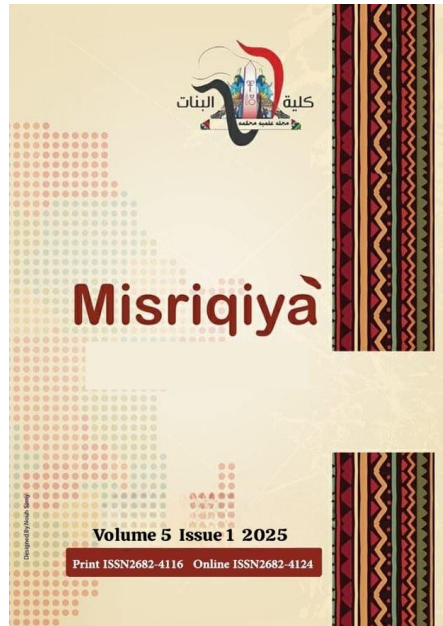




Afrocentrism in the Public Eye: An Appraisal-Corpus Based Analysis on Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra" Documentary

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Abstract

Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra", released in May 2023, is a documentary that has raised controversy as it represents Queen Cleopatra, who has Greek heritage, as black African, which supports the Afrocentric claims about the "Black" identity of ancient Egypt. Afrocentrism is a movement that not only believes in the rejection of the white race in Africa, it also sponsors claims that modern Egyptians have nothing to do with the ancient Egyptian civilization history. Moreover, they assert that light-skinned Egyptians are descendants of Arab and European intruders. Although filmmakers try to enforce the ideology of Afrocentrism by choosing an actress with African dark-skinned features, and by classifying it as a documentary, not a soap drama, it was poorly received by the mass audience and considered "rotten" as the series has an audience score of just 2%. The rationale of analyzing these comments stems from the importance of magnifying the power of popular sentiment, reflected in the audiences' comments; it serves as a crucial bridge between the filmmakers' intentions and the actual impact of the film on its target audience. Accordingly, this paper digs deeper in analyzing the vast majority of comments posted on the Rotten Tomatoes website from May to November 2023 quantitatively using KH Coder 3 program and qualitatively using Martin and White's Appraisal framework (2005). The results show that most of the audiences are aware of the inconsistencies between film portrayals and historical reality to the extent that Netflix restricted comments on the trailer and faced calls for boycotts.

Keywords: cultural identity, media discourse, history

1.1 Introduction

Social media platforms have revolutionized how people connect, share information, and express themselves; they have profoundly changed how various audiences communicate, consume information, and express themselves. They have become both creators and consumers of content, sharing their thoughts, experiences, and expertise. In fact, analyzing audience comments is essential for understanding and improving communication strategies; thus, measuring the success of any media outlet. This is a dynamic and interactive process which provides instant access to news and events, allowing users to be active participants in the information flow. Martin et al., 2023 state that “in the ever-evolving digital age, social media has played a pivotal role by providing a vast global platform for individuals to freely express their views and opinions” (p. 35)."

Overview of Afrocentrism

What is Afrocentrism, and where did it come from?" These questions have been perpetually raised as Afrocentrism has been a topic of debate for a while, and it frequently surfaces in arguments. Bay (2000) states that

Afrocentrism is a set of ideas that are rarely associated with any specific historical or cultural context." She adds that "many commentators, most notably Wilson Jeremiah Moses, have suggested that, since Afrocentric historical themes such as the belief that ancient Egypt was a Black civilization have been around since the eighteenth century, we ought to see Afrocentrism as a time-honored African-American tradition (p. 502).

This suggests that Afrocentrism has a long and esteemed history within African-American culture. In fact, it is a cultural and political movement whose primarily African-American members identify themselves and all other Black people as syncretic Africans and believe their worldview should positively reflect traditional African values. According to Asante (1991), "Afrocentrism is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person.... It centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world.

This means that we examine every aspect of the dislocation of African people: culture, economics, psychology, health, and religion.... As an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as key

players rather than victims. This theory becomes, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project" (p. 172)

In the late 1960s, Black activists advocated for an educational approach that focused on African experiences and perspectives, leading to the development of Black and African American studies. According to Early (2023), the terms Afrocentrism, Africology, and Afrocentricity were coined in the 1980s by the prominent African-American scholar and activist Molefi Asante; Cheikh Anta Diop's work is also considered foundational to Afrocentricity (Saad, 2024). Therefore, the specific ideas and goals of Afrocentrism weren't fully established until the publication of Molefi Asante's book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1980). This book is considered the foundation of Afrocentric thought. In it, Asante, a scholar who came to Black Studies from the Black Power movement, urged Black Americans to develop a worldview centered on African values and history following its initial emergence (Bay, 2000). According to Bay (2000), "Asante's notion of Afrocentrism is first and foremost a product of the Black Power culture of the 1970s... it draws on the Black cultural nationalist ideology that permeated the Black Arts Movement and the Organization US wing of the Black Power Movement" (p. 503).

Asante (1990, cited in Winters, 1994) states that the "Afrocentrist seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideas and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data" (p. 6). In a related vein, Bay (2000) states, "One problem with reading Afrocentrism backward is that the concept has not been around for a very long time. The word 'Afro-centric' was coined by Du Bois in the early 1960s to describe the subject matter of his projected *Encyclopedia Africana*, which was to center around Africa" (p. 502).

Consequently, it is clear that Afrocentrism is not monolithic; there are different approaches within the movement, with some researchers focusing more on cultural recovery and others on historical research. Afrocentrism isn't a single, unified idea. Within the movement, scholars take various paths, whether it's recovering cultural traditions or re-examining history. Bay (2000) explains that Afrocentric scholars from various disciplines (sociology, biology, healthcare) use their fields to develop Afrocentric theories. For instance, some Afrocentric

psychologists create therapy models based on the idea of a white racial inferiority complex. Afrocentric biologists study the influence of melanin on culture, and Afrocentric historians challenge traditional views of African history. Bay also stresses that “history plays no small role in Afrocentrism. From the outset, Afrocentric thinkers have claimed ancient Egypt as an African civilization” (p. 505-506)."

In a 2020 interview with Smith, Asante defined Afrocentrism as a paradigm that prioritizes African agency and centers African people within their own historical narratives, shifting them from the margins to the center of African discourse. This framework has fostered diverse Afrocentric theories across culture, spirituality, language, history, and psychology, contributing to a broad-based critical analysis (Smith, 2020, p. 212-213). Similarly, Mazama (2001) emphasizes that “the Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people. Its aim is to give us our African, victorious consciousness back. In the process, it also means viewing the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one” (p. 388).

Consequently, Afrocentrism directly challenges the traditional Eurocentric view of history, which often minimizes or ignores Africa's contributions to civilization. For people of African descent, Afrocentrism offers a means to contest the dominance of European perspectives and serves as a powerful instrument for combating racism and fostering Black pride globally. Asante (1991) articulates this as Africa's intellectual and psychological self-assertion, a liberation from Western mental domination, analogous to breaking free from other forms of subjugation (p. 172). Bay (2000) echoes this sentiment, noting that “Nineteenth-century Black thinkers responded to scientific racism's assault on their race by crafting their own version of ethnology” (p. 507).

In sum, Afrocentrism represents a multifaceted intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to retrieve and center African standpoints, challenging dominant Eurocentric narratives and promoting a sense of action and pride among people of African descent.

Afrocentrism vs. Egyptology

The core of the debate surrounding Afrocentrism lies in its approach to history, particularly Egyptian history, which is the focus of this study. Kelly (1992) notes, “Kemet is the term Afrocentrists prefer for Egypt, though Egyptologists insist that

Kemet, 'the Black Land,' refers to the color of the alluvial soil in Egypt, not to the skin color of the inhabitants... but a fundamental dogma of Afrocentrism is that the ancient Egyptians were Black” (p. 155). Bay (2000) cites examples, including Afrocentrist Runoko Rashidi, who posits that ancient Egypt (KMT) was the epicenter of African civilization and that examining its achievements illuminates the greatness of African people. Bay also highlights that prominent abolitionists David Walker and Frederick Douglass emphasized the connection between African Americans and their ancient heritage, particularly in Egypt. Walker lamented the lack of awareness among African Americans of their shared ancestry with Egyptians, noting that some held negative views of Egyptians, associating them with American slavery. In contrast, Frederick Douglass countered racist ideologies by underscoring the African origins of Egypt, Abyssinia, and Nubia. In fact, this focus on Egypt as a central point of African history exemplifies the Afrocentric project of reinterpreting history through an African-centered angle, directly challenging prevailing Eurocentric interpretations.

Building upon the assertion of ancient Egypt's centrality to African heritage, as discussed previously, the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) also claimed that "ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization" (p. xiv). However, Diop's argument extends further, asserting that the ancient Egyptians were Black Africans, similar to modern Black populations. According to Diop, the "Anu" were the original Black inhabitants of Egypt and the architects of Egyptian civilization, credited with developing agriculture, irrigation, dams, advanced knowledge, arts, writing, and the calendar, moreover, Diop even attributed the writing of ancient Egyptian texts like the Book of the Dead and pyramid texts to the Anu. This emphasis on linking African culture to a sophisticated civilization like Egypt appears to be a direct response to Eurocentrism, aiming to provide a source of pride and identity for people of African descent. As Aidi (2022) demonstrates, some contemporary expressions of Afrocentrism have even focused on DNA analysis, advocating for DNA testing of mummies to definitively prove the Black African origins of the ancient Egyptians.

As for the current study and based on the Afrocentric focus on ancient Egypt and the ongoing debate surrounding the ethnicity of its rulers, as previously discussed, Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra," released in May 2023, exploded significant controversy, particularly in Egypt. This production represents another attempt by the Afrocentric movement to publicize its ideology through the soft power of mass media

to promote its historical interpretations, which directly reflects Diop's earlier assertions and sparks similar debates about the accuracy and cultural implications of these claims. The documentary focuses on the life and reign of Cleopatra VII, the last pharaoh of Ancient Egypt, with biracial British actress Adele James portraying the queen and Jada Pinkett Smith serving as a producer. While Cleopatra belonged to the Ptolemaic dynasty, a lineage of Greek origin, the film's portrayal of her as a Black woman directly challenged the traditional understanding of her ethnicity. This casting decision was interpreted by some as reinforcing the Afrocentric belief that ancient Egyptians were Black Africans. However, this interpretation remains disputed among scholars, and Egyptians themselves powerfully objected to what they perceived as a pragmatic portrayal of their historical figures.

For instance, Saad (2024) states, "What many Pan-Africanist Egyptians like me are opposing is not the association of ancient Egypt with Blackness, but the Afrocentrist movement's insistence that ancient Egypt was originally and exclusively a Black civilization." (p. 203). Furthermore, Egypt's antiquities ministry stated that Cleopatra had "white skin and Hellenistic features". Mostafa Waziri, the secretary general of the Supreme Council of Archaeology, elaborated that the depiction of Cleopatra as black is a "falsification of Egyptian history and a blatant historical misconception", especially as the film is classified as a documentary. Waziri added that the view that Cleopatra was not black is not motivated by racism and discrimination. The main aim is to save and protect the historical record of the queen as a weighty symbol in ancient Egyptian history. (Middle East Eye, May, 2023). They assert that Cleopatra had Hellenistic features and white skin, emphasizing that their opposition is based on historical accuracy, not racism, and aims to protect the integrity of Egyptian history.

1.2 Objective of the Study

This study aims at measuring the film's effectiveness on different audience segments by analyzing, thoroughly and comprehensively, most of the comments written on the Rotten Tomatoes website from May 10th, 2023, to November 6th, 2023. The comments are critical in revealing the public's perspective concerning Afrocentric interpretation of ancient Egyptian identity which is the core of this study. Moreover, this website is considered a valuable resource for gathering reviews from a wide range of critics and viewers around the world. Accordingly, a mixed-methods approach is employed, utilizing KH Coder 3 for quantitative pattern identification

and Martin and White's Appraisal framework (2005) for a nuanced qualitative exploration of audience sentiment.

1.3 Study Questions

The research aims at answering the following question;

- 1- How do viewers construct appraisals of the film and its Afrocentric claims through language, focusing on the expression of judgment, affect, and engagement?
- 2- How do these choices reproduce and form cultural perceptions of the historical and cultural representations in the movie?
- 3-How far the controversy around this film lead to more diverse and comprehensive understanding of the origin of this debate?

1.4 Collecting & Refining Data

The compiled corpus consists primarily of most of the comments posted on the Rotten Tomatoes website during the period from May 10th, 2023, to November 6th, 2023. The corpus, as a whole, consists of 28,761 tokens. The researcher named the corpus 'Rotten Tomatoes Comments,' referred to hereafter as RTC, to be used in the analysis. The corpus in this study has gone through two stages. The first stage involved collecting and copying the comments from the website. The second stage involved refining the data by removing commenter names and publication dates, preparing it for use with the software program, namely KH Coder. The final step is to perform frequency analysis, generating lists of the most frequent words and visualizing these results through charts to identify prominent themes.

It is worth mentioning that in order to uphold the principles of objectivity and transparency, all comments, in the previous mentioned period, were included in the analysis; no selection was made. The reason behind choosing "Rotten Tomatoes" as a source stems from the systematic collection and analysis of reviews from a varied range of expert critics and ordinary audience, then they are collected in the widely recognized "Tomatometer" score. It is the metric that represents the percentage of positive assessments. Finally, it provides a fast and accessible scale of overall critical sentiment, effectively categorizing productions as either "Fresh" (generally favorable) or "Rotten" (mainly negative).

1.5 Koichi Higuchi's Coder: KH Coder

According to Higuchi (2016), KH Coder is a valuable tool for textual data analysis. KH Coder offers a more comprehensive approach than other software programs as Antconc. It combines qualitative and quantitative methods with a strong emphasis on text mining and statistical analysis. One of the most important features is providing advanced visualization tools and cross-language capabilities, making it suitable for multifaceted research projects that require in-depth thematic analysis and pattern discovery.

KH Coder's main benefit lies in its capability to bridge the gap between qualitative and quantitative text analysis, offering a powerful group of tools for researchers that allow them to deal with complex textual data. Besides, it provides advanced text analysis available to a wider audience. It saves time by performing tasks like content analysis, allowing researchers to focus on interpretation. Finally, being open-source, there are available tutorials, which can help users get started.

2. Literature Review of Previous Studies

This study adopts appraisal theory that is essential in understanding emotions. It hypothesizes that a person's subjective evaluation or "appraisal" of a situation is the primary driver of their emotional response. This perception deviates from earlier theories that viewed emotions as straight and automatic reactions to stimuli. In fact, the theory suggests, that the method an individual use in order to understand any situation involves many factors like personal goals, ethical standards, and personal and universal views which play an important role in forming any experience. So, the central principle of appraisal theory is the cognitive processes, which refer to how an individual assesses events and produces emotions. This idea emphasizes that sentiments are not simply submissive reactions but an active mental appraisal, which is the core of this study. It is worth mentioning that a same situation can arouse diverse emotional responses to different individuals based on their unique appraisals. In fact, this is the core of this study that investigates how diverse segments of audiences judge the movie, and those "judgments" create attitudes. Thus, emotions are viewed as the product of active cognitive process that shape emotional products.

In fact, the theory is drawn from the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics SFL which explores how language expresses attitudes and relationships. Afterwards, J.R. Martin's starts his studies and research in the 1990s. He focuses on

how language can be used to evaluate, express emotions, and participate with others. His work becomes a mile stone in influencing and developing appraisal theory. The collaborative work between Martin and White in the late 1990s and early 2000s has resulted in the final formation of the theory as they published, *The Language of Evaluation* (2005), which digs deeper in analyzing three main components in the theory. They divide it into “attitude”, “engagement”, and “graduation” which are explained in detail in the coming section.

In fact, this outline has become a basis for linguistic analysis, enabling researchers to investigate evaluative language across diverse genres, such as academic writing (Hyland, 2005; Hood, 2006), news reports (White, 2003; Martin & White, 2000), and political discourse (O'Donnell, 2008). Moreover, Appraisal theory's influence extends beyond these areas, as it has been integrated with other linguistic frameworks like critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). In fact, Appraisal theory is a dynamic and evolving field as it expands through research into cultural differences in emotional expression, computer-aided analysis, and its application in areas like education, healthcare, and any situation that triggers emotion.

Many studies have been conducted using Appraisal Theory. Muhammed Taghian (2020) employed the Appraisal model to investigate Trump's ideology in selected political speeches and TV interviews, using Martin and White's Appraisal model (2005). He investigated the linguistic aspects employed in those speeches to comprehend Trump's attitudinal stances and political dogma towards Arabs.

Jeong Han and Hye Gyeong (2024) conducted a detailed linguistic analysis of the television series "What is Love?" employing Appraisal Theory and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to identify the "signature" linguistic patterns of 11 key characters within a complete episode script. The study quantified the emotional and evaluative content of characters' dialogue by analyzing the frequency and types of words and grammar used to express feelings, judgments, aesthetic evaluations, and intensity.

Samir Hassanvandi and Mohammad taghi (2014) applied Appraisal Theory to analyze the performance of professional interpreters, specifically within the setting of the United Nations General Assembly. The study sought to pinpoint potential difficulties for interpreters by comparing how evaluative language was expressed in the source (Persian) speech and its target (English) translation.

The researcher Badar Fahad, in his paper “Students' Perceptions about Course Evaluation: A Discourse Analysis from the Perspective of the Appraisal System” (2023), explores how university students use language to evaluate a course in which they are enrolled. He focuses on the specific linguistic choices they make. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes student responses to evaluative questions, utilizing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Appraisal Theory as its theoretical framework. He studied the responses of 24 students to show their feelings and opinions about a course, highlighting the key linguistic patterns that emerge in their appraisals.

Another study carried out by Krizan 2016 who investigates how attitudes are conveyed in 200 modern print advertisements targeted at women in British magazines. Using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, the research analyzes how these ads use language to express emotions (affect), evaluations (judgment), and aesthetic assessments (appreciation). The investigation focuses on both directly stated and implied attitudes, exploring how these linguistic choices shape the reader's perception and social understanding.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Qualitative Analysis: Appraisal Framework

The appraisal framework, founded by Martin, White, and their colleagues in the late 20th century (Iedema et al., 1993; Martin & White, 2005), offers a methodology for dissecting the nuances of evaluative meaning in text. It examines two aspects of languages, firstly, how language bears positive or negative judgments. Secondly, how language intensifies or softens the force of these opinions, and allows speakers/writers to engage in a dialogue with both past and potential interlocutors. In fact, these tools for constructing meaning are collectively termed the "language of evaluation" because they reveal the speaker's/writer's subjective investment in the text.

According to Martin and White (2005)

The framework's orientation is towards meanings in context and towards rhetorical effects, rather than towards grammatical forms. As a consequence, it brings together a lexically and grammatically diverse selection of locutions on the basis that they all operate to locate the writer/speaker with respect to the value positions being referenced in the text and with respect to, in

Bakhtin's terms, the backdrop of alternative opinions, points of view and value judgments against which all texts operate. (p. 94)

In the same realm, Otieza (20217) explains that the appraisal framework "aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical and descriptive systematization of the linguistic resources that can be used to construe the value of social experience, and thereby to achieve a richer understanding of the patterns of interpersonal meaning beyond the manifestation of only emotionality across discourse". She adds that "this model maintains that intersubjectivity is built by writers and readers who have certain social roles, and who act in determinate social and cultural realms that shape and institutionalize the way in which emotions and opinions are codified through language" (p. 458).

Consequently, the framework builds on the idea that language serves three main purposes; **representing the world:** Language helps us describe experiences and ideas; **building relationships as** Language allows us to connect with others by shaping our social roles and interactions, **creating texts;** Language helps us organize ideas into clear and coherent messages. According to (Martin and Rose, 2003) appraisal is a discourse analytic frame that allows the analysis of these linguistically manifested stances by uncovering and evaluating prosodic meaning across whole texts.

The framework adheres to the systemic functional linguistic theory developed by Halliday (1994, 2004, 2014). This theory posits that meaning-making can be broadly categorized into three metafunctions: (1) the "ideational" metafunction, where language constructs our experience of the world; (2) the "interpersonal" metafunction, where speakers/writers enact social roles and relationships; and (3) the "textual" metafunction, where these meanings are organized into a coherent text suitable for the communicative context. The evaluative meanings described by the appraisal framework contribute to the interpersonal metafunction. They reveal speakers'/writers' feelings, preferences, and opinions with varying degrees of intensity and directness. They also allow the construction of propositions as more or less debatable or verifiable, ultimately aligning or disaligning with the value positions present in the communicative context.

The appraisal framework (Martin and White, 2005) is a sophisticated one that operates through three interconnected semantic systems: engagement, attitude and graduation. These systems offer a structured way to understand the "semantic

resources" that shape how we express emotions, judgments, and valuations in language. Significantly, the framework goes beyond simply identifying these evaluations. It also examines how language strengthens and interacts with these evaluations, creating a nuanced overall evaluative tone within a text. This is constructed through various linguistic choices at the word and grammar level, highlighting the complicated relationship between language and the expression of values. The following sections elaborate each of these three core semantic systems within the appraisal framework.

2.1.1.2 Appraisal Attitude system

Within the framework of Appraisal, the concept of attitude refers to the way feelings are built as a structure of meaning. Martin and White (2005) propose that this system is comprised of three interrelated domains; **Affect** is the main area that deals with the expression of positive and negative emotions, covering a major human experience, it expresses emotions such (happy/sad, excited/bored). **Judgment** is the second domain, it is based on affect, representing the institutionalization; normalizing or regulating some concepts, norms, beliefs or emotions into proposals for guiding behavior. It reflects social norms and values, influencing how actions are perceived as positive or negative. As for the third domain; it is **appreciation**. Actually, emotions are converted into propositions for running taste. It reveals cultural values and aesthetics, shaping how we perceive things as valuable or worthless within a specific domain. Martin explains this idea showing that is not only that appraisal allows the researcher to examine 'how speakers can exploit different ranges of appraisal to construct particular personae for themselves', but also that: the expression of attitude is not, as is often claimed, simply a personal matter – the speaker "commenting" on the world – but a truly interpersonal matter, in that the basic reason for advancing an opinion is to elicit a response of solidarity from the addressee. (Martin 2000, p.143)

Consequently, it is essential to note that "affect" comes first as a foundational layer. More complex ideas like "judgment" and "appreciation" build on top of this foundation. These more advanced concepts help us fit into certain social groups. They act as ways of socializing individuals into specific communities. As for Judgment, it acts like a kind of social pressure, using emotions to show what's considered good or bad behavior. Appreciation, on the other hand, shapes our tastes, influencing what we value based on what's considered beautiful or culturally

important. Oteiza (2017) elaborates that “The systems of affect, judgment and appreciation not only follow the distinction between positive and negative polarity, but also can be classified as direct or implied appraisals. This latter distinction is treated in the appraisal model as inscribed and evoked appraisal (tokens). (p.462). As a result, it is worth mentioning that the appraisal model differentiates between two types of evaluation: explicit and implicit. Explicit evaluation, called "inscribed appraisal," uses specific words and their intensity to directly express an opinion. Implicit evaluation, known as "evoked appraisal," relies on references and suggestions to create an emotional response in the reader without directly stating it.

2.1.1.3 Appraisal Engagement System

This domain focuses on how people influence each other's viewpoints in any discourse. Moreover, it helps the audience understand where opinions come from in a text. It can tell us if the author/ presenter introduces his ideas as the only truth (monoglossic) or allows for other perspectives and viewpoints (heteroglossic). This classification aims to pinpoint the specific dialogic arranging associated with each meaning. Moreover, it seeks to clarify the impact of choosing one resource over another. It discovers the impact of specific linguistic choices over other ones on a specific discourse. This depends on how the author acknowledges or ignores opposing viewpoints. (Martin & White 2005)

They also elaborate that engagement mechanisms create a backdrop of former utterances, divergent viewpoints, and predictable responses. In fact, this system evaluates how open a text is to other perspectives and how powerfully the author believes in their own evaluation. Finally, the author stresses that when analyzing evaluations in a text, it's essential to study the analyst's own ideology as different viewpoint can be positively or negatively affected by our background and position.

2.1.1.4 Appraisal Graduation System

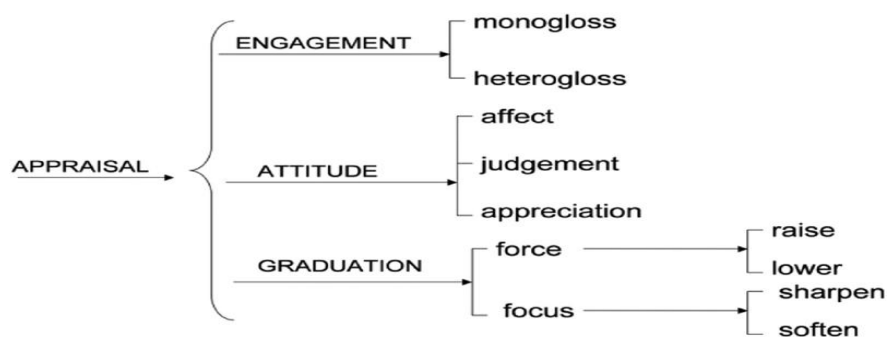
This subsystem, known as graduation, offers a potent tool for shaping the value and intensity for any discourse or communication. Martin & White elaborate that “The semantics of graduation, therefore, is central to the appraisal system. It might be said that attitude and engagement are domains of graduation which differ according to the nature of the meanings being scaled” (2005, p. 136). They add that “graduation operates across two axes of scalability – that of grading according to

intensity or amount, and that of grading according to prototypicality and the preciseness by which category boundaries are drawn” (p. 137).

In fact, it affects how strongly the ideas are expressed as it allows the speaker/writer to modulate the **force** and **focus** of our messages. Oteiza (2017, p.463) explains that “force” deals with intensifying or diminishing the overall meaning. This is about how intense or weak the meaning is received. Strong words can be used to intensify the message as ("absolutely must") or weaker ones to tone down the meaning ("should be taken into account").

“Focus”, on the other hand, refines the boundaries of our meaning. It's like adjusting the zoom lens on a camera. Words like "sort of" or "kind of" blur the limits, creating a vague picture. Conversely, the use of certain words such as "precisely" or "exactly" sharpens the focus, making the meaning crystal clear. For instance, saying "a real doctor" emphasizes the core category of a medical professional, while "a kind of" generates a more marginal, uncertain image.

The theory is summarized in this diagram by Oteiza (2017, p.464)



Appraisal framework: Basic semantic systems

To sum up, Cognitive Appraisal Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationship between situations, explanations, and emotions. The theory sheds light on the role of individuals in shaping his/her ideological stance through emotional responses, thus it explains why people could react differently to the same situation. This has significant implications and effects on various fields and topics including the main interest in this paper “Afrocentrism” as it seeks to illuminate the complex relation between facts and feeling which is a multifaceted process influenced by individual interpretations and ideological backgrounds. The theory also acknowledges that people can appraise the same situation differently, leading to diverse emotional reactions.

3. Comments' Analysis

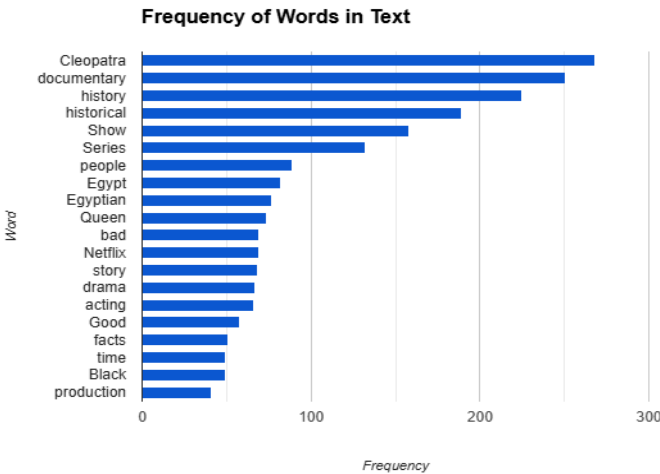
The analysis aims to identify the core thematic areas that reviewers emphasized when expressing their sentiments toward the film. To achieve this, a focused lexical approach was employed, listing nouns and adjectives as key indicators of meaning. The focus on sentiment is related to the "Affect" system, as adjectives are key lexical indicators of emotional appraisals, while thematic areas topics that include broader topics, are related to "Judgment" and "Appreciation".

Verbs and function words (demonstratives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions) were analytically excluded from the macro-level analysis to isolate the practical lexical choices that shape reviewers' overall evaluations. Using KH Coder, the most frequently occurring nouns and adjectives within the reviewer texts were then identified, providing a quantitative basis for understanding the dominant topics and sentiments. The table below shows the top twenty frequent words within the corpus of this study;

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	268	Cleopatra
2	251	Documentary
3	225	History
4	189	Historical
5	158	Show
6	132	Series
7	89	People
8	82	Egypt
9	77	Egyptian
10	74	Queen
11	69	Bad
12	69	Netflix
13	68	Story
14	67	Drama
15	66	Acting
16	58	Good
17	51	Facts
18	49	Time

19	49	Black
20	41	Production

Top Frequent Words in Audiences' comments



The provided table offers and pin points the key terms and their relative prominence associated with Queen Cleopatra documentary discussion which is analyzed in this section. The clear presence of terms like "Documentary," "History," and "Historical" indicates that much of the discussion revolves around factual or historically-based portrayals of her life. Besides, the appearance of "Show" and "Series," coupled with "Netflix," shows that a noteworthy part of their discussion stems from reactions to a visual production available on that platform. "Acting" is also a point of discussion. Another core subject is emphasized by "People," "Egypt," "Egyptian," and "Queen," highlighting the key figures and setting. Finally, the relatively high frequency of "Black" suggests controversy surrounding the casting or depiction of Cleopatra's ethnicity.

3.1 Documentary Historical Inaccuracy

By examining the top twenty frequent words revealed by the program, the researcher finds that one of the most frequent lexical items that revealed a dominant negative appraisal is the phrase 'historical inaccuracies.' By exploring the terms within their textual context, a strong pervasiveness of negative evaluative language is shown. For example, the word 'documentary,' which appears 251 times, is linked to terms like 'inaccurate,' 'misleading,' 'insightful' and 'awful.' Reviewers express negative affect to convey their dissatisfaction and disappointment.

Reviewers used the word 'harshly' to make their criticism of the film stronger, showing a high level of negative judgment. When discussing the 'documentary' aspect, they frequently pointed out that the film lacks factual and realistic accuracy and presents deceptive information. This indicates a clear difference between what the filmmakers intended and what the audience perceived. This widespread negative feedback suggests the film did not meet audience expectations for historical accuracy and effective filmmaking. The coming examples clarify this idea;

- “Calling this a documentary is a bad joke”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- “Depicting Cleopatra as a sub-Saharan African in a documentary is historically inaccurate” (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).
- “It is exactly what the producer and Director said it was, A political act, not a documentary.” (RTC, Concordance hit, 3)
- “This show claims to be a "documentary" but the only thing historically accurate about this series is it is set in Egypt”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 8)
- “Really boring, and a completely fantasy show not a documentary as Netflix want to sell”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 10)
- “Terrible - It says it’s a Documentary it looks like a cheap soap opera”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 11).

This table shows the top collocates to the noun “documentary” and its frequency

Collocate	Main word	Frequency
Awful	Documentary	15
Inaccurate	Documentary	15
Insightful	Documentary	15
Not	Documentary	15

Table 2 the top collocates to the word “documentary” according to the KH coder software

By digging deeper in the comments, it becomes clear that the central mode of evaluation is ‘judgment’. The viewers judge the production's accuracy and honesty. In doing so, they employ terms like "bad joke" and "historically inaccurate". Terms of negative affect, such as "really boring" and "terrible," emphasize their emotional dissatisfaction, while negative appreciation is evident in evaluations of the production's quality and value, as shown in “cheap soap opera”.

Phrases such as 'grossly inaccurate,' 'deliberately misleading,' and 'a complete fabrication' are repeated. This focuses on the strong expression of 'judgment', where reviewers evaluate the film's credibility and ethical standards. Commentators' pervasive sentiment reflects their belief that the film has purposely misrepresented historical events, demonstrating a strong negative 'judgment' on the film's creators' intentions and actions. This negative appraisal is evident in the repeated use of emotionally highly charged language. This was shown in many examples as in;

- "A falsification of Egyptian history and a blatant historical fallacy" (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- "A distorted view of history pushing a post modern narrative (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).
- "Hopelessly inaccurate and a complete failure to understand Egyptian culture and history" (RTC, Concordance hit, 4).

Some audiences also used the words "Colonize" to show how the political agenda of Afrocentric is similar to colonization in imposing foreign cultural and political ideology to an authentic deeply rooted one. Actually, this could be considered a kind of exaggeration by some groups, however, within the framework of appraisal theory, this accusation of 'colonization' covers several key aspects. It expresses a strong negative judgment of the filmmakers' ideological agenda. The term 'colonize' infers a planned cultural invasion. It can be understood as a conscious attempt to dominate another culture. Moreover, the word induces strong negative emotions, such as anger and abuse. Furthermore, by using the term 'colonize,' reviewers actively engage in defending the history as they reject the film's interpretation of the Egyptian culture and assert their own reliable viewpoint. In fact, this use of the 'colonize' as a metaphor highlights the deep sensitivity of historical and cultural depiction. It shows the important effect of language which can summarize a ethical stance against the fabrication of history. This is clear in these examples;

- "This show is an American colonization of Egyptian history. (RTC, Concordance hit, 7)
- Blackwashing, colonizing the Egyptian history. Rewriting history removing the Egyptians from their own heritage. (RTC, Concordance hit, 9)

- For a real person from history whose origins are Macedonian (Ptolemaic Dynasty) and considered herself as a real Egyptian I don't understand why an American view was needed. (RTC, Concordance hit, 11).

3.2 Casting Choices

Another main theme in reviewers' comments is the casting choices. Mainly choosing a black actress to act the main role of Cleopatra has been a chief point of debate. Most of the audiences have found it historically wrong and disrespectful to Egyptian culture and heritage. This casting decision has become a focal point for negative appraisal. Many reviewers powerfully objected to the depiction of Cleopatra as a black woman, viewing it as "blackwashing" and an alteration of history.

The term "blackwashing", which is a emotionally -loaded term, is used by those who oppose this reinterpretation of history to describe their negative judgement. They argue that it is an attempt to impose a modern political agenda onto the past. In fact, the producers exploit the allure magic of cinema to reshape perceptions by attempting to reimagine Cleopatra as a black African queen, regardless of the traditional Western and Egyptian observations of her as a Greek-Egyptian ruler. This is clear in many examples as in:

- "Its a **black** woman completely "Blackwashing" Egyptian culture and actual, physical history. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- One of the most stupid things ever, a **black** cleopatra just because your grandma told you, the most stupid argument ever (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).

The use of the word "black" in the context of the Cleopatra casting controversy has many ideological sensitive implications within appraisal theory, particularly concerning 'judgment, affect, and engagement'. The use of "black" in this context is not only for describing a skin color. It evokes strong emotional responses as it is a connotationally-loaded term that functions as a powerful tool for expressing negative judgment, it is a very powerful word, that has been used to exceed the negative judgement of the film makers. it has negative evaluations, going beyond a simple comment of skin color. Although the word "black" focuses on the connection to African culture and heritage, in these examples, it has been used in a racist offensive way.

- Dear Americans, Africa is not a country. It's a content with 54 countries each with it's own history. And not all Africans are black. We come in all skin shades

and we are all proud of our skin colour and civilization. (RTC, Concordance hit, 8).

In this comment, the reviewer addresses American audience. He /she employs appraisal theory to face predominant misconceptions about Africa. Through judgment, he/she highlights the lack of understanding and knowledge of film maker showing that Africa is not a single country but a diverse geography and cultures. The comment demonstrates affect through a tone of anger and frustration, in addition to a strong announcement of pride in African diversity. As for engagement, the speaker vigorously counters the delusion, declaring factual information and announcing their viewpoint as the factual one. The speaker uses graduation to intensify the message of diversity, by highlighting the number of countries in Africa, accusing the Americans of being ignorant and set a stereotyping image of Africa.

3.3 Production and Artistic Value

One of the main themes that has been a center of negative comments is the quality of production and the artistic values of the show. There has been negative appreciation as some reviewers expressed disapproval of the series' artistic value, such as its poor production quality, the dialogue and the costumes. Moreover, some viewers were confused about the category of the show and its genre; whether it is a docudrama or a drama or a documentary. For them, it is “lack of credibility” They accused Netflix of misleading the audience, which is disrespectful to history. These ideas can be shown in many examples as in

- This entire production is offensively racist, but not in the way people might initially think. It is no doubt offensive to indigenous Egyptians but it, and the entire premise of its creation, is offensive to Black people. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- With weak character development, inconsistent pacing, historical inaccuracies, and lackluster production values, it left me feeling unsatisfied as a viewer. (RTC, Concordance hit, 4).
- The cinematography, an integral element of any epic production, failed to rise above the ordinary. (RTC, Concordance hit, 5).
- It is a completely unoriginal, patchy, low-quality production (RTC, Concordance hit, 8).
- The production, writing, and acting is all very badly done. (RTC, Concordance hit, 9).

- Beside historical errors, the actors and acting was bad, production wasn't good and the dialog was really on a low level.(RTC, Concordance hit, 10).

The continuous use of negative affect, judgment, and appreciation across these comments creates a powerful and unified evaluation. The comments stress not only the manufacture's technical and artistic deficiencies but also its ethical and social faults. As for negative affect, the comments are loaded with expression such as "offensively racist," "unsatisfied," "very badly done," and "really on a low level" highlights the reviewers' negative emotional responses. The use of highly charges adjective as in "unoriginal", "patchy" and "low quality" reflects the audiences' judgement towards the movie. For them it is not only a violation of ethics but also an abuse of social esteem.

In fact, the series and its producers are accused of prioritizing dramatic storytelling over historical accuracy and prestigious and rich production. Actually, it is worth mentioning that the comments are reinforced by an online petition signed by 40,000 people, which accused the production of altering and mispresenting history.

3.4 Netflix

Finally, the last point of criticism is directed toward Netflix. The word "Netflix" is used 69 times by the viewers. This has many ideological manifestations. Netflix, as a global platform, should reach a massive audience and potentially influence consumer behavior; undoubtedly, it is driven by some political agendas. There is disappointment in how a potentially fascinating subject was poorly handled by Netflix. In fact, the frequency of these remarks has an important influence on Netflix's brand image. Negative sentiment associated with the platform can affect harmfully public trust and affect viewership.

These claims are reinforced by the viewers' comments as in;

- Netflix is not learning their lessons! (RTC, Concordance hit, 10).
- Netflix what were you thinking? Is this were my \$14.95 a month subscription fee goes? (RTC, Concordance hit, 11).
- I don't understand what Netflix was expecting publishing this "documentary" (RTC, Concordance hit, 12).

- The best thing I can say about this documentary is that other similar ancient history Netflix documentaries also suck. This show is an American colonization of Egyptian history. ((RTC, Concordance hit,13)
- Fictional or not, keep black characters black, white characters white, etc, etc, etc. It's that simple. Netflix, do yourself a favor: get better writers and hire historic fact checkers (RTC, Concordance hit 16).
- Shame on you Netflix for not overseeing the content of your broadcast; highly is misleading for younger viewers or indeed, anyone who is not adept with history. (RTC, Concordance hit 19).

Viewers are making a clear judgment of Netflix as the responsible agent. The repetition of the name indicates a strong negative judgment of Netflix's choices and actions. In fact, it is essential to focus on the importance of the soft power of mass media and more precisely the ability to influence and affect others through coercion rather than power and force. It counts on cultural and political values in order to reshape the comprehensive opinion which is the case of this study. It is a collective engagement against Netflix. The repetition of "Netflix" is not a neutral remark; it's a controlling expression of negative judgment, sentimental response, and engagement.

3.5 Egypt and Egyptian History

On the other hand, there has been a positive appraisal concerning the Egyptian culture, and history. While history and heritage are mentioned in many examples, the producers' absence of esteem for this attractive combination of ancient heritage is obvious. Positive appreciation and attitude are reflected by the audience in the collocates of the word “Egypt” and “Egyptian”. The following table shows the top collocates of these words:

Frequency	Words	Collocate
12	Ancient	Egypt
29	History	Egyptian
9	Culture	Egyptian

Table 3 the top collocates to the word “Egypt and Egyptian” according to the KH coder software

A juxtaposition of negative and positive appraisals is once more evident. This positive sentiment is evident in the strong collocations observed between 'Egypt' and

words such as 'ancient,' 'mysterious,' 'pharaonic,' 'civilization,' and 'treasures.' These collocates not only convey appreciation for Egypt's past but also criticize the production for failing to represent this attractive heritage. The negative judgment criticizes the film's historical accuracy, cultural understanding, and respect for Egyptian heritage. The affective tone is mainly of disappointment, frustration, and outrage. These comments highlight the significance of cultural sensitivity when historical figures are depicted in mass media. This idea is expressed in many examples as in:

- Hopelessly inaccurate and a complete failure to understand Egyptian culture and history. No depth or atmosphere of the time. Just a poor attempt to Americanize Egyptian history by changing it to suit American Culture. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1 and 2).
- The conclusion, after watching, I find no respect for Egyptian history. (RTC, Concordance hit, 10).
- This is not a documentary, it is a fallacy about a real person and it is disrespectful to all Egyptian culture. RTC, Concordance hit, 13).

The previously observed pattern of mixed negative and positive sentiment reemerges. Some audiences use the adjective “good” to express their satisfaction and approval of the movie. For them, the movie expresses a different perspective that must be respected. For them, despite these inaccuracies, they enjoyed the movie for its performing value, dramatic storytelling, and visual show. However, they recognize that the movie is not a firmly a factual representation of history. Regarding judgment, viewers positively evaluate the costumes, narrative simplicity, audio-visual excellence, and informational content, using terms like "pretty good," "good watch," and "pleasant". As for affect, the comments express a sense of approval in example such as "good watch". viewers' readiness to accept the film's advantages is a clear example of engagement. This is clear in many examples as in:

- A pretty good documentary with great costuming. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- I think it explains complex conflicts well and is overall a good watch. (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).
- It was a pleasant watch, good audio and visual quality. (RTC, Concordance hit, 3).
- I found the information interesting, the production good even if the acting was a bit over the top. (RTC, Concordance hit, 4).

- The only good thing are costumes and the work of the camera crew. (RTC, Concordance hit, 5).

It is worth mentioning that the use of the adjective “good” could be seen as more neutral term, especially when compared to another positive adjective like “wonderful” or “amazing”. It is not a strong positive sentiment to rely or depend on.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Years ago, audiences were passive receivers of information, they didn’t play any role in shaping the public opinion. This results from the nature of traditional media, such as printed or radio and television broadcast. Lack of interaction and communication meant that audiences did not have any chance and role to shape the public judgement of various events. They could choose only which media outlet they can listen or read, however, they had limited opportunities to challenge prevailing narratives. Media institutions with its planned ideological agenda controlled the flow of information, so consumers of information have limited opportunities for feedback or interaction. Their voices were marginalized, with inadequate platforms for expression. In a plain contrast to the traditional media, the contemporary digital world and the internet connection with every person worldwide, allow audiences to produce and share information. It empowers individuals to be the creators of events through social media, blogs, and online platforms. They became active participants as they engage in discussions, and actively shape narratives, which is the case of this study.

Public opinion in this study plays a vital role in the study of the Afrocentrism controversy surrounding the movie. They actively engaged in discussion to understand how historical figures and events are represented in the movie. This change is a significant illustration of how Appraisal Theory functions in a modern digital media environment. As for this study, the overall sentiment towards the Cleopatra documentary is devastatingly negative. In the lens of the Appraisal theory, **judgment** is the primary driver of the discourse in these comments. In fact, the mainstream of reviewers expresses robust dissatisfaction regarding its historical precision, casting varieties, and storytelling quality. They accused film maker of “**historical inaccuracy**”, “**falsification**”, and “**cultural colonization**”. Viewers consistently judge the production as a “**bad joke**,” a “**fallacy**,” and a “**falsification**,”.

This judgment includes Netflix, which is criticized as “**mis leading**” for disregarding for authenticity of Egyptian history.

Negative **affect** of the comments is also dominant. It is graded from merely dissatisfaction and disappointment as in “**unsatisfied**,” “**boring**” to outrage and offense “**offensively racist**,” “**terrible**”. This emotive strength is high graded by the use of strong lexical choices like “**blackwashing**,” “**colonizing**,” and “**fictional**.”

Regarding **engagement**, most of the audiences were very active and powerful in refusing the claims of being a “**documentary**” and calling it a “**cheap soap opera**” or “**fantasy show**.” Moreover, they were aware enough to hold **Netflix** the complete responsibility for this flaw. The comments also show great respect and estimation to the Egyptian history and culture; and they express their dissatisfaction when these values are perceived to be violated. “**Egypt**” and “**Egyptian**” are mainly connected in the comments to words with positive connotation as in “**ancient**”, “**history**” and “**culture**”.

However, a small number of comments use the adjective “good” express their satisfaction and approval of the movie which lacks evaluative force in judging. It is a standard level of approval that contrasts sharply with the severity and specificity of negative comments mentioned in the analysis as in “**good documentary**” , “**good watch**” and “**the good production**”.

In answering the research questions, it becomes clear that the Appraisal theory has succeeded in reflecting the public opinion regarding a sensitive topic such as Afrocentrism. The three main elements of the theory were present; judgment, affect and engagement, however, judgement is the main driver and contributor in the comments. Affect and engagement have empowered the viewers’ judgment serving as a powerful tool to surge the control of the judgement.

In fact, this has a practical and direct feedback that reflects and shapes cultural perceptions of the film. Firstly, the negative audience ratings on platforms like Rotten Tomatoes was one major reason of the movie deficiency. In addition, Netflix met noteworthy criticism for its handling of the controversy to the extent that it had to disable comment sections on some of their media related to the production. As for the positive impact of this controversy, it motivated not only scholars but also ordinary people to re-examine Cleopatra's historical background and sparked renewed interest in ancient Egyptian history. The controversy has brought the debate about Afrocentrism and historical representation into the public eye, raising

awareness of these complex problems. It highlights the critical role of mass media in handling history. Although some could see it as freedom of opinion in presenting history, others argue it is misrepresentation of facts. Accordingly, this kind of controversy could open new sources for understanding history away from biases. It can encourage communication with various scholars, academic and professionals to consider different viewpoint of complex historical and cultural issues.

5. Recommendation for Further Research

A comparative corpus analysis of online comments and discussions from different platforms can be conducted to reveal how language is used to shape perceptions of historical truth and cultural identity. Critical discourse analysis, more specifically, Van Dijk (1990), the "us versus them" dichotomy, and the related "ideological square can be applied in the analysis of these comments.

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Appendix 1

[Queen Cleopatra | Rotten Tomatoes](#)

KH Coder Official Website: <http://kncoder.net/en/>