and likely to win in future. It is an interesting factor that while the movie remained banned in the conservative Eastern Cape area, other cinemas were able to screen it for viewing.

## Discussion of Findings

The articles examined for this research paper conceded different themes. The first theme has hostility. This is deduced from the headline, which says, "Outcry over film showing AmaXhosa initiation rite". Hostility is derived from the threats by the AmaXhosa King as well as by Contralesa Youth League aimed at the actors, crew and anyone likely to want to watch the film. John Trengove, the film's director is also hostile in his response on CNN where he said, "they don't know what it's about, or who made it, they're just really mad that it exists." By referring to traditional leaders as 'mad', he is challenging them and insinuating that they cannot think properly.

The second theme is that of the problems or complaints related to the release of the movie. Every cast member involved in the movie was complaining about something happening to him or her as a result of the film's release. Even

those not involved in the making of the movie had their complaints. For example, King Sigcawu complained about the contents of the film and called it "humiliating and insulting," He escalated his concerns to the political leadership both in the province and when he promised to speak to the Minister of communication regarding the release of the movie.

Other complaints came from the supporters of the film. Those who defended *Inxeba* complained about harassment and homophobic attacks, as they claimed that those who opposed the film wanted to suppress the voices of the queer community by denying them space to engage on issues pertaining to gay people, especially within the cultural context.

The third theme was that of appraisal and is sourced from News24. It praises the film's plot and its themes while additionally comparing it to other Oscar nominated films from South Africa. The article quotes National Film and Video Foundation's Peter Kwela who also lavishes praise on the film by stating that; "the committee applauded the film as a masterpiece in terms of script, directing and performances, which are believable and captivating".

*Inxeba* was named 2018's Best Foreign Film by the African American Film Critics Association before walking away with Best Film at the International Queer & Migrant Film Festival in Amsterdam. The film's crew exclaimed their excitement over the movie's success abroad and said they hope it lands a much-coveted statue.

In the fourth theme is anger as shown by the protests around cinemas in Port Elizabeth, East London and Cape Town. Two Eastern Cape movie houses postponed the release of the controversial film *Inxeba (The Wound)*, as several groups of the movie's critics were threatening to picket and boycott its screening. The traditional leaders in conjunction with the political party EFF and Man and Boy Foundation instigated protests and threats of violence to cinema owners and staff. This resulted in cinemas suspending the film and removing it from their schedules in fear of retaliation by the protestors. They accused the film of promoting same sex at initiation schools, with claims of misrepresenting culture and the movie being too explicit. "Boys undergo initiation. We do not say this one is gay, this one is not. We are dealing with boys, regardless of their sexual preferences. Initiation schools are not a place for love affairs and sex," said Chief of AmaNdlambe, Andile Makinana.

The directors of the movie were also angry, despite getting positive reviews of the movie in other provinces around the country. The anger comes from the protests in the Eastern Cape Province where they were also expecting positive feedback despite the furore. Pre-screening held around the country yielded 85% of attendants and the directors gave it the thumbs up. It was also the number one film at seven of the venues where it screened across the country according to its directors. This comes after the film producers had petitioned the Human Rights Commission of South Africa following Film and Publication Board's reclassification of the film into a X18 ratings meaning it contains strong language, sex and nudity and not suitable for anyone under 18 years.

The Film and Publication Board has advised that despite the complaints they had received based on perceived cultural insensitivity, they could not restrict the launch of the film as this would be a direct contravention to Section 16 of the South African Constitution as well as of the Films and Publication Act No.96 of 1996. Inxeba officials complained about the threats to actors and cinemagoers following a wave of threats by protesters.

Inxeba (The Wound's) main actor Nakhane Toure talked about his life as a Xhosa man and his journey to manhood through the sacred male initiation passage, which is the theme of the movie. He admitted that due to the movie's sensitivity he knew that it was never going to be an easy task making something that would cause so much controversy. He further explained that at the heart of it all is the fact that the tradition of ukwaluka (traditional manhood initiation) is portrayed in the film for all to see. Toure had received death threats for his role in the film and was touted for not being 'a real man' by his detractors. He had to tell his story in order to prove to those people that he has actually undergone the rite of passage even though he is gay. According to Toure, there were many things in the story that he knew many people who had been silenced could relate to.

There were many things he also could relate to as a Xhosa man who has been to the mountain. He also says, "We're not aiming to teach anyone anything. We are not wagging our fingers at anyone or anything. We are telling a story – a story shared by many people. I am also Xhosa. I've been to the mountain."

The directors of Inxeba insisted that they are not exposing any aspect of the sacred rite of passage; all they are doing is narrating what everyone already knows. They got the backing of some members of the religious sector and support from the lesbian and gays societies who feel that the film is a 'queer love story' that is supposed to be told.

The repealing of suppressive apartheid laws and censorship is the theme of that also emerged. The articles portray a feeling that the public was being deprived valuable information by the banning of the film. Censorship, one of the insidious strategies used by the apartheid government, has made an ominous comeback in South Africa with the recent X18 classification of the award-winning film Inxeba (The Wound). In South Africa the film can now only be shown in locations licensed to screen adult entertainment. The apartheid government tried to maintain its power over a racially segregated South African population through controlling the media. The apartheid regime created the Publications Control Board to filter and censor media and it had powers to cut out scenes from films or outrightly ban the films from the public. Censorship was meant to keep apartheid in place and was mainly concentrating on black movies, which were deemed offensive, and a threat to government.

## Conclusion

Reporting by the two publications differed a bit. Reports from the Daily Dispatch appeared to report more in a negative

way about the movie. The articles projected the role of traditional leaders as guardians and custodians of AmaXhosa culture and actually mocking the film and criticising the directors and the actors for not seeking their approval first before doing the film. The other articles are friendlier to the film and try to portray a good image of the movie. News24 articles however, paint a rosier image of the film and they write positively about the film. Media power is generally symbolic and persuasive, in the sense that the media primarily have the potential to control to some extent the minds of readers or viewers, but not directly their actions. Reports by media houses helped polarize the readers and made them choose a side.

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