

Representation of celebrity pregnancies on online news portals

Celebrity pregnancy experiences are a common topic in entertainment media and popular magazines, which tend to represent them by consistent scrutiny of the pregnant and postpartum body (Sha and Kirkman 2009, Bedor & Tajima 2012, Gow et al. 2012) and by racializing and exoticizing celebrity pregnancy and motherhood (Tsaliki 2019).

This paper presents an ongoing study about the representation of celebrity pregnancy on online news portals in Croatia, with a specific focus on headlines. Since readers often get their first and often only impressions from headlines, analysing how they construct and normalize discourses about celebrity pregnancies is particularly called for.

Nowadays most media outlets rely heavily on their digital news portals since readers normally consume news online, given the rise of digital technology and internet. While earlier studies of headlines focused on their structure and style, more recent ones have noted that headlines play a central role in capturing audiences' attention by inducing anticipation and curiosity so the readers would click or tap and read on (Blom and Hansen 2015). Furthermore, headlines often rely on sensationalizing as an attention-grabbing technique through the use of various discursive strategies, including semantic macrostructures and narrative formulas (Molek-Kozakowska 2013).

The data for this study was collected from popular Croatian online news portals over a period of 6 months and qualitatively analysed following the tenets of small stories and positioning analysis (Giakoglou and Georgakopoulou 2021) and critical discourse studies (Wodak and Meyer 2016).

Preliminary results suggest that headlines about celebrity pregnancies tend to have a breaking-news quality and narrative-like (small story) structure with a resolution omitted, which creates the 'click-baiting' effect. They usually have some forward-referencing discourse marker that strategically works as a 'teaser' that can be filled only by reading the full article. Pregnant celebrities are repeatedly constructed through the lens of their age or appearance, e.g. hiding or revealing their baby-bumps, and are positioned as experiencers of a 'blissful state', or through their family roles as mothers and spouses. The wide availability of the medium suggests that these discursive strategies may lead to normalizing problematic discourses about pregnancy.

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