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Health Crises and Media Discourses in Sub-Saharan Africa

Springer

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Africa

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We dedicate this volume to all frontline workers including journalists, especially those who have lost their lives in the line of duty during health crises
**

. . .and to special people:
Jerome Dralega, Jane Laike, David Dralega, Robert Dralega, Prossy Tabu, Amani D. Kjelstrup and Aleni D. Kjelstrup
**

Cyprian Okirigi, Francis Ejobi, Nantongo Teopista, Katalina Nantenza, Scholastica Ikwaligant Okirigi

Foreword

Media and Health Crises in Africa

Africa is usually considered a laggard in many modern activities. Like most societies, however, African countries are just as contradictory as anywhere else. For example, the HIV/AIDS pandemic of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries generated both the best of preventative responses (Uganda) and the worst (South Africa). The South African's state's denialism, its antipathy towards Western pharmaceutical firms and its fear of stigmatization occurred in stark contrast with Uganda's proactive communication strategy. The resulting applied scholarship on public health communication in both countries became the global standard, as did the role that the national media played in enabling education entertainment TV and radio programming and all manner of other interventions.

Governments and NGOs have worked with and continue to collaborate with international partners in devising education entertainment and associated health education strategies. Amongst these partners were Johns Hopkins University, USAID, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and the KAISER Foundation, amongst many others. Research, theory and media partnerships derived from these collaborations were tested in national implementations [see, e.g., Durden E, Govender E (eds) (2012) Investigating communication, health and development. Jacana, Johannesburg. https://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Files/articles/Books/ee%20book.pdf, for some South African examples]. They built an unsurpassed body of knowledge that was influential across the English-speaking sections of the continent.

But the later era of fake news and anti-science that characterized the Covid-19 response from mid-2020 recalled the tragedy of South Africa's earlier official denialism and withholding of public health services that should have addressed the HIV/AIDS pandemic. What was for the decade stemming from the mid-1990s a seeming ideological anti-science aberration on the part of the Thabo Mbeki government became a full-blown discursive international pandemic of Covid-19 denialism by 2020. Such Covid-19 denialism did not find sustained expression in Africa, but

did so extraordinarily in the USA, massaged very effectively by President Donald Trump's electoral base. Like in many places, governments used the pandemic for narrow sectional political purposes, described by many authors in this volume.

Where earlier Africa had been tainted by the conspiratorial Mbeki response, 20 years later it was governments in the USA, Brazil, Madagascar and India, amongst others, and in Africa, initially Tanzania, that were touting denialism, and threatening the media. Internationally, significant anti-science/anti-democratic constituencies were pushing denialism. The beguiling populist alarmist messaging by now occurring through the new social media conveyed a tsunami of disinformation (seemingly issued by a very small minority) that created 'vaccine hesitancy' in the face of millions of dead and dying. The health crisis that ensued was compared by all media commentators to the devastating 1918 Spanish flu.

The discursive schisms became politicized even to the extent of mask wearing, and of voting choices in the USA especially, and with regard to allegations of what became known as 'vaccine nationalism'. Who had access and who did not became a global geopolitical issue, in the face of the usual allegations of experimental viral engineering gone wrong. Where Chinese people routinely wear masks as a social obligation when infected with contagious upper-respiratory tract viruses, in America (and even parts of Australia and France), mask wearing for the good of all was often alleged to be an infringement of individualist liberties—irrespective of the social consequences.

In light of this history, two digital comic authors in early 2020 identified children as potential influencers of appropriate public health messaging. Their animated, multiply translated *Don't Panic* comic applied fundamental principles of storytelling that did not load children with scientific facts that they would battle to comprehend.[1] As the digital storyteller Damien Tomaselli observed, "Rather, the comic's portrayal of the virus as an antagonist helps children to embody a larger problem into an identifiable concept. *Jungle Book* vilified the tiger Shao Khan, *Nemo* vilified the barracuda that ate the fish eggs, but children did not form a hatred of these animals based on the appropriation of those characters". "Our story", he concluded, "humanises the virus in a way that children could relate to".

Basically the message is: parents are not being mean by asking children to social distance and to undergo lockdowns. They are trying to protect you: "don't panic". One of the problems with the initial HIV campaigns was that there was too much clinical information based on technical detail of how the virus spreads. Hence as narrative practitioners, Durban-based Damien and his German colleague, Bernd Höllen, argued in terms of entertainment education principles that that 'story is king', with adult mediators reassuringly contextualizing the story.

Some African responses on media and health issues are examined in this book by a whole new generation of public health communicators who are homegrown, African graduates, sometimes of international research and training collaborations, who are responding to their own particular national environments. Just as African

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[1] https://www.enterthecauldron.com/project/dont-panic.

scholarship and health campaign strategy can positively inform global approaches, the support of the big Northern publishers—in this case, Springer—is just as important. Where the earlier generation cut their teeth on HIV/AIDS, the new generation seems destined to deal with successive and increasingly intense and interrelated crises: health, climate change and environmental degradation.

Thus this is one book that can speak intelligently to these issues from the perspective of the Global South. And, the task that they are taking on is herculean.

University of Johannesburg,   Keyan Gray Tomaselli
Johannesburg, South Africa

Preface

Long before the Covid-19 health crisis, sub-Saharan Africa has and still endures the brunt of many global health crises such as the deadly Ebola virus, HIV/AIDS, cholera and malaria, which have claimed millions of lives. Then came the Covid-19 outbreak at the dawn of 2019 that has, to date, infected 511,965,711 and killed 6,240,619 people globally. Although better[2] than other regions, Africa accounts for 8,790,143 confirmed cases and 171,666 deaths (WHO, 03 May 2022)—making Covid-19 a unique health crisis.

Unique in that when, in January 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (and a global pandemic soon after), countries around the world embarked on drastic public health measures to curb the spread. Restrictions of different proportions and motives were instituted with various repercussions on all sectors, including the media.

It was around this juncture that the idea for this volume emerged. The initial inspiration was to harness critical insights, inter-disciplinary perspectives and unique African experiences in media discourses surrounding the unfolding Covid-19 crisis. Later, we, the editors, decided to broaden the scope beyond the novel Covid-19 health crisis and embraced 'older' health crises like HIV/AIDS and Ebola, as well as the more 'silent' crises like mental health. The aim was to generate new knowledge on the impact and implications of the current Covid-19 health crisis on sub-Saharan media ecologies without removing the spotlight on and thereby relegating the other health crises that continue to affect the sub-continent.

We also believed that, while media discourse around health crises including Covid-19 in sub-Saharan African countries may share a global homogeneity, particular features, struggles, histories and challenges are specific to the sub-continent.

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[2] Africa has among the fewest cases (8,790,143) and deaths (171,666) compared to other regions. Confirmed cases in Western Pacific (54,913,452), Eastern Mediterranean (21,702,163), South East Asia (57,882,962), Europe (215,424,950) and the Americas (153,251,277). Deaths: Western Pacific (225,453), Eastern Mediterranean (342,243), South East Asia (786,438), Europe (1,990,235) and the Americas (2,724,571). https://covid19.who.int/, Last accessed 04 May 2022.

It is on the basis of this that this volume brings together timely and critical insights on media discourses around health crises from 13 countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, Namibia, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Tanzania.

The volume offers a diversity of innovative methodologies, critical empirical insights and rigorous theoretical analyses on media discourses around health crises. The chapters cover three interrelating themes: (a) shifts and disruptions in digital and the political economy of the media; (b) journalism practices, audience and news discourses; and (c) regulation, representation and marginalization discourses.

The first part, on the shifts and disruptions in digital and political economy of the media, builds on the existential conundrum surrounding media viability that has afflicted the global media industry over the last few decades. The chapters here explore the impact, especially of Covid-19, on the media while unpacking the complexities, intersections and dynamics surrounding technological, political and economic developments and trends.

Similarly, media discourses on journalism practice, audience narratives and news discourses are taken up. The contributors revisit and offer critical insights on a broad range of theories and debates, including political economy of the media, constructive journalism, the Fourth Estate, securitization and journalist safety. As such, we obtain a deeper understanding of the changes and continuities surrounding discourses on news frames, trends, actors and agendas in the context of health crises.

Also, the important role for public health communication and the notion of 'information' as a 'public good', especially during health crises, i.e. Covid-19, are invaluable areas of discussion.

Lastly, the volume contributes to new insights on media discourses around regulation, representation and marginalization in the context of health crises. We learn, for instance, how several governments under the guise of 'national safety' continue to impinge on human rights and freedom of expression for both producers and consumers. This occurs through loopholes in existing regulation but also because of non-existent policy like on social media and citizen journalism and affordances of impunity. Additionally, marginalization is an important theme taken up in this volume particularly regarding representation of various marginalized groups within the media systems (and society), especially during health crises such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola and Covid-19.

The volume is a timely resource for media and public health: policy makers, managers, practitioners, associations and lobby groups, marketers, researchers, academics and students—and not just in sub-Saharan Africa.

This volume would not have been realized without the Springer Team, especially Shinjini Chatterjee, Senior Publishing Editor, Pavithra Balasunndaram, Project Coordinator, Daniel Ignatius Jagadisan, Project Coordinator and Arunkumar Kathirava, Project Manager, who have guided us the whole way. Special thanks to the brilliant authors without whose rigorous and critical contributions there would be no book. We are deeply grateful to NLA University College for financing the Open Access publishing that makes the book accessible to global readers. Thanks

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Part I
Digital and Political Economy of the Media

The Sustainability and Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Media Houses in Uganda and Ethiopia

Gerald Walulya and Mulatu Alemayehu Moges

Abstract The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented economic challenges globally across various sectors, including the media. The economic effects of the pandemic, particularly, have hit the advertising sector, which is the lifeblood of media houses. Despite the raging economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the media, few studies have yet been conducted in the East African region, particularly in Uganda and Ethiopia, to assess how media organizations have been affected and what measures they have put in place to mitigate these challenges. This chapter investigates and discusses the key economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of media houses and the mechanisms they have put in place to counter these economic challenges. The study used a qualitative approach. The two researchers carried out interviews with CEOs and managers of 12 leading media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia. The data collected through interviews were transcribed and presented thematically. Findings from this study indicate that the media in the two countries have faced serious economic challenges including loss of advertisement and decline in newspaper sales, leading to salary cuts, loss of jobs, and closure of some media houses.

Keywords Media viability · Political economy · Uganda · Ethiopia

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented economic challenges globally across various sectors, including the media. It has ravaged the business world, leading to crushing of stock markets and closure of businesses, and left the global economy on the verge of an economic depression (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020;

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3

Powell 2020). According to the June 2020 Global Economic Prospects of the World Bank, the global GDP was forecast to contract by 5.2% in 2020 (World Bank 2020). In addition, Nuno (2020) warns that the economic effects of the COVID-19 outbreak may be more disastrous than the current estimates, noting that the pandemic could slow GDP growth by 3–6% depending on the country. He further forecasts that service-based economies such as Greece and Spain that are so reliant on tourism could have a reduced GDP growth of up to 15% (Nuno 2020).

Uganda and Ethiopia confirmed their first cases of COVID-19 in March 2020 (Kyeyune 2020a; WHO 2020). By February 15, 2021 (08:45 GMT), the Worldometer indicated that Uganda had so far had 40,019 COVID-19 cases and 328 deaths, while Ethiopia had 147,092 COVID-19 cases and 2194 deaths (Worldometer 2021). Despite these huge numbers, across Africa, the health effects of COVID-19 have so far generally been minimal compared to earlier estimates based on the poor health infrastructure and systems on the continent. Nevertheless, COVID-19 continues to have far-reaching effects on the continent as is the case with other parts of the world.

Like elsewhere in the world, Africa's economic fortunes have been greatly affected by COVID-19. By June 2020, the World Bank projected that the GDP growth in Sub-Saharan Africa would only be 2.8% (World Bank 2020). According to Deloitte (2020), Africa's projected GDP growth of 3.2% for 2020 was further forecast to fall to −0.8% due to the enforced partial or total lockdown of economies as a result of COVID-19. Deloitte (2020) further points out that by May 2020 Kenya's projected GDP growth of 5.7% had fallen to 1% due to a decline in tourism and export revenues and a disruption in the supply chain. In the same report, Ethiopia was expected to struggle with high unemployment, with the GDP revised to 3.2% from 6.2% in 2020. Similarly, the outlooks in Tanzania and Uganda showed a similar trajectory, with GDP growth being revised to 2% and 3.5% respectively compared to the usual 5–6% growth.

The media perform an important role of providing accurate information to citizens during health emergencies (UNESCO 2020). However, the media globally continue to face financial pressure to sustain their operations amid reduced revenue streams due to COVID-19. The spread of the virus and the subsequent lockdowns in most countries has brought serious consequences for the media, including closures of some outlets and salary cuts. The economic effects of the pandemic, particularly, have hit the advertising sector, which is the lifeblood of media houses (Rhodes 2014). In most corporate organizations, during times of adversity, advertising is the first victim of budget cuts (Rajan 2020). As such, when most businesses slowed down due to COVID-19, they generally limited or stopped their media advertising, which consequently affected the cash flow of media houses. In fact, results of this study have suggested that some organizations, including government, struggled to pay for even the advertisements that had already been commissioned. In Kenya, for example, at the time of the outbreak of the pandemic, the government owed various media houses $2.8 million (Chelagat 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional media were particularly under threat, with sales of newspapers and advertising revenue for the media houses

significantly dropping due to effects of the extended lockdown. This forced some media houses to restructure their organizations or even close. For instance, in the first five months of the pandemic, partly government-owned Vision Group in Uganda closed three regional newspapers published in local languages, and laid off staff who were working for these publications (Muhindo 2020). These newspapers included *Orumuri*, *Etop*, and *Rupiny*. Another privately owned weekly, *The Observer*, was also forced to suspend its operations (Kigambo 2020). Apart from closure of some media outlets, media organizations have also had to lay off staff as well as making salary cuts for the remaining staff. In Uganda, the *New Vision* cut staff salaries by up to 60%. Its competitor the *Daily Monitor* also made staff salary reductions of up to 35% (Kyeyune 2020b).

It should be noted that COVID-19 found media enterprises in Uganda and Ethiopia in a fragile state, with many of them struggling to financially sustain themselves. In fact the closed newspapers in Uganda were previously running on subsidies from subsidiary media outlets such as the *New Vision* newspaper (Muhindo 2020). In Uganda, for instance, less than 30% of newspapers and online publications are able to sustain themselves (Kigambo 2020). The coming of COVID-19 simply exacerbated an already fragile financial situation for most media organizations in Uganda and Ethiopia.

Theory

Using the media economy theoretical analysis, this study investigates the key economic effects of COVID-19 on media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia and explores the strategic responses media houses put in place in these countries to mitigate the COVID-19 economic effects. One of the proponents of the media economy theory, Allan Albarran, defined it as "the study of how media firms and industries function across different levels of activity (global, national, household, and individual) in tandem with other forces (globalisation, regulation, technology, and social aspects) through the use of theories, concepts, and principles drawn from macroeconomic and microeconomic perspectives" (Albarran 2010, p. 3). In this vast definition, the scholar attempts to explain how the media business could be affected by so many factors. Albarran (2010) described levels such as global (how their service reaches out to global communities), national (how the industries attempt to cover), households (how the media technologies and media content are used in households), individuals (how much time and attention individuals allocate to the media) as possible factors that could have clear effect on the media businesses. He further argues that since individual media consumption is constantly changing, which ultimately has an impact on the advertisers who are always changing their strategies based on the market, the traditional media evolve with the times so as not to be left out of business (Albarran 2010, p. 5).

Albarran's idea clearly shows that it is the media strategy to fit in the contemporary political, economic, and technological situation. COVID-19 as a global

pandemic can be seen to have a direct and indirect impact on media businesses. According to Albarran, this requires media businesses to make necessary adjustments to fit the prevailing economic circumstances.

One of the key points Albarran (2010) raised is that the media economy is not working in a vacuum. Rather, there are additional factors that sway the media businesses in different directions. These factors include globalization, regulation, technologies, and societal aspects (Albarran 2010, p. 5). He advises that in situations of crisis, media businesses should have strategies for how to use scarce resources to produce content and meet the needs of their consumers (Albarran 1996).

On one hand, Picard (2006) has described media economics as "a specific application of economic laws and theories to media industries and firms, showing how economic, regulatory, and financial pressures direct and constrain activities and their influences on the dynamics of media markets" (Picard 2006, p. 23). On the other, Doyle described media economics as mainly being concerned with a range of issues including international trade, business strategy, segmentation, risk-spreading, exploration of rights, pricing policy, evolution of advertising market, and competition and industrial concentration as they affect the media businesses' firms and industries (Doyle 2013, p. 3). She argues that "analysis of long term trends in advertising suggest a strong association between the performance of the economy as a whole and levels of advertising activity" (Doyle 2013, p. 4). Here, it is fair to note that while Albarran mainly focuses on globalization, technology, regulation, and societal aspects to describe the media economies, Doyle only emphasizes consumers, firms, and government. In her argument, economies rely on certain assumptions about how these actors make their choices (Doyle 2013, p. 4). It is quite clear that consumers, firms, and the government have a major say in production and dissemination of media content to sustain the media businesses.

Literature Review

Globally, the pandemic has caused significant economic damage for all newsrooms. A report by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) noted that the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 was a top priority for most media industry employees, with three in four respondents saying that they prioritized the continued operation of their publications during the pandemic ahead of everything else (Mulcahey 2020). The report further noted that about eight in every 10 respondents with knowledge about their media houses' financial standing reported at least a 50% reduction in revenue (ibid).

In the United States, more than 36,000 journalists were laid off, furloughed, or took salary cuts (Radcliffe 2020). Not even the benefits that came with COVID-19 such as increased subscriptions for some media houses have been able to save the situation. According to an analysis by the journalism institute Poynter, more than 200 newsrooms and media groups in the United States were affected by job losses and other austerity measures that include mergers, which mostly affected local media outlets (Hare 2020).

In the United Kingdom, several media houses were affected in different ways. *City AM*, a London-based business newspaper, stopped printing; *Playboy's Spring 2020* magazine was its last regular print output; and regional publisher JPI Media ceased printing 12 titles that included the *News Guardian* in North Tyneside and the *MK Citizen* in Milton Keynes. At least 350 staff were furloughed while the remaining staff took a pay cut of up to 15% (Rajan 2020). Other affected publications in the UK include *Kerrang*, a music magazine, which announced in April 2020 that it would stop printing for three months. Regional publisher, Reach, which prints the *Express* and *Mirror* newspapers, furloughed 940 of its 4700 staff, while senior management took a 20% pay cut and the lower-level staff took a 10% salary cut (Rajan 2020).

In Africa, COVID-19 has devastated the lives of many journalists. For example, in Nigeria, journalists at Dandal Kura International, an independent radio network, who earn about $100 per month, took salary cuts and a third of the radio's staff were forced to stay at home with an 80% salary reduction (Krippahl 2020). In South Africa, several media houses were forced to make salary cuts while others closed altogether. In Tanzania, Mwananchi Communications, which publishes three newspapers including *The Citizen*, *Mwananchi*, and *MwanaSport*, laid off 50 members of staff in April 2020 when COVID-19 was at its peak, while in Kenya, 300 journalists lost their jobs, and other journalists had to take a pay cut as high as 50% in 2020 mainly due to effects of COVID-19 (Chelagat 2020).

Financial Meltdown, a Pre-Existing Condition

The outbreak of COVID-19 and its attendant economic effects have spurred the collapse of a number of publications that were already facing financial pressure for different reasons (Friedman 2020). Indeed, Mugisha (2020) notes that since the coming of the Internet, the business model that has sustained the media for two centuries around the world has been crumbling following a decline in revenue from advertising.

Industry analysts contend that even before the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic, the media industry, and specifically the printing sub-sector, was already a sinking ship, with COVID-19 only accelerating its demise. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), COVID-19 has accelerated job losses and a decline in economic returns of the media industry worldwide (ILO 2020). Rajan (2020) notes that long before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic many titles in the United Kingdom were already economically stressed, only running with the support of wealthy owners or operating under commercial models that are unsustainable. Following the decline in revenue from many media houses across Europe, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted a declaration in 2019, calling on European countries to make sure that media houses that produce quality journalism are financially sustained because they are considered a public good that play an essential role in society (CEO.INT 2020). In the United States

Radcliffe (2020) observes that COVID-19 exacerbated the already known negative financial trends in journalism, especially for newspapers. For instance, from 2008 to 2018, newspapers and magazine revenues in the United States declined by 62%, with about US$23.5 billion of advertising revenue moving to platforms such as Google, Facebook, and Craigslist (Radcliffe 2020). The decline in revenues and the changing media habits meant that even before the pandemic, the newspaper industry had suffered significantly.

In Africa, like elsewhere in the world, there was already a trend of newspapers declining. For instance, in Ethiopia, the media had already been struggling financially, especially after the passing of a new law banning the advertising of alcohol (Proclamation 1112 2019), which was a major source of income for media houses. In countries with the highest newspaper readership, such as Kenya and South Africa, there has been a sustained decline in newspaper readership over the years. For example, in South Africa, newspaper circulation has declined by about 49% in the last 10 years (Ntibinyane 2020).

A Migration from Offline to Online Media

The coming of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted media houses to accelerate their move toward digital media as a solution to dwindling offline media revenues. Although the Internet was initially viewed as a threat to the traditional media business model (Ha and Fang 2012), the same Internet is turning out to be the savior of traditional media. Traditional media have embraced new ways, investing in digital platforms to facilitate journalists and media players who were stuck at home during the lockdown (Mugisha 2020). For example, in South Africa, a recent report notes that there has been an increase of online audiences of up to 76%, yet at the same time, magazines and newspapers have been folding or reducing the number of copy sales (Cision 2020). In Kenya, some radio stations saw a spike in audience numbers, with one managing editor reporting a sharp rise in engagement with listeners at the 13 FM stations he was overseeing at the beginning of the crisis (Chelagat 2020).

Another example of winners during the pandemic is Netflix, a US-based streaming giant that is reported to have gained about 26 million new customers in the first six months of 2020 compared to the 28 million new subscribers that it gained throughout 2019 (Alexander 2020). The International Telecommunications Union (ITU 2020) notes that television viewing had gone up, with an average person in North America spending at least seven hours watching television every day, compared to six hours in the pre-pandemic period.

Despite the traditional media's online migration, making money from the Internet still remains a challenge for most of Africa's traditional media. There is still a need to expand and improve the coverage and quality of Internet in most parts of the continent. Available data shows that at least 60% of people in Africa lack access to the Internet, with some countries, such as Burundi, having only 10% of their

population online (Mugisha 2020). This makes it difficult to sustain a media house in Africa through online revenue streams.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative interviews with 12 managers of leading media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia. Six managers who participated in the study were from Uganda while the other six were from Ethiopia. Although the study was conducted in two countries, it is not necessarily a comparative analysis per se. Instead, the two countries have been used as an extended case study. In terms of media disaggregation, of the six managers who were interviewed in each of the two countries, two each were drawn from radio, television, and newspapers. In some cases the people interviewed were in charge of more than one media format. This applied to news organizations that own radio, television, newspapers, and sometimes online publications. This means that the data collected represent opinions beyond the 12 targeted media houses platforms. The study targeted the most influential radio, television, and newspapers. Influence was measured in terms of circulation of a newspaper and viewership or listenership of a TV or radio station. The media houses considered included public and privately owned media houses. In Uganda, we interviewed managers of UBC radio and TV, CBS FM radio, NTV, *Daily Monitor*, *New Vision*, and NBS TV. The media managers interviewed in Ethiopia were from the *Reporter* Newspaper and *Kumeneger* magazine, *Fana* Broadcasting Cooperation (airing on television, radio, and online platforms), and *Sheger* Radio. Television respondents were drawn from *Ahadu* Radio and Television and *Walta* Media and Communication Corporation. The titles of the people interviewed varied from one organization to the other. Some were Managing Directors or their Deputies and Chief Executive Officers, while others were Managing Editors or Editors. We decided to interview managers because they are the ones who have knowledge of the business decisions of media houses. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the busy schedules of the interviewees, most interviews were conducted remotely through zoom, email, telephone calls, and WhatsApp messaging. A few interviews were conducted physically with observation of the COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures. All the informants gave their consent to be quoted if their ideas were found relevant.

Data from interviews was transcribed, analyzed, and organized according to emerging themes as presented in the findings below. While the key informants raised many concerns related to COVID-19 and its impact on their media houses, the authors only focused on the economic effects of the virus on the media business.

Findings

The COVID-19 pandemic affected media houses in different magnitudes depending on the type of media house and its financial standing at the time of the outbreak of the pandemic. As noted above, presented here are the economic effects of COVID-19 on media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia. These include loss of advertising, reduction of salaries, closure of media houses, and loss of jobs. Also discussed are opportunities and measures that have helped media houses to stay in business despite the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Loss of Advertising

As mentioned earlier, advertising is the major source of income for most media houses in any part of the world. Following the outbreak of the pandemic and its economic consequences for businesses, most organizations cut their advertising budgets, which adversely affected media houses. The loss of advertisers became the source of most of the problems that the media faced during the pandemic. In Ethiopia the problem of lack of advertising was exacerbated by an earlier ban on alcohol advertisements in the media (Proclamation 1112 2019). This reduced advertising both in number and income for all media outlets (both private and government owned) in the country. According to a document submitted to the prime minister's office by Ethiopian media stakeholders, "Ethiopian media houses were already in deep liquidity crisis due to a reported 40% loss in advertising revenue as a result of a ban on alcoholic beverages' commercials" (Media Council 2020).

In Uganda, media houses, especially newspapers, were already under financial pressure, long before the outbreak of COVID-19, as one privately owned newspaper manager explained:

> Before COVID-19 came media houses were already struggling, especially the print media. It is not a Ugandan problem; it's not our newspaper problem. It's an international trend, where print circulation has been falling for the last many years. It's been gradual but in the last five years the decline has been very sharp. So, print media was already grappling with falling circulation. Yet, the online platforms have not fully monetized. It's a new thing. Here subscription has not picked up. So for us, print is still the cash cow; it pays the bills, does most of the things. So the fact that circulation has already declined put us under more pressure when the COVID-19 hit because we had to quickly come up with ideas on how to cope. (Interview, January 21, 2021)

The loss of advertising was followed by a significant reduction in income because several businesses that were under lockdown could not even pay for advertisements that they had recently commissioned, leading to revenue loss. Nevertheless, the costs of running media houses were rising due to requirements of observing standard operating procedures, as one manager of Uganda's public TV and radio explains:

> We saw our revenue dwindle from about 500 million ($139,000) a month to around about 100 million ($28,000) a month and that was much later probably towards the fourth to seventh month of lockdown. We almost had zero revenue in the first three months of COVID-19. So, it really dwindled our accounts but also, our costs of operations went up because we had to operate a little differently, we literary were picking and dropping some staff home. We had also to provide accommodation to some of our technical staff at the beginning of COVID-19 because we didn't know how to take them home and back during this period. (Personal interview conducted on January 7, 2021)

The newspaper sub-sector seems to have suffered most due to loss of advertising because the sales from circulation of newspapers had also dropped because of the lockdown and decrease in people's income.

Loss of Market

Most newspapers in Ethiopia and Uganda are sold on streets rather than by subscription. Tamerate Haile and Amare Aregawi (personal interviews, 2020), for instance, noted that vendors were not interested in circulating/selling newspapers. They also highlighted that this happened due to the fear of COVID-19 transmission while buyers/readers were touching the newspapers. Besides, most of the vendors shifted their business for survival, which had repercussions for the newspaper business in the country.

Due to fear of COVID-19 infection as well as the state of emergency declared in Ethiopia, people were not interested in socializing and engaging themselves in the search for information from the traditional media. As a result, the number of newspaper subscribers, particularly hotels and other business firms, radically decreased. This was caused by two reasons. The first one was due to the lockdown; they were not running their business and there were no guests to read the newspapers. The other reason was that their businesses were at risk and they preferred to save their money.

Closure of Media Houses and Loss of Jobs

Different media houses responded differently to the loss of advertisement revenue. One of the common problems in both Uganda and Ethiopia was the closure of some media houses leading to job losses among journalists and other media workers. In Ethiopia two media firms were forced to shut down and lay off their staff members due to the effects of COVID-19. One of the closed media outlets was JTV, owned by artist Josef Gebre. JTV had been on air for more than three years. In an article published in *Ethiopia Insight*, Marew Abebe Salemot (2020) noted that in addition to the total shutdown of JTV, other outlets, particularly newspapers and magazines

such as *Ghion Journals*, *Sheger Times*, and *Berera*, temporarily stopped their publications.

In Uganda, partly government owned Vision Group closed three regional newspapers, *Orumuri*, *Etop*, and *Rupiny*, published in local languages, and laid off staff who were working for these publications. Another privately owned weekly, *The Observer*, was also forced to suspend its operations. Still, with media houses that continued to operate, some journalists were laid off due to limited revenue. Newspapers that continued operating reduced the number of pages by at least 50% because they had a limited number of journalists to write enough stories to fill the newspapers. Interview respondents suggested that they were not very keen on laying off their staff because they kept hoping that the pandemic would last for only a short period. Ironically, in the same period, Vision Group opened a new TV station broadcasting in one of the languages the local newspaper was serving. This demonstrates that whereas print media was struggling, electronic media was more resilient and dynamic in adjusting to change.

One special charter of the Ethiopian media that produced content for media organizations stopped production due to economic difficulties. These out sourced programs were a source of income for some media firms. However, due to various reasons related to COVID-19, most outsourced programs were cancelled. Journalists working on these programs were forced to leave. Indeed, even in Uganda, TV managers confirmed that they suspended buying of externally produced content, resorting to in-house production to cut costs.

It is worth noting that in Ethiopia the government made it illegal to lay off staff during the state of emergency. The state of emergency included an article that prohibits organizations from laying off their workers to minimize the number of affected people. Consequently, the media were trapped between bankruptcy and fulfilling the law against laying off staff. As a result, most of the media firms continued to suffer from the chronic economic challenges during COVID-19, particularly in the period of the state of emergency.

Reduction of Salaries

Due to fall in revenue, almost all media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia cut salaries of their staff. The magnitude of salary cuts varied from one organization to another. For instance, Uganda's Vision Group's salary cuts went as high as 60% for the company's top earners and 40% for the lower-category earners. A manager at a privately owned newspaper in Uganda further explains:

> Salaries were also affected and the staff were affected by different percentages [of salary cuts] per category from 5% to 30%. I think ours was not as bad as some media houses, where it was up to 60% or 40% for everybody. That was the immediate effect. After two months of the lockdown, we had the salary cuts implemented. (Personal interview conducted on January 21, 2021)

It should be noted that about three quarters of journalists in most newsrooms in Uganda and Ethiopia are freelancers. During this period, this category of journalists struggled to earn because the lockdown measures made it difficult for them to gather news due to lack of private transport and equipment. It is possible that some of these freelancers may have quit journalism altogether.

Sustainability Measures during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Despite the disastrous economic effects of COVID-19, most media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia found coping mechanisms to deal with the effects of the pandemic. Some of these mechanisms, such as salary cuts, have already been discussed above. Below is a discussion of some of the more positive approaches that have helped media houses to stay in business.

Creativity and innovativeness Following the suspension of advertising by the traditional advertisers, some media houses resorted to soliciting for advertisements from non-traditional advertisers. This is particularly the case with television stations that resorted to hosting e-conferences for organizations, as one TV manager explained:

> Without a doubt, this has been our best year in terms of revenues. Our revenues have grown by 50%. The reason [for growth] is not because of the traditional spenders, the traditional advertisers. It is because we have been very creative in the way we adapted. So, once COVID-19 struck, we had to go back to the drawing board and re-evaluate our strategies on how we are going to: one, sell products that are related to COVID-19. So we have gone into companies and organisations as a media platform to help them communicate their responses. So this has been a very good revenue stream for us, which is outside the traditional way of advertising. (Personal interview conducted on December 31, 2020)

Cost-cutting Another measure that has helped media houses to stay afloat is the reduction of operating costs through avoiding unnecessary spending. Organizations introduced shifts to reduce the number of staff coming to work and also reduced the number of services they were outsourcing, as one private TV and radio manager explained:

> We had to do a cost cutting across our operations to channel all that money to human resource. For example, if you are going to report and you are spending X amount of money and you have been sending two reporters, send one reporter. If you have been deploying two cameras, if you have been doing more pre-produced products, if you have been buying content, you reduce on buying content and produce it internally. So all these external costs that seemed like a luxury in this time, we had to reduce on them. Working from home also reduced on our costs because most of the 300 staff we have would consume food, water, electricity bills (Personal interview conducted on December 31, 2020)

Similarly, in Ethiopia, many media organizations started to conduct interviews through telephone and other new technologies such as Skype and Zoom to minimize costs. Though it might not lead to good-quality production, particularly for

television, most media organizations tended to gather information through such technologies. This helped them to minimize some of the facilitation costs.

Re-adjusting content to suit the COVID-19 pandemic Most of the media houses in Uganda made a deliberate effort to change their content to match the requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most media houses, for instance, started radio and TV education programs to teach learners who were not going to school due to COVID-19. Other channels earned money through relaying church services. Some newspapers also carried learning materials for learners. This helped the media to get new audiences and also earn income from non-traditional sources while remaining relevant, as one Uganda radio manager noted: "Our station gained relevance due to the new programmes of education and church services. We have now got a new high captivating audience. We are starting to think outside the box" (Personal interview conducted on December 18, 2020).

Other interventions that newspapers came up with include venturing into other income-generating activities such as book publishing. One newspaper started to do home deliveries. The manager of this media house indicated that the number of people who had subscribed to the paper was growing. Two newspapers in Uganda also tried to interest readers in the electronic version of the newspaper during the lockdown, hoping that people would eventually start to subscribe to the electronic newspaper.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the various economic challenges that the media in Uganda and Ethiopia have endured during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have ranged from loss of advertising revenue, to reduction of salaries, to closure of media houses and job losses. The media responded with both radical and innovative measures to counter the adverse economic effects of COVID-19. As Albarran (2010) argued, individual media consumption habits are constantly changing, which ultimately has an impact on the advertisers who are always changing their strategies based on the market. This requires that the media evolve in ways that conform to the contemporary trends in order to stay in business. While this part of the book has focused on Uganda and Ethiopia, it is possible that the findings of this chapter are applicable to the situation in other countries, as literature from elsewhere has suggested. As Doyle (2013) noted, there is a strong association between the performance of the economy as a whole and levels of advertising activity.

While the media in the two countries have faced similar problems, the mechanism they took to overcome the challenges were somewhat different. Media in Uganda took some major steps toward shifting business from traditional to online, as well as using the media firms to produce additional content such as educational programs for learners to earn some income which helped to sustain them. The Ethiopian media was highly constrained by the law preventing them from laying off staff, yet they were required by the state to relay COVID-19 information without pay from the

state. Instead, the Media Council of Ethiopia applied for a subsidy from the government, and to get some form of relief from paying income tax.

Findings from this study have further confirmed that long before the coming of COVID-19, media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia were already struggling economically. COVID-19 only provided a spur for an already crumbling sector. This was particularly the case with the newspaper sub-sector. As Rajan (2020), Radcliffe (2020), and Kigambo (2020) have noted, the finances of the media in many parts of the world have been on a decline since the advent of the Internet. Newspaper copy sales have been significantly dropping, especially in the last ten years. In fact, even before the start of COVID-19, many media houses in Uganda and Ethiopia were restructuring their organizations to take care of the decreasing income. This restructuring has involved merging the roles of some personnel and departments, thereby laying off some staff (Kigambo 2020). The folding of some newspapers and laying off of staff after the start of COVID-19 have not come as a surprise.

Whereas many traditional media houses have embraced the Internet, it is clear that this platform has not yet provided financial rewards for them. As Mugisha (2020) observed, many media houses in Africa are still struggling with making money off the Internet. This situation has further been complicated by the limited reach and quality of Internet in Africa. Even when newspapers opened up their electronic paper to be accessed freely by the public during the pandemic, results did not seem to suggest that more readers appreciated the idea of subscribing to these e-papers.

One of the positive effects that has emerged from COVID-19 was that the electronic media, especially television, performed better financially compared to the pre-pandemic period. As Cision (2020) and Chelagat (2020) reported in South Africa and Kenya, some TV stations, particularly in Uganda, made more money during the pandemic when compared to the pre-pandemic period. As Albarran (2010) noted, crisis times such as the COVID-19 period require media businesses to make necessary adjustments to fit the prevailing economic circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic helped some TV and radio stations to connect with new viewers and listeners.

The spike in the number of viewers and listeners might have been caused by the search for information by citizens during a health emergency (UNESCO 2020). The introduction of new programs, such as church services and school lessons for learners contributed to the emergence of a new audience. This in turn attracted non-traditional advertisers who were looking for opportunities to communicate COVID-19 information. It may also be argued that some of the coping mechanisms that media houses adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic may be instrumental in helping the media to become financially stable for many years to come.

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Political Economy of COVID-19 and the Implication on Media Management and Sustainability in Nigeria

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Abstract This study investigates the political economy of government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and its implications for media management and survival. It is a qualitative research that relies on primary and secondary sources for data gathering. The study discovers that the ungainly and discriminatory political economy of the Nigerian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is unfriendly to the media as it is isolated and made the media operating environment unfavorable for growth and sustainability. The study also reveals that the past business model where the media render service before being paid and disseminate news content in hard copy while relying on old news consumers can no longer suffice during the COVID-19 era. Conclusively, the study highlights some coping strategies for media managers which include pulling resources together as through a consortium, merger, and acquisition of outfits with similar editorial focus, raising funds from the stock market, changing the business model of service before pay and digitization of contents. The study recommends that the Nigerian government in conjunction with the international development agencies should launch a media recovery plan (MRP) as was done in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and France to stabilize the industry and reposition it to fulfill its statutory roles in national development.

Keywords COVID-19 · Media viability · Government response · Digital shift

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was not merely a global health catastrophe, but a shattering event of politics, economics, public policies, international politics, and world trade among others (Frieden 2020, p. 1). In December 2019, the new coronavirus COVID-19, a type of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), started in the Wuhan province of the People's Republic of China. As of

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December 27, 2020, there were 80 million confirmed cases globally and 1.75 million deaths on its trail (WHO 2020). In Nigeria, as of December 26, 2020, there were 85,587 confirmed cases, about 1247 deaths while 70,495 had been discharged (NCDC 2020).

Besides loss of lives, the socio-economic implication of COVID-19 on the global landscape varies from country to country. Nevertheless, the general view, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA 2020) is that, it will most likely increase poverty and inequalities, engender global suffering and jeopardize lives and livelihood at an un-unimaginable scale. According to (*Kretchmer* 2020, p. 8), "hundreds of millions of people could be left without work as a result of COVID-19" and "1.6 billion informal economy workers could suffer 'massive damage' to their livelihoods." The report specifically outlined the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the G7 nations' economies. For example, more than 20 million jobs were lost in April in the United States; over 7.2 million people applied for emergency unemployment credit in Canada while 1.76 million are unemployed in Japan. Besides, over 2 million people applied for universal credit in the United Kingdom; about 10 million workers applied for partial employments in France over 10 million applied for government assistance in Germany (*Kretchmer* 2020, p. 8).

In Nigeria, COVID-19-induced lockdown caused about 300,000 job losses in the leisure and hospitality industry, with travel crashes and cancellations of bookings expected to continue (CSEA 2020). In particular, the Micro, Small, and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs), which include the media industry was the worst affected by the general lockdown. This is due to their relatively low savings capacity and because of the official restrictions on the free movement of goods and people which MSMEs depend upon to keep their supply chains and ultimately make their businesses running profitably (Nnanna 2020). In the present circumstance, the media are institutional structure that updates the public on measures, best practices, and other essential health information to checkmate the spread of Coronavirus. As COVID-19 continues to bare its fang, each country has evolved certain policies. On her part, Nigeria in collaboration with other international agencies particularly, WHO took certain political decisions with economic implications, which is the focus of this study.

Against the above background, the chapter attempts to, among others; evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nigeria's economy in general and the media industry in particular; examine the social, political, and economic policies of the government and their implications for media management and sustainability; and investigate the prospect and challenges of managing the media during the COVID-19 era. Furthermore, the chapter identifies some coping strategies which the media could adopt to survive the present challenges posed by COVID-19.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative research that relies on primary and secondary data. In-depth interviews were conducted with media stakeholders to know the challenges they faced in managing and sustaining the media during the peak of COVID-19. The government officials were also interviewed to explain why the media industry was excluded from the distribution of financial palliatives and relief materials distributed to other sectors of the economy. Data were obtained from secondary sources such as policy documents from the Federal Ministry of Health, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19, Central Bank, and World Health Organisation Offices in Nigeria. Existing data were also gathered from online and offline sources such as newspapers, magazines, journals and books, bulletins, newsletters, and other publications of government agencies coordinating COVID-19.

The findings were discussed, and recommendations were made on ways of keeping the media industry afloat during difficult times such as the COVID-19 era.

Theoretical Underpinning

This research is anchored on and guided by political economy theory of the media propounded by William Stanley Jevons in 1871. The theory argued that the manner in which the media function is shaped by the political environment where they operate, ownership influence, market environment (whether free or regulated), advertisers' impact, and availability of financial support. Political economy is an interdisciplinary branch of the social sciences that focuses on the interrelationships among individuals, governments, and public policy giving birth to wealth production and distribution among people with unequal strength, access to education, and economic wealth. There are three notable types of political economy theories, i.e., capitalism, socialism, and communism.

It needs to be emphasized that Nigeria's economy is neither strictly capitalist nor is it of purely socialist. The Nigerian economy is driven by a mixture of capitalism which emphasizes private ownership of the means of production and socialism that advocates for public or government ownership of properties. By this, both the private and the public sectors are invested in businesses in some strategic areas such as energy and power, manufacturing, estate, banking, insurance, and media among others.

Literature Review

An Overview of Political Economy of Nigerian Media

The critical political economy literature is replete with a plethora of definitions anchored on different ideological premises. The concept of political economy is understood as a collective term for theories and approaches that deal with the issues of culture and the media; and by extension, appreciates the interrelationships between economic process and specific political circumstances (Hardy 2014). While contributing to the political economy discourse (Ikpe 2000, pp. 14–15) perceives "political economy as the manner by which political decisions and interests influence the location of economic activities and the distribution of their costs and benefits." Going by the above definitions, certain facts emerged. The market and economic forces exert influences on the production and distribution of power and resources among states and other political actors. This suggests that media markets are part of the capitalist economic structure with close link to the political system of a country (Fourie 2007, p. 136). Salawu (2018, p. 309) notes that the media industry sticks to four basic features of the capitalist mode of production. These include mass production and distribution of commodities, capital intensive technology, managerial organizations with specialization and cost-efficiency as the basis of success.

It is difficult to rightly define the political-economic theory of the media in Nigeria without understanding the theory that drives the Nigerian economy. The argument that it is capitalist-oriented could not stand because, according to Ogunde, the difficulties involved in the acquisition of private property, freedom of choice, self-interest, and competition all of which are crucial elements of a thriving capitalist or free-market economy are absent in Nigeria. Besides, Ogunde added that there are heightened problems of transport costs, protectionist trade policies, inadequate power supplies, and insecurity, all of which create an inclement environment for private sector expansion.

Another school of thought also argues that Nigerian economy could not be straightly described as socialist in nature. The reason, according to Tochukwu (2018), is that key elements of a socialist system are clearly missing in the socio-economic climate of Nigeria. The government is central to the production process which it unequally distributes based on class distinctions. In other words, the government controls and determines who gets what, why, and how, based on educational and economic strength and other factors. There is absence of government protection in terms of tax incentives for emerging businesses except for monopolistic companies having a direct connection with the government. Based on the above, we can conclude that Nigeria's economy is neither strictly capitalist nor socialist but rather, a mixed economy incorporating both capitalist (free market) and socialist ideals.

A basic principle of political economy theory according to Apuke (2017, p. 26) is that those who belong to special groups: the rich, multinational industrial organizations, big financial corporations, big advertising conglomerates, communication

technology, and oil giants among others, take the lion share of the available resources. This has always been the battleground between the rich and the poor as the wealthy hardly want to be taxed to pay the poor but rather, the reverse is true. This explains why the government's decision may sometimes appear odd and unfavorable to the poor and the vulnerable groups.

A good deal of political economy research has focused on the evolution of mass communication/media as commodities that are produced and distributed by profit-seeking organizations in a capitalist economy. By this observation, the media organizations are perceived first as businesses and economic generating means for the community where they operate (Aderibigbe 2018). An analysis of media operation as a business venture has given birth to several concepts such as commodification/commercialization, diversification, horizontal/ vertical integration, and concentration among others. According to Popoola (2018, p. 6), media and communication resources have become commodities (products and services) that are offered for sale to buyers and consumers for profit. By diversification, he sees the media as a relatively large organization with diversification into new lines of business from which each line seeks to maximize profits. Media are also perceived as expanding corporations with the ability to integrate new organizations, both horizontally and vertically.

Under capitalist societies, majority of producers of public communications are privately owned and generate considerable returns for shareholders either by crafting symbolic goods (media messages) for direct sales in the media market without considering other aspects of life or by assembling audiences as commodities to be sold by the media to the advertisers according to ratings and other market criteria (Ayodabo and Babatunde 2018).

Media ownership influence has been a recurring issue in the political economy of the media and has been criticized because of its implication for both media management and practice. Adejola and Bello (2014) note that most media owners, especially in Nigeria, have commercial and political interests which they seek to protect regardless of whether or not they offend journalistic principles of objectivity, accuracy, balance, and fairness. Closely related to ownership influence is the wave of privatization and commercialization that concentrated the media in a few hands and have placed the acquisition and control of the internet within their grasp. It is worrisome that commercial interests of media owners and advertisers are now the primary determinants of media contents, bringing about a compromise of ethics and objectivity (UNESCO 2011).

Another salient matter relating to the political economy of the media is the issue of coverage and concentration of operation. Media coverage is lopsided in favor of urban centers at the expense of the rural communities. The consequences of this uneven media coverage, according to Fourie (2007, p. 137), include reduction in independent media sources, focus on the largest markets and their tastes, avoidance of risks, reduced investment in less profitable media tasks (such as investigative journalism and documentary film making), and neglect of rural and poor potential audience.

According to Enahoro (2010, p. 208), in every media system globally, certain interests of the government usually manifest. In Nigeria for instance, some of the media outlets (broadcast and print) are privately owned while some are owned and managed by the government and it exerts some statutory regulatory authority through the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). The above presupposes that the production and distribution of information are concentrated in the hands of their owners (public and private) whose ideas, views, and interests are protected.

Findings

Understanding the Political Economy of Government's Response to COVID-19 in Nigeria

The government's policy response to COVID-19 varies from country to country depending on the health, economic, and political exigencies of each. For example, the dread of a long global recession prompted most developed nations to take unilateral decisions against multilateral to curtail the spread of the Coronavirus and to minimize the anticipated economic adversity. According to the a total of 32 countries and territories, adopted stringent and immediate export restrictions on critical medical supplies and drugs that were specifically meant to respond to COVID-19. From America, to Switzerland, Germany, Russia, India, and France, there were export bans of all kinds of medical protection gear including breathing devices, medical gloves and protective suits, drugs, and medical supplies such as hydroxychloroquine, ventilators, personal protections masks, and oxygen therapy apparatus. These are in addition to border closure. Although these policies were believed to hurt the developing nations severely, they are actually protection policies aimed at safeguarding citizens.

In the case of Nigeria, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the country had been battling a weak economy owing to the decline in the price of its crude oil in the world market. This, coupled with the outbreak of Lasa fever in the early part of 2019 compelled the government to take certain deft political decisions with economic implications. The decisions were guided by the following enquiries: what restrictions to impose and when to ease them, how much funds are required, how will the funds be generated and disbursed, and what national interests could be deemphasized to pave way for international cooperation. These certainly involved the combined efforts of the government, medical experts, and researchers, social scientists and psychologists; taking into consideration the economic factor and political constraint.

During the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, the NCDC through the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) continued to lead the national public health response in Nigeria with oversight of the PTF on COVID-19. Several drastic decisions were taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the

PTF-COVID-19 in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Health to curb the spread of the disease and secure the health of Nigerians (NCDC 2020, pp. 1–2). The decisions included: closure of the international borders, interstate travel restrictions, total lockdown of commercial activities, schools, worship centers, and recreation arenas. These were political decisions with economic costs. Specifically, the Nigerian government through the Central Bank also responded by supporting hospitals and the pharmaceutical industry with low-interest loans to immediately deal with the public health crises. The CBN also worked with the private sector Coalition Against COVID (CACOVID) to raise approximately $20 million in cash and to mobilize palliatives (food items) for the poor and vulnerable. Other policies put in place by government composed of granting additional moratorium of one year on CBN intervention facilities; reducing their interest rates from nine percent to five; creation of N450 billion credit facility for affected households and MSMEs; facilitating easy access to cheap and long-term loans for MSMEs; providing N1 trillion in loans to boost local manufacturing and production across critical sectors; engendering financial inclusion by ensuring the poor and vulnerable are empowered by all means necessary, through banks, microfinance, community, and nonbank financial institutions, to access financial services to meet their basic needs (Emefiele 2020, p. 14).

Despite government's huge fiscal intervention provided to boost local manufacturing and empower other critical sectors, surprisingly, the media industry did not benefit from the largesse. The consequence of this, according to (Owolabi and Samson 2019) is that, the media have continued to operate in a very hostile economic atmosphere.

Discussion of Findings

Condition of the Media During COVID-19 Pandemic

Obi-Ani and Isiani observe that social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter became the most dependable source of information to Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first Coronavirus victim was reported through different social media. Given the significant number of Nigerians connected to those platforms, the dissemination of health information became quite easy. Health care agencies like the NCDC and PTF provide daily updates on the number of cases and fatalities recorded in Nigeria through these social media platforms. This gave Nigerian citizens better opportunities to be fully prepared for COVID-19 as against the period of the Influenza pandemic when information pertaining to its spread, impact, and curtailment were inadequate.

Another major aberration observed in the workings of journalists is their repression by the state. The chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists NUJ recounts that the pandemic ushered in difficult times for Nigerian journalists who had to do their jobs in the face of a new "unwritten rule," "you cannot criticize government

officials." Going by some recorded incidences at the peak of COVID-19, the only information allowed to be published/broadcast were those volunteered by the government or its appointed agents which, in most cases, portrayed the government in good light. This is against the provisions of Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) which stipulates that "the media have a responsibility to hold the government accountable to the people."

Contrary to the above constitutional provisions, between March and May 2020, there were no fewer than 10 instances of reported assaults on journalists in Nigeria apart from those who lost their jobs (Offiong 2020, p. 9). The Chairman of Imo State NUJ chapter on May 28, 2020, said that a female reporter, Angela Nkwo-Akpolu, of *Leadership* newspaper was assaulted and her iPad seized by personnel from the Department of State Security Service. The Media Rights Agenda (MRA) in a statement reported that the reporter was attacked while taking pictures of a hotel in Owerri where guests were forcibly quarantined on the grounds that the hotel did not comply with the government's COVID-19 protocol.

The restrictions on movement within and across state boundaries put in place by the government also affected the distribution of newspapers and magazines. Due to the fear of contracting COVID-19 disease, people refused to buy newspapers and vendors also declined to circulate them. Therefore, people turned to online editions rather than risked their lives to buy hard copy newspapers. Considering the schedules of journalists, frequent movement around the cities and communities was inevitable thus, making them vulnerable to contracting the virus. Perhaps, this is the reason why the Nigerian media industry lost seven active journalists to COVID-19 (Sule and Nwankwo 2020). These are apart from 12 others who were tested positive and ended up being admitted to the isolation centers in different states.

Within the first eight months of its outbreak in Nigeria, the COVID-19 pandemic occasioned a vast interruption in individual routine and gave rise to severe economic recession characterized by loss of jobs and pay cuts across various industries including the media. According to (Obadofin 2020, p. 12), "the pandemic caused significant drop in revenue for media outlets in Nigeria due to sharp drop in circulation and advertisement." Other "*challenges resulting from the Covid-19 outbreak, according to (Odutola 2020), included reduction in print pagination and staff furloughing." All the national newspapers in Nigeria such as the Nation, Punch, Guardian, Vanguard, The Sun, Tribune, and This Day took drastic measures by reducing their pagination by almost half; slashed the staff salaries by 45–50 percent and reduced staff strength by about 30–40% due to what the management called "the reduction of newspaper readership." The General manager of Complete Sports, a specialized newspaper said, "I decided to pay off all the workers at the height of the pandemic in April (2020) so as to pave way for financial reengineering." The broadcast sub-sector of the industry is not faring better. Except for the few ones that are owned and financed by the government, all others had* no choice but to send some of their staff on compulsory leave without pay till the situation improved.

The narrative is not different in the global media space. Jonty (2020) reported that the UK *Financial Times'* print sales dropped by 39% in April. Also, ITV's

advertising revenue diminished by 42% and FOX in the United States by 50% at the same period. A survey by the *Network Times* reports that about 36,000 media workers have been laid off, or had their pay slashed due to the shutdown of many newspapers such as *The Stranger* in Seattle, digital empires like *Vox Media,* and *Gannett*, the nation's largest newspaper chain.

As the pandemic ravaged the world, death rates kept mounting and the economic misery continued to soar. It became increasingly important that both the national and the multinational governments put heads together to check the spread of the deadly virus. Africa and indeed, Nigeria are believed to have fragile health care delivery systems that cannot effectively respond to the growing needs of infected patients, especially those with complications requiring admission into Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for Acute Respiratory Diseases (ARDs) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

While the pandemic continues to bare its fang, the reality is that poverty and inequality breathe lives into the disease, especially in Nigeria that is regarded as the poverty capital of the world (Kazeem 2018). The matter is made worse by the fact of government's misplacement of priorities coupled with other factors such as high-level corruption among the political elites, uneven distribution of wealth to every sector, and the uncoordinated attention given to the economy in general. The consequences of the discriminatory, inept, and inconsistent responses are vividly illustrated in the economic adversity that befell some sectors of Nigeria's economy especially, the media. The question arising from the above is: how will the media industry survive and be sustained in this precarious situation without compromising their professional ethics?

Economics of Managing the Media During the COVID-19 Era

The media as the fourth estate are to professionally inform, educate, entertain the public, and serve as a watchdog over the conduct of public affairs. In addition, the media provide information that enhances the functionality of the political and economic market. For the media to efficiently carry out these traditional functions require deft management. The management of media organization according to Ayodabo and Babatunde (2018, p. 326), can be examined from two perspectives. The first is the personnel and space management which deals with the management of human resources to achieve corporate goals and to conserve space and material. The second is the material production management that takes care of the quality of newsprints and other production materials, soft copies, editorial processes, depth of research, news gathering, and logistics. While contributing to the discussion on economics of media management, Murdock and Goldings (2016) also observed that the media as an economic institution must be examined in terms of production and distribution. Besides, it is important to emphasize that as a business venture, the media management and operations are directed by the entrepreneurial principle

governing other establishments in the society although with the inherent notion of social responsibility.

In capitalist societies where the major producers of public communications are privately owned, their primary goals are to profitably manage the enterprise so as to generate substantial dividends for their shareholders either by producing tangible goods for direct sales or by assembling media audiences for marketers and advertisers on cash and carry basis.

It is pertinent to note that media ownership policy affects the management and audience's preference for media organizations. For instance, according to Ayodabo and Babatunde (2018, pp. 329–330), viewers in Nigeria have a preference for some privately owned media such as African Independent Television, Channels Television, and Television Continental among others, when compared with the viewership of the Nigerian Television Authority and other state-owned television stations. The same is for the newspaper genre. Privately owned newspapers such as *The Guardian, Punch, Vanguard, The Sun,* and *Tribune* have more patronage among business class, youths, and job seekers. Most reading and viewing public who are longing for credible and unbiased news reporting also give preference to newspapers produced by privately owned media outfits. In essence, privately owned media attract more readership and viewership than government-owned outfits. The above observations concerning viewership and readership levels explain why marketers, advertisers, and business classes often prefer to patronize privately owned media when it comes to advertisement placement. This fact, according to Adejola and Bello (2014), also explains why more privately owned media organizations are more self-sustaining and vibrant than the government owned.

Preceding the current disruptions occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, the media industry had been threatened many times (Owolabi and Samson 2019). Since the turn of the century, digitization of content, the rise of social media, and acceleration in mobile consumption have forced the youth population to migrate online. Freedman (2010, p. 35) also observed that "newspapers and magazines in particular are imperiled as a result of audiences decline and shrinking advertisement revenue in the face of increasing competition from online news providers."

The pandemic has also paved the way for every publisher and distributor to benefit more from advertising and the attention of consumers that migrated online. The social distancing policy and the total lockdown which pushed most youths online have created new business opportunities of reaching large audiences through social media platforms. Some of these media are thriving and their addressable markets are getting bigger.

Despite the strategic role the media played before and during the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic, the political economy of government's response to it was not favorable to the industry. Apart from the 50% tax rebates given to all businesses that registered under the Companies and Allied Matters Act, the privately owned media did not benefit from other aspects of the COVID-19 palliatives which the government provided for other organizations. When asked why the government excluded the media as social institutions from the list of beneficiaries of COVID-19 palliatives, the Minister of Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed said the media are private

ventures and they should take care of themselves. When reminded of other private organizations that benefitted from the distribution of palliatives, he said, "If that is the case, the government will find another way of cushioning the effect of the pandemic on the media industry." However, pundits have proffered reasons for the Minister's answer. The ownership structure of the media in Nigeria is divided between the government and some private individuals most of whom have strong political and/or business ties with the government in power. The attitude of the present government to the privately owned media is a "clever" way of showing its displeasure in their style of reporting government activities. The banning of Twitter, the threat of other social media operating in Nigeria, and the speedy consideration of the controversial Social Media Bill by the National Assembly are confirmation of government's anti-media postures. Accordingly, the bill if passed into law proposes life imprisonment for convict and total closure of the medium involved for a minimum of ten years.

The economic condition of the media in Nigeria is made worse by the fact that the financial institutions are not always disposed to advancing credit to media organizations as they are perceived as risky investments that take a longer period of adept management to break even and be self-sustaining. Moreover, the media industry is also observed to experience a high mortality rate. The above reasons explain why media owners often resorted to diversifying resources from other investments into the business or borrowing from informal sources. Some proprietors do volunteer their medium as the mouthpiece of a political party with the intention of gaining undue favor. Each time this occurs, truth, objectivity, and fairness, which are the hallmarks of journalism, are usually sacrificed on the altar of political patronage. For example, two prominent media groups in Nigeria were dragged before the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in 2018 for offenses that border on corruption. The publisher of *This Day* newspaper, Nduka Obaigbena was alleged to have collected N670 million from the former Security Adviser to the Federal government out of the funds allocated for arms purchase while the proprietor of Africa Independent Television, Raymond Dokpesi was also involved in money laundering to the tune of N2.1 billion. Over the years, these two media organizations were reputed for compromising media ethics by defending programs and policies of any government in power whether good or bad.

There are media organizations that have also taken to commercializing news content by insisting on charging fees for covering company annual general meetings AGM; even the daily briefing of NCDC. Going by their unethical behavior, they are not only compromising the integrity of news, but they are also actually insulting their audience and breaching the national broadcasting code (Adaba 2019).

Another unethical phenomenon that characterizes the media in Nigeria during the COVID-19 is what is often referred to as wrap-around, wherein the entire front and back pages of a newspaper and a substantial number of inside pages are filled with adverts, leaving just a few pages of news content for readers. This, according to Arogundade (2019), amounts to selling fake products to the reading publics. This was the feature of *The Nation, Vanguard, Tribune,* and *This Day* newspapers on

March 29, 2020, and September 21, 2020, the birthdays of Bola Tinubu, a top political leader and his wife, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, respectively.

The "brown envelope syndrome" is another form of reprehensible conduct caused by the dismal economy heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. This simply refers to as "the gift given to journalists in cash purportedly in appreciation of their coverage." In other words, it means "bribing a journalist in anticipation of favorable coverage" (Akabogu 2005, p. 202). This professional misconduct existed since before the outbreak of COVID-19 but has now become prevalent to the extent of some media proprietors tactically removing payment of salaries and wages of journalists from their obligations to their workers. *This Day* Newspaper group and African Independent Television Group have been notorious for these. The pertinent question is: to what extent can a journalist that is not paid at the end of the month resist the temptation to collect brown envelopes?

One other feature of media practice during coronavirus era is the tendency to relapse into sensationalism and human-interest stories. The human-interest story is a feature story that discusses a person, people, sex, crime, and disaster news in a sensational way. The print media resorted to this style of journalism on realizing that media engagement is higher during the lockdown and that between 80% and 90% of people consume news and entertainment for an average of almost 24 h during a typical week. Human angle stories, therefore, became the regular menu the media serve their audience to satisfy their information quest and entertainment desire. It is therefore not surprising that most media content during the time were products of gossip, news agencies, and press releases.

Sustainable Strategies for Media Managers

Globally, the media have always had various challenges to contend with. For the media industry to survive at a difficult time requires adroit resourceful management and proven sustainable strategies. According to Owolabi and Samson (2021), if the media would ever be a catalyst and not drag in the wheel of development, it must be sufficiently equipped and well managed to function at its best despite constraints. Minnie (2008) suggests a number of strategies through which the media can be sustained during an economic depression.

On the challenge of underfunding, Minnie opines that media houses could marry their resources together as consortiums to import newsprints and other consumables. Besides, they could also embark on joint distribution of their newspapers and magazines as well as collectively negotiate for advertisement rates. In South Africa, an Association of Small Independent Local Newspapers was established to give the members strong bargaining power when making a purchase in the market.

In the opinion of Owolabi and O'Neill media houses with identical editorial focus may merge together to form a bigger organization under a new name. Alternatively, the one with a larger capital base may acquire the smaller ones. According to Graves

(2010, p. 9), between January and May 2007, about 372 of such mergers occurred globally in the media industry with some of them involving American-based companies. Merger and acquisition are two business strategies by which media organizations can enlarge their capital base and become financially independent.

It has also been observed by financial experts that the media, instead of borrowing from conventional banks, may also consider raising funds from the stock market. For example, the Media Works (NZ) Limited, a New Zealand television broadcast group once had a financial crisis and in 2004, a Canadian broadcast group through the capital market acquired 100% shares of the group, renamed it as CanWest Media Work (NZ) Limited and eventually sold 30% of its share interest to the public. The African Newspapers Limited (ANL), the publisher of *Tribune* titles and the oldest surviving private newspaper in Nigeria also threaded this pathway in 1998 when it ran into financial crisis. Surprisingly, most media managers hardly ever consider this financial window.

Ifijie (2019) also observes that there is an urgent need for a change in the media business model in Nigeria. For many years, the media have been running on credit: agents run commercials on credit and adverts are also published on credit, thus leaving owners and managers at the mercy of agents and advertisers. In other sectors of the economy, services are rendered on cash and carry basis but in the media industry, products are consumed while services are enjoyed before payment is made. This explains the high unsold copies that are usually returned to the company and the huge unpaid adverts rates, which commonly become bad debt.

According to Minnie (2008), the United Nations and other International Development Agencies could also launch a media development fund that could provide assistance in funding and training of media practitioners, especially among developing nations. However, this must be done with close monitoring so as to check situations where the funds allocated for media development are diverted into unintended projects.

It is noteworthy that during this COVID-19 crisis, a news media recovery plan was launched for the United Kingdom and Ireland to revive the media industry for better performance. A donation fund account was opened for its members in need. The union's hardship funds are expected to help those affected by the coronavirus. A similar strategy was adopted in France during the 2007/2008 global financial crisis. The then President; Nicholas Sarkozy had to embark on a bail out strategy to prevent some badly affected newspapers from closing (Pfanner 2009).

Another strategy is the optimization of search engines to drive traffic to a firm's website. It is called Search Engine Optimization (SEO). This is a proven strategy put in place to make sure news aggregators, search engines, bloggers, and anyone else who can redirect traffic to one's news website are able to scroll the news headlines of affected news organizations. In other words, the news firms package their news stories in a way the news aggregators/search engines could locate them and thus redirect traffic to the news firms. In the media industry, traffic equals page views and the more page views the news site gets, the more advertisers are attracted to advertise on such heavy traffic sites. This will consequently lead to more revenue for the news media organization.

At the international level, Seamus Dooley, Irish NUJ secretary having recognized the fact that the COVID-19 crisis had negatively impacted the Irish media industry called on all parties engaged in government information to be committed to media rescue plan and to establish a Commission on the future of the media in Ireland.

NUJ (2020) advocates for targeted measures by the government aimed at supporting jobs and quality journalism. Specific intervention is needed to protect and invest in hyperlocal and community enterprises. The union proposed both short- and medium-term measures which they believe can impact positively on the practice of journalism. Some of these short-term measures are discussed below:

(a) The provision of tax credits and interest-free loans to support journalists who are frontline reporters covering the COVID-19 crisis and recovery. (b) The provision of free vouchers for online or print subscriptions for people aged 70 years and above, in line with the free TV license scheme. (c) To take immediate and necessary steps to address the financial crisis in public service broadcasting.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has left no one in doubt that it has the potential of crippling the world economy and bringing many nations to their knees. The fact that the impact of the pandemic is felt at varying degrees could possibly be responsible for why instead of a coordinated international response, policymakers in each country decided to divert resources away from other countries through banning of food and drugs exportation, and hoarded essential supplies. The conse- quences of a disunited response are seen in the global fatality rate of unimaginable scale. The Nigerian government in particular has taken numerous health, social, and economic measures to cushioning the impact of COVID-19. However, the policy responses have weaknesses and, taken together, are unfavorable to the media industry. This study, specifically found that the political economy of Nigerian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic which includes low-interest loans to the SMEs, as well as other CBN's financial interventions to the formal and informal sectors of the economy were not tailored to benefit the media industry. As such, the media as a key player in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic are worse for it. This, therefore, explains why the media have been left to struggle on their own with a heightened record of mortality, loss of professionals to retrench- ment, loss of reporters to COVID-19, escalated economic misfortune, and above all, compromised professional standard of practice. The study also discovered that as a result of sensationalizing of news, the media entertain a lot and inform a little, thus creating armies of less-informed audiences and erosion of robust democratic engage- ment that is essential for good governance in this time of global health crises.

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The Impact of COVID-19 on the Digitalization of the Namibian Media

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Abstract It took a pandemic to fast-track the reorganization of productive forces in the Namibian media industry and to expose their vulnerability in digital capitalism. Predominant to this vulnerability has been the realization among media workers that they are "not conditions of production" but only their labour is. A combination of digitalization and the onset of the novel Coronavirus 'unsettled' the small but relatively "stable" media industry operating in a neoliberal political and economic environment since the birth of independent Namibia in 1990. This chapter examines how COVID-19 fast-tracked the restructuring process of the Namibian media. It starts by evaluating the impact of neoliberal media restructuring (digitalization) of the Namibian media before scrutinizing how the pandemic has fast-tracked this process. While much of the emerging work on COVID-19 tends to prioritize media discourses, largely confined to COVID-19-related media messages by dominant political and societal sources, this study probes the practical restructuring of the industry itself as the result of the pandemic. The study is grounded in critical perspectives drawing from works of contemporary critical media and communication theorists.

Keywords Pandemic · COVID-19 · Digitalization · Media restructuring · Marxism · Namibia · Digital capitalism

Introduction

The novel Coronavirus landed a devastating blow to pillars on which neoliberalism is constructed and thereby immensely reversed their "gains" made over the past four decades (Saad-Filho 2020). The pandemic, the first in the "information age", inflicted heavy setbacks on social and economic lives and wrecked operations of countless social institutions, including the media. Its blow on the media finds this

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institution under severe pressure from the restructuring processes triggered by the transformations in global capitalism.

While Namibian media, like many others in the developing world, had been under structural changes during the past few years resulting from digitalization, it needed a huge jolt from the novel COVID-19 to fast-track this restructuring process. Thus, a combination of digitalization and the impact of the pandemic "unsettled" the small but relatively "stable" media operating in a neoliberal setting since the "decolonization" of Namibia in 1990.

Being a critical institution, the media apart from profit making like other business undertakings, are also "special businesses effected with public interest" to borrow a phrase from Melody (1997, p. 11). This dichotomous character is manifested by having both economical and political (ideological) dimensions, or as Manfred Knoche (2019, p. 289) notes having both "physical and intangible specificity, which fulfils a fundamental role in the economy and political ideology". Put differently, while media make profit, they do also provide a public interest function, in that they "manufacture" and disseminate information the citizens rely on to make informed decisions about their lives in societies (Murdock and Golding 1979; Fuchs 2018, pp. 277–278; Mosco 2009). This is a fundamental role performed by the media.

However, the onset of COVID-19 in the media sought to obliterate both these dimensions on which the role of the media is molded. For instance, the pandemic inadvertently contributed to the "destruction" of the media's core and long-standing advertising and circulation-based business model (Fray 2020). This "destruction" resulted initially from the broader global restructuring process of the neoliberal capitalist order which impacted on the media as well, in the first place. At the same time, the pandemic significantly weakened or diminished the public interest role of the media, to which Sir Alex S. Jones (2009) refers to as the "iron core" of journalism (or the media).

Drawing from what has just been denoted, both the pandemic and the process of digitalization impacted on the functioning of the media in both their composition and their roles in various ways. This is reflected in terms of the reduction of income derived from advertisement and circulation, which in most cases led to staff lay-offs, salary cuts and the scaling down of operations. This in turn negatively affected the core responsibility of the media (Benton 2020). The "iron core" covers a broad area that comprises high-quality public interest journalism (including investigative work) critical to the functioning of democracy (ibid.). It encompasses issues that impact on democracy and on which the electorates need to be informed.

The chapter starts with an assessment of the impact of neoliberal media restructuring (digitalization) set off by the transformation in global capitalism of the media. It then scrutinizes how the pandemic fast-tracked this process. More particularly, this assessment centres on the reorganization of the capitalist mode of production.

The work is grounded in theoretical perspectives drawing from contemporary Marxist media and communication scholars. It traces the media restructuring processes within the broader transformation of the capitalist mode of production,

resulting from the endemic crises associated with capitalism. Hence, context was set with the objective of deepening the understanding as to what led to the restructuring of the media in the first place.

In addition, very few emerging studies in Africa that seek to examine this pandemic are grounded in critical perspectives. Moreover, there is hardly significant work being done to investigate the impact of the pandemic on digitalization of the African media. The present chapter seeks to fill this gap, while encouraging critical media research in digital capitalism in Africa in general.

Much of the data used in the chapter is derived from the analysis of the documents (studies and reports), but more particularly newspaper reports/articles. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many societies to a standstill, evidenced by lockdowns and closure of many economic and social activities. But, despite this negative impact, the media remained the main source of information for many about what was taking place. Newspapers have remained an important resource of research not only in the arts, social sciences and humanities, but across various other subject areas. They had provided accurate, reliable and timely information on a variety of subjects (Suciu 2018), including public health issues (see Meyer 2018; Shih et al. 2011). Those who have conducted studies during the COVID-19 can attest to this reality. Below we provide a birds' view of the impact of COVID-19 on society and its institutions in the course of 2020.

Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic: A Brief Overview

The pandemic unleashed a devastating effect on nations and their institutions. It triggered the deepest and sharpest economic contraction in the history of capitalism, which reversed the gains of globalization and thereby shuttered the foundation of neoliberalism to its core (Saad-Filho 2020). At the same time, it temporarily reversed some of the most neoliberal fiscal austerity measures. During the course of 2020, it was not surprising to hear calls from staunch neoliberals demanding state interventions with relief measures, including the bailing out of public sector and major private industries, including the air transport industry (Fuchs 2020; Hague 2020).

With regard to the media, the pandemic affected their business model, notably advertising. This was due to the reduction of advertisement spending (Gabbatt 2020). Many traditional media outlets are reliant on advertisements but they suffered major losses as circulation dwindled due to lockdowns and curfews. In addition, the consolidation of online platform giants like Google, Facebook, Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft, the infamous GAFAM (De Rosnay and Musiani 2020, p. 622) led to a reduction in advertisement revenue of traditional media, because businesses diverted their advertising revenue online platforms during the pandemic.

Globally, the world witnessed the lay-off (furloughed) of thousands of media workers and reduction in salaries of media personnel. Some journalists were forced to work from home, while others became freelancers. There had been shutdowns of news media outlets, while many migrated to online platforms, resulting in more job

losses (through retrenchments) (Ntibinyane 2020; Mason 2020; Gabbatt 2020; French 2020).

Against this background, we need to understand that in general the dominant neoliberal economic policies had depleted many nations' capacities to produce basic necessities. Many nations, but more in Africa were unable to provide the necessary life-saving measures needed to fight the pandemic, in its early days. Linked to this had been the general lack of provision of satisfactory public service to all the citizens, mostly in developing nations. Alfredo Saad-Filho (2020) argues that "neo-liberalism has hollowed-out, fragmented and part-privatized the health system". He goes on to say that it created a precarious and impoverished working class who are highly vulnerable, as they lack not only savings, but also proper housing, nutrition, and other basic services.

Africa has been much affected as a good number of countries could not produce the much-needed PPEs during the pandemic, not to speak of the life-saving vaccines. In addition, many people on the continent were left with a dysfunctional public health system, while some advanced health systems on the continent, wherever they are available, can only be afforded by a small middle class (Ntibinyane 2020).

The Genesis of Ongoing Media Restructuring

Before outlining the dynamics of the Namibian media restructuring process that has come to be fast-tracked by the pandemic, it is important to first appreciate the context that explains media restructuring globally. The global capitalist restructuring process is the context, while the critical political economy serves as the guiding theoretical framework informing this discussion.

The mistake neoliberal enthusiasts make is to ascribe the current "transformations" in the media industry to "rapid economic, technological and political changes" (Remmert 2019), without explaining how these "changes" have come about. No effort is made to link these transformations to the broader global transformations in the capitalist economy.

To understand the advent of change and transformation of media in society, the starting point must be based on the argument that the capitalist mode of production has been the primary driving force behind the media companies' strategic actions and therefore the force behind their structural transformation. As the dominant mode of production, capitalism encompasses social formations that depict its characteristics. These include the forms of production, consumption and distribution as well as the entire mode of life pursuit by members of society. Therefore, capitalism influences the activities of the dominant agents and core institutions in society and thereby accounts for their entire "behaviour" (Remmert 2019, p. 288).

In addition, capitalism has been through incessant transformations as a result of imminent crises it is disposed to. But capitalism at the same time is resilient to these crises, as it has been overcoming them over the centuries. David Harvey (2020) argues that capitalism requires processes of expansion (acceleration, globalization,

and financialization) as strategies of temporal, spatial and spatio-temporal fixes that aim to temporarily overcome its inherent crisis tendency. It reaches "spatial and temporal limits", which it needs to overcome in order to avoid crises related to accumulation. The "spatio-temporal fix" is a "metaphor for a particular kind of solution to capitalist crisis through temporal deferral and geographical expansion" (Harvey 2020, p. 115).

Manfred Knoche (2019, p. 290) tells us that the "crisis is an enduring and essential element of capitalist production, as crisis and change conditioned each other in a permanent process". In fact, the continuation and thriving of capitalism are ascribed to or facilitated by overcoming crises. By overcoming the persistent and ongoing crises capitalism invents new ways of capital accumulation and value creation.

The development of new technologies (including digitalization) is embedded in the search for spatio-temporal fixes to capitalism's immanent crisis tendencies. In fact, the solving of crises led to various 'forms' of capitalism. This can attest to the different 'forms' (or layers) of capitalism over the centuries, culminating in industrial capitalism. The latter gave way to information capitalism—information and technology. Digital capitalism was introduced to solve crises experienced with financial capitalism that reached its peak during the 2008 financial crisis. Digital capitalism is therefore the latest 'form' of capitalism.

Technology and the Process of Digitalization

To understand the process of digitalization, let us first examine the concept of technology to see how its role in capitalism has been conceptualized. The development of technology in society comes from the needs of society, or at least the needs of the dominant strata of society (Holzer 2017, p. 692). Thus, as Horst Holzer argues, technologies do not come into existence arbitrarily, but their development is stimulated by economic, political and ideological interests, strategies and agendas. Technological advances can lead to improved production and therefore improved quality of life. However, it can also lead to alienation since it can allow the appropriation of human work by capital, which leads to an increase in the prevailing relations of domination (De Rivera 2020, p. 730).

For instance, Karl Marx (1990/1867) acknowledges that technology is a "fixed capital" and is therefore a means of production, of which its ownership defines power relationships in capitalist society. This is the contradictory nature of technology, which he hints on when arguing that while technology advances "new potentials of co-operation and welfare for all", it also creates domination and exploitation at the same time. He notes that "every development of new productive forces is at the same time a weapon against the workers" (see Fuchs 2018, p. 524). To Karl Marx capitalism is behind profit and therefore, treats workers and machines that substitute workers as a means to maximize profits.

Despite, this critique, Karl Marx acknowledges that "technology can be appropriated and transformed" (Fuchs 2018, p. 256). In Grundrisse, he acknowledges the critical roles knowledge and communication can play in increasing productivity in capitalism. He anticipated the emergence of informational capitalism or digital capitalism or cognitive capitalism. Boes and Kämpf (2012; Knoche 2019, p. 295) refer to digital capitalism as the "informatisation of the productive forces". It is a restructuration process of production and labour based on the use of microelectronics and the Internet (Sauer 2006, p. 89 cited in Knoche 2019, 295).

The concept of digital capitalism became popular in the 1990s when it came to accentuate the role of digital technologies in the success of economic globalization (De Rivera 2020, p. 725). It also represents a new epoch in which cyberspace has come to shape the political economy (Schiller 2000; De Rivera 2020, p. 725). Digital capitalism must be understood beyond the production of digital products (commodities) crucial infrastructure provided major technology companies (Fuchs 2020, p. 71). These infrastructure are provided by major technology oligopolies such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft (GAFAM) (De Rivera 2020).

GAFAM positioned themselves as "natural monopolies" or "public utilities" that provide "informational infrastructure". The infrastructure has enabled GAFAM new regimes of accumulation and social control. Google, for instance, provides storage systems used by the public and private systems (De Rivera 2020, p. 727).

Namibia Media Structure: An Overview

Namibia has a fairly pluralistic media but, they lack in diversity. In the media policy parlance (discourse), plurality refers to many media outlets while diversity means different. For instance, a country may have many radio stations and restrict them to the commercial in orientation. Diversity on the other hand refers to a media policy objective that seeks to ensure and promote various media interests: commercial, community, religion, students and workers (see Freedman 2008). South Africa, for instance, has a media diversity legislation and a media diversity fund run by a Media Development and Diversity Agency that promotes media diversity in the country (Republic of South Africa 2002).

Ownership in the sector is informed by the "mixed economy" policy of the government. The media system comprises public and private (community and commercial) media sub-structures in line with the "mixed economy" policy. The guiding philosophical outlook of the media is overwhelmingly "liberal" (McQuail 2005; Nordenstreng, 2007), while an element of the social responsibility perspective is discernible as well, more particularly among the public and the "independent" press.

Since 1990, the Namibian government sought to promote a developmental media agenda through its first information policy of the early 1990s, where it sought to persuade the media into developmental objectives, in addition to democratization of society (Heuva 2010a). However, the private media had been reluctant to embrace

the developmental commitment and preferred the Western liberal stance. Despite this, some private media have undertaken development-oriented projects in society, but more specifically from the social responsibility perspective (investing in the community), and not from the media development agenda.

The state–media relations have generally remained cordial although antagonistic at times. The country's constitution guarantees basic human rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and media freedom. Interestingly, the state has taken close to 30 years to adopt access to information legislation, while it was quick to adopt a clause in its communication legislation that authorizes state surveillance (Heuva 2012, 2017). Nevertheless, Namibia is the birthplace of the "World Press Freedom Day" and the "Windhoek Declaration", which marked its 30th anniversary in 2021 and its media was rated as the "freest" on the African continent for a number of years.

The most testing time for state–media conflict was the first 10–15 years after the independence of the country (Posluns 2002/2003). This is perhaps, because the two institutions weighed each other's position viz-a-viz their roles in the new society. Noteworthy is that it was during this phase and only time that a journalist, Hannes Smith, was sent to prison for refusing to reveal his source of information. Shortly after, the State, for the first time, banned buying and advertising through the *Windhoek Observer*, for arguably "embarrassing" the State with remarks published by the editor about the visiting Zimbabwean head of State to Namibia. This was to be followed a few years later by a decade-long advertising boycott on the Namibian newspaper due to its "critical and unpatriotic" reporting on State matters (Blaauw and Letholo 2009, p. 358; Mwilima 2008).

For a country of about 2.4 million people, the media landscape is slightly overcrowded (Remmert 2019, p. 14). The neoliberal dispensation created a burgeoning private media entity that competes fairly with the established State media. In addition, there have been many emerging media entrepreneurs who have been competing for audience in this limited space. By 2019, Namibia had 30 radio stations, 10 state-owned, nine commercial and 11 community stations. Radio provides about 97.5%. During the same period, there were five dailies, seven weeklies and four online newspapers (FES 2018, pp. 24–25). The private and commercial media companies are run on business principles and they generate income and profit.

All the state-owned media entities had been under severe financial strains due to the government's austerity measures. The national broadcaster, Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) had been experiencing perennial financial problems since its establishment in 1991 (Heuva 2000, 2010b). This can be ascribed to the failure by the state and the corporation to design a suitable funding model. While by law the NBC is a non-profit entity, government expects it to move into a financial direction to fund its own operations. Thus, in addition, the NBC has also been reliant on advertising and television license fees.

The public-owned newspaper, *New Era*, although established as a non-profit establishment, is overwhelmingly State-funded, and relies on advertising and circulation for income. The government-owned wire services, the Namibia Press Agency (Nampa) relies on subscriptions from clients, in addition to state funding. Presently

there are discussions of a merger between the New Era Publication Corporation (NEPC) and Nampa.

The neoliberal economy opened the media sector to competition with media products from outside, more especially from South Africa. The two economies are linked due to historical developments. Namibia has a small business and manufacturing sector, as most commodities come from South Africa. Many South African companies that operate in the country serve as a major source of advertisements for local media (Tyson, 2008). Namibia's own advertising market is small due to its small population and economy (see IPPR 2019). The largest local advertisers include the State and its State-owned enterprises (parastatals).

In this locally crammed environment, media operations are described as a "risky and challenging business" as many media houses are operating on a "shoestring budget" (Tileni Mongudhi; Remmert 2019, p. 13). The IPPR report on media sustainability in the country notes that the "Namibia media market is suffering from oversupply of media outlets without a corresponding supply of advertising revenue" (Remmert 2019, p. 14). Consequently, a combination of these factors has affected media economic sustainability before the onset of digitalization.

The Digitalization of the Namibian Media

The Namibian media industry is operating within the broader capitalist environment and has therefore been affected by the transformation in this mode of production. This is the starting point in understanding the impact of digitalization of the Namibian media. The crisis of accumulation affected the business model of the media and the latter had to adjust in the face of the emerging realities.

This reality dawned on the industry as early as 2016 when it resolved to embrace the digitalization process. Media managers maintained that they could not postpone the process (of digitalization), "since it has started taking its toll on those who are reluctant to embrace change" (Kahiurika and Ngutjinazo 2019). Pressure due to reduction in advertisement revenue and the decrease in readership forced the media to migrate to online platforms.

By the end of 2019, a few Namibian media had adopted these measures, apart from those that finally migrated to online platforms after the pandemic. The motivation for this restructuring was to cut production (both labour and printing) costs, while also trying to follow readers and advertisers on digital platforms. For you to have an idea on the printing and distribution costs in Namibia consider the *New Era* newspaper, which is state funded, and its results are publicly available. In 2017, the State spent N$24 million (about US$1, 6 million) for printing and N$9 million (about US$600,000) to distribute the newspaper across the country. *New Era* does not have a high print run like its commercial counterparts, as in 2017 only 17,000 copies were printed daily from Monday to Thursday and 25,000 copies on Fridays (Tjitemisa 2017). However, it can be seen that the printing and distribution budget was extremely high for a small non-profit newspaper.

The migration to online platforms eliminated these huge production and distribution costs for many newspapers. Knoche (2019, p. 301) explains; "capital succeeds in radically lowering fixed constant capital (the costs of the means of production), because there is no longer a need for the reproduction and distribution of physical products". But this development had adversely affected media personnel. Knocke (ibid.) further argues that the reduction of costs leads to change in the organic composition of capital, which is achieved through the reduction of the number of workers (journalists) by replacing their labour power with production technologies (machines). The reason for the reduction of these major costs of production was to increase profits by commercial media.

The media restructuring process in Namibia started in earnest in 2016 with media migrating to online platforms. Two weekly newspapers with small print run, *The Villager* and *Namibia Economist* were among the first to venture online. By the beginning of 2019, this restructuring process shed 40 jobs in the media industry (Kahiurika and Ngutjinazo 2019, p. 4). In the same period, the total number of Namibian journalists was estimated to be 300 for a country of about 2.4 million inhabitants (Remmert 2019, p. 14). Consequently, the loss of 40 jobs represented a 13% reduction in the total media labour force, which is a significant number of people in the Namibian context, considering that most of the retrenched people have families to look after.

While Namibian media managed to cut production costs, it is debatable as to whether it managed to increase profits. The digitalization process allowed Namibian media, like others, to post their editions on Social Network Sites (SNSs), such as Facebook in return for a reasonable fee. But these posted media products (articles, pictures and videos) as well as their users (formerly "readers") and their online activities, called the Users Generated Content (UGC), provide "free labour", which is appropriated by the owners of the SNSs, the GAFAM corporations. The UGC is the main source of capital accumulation by the GAFAMs, as this work and their labourers (users/readers) are sold to advertisers (Jin and Feenberg 2014, p. 57).

Secondly, apart from the UGC, the GAFAM corporations are also engaged in other "multi-commodification strategies that are marked by aggressive economic synergy and technological convergence" (Jin and Feenberg 2014, p. 57). This is done by transforming the labour used to produce the UGC into markets and advertising medium labour. Thus, the process of audience commodity production itself is turned into the creation of another commodity, called rating.

This process is referred to as "immanent commodification". Vincent Mosco notes that "ratings" are commodities "born directly out of the process of creating another" (Mosco 2009, p. 141). Ratings, according to Eileen Meehan (1993), play such a crucial role in the production of cultural commodities as they "set the price that networks (SNSs)" demand. These strategies enable the SNSs to attain high profits as well as financial rent, which is a major source of financial evaluation for the GAFAM corporations. Through these activities, the GAFAM are able to reinforce their financial competitiveness (see Jin Jin and Feenberg 2014, pp. 53–59).

The Namibian media editions posted on digital platforms and their readers and listeners are subjects to the processes described above. In fact, the GAFAM

companies make more money from the media and their users than the owners of the media organizations. That is why there have been campaigns aimed at convincing GAFAM companies to share profits with the media whose content they use (Bloomberg 2021). While Europe is spearheading this campaign, Australia has enacted a law that requires GAFAM corporations to share their profits with the Australian media (AFP 2021). It needs to be noted that some GAFAM companies offered some form of assistance to media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact of COVID-19 on Namibian Media Restructuring Process

While the Namibian media had been in restructuring due to changes in the capitalist mode of production, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that wielded the final push, fast-tracking the restructuring process and thereby, negatively affecting the media's two core roles.

As indicated earlier, the pandemic attacked the economic base and almost brought the core media economic activities to a standstill. This development affected the lifeblood of the media, i.e. the advertising sector which consequently failed the media from effectively performing its political role. The initial problem it faced before the pandemic was economic, as advertisers cut advertising spending due to the economy coming to a halt. The first COVID-19 infections were reported in March 2020 and the government immediately declared a State of Emergency placing the country under lockdown. Businesses and even governments (largest advertisers in the economy) cut advertising budgets.

Two months into the lockdown, the largest print media group, the Namibia Media Holdings, that publishes three dailies in English, Afrikaans and German, announced plans to cut employees' salaries by 20% (Ngutjinazo 2020a, p. 5). During the same lockdown, the English daily *The Namibian* adopted a "restructured" process through which the company offered early retirement packages to those above 55 years, while others were granted voluntary retrenchment. Those who opted to stay had their benefits reviewed downwards (APA 2020).

A weekly newspaper, *Confidénte*, reduced employees' salaries by 15% (Ngutjinazo 2020a, p. 5). It also temporarily suspended the operations of its two regional offices and asked staff at these offices to operate from home. *Windhoek Observer* went through a major restructuring process both pre- and during the pandemic period. It moved to the online platform, abandoning the print edition completely. It significantly laid off staff and left core staff, supported by freelancers and interns/apprentice writers.

Newspapers' print run and circulation were reduced significantly. *The Namibian* newspaper saw its printed copies dwindle to a mere 17,000 per edition during the pandemic, from as high as 78,000 copies per edition in 2016 (Ngutjinazo 2020a, p. 5). The weekly *Windhoek Observer* reduced its print run from 36,000 to 16,000

during the pandemic, before it ultimately abandoned its print edition. The national broadcaster NBC downsized its staff while it reduced its programmes and broadcasting hours. Some staff were furloughed, as it suspended most programmes that required journalists to interact with their sources (Ngutjinazo 2020a, p. 5).

Ironically, *The Namibian* opted to cancel its subscription to the only local state-owned news agency (wire service), the Namibia Press Agency (Nampa). The agency provides regional and international news and picture services to local Namibian media. This seemed odd, considering that the operation of most of Namibia's newspapers is confined to urban centres leaving the rural and far-flung areas uncovered. Nampa covers most parts of the country as it has offices in the greater parts of the country's 14 regions. It is Nampa that supplies the local media with regional and rural news. When major clients like *The Namibian* cancelled subscriptions, Nampa was forced to reduce its subscription rates by half to entice its subscribers to stay.

With the reduction of staff and realignment of operations, coupled with the cancellation of its subscription to Nampa, this meant that *The Namibian* newspaper, and many others that had embarked on these strategies, could not only report on rural news, but had significantly reduced their iron core responsibility through their actions. In return, most of these newspapers opted to fill column spaces with opinion pieces from readers and other experts or political commentators. While comments on various issues are important, personal views of people cannot replace the iron core material, as readers need to get the original information to form their own opinions in the first place.

With retrenchments of journalists, only those tasks that could be completed in a day were preferred, an aspect that also compromised the iron core of the Namibian media. In-depth stories, including investigations, and assignments that had some risk on reporters were avoided. The easy options available as, Alex S. Jones (2009) noted, was to dilute the iron core of journalism, while feeding readers, the few that remain with traditional media, with the news from the same sources, and a lot of information from press conferences, and opinions rather than factual news (Benton 2020).

By 2020, the Namibian media had not invested much time and resources in investigative journalism, albeit with a few exceptions. Conspicuously lacking in 2020 were major investigative stories, such as the "Fishrot" scandal. This clearly demonstrated the negative impact of the pandemic on the public service mandate of the media.

While a full study needs to be conducted to determine how far the iron core had been affected in the Namibian media context, it is evident that the general reduction in the overall coverage of news and related issues significantly and negatively affected the iron core. Therefore, further studies need to address much of the loss which affected the iron core, the robust coverage of issues which citizens needed to be informed on for them to function as well-informed citizens during the pandemic. We need to ask ourselves as to how far the media has protected its iron core in efforts to cut on production due to austerity measures they implemented as a result of the pandemic. Democratically inclined and serious media would prefer to cut on

lifestyles, features hobbies, reviews etc., rather than on political, national, community and business coverage.

Perhaps the most single concrete outcome of the impact of COVID-19 on the Namibian media had been the realization by media workers, following the decimation of jobs and salaries and retrenchments, that they needed to organize themselves as a class for itself and fight for their rights. Media restructuring, hastened by COVID-19, enhanced the de-individualization and de-qualification of journalists, a process that uses computers as "universal machines" to achieve automatization (Knoche 2019, p. 296), and some of the Namibian journalists "superfluous and a substantial industrial reserve army" (ibid.). Karl Marx noted "when machines gradually take over an industry" it creates a chronic misery industry between the workers who had to compete with machines (Marx 1990/1867, p. 557; Bakioğlu 2021, p. 8).

Digitalization, therefore, embraced by Namibian media companies tended to favour capital to the detriment of the journalists. This is what the journalists realized and therefore decided to set up their own trade union (Jason 2020; Ngutjinazo 2020b). This was the first successful attempt by Namibian media personnel to unionize because of the impact of COVID-19 that threatened job security and livelihoods. The formation of the trade union was a realization that journalists were not conditions of production, but only their labour was. Put in simple terms, it meant they had come to acknowledge that their labour is a commodity that can easily be replaced with technology, and they needed to protect it.

Conclusion

The chapter sought to demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic fast-tracked the media restructuring process (digitalization) in Namibia. The Namibian media had been operating in a neoliberal capitalist environment, a foundation that had been shaken by the pandemic to its core. As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, the pandemic wiped out the foundations of the media income, both sales and advertisements. This is how we should understand the impact of COVID-19 on the digitalization of Namibian media.

The chapter further sought to locate the media restructuring process within the broader transformation in capitalism, which came about as a result of inherent crises in this mode of production. It then highlighted the major changes in the Namibian media due to digitalization, before examining how the pandemic had fast-tracked its digitalization process. It has been argued that COVID-19 negatively affected the economy, which is the media's lifeblood. Consequently, the media migrated to digital platforms since their traditional business model based on advertisements and circulation was decimated.

The idea behind digitalization was to eliminate production costs that required huge capital. This led to retrenchments of staff and streamlining the core production processes. This development had an adverse impact on both the labour force as well as on the main function (the "iron core") of the media, as demonstrated above.

However, one positive outcome was the formation of the first Journalists' Union in Namibia. This was a specific outcome of the digitalization process which was fast-tracked by the pandemic.

The chapter provides opportunities for further work to closely test the assumptions and propositions made and thereby grow this burgeoning critical scholarship. While the focus was to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the digitalization of the Namibian media, the broader objective remains to encourage media research grounded in critical (Marxist) perspectives in Africa during digital capitalism.

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Media Viability, Covid-19 and the 'Darwinian' Experience in Southern Africa: Glimpses from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Carol Azungi Dralega

Abstract Political economy predicates suggest that media viability is about the influence and balance between politics and economics of media systems. It is about survival and control. This logic informs this study, which seeks to gain insights into the impact of Covid-19 on media viability in Southern Africa. For decades, the media industry in Southern Africa, and indeed globally, has been trapped in an existential struggle—experiencing, for instance, the steady demise of traditional business models amidst rapid technological developments and proliferation of digital communication, waning trust in legacy media, and an unconducive political and legislative environment. In this qualitative study, we learn from leading industry experts from eight countries about the wide-ranging impact and paradoxes of the pandemic on the media industry—a phenomenon some have referred to as 'a Darwinian moment' or 'media extinction event'. In this study media-house size and ownership, trustworthiness and ability to fully switch to digital operations were key to survival, as was the need for newsroom and work-form restructuring. The study raises concerns over the Covid-19-exacerbated dangers regarding journalists' welfare and cautions against the deepening threats to press freedom, the further marginalisation of minority groups and the relegation of the media's public interest role.

Keywords Covid-19 · Media viability · Southern Africa · Journalists' welfare

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Introduction and Context

Prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the media industry around the world had been trapped in an existential struggle. Key among the challenges was the fact that the key traditional pillars of financial sustainability (i.e. advertising and sales) were increasingly becoming obsolete (Pickard and Williams 2014; Barland 2013; Hollifield 2019) amidst rapid and fundamental shifts in digital technologies and online communication (Chyi 2005; Schubert and Klem 2011; Hill and Bradshaw 2018). For instance, it is well documented how the proliferation of social media and citizen journalism (Olsen et al. 2020; Berger et al. 2015) has contributed to the diminishing trust and credibility of legacy media (Reuters 2020; Chyi 2005). Hill and Bradshaw (2018) and Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2020) have offered an explanation for this diminishing trust in legacy media, highlighting the dangers of the 'mobile first' trends in news production adopted by many newsrooms in a bid to feed the insatiable 24/7 habits of digital news consumers—often at the expense of good verified news.

To make matters worse, the above trends are coupled with the rise in competition from and dominance of large media establishments (i.e. media monopolies/conglomerates) and international technology companies like Facebook and Google (Chakrabarty 2011; O'Connor 2012; Nielsen 2012). These companies are 'digital omnivores' as Goggin (2014) refers to them, for they tend to take up the biggest share of the markets—a fact that has forced some countries in Asia and Europe to renegotiate a redistribution of revenue collection in ways that are democratic and just.

It is within this context that the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Research is beginning to emerge on the scope of impact of the pandemic on an already weakened industry and workforce. Such research includes, for instance, Olurunyomi's (2021) on media viability in Nigeria; and SANEF (2020), which foregrounds the impact of the pandemic on the media industry in South Africa. Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2020), Repucci and Slipowitz (2020) and Reuters (2021) highlight the impact on 46 countries including South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. In addition, scholars such as Jamil and Appaiah (2020), Osmann et al. (2021), Tyson and Wild (2021) and Wake et al. (2021) bring up the important topic of the impact of the pandemic on journalists, especially focusing on their mental health and the chilling effect on their work. The threats to democracy, particularly impingements on freedom of expression, are highlighted by scholars such as Repucci et al. (2020) and Papadopoulou and Maniou (2021). That the challenges are all-encompassing and existentially challenging has led some pundits to refer to the phenomenon as 'a media extinction event' or 'a Darwinian moment'.

The chapter draws on industry experiences from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe with the main objective to deepen our understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the media industry (media houses, journalists, etc.) and implications for media viability. In doing this the

chapter also explores how the media houses responded to the crisis and shares good practices/recommendations for a sustainable media industry in the future.

The chapter makes three main contributions to the scholarship on media viability in times of (health) crisis. First, the chapter is among the first in the budding corpus on the subject to offer regional multi-country (from eight Southern African countries) perspectives on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the media industry. Studies into country-contexts such as the South African Editors Forum (SANEF) report (2020) and Free Press Initiative report from Zambia (2021) and the State of the media Quarterly report from Zambia (MISA 2020) are among the few that this study builds upon. The multi-country experiences shed light on the discourse of survival and control and the implications for media viability, journalist welfare, freedom of expression, digital divides and marginalisation, and other issues at the core of the journalism profession.

The second contribution lies in the critique of the hyperbolic notions of 'a Darwinian moment' or 'media extinction event', arguing that not all is gloomy and hapless. First, in acknowledgement of the devastation, the chapter points out how Covid-19 generated winners and losers in relation to media viability. Traditional print media, i.e. newspapers and magazines, as well as small and community/ alternative media were clear losers as the their economic model of sustainability (i.e. advertisements, sales as well as donations) became unsustainable, especially during lockdown. Among the winners— were broadcasting media such as radio and Television as well as those that embraced digital media. In the analysis, we show how these survivors adopted innovative sustainability schemes that gives hope to the future of the media.

For instance, several newsrooms are experimenting with new digital advertising models, others entered into strategic partnerships—say between small and big media houses—while others are investing in technologies (apps) and diversifying their sources of income. This is not to mention the fact that the shift towards 'online' versions of print media did attract many readers—indicating that legacy media are still trusted despite what other scholars have posited (Reuters 2020; Chyi 2005; Berger et al. 2015). With regard to the workforce, we see that some newsrooms (e.g. Botswana) chose the 'moral high ground', avoiding staff lay-offs and salary cuts and instead electing, through dialogue between management and staff, to find win-win solutions that kept them afloat in and after the worst of the lockdown. Another inspiring example is South Africa, through the Southern African National Editors' Forum's (SANEF) establishment of a Relief Fund, now in its fifth round— offering much-needed financial aid to the most vulnerable and struggling journalists (especially freelancers). It is a strategy now being adopted, albeit with some hiccups, by others including Zambia. In short, there is hope with innovative thinking, concerted efforts and ability to unlearn and relearn.

Third, in line with the broader implications of the impact of Covid-19 on the media industry, this study foregrounds and cautions against Covid-19-driven dangers to democracy, human rights and equality. For instance, caution is sought against the deepening threats to freedom of expression under the guise of 'national security and safety measures'; the moves or inaction against further marginalisation and

exclusion of traditionally marginalised groups, as well as dangers associated with further relegation of the 'public interest roles' of the media, are among several recommendations.

In short, the chapter builds upon findings from emerging research documenting the devastation caused by Covid-19 on the media industry in the selected countries. This study shows that the pandemic heightened the long-running existential challenges. For instance, the pandemic delt a heavy blow to the traditional economic model but at the same time highlighted the importance of independent, public and trustworthy news. Also, while the pandemic accelerated the shift to digital, mobile and platform-dominated media environments in order to tap into the surge in digital consumers, this move did not result in growth in revenues—a paradox that left media houses wondering how to monetize online news consumers (MacLeod 2021). The debilitating impact on journalists is also documented, as is the implication of the Covid-19-induced dangers to freedom of expression, inclusion of marginalised groups and the dangers associated with public interest communication.

The following sections start with a summarized overview of the mediascape in the countries under study, followed by a brief examination of the conceptual and analytical frames as well as the methodologies of the study. The chapter features a thematic presentation and discussion of key issues regarding media viability during Covid-19 and concludes with reflections on the implications not just for media viability but also broader issues around freedom of expression, marginalisation, and the future of the journalism profession. Recommendations come at the end.

Overview of Mediascape in Context

A review of the African Media Barometer for Botswana (2018), Eswatini (2020), Lesotho (2018), Malawi (2012), Namibia (2018), South Africa (2018), Zambia (2021) and Zimbabwe (2020) indicates, to varying degrees, a number of common features of the media. Some of these are summarised below for the purpose of this chapter.

Much of the media is elitist and urban-centred; there is a presence of native-language media products but mostly a predominance of English-language media products. Persistent digital divides, especially among the poor and rural dwellers, persist despite a rise in mobile phone subscriptions (e.g. a high number of the populace cannot afford smartphones and Internet access to obtain multimedia products). Radio is the leading medium especially for the marginalised and rural population for its ability to transcend geographic and distribution challenges, local language use and affordability. Media ownership is mostly by governments, the monarchy and the private sector, while few of these are owned by NGOs and local communities. Often there is interference in media content and freedom of expression especially by governments and monarchy. Media products and access to Internet are costly amidst high levels of poverty and limiting legal frameworks. Advertising is dominated by governments and corporate companies, and in several instances, these

are politically steered (e.g. Zambia). With a few exceptions like South Africa (SANEF 2020), there was a general lack of strong journalism unions with/and financial support structures (such as the SANEF relief fund) in place to support journalists in difficult times such as the Covid-19 crisis. It is within this mediascape that media viability in relation to the Covid-19 crisis is discussed.

The theoretical framework derives from principles within the political economy of the media that analyse the interconnectedness between economic processes, technological developments and political situations (Schubert and Klein 2011). The connection between the political and economic emanates from the understanding that both influence and shape national media systems and structures that in turn shape practice (Richter and Gräf 2015; Murdock and Golding 2005). According to Richter and Graf, a good way to understand political economy is to ask the question:

> Who has the means and the power to produce media content and who has access to it? To what extend do specific political and economic structures form media institutions and thus regulate flows of information? . . . how do media technologies shape the economic and political practices that eventually create structures. (2015, p. 25)

Jasques Guyot (2009) argues that political economic factors driving news cultures can have pervasive influences on media, including political influences over editorial content in which media ownership plays a key role, and economic pressure from competition and advertising (Guyot 2009, p. 2). This pressure, Guyot posits, extends to journalists, with newly employed journalists being most vulnerable (p. 10).

The balance between capitalist ideologies and information as a public good (Murdock and Golding 2005) is an important dichotomy in media viability studies because it tackles discourse on marginalisation (Chakrabarty 2011). The Hardy (2014) argument that political economy analyses deal with power, control and survival supports Richter and Gräf's (2015), i.e. we entertain the need to revisit hegemonic power structures within mediascapes in defence against modern forms of injustice while tackling issues around representation and awareness in relation to inclusion and exclusion (p. 29). Hence, the study interrogates hegemonic influences and their limits on the cultural independence of sub-Saharan countries (Mattelart 1994; Siebert et al. 1963; Guaaybess 2013; Rozumilowicz 2002). It is within these frames that we study how the media are able to survive and adapt to change in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the context of existing digital and social changes affecting the viability of an industry already in peril (Mosco 2009).

The above theoretical underpinnings form part of a corpus on media viability globally. Media viability is understood as the ability to produce media products sustainably without compromising professionalism and public interest functions (DW 2018). It is also about the ecosystem within which the media operates meaning; networks, users/consumers and legal/regulation as well as training, content, finances and general performance play an important part in media viability (Albarran 2016; Schiffrin 2019; UNESCO 2015; Moore et al. 2020). According to DW, media viability indicators[1]: politics, economics, community, technology, and content and

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[1] https://www.dw.com/en/media-viability-new-indicators-show-what-is-at-stake/a-47874028.

expertise, are important factors to streamline for media to survive and thrive in the long run.

Studies affirm that across the sub-continent, media houses explored ways to remain sustainable in an age of technological disruptions that overturned the traditional media's modus operandi (Reuters 2020; Taremwa 2021; Moyo et al. 2019; Chyi 2005). Sometimes amidt political persecution and censorship (Reporters without boarders 2020). Studies show that in a bid to remain relevant, media houses had disruptions in their production and consumption practices, several of which embraced social media, i.e. incorporated Facebook, Twitter and Instagram handles (Olsen et al. 2020). Other studies highlighted the weakened role of journalistic gatekeeping due to the rise in citizen journalism (Berger et al. 2015) and that the resulting lack of trust in legacy media made matters worse amidst the infodemic of fake news, including legacy media casting heavy doubt upon the future of the industry (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020; Ahmed 2020; Reuters 2020).

Some studies documented how the digital shifts led to fragmenting audiences to tap into different demographics, something which undermined sales and advertisement-based business models (Reuters 2020; Chyi 2005; Berger et al. 2015). Others showed how, faced with the dramatic dwindling in circulation and advertisements (Pickard and Williams 2014), print media houses were exploring new ways to remain viable. Many experimented with various new models, such as different kinds of subscription models and paywalls including soft, metred and hard (Taremwa 2021; Chyi 2005) and digital advertising (Tzuo 2020). Another approach was to change content formats, i.e. storytelling targeting social media (Newman et al. 2020; Berger et al. 2015; Reuters 1999; Taremwa 2021) or just quality of journalism (Barland 2013) and paid content (Bradsetter and Schmalhofer 2014). Others focused on distribution channels and platforms (Olsen et al. 2020), pricing logics (Goyanes 2014; Taremwa 2021) and donor funding (Mare[2]), lobbying governments to fund the media as public good (Dahir 2019), but also revisiting legal and taxation regimes on both legacy media operations and social media (Dahir 2019; Taremwa 2021) and more (Deutsche Welle (DW) Akademie 2018). This had an impact on the content produced and audience access, which was likely detrimental to democracy (Repucci and Slipowitz 2020; Shuker 2019; Dragomir 2017; Papadopoulou and Maniou 2021), media dependencies (Mare footnote, 12), social justice, inclusion and representation, or marginalisation (M'ule interview).

Studies showed that despite the fact that over the years Southern Africa witnessed a rise in digital media production and consumption (SANEF 2020, African Media Barometers), there was still a ways to go in terms of accessibility among marginal and rural consumers Younger consumers who were mostly online were unwilling to pay for digital content (African Media Barometers of all the countries make note of this). The overall picture indicated that the digital divide was still an issue despite the rapid growth in mobile and smartphone use and access to the Internet in the region (African Media Barometers Botswana 2018; Eswatini 2020; Lesotho 2018; Malawi

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[2]https://gga.org/challenges-and-hope-for-africas-media-sustainability/.

2012; Namibia 2018; South Africa 2018; Zambia 2021 and Zimbabwe). According to recent global Internet statistics, only 40% of Africans (525 million users) had access (Internet World Statistics 2019). The numbers varied between 1% in Eritrea and 90% in Kenya. This discussion revisits these debates and explores the impact of Covid-19 on media viability—focusing on media house experiences, journalists and journalism practice concerning the topic of media viability.

Methodology

This was an online qualitative study (Howlett 2021) derived from a webinar that the author facilitated in April 2021 and follow-up questions administered through email. The author was invited by the Director of the Southern African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) Windhoek to facilitate its first Zoom webinar on the sub-theme: *The viability of media (in COVID-19 times and during dominance of Oligopolies) and their role in the production of information*. The discussion that took place on April 13 and two others that followed were precursors to the 2021 World Press Freedom Day (WPFD) celebrations in Windhoek (May 3). The aim of this discussion was to help SANEF shape another groundbreaking Windhoek '+30 Declaration' (M'ule interview).

Online methodologies were employed for the research, i.e. a public webinar and qualitative questionnaire. The eight panellists were editors and chairpersons of SANEF chapters or leading journalists' associations in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The webinar was conducted through Zoom Archibald et al. (2019); Gray et al. 2020; Howlett 2021). In his study "Looking at the 'field 'through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic", Howlett (2021) shares some of the positives of online research, identifying among others, relaxed informants, remote embeddedness and negatives such as lack of access to non-verbal communication, and longer, stressful online interviews (2021, p. 3). In addition to this, the researcher, as the moderator, felt that the 2 hours for the webinar were insufficient to obtain a nascent deep conversation covering issues in the context of the eight countries as well as incorporate an audience Q and A session. Nevertheless, despite the limitations, the researcher panellists obtained useful experience-based insights into the discourse on media viability during the Covid-19 pandemic. Permission was granted by the panellists to write and publish this chapter. The chapter abides by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics regulations on *Internet Research Ethics* (NESH 2016),[3] which permits use of public debates/information such as this without seeking permissions. However, all informants were apprised of this publication and apart from the Director of SANEF, no

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[3] https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/a-guide-to-internet-research-ethics/.

other names are mentioned. Although the data is drawn from the webinar, the author is responsible for the interpretations in this analysis.

The analysis harvests some key discussion points from the webinar that were discussed through the theoretical lens of the political economy of the media as well as references from earlier studies.

Findings and Discussion: Devastation, Paradoxes and Opportunities

Key impacts raised at the webinar were extracted and discussed under three main themes: (a) impact on media houses—showing that Covid-19 accelerated digital shifts amidst media house closures; a paradox showing high digital news consumption vis-à-vis massive revenue loss and experimentation with third-revenue streams; (b) journalists paid a high price amidst newsroom restructuring and changes to work practice; and (c) threats to freedom of expression and marginalisation. Overall, the findings not only affirmed previous research, highlighting the existential challenges faced by the media industry/profession, but also provided fresh insights into the traumatic impact on the industry of Covid-19.

Media Houses—Survival and Control

Covid-19 accelerated digital shifts amidst media house closures Building upon research on the impact of new technologies and online communication on the media industry Pickard and Williams (2014) and Berger et al. (2015) affirm emerging Covid-19-related research showing the accelerated and devastating impact of the pandemic on the media (SANEF 2020; Olurunyomi 2021; Taremwa 2021). The findings indicate that the transition processes that were under way from old to new models, were given impetus, as one South African discussant elaborated:

> Through retrenchments and restructuring over the last few years, many newspapers only managed to cut costs enough to continue for another few years but we see later with Covid, many magazines and small print media houses closed. (South African Discussant, SANEF 2020 report)

This accelerated the digital shift within media houses, as reported by all discussants. The shift was attributed to restrictions in movement that led to consumers and media producers going digital. During the pandemic, the print operations and supply structures ceased to be functional and at some time, several were not printing—as elaborated by a Zimbabwean discussant:

> Print media in Zimbabwe just stopped the printing of its already dwindling supply because there were no readers out there. People were not out and about buying because most of the

newspapers still rely on the street sales. People were at home and they concentrated on looking for news and information online.

The urban and elitist centeredness of legacy media, as documented in the country media barometres, meant that with this concentrated subscription base, the restriction (lockdown) that ensued becasue of the pandemic would naturally deal the media a heavy blow. We get a clearer picture from our informant from Zimbabwe:

> And the structure of the market is such that between 60% to 80% of the market for Zimbabwean print media is in Harare, the capital, and then the 40% is generally shared across other cities like Bulawayo and the rests. So you'll find that if people are not out there because the subscriptions are low and due to restrictions in movement, it means that you can't sell the hard copy. So they stopped printing.

Paradox of evaporating revenues despite upsurge in news consumption Already traditional revenue structures and streams that sustained legacy media organisations over centuries had started to scramble before Covid-19 (Pickard and Williams 2014; Guyot 2009), as a result of, among other things, the advent and proliferation of digital technologies and social media (Mosco 2009). This study reveals that none of the media establishments escaped the economic downturn. The discussants articulated how Covid-19 expedited the demise of traditional revenue streams. Several of the countries acknowledged sharp drops in advertising, especially in print media as readers migrated to digital platforms—mostly television and radio genres.

The surge in digital consumers was a positive development indicating that consumers still trust the importance of verified information that legacy media provide as opposed to social media. However, the paradox remains that the digital shift did not bring along revenues. This in itself was linked to a deep concern over sustainability:

> There is a disequilibrium between the increase in readership online and the increase in revenues online. It doesn't necessarily mean that when you have huge readership growth in that direction, it means that you are going to have a better chance of survival. So it's a very new territory, uncharted waters. (Zimbabwean Discussant)

Hence, media houses found themselves with the same huge cost structures, but diminished revenue:

> We witnessed a massive rise in digital readers. So, we have much more readers now digitally that read journalism in South Africa than we ever had in print and that can be a good thing. But they were not paying readers. So how do we turn these into paying readers because we still need to pay the bills and we still have our rental, we still have our salaries, we still have technology to pay for, etc. (South African Discussant)

Winners and losers—survival of the fittest? In line with Chakrabarty (2011) and Richter and Gräf 2015) criticism of hegemonic power structures in media regimes that favour the large and strong, this chapter establishes a clear picture of winners and losers from the crisis, confirming Darwinian notions of 'survival of the fittest'. Among the losers considered were the traditional print media, i.e. newspapers and magazines, which suffered the most from the unsustainability of their economic model, i.e. advertisements and sales. In addition, small community

and private media came out as clear losers for the same reasons. The study from South Africa shows similar findings (SANEF 2020). Questions about media diversity, public interest, marginalisation and social justice, especially among large sections of populations (all African Media Barometers), were a matter taken up, among others, by Chakrabarty (2011) and this study. For instance, the SANEF director underscored the following concerns regarding the impact of Covid-19 on minority groups and on journalism practice:

> SANEF has seen a considerable reduction in investigative journalism, poor coverage of already marginalized communities, especially those in the rural areas. So, instead of providing access to information to these communities they are further marginalized because media houses cannot frequently send out teams to cover these communities as it involves travel and daily subsistence allowances. Trust in media is also slowly eroding because print runs have been slashed and the number of pages printed daily or weekly, reduced drastically. Moreover, there is a greater dependence on events coverage—this needs to be addressed.

Among the winners were the large media houses and international technology companies. This is mainly because, during the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers turned to digital platforms such as Google and Facebook for news and marketing in a bid to reach the massive online audiences at the expense of local media houses. Media conglomerates moved their print content online and revamped their broadcast sections monetising all their online content and consequently surviving the worst of the economic crisis, as shown below:

> If you look at digital advertising, what we're seeing in South Africa, and I am fortunate enough to work for the largest news publication in South African, which has about 13 to 15 million readers a month. We have managed to turn the ship in terms of digital advertising. So, a few years ago, the bulk of advertising was still going to print, but we now make easily the same or more money than a normal newspaper publication on digital. But, and this is a big BUT, I'm afraid this model will only work for the largest news sites, probably the two or three largest news sites in your country.

There was a sense of hopelessness when addressing the international technology companies eating up large shares of the advertising market. The injustice resulted from these companies circumventing nationally bound legislation and tax regimes placed on local media—in addition, they are tech companies acting as conduits for conventional journalism products (Nielsen 2012; O'Connor 2012; Goggin and Hjorth 2014). Therefore, hegemonic power structures were sustained since market models and globalisation favoured large and international companies over the small local/national ones (Chakrabarty 2011).

New trends in third-revenue stream innovations Political economy predicates suggest the centrality of economics in media viability (Schubert and Klein 2011; Richter and Gräf 2015). Below are ways media houses harnessed third-revenue streams for viability.

Start-ups The stark digital shift meant the process of transitioning from the old models to the new models was given impetus. In Zimbabwe, for instance, there was the mushrooming of digital media start-ups, which:

Have been a positive thing in the sense that it widened the diversity and pluralism in the media. It has also given the media a new way of renewing itself because that's the direction anyway. So that process has been accelerated which is positive.

Partnerships Partnerships between small publications and large media houses emerged. In South Africa particularly there was emergence of small digital early publications funded by donors and memberships like *ama Bhungane*. These publications conducted amazing investigative journalism based on poor rural areas and wrote stories where mainstream newsrooms no longer sent journalists nor had bureaus:

We see these organizations having these stories published on the largest websites in exchange for eyeballs (views). So that is a very good relationship emerging in South Africa where the small publications journalism gets published on the larger websites as well.

Government funding Government funding, an option in some of the countries, faced challenges like strings attached, delays in funding, arm-twisting by government, etc. The problem with strings attached was elaborated as follows:

We have seen government stepping in at a time of hardship for the media in exchange for positive coverage. An example involves evidence of state capture of the commission of inquiry, in which a South African intelligence agency paid money to a media house to produce journalism that reflected positive on Ex-president Jacob Zuma and his regime, which is a huge, huge threat to media freedom and credibility in our country." (South African Discussant)

Relief fund SANEF offered support to journalists struggling with basic necessities. The recipients applauded having strong support structures in the media industry for its survival. Zambia, at the time, was experimenting with a government relief fund—internal mechanisms and impact needed studying. At the time, a research project by SANEF was under way to investigate ways to galvanize funds for and within the different chapters to support journalists, freelancers and contracted journalists who had lost their jobs (SANEF's director).

Paywalls Subscription services and various forms of paywalls had existed for a while (Chyi 2005). This system of monetising media content expanded during the pandemic to include different approaches. For instance, almost all the major news websites in South Africa activated some kind of paywall, i.e. either a 'hard paywall' where one only accessed content after paying or in the case of *News 24* accessed a 'leaky paywall', where certain content was free and the rest was through paid subscription. The gap resulted from media literacy:

I think it is critically important that we educate our readers, why they have to pay for journalism. For too long we gave away journalism for free on the Internet because everything was free on the Internet, but also globally, that trend is changing very fast. People now pay for music, they pay for movies, they pay for TV shows. So why not pay for journalism? And I think that's something that we, as colleagues across the continent can do and should strengthened together. (South African Discussant).

Journalists Pay High Price: Retrenchments, Mental Health, Death

> Many economies are struggling because of the pandemic and several industries have collapsed. Thus, it is a challenge for media to get adequate revenue to sustain themselves. Many have laid off experienced senior journalists in efforts to reduce the wage bill, while some have slashed the salaries of those who have stayed on by as much as 20%. (Interview, Director, SAEF)

This is a snap-shot of the impact of the pandemic on journalists. This section revisits political economy debates in the context of journalists and their practice (Guyot 2009). Generally, life during the Covid-19 pandemic was a nightmare for journalists. While veteran journalists did not survive the shocks, the findings indicate that young, newly employed journalists were first to be laid off—but the dilemma arose from the fact that they were more tech-savvy than their older counterparts. Consequently, given the online/digital shifts, this was a setback which clarified that journalism underwent severe notable disruptions such as working in shifts, part-time work, changes from newsrooms to home offices and online news production. The pandemic also negatively impacted journalists' mental health through exposure to death, stress and the chilling effects on media content/production.

Cost-cutting measures: lay-offs, working in shifts, leave, lack of pay, home office Media houses resorted to cost-cutting measures including changes to news production and newsroom structures along with layoffs/retrenchment, working in shifts and indefinite leave, which impacted work pressures.

> In Botswana, much as many journalists lost their jobs as several media houses laid off staff, there were exceptions: we did not cut staff. Instead we took a moral ground and worked towards possible phasing out of print but only after digital has started generating enough revenue to take care of staffs. So for us it was important that the staff and management worked together to find ways for sustainability. (Discussant from Botswana)

It is worthy of note that journalists who were laid off were young and new to the newsroom, while those who were retained were not tech-savvy.

In Malawi, journalists were either laid off or sent on indefinite leave. The remaining few bore the burden of news production and thus they had to "multitask to produce for online platforms, TV station, radio in addition to the business newspaper" (Saltzis and Dickinson 2008).

In Namibia, two-week working shifts were introduced as a self-help approach aimed at taking "responsibility and finding solutions by ourselves and not looking at government to solve them. We needed to be modest and be creative and innovative in helping to solve our own issues, especially those of the viability". In the long run, however, the newsroom scaled down staff, especially radio journalists who resorted to freelancing, which features poor work conditions and uncertainties (Blaising et al. 2019) that worsened especially for photojournalists:

> . . . I think photographers are groups of media workers who have been exceptionally vulnerable during COVID times . . . and when things are hard in newsrooms, it's usually freelance journalists don't work. They don't have contracts, they work adhoc. And, you

know, from different countries, we see freelance journalists lacking the basics like food and so on. So, calling for, a union or other initiatives to support the weak among us, is quite important.

In South Africa, major media houses retrenched to cut costs. For example, we were informed the *Avusa*, a public broadcaster, retrenched between 500 and 600 staff members. It is worth noting, however, that SANEF established a media relief fund which enabled it to help retrenched journalists with basics like food, shelter, children's school fees and clothing.

According to the discussant:

I can report that we had almost 300 applications from journalists who literally lost their livelihoods overnight, who we could luckily support, but obviously not in a sustainable way. These are people who will have to either review their careers, start new jobs, look for other jobs in other industries.

Government media house journalists also lacked adequate funding. The state-owned Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation had to contend with employees going on strike demanding their salaries, as one discussant explained: "Salaries are always late. And then when this COVID came in, it has become a curse for Tv and radio. The newspapers are hardest hit".

For others, remote work became a new normal given the blanket COVID-19 restrictions, in Zimbabwe. The loss of revenues for the media houses impacted on the structure of the newsrooms—as people were no longer working in the newsrooms but from home. This, disrupted their workflows and methods of reporting. People had to rely on new apps and innovations, including zooms among others, in order to conduct duties and the coordinator stories.

Mental health and the chilling effects of stress, psychological trauma and death Mental health among Southern Africa journalists during the Covid-19 pandemic was a topical issue (Tyson and Wild 2021; Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020; Wake et al. 2021; Osmann et al. 2021)). Experiences from Eswatini, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe indicated its seriousness during the pandemic:

A very difficult situation we are dealing with in our own media and newsrooms is the tragedy of the mental and psychological health of journalists as frontline workers who not only have to cover the biggest story of our times but must do this in the face of the looming job losses and existential threats to the profession. (Eswatini Discussant)

The Lesotho discussant added: "Not only must journalists work with the depressing nature of the (Covid-19) news, they must do this while facing the danger of infection and death in the line of duty".

This, consequently, had a chilling effect on journalists and manifested through self-censorship:

The nature of the frontline role journalists play in the fight against the Covid-19 puts them in direct line of danger. As journalists, we are not immune to the chilling effects of this danger—leading some to opt out of reporting from the frontline and exposing ourselves. (Lesotho Discussant)

Death as an ultimate threat to journalists was confirmed by this Zimbabwean discussant:

> We actually lost some very well-known journalists who died of Covid-19. One of them was Foster Dongozi, well known in Zimbabwe and across Africa on issue of the human rights and the welfare of journalists and trade unionism. So we see here that Covid-19 had a devastating impact on the media in some bad way.

Threats to Journalists and Media Freedoms

This study emphasises the heightened threats to media freedom affecting journalists but also the overall media roles and functionality, especially in Lesotho, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Some governments in Southern Africa took advantage of Covid-19 to crack down on journalists and the media:

> We then saw a targeting of certain journalists who were very active in exposing government corruption around the Covid-19 related issues. The example of Hopewell Chin'ono is pertinent. He was arrested many times.[4] At one time detained for 45 days, but overall, he was detained for a longer period for getting involved in a media exposure on corruption. Another one young journalism student was abducted, tortured and basically his life disrupted for good and forced to flee the country into South Africa. These are some of the brutalities that were visited upon the media and journalists by the regime in Harare under the cover of Covid-19. (Discussant from Zimbabwe)

Reporters Without Borders (2020) warned against the impingement of media freedoms under Covid-19 yet the impingement of media freedoms were reported in Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Our respective discussants faulted the lacking accountability measures within national policy and the lack of democratic and inclusive processes in policy making.

The Zambian[5] experience was influenced by the background of oppressive laws against the media. In the face of Covid-19, the government demanded free advertising on Covid-19 issues. Media houses such as the *Post* and Prime TV which refused to follow the directives were shut down. Media houses agreed to carry stories on Covid but not adverts, arguing: "Well, for stories, we can carry, but for advertising, no. We already give a lot of space to Covid-19 for free".

According to the Free Press Initiative (FPI) study on Zambian media, there was a downturn on economic activities due to lost sales and lost advert-revenues following government directives to support the Covid drive. Over 70% of the media houses needed aid. By April 2020, there "had been no support whatsoever to anchor them from the Covid-19 impact and journalists had to survive through 'resilience". Consequently, there was a need to establish a fund to salvage the media and establish

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[4] Sixth arrest in six months reported here: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/08/zimbabwe-journalist-hopewell-chinono-arrested-for-third-time-in-six-months. Last accessed 21 August 2021.

[5] https://zambia.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/SOM__Report_Q4_Final_version.docx20204.pdf.

a self-regulatory framework.[6] Thus, the impingement of journalists' freedoms and rights under the cover of Covid-19 raised serious concerns for media viability in the countries concerned.

SAEF, in implementing support structures, laments:

> The self-regulatory mechanism option is promoted by the forum (to which all discussants here are members and country representatives). The option is voluntary but does not enjoy the support of all media in any given country. This has played into the hands of governments who want to regulate media as very often the non-members are the ones breaking the codes of ethics.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The study highlights political and economic predicates (Schubert and Klein 2011; Mosco 2009) and technological imperatives at play. At a media outlet level, all panellists reported gross loss of income, and permanent and temporary closure of several newsrooms leading several media outlets to adapt lean structural changes to survive the lockdown. Media houses embraced digital operations since consumers were online. However, the digital shift did not translate into revenues, forcing media houses to embark on austerity measures to survive.

The above trends gravely impacted the workforce, resulting in lay-offs, salary cuts and cancelled annual leaves. Vulnerable media workers without safety nets such as contracts were hit hardest. Likewise, journalists' welfare and mental health as fundamental to media viability were a matter of concern that needed to be addressed by media houses, government and regional media organisations.

This study identifies winners and losers in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on media viability. Traditional print media, i.e. newspapers and magazines, were losers as the print economic model of sustainability (i.e. advertisements and sales) became unsustainable. Small, community and private media were also losers for the same reasons. However, migration online meant that people found these 'online legacy media' credible and trustworthy. Nevertheless, the heavy migration did not increase revenues. It was up to these organisations to harness new audiences into paying customers and find innovative ways to sustain them post-Covid. Small community media played a crucial role in serving sections of the poor rural population. Community media offer diversity and social justice and hence their promotion/resurrection was encouraged.

The media in South Africa responded to the devastation through establishing relief funds to assist struggling journalists. This kind of help was dependent on donnors and well-wishers, transparency and clear criteria for distribution. Other opportunities or strategies for sustainability included migration to online platforms in a bid to follow the migration of consumers to TV, radio and online print versions.

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[6] But as of August 2021, the researcher has discovered that a stimulus package for journalists during Covid in Zambia had been announced but this was embroiled in challenges.

Other media houses in the region saw a; rise in start-ups and social media Apps indicating that not all hope was lost. The onus was on the media industry to find ways to maintain media viability.

Other threats to media viability were political (Repucci and Slipowitz 2020; Papadopoulou and Maniou 2021; Dragomir 2017). This chapter cautions against the enactment of unconducive laws and praxis aimed at impeding freedom of expression and journalists' fourth estate roles as well as exploiting journalists (reported, e.g., in Zambia and South Africa). Likewise, the intimidations and harassment of journalists (reported in Zimbabwe and South Africa) must stop. The study cautions against further marginalising minority communities and groups (Chakrabarty 2011; Dralega 2009)—citing the persistent digital divide manifested in poor infrastructural outreach and inclusion of marginal communities in media discourses in times of crisis. Media content and information as a public good (Murdock and Golding 2005; Richter and Gräf 2015) is another factor to consider for a viable media—as the importance of credible, transparent and trustworthy media cannot be underestimated (DW 2018).

Recommendations

Media viability in Southern Africa and indeed in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa required strategies that targeted broader media ecosystems: governments, media houses, journalists, corporates, citizens, etc.

This study revealed the need to engage in multi-actor partnerships and dialogue around media viability, in-house training and journalism education. There is need for media literacy campaigns for governments and general publics on the major shifts and importance of paying for quality information (as public good), protecting rural and community media, unionisation (especially protecting vulnerable journalists like freelancers and photographers), and most importantly finding sustainable revenue streams (also refer to Fig. 1) to ensure media viability in the long run.

SAEF's role in strengthened national and regional discourses on media viability SAEF plays an important role in mobilising and supporting media in member states but cannot achieve its mandate without resources. SAEF needs to be funded by all stakeholders who subscribe to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, so that in turn it can run programmes that will strengthen national chapters to provide a livelihood to the many journalists and other media practitioners who lost their jobs because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, SAEF proposes:

(a) Funding for research in nine of the 10 member states on the impact of Covid-19 on media viability in the region
(b) Funding to commission laid off and experienced journalists to cover marginalised communities
(c) Obtaining guarantees from media in respective countries to publish and broadcast stories on marginalised communities

SHIFTS AND TRENDS IN REVENUE STREAMS

'NEW' ONLINE
Paywalls: Subscription (hard vs metered or soft/leaky)
Communities/Membership
Donations (NGOs/Associations, Corporate)
Messaging services
Public/government funding
Investments
Events, branded content, reputation/talent, mechandizing
Crowdsourcing
Partnerships between/with media houses
Social Media marketing
Digital advertising

'OLD' TRADITIONAL/LEGACY MEDIA
Sales (readers, listeners, viewers)
Advertisements

Fig. 1 Summary of emerging third-revenue streams

(d) Galvanising funding from Internet companies for all media through paying for content that they have not generated but wish to use

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Part II
Journalism Practice, Audiences and News Discourses

Critical Journalism and Media Convergence During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Representation of Corruption in Zimbabwean Online News

Wishes Tendayi Mututwa and Akpojivi Ufuoma

Abstract The coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, which began in China's Wuhan province in December 2019, has impacted nation states, highlighting their approaches and abilities to fight the pandemic. In Zimbabwe, attempts at fighting the pandemic have opened the floodgates for COVID-19-related corruption by "Covidpreneurs"-the politically connected and public officials. Therefore, in this chapter, we seek to examine the role of critical journalism and media convergence in exposing COVID-19-related corruption in Zimbabwe. Using qualitative content analysis on *Zimlive newspaper* stories culled over 1 month (1–30 June), interviews with media practitioners*,* and media convergence theory as a lens, this chapter critically looks at the discourses from *Zimlive,* and how these discourses expose corruption scandals involving COVID-19 funds. The study argues that critical journalism, taking advantage of digital technologies, was pivotal in exposing COVID-19 corruption in Zimbabwe.

Keywords Corruption · Watchdog Journalism · Covid-19 · Zimbabwe

Introduction

Journalism in Zimbabwe has been negated by authoritarian media policies and practices spanning three phases: colonial rule, Mugabe era and post-Mugabe era. These authoritarian policies have affected the quality of critical journalism in Zimbabwe (Ntibinyane 2018). For this study, critical journalism, commonly referred to as investigative journalism, is defined as journalism that is focused on challenging and sometimes risky extraction of "facts" that are not generally known, and often

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deliberately hidden or covered up, especially by those in positions of power (Olivier 2010, p. 1). Likewise, Senam and Udo (2015, p. 44) define critical journalism as journalism that goes far beyond news gathering, writing and dissemination to exploration of news and information in a way that seeks to promote the survival of the society and strengthening social institutions and governance through credible and objective reporting. Consequently, critical journalists are commonly targeted by state security forces, and may sometimes face death. The practice of critical journalism has created an effective marketplace of ideas where information is readily available.

The importance of critical journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic where many countries and donor organisations are pouring huge financial support to deal with the pandemic cannot be overemphasized. Journalism helps provide crucial information to the public about the management of the funds, exposes corruption, betrayal of public trust, and holds government accountable during this period. Schauseil (2019) identifies three functions of critical journalism: to be watchdogs of corruption, to promote integrity and to engage citizens in anticorruption efforts. Schauseil (2019) adds that the watchdog function is founded on an understanding of the media as the "fourth estate" of democracy within a system of checks and balances with the purpose to monitor and observe the behaviour of public officials in the legislature, executive and judiciary.

The purpose of journalism lies in its end, that is, the functions or responsibilities of journalism to society. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) put it, the purpose of journalism is not defined by technology, not by journalists or the techniques they employ by the function news plays in people's lives. Put differently, critical journalism exists to provide the citizens with information by engaging in watchdog activities (Ntibinyane 2018). Locating critical journalism's role in a democratic setup, Coronel (2010), noted that high impact investigative journalism has made the media an effective and credible watchdog and boosted its credibility and support among the public. For Coronel and many others, the press as an institution is strengthened when journalists have demonstrated that they serve the public interest by uncovering malfeasance and abuse. Critical journalism requires the journalist to thoroughly scrutinize the behaviour of officials and bring to light their shortcomings, as officials cannot always be trusted to act properly, and the press is a check on impropriety. When journalists assume a critical stance towards the state, they become representatives of generalised public opinion, and their discourse is distinct from the discourse of political parties and politicians (Norris 2000). Despite the growing attacks on critical journalists in many developing countries, there is a general agreement among researchers that media actors have a pivotal role to play in strengthening anti-corruption initiatives (Brunetti and Weder 2003). Zimbabwe's post-Mugabe administration led by Emmerson Mnangagwa had declared zero-tolerance for corruption. However, numerous efforts by the media and whistle-blowers to expose corruption of senior public officials have been consistently frustrated by Zimbabwe Anticorruption Commission (ZACC)'s unwillingness to take any serious action to address the corruption allegations. Instead, attacks on

critical journalists and whistle-blowers by the country's security forces have been on the increase (Freedom House 2019).

This study is therefore premised on the following questions: to what extent does critical journalism play a watchdog role on public finances during the COVID-19 pandemic? How do digital tools enhance news gathering and dissemination for critical journalism on online newspapers?

Corruption and Critical Journalism in Zimbabwe: 1987 and Beyond

Zimbabwe has a long history of corruption, mainly by public officials and the political elite predating independence in 1980. It is important to explore the role of critical journalism in reporting corruption cases involving the political elite and public officials after independence. From independence in 1980 up to 1987, there were no major corruption scandals in Zimbabwe. Shana (2006) argues that the most unanimous opinion condensed from audit reports, donor reports, household surveys, business environment and enterprise surveys, legislative reports, and diagnostic studies available between 1980 and 1987 reveal that the incidences of corruption, though present, were minimal no matter how they were defined. Major corruption incidents began to be noticeable from 1988 onwards with prominent corruption scandals like the Willowgate scandal (1988), GMB Grain scandal (1995), Harare City Refuse Tender scandal (1998), ZMDC diamond 15 Billion heist (2015), Salarygate (2015) RBZ Loan scandal (2007) and the COVID-gate (2020). While many other corruption scandals have occurred in Zimbabwe, the focus of this study is to explore the place of critical journalism in bringing these scandals to light and setting the agenda. We argue that a more nuanced study of the Zimbabwean society in the 1980s reveals that corruption was rampant though it remained largely outside the media gaze. This was because all media was state controlled then and the political elite in the security sector discouraged critical journalism (Mwatwara and Mujeri 2015).

The Willowgate car scandal became one of the most outstanding cases of critical journalism, spearheaded by the state media in Zimbabwe. The scandal involved senior military, government and ZANU-PF party officials who purchased Toyota Cressida cars at a government-controlled cheap price of Z$27,000 and resold them on the black market for Z$110,000 (Saunders 2000). *Chronicle* editor, Geoff Nyarota and his deputy, Davison Maruziva broke the story despite threats from the political elite (Nyarota 2006). After the exposure of the Willowgate scandal, President Robert Mugabe instituted the Sandura Commission to investigate the scandal but the report was never made public (Meredith 2002). In a move that was designed to discourage critical journalism, Geoff Nyarota lost his job as editor of the *Chronicle* (Meredith 2002, p. 86). Subsequently, corruption scandals in the 1990s were not sufficiently exposed by the media (Mwatwara and Mujeri 2015).

By 2013, corruption had become so endemic that the media became vocal in calling for corrective measures. This followed one of the worst corruption scandals ever to hit Zimbabwean sport popularised as Asiagate. This was a football match fixing scandal that was choreographed by Wilson Raj Perumal of Singaporean origin and the former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA), Henrietta Rushwaya between 2007 and 2010 (Toni 2012). As Chiweshe (2020) intimates, officials of ZIFA, led by Henrietta Rushwaya allegedly connived with Asian betting syndicates to send the Zimbabwe senior national football team to participate in fixed "friendly" tournaments in Asian countries such as Malaysia, Jordan, Singapore, Vietnam, Yemen, Oman and Thailand, earning huge amounts of money for the match-fixers. The scandal was eventually exposed in 2010 by Mthulisi Mafa, a former sports reporter with *The Sunday Mail*, a publicly owned but state-controlled weekly newspaper (Chiweshe 2020). Ncube (2017) and Chiweshe (2020) noted that Asiagate also involved key political actors who in many ways remained behind the scenes.

From 2009 to 2013, parastatal bosses awarded themselves hefty salary and allowance packages. Rusvingo (2014) reveals that the media played an important role in exposing these high-level corruption cases. For instance, the media made public that the Chief Executive Officer of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Happison Muchechetere earned about US$ 40000.00 and got US$ 250000.00 as a housing allowance while many employees at the public broadcaster were not being paid for months. In another salary scandal at Harare City Council which was exposed by the media, Town Clerk Tendai Mahachi and his bloated 18 management team at Town House were reported to have amassed US$ 500,000 in monthly salaries and allowances (Matenga 2014; Mtomba 2014). In addition, investigative journalists exposed another top-level salary scandal at Premier Services Medical Aid Society (PSMAS), where top management was earning at least US$ 1.3 million in monthly salaries and its CEO, Cuthbert Dube was reported to be earning US$ 230,000 in allowances, yet the organisation owed various service providers approximately US$ 38 million as on 31 December 2013 (Rusvingo 2014).

The overthrow of President Robert Mugabe through military-backed civilian demonstrations was premised on Zimbabweans' frustration with corruption and criminal activities by the political elite around the president. The incumbent president, Emmerson Mnangagwa promised to eradicate corruption in his inaugural speech on 24 November 2017. Consequently, he reconstituted the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) with new members, and this led to initial success as ZACC took on some financial scandals that had previously been ignored. For instance, under the new-look ZACC, Tourism and Hospitality minister, Prisca Mupfumira became the first high ranking official to be arrested over corruption in post-Mugabe era after the media had exposed a $US 95 million financial scandal at NASSA during her tenure (Chingono 2019). However, Mupfumira was later released, a move which the media described as "catch and release game" by the new government (Bwititi 2020; Tapfumaneyi 2020). The public sentiment was that the new administration was unwilling to punish politically connected officials. Despite the persistent threats to journalistic freedom, critical journalists in Zimbabwe

play a critical role in bringing corruption to light. As Adriano (2019) opines, critical journalism has made major contributions in bringing to light what some would rather keep in the dark.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Corruption in Africa

The rising number of COVID-19 cases in Africa has resulted in a significant increase in corruption as the institutional mechanism to regulate procurement were suspended due to the emergency response of nation states to the pandemic (World Justice Project 2020). Therefore, a significant number of COVID-19 corruption scandals have been reported in countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Mbewa 2020). For instance, South Africa has been one of the worst hit countries with coronavirus infections and deaths, prompting the government to set aside R 500 billion and taking a further $4.3 billion loan from the International Monitory Fund (IMF) to tackle the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and citizens. However, there have been cases of corruption in personal protection equipment (PPE) procurement, and these involved overpricing, substandard products and services, and giving tenders to those connected to the government and the ruling party. The media reported that Madzikane II, Thandisizwe Diko, the husband of presidential spokesperson, Khusela Diko had received contracts worth R125-million for Covid-19 PPE from the Gauteng Department of Health (James and Singh 2020a). The newspaper based its report on "sources and official documents" and it was evident that the story emerged as a result of inside information, perhaps a whistle-blower, rather than information publicly available or via systems currently in place to monitor procurement (James and Singh 2020b). Similar corruption cases were reported in Limpopo, Free State, Eastern Cape amongst others, thus the declaration that, there was the emergence of "Covidpreneurs" in South Africa (Mwangi 2020).

In Kenya, the political elite were at the forefront of COVID-19 financial scandals. An investigative report by the *Daily Nation* newspaper found that some of the companies awarded government contracts were not properly registered, while others purchased products that were not fit for purpose. Kapchanga (2020) highlighted that critical journalism was pivotal in exposing corruption and extravagancy of government officials. Of the Ksh 1 billion donated by the World Bank for the procurement of PPE, medicines and the setting up of isolation facilities, the government officials spent Ksh4 million on tea and snacks, and Ksh2 million on airtime (Kapchanga 2020). Similarly, Uganda witnessed some cases of corruption by the politically connected. After the media exposed these rampant acts of corruption, some Members of Parliament were ordered by the high court to pay back 10 billion Ugandan shillings ($US 2.7 million). Also, in April 2020, four senior officials in the prime minister's office were arrested on charges of inflating the cost of relief food meant to help Ugandans who were struggling to feed due to the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihood (Hayden 2020). The impact of these corruption cases on the ability of nation states to fight the COVID-19 cannot be ignored because according to Hanstad

(2020), corruption prolongs the crisis by undermining government efficiency, significantly increasing the loss of life, wasting untold resources and reducing society's fragile trust in government.

Media Convergence Theory

Media convergence is all about integration and interoperability; the coming together of computing networks, information and communication technologies, and digital forms of information that are inherently adaptable, delivered via "intelligent" platforms, applications and devices (Holliman 2010). Jenkins (2006, p. 3) defines media convergence as "flow of content across multiple media platforms." This results in the technological combination of communication, computing and content (Fosu and Akpojivi 2015). According to Jenkins, media convergence is an ongoing process that should not be understood as a displacement of the old media, but rather as interaction between different media forms and platforms. For instance, a smart phone enables the intersection of various media such as print media, broadcast media and new media. Media convergence should be seen as cooperation and collaboration between previously unconnected communicative forms and platforms Chakaveh and Bogen 2007; Erda 2011). African countries are increasingly embracing the digital revolution in journalism practices, therefore, the way news is gathered, compiled, and disseminated is changing. Globally, critical journalists are taking advantage of the digital affordances available to them to provide evidence to their stories so that readers are exposed to the facts (Khisa 2018; Senam and Udo 2015). Exposing highly sensitive issues such as corruption requires factual documentary proof, thus critical journalists are providing video images, audio files and photographs as evidence, making the news stories compelling. The availability of this digital affordance is also assisting the whistle-blowers who might be the sources working with critical journalists.

These affordances have consequently made online newspapers central to critical journalism. Mabweazara (2015, p. 1) echoed this centrality by stating that vibrant digital media practices are emerging in the African continent despite infrastructural, political and economic obstacles. Stovall (2011) observes that the web is an ideal news medium because of its ability to handle information in most of the formats of traditional media like texts, pictures, graphs, audio and video. The web provides enhanced capacity as the reporter has the liberty of using as many words and as much time to tell the story (Kalamar 2016). The web provides the option to include with the reports full text of the speech that they cover, audio of the source and videos of the scenes where the stories unfold. The medium offers more flexibility as information can be shared in different-formats therefore encouraging interaction and participation (Rahnavad et al. 2017). Fosu and Akpojivi (2015) add that the inclusive and participatory ambience that brings those in authority and ordinary people into direct interaction is created to overturn the hitherto mostly one-dimensional flow from top to bottom. Therefore, online newspapers allow critical journalists to join a network

society, collaborating with readers, other reporters and media outlets, yet publishing in media outlets, which arguably remain the central stage of the public sphere (Carson 2013).

Unlike independent print newspapers, which are elite papers mainly because they target an urban and middle-class readership, online newspapers have found a niche market in the ordinary citizen, thus assuming the role of the voice of the voiceless as such online newspapers encourage participation, and provide citizens with information they require (accountability and transparency of the state), thus endearing online newspapers to the citizens (Asieng and Akpojivi 2019). Online newspapers aim to promote accountability and transparency due to their crucial and investigative stories (Ungar 1995; Rønning 2009). It is in this context that we argue that online publications can fill the void and write stories which resonate with the majority of ordinary citizens that is, holding governments accountable.

Methodology

The study adopts qualitative research approach in data collection and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as an inquiry to understand the meaning of human action by describing the inherent or essential characteristics of social objects or human experience. The major focus of the qualitative research methodology employed in this paper is to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations around how COVID-19 funds were corruptly used by the political elite and public officials in Zimbabwe. We selected *Zimlive* online newspaper purposively for two reasons. Firstly, *Zimlive* is the publication that exposed the COVID-19-related corruption. Secondly, *Zimlive* as on online newspapers has been actively engaged in critical journalism in Zimbabwe since its inception, thus a veritable field for study. Therefore, data was extracted from *Zimlive* for a period of 1 month, between 1 and 30 June 2020, a period characterised by the reportage of corruption and misappropriation of COVID-19 funds. From *Zimlive*, we used the keywords, "COVID-19," "COVID-gate" and "Corruption" to search for stories on COVID-19. A total of six stories on corruption were collected during the period (refer to Table 1 for summary of stories).

In addition, to further explore the role of critical journalism in exposing corruption and strengthening the democratic project, semi-structured interviews with five prominent critical journalists in Zimbabwe were conducted, one of them being *Zimlive* editor, Mduduzi Mathuthu who broke the COVID-gate news.[1] The other four journalists are from *New Ziana, Insure 263, Zal Empire Radio Station* and *The Herald.* Due to the COVID-19 restrictions (lockdown), the interviews were conducted via Zoom. According to Kvale (2006), interviews are key in understanding the world from the subject's point of view and to unfold the meaning of their

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[1] All the interviewees consented to have their names published.

Table 1 COVID-19 corruption stories run in Zimlive

Author	Date (2020)	Story title/brief description of story
Tony Karombo	28 May	Mnangagwa-linked company nets US$1 million in Covid-19 funds The finance ministry authorised the payment of US$1 million for a consignment of Covid-19 equipment at inflated prices from a company linked to President Emmerson Mnangagwa's son, according to a leaked document
Sipho Mabuza	9 June	Zimbabwe cancels US$60 m tenders given to Mnangagwa-linked company The government has cancelled corrupt procurement deals worth up to US$60 million signed with a company linked to one of President Emmerson Mnangagwa's sons
Mduduzi Mathuthu	13 June	The Zimbabwean government's payment of $2 million to a new start-off firm (2 weeks old), prompting an Interpol investigation Authorities in Hungary commenced a money-laundering probe following the payment of US$2 million to a two-weeks-old company by the government of Zimbabwe. Following the referral of the case to Interpol, the business opened a new office in Dubai and requested the government of Zimbabwe to pay the new invoice of over $1 million into an account in Mauritius, an African tax haven
Lindie Whiz	14 June	Delish Nguwaya first person charged over COVID-19 procumbent scandal Delish Nguwaya, on Saturday became the first person to be charged over a multi-million-dollar COVID-19 medical equipment supply scandal exposed by *Zimlive*
Mduduzi Mathuthu	19 June	Zimbabwe arrests health minister in COVID-19 procurement scandal Health Minister Obadiah Moyo was arrested on Friday over an international COVID-19 procurement scandal exposed by *Zimlive*
Nelson Banya	20 June	Obadiah Moyo has been granted bail after being indicted in the COVID-19 procurement corruption Health Minister has been freed on bail Saturday following his arrest the previous day on allegations over a US$ 60 million deal to procure COVID-19 tests and equipment

lived world. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was used to analyse both interview data and data from the corruption stories from *Zimlive*, allowing us to come up with thematic interpretations about corruption. Roller and Ravrakas (2015, p. 232) define QCA as "the systematic reduction of content, analysed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations of the data." In QCA, content embraces all appropriate data sources beyond the text such as images, videos, audio, graphics and symbols (Kuckartz 2014).

Findings and Discussion

The discussion below will be based on the themes derived from both the interviews and news stories collected.

Corruption Starts from the Top

The data gathered from interviews and the online newspaper *Zimlive* show that corruption in Zimbabwean public offices is closely linked to influential politicians. The political leadership in Zimbabwe speaks against corruption on public forums but they rarely live up to their promise. The spike in COVID-19 cases in Zimbabwe like in many other nation states, motivated an urgency in the purchase of COVID-19 equipment. The companies and individuals who benefitted from the tenders are closely linked to the president of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa. *Zimlive* exposed that a "two-week old company" called Drax International using a United Arab Emirates address yet claiming it was headquartered in Switzerland. The connection between Drax International and the Mnangagwa family is traced from the "business partnership" and friendship between Drax owner, Delish Nguwaya and Mnangagwa's son, Collins Mnangagwa. Drax's proximity to political power can explain why the "Zimbabwe government lifted its own restrictions on buying from third party vendors to approve the deal" and "gave a special dispensation for Drax to deliver its consignment worth US$987,720." From the story "Mnangagwa-linked company nets US$1 million in Covid-19 funds," the invisible elite political hand can be deciphered in the actions of the secretary of the Ministry of Finance, George Guvamatanga who had "earlier terminated existing contracts" to pave way for the Drax tender. Apart from winning the COVID-19 equipment supply tender through its proximity to power, Drax International also overpriced the equipment.

Drax International won a tender to supply 5040 units of N95 masks at a unit cost of US$28 per unit, 15,000 Covid-19 test kits at a unit cost of US$34 and 3740 protective clothing at the unit cost of US$90 each. As Karombo (2020) established, the masks cost an average US$5 per unit or less with suppliers in Dubai, where Drax was registered, while the protective clothing cost an average US$30. Therefore, that the contract was allowed to sail through the Ministry of Finance without any red flags allude to the political influence behind Drax International. *Zimlive* editor, Mduduzi Mathuthu explained how corruption culture is sustained saying:

> Sadly, there is corruption at the very centre of government, in the country's cabinet and among those who wield political power. Weak controls and oversight in offices such as the Presidency, the Legislature, Treasury, the Procurement Regulatory Authority which on numerous occasions is bypassed by government agencies that flout procurement rules, make it difficult to police corruption. (Mduduzi Mathuthu, personal communication, 24 September 2020)

In the early stages of the pandemic, President Mnangagwa had publicly announced that he had "made a personal appeal to Drax international" for help and they kindly responded by donating COVID-19 test kits before promising to supply equipment worth US$ 60 million. As *Zimlive* exposed, the president was fully aware of the identity of Drax International and the "donations" are common in corrupt regimes as they are a means to gain proximity to the political elite and eventually supply tenders. Drax International was not registered with the Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (PRAZ) (Mathuthu 2020). This is a legal requirement for all companies dealing/doing business with the government. Despite failing to achieve this condition, the Drax International was paid US$ 2 million for the overpriced supply of Covid-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) and test kits. Ilir Dedja, a 51-year-old man from Sefaraj, a community in Albania, arranged the payment. Dedja had been to Zimbabwe to meet with Mnangagwa and Delish Nguwaya, his Zimbabwean partner. On 20 February 2020, he registered Drax Consult SAGL in Hungary, indicating that the company's activities include "business consulting, marketing, advertising, and business management consulting for foreign firms trading in medical and cosmetic products," according to official records. Following its registration, the company was credited with US$2 million, in the form of $1 million deposits. The payments were a 10% deposit on a delivery of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies worth $20 million under a contract. The National Pharmaceutical Company (NatPharm), a state-owned drug company, would pay the remaining US$18 million in monthly payments of US$1.5 million through the country's Treasury. Zimbabwe has a long history of political influence on government tenders and as Rusvingo (2014) opines, corruption in Zimbabwe is pervasive because the head of this mafia or "yakuza"-like operation sits in the highest office in the land and there are no repercussions for those found guilty except being arrested and later released, popularised in Zimbabwe as the "catch and release" system. *New Ziana* journalist Moses Chitiyo, while buttressing the above held that:

> *Zimlive* did well in exposing the procedural shortcomings in the COVID-19 equipment tender. There are some who have been arrested on allegations of high level corruption but their cases have not progressed much from the initial court appearances to the last one. There is much hype at the start, but it dies naturally and there seems to be no longer any interest by the authorities to pursue the corruption cases. (Personal communication, 27 September 2020)

This explains the breach of the tender process to favour Drax International. This observation was summed up in an interview with another critical journalist who said:

> Lack of political will. The catch-and-release system currently prevailing in the country is nurturing corruption in Zimbabwe. The system protects criminals within the government and hounds perceived enemies. (Lazarus Sauti, personal communication, 25 September 2020)

Corruption in Zimbabwe is part of the patronage system which begins from the grassroots political structures to the presidium. Part of the *Zimlive* exposé showed that one of the beneficiaries of the COVID-19 equipment supply tender was President Mnangagwa's bodyguard who owns a shelf company registered in Namibia

called Jaji Investments. The company had received payment for the supply of COVID-19 test kits worth US$ 66,000. Apart from the test kits being costed at twice the standard price by Jaji Investments, the kits were never delivered. The Minister of Health and Child Care, Obadiah Moyo used his political influence to assist Jaji Investments to bypass the tender process. On 14 April 2020, Moyo wrote a note instructing his permanent secretary Agnes Mahomva to "find an invoice for the rapid response kits for purchase from Namibia." This was despite Mahomva having earlier declined, citing that the kits were locally available. The adverse impact of corruption is that it erodes the institutional capacity of government as established procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned and officials are assigned or promoted without regard to performance (Bonga et al. 2015).

Digital Tools Provide Irrefutable Evidence

The study finds that the use of digital tools in news gathering allowed *Zimlive* to provide irrefutable evidence that exposed corruption. Schiffrin (2014) argued that critical journalists in today's highly connected digital society are now taking advantage of their online community relationships to scour documents and uncover potential wrongdoings. Critical journalism as watchdog journalism performs an important role in maintaining checks and balances on governance by exposing corruption by public officials and their associates (Malila 2018). In an interview with *Zimlive* editor, Mduduzi Mathuthu, it was found that *Zimlive* journalists relied on sources within the Ministry of Finance who provided documentary evidence of corruption through photos of the corrupt transactions and messages. *Zimlive* stories provided several photos which drew the connection between President Mnangagwa, his twin sons Collins and Shaun Drax International. One of the photos accompanying a story titled, "How Zimbabwe paid a two-week-old firm $2 million, prompting an Interpol investigation"; Collins and Shaun Mnangagwa are pictured with Valdano, the Zimbabwe agent for Jaji Investments. With digital affordances, the online newspaper used graphic tools to encircle Delish Nguwaya's face in one of the pictures taken with the Mnangagwa twins and other youths while on a trip in China in 2019 (see Fig. 1). While the graphics allow the publication to direct the readers' eyes to the key person, it also reinforces the connection between Nguwaya and the president's family. Commenting on the appropriation of graphic tools by *Zimlive*, one journalist said:

> *Zimlive* provided evidence in form of photographs and used graphic tools to encircle the subjects of corruption. This would make readers easily identify the subjects and draw connections between entire groups of connected political elites. (Neo Batakati, personal communication, 29 September 2020)

These digital tools offered critical journalists access to critical images, audios, videos and graphics which would strengthen their evidence of the COVID-gate

Fig. 1 A photograph shows Delish Nguwaya (*circled*) flanked by the Mnangagwa twins and other ZANU-PF youths during a China visit back in 2018. *Zimlive* (28 May 2020)

scandal by the political elite in Zimbabwe. Highlighting the efficacy of digital tools in exposing COVID-gate, the *Zimlive* editor commented thus:

> Digital tools were critical in our investigations. We were able to communicate with investigative journalists and authorities in other countries using digital tools, online messaging services and encrypted services to receive and share messages, information, images and records relating to our investigation. Digital tools were also used to examine documents and images for authenticity. We were able to use social media listening tools to track certain stories, comments and trends relating to this story. We were able to procure official documents relating to this scandal using digital tools that helped us protect our sources. (Mduduzi Mathuthu, personal communication, 24 September 2020)

More evidence of political interference in the COVID-19 equipment tender scam provided by *Zimlive* evidence of political interference to the COVID-19 equipment tender scam was a photo of a hand-written note by the Minister of Health and Child Care, Obadiah Moyo, directing the Permanent Secretary, Agnes Mahomva, to authorise payment for 4500 COVID-19 test kits to be supplied by Jaji Investments based in Namibia and to copy the transaction to himself and the Minister of Finance, Mthuli Ncube (see Fig. 2). There was also another letter dated 8 May 2020 from the secretary of Reserve Bank for Finance and Economic Development, George Guvamatanga directing Agnes Mahomva to immediately arrange a payment for the supply of surgical masks, coveralls and COVID-19 test kits, which had been
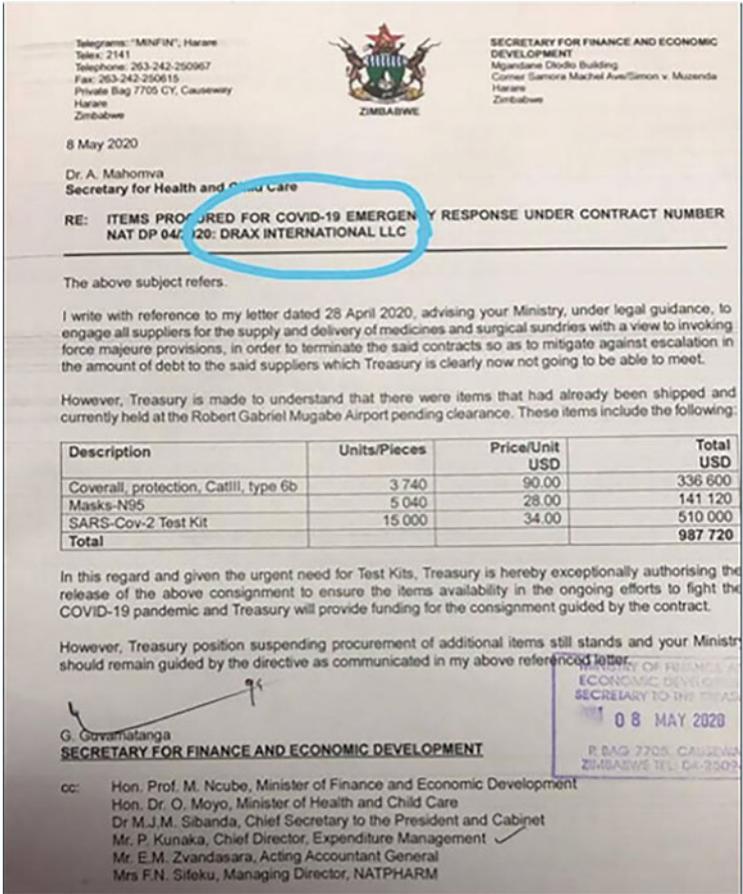
Fig. 2 George Guvamatanga's letter directing the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Health to quickly arrange payment of COVID-19 equipment. *Zimlive* (13 June 2020)

supplied without following tender pocesses. As argued by Steingrüber et al. (2020), this pandemic has been seen by some as an opportunity to take advantage of the emergency to abuse their power for private gain. Schipani et al. (2020) add that although corruption has been rife in Africa before COVID-19, the pandemic has given room to another level of looting. As this study finds, this looting is sophisticated as it is a network of well-connected politicians and public officers, making efforts to address the graft difficult.

The photo evidence from *Zimlive* shows that COVID-gate was executed through a collaboration of top officials in the Ministry of Finance, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Health and Child Care and the presidium. *Zimlive*'s exposure of the handwritten note by Moyo demonstrates that corruption in Zimbabwe is pervasive

and it starts with the political elite downwards. This view is also shared by journalist, Neo Batakati, who noted:

> Corruption in Zimbabwe is institutionalised and sadly, very functional. The culture will be difficult to stop as it is enabled by those with political privilege who use their power to override public officers and law enforcement agents. (Personal communication, 29 September 2020)

In an environment where access to information is difficult for journalists, this study finds that digital tools, particularly the mobile phone ensured that journalists were digitally connected with sources who captured and provided crucial evidence of corruption without risking themselves.

Impact of Exposing Corruption by the Media

The effectiveness of critical journalism is revealed in the *Zimlive* COVID-19 corruption scandal as shown by the response of government, citizens and the police. The role of critical reporting is to safeguard effective political competition by ensuring that claims about a government's record or a candidate's qualifications for office are open to external scrutiny and evaluation (Norris 2000, p. 29). Casero-Ripollés et al. (2016) add that critical journalism is a vital safeguard against abuse of power. Officials cannot always be trusted to act properly, and the press is to check on impropriety (Adriano 2019). Understood within the context of watchdog journalism, critical journalism's task is to oversee political activity, particularly of those in positions of power, detect and expose errors, corruption, injustice and abuses of power (Casero-Ripollés et al. 2016). In response to the media exposure of COVID-gate scandal and growing public anger, mainly expressed on social media under the hash tag #bringbackourmoney and #corruptionmustfall, there was some attempt by the state to address the scandals. For instance, the Health Service Board responsible for supervising the tender process was immediately dissolved. Also, the Health Minister was fired few weeks after both the Minister of Health and Child Care, Obadiah Moyo and Delish Nguwaya of Drax International were arrested. However, they were both granted bail and Nguwaya's case was reduced to a mere procedural misdemeanour instead of corruption (Fig. 3).

All the journalists who were interviewed concurred that the "catch and release" game reflects that corruption has the blessing of the powerful political elite. However, in comparison to the charges given to the political elites involved in the corruption scandal, *Zimlive* editor and a fellow freelance critical journalist, Hopewell Chin'ono, who amplified *Zimlive*'s coverage of the corruption stories on his popular Twitter page, paid a huge price as they were arrested on spurious charges of threatening to overthrow an elected government (Paradigm Initiative 2020). According to Joseph (2014), critical journalism in Zimbabwe has become a minefield for journalists and editors as they are exposed to dangers and threats from the state while engaging in their constituted responsibility of informing the public and
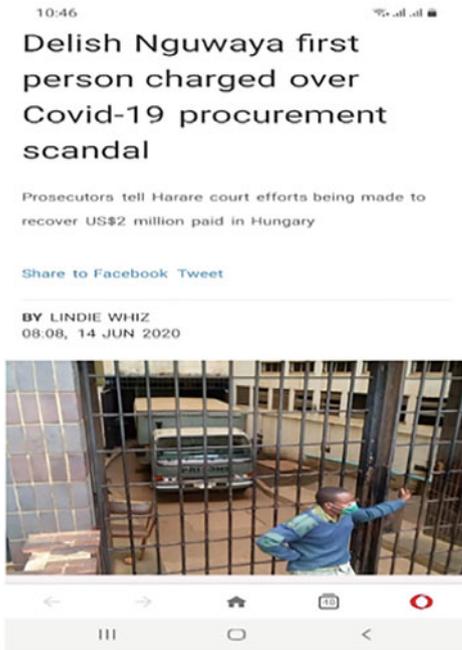
Fig. 3 News headlines in *Zimlive*, 14 June 2020 by Whiz (2020) (*left*) and *Zimlive,* 20 June 2020 by Banya (2020) (*right*), showing the arrest of Delish Nguwaya and Minister Obadiah Moyo

holding state officials accountable. Casero-Ripollés et al. (2016) trace the strong and systematic pressures on journalists to the political realm and the efforts by politicians to control the news. Despite these threats, the power of critical journalism in society cannot be overemphasised as the coverage of collusion and corruption by journalists may help prevent corruption or affect the trajectory of corruption as it unfolds (Andvig and Moene 1990).

Conclusion

The study established that critical journalism is a critical component of democracy as it performs the watchdog role over public officials and their use of public finances. As Abdelkader (2019) opined, the online press associated with the field of cyber media engage in investigation and dissemination of information to large and uncontrolled social networks. In this study, we find that online newspapers like *Zimlive* play an important role in highlighting and enhancing the role of critical journalism in exposing corruption cases and the prominent personalities involved in such corrupt acts to the general public. In a society in which misinformation has impacted people's trust in news, the availability of digital tools and their affordances

allow online newspapers to use images, audios, videos and graphics to provide proof in corruption cases to the satisfaction of the readers. These technological affordances augment the main story offering graphic evidence of people, organisations and the relationships between them.

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Constructive Journalism and COVID-19 Safe Nation Narratives in *The Herald* Newspaper: Implications for Journalism Ethics in Zimbabwe

Thulani Tshabangu and Abiodun Salawu

Abstract The coverage of crises such as the global health pandemic, COVID-19, is to a large extent guided by national interest, journalistic culture, and editorial policies of media outlets. This chapter argues that the state-controlled newspaper, *The Herald*, in Zimbabwe deployed constructive journalism as an approach to report COVID-19. Constructive journalism is about injecting positive angles into news reports whilst abiding by the core news values of accuracy, impartiality, and balance. The findings reveal that constructive journalism elements of solutions orientation, future orientation, and explanation and contextualisation were frequently deployed by *The Herald* to advance a safe nation narrative whose objective was to prevent public hysteria in the face of a deadly COVID-19 outbreak in the country. The chapter concludes that the deployment of constructive journalism in less developed countries like Zimbabwe to inspire hope through positive psychology in the face of global crises does not always yield the intended outcomes.

Keywords Constructive journalism · COVID-19 · Zimbabwe · Critical discourse analysis · Moral panics · Health reporting

Background

COVID-19 is one of the most recent natural disasters and pandemics that have affected Zimbabwe in the last four years. In 2016, Zimbabwe was hit by an El Niño-induced drought that affected four million people. In 2017, Cyclone Dineo affected Tsholotsho district flooding more than 2000 people and causing 250 deaths. In 2018, a cholera outbreak had 10,421 cases and 69 deaths. In 2019, Cyclone Idai affected 270,000 people and caused 299 deaths (ReliefWeb 2020). The first COVID-19 case in Zimbabwe was reported on 20 March 2020. At the time of this study, 31 August 2020, Zimbabwe had 6497 confirmed coronavirus cases, 202 deaths, and 5221

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recoveries. COVID-19, like previous disasters, found Zimbabwe in a crisis, ill-prepared to reduce the risk and to respond accordingly to save lives. President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared COVID-19 a national disaster, and a National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 was put in place. Zimbabwe's response to COVID-19 is founded on the principles of limiting human-to-human transmission; early identification, isolation, and care for patients; risk communication and community engagement; narrowing knowledge gaps in disease transmission, prevention, and treatment; and minimising social and economic impact. The role of the media during the COVID-19 crisis is to provide the public with clear, accurate, credible, and timely information. COVID-19 information must articulate the nature and extent of the pandemic in the country. It must include general information about the virus, provision of health services, and challenges in the health delivery system. The government's response to the pandemic should be clearly articulated and accessible to everyone.

The Media Landscape

Zimbabwe has a monolithic and repressive media system, which is largely owned and controlled by the state. The state-controlled print media comprises eleven newspaper titles and three magazines under the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (1980) Ltd. (Zimpapers). Publications under the Zimpapers arguably have the largest readership and are the dominant voice of government that shapes public sphere discourses. Amongst the list of Zimpapers publications is the leading daily *The Herald*, founded in 1891. Unaudited results of the 2019 Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey estimate that 14% of the adult population in Zimbabwe read *The Herald*, hence its dominance of the print media market. *The Herald* was chosen for this study because it is a public medium with the widest reach. It has an outstanding health reporting beat and a Coronavirus Watch section on its website dedicated to bringing up-to-date news and information about the pandemic.

Research Questions

The goal of the study is to evaluate the applicability of constructive journalism in Zimbabwe in the context of *The Herald* coverage of COVID-19. The specific research questions are:

What are The Herald journalists' knowledge and attitudes towards constructive journalism?

What elements of constructive journalism can be identified in COVID-19 news by The Herald?

What are the main discourses and themes in COVID-19 news by The Herald?

What are the attitudes and emotions of readers towards COVID-19 news that use constructive journalism elements?

Constructive Journalism

The role of the media in the coverage of health pandemics can be explored from a variety of theoretical perspectives such as health reporting, development communication/journalism, social behavior change communication, risk communication, and moral panic. The theoretical point of departure in this study is constructive journalism. The motivation for using constructive journalism was to test the applicability of new journalism theories in Africa, thereby contributing to de-Westernised understanding of journalism. Constructive journalism is an emerging form of news reporting that distances itself from negativity bias in the news. It is being pioneered by two Danish journalists, Catherine Gyldensted and Ulrik Haagerup, who argue that negativity bias in news may lead to public frustration with journalism and societal developments in general (Bro 2019, p. 516). Constructive journalism draws from positive psychology and its assumption is that constructive news can lead to positive emotions. Although constructive journalism avoids negative news about death, destruction, and societal misery, negative journalism is not necessarily bad or unconstructive. Negative news may have positive intentions or outcomes such as revealing human rights atrocities and abuses of power that can lead to social justice. In crisis times, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the role of constructive journalism is to provide solutions and avoid scaremongering and pumping public fear and anxiety.

Constructive journalism has been likened to "solutions journalism," "peace journalism," and "development journalism." From and Kristensen (2018, p. 717) observe that it shares traits with "solutions journalism," which was introduced as a journalistic practice in America in the late 1990s, focusing, much like constructive journalism, on how journalism should not simply pinpoint problems but also provide alternative perspectives and solutions. Because constructive journalism has positive intentions, it is almost similar to peace journalism, which is concerned with media reportage of conflict and the creation of peaceful solutions (Galtung 2015). Constructive journalism also appears like a poorly named version of development journalism because both are concerned with the role of journalism in bringing positive change in society. The difference is that development journalism is hackneyed, rooted in development communication theories, and intent on nation building, whereas constructive journalism is recent and is rooted in behavioral sciences with the objective of promoting feel-good positive psychology. Constructive journalism can achieve effects at micro, meso, and macro levels (Meier 2018). At the micro level, readers, viewers, listeners, and users should feel better after being exposed to constructive news reports as opposed to being burdened with problems. At the meso level, media companies should achieve greater audience loyalty, thereby increasing reading times and reach such that the media brand should be regarded as

positive and helpful. At the macro level, it must proffer possible solutions and perspectives for social problems and bring about progress for society Meier 2018).

In Africa, constructive journalism is still relatively new with two pioneer studies worth mentioning. McIntyre and Sobel (2017, p. 8) established that Rwandan journalists contributed to the reconstruction and recovery of the country by practising constructive journalism. Their study revealed that Rwandan journalists feel a strong obligation to promote unity and reconciliation by employing constructive journalism techniques as a direct result of having survived the 1994 genocide and wanting to prevent a similar tragedy from reoccurring. Zhang and Matingwina (2016) applied constructive journalism theory to compare the BBC and China Daily's coverage of the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. They established that constructive journalism was emerging as an alternative narrative to tell the story of Ebola and Africa replacing negative narratives and enduring stereotypes about Africa.

Hermans and Gyldensted (2019, p. 539) propose a six-point model of constructive journalism: solutions orientation demands journalists to include solutions when covering problems; future orientation: a strong inclination to look further than the events of the day; inclusiveness and diversity: including more voices and perspectives in the news; empowering people: by including a variety of views that empower so-called victims; explanation and contextualisation of the news; and co-creation by engaging and empowering the public to participate in news production. Central to this study was an endeavour to evaluate the applicability and suitability of Hermans and Gyldensted's (2019) six-point model of constructive journalism in Zimbabwe with *The Herald* newspaper as a case study. It is imperative to study constructive journalism in Zimbabwe to appreciate its application and challenges it may have in de-Westernised contexts.

Methodology

The study was interested in three key issues of constructive journalism, these being the context of production, the news products, and reception of constructive journalism. This was achieved through a triangulated data collection strategy that utilised semi-structured interviews, critical discourse analysis (CDA) of news articles, and an analysis of selected reader feedback obtained from *The Herald* interactive webpage and Facebook page. Interviews were conducted with a senior health reporter and two health reporters to understand how institutional pressures and policies affected the journalists' choices and decisions and other subjective experiences that influenced the way how journalists framed COVID-19 news. To avoid easy identification of the research participants, all interview responses were coded Journ1, Journ2, and Journ3. CDA was used to determine the presence of constructive journalism elements in COVID-19 news articles. Van den Bulck defines discourse as "a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area" (2002, p. 85). Discourses

are the story of reality as presented to us through media or other cultural texts. News articles on COVID-19 were analysed at the textual and contextual levels following the CDA model initially propounded by Van Dijk (1988) and varied in subsequent years. At the textual level, news articles were analysed to determine the extent to which they infused constructive journalism elements. At the contextual level, they were analysed to determine how they were constrained by institutional and structural factors. Data saturation strategies were used to identify and select 120 news articles published on the 'Coronavirus Watch' web section between 3 March and 30 August 2020 for analysis. Articles were selected on the basis of the rich information they yielded and their propensity to provide answers to research questions. Due to the fact that analysed articles did not vary in thematic content, only a few are selected to illuminate the findings. The second approach to data collection was the analysis of selected readers' responses to news articles to determine if constructive journalism as deployed by *The Herald* journalists to report COVID-19 leads to positive or negative feelings. Readers' feedback conveniently sampled from *The Herald*'s website and Facebook page was used as vox populi to measure audience emotions towards constructive journalism. The objective of data collection was to obtain rich qualitative data that aided the researcher's understanding of the subject matter rather than generating survey data. CDA was the overarching research method that helped to produce succinct findings through a process of transcription of interviews, sorting, and categorisation of the data to discover patterns, concepts, themes, and meanings.

Constructive Journalism at The Herald

Unlike the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which already has media guidelines for reporting it, there are no policies yet to guide media reportage of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. This means that journalists were learning about the pandemic inasmuch as they learnt to report it. The interviewees said they had no knowledge of constructive journalism and used basic journalistic skills and intuition to report COVID-19. They reiterated that media had a duty to combat the pandemic through dissemination of appropriate information and educating the public about its causes, symptoms, and prevention. This role of media during the COVID-19 crisis was summed by Journ2:

> Imparting information on COVID-19 is priceless. I report on COVID-19 hoping to change health behaviors and to save lives. I want to empower people to make informed decisions and to take preventative measures. The role of the media is to inform and educate the public about COVID-19 using simplified writing. [Interview with Journ 2: 3 Aug, 2020]

The Herald health journalists were perhaps unconsciously knowledgeable about constructive journalism as they frequently mentioned phrases that were closely associated with it during interviews. Journ1 defined the role of the media during the pandemic using a constructive approach as follows:

> Mainstream media must play a role to dispel rumours that come through social media. The role of media must be to calm the nation, so that people are not afraid. Fear of COVID-19

may lead to stigma and discrimination that can scuttle the government response effort. The media must give hope to the nation, especially to those who have tested positive for COVID-19 by profiling recoveries. It must put a human face to the recoveries so that those who are infected may also have hope that they will fight through. [Interview with Journ1: 30 July 2020]

Although *The Herald* did not explicitly refer to constructive journalism as the guiding philosophy for its COVID-19 news coverage, it often used some of the constructive elements proposed by Hermans and Gyldensted (2019) in its reportage of the pandemic. The frequently used constructive elements were solutions orientation, future orientation, and explanation and contextualisation. The solutions-oriented element was used to encourage local people to be responsible and play a role in fighting the pandemic. A solutions-oriented approach sees local people as empowered and capable of action because they can identify problems and provide solutions. Solutions-oriented reporting often documented the local actions of people individually or collectively providing solutions to the pandemic. Future orientation was used to pacify people, to restore hope, and to encourage them to comply with lockdown restrictions. It was also used to prepare readers for a new normal life during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Explanation and contextualisation were used to guide readers through the unfamiliar news topic of COVID-19. Explanation and contextualisation articles highlighted the meanings and implications of the pandemic for ordinary people through detailed information about how COVID-19 was transmitted, its symptoms, and how it could be prevented. News about new scientific findings and progress of research into vaccines was also framed using explanation and contextualisation elements.

The less used constructive elements were inclusiveness and diversity, empowerment, and co-creation. *The Herald*'s use of official sources for COVID-19 news meant there was no inclusivity and diversity of voices in the news. Underrepresented and underprivileged segments of society rarely had their concerns about COVID-19 published because the newspaper was preoccupied with preserving the status quo. This was worsened by the fact that news and information about COVID-19 were part of government crisis communication. Consequently, media reportage of the pandemic was centred on government authorities who provided official information such as the number of cases in the country and policy pronouncements.

The media can play an empowerment role by incorporating the voices of ordinary people infected and affected by COVID-19. *The Herald* used the empowerment element less because COVID-19 discourses were centred on public officials as disseminators of news and information about the pandemic. Empowerment can be attained if *The Herald* opens news production to participation by ordinary citizens. Citizens can be empowered to participate in public sphere debates, expressing their fears and concerns about the pandemic. Co-creation was a less used element of constructive journalism because *The Herald* journalists regarded themselves as the legitimate creators and conveyors of COVID-19 news. The absence of co-created content indicates that *The Herald* is still rooted in traditional journalism and has a low uptake of participatory or citizen journalism. It is commendable that *The Herald* journalists engaged with readers on social media platforms to obtain feedback and

tips on new story ideas. Engagement with readers often led journalists to human interest stories about returnees escaping from quarantine centres and sneaky previews of life in quarantine centres.

The study was also concerned with how readers respond to COVID-19 news written using constructive journalism. Readers' feedback on *The Herald*'s website and Facebook page was used as a proxy to gauge the acceptability of constructive journalism. The analysis revealed that the majority of the readers' comments were negative. This means that *The Herald*'s use of constructive journalism elements in reporting COVID-19 did not lead to positive emotions as anticipated in theory. The negative readers' feedback can be attributed to the citizens' distrust of politicians and frustration with the country's ongoing crisis. Overall, readers had a negative disposition towards the nation's COVID-19 response plan since they regarded Zimbabwe as a failed state. The insignificant positive comments indicate that perhaps some news articles written using constructive journalism elements have an appeal to some readers. It is possible that positive comments to COVID-19 news articles mainly came from ruling party sympathisers and state propaganda armies who used the comments section on *The Herald* website to distract and influence the citizen discourses to favour the status quo.

COVID-19 Discourses and Themes in The Herald

COVID-19 and decoloniality The coverage of COVID-19 by *The Herald* revealed the public health and political dimension of the pandemic. News with a public health dimension had an informational and educational value aimed at creating COVID-19 awareness. News with a political dimension usually had a propaganda spin to reflect the dominant thought pattern of the ruling elites. Journalists at *The Herald* were under pressure to write articles that were biased towards government. This is confirmed by Kovacevic and Perisin (2018), who note that in some contexts constructive journalism connotes being in support of a certain regime or ideology. Journalist 2 attested that 'a good COVID-19 story is one that reflected the government position' [Interview with Journalist 2: 3 Aug, 2020]. Decoloniality is one of the political ideologies that were carried in the COVID-19 news. News with decolonial agenda promoted nationalistic, Pan African, and anti-Western solutions to the pandemic. A frequent argument in such articles was that Zimbabwe and the rest of the African continent could provide home-grown solutions to the pandemic without looking up to Western countries. The article "Could African indigenous knowledge hold answers to COVID-19?" (Ndhongo 2020), framed using the solutions-oriented element, argues that Africa could be the source of the elusive cure for COVID-19. This followed the discovery of an herbal remedy for COVID-19 in Madagascar. *The Herald* consistently pressed for the need to recognise African solutions to the pandemic lambasting Western countries for claiming to have "God-given power to research, find, produce and sell treatment for any ailment" (Ndhongo 2020). The decoloniality theme was also advanced to explain the strengthening of Sino-Zimbabwe

cooperation in the field of medicine and in the fight against the pandemic. As part of the solutions-oriented reportage, *The Herald* urged citizens to accept Chinese traditional medicine as cure for COVID-19. Later, China donated medical expertise, cash, equipment, and vaccines to Zimbabwe.

COVID-19, sanctions blame game, and opportunities *The Herald* frequently argued that sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by some Western governments, mainly the USA, Britain, and the European Union in 2001, were impeding COVID-19 response efforts in the country. The newspaper also propounded the narrative that COVID-19, just like Western-imposed sanctions, was stalling economic progress in the country. 'Coronavirus stalls progress at New Parly building' in *The Herald*, 16 March 2020, reports that COVID-19 had slowed the construction of the New Parliament building after 100 Chinese technocrats failed to return from holidays. The article used explanation and contextualisation to elicit positive responses from readers who in this case were expected to commiserate with the government for failing to finish national projects on time due to the pandemic. However, the article received negative responses as some readers reasoned that the government was using COVID-19 as a scapegoat for its ineptitude. 'Now Zanu Pf will blame everything on the twin evils, sanctions and Coronavirus', lamented a reader by the pseudonym Aljezeera-Alshabab (Chidakwa and Zhakata 2020). As if to contradict itself, *The Herald* also presented COVID-19 as a blessing in disguise that would unlock economic opportunities by reviving industries and promoting research innovation. 'Home-grown response to Covid-19 lauded' in *The Herald*, 7 May 2020, encouraged Zimbabwe to go 'overdrive in using home-grown solutions [. . .] to grow the economy' (*The Herald*, 7 May 2020c), during the COVID-19 pandemic. Framed using the solutions-oriented approach, the article adds jingoism and optimism that are the characteristics of constructive journalism. Consistent with constructive journalism's objective of creating positive psychology, *The Herald* focused on the bright side of COVID-19, in particular, how the enforcement of a lockdown was beneficial. 'Harness positives from lockdown to spruce up city' (Butaumocho 2020) encouraged the City of Harare to embrace the positive spin-offs of the lockdown such as reduced human traffic previously caused by illegal vendors and pirate taxis. The article says the lockdown had brought 'a fresh look' to Harare within a matter of days. Such positive frames were meant to encourage citizens to embrace the lockdown as a new normal and to allay concerns about their livelihoods and decreased income earning opportunities due to the lockdown.

COVID-19 response capacity and preparedness *The Herald*'s consistent messaging during the pandemic was that Zimbabwe had capacity and was prepared to respond to COVID-19 despite the country's disadvantaged economic position caused by Western sanctions. Concurrent with this messaging was the safe nation narrative aimed at preventing public panic. In keeping with constructive journalism, *The Herald*'s main preoccupation was to reduce public anxiety, offer assurance, and keep its audiences calm during the public health crisis. One way of presenting Zimbabwe's capacity to deal with COVID-19 was to use the flashback technique to remind the public that the country had in the past overcome colonialism, consecutive droughts, and busted Western sanctions. Citizens were encouraged not to fret

because the country was safe and in the capable hands of its leadership comprising President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his two Vice Presidents Constantine Chiwenga and Kembo Mohadi, who were all experienced war liberation heroes with the right determination and discipline to lead the country in overcoming the pandemic. *The Herald*'s key message was that of hope and resilience during times of distress to build around positive frames of responsible leadership, national building, and unity of purpose.

In most narratives, the fight against COVID-19 was equated to a fight against a political opponent. This is seen in 'Covid-19 provides turning point for Zimbabwe: VP' (*The Herald*, 4 May, 2020b) which quotes Mohadi as saying:

> I am sure we will conquer the current crisis just as we have done in the past. The 16 years of the brutal war towards independence taught us that no matter how hard and difficult a situation might be, there is light at the end of the tunnel. (*The Herald*, 4 May, 2020b)

Although government critics and private media were always sceptical of government's capacity to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, the death of prominent broadcaster Zororo Makamba on 23 March 2020 was a turning point. The state media for the first time exposed the government's lack of capacity to deal with COVID-19 as it emerged that Makamba died because he could not be put on a life-saving ventilator. Despite creating the impression that the nation was safe, *The Herald* was forced to reveal that the country's COVID-19 referral hospitals needed skilled personnel, equipment, and refurbishments to effectively manage infections and treat hospitalised patients.

The Herald sometimes overestimated the country's capacity to respond to the pandemic through constructive articles laden with puffery and patriotism. 'Coronavirus: Bringing the best out of nations' (Butaumocho 2020) stated that COVID-19 had brought out Zimbabwe's best capabilities. Another related article, 'Covid-19 could be catalyst for top-notch health delivery system' (Chikova 2020), reasons that Zimbabwe can achieve a top-notch health delivery system owing to improvements to be made to hospitals during the crisis. Articles that appeal to patriotism present a challenge to journalism ethics as journalists sometimes violate their duties of truth-telling for the sake of national fervour.

Despite continuously saying the nation had capacity to respond to the pandemic, *The Herald* often contradicted itself by openly celebrating COVID-19 donations from local and international funders. News that celebrated COVID-19 handouts from donors riled readers who were initially made to believe that the government was prepared to handle the pandemic. The article, 'Trust hands over ventilator to Wilkins' (Rupapa and Chidakwa 2020), framed using the constructive element of local solutions to COVID-19, disgusted readers after the newspaper celebrated the donation of a ventilator to Wilkins Clinic. One reader Manucho lashed out:

> Idiots. You enjoy parading donations yet you spend millions buying cars for Zanu PF elite and ministers. When it comes to buying things that benefit the public you blame sanctions for not buying but when it comes to hiring private jets from Dubai and buying expensive cars you spend like billionaires. It took the death of Zororo for u to realise that a ventilator was needed at Wilkins seriously??? Fellow Zimbabweans we are alone in this battle. Reader's Comment. (Rupapa and Chidakwa 2020)

In general, readers did not respond positively to news about COVID-19 pledges and donations because they felt these were likely to be embezzled by corrupt politicians for selfish gains.

COVID-19 Othering and Blame Games

The media and politicians may seek conspiracy theories to 'others' or blame others when public health is at risk. Former US President Donald Trump called coronavirus a 'Chinese virus', blaming China for the global outbreak of the pandemic, adding to conspiracy theories that the virus was engineered by China as a bioweapon. *The Herald* often 'othered' Zimbabwean migrants, who returned home from the diaspora at the height of the pandemic, blaming them for an increase in COVID-19 cases in the country. This led to a moral panic that returnees were undesirable to society. The essence of a moral panic is that a situation, person, group, or setting is seen by the public as a threat to society. Returnees were cast as highly infectious, troublesome, and undesirable. 'Border skipping returnees a risk to us all (Dzenga 2020) blames returnees for 'threatening to dislodge Zimbabwe's good standing against Covid-19 which had otherwise been well handled'. Returnees were also portrayed as failed economic migrants that were skipping borders into the country with petty criminal minds. 'Quarantined returnees drinking sanitisers' (Chipunza 2020) reports that some returnees in quarantine facilities were drinking liquid sanitisers that have a high percentage of alcohol as a way of mitigating boredom associated with staying in compulsory quarantine. This article, although intent on bringing out the human interest of the pandemic, leads to 'othering' of returnees as a nuisance to society.

COVID-19 deaths Although *The Herald* tried to avoid negative news about the pandemic, it found itself having to report inevitable COVID-19 deaths. As a matter of principle, the media must play a role in consoling the nation when it is grieving the death of its citizens, especially due to natural disasters. *The Herald* covered COVID-19 deaths using the constructive element of explanation and contextualisation. This was done to preserve public calm and create an understanding of the pandemic to prevent more deaths. As part of contextualisation, *The Herald* usually evoked patriotism to say Zimbabwe was faring better in terms of COVID-19 infections and deaths compared to neighbouring South Africa and Western countries.

The first Zimbabwean to die of COVID-19 was media personality Zororo Makamba on 23 March 2020 at 30 years of age. At that time, he and another unnamed compatriot were the only two known positive cases in the country. His death, due to COVID-19, attracted significant media coverage because he was the first Zimbabwean to die of the pandemic and due to his celebrity status. *The Herald*'s reportage of Makamba's death exposed entrenched beliefs that COVID-19 was imported into the country by diaspora returnees and that people who had a history of foreign travel to Western capitals of affluence and close contacts of such people were more likely to be infected. This is revealed in the article 'Broadcaster laid to rest' (*The Herald*, 25 March 2020a), which says 'it is not clear where he picked up

the infection from' but it was after his travel to New York and return to Harare via Johannesburg. In a show of patriotic superiority, the USA and South Africa are flagged out as COVID-19 hotspots and subtly blamed for Makamba's COVID-19 infection and subsequent death.

The obituary 'In Zororo's silence' (Sharuko 2020) reveals the beliefs of journalists regarding the pandemic. The author notes:

> Until Zororo Makamba died on Monday, there was a feeling, among some of us, that coronavirus was some distant offshore pandemic. There was this myth, black people were immune to this virus and it could not survive in our hot conditions. We also told ourselves it only posed a danger for those above 70 years, and not the African youths, the ghetto youths. (Sharuko, 28 March, 2020)

It is apparent that *The Herald* journalists mystified COVID-19 as a disease that affected wealthy, elderly white people.

Another characteristic theme in *The Herald*'s reportage of COVID-19 deaths was the use of Biblical parallelisms. Although this was not a consistent feature, Biblical verses were used to bring positive emotions of hope and grow readers' faith in the face of adversity as part of constructive journalism. Makamba's obituary stresses that he died at 30, 'the age David became King, the age Ezekiel began his ministry and the age our Lord Jesus Christ was baptised by John the Baptist' (Sharuko 2020). The age of 30 in the Bible symbolises the end of one cycle in a person's life and the beginning of another. The number 30 also signifies positivity and joy in life. To promote positive psychology, the obituary ends with the statement 'To God Be The Glory!' which gives hope for a better future post-COVID-19.

The Herald was not always successful in deploying constructive journalism to maintain public calm in the face of COVID-19 deaths. In some instances, it unintentionally created panic through sensational headlines and stories. The article 'Makamba contact web exceptionally complex' (Mugabe 2020) creates public hysteria by reporting that it was difficult to trace the web of people who had contact with the deceased for screening, testing, and possible quarantine. *The Herald* was sometimes caught in unnecessary scaremongering, saying Zimbabwe was headed towards mass deaths because citizens were failing to abide by lockdown restrictions. The use of scaremongering tactics to communicate health message led to unintended panic and fear. By the end of August 2020, over 200 Zimbabweans had died of COVID-19, including government ministers, but *The Herald* still reported COVID-19 deaths with stigma and sometimes in sensational ways that induced public fear.

COVIDgate: Corruption and misuse of public funds The watchdog role of the media implies that journalists must monitor and hold those in power accountable by exposing acts of abuse of power and corruption. During the COVID-19 crisis, the media must expose corruption scandals that relate to the pandemic and demand accountability of resources mobilised for the response effort. It is commendable that *The Herald* exposed various acts of petty corruption involving businesses that were overcharging COVID-19 test kits, fake public service exemption letters, and police officers extorting travellers without valid permits at lockdown roadblocks. However,

it ignored the biggest corruption scandal that involved the Minister of Health, also known as 'COVIDgate' or 'Draxgate'. This was largely due to its deployment of constructive journalism, which led it to uncritical news. Therefore, the challenge with constructive journalism is that it can be reduced to 'uncritical reporting' or simply 'happy news' (Mast et al. 2019, p. 494). Institutional pressures are also to blame for *The Herald*'s sin of omitting the 'COVIDgate' scandal as journalists were forced to exercise self-censorship. This was revealed by Journ2:

> We sometimes get reprimanded by news editors over stories that are problematic or don't toe the line. As a result, we now know what stories to write. The objective of our reportage of the pandemic has always been not to cause fear, alarm and despondency, incite the public and expose government officials. [Interview with Journ2: 3 August, 2020]

The 'COVIDgate' scandal happened after government relaxed procurement rules to expedite purchase of supplies and to support local industries. This relaxation of procurement procedures during emergency mode bred corruption through price gouging, kickbacks, bribes, and favouritism. The Minister of Health, Obadiah Moyo, was arrested and subsequently fired from his position for alleged procedural misconduct after he allegedly allowed a dodgy company, Drax International, to get a USD 42 million tender to supply COVID-19 drugs and equipment at exorbitant prices without going to tender. *The Herald* initially ignored whistle-blowers and public outcry regarding the scandal in the spirit of constructive journalism which typically 'avoids politically controversial articles' (Rotmeijer 2019, p. 602). The president fired the health minister after the 'COVIDgate' scandal was exposed by independent journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and an online publication ZimLive. In response to this, the article 'No sacred cows in fight against corruption' (*The Herald*, 26 June 2020d) went into overdrive eulogising the state for fighting corruption. Instead of seeking to investigate more cases of corruption, *The Herald* dismissed corruption as a 'hackneyed' campaign trump card for the opposition and called on 'the journalists who claim to have unearthed the alleged tender scandal' to leave the case in the competent hands of the judiciary and stop making 'needless hullabaloo' (*The Herald*, 26 June 2020d).

Conclusion

Although constructive journalism is an emerging genre, *The Herald* is already embracing it albeit unknowingly. Constructive journalism was deployed to COVID-19 news to avoid public alarm and hysteria whilst creating calm and hope in the face of adversity. By using constructive elements, *The Herald* attempted to create public confidence in the country's leadership and a false hope that Zimbabwe had capacity to respond to the pandemic. The use of constructive elements did not necessarily lead to positive emotions as anticipated. Instead, readers were in most instances furious about constructive news as it was perceived to be propagandistic and serving the interests of political elites. Crisis-ridden countries such as Zimbabwe

do not need constructive journalism because it may become a propaganda tool that perpetuates existing inequalities and the hegemonic order. Zimbabwe needs news media that are disruptive and unsettling and deconstruct the hegemonic power dynamics (Rotmeijer 2019). The news media in Zimbabwe must play the role of speaking truth to power thereby holding the authorities accountable and expose corruption and injustice.

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Endangered Voices: Nigerian Journalists' Safety amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Moyosore Omowonuola Alade and Bernice Oluwalanu Sanusi

Abstract This chapter examines the difficult conditions Nigerian journalists faced while reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the threats and dangers faced by Nigerian broadcast journalists and its implication for journalism practice amid a pandemic. Using a qualitative approach, we conducted nine in-depth interviews (online) with broadcast journalists in 2020 and employed thematic analysis to address the study's findings. The study found that the safety threats encountered by journalists during the COVID-19 outbreak include the risk of contracting the virus, financial insecurity, and emotional trauma, among others. To combat these safety threats, journalists were responsible for their safety; hence, they ensured adherence to safety protocols with little or no support from the media houses they worked for. The implication of these safety threats to journalism practice includes reduced work output, reduced dissemination of factual reports, low-quality stories, and the lack of in-depth and investigative news reports during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Keywords Journalist safety · Mental health · COVID-19 · Nigeria

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported and identified a novel Coronavirus disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2 in China on 31 December 2019. On 30 January 2020, WHO (2020) declared Coronavirus also known as COVID-19, a public health emergency of international concern and issued temporary recommendations for curtailing its spread, including travel and trade restrictions. As of December 2020, COVID-19 cases were recorded in 213 countries with 1,845,597 deaths and 84,532,824 cases tested and confirmed in the laboratory (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control 2021). Of these over 84 million cases, Africa accounts for over 2 million, with Nigeria categorised by WHO as one of the

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13 high-risk African countries susceptible to the spread of COVID-19 (Amzat et al. 2020).

The index case of COVID-19 was reported in Lagos State, Nigeria, on 27 February 2020 (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control 2020). As cases increased and spread to other states, the Nigerian government initiated lockdown restrictions to curb the virus's spread. The lockdown was announced for an initial period of 14 days with immediate effect in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja states on 30 March 2020. The government further extended it for another 14 days with the inclusion of Kano state on 27 April 2020 (Ibrahim et al. 2020). Nevertheless, in these states and other states in Nigeria, essential workers, including journalists, were required to carry out their duties despite the lockdown. Alongside public health workers, journalists were at the frontline of "an emotionally loaded, complex playing field; and are pulled in many directions" (The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University 2009) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The crucial educative and informative roles of journalists and the media were heightened amid the pandemic as they informed the public on the accompanying effects of COVID-19 (UNESCO 2018). To help the public make informed decisions during the pandemic, journalists' safety was threatened as they faced unprecedented challenges to report accurate, credible, and reliable information about the COVID-19 pandemic; hence, the novel Coronavirus heightened the existing threats and safety issues faced by journalists and media workers. For instance, several national governments took legal actions against journalists and used the health crisis to punish them for their COVID-19 reportage (Cooper 2020).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerian journalists faced safety issues bordered on freedom of expression, verbal and physical assault by security agencies, political party agents, and unknown gunmen, indiscriminate arrest, and detention by Nigerian authorities among others (Amnesty International 2019). However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety issues associated with journalists and journalism practice in Nigeria have taken a new dynamic. Journalists' voices are endangered as they are exposed to the risk of contracting the Coronavirus while carrying out their sacrosanct journalistic duties, which has implications for their safety.

Drawing on in-depth interviews, this study explores new and emerging safety challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic as experienced by Nigerian journalists who work in broadcast media houses. Specific questions this chapter seeks to answer are this: What are the safety issues or challenges experienced by Nigerian journalists during the pandemic? How did journalists respond to these safety challenges? What are the implications of these emerging safety issues associated with the pandemic to journalism practice in Nigeria? The findings of the study will inform future interventions for improving journalists' safety amid health crises. However, note that journalists' self-reports in this study are subject to intentional or unintentional misrepresentations of journalistic reality, which may constitute a limitation to the study.

Journalists' Safety in Africa: A Purview of the Past and Changing Dynamics Resulting from COVID-19

Globally, journalism practice is plagued with socio-political and socio-cultural factors that undermine media freedom generally and journalists' safety specifically (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020). Scholars identified these factors to include structural forces (Carlsson and Pöyhtäri 2017), cultural assumptions (Palmer 2018), and factors related to journalistic practice (Høiby 2019). However, the contextual practice of journalism in many developing countries of Africa varies widely from what is obtainable in the global north. As a result, the safety challenges encountered by African journalists may vary in detail, but it remains an apprehensive and unsolved phenomenon (Saleh 2015). Apart from challenges that include information disorder, lack of editorial independence, limited technical and financial resources, strict legal frameworks, etc. (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020), African journalists have a history of offline and online safety risks that undermine their freedom in the discharge of their duties.

Offline safety risks encountered by African journalists include killings and assassination in targeted attacks from extremist insurgencies and sectarian violence. Since 1990, 2658 journalists have been murdered globally; the International Federal of Journalists (IFJ) records that Africa accounts for 467 deaths out of this number (IFJ 2020). Alongside Arab and the Middle East, Africa was ranked third on the global list of the most dangerous region for journalists, with six killings, including three killings in Nigeria in 2020 (IFJ 2020). Journalists also encounter the safety threat of forceful arrests and imprisonment without trials beyond periods stipulated by constitutions. As of 2020, IFJ reported 235 journalists in prisons for work-related issues and ranked Africa second to Europe on the number of jailed journalists accounting for 62 media professionals held in jails in 2020 (Committee to Protect Journalists 2020). These statistics are a pointer to the prevailing safety threats encountered by African journalists. In addition, most journalists are detained without charges proving that their arrests had to do with an abuse of power by perpetrators of violations against journalists and press freedom.

Also, obnoxious media regulations are imposed to gag the independent press in Africa. These legislations include archaic defamation and libel laws that facilitate journalists' imprisonment and outrageous registration and licensing fees. Other safety threats include physical attacks, harassment and intimidation, disappearances, torture, inhumane treatment, and confiscation and destruction of equipment and publications (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2012). These offline safety risks are perpetrated by state and non-state actors, including government representatives, security officials, influential individuals in the society, extra-state political groups, and terrorists (Harrison and Pukallus 2021).

Journalists are not only victims of physical violence; they are also subjected to psychological attacks online. These online safety risks include online hatred, death threats, verbal abuse, and sexual threats, particularly towards female journalists (Nilsson and Ornebring 2016). As a result, journalists are becoming vulnerable

and endangered in the digital world, with instances of being targets of trolling aimed at misleading and endangering them (Posetti 2013). Also, the advent of digital devices that allow for easy access to digital communication aids the digital surveillance of journalists by non-benevolent actors who pose safety threats to them (Waters 2018). Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2020) reported that governments are increasingly using digital surveillance to access journalists' digital communication in African countries like Egypt and Uganda. The online abuse of journalists has become prevalent that the United Nations (UN), UNESCO, RSF, and other civil organisations have recognised it as a problem and made calls to address it through research (Posetti 2013).

With the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists encountered emerging challenges in reporting accurate information, and these have implications for journalism practice and journalists' safety. They include job and benefit cuts, reduced salaries, extra work hours, threats to media freedom, health issues, and safety risks (Posetti 2013). Mahoney (2020) projected that the existing threats for journalists in developing democracies like Africa would be heightened amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the case globally as data gathered by RSF (2020) during the pandemic revealed a significant surge in press freedom violations—with 35% constituting arbitrary arrests while 30% constituting physical or psychological violence. As a result of the state of exception laws and emergency measures adopted to combat the pandemic, journalists were arrested and sometimes jailed for their coverage of the COVID-19 health crisis. In addition, several governments used the excuse of false information to clamp down on press freedoms. In a tragic instance, an Egyptian journalist was detained for covering the COVID-19 pandemic but contracted the virus in detention and died there. Also, in 2020, there was an increase in arrests, prosecution, and attacks on the Nigerian media compared to 2019, with 60 journalists affected in 51 incidents (Article 19 2020). However, most journalists were released within a short period of arrest; 14 journalists are still in detention in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. There were also reports of assaults against journalists perpetrated by security forces in African countries like Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone (Knott 2020). Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced the violation of journalists in Nigeria, endangering their voices in the process.

While studies exist on journalism practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, an extensive review of literature reveals that they focus on coverage (Perreault and Perreault 2021) and combating infodemic and disinfodemic (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020). Also, research commentaries and essays (e.g., Bernadas and Ilagan 2020) on the changing dynamics of journalism practice during the pandemic exist and argue that COVID-19 has led to the emergence of new safety challenges for journalists and compounded existing safety issues. However, there are no existing empirical studies to back it up. Hence, the current study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

Journalists' Safety in Nigeria

With a population of more than 200 million, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa (Varella 2020). Although the country enjoys media pluralism and the Nigerian constitution guarantees freedom of expression and press freedom, there are limitations to exercising these rights. For example, there is silence on the threats, and attacks press members are exposed to while reporting. The threats to journalists' safety in Nigeria date back to the colonial era when journalists were attacked for exercising their freedom of expression. For instance, two nationalists, Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe, were jailed for challenging the colonial masters on colonialism and Nigerians' self-determination (Hajara et al. 2018). The colonialists also came up with obnoxious laws like the sedition law to limit press freedom.

Years after gaining independence from colonial rule, press freedom is still not guaranteed as Nigerian journalists continue to work in an environment that is unsafe and restricted. They are continually killed, attacked, and harassed with little or no effort to bring the culprits to book. In 2012, for example, the Committee to Protect Journalists recorded 143 cases of press freedom violations in Nigeria. Security officials were major perpetrators and accounted for 79% of these press violations (PEN International 2013). Also, between 2014 and 2015, there was a peak in the threats to journalists' safety as 47 journalists were assaulted due to elections and electioneering campaigns. Threats to journalism practice in Nigeria include attacks perpetrated by terrorists and security officials, trauma resulting from dealing with vulnerable populations, arrests, detention, and seizure of equipment, among others (Isola 2020). For instance, between January and October 2020, 3 journalists were killed, 52 were assaulted, and 12 were arrested (Article 19 2020).

In 2020, Nigeria ranked 115 out of 180 countries in the annual World Press Freedom Index (Committee to Protect Journalists 2020). This is an improvement because Nigeria was ranked 120 out of 180 countries in 2019. However, threats to journalists' safety remain, as the country is globally known for issues related to press freedom and is listed as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists in the world (Committee to Protect Journalists 2020).

There are several studies on journalists' safety in Nigeria. Scholars have examined threats to media freedom and journalists' safety generally (Umaru and Sharafa 2020), based on gender with a focus on women during elections (Adamkolo et al. 2020, 2021), etc. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the dynamic change it brought, scholars have provided commentaries on health and safety risks to journalists during pandemics (e.g., Bernadas and Ilagan 2020). While these commentaries exist, there are no existing empirical studies on the emerging safety threats and risks to Nigerian journalists during the pandemic. Understanding the emerging safety threats to journalists in a country like Nigeria, listed as one of the most difficult countries for journalists, is essential for understanding how safety threats to journalists are changing and heightening amid a pandemic. A revelation of these emerging safety threats and their determining factors is a crucial step towards proffering long-lasting solutions.

Theoretical Framework: Hierarchy of Influences

Journalism plays a pivotal role in the society; hence, journalists exist in an ecology where their work influences and is influenced by the environment surrounding it (Perreault and Perreault 2021). Several theoretical and conceptual groundwork exists to study the factors influencing and shaping news content and journalism practice (e.g., McQuail 2000; Preston 2009). However, the hierarchy of influences model remains one of the most widely known theoretical frameworks. The model, propounded by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), provides greater explanatory power and a framework for analysing the influence of combined factors at different levels on journalistic work. It explains factors that influence media production and organises it into a continuum from micro-individual to macro-social system levels. The levels in the continuum are individual, media routines, organisational, social institutional, and social system levels of influence, and the model suggests how influence at different levels may interact with one another (Reese 2019). The individual level of influence, the most micro level in the continuum, postulates that journalists' backgrounds, attitudes, personal traits, and professional orientation influence the media content they create (Hanitzsch et al. 2010). The media routine level of influence describes how newsroom routines and structures embedded in the immediate work environment of journalists shape their work and how media content is created (Reese 2019). The organisational level of influence refers to the media organisation's goals, roles, structures, and policies, and how they are implemented to balance commercial and professional concerns based on ownership goals (Hanitzsch et al. 2010). The social institutional level focuses on how the environment, sources, social institutions, etc., shape journalists' work, while the most macro level—the social system level explains how ideologies and the complex system within which journalists' operate as a whole can influence journalists' work (Reese 2019).

Apart from this model, several models also explain the levels of influence on media productions and journalism practice (e.g., McQuail 2000; Preston 2009). However, these sources portray similar influences, namely, individual, organisation, institution, societal, and international. The inclusivity of micro, meso, and macro levels makes the hierarchy of influences model distinct from other models. The model identifies individual and routine influences at the micro level, organisational influences at the meso level and institutional environment (i.e., political, socio-cultural, regulatory environments), and social system influences on journalistic practice at the macro level. Although the model has been used in journalism studies to unpack several communication concepts like professionalism and gatekeeping (Vos and Heinderycks 2015) across the proposed five levels of analysis, studies are lacking on how the model explains the concept of journalists' safety and the factors that influence it across the micro, meso, and macro levels. Therefore, the hierarchy of influences model underpins this study because it allows the researchers to examine the determinants of safety challenges journalists encountered while carrying out their

journalistic duties within the appropriate micro, meso, and macro levels in the Nigerian context.

Methods

By exploring journalists' experiences, this study provided an in-depth understanding of journalists' safety issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, we adopted a qualitative research method, including in-depth interviews that allowed research participants to express "their perspectives, thoughts, opinions, and behaviors related to their everyday experience using their sentences and expression methods" (Rapley 2004).

We used the purposive homogeneous sampling technique (Creswell 1998) that included the "snowballing" method—where the number of participants grew based on references made by interviewees (Henning et al. 2004) to select nine broadcast journalists in Lagos media houses interviewed between December 2020 and January 2021. Lagos was considered the most impacted state with 52,282 cases as of 10 February 2021—the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria during the pandemic (Varella 2021); hence, the focus on broadcast journalists in Lagos, Nigeria.

The respondents consisted of four male and five female journalists working with private- and government-owned broadcast media stations in Nigeria. Of the nine respondents, three work with radio stations, while six work with television stations. Six respondents have been journalists for 10–20 years, and the experience range of the remaining three respondents was between 3 and 9 years. The selected journalists have designations that include anchor, reporter, producer, researcher, among others.

Data Collection and Analysis

The in-depth interviews were conducted via telephone by one researcher and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for a thematic analysis conducted by reading the transcripts carefully and using an open coding procedure to analyse the data. The researchers coded the respondents' answers, and the coded responses were linked to themes categories related to the research objectives that emerged from the data. Next, we will discuss the key findings of the study related to the research objectives.

Results and Discussion

The challenges of journalism in making sense of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the pandemic is transforming journalism practice are critical but have seldom been discussed. Given this, this study explores emerging safety issues journalists encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, how journalists responded to these safety issues, and the implication of the safety issues to journalism practice in Nigeria. We found existing safety issues and changes in the dynamics of journalists' safety that appear driven by the contextual specifics of the COVID-19 pandemic. We present and discuss the current safety issues viz-a-viz the changes in the dynamics of journalists' safety.

Emerging Safety Challenges and Journalists' Response(s) amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Risk of Contracting Coronavirus A significant safety challenge that resonated with Nigerian journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic was the risk of contracting the virus while discharging their journalistic duties. This finding is associated with existing literature identifying the danger of contracting diseases or viruses like Coronavirus as a safety issue for journalists (Collins 2001). Furthermore, the traditional media is already recognised as a poor vehicle for communicating accurate information regarding health issues because of sensationalism, omission, and inaccuracy (Leask et al. 2010). Hence, the risk of contracting a virus or disease during a pandemic further heightens journalists' inability to communicate accurate information on health issues like Coronavirus.

The safety challenge of journalists contracting COVID-19 while discharging their duties presented itself in different dimensions. First, the study reveals that journalists encountered sources who were dismissive about the virus's existence and spread. These sources refused to follow COVID-19 safety protocols; hence, journalists at an individual level had to continuously insist on the safety and social distancing protocol by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). As one journalist commented:

> I work in the field and interview people in the studio, so I have the challenge of insisting on the social distancing protocol set by the disease control body in Nigeria. If you are in the studio and want to talk to someone and the person comes in, and you ask the person, can you please put on your face shield and the person says I don't have, and you don't have extra to give to the person. There are also some that you say to them, can you please wear this face shield and they say to you, for what now? There is social distancing, and more so, there is no COVID-19; I don't have COVID-19. (Private television reporter)

Second, carrying out specific journalistic duties such as sourcing for news, following leads, and conducting interviews required journalists to continually interact with members of the society whose COVID-19 status was unknown. Hence, the

potential risk of contracting COVID-19 from the public was another safety challenge Nigerian journalists encountered. Also, journalists encountered the safety challenge of contracting the virus from their colleagues as media organisations did not take adequate measures to carry out COVID-19 tests for journalists continually. Two journalists described the safety threat of closely interacting with the public and other journalists while discharging journalistic duties in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> I am mixing with people, and I had to protect myself as much as possible. I mixed with people with minimal PPEs, both on them and me. I just had on my face mask; some of them had, some of them didn't have. So mixing with people alone is a huge threat. In fact, that was the major threat I had. (Private television journalist)

> I encountered the safety challenge of carrying out my reportage with other colleagues who might be suspected carriers of the virus, including me myself. (Private radio journalist)

Unlike previous studies that identified the predominant perpetrators of violations against journalists to include state actors like the government and security officials (Harrison and Pukallus 2021), the finding that safety threats to journalists were predominantly perpetrated by members of the society and media colleagues who were dismissive about COVID-19 and its increasing spread is interesting. The finding identifies an emerging safety threat that indicates a shift in the dynamics of journalists' safety due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The dynamics of this safety threat are different from previous safety issues that can lead to journalists' death because journalists can control it when they take appropriate safety measures.

In responding to these safety threats, the study unpacks that journalists had to sensitise, educate, and appeal to dismissive sources relevant to the newsgathering process but dismissive about Coronavirus, on the need to maintain safety protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic at the individual level.

> I had to go through the challenge of educating people and telling them you don't need to know if you have COVID-19 or not. Just wear the face shield to prevent it. I sensitized and appealed to people on the need for safety. This is what should be. For the sake of our older generation and for the sake of those who have an underlying illness, let's protect them by using a hand sanitizer and washing your hands. (Government television journalist)

These findings affirm the suggestion of the hierarchy of influences model, which proposes that social institutions (e.g., sources, environment) influence journalism practice (Reese 2019). However, it is important to note that the influence of sources at the social-institution level regulated the safety challenges journalists encountered and shaped how they carried out their duties at the individual level. Hence, this finding suggests that regarding journalists' safety, influence at the macro-social institution level interacts with and determines influence at the micro-individual level in this instance (Reese 2019).

Third, this study also finds that media houses did not provide journalists with broadcast equipment that aided safety protocols during the pandemic. Most journalists complained about using microphones without long stand; hence, they could not maintain social distancing and were increasingly exposed to the likelihood of

contracting the virus while gathering information from sources during the pandemic. A journalist described the frustration that came with doing fieldwork with inappropriate equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> Go out, interview people, do vox-pop, how are you protecting me? Do I have a long stand to use for my mic? Because I am holding the microphone with my hands to their mouth, I am mixing with them. Our counterparts in the UK, US, Asia, etc., put safety measures in place. Their cameras and all the equipment they use on the field, they don't use it for the next 72 hours after polishing it with alcohol-based solutions. But here, you have to use the cameras over and over again because you probably three or four cameras, and you have four or five reporters going out, and so you don't have the time to drop it for 72 hours. (Private television journalist)

Also, some media houses did not provide journalists with protection kits (e.g., face masks, sanitisers) needed to protect them while they discharged their duties amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Where media houses provided journalists with face masks and sanitisers, they complained that the protection kits were not enough in relation to the journalistic work that had to be done and the increasing social interactions they had with the public. Hence, most journalists had to bear the cost implication of protecting themselves by securing protection kits. A reporter noted the following:

> Working during the COVID-19 era has been challenging, especially as it concerns welfare and adequate PPE provision and transportation. Our job entails us to be part of the frontline workers, but our working conditions and allowances don't exemplify that. Safety on the part of journalists like myself is more personal rather than organisational. (Government television journalist)

These findings are consistent with Saleh's (2015) position that journalists are not equipped with Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) and insurance to work within the confines of safety. At an organisational level, the findings also confirm the hierarchy of influences model proposition that the establishment and implementation of media organisation's structures to balance commercial and professional concerns influence journalism practice (Reese 2019). By not providing PPEs and appropriate equipment for reporting news during the pandemic, media organisations were positioned as sources of safety threats to journalists. This is an interesting finding because apart from censorship violations, media houses are seldom recognised as perpetrators of safety threats against journalists (Diedong 2017).

The unavailability of resources needed by media houses to provide PPEs for journalists posed a safety threat to journalists and influenced their decisions and actions at the individual level. Since the PPEs provided by most media organisations were not enough for reportorial duties, journalists took the initiative regarding safety protocols by regularly washing their hands, avoiding crowded places, taking private taxis to places, and buying PPEs for themselves and others while incurring the cost personally. This is illustrated by the remark of two journalists on how safety precautions were the personal duty of journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic:

> I had no option but to protect myself. I had to buy face shields and face masks for the people I was interviewing. I had to clean the table myself with an alcohol-based sanitizer. Yes, the

furniture I was going to sit on in the studio. Sometimes, I had to give people hand sanitizers and share with them to be protected. (Private television journalist)

First is survival of oneself, so I have to invest my resources to get my protective gear while trying at all times to be extra conscious of the necessary safety measures I should take to keep safe. (Government television journalist)

Based on this finding, the study shows that the inability of media houses to provide the needed resources for journalists is a determinant of emerging safety threats to journalists amid the pandemic and suggests influence at the organisational level (Reese 2019).

Financial Insecurity

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, financial insecurity from the non-payment of salaries or underemployment has plagued journalists in developing countries because many news organisations cannot afford resources that make journalists safe (Diedong 2017). Compared to the pre-COVID-19 period, we found that journalists' financial insecurity was heightened as spending increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since most media organisations failed to provide PPEs, most journalists personally incurred the cost of buying PPEs and protecting themselves while discharging their duties during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were also forced to commute using private taxis more expensive than the public transport system. Additionally, because most media organisations reduced the working population at the offices and moved work online, journalists consumed a lot of data to connect virtually with their colleagues and work online. Hence, journalists were faced with the safety challenge of financial insecurity as they incurred huge expenses while discharging their journalistic duties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two journalists, for example, commented:

Having to consume lots of data in connecting virtually for some assignments resulted in huge expenses amongst others. Also, I experienced the challenge of spending much more money by taking a taxi from far distances. (Private radio journalist)

I have the challenge of getting the non-pharmaceutical equipment that I can use in protecting myself, like hand gloves, face masks, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers. This was because we didn't get those supplies, and if I wanted to get mine personally, it was very expensive. (Private television journalist)

The implication of this safety threat includes journalists choosing financial security over staying with the facts. Hence, journalists pursued agendas that give them access to financial resources instead of staying with the facts and reporting them. As a result, this safety threat led to the scarcity of factual and in-depth reports during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Constant Fear and Emotional Trauma

Journalists reported that carrying out their journalistic duties during the COVID-19 pandemic was an emotional roller-coaster as they were plagued with feelings of fear and paranoia of contracting the virus. On the one hand, they were afraid of contracting the virus and passing it on to their loved ones. On the other hand, their loved ones were also worried about journalists' safety. On this, two journalists said:

> I have got family, I have people who depend on me, if anything happens to me, what happens to them? (Private television journalist)

> I have family members who express worry over my safety as I might be infected while going out. (Government radio journalist)

While some journalists disclosed feelings of depression, some journalists also disclosed that they repeatedly questioned whether they were in the right profession during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questioning resulted from the fact that most media organisations did not tend to their journalists' safety and welfare during the pandemic. For instance, one journalist remarked:

> At one point, I was thinking must I be a journalist? See what the bankers are doing, see what the oil and gas people are doing and other industries are doing for their people, and as a journalist, you are not taking care of me. (Private television journalist)

Generally, there was a consensus that the COVID-19 pandemic induced constant fear, emotional trauma, depression, and uncertainty among journalists who actively reported during the pandemic and their loved ones, affecting their mental well-being. The emotional trauma experienced by journalists was heightened by the inability of media houses to see to journalists' overall well-being and welfare. Hence, the emotional and psychological impact of dealing with COVID-19 was an emerging safety threat for journalists. The emotional trauma experienced by journalists has implications for journalists' work output (Seely 2017); hence, it is possibly one of the factors responsible for the reduced work output of journalists and low-quality reports produced during the pandemic.

Implications of Emerging Safety Issues Associated with the Pandemic to Journalism Practice in Nigeria

Journalists acknowledged that emerging safety issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria have implications for journalism practice in Nigeria. Some journalists agreed that the non-provision of PPEs by media houses increased the risk of contracting the virus through their interactions with individuals and organisations, thereby reducing their work output during the pandemic because they had to reject some assignments. These journalists further claimed that their rejection of assignments negatively affected their relationship with their direct superior. Hence, the

work environment in and outside broadcast media houses was not conducive enough for journalists, which affected their output. A journalist described this unconducive work scenario as:

> Sometimes, they would tell you there is a gathering, go for this gathering, hear what they have to say, and come back with the story. I am like, I have no protection. I don't even have insurance, for crying out loud. There were some assignments I said no, I am not doing this, so I was short of reports, and it affected my relationship with my boss, but I don't care; it is my life. If you don't do anything to protect my life, why should I trust my life in your hands? (Private television journalist)

Also, because of journalists' safety issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists agreed that they did not follow or stay with the facts. Hence, there was a reduction in the dissemination of factual news reports. The safety issue that particularly led to the reduced amount of factual news reports disseminated to the public during the pandemic is increased financial insecurity. Journalists indicated that their working allowances were insufficient to meet the increased expenses (e.g., buying large amounts of data, commuting in private taxis) incurred while discharging their duties. This increased financial insecurity of journalists has implications for journalism practice in Nigeria. First, the journalists agreed that financial insecurity would make journalists run with making money to meet their increasing needs of getting PPEs instead of getting the facts and running with it. Second, financial insecurity contributed to journalists' inability to *meet up with assignments* as they did not have enough money to go about their reportorial duties. Two journalists reiterated these implications:

> More often than not, you need monetary resources, and some journalists would decide to fight for the money themselves. So it affects getting and staying with the facts, so people want to run with making money to get your PPEs. This happened during COVID-19. (Private television journalist)

> It made me spend more finance in order for me to meet up. At some point, I didn't meet up with my assignments due to a lack of finance. (Private radio journalist)

The journalists agreed that the risk of contracting Coronavirus inhibited their ability to produce quality news reports. A journalist who works for a government television station noted that journalists were more interested in *thinking of their safety instead of concentrating on doing a good story*. As a result, most journalists did not effectively cover and report stories during the pandemic resulting in low-quality news stories. Also, the lack of PPEs and the fear of contracting the virus hindered journalists' ability to visit isolation centres. In the words of a journalist, *people were not ready to take the audacious move to go into isolation centres to bring to the people reports live from the isolation centre*. Hence, there were no ground-breaking stories or discoveries as journalists could not develop in-depth and investigative reports on the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, journalists reported encountering *overzealous* sources who didn't want to speak to journalists because of the fear of contracting the virus. This made the process of journalistic practice very difficult and tedious for journalists. A journalist described this situation aptly:

> Sourcing for visuals and finding respondents to some topic issues became almost impossible to get because most people were reluctant to leave their homes to come out and grant interviews, which affected the quality of some of my reports. (Government television journalist)

Also, even though the COVID-19 pandemic prompted an increase in news production, journalists could not go the extra mile to obtain information on the pandemic due to fears regarding safety, which led to the creation of low-quality reports. These low-quality reports churned out by journalists during the pandemic potentially contributed to the rise of disinformation and misinformation associated with the pandemic (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei 2020). Low-quality reports were aided by safety threats that included the risk of contracting the virus and increased spending during the pandemic.

Finally, journalists and health workers were on the frontline of combating the COVID-19 virus during the pandemic. As frontline workers, journalists are highly susceptible to contracting the virus. Hence, they have become endangered as they can become ill or die from the virus.

Based on the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker and Reese 1996), these findings suggest that influence on journalists' safety at the organisational level, in turn, affects and shapes journalistic practice at the routine and individual levels as reflected in journalists' reduced work output, low-quality outputs, and not staying with the facts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 outbreak had a far-reaching impact on individuals, organisations, and governments in novel ways (Powell 2020). The need to report accurate information on COVID-19 changed the dynamics of safety issues experienced by journalists and journalism practice. On the one hand, the perpetrators of violations against journalists and press freedom are not limited to the government and influential individuals but now include every member of the society and media organisations representing the social institutional and organisational levels of the hierarchy of influences model (Reese 2019). This implies that the emerging safety threats identified by this study are determined and shaped by factors at the social institutional and organisational levels, which in turn influences and shapes journalists' decisions regarding media content and journalism practice at the individual level.

Journalism practice within the COVID-19 context has created a shift from the assumption that journalists are threatened by wars and civil unrest to the reality that the lives of journalists are threatened by possible disease or virus infection while reporting health crises resulting from infectious diseases or deadly viruses like Ebola and, recently, Coronavirus. This trend is likely to deprive the continent of important information as journalists have become endangered species. The findings of this study mirror some of the challenges journalism would likely encounter

post-pandemic and emphasise the need to re-imagine journalism's future regarding journalists' safety in African countries and developing democracies.

Although it has been established that many news organisations in developing countries like Nigeria may find it challenging to afford resources like PPEs that make journalists safe, in line with Bernadas and Ilagan (2020), we recommend that safeguarding the physical well-being of journalists during a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic should not be the personal responsibility of journalists; it should be the responsibility of governments and news organisations. Therefore, governments should create and implement policies that enforce media houses' adherence to safety measures during health crises. Governments should also provide funding and support to media organisations during a health crisis. Also, journalists should learn to speak up, stand for their rights, and ensure that they are adequately protected during health crises.

Preparing and training regarding emotional distress aids adaptive coping mechanisms (Osofsky et al. 2005); hence, media houses should prepare and train journalists by providing them with an arsenal of coping methods to deal with emotional distress while reporting traumatic health crises live the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with Posetti (2013), we recommend that media houses provide mental health support and interventions and offer guidance to alleviate burnout and emotional distress during a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Framing Poverty in Nigerian Online Media Reports on the Inaugural Neglected Tropical Diseases Day

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Abstract Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are so called because they affect the poor people in the low income tropical and subtropical regions of the world which do not draw much global attention. The diseases can be totally cured with adequate clinical interventions; however, their persistence, in spite of the availability of drugs, brought about the dedication of January 30 as a world awareness day to focus on them. This chapter looks into online media reports about the day in Nigeria, the country with 45% of the disease burden in sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 34 reports turned up by a Google search were sampled. Using framing theory, the chapter identifies how the reports, relying on the testimonies of medical experts, rightly highlight poverty as the major driver of the diseases. They are, however, silent about the need to eradicate poverty in order to eradicate the diseases, thus neglecting it (poverty) at a critical point. This creates an amputated frame that does not deliver on how the incidence of the diseases can be holistically tackled. Journalists are urged to conduct independent research when reporting on technical issues in order to complement the testimonies of experts and thus complete their frames.

Keywords NTDs Day · Poverty · Framing · Nigeria

Introduction

There are diseases that are particularly associated with poverty because sufferers lack proper sanitation and hygiene, which are the drivers of said diseases. Malaria, tuberculosis, and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which causes the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) are referred to as the "big three" diseases of poverty, while "a diverse group of communicable diseases caused by bacteria, helminths, protozoa or viruses" (Engels and Zhou 2020, p. 1) make up the neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). NTDs are so called because they do not enjoy

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the same attention as the life-threatening big three. However, NTDs disable and disfigure sufferers, and they have come into the limelight because their aggregate burden is the equivalent of any of the big three as they affect an estimated 2 billion people.

Globally, in tackling the diseases of poverty, the vertical, biomedical approach has often held sway, with drug administration for eradication being the order of the day. While this approach has been logical in immediately arresting the diseases, robust, holistic, and multisectoral approaches addressing the context and drivers of diseases have not been as common and we have continued to experience the diseases (Asiedu et al. 2008; Allotey et al. 2012; Tusting et al. 2016; Engels and Zhou 2020). In recognition, the World Health Organization (WHO) has had to come up with frameworks for tackling these persistent diseases. For instance, the 2013 Multisectoral Action Framework for Malaria "emphasizes complementarity, effectiveness and sustainability, and capitalizes on the potential synergies to accelerate both socio-economic development and malaria control" (p. 9), since "malaria is both a result and a cause of a lack of development" (p. 11). In spite of this, Tusting et al. (2016) point out the paucity of discourse on how such multi-sectoral interventions should take place, and this is also the case with NTDs. In particular, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services have been identified as tools for tackling the root causes of NTDs, but their importance has been largely undervalued (Sightsavers 2013). To tackle such root causes is to tackle poverty and promote an awareness of same. The media are in a vantage position to do this.

The media, as the fourth estate of the realm, have the potential to perform some essential functions in a multi-sectoral approach to disease eradication (Martinson and Hindman 2005; Chapman 2007). Being information providers and information drivers, the media educate the public on matters of importance and significance, including health in general and diseases in particular (Owolabi 2014; Sodeinde et al. 2015). On days earmarked for creating awareness for diseases therefore, the media are always well represented to advance the awareness creation and educate people on the particular diseases being singled out. While this chapter joins the stream of other voices identifying the role of the media in tackling poverty (e.g., Leask et al. 2010; McArthur and Reeves 2019), its argument is anchored on Nigerian online media reports of the inaugural NTDs day. It seeks to address questions regarding if and how the reports have raised stakeholders' consciousness about the need to tackle poverty in order to tackle NTDs.

NTDs Day

January 30 is the day chosen as the World NTDs Day to raise awareness about the diseases that are endemic among "the bottom billion" (Smith and Lynch 2004, p. 693) of the world residing in its tropical and subtropical regions. This day is significant because it marks the anniversary of the London Declaration on NTDs of the year 2012 when the World Health Organization's (WHO) roadmap for the

prevention and control of NTDs was published. The launch of the NTDs Day, funded by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, was precipitated by the need to "#EndTheNeglect," considering that with the 2012 road map, even though there had been substantial progress, a lot more needed to be done to spur stakeholders into action. Over 250 global partners, including pharmaceutical companies, the Nigerian Ministry of Health, and other organizations, signed up to commemorate the inaugural celebration of the day in 2020 as an avenue to win the war against NTDs.

Perhaps then, lack of a broader development agenda that is focused on equity is responsible for the persistence of NTDs, which ironically are treatable with a perfect rate of recovery achievable (Allotey et al. 2012). Arguably, NTDs have remained persistent because poverty, their contextual driver, remains persistent. We can liken this to the case of malaria. Tusting et al. (2016) note that although "long-lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs), indoor residual spraying and improved case management. . . are highly effective interventions, malaria is closely associated with poverty and underdevelopment" (p. 2). They, therefore, call for "long-term. . . sustainable control strategies. . . that embrace non-health sectors, including agriculture, water & sanitation, and housing [WASH]" (p. 2). Such long-term sustainable control strategies take cognizance of the need to decisively address social factors such as economic empowerment, health seeking behavior, sanitation, and the environment in a multi-sectoral manner. Similarly, Engels and Zhou (2020) stress that China's eradication of schistosomiasis was strongly to do with its (i) strong national policies in favor of multidisciplinary disease control; (ii) intersectoral action for health and development, piloted by municipalities and local governments; and (iii) a strong emphasis on equity and poverty reduction in areas where it was most needed (p. 5). As a world awareness day, therefore, January 30 "offer[s] an annual opportunity to mobilize greater attention, action and investment on priority issues, particularly in the countries and communities most directly affected" [by NTDs] (worldntdday.org). Poverty is unequivocally a priority issue in NTDs' eradication, and it is necessary to examine the media's interpretation of this fact on the world awareness day.

The Media in Poverty and Disease Eradication Although coverage of poverty is an ethical responsibility of journalism, providing an avenue to focus on important issues affecting the society (Yousuf and Craig 2017), research suggests that the structure of media outlets, their routines, and practices do not encourage journalists to dwell often on poverty in their reports even though it is pervasive (Redden 2011; Devereux et al. 2012). In other words, ironically, the pervasiveness of poverty does not make it newsworthy in and of itself (Wood and Barnes 2007; Owolabi and O'Neill 2014). However, poverty has always found relevance in many ancillary contexts. In the base of the pyramid (BoP) discourse, poverty occupies a central position as private corporations seek to maximize profit by taking advantage of the "latent collective purchasing power" of the poor (Arora and Romijn 2012, p. 483). With regard to governance and journalistic practice, Sodeinde et al. (2015) report that poverty alleviation or eradication is contingent upon successful continuation of previous administration's interventions and development journalism as against

traditional journalism. McArthur and Reeves (2019) thus note that in the face of rising unemployment in the twenty-first century, stigmatization of the poor in British newspapers is also on the rise.

Poverty is also rarely mentioned in news coverage of health. Some scholars have observed that there will always be some limitation in media coverage of health issues (Nelkin 1996; Schwitzer et al. 2005), particularly considering that journalists are more comfortable with anecdotes, expert testimony in place of publications, controversy and not consensus, and polarities rather than complexities in issues (Nelkin 1996). Such practices inform how poverty is portrayed in relation to health. The "othering" of the poor is also commonplace, hence the mere occasional mention of poverty in health issues (Lister 2015; McArthur and Reeves 2019). In line with this, Yousuf and Craig (2017) are of the opinion that when the media highlight the health issues of the poor, they often show the poor in a negative light. When the poor are seen merely as the "other" and not quite a part of "us," then it becomes difficult to do justice to their plight and identify with them as a group.

Poverty and NTDs in Nigeria Poverty in Nigeria has often been said to be a paradox—a situation where a large segment of the population in a resource-rich country leads impoverished lives (Nwaobi 2003; Omoyibo 2013). This is in spite of the many poverty alleviation/eradication programs launched by successive administrations. Military and civilian regimes alike have attempted to stem the tide of poverty, but the country so far has little or nothing to show for these efforts. From Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) to the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), to Better Life Programme (BLP), and to the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2001, no significant improvement in the plight of the poor in Nigeria has been recorded (Obadan 2001; Danaan 2018). Corruption, lack of political will, weak state structure, and impunity are among the factors that have been identified as leading to the increasing poverty situation in the country and the failure of the many poverty eradication programs (Oshewolo 2010; Danaan 2018). Evidence of this failure is well documented. In the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index of 2019, released in 2020, Nigeria was ranked 161 among 189 member countries. In 2018, it was ranked 158. More alarmingly, Dapel (2018, p. 1) notes that 72% of the 91% of Nigeria's populace living in poverty risk "spending their entire lifetime below the poverty line" of subsisting on $1.25 dollars a day. Dapel's figures draw attention to the appalling segment of Nigeria's population that is regarded as poor and also dampens hope regarding this segment's ascension from poverty—which is tied to diseases like NTDs.

Poverty makes the incidence of diseases among the impoverished cyclical: their poor financial state predisposes the have-nots to infectious diseases since they cannot afford to live in clean environments with the necessary amenities; at the same time, the ensuing ill-health prevents them from pursuing greater economic freedom (Pearson 2015; Danaan 2018). As for NTDs, due to the disabilities they cause, they deny their sufferers access to schooling and gainful employment and so detract from their quality of life. As such, the Nigeria NTD Multi-Year Master Plan (2015–2020) stresses that "the strategic goal of the NTD Programme is to reduce

morbidity, disability and mortality via the control, elimination and eradication of targeted NTDs and contribute to poverty alleviation." By the foregoing, we understand that the government sees the eradication of NTDs as a way of contributing to poverty alleviation even if not eradication. In other words, so long as NTDs are controlled, eliminated, and eradicated, the war against poverty is being won and the disease burden gets lighter.

There are more than 20 NTDs, including leprosy, blinding trachoma, scabies, guinea worm disease, rabies, lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), onchoceraciasis (river blindness), and snake bites, and 15 of them affect more than half of the over 200 million total Nigerian population. In fact, Nigeria alone accounts for 45% of the population affected by NTDs in sub-Saharan Africa. The disease burden is felt in terms of population density and overcrowding—which promotes transmission, as well as rapid urbanization—which diverts [public] funds from rural areas to the urban areas and therefore denies poor rural dwellers (mostly women and children) the needed infrastructure for health and other social services. For this group of people, the media is their hope of escalating the message to stakeholders and thus ending the neglect.

Framing Theory

Frames are the specific ways in which events or issues are understood. Journalists and the generality of communicators use them to emphasize specific aspects of issues and downplay others, thereby defining problems, diagnosing causes, making value/moral judgments, and suggesting remedies (Entman 1993; de Vreese 2005). Framing entails drawing attention to certain attributes of the objects of news coverage and to the objects themselves (Goffman 1974). It occurs in two ways: "frame in communication or media frame," i.e., how an event/occurrence or topic is communicated by a speaker to an audience, and "frame in thought or an individual frame," i.e., how the audience perceives the communication (Chong and Druckman 2007, pp. 100–101). As such, framing is an antecedent of audience interpretation as well as the essence of audience perception (de Vreese 2005) of media messages. To this end, Neuman et al. (1992) identify five media frames to include human impact, powerlessness, economics, moral values, and conflict, while Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) note five similar frames of conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, morality, and economic consequences. All ten together are considered standard in frame typology (Linström and Marais 2012).

Alongside the frames employed in the media, the tone of media messages as well as the attention an issue gets in the media from various perspectives goes a long way in determining how the audience perceives such an issue (Damstra and Vliegenthart 2018). For instance, while the scientific origins and thus control of diseases are crucial, equally important are the social angles to disease control and eradication. We thus find that the frames created by the media around diseases are crucial to shaping people's attitudes and beliefs about the diseases and consequently the success of the

fight against such diseases. Perhaps now, more than ever before, we are beginning to appreciate the importance of framing in health communication, what with the COVID-19 pandemic, which also reinforces the connection between poverty and diseases (Bolsen et al. 2020; Diwakar 2020; Poirier et al. 2020). This study is, therefore, concerned with how poverty is framed with regard to the problem of NTDs and also the solution(s) to this problem. It is thus guided by the questions:

RQ1 *How is poverty featured in the framing of the incidence of NTDs?*

RQ2 *How is poverty featured in the framing of eradicating NTDs?*

Methodology

Data Gathering

A total of 34 online media reports in English about the inaugural celebration (2020) of the NTDs Day as observed in Nigeria were considered in this study. This is a small dataset and so following Van Gorp's (2007) advice, we apply a qualitative frame analysis in order to examine the "subtle framing" it contains (Linström and Marais 2012, p. 27). The reports are the results of a Google search using the "news" and the "all" option in the search engine. Each of the 36 states in Nigeria and their capitals were entered as search words in combination with "Nigeria," "Neglected Tropical Disease(s) Day," "NTDs Day," and "NTD Day." Thus, media reports focused on the NTDs Day in Nigeria as a whole and in specific states in the country were part of the study as the units of analysis. For each search, the results of the first five Google landing pages were considered. The search turned up several media reports about NTDs in Nigeria, but only the ones about the NTDs awareness day were considered. While most of the reports were dated either 30 or 31 January, 2020, the earliest report was dated January 18, 2020, and the latest one, at the time, was dated February 13, 2020. For some of the reports which also contained Lassa Fever news, the NTDs Day aspect was culled. One of the results turned up by the search was a generic report on the inaugural NTDs Day as culled from worldntd.org by the news media pulse.ng to make for a sponsored post. The report was not focused on Nigeria and so it was not considered in the study. The search was carried out with the help of a research assistant from January 15 to February 29, 2020—some two weeks after the inaugural NTDs Day (January 30, 2020). This was to ensure as much as possible that even the news articles about the NTDs day that were not published on the day or the day after were eventually captured for the research.

Data Analysis

We identified four out of Neuman et al.'s (1992) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) 10 frames and also came up with a new one (intervention) through repeated reading and study of the reports. The following frames were identified with Linström and Marais' (2012) tools of technical devices (e.g., headline, concluding statements, source selection, quote selection, etc.) and rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors and exemplars).

Human Impact/Human Interest Identified through the description/listing of the impact of NTDs to affected people. Such impact includes loss of schooling and employment opportunities, disabilities (e.g., blindness), perpetuation of poverty, etc.

Powerlessness Identified through the description of the prevailing condition and environment for the diseases such as poverty, lack of WASH facilities, lack of access to health facilities, and also, mention of some or all of the diseases as a way of showing co-endemicity and the graveness of the disease situation.

Intervention Identified through mentions of efforts at tackling the diseases. Such efforts include drug administration, surgery, and training of personnel.

Attribution of Responsibility Identified through the mention of [the activities of] stakeholders responsible for ending the neglect and/or caring for the affected people. Also, mention of how vulnerable populations can reduce the incidence of the diseases.

Economic Here, the economic consequence of the incidence of the disease in the country is explained in economic terms like gross domestic product (GDP).

An attempt was made to identify the dominant, secondary, and other frames in each of the news reports, but not all of them presented all three. The dominant frame, as explained by Linström and Marais (2012), "is the main theme of the news article, while the secondary frame is a supplementary idea that supports the main theme." In this research, we concluded that a frame is dominant when it employs the most technical and rhetorical tools among other frames in a given report. A breakdown of the reports is presented in Table 1 as shown in the Appendix.

Results

While some of the reports (13) focus on Nigeria as a whole, others are about specific states in the country. These are Ogun, Kwara, Abia, Adamawa, Ondo, Bauchi, Abia, Imo, Cross Rivers, and Plateau states. Four of the reports originated from social media platforms, including Facebook (three reports) and Nairaland (1 report), and two of these four reports originated from health non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria.

Thirty-one of the 34 reports are based on the testimonies of experts; only the two reports by the NGOs do not have expert testimonies. Except for one report that is drawn from the activities of the Christian Medical Scientists and Basic Health

Foundation (CMESBAHF) and the two NGO reports, all other reports focusing on Nigeria revolve around the speech of the minister of health and, in some cases, the WHO Officer in Charge, Nigeria. One report by (punchng.com) is a long one that combines excerpts of the minister's speech, excerpts of the speech of the Director of NTDs, Federal Ministry of Health, excerpts of the speech of the Commissioner for Health, Abia State, and excerpts of the speech of Nassarawa state commissioner for health. Similarly, those focused on the states revolve largely around each state's health commissioner or permanent health secretary. One report on Ogun state which was culled from Facebook has neither a headline nor an expert testimony.

Context of Poverty, Prevalence of NTDs

The frames of powerlessness and human impact/human interest were the most identified in the reports. Without a doubt, NTDs thrive well in situations of poverty where hygiene is lacking and healthcare facilities are not readily available. Virtually all of the reports make allusions to poverty in talking about NTDs. Be that as it may, what makes their submissions really believable is the fact that the reports revolve around expert testimonies where poverty is pointed out as culpable in the continued existence of the diseases. The Nigerian Minister of Health, a World Health Organization (WHO) official, and state commissioners of health are given pride of place as the sources of the information disseminated by the journalists in the reports. In keeping with this, the reports employ technical tools such as headlines and quotes to remind the reader that poverty is indeed the context of these diseases. While a number of the headlines attract attention through the figures they quote and their choice of words, the quotes give context to the headlines. When punch.com.ng announces through its headline that "100 million Nigerians risk tropical diseases infection—FG," it backs this up in the report with a direct quote from the minister that "people afflicted are usually poor... live in poor conditions with limited or no access to basic education and healthcare amenities like potable water, sanitation or knowledge of hygiene."

The state commissioners of health make similar submissions. For the novice and the average Nigerian with limited or no knowledge of the diseases, the fact that such trusted people make these statements is enough for them to have an understanding that the diseases actually affect only the poor; meanwhile, the diseases are only *prevalent* among the poor as they can be contracted by anyone regardless of their socioeconomic status. In this spirit, the Health Commissioners, just like the Minister, are careful to mention that practically all areas of their states are at risk, but the larger chunk of their rhetoric makes it clear that only the poor really have to fear. The Kwara State Health Commissioner points out that adults and children in all 16 local government areas of the state have been treated for NTDs; just as the Ogun State Health Commissioner notes that none of the 20 local government areas in the state is free from NTDs; and their Abia State counterpart stresses that since 2015 some

2.8 million people in all 17 local government areas of the state are treated annually for river blindness, soil transmitted helminthiasis, and lymphatic filariasis.

Kwara State Health Commissioner: . . .disease is associated with disability and disfiguration, taking away not only their health but also their chances of staying in school, earning a living or even being accepted by their family or community (vanguardngr.com, January 30, 2020).

Ogun State Health Commissioner: NTDs are group of infectious diseases that are associated with poverty (dailypost.ng, January 29, 2020); . . .the burden of the diseases is huge with many of the sufferers developing disabilities with negative socioeconomic consequences (dailytrust.com, January 30, 2020).

Plateau State Health Commissioner: NTDs, which are communicable diseases, are usually prevalent in areas that had poor sanitation, inadequate or no safe water sources (sunnewsonline.com, January 30, 2020).

Similarly, the WHO report featured on allafrica.com and reliefweb.int (as indicated in the reports) stresses the importance of poverty to NTDs, noting that "[N]eglected tropical diseases (NTDs) threaten more than 1.5 billion people living in the poorest and most marginalized communities worldwide." Given the status of the WHO as a global body, Nigerians are likely to consider it (WHO) as the last bastion of truth on health matters and so see any statement by it as the ultimate. In essence, they come to understand that while poverty is not the cause of NTDs, NTDs are most definitely at home in poverty endemic locations. It is almost as though without poverty the diseases would not be in existence. This understandable preoccupation with poverty brings about the human impact frame. The effects of the NTDs on the affected population as highlighted by the experts end up being descriptors of the poor and the poverty that marks them out in its multi-dimensions. In the only instance that a non-expert's testimony is featured, it becomes a rhetorical exemplar tool which draws attention to the disadvantaged position of the poor. In the WHO report, there is a brief narrative of a man whose neighbor suffers from one of the diseases. The man relates in Pidgin English that his neighbor's Buruli Ulcer was thought to be a spiritual attack which doctors could not cure. This narrative points again to the context of poverty which manifests as a lack of enlightenment occasioned by a lack of education. It is reinforced further in the WHO report and others.

thenationonline.ng (January 31, 2020): Child NTDs-sufferers shy away from attending school, grow up with no skill and are hindered in basic occupation, like farming and fishing, or any avenue of earning a living.

reliefweb.int (February 5, 2020) and allafrica.com (February 5, 2020): These diseases blind, disable and disfigure people, taking away not only their health, but also their chances of staying in school, earning a living, or even being accepted by their family or community.

The above extracts have inverted the relationship between poverty and NTDs, suggesting that NTDs cause poverty but neglecting to point out that the unsanitary living conditions associated with the poor are also drivers of the diseases. They lend credence to the fact that there is a cyclical relationship between NTDs and poverty.

Having considered how poverty is framed in relation to the incidence of NTDs, we now take a look at how it is framed in the eradication of NTDs. We identify the frames created for the eradication and see if and how poverty fits in.

Stemming the Tide: Poverty and/or Diseases?

The reports afford poverty some importance when the concept of NTDs is introduced so that the two (poverty and NTDs) exist side by side as equal but different. As such, it would be logical if poverty were to feature prominently when solutions to the disease situation are discussed. However, this is not the case. The reports create some kind of polarity while leaving out the necessary complexities as we see in the intervention frame where poverty and NTDs part ways but NTDs feature as the only one of the pair considered for eradication. This is the biomedical approach of "fixing" the situation through the metaphor of drug administration/surgery as intervention. It runs through most of the reports as shown in the examples below.

Vanguardngr (January 30, 2020): "In Kwara, we have distributed drugs such as Mectizan, Albendazole, Praziquantel and Mebendazole to combat these diseases. We have also carried out free surgical operations on 210 patients with hydrocele."

punchng.com (January 31, 2020): About 2.8 million persons across the 17 LGAs in Abia have annually been treated with Mectizan and Abendazole for the control of river blindness, soil transmitted helminthiasis and lymphatic filariasis since 2015.

prnigeria.com (February 3, 2020): . . .although treatments for NTDs are accessible, Nigerians must make sure everyone affected by the disease get [sic] treatment in order to eradicate the disease.

Since the reports already suggest in some instances that NTDs are the cause of poverty, it stands to reason that they would be more concerned about slugs, bugs, and drugs, as well as technical fixes. The experts in the three excerpts above (Kwara State Health Commissioner, Abia State Health Commissioner, and WHO OIC, Nigeria) focus on the treatment of the diseases either with drugs or with surgery. At other times, the training of personnel is presented as intervention toward the eradication of the diseases. This occurrence is recorded in two reports from Ogun State and one from Abia State as indicated below:

dailypost.ng (January 29, 2020): "The [Ogun] State Government treated 780, 657 children in 6000 schools and trained 8500 teachers on NTDs in 2019," she [commissioner for health] said.

punchng.com (January 30, 2020): He [permanent secretary, Abia state ministry of health] said in order to stem the tide of these diseases the state government with the support of Carter Centre had trained 45 local integrated health team members, 611 community directed distributors, 2153 teachers, 42 school supervisors and seven Social Mobilisation Officers.

punchng.com (January 30, 2020): She [Commissioner for Health] said that the state's NTDs programme treated 780, 657 children in 6000 schools in 2019 and trained 8500 teachers in NTDs within the same period.

Although the assignment of the trained people is not explained, there is a general understanding that they are to work toward eradicating the diseases. In addition to this particular intervention is that of the creation of WASH facilities as mentioned by Kwara State Health Commissioner and reported in a similar manner in two outlets. This is the only intervention that touches on poverty eradication.

thenigerianpost.com.ng (January 30, 2020): He [Kwara State Health Commissioner] pledges the state government will give support in the area of improved water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), reversing the cycle of poverty and saying no to stigmatisation, among others.

businessday.ng (January 30, 2020): He [Kwara State Health Commissioner] pledged that the state government will give support in the area of improved water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), reversing the cycle of poverty and saying no to stigmatisation, among others.

One other frame employed in discussing the eradication of NTDs is that of attribution of responsibility. Mostly, the reports identify stakeholders as the ones solely responsible for ending the neglect and putting an end to NTDs. Metaphors, exemplars, headlines, concluding statements, and quote selections are used to build this frame. While some reports attribute responsibility to stakeholders such as government and development partners (e.g., Carter Centre, NGOs), others attribute responsibility to the people, i.e., the vulnerable population, as well. While it is the job of government and other stakeholders to intensify efforts in creating awareness, training people as the case may be, and providing medical assistance, the people are urged to be more conscious of their environment and take better care of themselves.

Discussion and Conclusion

As Allotey et al. note, "from a biomedical and clinical sciences perspective, diseases of poverty represent 'slugs, bugs and drugs' and present an ideal opportunity for technical fixes" (2012, p. 336). Understandably, the news reports are basically about diseases and not poverty, hence the featuring of health experts alone. Economists cannot feature in these reports as elaborately as health experts but a strong case ought to be made about the importance of tackling poverty if the NTDs are to be completely eradicated. The onus is on the journalists to at least succinctly comment on the need to fight poverty in order to fight NTDs. Journalists draw inferences from the submissions of experts, and in this case, a most important inference that was not drawn is the necessity of tackling poverty. This gap creates an amputated frame where poverty is touted, if not necessarily as the proximal or distal cause of NTDs, but at least as a driver; yet it is left out in the resolution of the NTDs conflict. Poverty is framed as an essential context for NTDs, but it shabbily and conspicuously loses prominence when it comes to conquering NTDs. This is a case of asymmetric framing where the media reports on an issue are one-sided (Bolsen and Shapiro 2018; van der Linden et al. 2019). Such an amputated frame leaves the reader unsure about how exactly stakeholders plan to eradicate NTDs when their key driver is not

taken care of. While the prevalence of poverty might not make it newsworthy, the occasions of awareness days such as the NTDs day should be better seized by the media as opportunities for raising consciousness about it as a major structural problem that needs to be tackled.

Considering that the chances of featuring an economist, a sociologist, or a medical anthropologist in such reports are slim, journalists should conduct independent research and incorporate narratives that show the plight of the neglected poor people as it relates to NTDs. Experts can only speak authoritatively about what they know, hence the featuring of drug administration and training of health workers in the intervention frame. As such, more of what is needed is the building of poverty eradication into the frame of intervention. With such a frame, the discourse on poverty will be escalated and the chances of eradicating not only NTDs but diseases of poverty in general will be improved. This will be a way of not just combating the scourge but also combating its accomplice (poverty) and alerting the authorities to their huge responsibility, failing which the poor might yet again be subjected to stigmatization and marginalization, with the real possibility of them being considered solely responsible for their poor state of health. Indeed, it is necessary to "maintain continuity of and expand pro-poor development interventions" (Diwakar 2020, p. 14) if NTDs are to be effectively eliminated, and the media's role is to frame poverty and diseases comprehensively as a way of reminding stakeholders to continue the fight.

The rather small dataset considered in this study as well as the similarity of the reports may be seen as limiting in some ways, but they actually point out succinctly the minimal attention paid to poverty in the context of NTDs in Nigeria as a whole even on the NTDs awareness day. While online reports alone were the units of analysis, the dataset is representative of Nigeria as all the geopolitical zones are featured in the reports. In addition, another contribution of this study is that it identifies the frame of intervention, thereby facilitating the possibility of addressing the issues identified by other frames.

Admittedly, the year 2020 is the first edition of the World NTDs Day, but considering that a large percentage of those affected by the diseases live in Nigeria, the Nigerian media space ought to have been more inundated with reports about the diseases from varying angles. Hopefully, there will be an improvement in subsequent years, especially since underlying health conditions have been identified as risk factors for deadlier diseases like COVID-19. Further research can thus be a comparative study of countries' media coverage of the awareness day and the diseases over a period of time.

Appendix

Table 1 Media reports and their frames

S/N	Publication	Date	Title of article	Spatial setting	Expert	Dominant frame	Secondary frame	Other frames
1.	prnigeria.com	03/02/20	Nigeria launches first World Neglected Tropical Disease Day	Nigeria	Minister of health; permanent secretary, Ministry of Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	Human impact/Human interest
2.	reliefweb.int	05/02/20	Neglected tropical diseases not deserted. Government collaborates with WHO to create awareness	Nigeria	Minister of Health; WHO Nigeria Officer in Charge	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	Human impact/Human interest
3.	allafrica.com	05/02/20	Nigeria: Neglected tropical diseases not deserted. Government collaborates with WHO to create awareness	Nigeria	Minister of Health; WHO Nigeria Officer in Charge	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	Human impact/Human interest
4.	punchng.com	31/01/20	100 million Nigerians risk tropical diseases' infection—FG	Nigeria	Minister of Health; Director of NTDs, Ministry of Health; Permanent Secretary, Abia State Ministry of Health; Nassarawa State Commissioner of Health	Powerlessness	Intervention (drug administration, training of health workers)	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders), Economic
5.	punchng.com	30/01/20	Three million Ogun residents risk leprosy, others—Govt	Ogun State	Commissioner for Health	Powerlessness	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Intervention (drug administration, training of teachers)
6.	dailypost.ng	29/01/20	Three million Ogun indigenes may die of leprosy, others—Govt warns	Ogun State	Commissioner for Health	Powerlessness	Intervention (training of teachers)	—

Table 1 (continued)

S/N	Publication	Date	Title of article	Spatial setting	Expert	Dominant frame	Secondary frame	Other frames
7.	dailytrust.com	30/01/20	3m people at risk of leprosy in Ogun—Commissioner	Ogun State	Commissioner for Health	Powerlessness	—	—
8.	thenationonlineng.net	31/01/20	Over 100m Nigerians at risk of NTDs, says Fed Govt	Nigeria	Minister of Health; WHO Nigeria Officer in Charge	Powerlessness	Human impact/Human interest	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)
9.	sunnewsonline.com	30/01/20	NTDs: Abia Govt. to intensify efforts in tackling disease burden	Abia State	Commissioner for Health; Director of Public Health, Manager of NTDs, Carter Centre Programme Officer	Intervention (drug administration)	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness
10.	allafrica.com	31/01/20	Nigeria: 100 million Nigerians threatened by tropical diseases, says Ehanire	Nigeria	Minister of Health	Powerlessness	—	—
11.	vanguardngr.com	30/01/20	Govt decries high prevalence of tropical diseases, says 120m Nigerians at risk	Kwara State	Commissioner for Health; State Coordinator of NTDs	Powerlessness	Intervention (drug administration)	—
12.	sunnewsonline.com	30/01/20	Hygiene key to preventing tropical (sync) diseases—Health Commissioner	Plateau State	Commissioner for Health	Attribution of responsibility (vulnerable groups and stakeholders)	Powerlessness	—
13.	sunnewsonline.com	8/02/20	NTDs: The world has abandoned Nigeria, others—FG	Nigeria	Minister of Health	Powerlessness	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—

No.	Source	Date	Headline	Location	Stakeholder			
14.	guardian.ng	01/02/20	Stakeholders lament NTDs afflicting 1.6b world's poorest	Nigeria	Christian Medical Scientists and Basic Health Foundation (CMESBAHF) Project Assistant; NTDs programme manager for the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)	Powerlessness	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—
15.	leadership.ng	03/02/20	WHO commits to helping Nigeria address neglected tropical diseases	Nigeria	WHO Officer in Charge in Nigeria; Coordinator, NTDs Department, Ministry of Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	—
16.	thisdaylive.com	13/02/2020	Abia targets two neglected tropical diseases for elimination in 2022	Abia State	Permanent Secretary, Abia State Ministry of Health, State Director of Public Health	Intervention (drug distribution)	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—
17.	hsdf.org.ng	30/01/2020	Ministerial press briefing marking the 2020 neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) Day	Nigeria	Minister of Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	—
18.	thescopenewspress.wordpress.com	09/02/2020	Adamawa intensifies advocacy on NTDs	Adamawa State	Commissioner of Health and Human Services	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Intervention (drug administration)	Powerlessness
19.	nnn.ng	30/01/2020	21 Adamawa LGAs endemic to schistosomiasis, says Health Commissioner	Adamawa State	Commissioner for Health	Human impact/Human interest	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness
20.	dailytimes.ng	30/01/2020	Adamawa endemic to schistosomiasis, says Health Commissioner	Adamawa State	Commissioner for Health	Human impact/Human interest	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

S/N	Publication	Date	Title of article	Spatial setting	Expert	Dominant frame	Secondary frame	Other frames
21.	independent.ng	31/ 01/ 2020	Neglected Tropical Diseases Day: Bauchi marks day with call to govt for sponsorship	Bauchi State	Bauchi State Coordinator for NTDs	Attribution of responsibility	—	—
22.	thisdaylive.com	30/ 01/ 2020	Lassa fever: Death toll rises to 20 in Ondo	Ondo State	Commissioner for Health, Epidemiologist	Intervention (drug administration, awareness campaign)	Powerlessness	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)
23.	web.facebook.com/ News-Update-1 570345749957870/	31/ 01/ 2020	2020 World NTD Day: C'River Govt won't relent in providing sustainable health care system -Dr. Betta Edu	Cross River State	Commissioner for Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—	—
24.	onemantv.com (web.facebook. com/1000634 99964433)	30/ 01/ 2020	Ministry of Health, Anambra State today joined other states to celebrate NTD	Anambra State	Anambra Health Commissioner	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—	—
25.	old.anambrastate. gov.ng	31/ 01/ 2020	Health Ministry partners Carter Centre to eliminate neglected tropical diseases	Anambra State	Anambra Health Commissioner	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders, vulnerable groups)	Intervention (drug administration)	—
26.	web.facebook.com/ ALIMA.org/	30/ 01/ 2020	Today is the first ever World Day for Neglected Tropical Diseases	Nigeria	—	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—	—
27.	https://web. facebook.com/ redaidnigeria/	18/ 01/ 20	#WorldNTDDay	Nigeria	—	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	—

28.	nnn.ng	31/ 01/ 2020	Centre to partner Imo government on fight against tropical diseases	Imo State	Director, Carter Centre; Director of Public Health, Imo Ministry of Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders, vulnerable groups)	Intervention (drug administration)	Powerlessness
29.	thenigerianpost. com.ng	30/ 01/ 2020	World NTDs Day: Over 120 million Nigerians at risks–Kwara Commissioner	Kwara State	Commissioner for Health	Powerlessness	Human Impact/ Human Interest	Intervention (drug administration, WASH facilities)
30.	businessday.ng	30/ 01/ 2020	Over 120 million Nigerians at risk of NTDs—Razaq	Kwara State	Commissioner for Health	Powerlessness	Human Impact/ Human Interest	Intervention (drug administration, WASH facilities)
31.	hebusinesspackage. com.ng	30/ 01/ 2020	Ogun Commemorates Inaugural Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) Day	Ogun State	Commissioner for Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Human Impact/ Human Interest	—
32.	web.facebook.com/ HealthOgun/posts	30/ 01/ 2020	—	Ogun State	State Ministry of Health	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	—	—
33.	nairaland.com/ 5659688	30/ 01/ 2020	World NTDs Day : Ondo Govt launches campaign against neglected tropical diseases	Ondo State	Commissioner for Health	Attribution of responsibility (vulnerable groups, stakeholders)	Powerlessness	—
34	https://www.afro. who.	05/ 02/ 2020	Neglected tropical diseases not deserted, government collaborates with WHO to create awareness	Nigeria	Minister of Health; WHO Nigeria Officer in Charge	Attribution of responsibility (stakeholders)	Powerlessness	Human impact/ Human interest

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Face-to Face with COVID-19: Experiences of Ghanaian Frontline Journalists Infected with the Virus

Kodwo Jonas Anson Boateng and Redeemer Buatsi

Abstract Journalists around the world have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, media houses have had to make drastic adjustments to the impact of challenges wrought by the pandemic on their operations. Ghanaian media houses also faced similar challenges and disruptions. News reporters and journalists felt the impact of these disruptions with many Ghanaian journalists losing their jobs. This study used affective-emotive theoretical perspective to examine how the possibility of contracting COVID-19 could affect or trigger emotions of fear and anxiety among Ghanaian journalists. The study set two main objectives (1) what workplace safety policies and protocol guidelines were established in newsrooms to mitigate the spread of the virus and (2) to what extent did journalists fear for the safety and well-being of close family members because of their journalism work. The study conducted in-depth unstructured interviews with five journalists who had recovered from the COVID-19 infections. The study found that despite high degrees of fear and anxiety among respondents about on-assignments and workplace infections, respondents still maintained 'emotional detachment' to attain objectivity in news reporting. Respondents also expressed high degrees of fear of exposing family members to the virus.

Keywords COVID-19 · Emotional detachment · Emotional stress · Ghanaian journalists

Introduction

The narrative above (abstract) culled from Ghana's leading online news portal typifies the experiences of most frontline journalists in Ghana who contracted the COVID-19 virus in the line of duty. Though no official records exist, the Ghana

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Journalists Association (GJA) estimates that over 50 Ghanaian journalists contracted the COVID-19 virus since March 2020. It is difficult to ascertain the true numbers since most journalists, especially freelance journalists failed to disclose their status for fear of stigmatisation.

As in many other countries including Ghana, news organisations, media houses and journalists faced daunting challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the peak of the pandemic in Ghana, many news organisations adopted stringent work policies that enabled them to stay financially viable. Most newsrooms reduced staff, adopted shift systems or remote reporting, and in more severe instances, laid off staff. In a comparable situation in the Philippines, Bernadas and Ilagan (2020) reported that many journalists worked from home while under nationwide lockdown. An interesting outcome of this remote work was the creative adaptation of mobile journalism (MOJO) and social media applications for newsgathering and reporting (Bolledo 2020; Tantuco 2020). Most Ghanaian journalists and media houses improvised and adapted to social media apps like Zoom and WhatsApp for live interviews. A challenging feature of the pandemic, however, was the toll it took on the psychology and physical well-being of journalists around the world. Various scholars have reported on the high degrees of physical stress and emotive anxieties that most journalists suffered during the pandemic (Posetti et al. 2021). Ghanaian journalists and frontline reporters reported similar anxieties as their Filipino colleagues who contracted the virus (Bernadas and Ilagan 2020).

As of December 2019, the news media in Ghana had created false impressions about the spread, infectious nature and patterns of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impression among Ghanaians was that the spread of the pandemic was confined to China and a few western countries with the hope that Africa was immune to the virus due to hot temperatures on the continent. However, by the beginning of the New year, 2020, Ghana had recorded significant COVID-19 infections. By March 21, 2020, health authorities reported 3 deaths and 21 confirmed cases (Citi news 2020). Ghana's air, sea and land borders were subsequently closed on March 22, 2020 in a measure to restrict the spread of the virus. In an address to the nation on March 27, the President of Ghana, Nana Addo-Dankwa Akuffo Addo, announced a mandatory quarantine for 78 persons infected with the virus. Schools, churches, and night clubs were shut down and aban on public gathering was included. As further measure to slow the spread, the Government imposed a two-week partial lockdown on two major cities and municipalities in Accra and Kumasi. Only medical, security personnel, and other essential service officials, designated 'frontline workers', had special permissions and passes for free movement. In addition, a comprehensive contact tracing regime was established to identify possible persons who had come into contact with infected persons. Nevertheless, by the end of April 2020, the infection rate had spiked to 152 cases with 5 deaths, 22 recoveries and 125 active cases (World Health Organization 2020b). Compared to other African countries like South Africa or Nigeria, the infection rate in Ghana stabilized leading to lifting of the mandatory two-week lockdown. By May 2020, Ghana had over 95 COVID-19 recovered cases.

Additional precaution included the distribution of essential Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to medical personnel and designated frontline workers. Interestingly, journalists and allied media workers at the spearhead of COVID-19 awareness creation campaigns were sidelined, ignored, 'forgotten' or overlooked. According to Høiby and Ottosen (2019) this was a widespread practice in most countries. They pointed to the 'lack of safety and security for reporters' (p. 70). Despite the likelihood of contracting the virus, newsrooms continuously assigned reporters to pandemic-related events. Frontline reporters bravely visited and reported from isolation centres. Posetti et al. (2021) noted similar situations in other jurisdictions. Aside from the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus, frontline journalists also faced threats of physical assaults, and harassment from either government officials, security personnel, prominent news actors and the public. In Ghana, a local radio station manager for *Deutsche Welle*, on a COVID-19 related assignment, was assaulted by security personnel, instead of sympathising with the journalist, one editor used the moment to reproach Ghanaian journalists for being timid in the face of such assaults. He believes that journalists should stand up and defend their rights:

> I think it is high time Journalists registered their public displeasure on matters of their conditions of service and legitimately use their arsenals to press home their demand for what rightfully belongs to them. We cannot continue acting the same old same and expect different results. The corona Pandemic is here with us and Journalists are at a crossroads, but we have no option than to cover it to the letter because it is our civic responsibility, failure of which would mean we are reneging on the main tenets of our profession. (Mawugbe 2020)

According to media scholars like Ojebode (2020), though such assaults threaten media freedoms, in most African countries it increased the anxiety, fear and insecurity for journalists (Ojebode 2020; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2020; Høiby and Ottosen 2019). The Deputy Director-General of UNESCO had earlier warned that:

> Safety for journalists is a matter of public concern that is wide-ranging. It is vital for those who practice journalism, for their families and for their sources. It is essential for the wellbeing of media institutions, civil society, academia, and the private sector more broadly. If we value the free flow of information for citizens, their governments, and their international organisations, then the safety of journalists is central. (Henrichsen et al. 2015)

The aim of this chapter is to explore the emotive stress experienced by the Ghanaian frontline reporters who contracted COVID-19. The study set two main objectives (1) what workplace safety policies and protocol guidelines were established in newsrooms to mitigate the spread of the virus and reduce the emotional stress for frontline journalists and (2) to what extent did the safety and wellbeing of close family members of frontline reporters increase their stress and anxiety.

The chapter examines these questions through the affective-emotive lens. The chapter argues that affective and emotion discourse presumes that a journalist who witnesses tragic, traumatic accidents and incidents of human suffering and distress may be affected by such incidents. It is therefore likely that such distressing incidents can trigger anxieties, fear, and other mental/psychological emotions in these journalists which may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Monteiro and Marque-Pinto 2017). Thus, aside from the risk of contracting the virus, frontline

reporters are more likely to suffer mental stress, anxiety and fear which may lead to PTSDs (Bolton n.d.). The study reports experiences of five Ghanaian frontline journalists who contracted the COVID-19 virus in their line of duty. The narratives that are shared in this chapter provide African media researchers insights into studying the relationship between emotional stress assignments and threats against the mental well-being of African journalists. The study also affords opportunities for Ghanaian journalists to ventilate their views on wide ranging issues surrounding work conditions during the pandemic. The research replicates Peseckyte's (2020) multimedia project that provided a digital platform for selected journalists in the UK to share their work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Affective Perspective: Journalism and Emotional Stress

Discourses on the media and its affectations have centred on audience and media use, ignoring the impact of content generation on media workers. Various media effects theories—agenda-setting, uses and gratification, cultivation theories etc., have examined the direct and indirect effect of media content on audience behaviour, actions and attitudes (Valkenburg and Oliver 2019). The assumption is that media content affects audience psychologically, triggering or inciting certain emotional reactions and responses. Media content tends to induce mood arousals, which trigger emotional feelings such as pleasure, pain, passion, melancholy and others. Thus, the media and its content become an 'embodied force that influences the mind' of its audience. Such assumptions dovetail into Baruch Spinoza's definition of 'affect' as 'the modifications of the body whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained. . .' (Shepard 2004).

Theoretically, the discourse surrounding affect and its emotive trigger is complex. A number of scholars associate affect with emotions or use them interchangeably (Choi 2018; Anderson and Harrison 2006; Thien 2005). Choi's analyses of Gustafson, Aquinas and Edwards' interpretations of the dichotomy inherent in the notions of affectation and emotion provide some useful pointers. On the one hand, Choi emphasises that 'affections are bound to but functionally distinct from the emotions' (p. 114). On the other hand, emotions are perceived as reactions to and responses to external stimuli that cause affectations which in turn trigger internal emotions. By this interpretation, external affective forces stimulate emotions like love, fear, anger, anxieties and stress.

Although risk assessment studies of journalists tend to concentrate on physical risks, assaults, and issues of physical threats on journalists, studies by Høiby and Ottosen (2019) and Bolton (n.d.) find that the coverage of tragic, traumatic events and disturbing images have stressful impact on the emotions of journalists or reporters. Høiby & Ottosen argue that aside the risks of getting killed or injured in conflict zones, frontline war reporters are also likely to experience bouts of post-traumatic stress. Bolton adds that like first responders, reporters who cover disaster stories, fire and accidents assignments involving human suffering are likely to

experience similar post-traumatic stress disorders. In another study, Feinstein et al. (2002) reported that war correspondents tend to experience higher levels of psychological distress than their counterparts who work on normal assignments. Other studies (Kotisova 2019; Stephen 2017) report that journalists develop emotional detachment as a means of coping with bouts of PTSD. However, in some cases, young and inexperienced reporters regard accident and fire assignments as exhilarating experiences and a crucial part of professional growth and achievement. Such beliefs buck assertions that the journalism professional ideology considers accident, war as well as crises reporting as the pinnacle of achievement in the profession (Kotisova 2019). Stephen (2017) for instance recounts his experiences covering sensational and traumatic events during his young days in journalism. In his doctoral thesis titled '*Affective Journalism—uncovering the Affective Dimension of Practice in the Coverage of Traumatic News*', Stephen explores how journalists cope with the stress and strains of covering news incidences related to war, accidents and turmoil. According to Stephen, journalists are obliged to maintain a 'cool detached' professional sense and mentality in covering such assignments. Journalists such as Fergal Keane (BBC), John Laurence (CBS) and Margaret Bourke-White (a private female photojournalist) are among the few war correspondents who have documented the psychological impact war coverage had on them in their line of duty. Thus, Peters (2011) claims that journalists are continuously engaged in 'emotion management' which is central to the emotional nature of their work. Despite these studies, Kotisova calls for more critical studies in the area: 'Not only have media scholars started to pay attention to the fact that media is an emotionally charged environment and to suggest that personal, affective, and emotional engagement with news work needs to be considered carefully' (p. 16).

Kotisova posits that all aspects of journalism including digital journalism are an '*emotional labor*' that may create mental health challenges and may ultimately evolve into serious PSTD.

> Indeed, symptoms of PTSD are evident not only among on-the-spot reporters, but also among the staff working on a frontline which is no longer geographic but digital. One of the reasons might be that post-traumatic reactions are not determined solely by being on the scene and directly witnessing human suffering, but are also related to increased exposure to dilemmas, feelings of guilt, or tension between journalists' beliefs about professionalism and its practice in the field. (Kotisova 2019)

Like other crimes and accident scene reporters, war correspondents, crises reporters and frontline COVID-19 reporters are certainly amiable to emotional and psychological risks. Posetti et al. (2021) reveal that though most journalists have conflicting impressions of the impact of the pandemic, an outstanding impression relates to high levels of psychological and mental strain of COVID-19 on frontline reporters.

> 70% of our respondents rated the psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis as the most difficult aspect of their work. A similar number (67%) identified concerns about financial hardship as a significant difficulty, while the intense workload was ranked the third biggest challenge, ahead of social isolation and the risk of actually contracting the virus. (Posetti et al. 2021, p. 2)

The fact that most journalists expressed fear and anxiety of contracting the virus and going into self-isolation provides sufficient evidence to support Reinardy's (2011) hypothesis of the high stress levels experienced by most journalists on the job. An International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) 2020 survey also claims that 'half of all journalists were suffering from stress and anxiety' as a result of the pandemic. PEN America reports that some journalists, especially, White House correspondents expressed similar fears and anxieties reporting from the White House which had been declared a Coronavirus hot zone after President Donald Trump contracted COVID-19. The White House Press Corps Association issued a precautionary notice to its members:

> That means that we as a press corps, and each of us individually, must be cleareyed about the potential risks of COVID-19 exposure on the job, taking every precaution we can to fulfil our coverage obligations while being prepared for situations with which we may not be comfortable. (PEN America—Freedom to write 2021)

Workplace Safety Guidelines

Newsrooms around the world instituted elaborate regulatory guidelines and safety protocols to curb the spread of the virus in newsrooms and among media workers. In June 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a warning bulletin that the workplace posed a substantial risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. The WHO recommended implementation of protective measures and guidelines to protect workers around the world (World Health Organization 2020a). These recommendations consisted of basic safety protocols including provisions of wall-mounted hand sanitizers, introduction of frequent handwashing protocols, frequent cleaning of workstations with alcohol-based wipe tissues, the compulsory wearing of nose masks and transparent shields, introduction of remote reporting, social distanced sitting arrangements in addition to reduction in newsroom personnel and location crews.

The Ministry of Health in Ghana, in collaboration with the Public Services Commission issued an eight-point contingency safety measures in March 2020 for workplaces. Key among the measures was the directive to Human Resource units to issue education pamphlets, on office notice boards and on organisations' internal social media platforms stipulating various 'Dos and Don'ts' in line with COVID-19 safety protocols (Public Services Commission 2020).

In places like East Africa, Kenya media houses worked with the BBC, Protect Consortium and some UK-based news organisations to develop and implement comprehensive safety guidelines and protocols. The guidelines recognised the risk to exposure and infection by journalists and other media workers. It recommended frequent reassessment of newsroom situations to forestall spread of the virus in newsrooms. The guidelines listed the following assessment areas; Identification of clinically vulnerable people, work patterns/shifts, breaks during the day and potential changes, studios and studio operations, crews and deployments—how many

people should be on any given assignment, including use of local correspondents to reduce travel, newsroom sitting arrangements, equipment handling and storage and hygiene measures, including provision of water and soap, and/or alcohol-based hand sanitisers at vantage points in the workplace.

Impact of the Pandemic on Journalism Work

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected all spheres of the global economy. As of January 2021, over two million people had died from COVID-19 related complications (New York Times 2021). The pandemic had a devasting impact on the media industry and journalism profession around the world affecting an already dwindling business. The pandemic came at a time when most media industries were adjusting business models to accommodate the destabilising intrusion of Internet technology and social media. For instance, in the United States, several news outlets were grappling with low advertising revenues due to low readership and a decline in audience ratings among other challenges. Writing in an op-ed in *Sowetan Live*, Daniels (2020) argues that the combined forces of digitalisation and COVID-19 reshaped newsroom work in South Africa leading to massive retrenchments and salary-cuts even in state-owned media houses like the SABC. In Ghana, the media industry [was] already in dire straits (Asante 2020). Most media houses responded to the dwindling advertising market by adapting and implementing drastic cost-cutting measures to stay afloat in an already competitive media market. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) reported that as of 2015, over 160 newspapers had vanished from newsstands in Ghana. The intrusion of digital news platforms shifted news consumption patterns especially among the youth. Massive government investments in Internet infrastructure increased Internet connectivity to almost all parts of Ghana. Comparatively Internet data is relatively affordable, all of which helped to deepen the penetration rate of Internet use in Ghana (Media Federation for West Africa 2018). The onset of the pandemic destabilised an already challenging media economy in most countries including Ghana (Alexandre et al. 2020). A result of a survey conducted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in April 2020 supports assertions made here. The IFJ survey of over 1300 journalists from 77 countries, reveals the extent to which freelance journalists faced massive job losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings also reiterate Reinardy (2011) and positions that there was growing anxiety and fear among journalists over job losses due to the negative effects of the pandemic. According to Asante, over 5000 journalists had so far lost their jobs in South Africa.

Against this backdrop and with the onset of the pandemic, the IFJ pointed to the high levels of stress and anxiety most frontline journalists experienced covering COVID-19 related assignments. In most countries, some journalists expressed anxiety over insufficient provision of Personal Protective Equipment—PPEs—expected to ensure the safety of frontline reporters on COVID-19 related assignments. Posetti et al. (2021) reported that the fear and anxiety of contracting the virus

ranked high on the list of significant psychological and emotional fears journalists harboured in relation to coverage of the pandemic. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) also argued that all results indicated that frontline journalists were all eager to ensure maximum safety during COVID-19 related assignments, yet it was apparent that frontline journalists were stressed by the high probability of contracting the virus in the line of duty. To forestall this, the CPJ issued a safety advisory caution to all frontline journalists asking them to ensure their work activities did not threaten the health and well-being of themselves, their immediate family and friends (Committee for Protection of Journalists-CPJ 2020). Despite these cautions, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) speculated that over 50 journalists had been infected and recovered from the virus.

Ghana Media Landscape

Reliable data of the population of journalists in Ghana is difficult to come by (Asante 2020). At the time, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), was the only entity compiling the most reliable and up-to-date register of members in good financial standing. Data of the number of journalists in Ghana was released in February 2021 by the GJA, in preparation of the general assembly and elections of new executives, indicated that the Association had 656 registered members (Ghana Journalists Association 2017).

Ghana had been one of the poster-boys of media freedoms on the African continent. Ghanaian private editors and media scholars were active in the processes, culminating in the formulation of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration in Namibia, a process which finally kick-started media and press freedoms on the African continent. Since 1992, Ghana instituted a largely free media system giving preference to private participation in a vibrant media economy ensuring establishment of free and plural media without much restrictive regulation on freedoms of speech and expression (Asante 2020). For instance, Chapter 12, article 162 sub-sections 3 and 4 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution stipulates that:

> There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a licence as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information.
> Editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications. (Constitute 2020, p. 87)

One consequence of this broad mandate makes Ghana's media landscape one of the most highly deregulated and most competitive in Africa. Consequently, the country's 30 million people are served by a plethora of media houses. By 2017, Ghana's National Communication Authority (NCA) had granted frequency licenses to 128 organisations to establish and operate television broadcast services across

cable, terrestrial wireless and satellite platforms. As of June 2020, 437 commercial FM radio stations, 33 public service stations, 81 community and 21 campus radio stations were operational in Ghana (National Communication Authority 2020). The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) argues that while newspaper consumption is on the decline, most Ghanaians consume information mainly from radio and online media.

Many notable Ghanaian journalists hold either diploma, Bachelor or master's degree certificate but a majority still practise without any qualification or training in journalism. This is partly due to the inability of media owners to pay qualified journalists. On average, trained and qualified journalists earn between $300 and $500 a month (Paylab-Ghana 2021). This makes the journalism profession one of the least paid professions in the country. In addition to the low salary levels, the profession in Ghana is very volatile with high levels of attrition and low employment possibilities (Asante 2020).

Study Design

Unofficial records of the GJA reported that over 50 journalists contracted the COVID-19 virus. On June 18, 2020, one of Ghana's high-profile sports journalists working with Multimedia Group Limited became the first journalist to publicly reveal his COVID-19 infection status. In a short live video on his Facebook page, he walked viewers through the quarantine isolation centre, narrating his daily ordeal and suffering of the disease. He cautioned the public to follow the protective protocols faithfully in order to avoid infection. He was part of five other journalists at Multimedia that had tested positive for the virus. By October, his courageous act of public disclosure punctured the wall and veil of silence among journalists, forcing some infected journalists to publicly disclose their COVID-19 status. Even though media houses engaged in anti-COVID stigmatisation awareness campaigns, a large majority of journalists hid their infection status.

This study reports on in-depth conversational interviews with five frontline reporters from Multimedia Group and Media General. These two media houses are Ghana's leading private broadcast media outlets. The five respondents had recently recovered from the virus infection and returned to reporting duties in their respective newsrooms. The study also conducted a content analysis and reported narratives of journalists infected with COVID-19 from online news portals. In addition, names of some of the respondents were changed to ensure anonymity.

Frontline Journalists: Of Experiences and Anxieties

Lily (*not real name*), a 30-year-old radio news reporter with nine years of working experience in journalism was a key frontline COVID-19 reporter. Lily was part of

the media team embedded with the Zoomlion Ghana Limited's sanitation team on a nation-wide disinfection exercise. Lily, married with two children, travelled mostly around the country reporting on the disinfection and sanitation exercise.

During the interview, Lily described the early symptoms of the infection to include fever, cold and strong dry throat and cough. She noticed these symptoms after the first phase of the exercise (the disinfection exercise occurred in distinct phases. As of January 8, 2021, the third phase of the exercise had begun. The exercise was started as a way of reducing the spread of the Coronavirus through disinfection of public spaces by Zoomlion Ghana Limited contracted by the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Sanitation). After a few days of persistent dry throat and cough and especially the loss of sense of taste and smell, she suspected she was showing symptoms of the virus and decided to test. The test came out positive. Lily recounts her fear, anxiety and traumatic experience over contracting the virus. 'As a victim of COVID-19, I must say it's very terrible to be in that situation which makes life extremely uncomfortable and scary to even associate yourself with others.'

Lily's experience mirrored that of Grace, a 26-year-old radio and television news reporter and an anchor with one of Ghana's leading private media houses. Grace reported from the frontline of COVID-19 isolation centres. During the peak of the pandemic, Grace reported from isolation centres interacting constantly with infected patients around the country.

She claimed she was constantly scared and anxious anytime she visited these isolation centres. Interestingly, she and other journalists were consistently advised by health officials not to express their fears due to stigmatisation. The admonition for journalists to maintain emotional detachment from stories affirms Stephen's assertion that '*detachment was a hallmark of professionalism*' in journalism (p. 168). Kotisova maintains that the principle of achieving objectivity in journalism reports imposes obligations on journalists to maintain emotional distance and detachment from the subjects and individuals of their reports. This sense of 'detachment' is amplified in Grace's philosophical declaration of 'achievement and a sense of unity of purpose' after her recovery.

> Personally, COVID-19 came to make me brave, because after visiting most of the isolation centres, the fear of the disease as well as other fears were gone, and it gave me more confidence in myself that I can do a lot of things. It also unified us as a people, as everyone came together with the sole aim of fighting and defeating the virus.

First, it is important to note how Grace contracted the virus and secondly is necessary to recognise how Grace's narrative provides significant insights into how, despite all the recommended workplace guidelines, journalists could easily contract the virus from outside sources. Grace's experience affirms the notion and possibility of on-assignment infections.

> At a point when I came back from my normal assignments at the Korle Bu Teaching hospital, my eyes were red and itching and I was coughing and that was the same time WHO had announced that the eye was another entry point for the virus. I however did not test positive for it at the time, although I had the symptoms.

Another frontline journalist of the Multimedia Group, Raymond, discussed his misery, fears and anxieties on public radio after contracting the virus. But Raymond's Facebook and Twitter posts on January 9, 2021 provided the public valuable insights of his emotive state of mind. He gave vivid accounts of the extent of his fears and anxiety. His narrative also reflected similar emotions and fears expressed by most journalists who recovered from the infection.

> Gratitude Saturday: My Covid Story! I rise this day to thank the Almighty for keeping me alive! COVID-19 battered, bruised, and brought me to the lowest ebb! There was a point, when the going got tough and they kept upgrading my respirators for oxygen with more complex machines, I just asked God to take my life away and put me out of my misery! But God came through for me. I am also eternally grateful to my wife MzGee Ghana, who braved the storm to help me pull through it all! To my doctor Dr Tanko, those wonderful doctors at Nyaho Medical Centre especially, Ofori Anti and Dekpor and their lovely nurses! I say ayekoo! Finally, friends I lived most part of the year in the UK without COVID-19, got it in Ghana and it almost killed me without any underlying medical condition! Please be careful!

Workplace and Safety Policy

The interview narratives reveal the workplace as an incubator for the spread of the virus. At least the narratives of Israel clearly indicate that some workers pass on the virus to their colleagues in the newsrooms. Generally, media houses instituted precautionary measures, insisting their workers follow religiously full safety protocols. Multimedia Group for instance introduced news presentations via Zoom and instituted shift systems for journalists. Alexandre et al. (2020) reported that similar systems were established by most newsrooms in the Philippines.

In the meantime, in Ghana, most media organisations ensured that radio studios and interview consoles were partitioned by glass while all staff and visitors wore mandatory face and nose masks. News crews were supplied with telescopic microphones to ensure reasonable social distance. Meanwhile, newsroom gadgets were regularly sanitised by cleaning staff.

As pointed out above, the Public Services Commission's eight-point Coronavirus (COVID-19) workplace contingency measures recommended the following; a ban on local non-critical conference/seminar/workshops/face-to-face/meetings/gatherings, provision of basic preventative items and measures such as hand sanitisers, alcohol, access to soap and running water, paper towels and proper waste disposal items, encouraged employees who felt unwell to stay out of work and seek immediate medical attention, public health education in the form of simple 'Dos and Don'ts' displayed on notice board, emails and other vantage points (The Office of the Public Service Commission 2020).

Despite these measures, there is ample evidence that some journalists were infected through workplace contacts. Israel's narrative below affirms this idea of the workplace as a possible infection point:

Do I know how I may have been infected? I have a few suspicions. When I had to resume work physically to the office after working from home for a few months at the height of the pandemic, I didn't take chances at all. I packed my meals and drink to the office from home and had my lunch in my car. No canteens, no restaurants, and no eating together with colleagues. I wouldn't let a "stranger" drive my car to even repark it, because I was scared of possible contamination. I stopped going to the make-up room. I made-up myself before going on air. I sanitized my hands and space before I took off my mask in the studio. I stopped going to the barber. He rather came home. I ensured I washed my hands, disinfected, and had my mask on. Admittedly, after a significant decline in the number of cases though, I eased my strict preventive protocols somewhat and visited the office canteen. I ate in restaurants even though I tried to keep a good distance away from people. I allowed others to repark my car in the office and took off my mask to have a drink or a snack at my desk when I was alone. So yeah, I dropped my guard in quite a few instances, making it difficult to determine at which point I got infected.

Like Israel, Brachie who works in the same news organisation could not be specific as to where and when he contracted the virus. He, however, claimed that though he was much more stringent in following the safety protocol measures, he, like Israel, may have lapsed in his vigilance on one occasion. His testimony also reveals the extent of failure of some of the precautionary measures some news organisations took to limit the spread of the virus in their newsrooms.

I got the virus at work as I went about my normal day to day duties. When it was detected that I had the virus, everyone at work was immediately asked to proceed on self-isolation after which everyone was tested for any possibility of infection. I suspect I had the infection despite the many information available through the disposal of my nose masks at a point. Many times, as we go about our normal duties, we sometimes forget to dispose our masks regularly. Maybe in one of those instances in the process of disposing my mask, I got into contact with an infected person and probably got infected too.

Though most news organisations in Ghana were hit by infections, they continued to operate. In most instances, most newsrooms operated on meagre budgets. Despite these bleak economic prospects, a majority of respondents were impressed with the comprehensive safety protocols their organisations put in place. In addition, some media houses provided insurance policy cover for their workers.

Grace for instance was particularly impressed about her management's provision of an insurance scheme and other motivational packages to assure staff of their safety. For instance, she praised the Management for.... 'Frequent testing of suspected cases at the office and assurance was given all workers that anyone who contracted the disease in line of duty was going to be properly taken care of.'

Family and Relations

Previous studies about journalists' work-life balance have proven an imbalance between the journalist's work life and their social life. A recent study by Bhalla and Kang (2019) in India also found related results showing the extent to which journalism work is largely unfriendly and extremely intrusive into the family lives of

most Indian journalists. In the light of the spreading pandemic, how did journalists' work life impact on their family's well-being?

Once again, Grace who lives with her parents explains that her family constantly expressed fear for her health and safety. Grace's family relied on a combination of traditional herbal concoctions and orthodox therapy in addition to the recommended safety protocols to ensure they did not contract the virus from her.

> My family were equally scared, and my family calls me to be very careful especially my mommy. My mummy makes sure she gets hot water ready for me whenever I came home so I move straight to the bathroom after work before joining the family. On safety protocols, we had water and soap Infront of our house so that any who entered washed the hand. Sanitizers were also around. We also frequently engaged in some traditional therapy such as using the neem tree to prepare hot water.

Even though Israel worked consistently throughout the COVID-19 period both in the newsroom and from home, he is convinced he contracted the virus from contact with other work colleagues. Israel claims he followed all recommended protocols stringently and was fastidious in the use of sanitisers and face masks. What is also significant about Israel's previous narrative and with his narrative below was his emotive anxiety and fear of infecting his family and the measures he took to ensure his family's safety and well-being.

> I tested positive for COVID19. This was after a colleague named me as a contact. I immediately had to get my sample taken and tested. This was Wednesday, January 27, 2021. I quarantined in the outhouse at home and only accessed the main building when it was necessary. When I did, I made sure I sanitized anything I touched, especially the door handles. Being in the outhouse was kind of lonely—even though comfortable and had everything I needed.

According to the ICJ survey report (2020), journalists were more likely to be committed and appreciative of their family and close relations than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, Grace, Lily, Raymond and Israel expressed extreme appreciation to their spouses and family for support. Israel was highly emotional and appreciative of the loving relationship that developed between him and his wife despite the strain of infection and added stress of self-isolation.

> Being in the outhouse was kind of lonely—even though comfortable and had everything I needed. I missed my wife. We spent the nights chatting away on phone, as if we were just starting to date. Fortunately, the rest of my household tested negative—that is my wife and my middle son, who is the only child currently at home, schooling online, as the other two are in boarding school. I do not have any other contacts to name as I ensured to keep my mask on in the presence of others to prevent a spread.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the emotive experiences of frontline journalists who contracted the Coronavirus from an affective-emotive viewpoint. It has tried to argue that research in media especially in Africa and Ghana failed to explore how

traumatic assignments could affect journalists and induce high levels of emotions leading to post-traumatic stresses. The study, through the narratives, established that the respondents who contracted the virus lived with fear and anxiety which could have impacted on their psychological well-being. More importantly, the study finds that the emotive anxieties and fears of these journalists extended to fears of infecting close family members.

The study also established that newsrooms and media houses around the world including ones in Ghana instituted safety measures and precautions meant to protect and ensure the safety of their journalists during the peak of the pandemic. Despite these precautions, some key journalists contracted the virus. A far-reaching revelation came from Grace's appreciation of her outfit's efforts to assure the well-being of newsroom staff.

We can safely conclude from Grace's responses that most major news organisations provided extra workplace safety protection for their staff during the pandemic. Unfortunately, it was difficult to ascertain whether small news organisations provided staff members with similar medical insurance policies to cover COVID-19 infections. For instance, though Raymond worked with a major media organisation he expressed on his Facebook wall, how he had to personally finance the purchase of extra oxygen canisters to sustain his life during his isolation.

Another interesting finding relates to two dimensions of 'emotion of labor' hypothesis of journalism profession. First, as Grace explains the demand by medical officers to suspend their emotions affirms Stephen's allusion to professional journalists to have the capacity to detach their emotions from the stories and by far, these emotions have a bearing on media content.

Finally, it is significant to highlight how this study provided respondents the opportunity to vent their sentiments and appreciation for surviving the traumatic COVID-19 infection. This finding is in consonance with ICJ's finding that 42% of respondents became appreciative of life after recovery from the infection. Raymond shows such sentimental appreciation in his gratitude to God for his life.

> COVID-19 brought me to the lowest ebb! There was a point, I just asked God to take my life away and put me out of my misery! But God came through for me. I am also eternally grateful to my wife MzGee Ghana, who braved the storm to help me pull through it all! (January 9, 2021 Twitter)

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A Comparative Discourse Analysis of African Newspaper Reports on Global Epidemics: A Case Study of Ebola and Coronavirus

Sisanda Nkoala

Abstract This qualitative multi-case study analyses how two African newspapers engaged in self-presentation of African countries and other-presentation of Western countries when reporting on the outbreak of diseases. Using van Dijk's ideological square as a framework, the study undertakes a discourse analysis of news reports on the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak reported by the South African daily broadsheet, the *Sowetan*, and the Nigerian daily broadsheet, the *Daily Trust*. The analysis shows that in their reports on European countries and the United States of America, the discourse's macro- and microstructures emphasised the positive features of Western nations and de-emphasised the negative ones. Conversely, concerning African countries, there was a tendency to de-emphasise the positive while emphasising the negative ones. As a result, the newspaper reports were found to engage in negative self-presentation of African countries and positive other-presentation of Western countries, perpetuating the "us vs them" ideology that newspapers from Europe and America employ when reporting on the outbreak of diseases in Africa.

Keywords Ebola · Coronavirus · Us vs them ideology · Newspapers · Discourse analysis · van Dijk

Introduction

The outbreak of a disease, whether local or global, is not merely a public health matter. It is also a health communication issue, as people require information to help them respond accordingly. As citizens require more and more information to make decisions amid the fear and dread that can ensue, established information sources, such as newspapers, become critical in shaping how the crisis is understood and responded to by the public. However, beyond providing information, research has found that these media sources advance ideologically laden meanings for their

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163

audiences through the discourses they use (Williams and Julia 2009; van der Meer and Piet 2013; Witte 1992). This is undoubtedly the case when it comes to news media reports on global epidemics and pandemics. There is an extensive body of literature, for example, that links the news media's inclination to use militaristic discourse in reference to the HIV/Aids pandemic to the stigma that those infected by the disease bear (Treichler 1992; Sherwin 2001). More recently, studies have argued that news media reports engaged in "fear-mongering" in the discourse they used when reporting on the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak in China by "presenting the Coronavirus as a deadly living thing" and emphasising the global spread of the pandemic (Chaiuk and Olha 2020, p. 184).

As audiences try to make sense of what is happening in their country and how the outbreak is affecting the rest of the world, the scholarship argues that news media perspectives become a critical window through which peope look to understand of what is unfolding. In this respect, considerable research exists on how news media from Western nations, particularly America and European countries, report on the outbreak of diseases in other parts of the world (Gerlach 2016; Stevens and Shawnika 2013; Stephenson and Michelle 2009). These studies confirm that when Western newspapers report on these outbreaks concerning Africa, their discourse is undergirded by colonial perspectives that deem Africans as primitive, poor and powerless people who can only navigate health crisis with aid from the West (Gerlach 2016). As a result, we have evidence that Western media depictions are prone to perpetuate Africa's images as the dark continent prone to "death, disaster, disease and despair" (Hunter-Gault 2006). The literature finds that when it comes to Africa, Western media naturalises an interpretation of developments, including disease outbreaks, in ways that the discourse employed misrepresents Africa (Jarosz 1992), and portrays Africans as the inferior and dangerous other (Washer 2004). In doing this, they perpetuate an ideology of othering that emphasises the West as superior and Africa as inferior. Niel Gerlach's (2016) study on English newspaper coverage of Ebola found one of the dominant frames employed emphasised the West as a source of aid. In these reports African cultural practices were also alluded to as the cause of the outbreak of diseases (Gerlach 2016). Similarly, in Gabore's (2020) study on American and Chinese news reports on Africa and Coronavirus, the author found Western media's dominant frames were those of conflict and negativity.

The studies referenced above show that news reports on health matters should not be taken at face value as objective texts that provide an unbiased and objective account. Instead, their ideologically laden content should be read critically to evaluate the perspectives being advanced (Dudo et al. 2007; Luisi et al. 2018; Davis and Davina 2020). Samuel Gabore argues that through their choice of discourse, news media constructs reality for its audience in how they "present a particular consideration of a situation and then report evidence to strengthen, legitimise and naturalise the interpretation" (Gabore 2020, 299). Roger Fowler states that "news is not just a value-free reflection of facts. Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position" (Fowler 1991, 101). Thus, when consideration is given to how a particular pandemic is understood and even experienced, consideration must be given to media coverage of this

outbreak since these platforms are the primary means through which people obtain information. Furthermore, one cannot read the media report uncritically, assuming they are merely providing information. One must be mindful of the ideologies that are also being communicated through these platforms because they shape how meaning is made amid the chaos of a disease outbreak.

What also emerges from the literature is that studies on news media coverage of pandemics tends to focus on how Western publications report on developments in Africa with minimal scholarship on how African countries report on these outbreaks in other African countries, and even less on how African countries report on the outbreak of diseases in Western countries. There appears to be a gap in research that explores how African news media reports on epidemics and pandemics that affect the rest of the world. Research exploring the discourse employed by African newspapers when reporting on disease outbreaks, not just in other African countries but also in Western nations, seems scant. Furthermore, there do not appear to have been many studies undertaken that analyse the type of discourses employed by African publications when reporting on disease outbreaks in Western nations and whether these discourses are the same as those used about African countries.

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study is to analyse how two African newspapers report on global epidemics. Using van Dijk's (2000) ideological square as a framework, the study undertakes a discourse analysis of news reports on the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak as reported by the South African daily broadsheet, the *Sowetan*, and the Nigerian daily broadsheet, the *Daily Trust*. It considers the discourse used when egnaged in self-presentation of African countries and other-presentation of Western countries, mainly European countries and the United States of America. Of particular interest is the "us vs them" ideology advanced in African newspapers' discourse on global epidemics.

Conceptual Framework

Because of the pervasiveness of news discourse due to the sheer reach of news media, a discourse analysis of these texts helps one ascertain the "connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures, connections that might be opaque to the layperson" (Xie 2018, p. 399). Through discourse analysis, one can examine the unacknowledged ideologies that are being communicated in news texts on pandemics. One of the theorists in discourse analysis, Teun van Dijk, advances two concepts that are relevant to this study. The first relates to the scheme of discourse wherein he posits that texts are composed of three structures that support the overall meaning that can be read into them (van Dijk 1985). The first are macrostructures which give the overall theme of a text. The second are superstructures, which are about how the text is organised. The third are microstructures, focused on the sentence level and considers aspects such as syntax, rhetoric and sentence structure. In newspapers, van Dijk posits that to analyse the macrostructures of the news discourse, one must look to the headlines; for the superstructures,

one must look at how the news report is arranged; for the microstructures, one must look at the sentences and words used. Due to scope, for this study, only the macro- and microstructures are considered.

The second van Dijkean concept used in this study is his ideological square framework (van Dijk 2000). This framework is rooted in a view of discourse as something that advances ideology, particularly in how it includes and esteems through references to "us," and excludes or disparages through reference to "them." This "us vs them" perspective is commonly known as othering or otherness. When it comes to news media, it asserts that Western news coverage of African countries tends to portray these nations as the inferior other (Ebo 1997). In this respect, van Dijk argues that language that alludes to "us" is associated with favourable properties, while language that alludes to "them" is associated with negative properties. From this, he derives an ideological square framework made up of the following four principles:

Emphasise positive things about Us
Emphasise negative things about Them
De-emphasised negative things about Us
De-emphasise positive things about Them. (van Dijk 2000; Ramanathan and Bee Hoon 2015)

Based on this, the study considers the news reports based on their headlines and at a sentence level. It analyses discursive expression of the "us vs them" ideology to postulate on whether, and how, African newspaper discourse on pandemic and epidemics conforms to or challenges a Western orientation of othering African countries. This study seeks to fill the gap that considers how African news media reports on developments on the continent as well as in Western nations concerning the outbreak of diseases.

Methodology

Research Design

This is a multi-case comparative study that considers two publications—*The Sowetan*, a daily broadsheet from South Africa and the *Daily Trust*, a Nigerian daily broadsheet. These newspapers are among the most widely read and distributed in their respective countries (Hassan and Mohd 2018; Cowling 2014). The newspaper articles were published over two 31-day periods: 1 August 2014–31 August 2014 for Ebola and 23 March 2020–23 April 2020 for the COVID-19 pandemic (Coronavirus). These periods were chosen because they marked a significant development in the Ebola and Coronavirus outbreak, respectively, and thus marked growing media coverage in the countries being considered. The first period in 2014 was chosen because it came a week after Nigeria reported its first Ebola-related death, marking the beginning of the Ebola outbreak in the country (World Health Organisation

2014). The second 31-day period, which was in 2020, was chosen because on 23 March 2020, South Africa announced it would be going into a national lockdown to try and mitigate the spread of Coronavirus.

The weakness of case studies as a research approach is that they are very specific to the cases they consider (Houghton et al. 2013). As such, there are limitations to the extent to which they can be generalised. By choosing to focus on these two disease outbreaks, and how these two specific publications reported on them, it cannot conclusively be said that this is generalisable to African newspapers as a whole. Given that the purpose was to undertake a discourse analysis, this limitation is expected since this analysis approach often considers fewer texts to examine them with greater depth.

Data Collection

Online versions of the physical newspapers were obtained from the digital newspaper repository, *Press Reader*. A search was done for the word "Ebola" in the papers' 2014 editions and a search for "Coronavirus" in the 2020 editions. These search terms were used because for each of the respective periods, the study was concerned with only those reports dealing with the particular disease that was topical in that year, namely Ebola in 2014 and Coronavirus in 2020. From this, only those articles that were deemed to be news reports were considered, including sports news. This means that items that were deemed to be opinion pieces, feature articles, profile interviews and the like were excluded. The researcher then read through the remaining articles, and a second set of exclusion was made to remove all of the newspaper reports based on developments in the country where the publication was based. For the *Sowetan*, this meant excluding all articles that were about developments in South Africa. Similarly, for the *Daily Trust*, all the articles that were about Nigeria were excluded. This is because the study was specifically concerned with these newspapers' discourse when reporting on other countries, not domestic developments. After these exclusions were effected, 318 news reports remained, and based on these, the analysis was undertaken.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was primarily qualitative, however, some aspects needed to be quantified to make sense of the discourse that emerged. These included the number of newspaper articles dealing with international developments on each of the outbreaks, the number of publications written by local reporters compared to the number taken from international wire services such as Reuters and AFP, and which countries were mentioned in the news reports. It was important to quantify these aspects because they assisted in gauging how international developments were

prioritised. In the case of who wrote the stories, the quantities revealed how much of the discourse in these newspaper articles originated from local reporters and how much originated from the international wire services. Finally, by quantifying which countries were mentioned the most, one can ascertain where the priority of coverage was and which countries were deemed not to be relevant enough to be reported on.

The qualitative analysis, which is the core of the study, was done using van Dijkean approaches. The starting point of the analysis was to examine the macro-structure of the publications' news discourse by considering the overall themes dealt with as articulated in the headlines. From this, the twelve topics captured in Table 1 were deemed to be the main themes covered by these African newspapers concerning global developments around the Ebola virus in 2014 and Coronavirus in 2020:

While twelve topics emerged from the headlines, to engage in a thorough discussion of the discourse's microstructures, some of these topics were collapsed into others, while some topics were not considered for discussion. Thus all of the stories that dealt with the infection, death, and recovery of individuals; stories that were about individuals who were thought to be infected but were not; as well as stories that quantified the rates of infection and death were collapsed into one topic, namely: "Stories about Infections, Deaths and Recoveries." Likewise, the stories on the economic impact and those about requests for assistance were collapsed into one topic: "Stories about Economic and Financial Implications." Stories that were not analysed are those that dealt with the impact of the virus on individuals because some of these stories did not adequately identify where the individual was from. The analysis did not deal with stories about general information on the virus because these reports were not focused on a specific country and often referenced several countries. The remaining topics therefore are:

- Topic 1: Stories about Infections, Deaths and Recoveries
- Topic 2: Stories about Financial Implications
- Topic 3: Stories about the Domestic Developments in Individual Countries (excluding South Africa when it comes to the *Sowetan* and Nigeria when it comes to the *Daily Trust*)

Based on these three topics, the news discourse's microstructure was considered by looking at how words were used and sentences structured to articulate the "us vs them" perspective.

Findings and Discussion

Figure 1 shows the coverage of both the 2014 Ebola and 2020 Coronavirus out-breaks, news reports that mentioned countries on the African continent dominated the coverage. From a macrostructure perspective, this aspect of the African news-papers' discourse challenges Western newspapers, where Africa is usually given minimal coverage (Bunce 2015).

Table 1 Overall themes based on the article headlines

Topic	Example of headline
Headlines that quantified the death and infection rates from the virus	LIBERIA RECORDS MOST NEW EBOLA DEATHS (*Sowetan*, 20-Aug-14) ITALY REPORTS 602 NEW CORONAVIRUS DEATHS (*Daily Trust*, 24-Mar-20)
Headlines about individuals who had recovered from the virus	US DOCTOR RECOVERS FROM EBOLA (*Sowetan* 22-Aug-14) CORONAVIRUS: BORIS JOHNSON DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL (*Daily Trust*, 13-Apr-20)
Headlines about individuals infected with the virus	NEWLY-WED LAGOS NURSE INFECTED WITH EBOLA (*Daily Trust* 12-Aug-14) FELLAINI IS FIRST CORONAVIRUS CASE IN CHINESE SUPER LEAGUE (*Daily Trust*, 23-Mar-20)
Headlines about individuals who died from the virus	LIBERIAN VICTIM KNEW HE HAD EBOLA BEFORE TRAVELLING TO NIGERIA—REPORT (*Daily Trust*, 8-Aug-14) TOP HIV SCIENTIST, GITA RAMJEE DIES OF CORONAVIRUS (*Daily Trust*, 2-Apr-20)
Headlines about suspected cases of the virus that turned out to be negative	NIGERIAN SUSPECTED OF EBOLA TESTS NEGATIVE IN HONG KONG (*Daily Trust*, 11-Aug-14) BOTSWANA PRESIDENT TESTS NEGATIVE FOR COVID-19 (*Sowetan*, 2-Apr-20)
Headlines about the impact of the virus on the economy	EBOLA, FLIGHTS CANCELLATIONS AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES (*Daily Trust*, 27-Aug-14) AFRICA, ASIA POOR TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF ECONOMIC FALLOUT (*Sowetan*, 1-Apr-20)
Headlines about Western countries providing aid to African countries affected by the virus	UN TO STEP UP ON EBOLA (*Sowetan*, 25-Aug-14) FG SEEKS N2.56TRN FROM WORLD BANK, IMF, OTHERS (*Daily Trust*, 7-Apr-20)
Headlines about the impact of the virus on planned global events	FG RULES OUT HAJJ FOR ANYONE WITH EBOLA VIRUS (*Daily Trust*, 15-Aug-14) TOUR DE FRANCE PUT ON ICE BY VIRAL OUTBREAK (*Sowetan*, 16-Apr-20)
Headlines about the impact of the virus on individuals	JOHN KANI FEELS VIRUS SETBACK (*Sowetan*, 24-Mar-20)

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Topic	Example of headline
	MY EXPERIENCE AT ISOLATION CENTRE—COVID-19 SURVIVOR (*Daily Trust*, 31-Mar-20)

Headlines about the domestic developments in individual countries (excluding South Africa when it comes to the *Sowetan* and Nigeria when it comes to the *Daily Trust*	LIBERIA ORDERS EBOLA VICTIMS' BODIES CREMATED
	    (*Daily Trust*, 5-Aug-14)
	ZIM ROLLS OUT ITS LOCKDOWN
	    (*Sowetan*, 31-Mar-20)

Headlines about general information concerning the virus	THERE'S NO EBOLA CURE, BUT EARLY INTENSIVE TREATMENT BOOSTS SURVIVAL
	    (*Daily Trust*, 7-Aug-14)
	TIPS FOR TAMING THE EBOLA SPREAD
	    (*Daily Trust*, 12-Aug-14)

Headlines about the implications of the virus on the African continent specifically	AFRICA, ASIA POOR TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF ECONOMIC FALLOUT
	    (*Sowetan*, 1-Apr-20)
	WHO WARNS OF WORRYING COVID19 TREND IN AFRICA
	    (*Daily Trust*, 23-Apr-20)
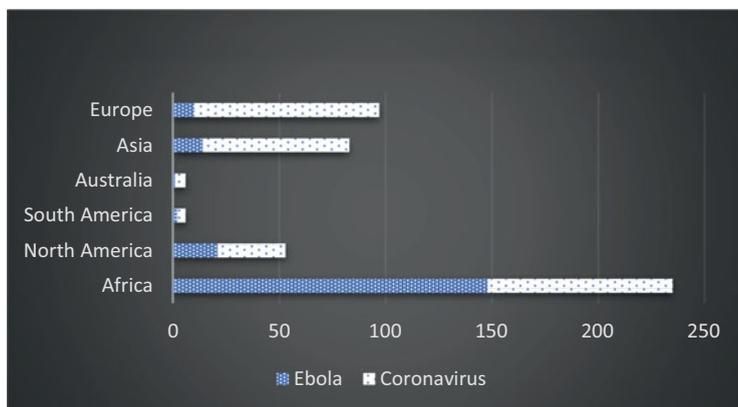
Fig. 1 Number of news reports by continent

Figure 2 shows how the apparent focus on Africa is markedly distorted when one considers the coverage of specific countries. The blue bars, which represent news reports on Ebola, show that other than Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, which were the countries with the highest Ebola infection rates in 2014, the country that these African newspapers reported on the most was America. However, when it comes to the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak, three of the four most reported on countries are Western countries, which incidentally had very high infection and death rates, namely America, Italy and England. The fourth most mentioned country is China,
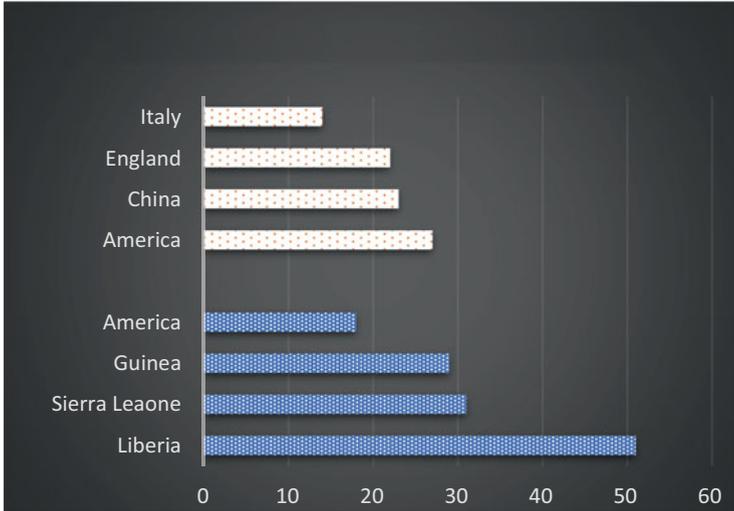
Fig. 2 Number of news stories by country
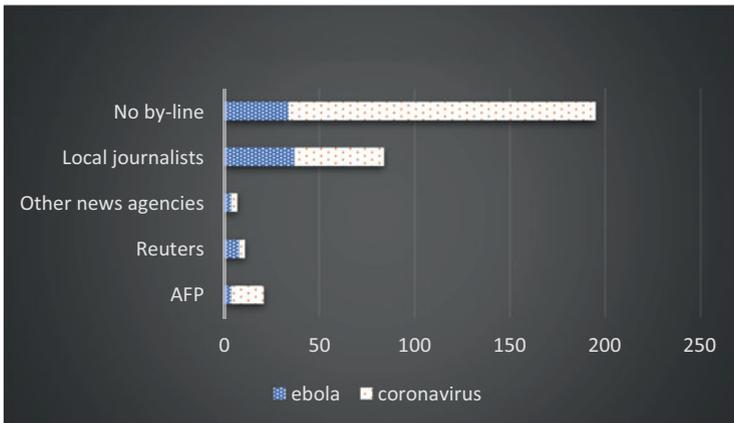
Fig. 3 By-lines of reports

from where the outbreak originated. Thus, while the continent overall received much coverage for the Coronavirus reports, individual African countries did not get focused coverage to the degree that Western countries did.

The final aspect of the data to be quantified is the source of the news reports, as depicted in Fig. 3. Only about a quarter of these news reports were by-lined by local journalists. The rest were from international news wire services such as Reuters and AFP. Two-thirds were not by-lined at all, which suggests that they too were from an international wire service. This information is relevant for discourse analysis because it points to the origins of the news discourse in these African publications,

namely wire services based in Western countries. Of course, newspapers often edit the material from these wire services to make it suitable and relevant for their readers. However, even with the prerogative to alter the texts, the discourse's overall macrostructures were largely intact because the report's topic was unchanged. In the following section, consideration is given to the study's qualitative aspects, namely the news reports' discourse, using the van Dijkean ideological square.

Topic 1: Stories About Infections, Deaths and Recoveries

If one considers how the death rates were reported, it can be seen that in the case of Ebola, which killed mainly Africans, the reporting on the death rate was always accompanied by a stipulation describing the disease as deadly. An example of this is the following reference:

> Fear about a possible spread of the deadly virus... More than 700 people in West Africa have died from Ebola, a haemorrhagic virus with a death rate of up to 90 percent of those infected. (*Daily Trust*, 5 August 2014)

Contrast this to reports on Coronavirus, which, as of February 2021, had killed more than 2 million people. Fatalities in Western countries due to the virus were frequently reported using less descriptive language, merely stating the figure, as shown in this report:

> The United States recorded 1509 deaths related to the Coronavirus pandemic over the last 24 hours... The number of fatalities was similar to the previous days' toll. (*Daily Trust*, 14 April 2020)

One observes an emphasis on the negative impact of Ebola on Africans and a de-emphasis on the fact that thousands of people were dying daily in America due to the Coronavirus pandemic. We also see a de-emphasis on the fact that with Coronavirus, African countries had considerably lower rates of infections and fatalities. These low infection and death rates run counter to the West's overall negative perspective of Africa as a continent ill-equipped to deal with the outbreak of diseases (Jarosz 1992). In the news reports considered, there is no postulating on why the rates were so low for Africans; it is a topic that is altogether ignored and hence de-emphasised.

Looking at news reports on specific individuals who were infected or died due to either of these two viruses, the tendency observed was one that emphasised the humanity and positive traits of affected Western individuals while either anonymising or writing negatively about African individuals. This was particularly evident in news reports on Ebola.

> The first European infected by a strain of Ebola that has killed more than 932 people in West Africa, Spanish priest Miguel Pajares, was stable in Madrid. (*Daily Trust*, 8 August 2014)

Here one sees the infected person is named, and the report goes as far as to tell us he is a priest, a role that carries positive connotations. However, on the other hand,

words like "imposter" and "suspect" are used in reference to the first person who died during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Nigeria, Patrick Sawyer:

> who had direct contact with the Liberian Ebola 'imposter'. (*Daily Trust*, 13 August 2014)

> The phrase "runaway nurse" was used concerning a nurse infected with Ebola but left the quarantine site without the officials' knowledge. (*Daily Trust*, 15 August)

Concerning Coronavirus, most of the deceased named were well-known Africans, and the reports foreground their occupation and sometimes medical history when reporting about their deaths. The reports also frequently made mention of their travel history:

> The Nigeria centre for disease control yesterday confirmed engineer Suleiman Achimugu as the first fatality from COVID-19. The 67-year old Achimugu reportedly died in Abuja after returning to Nigeria following a medical procedure in the United Kingdom. The NCDC said he had underlying medical conditions including multiple myeloma and diabetes and that he was also undergoing chemotherapy. (*Daily Trust*, 24 March 2020)

In several of these reports on Africans who died of Coronavirus, there was explicit mention of the fact that the victim had travelled abroad. This matters when one considers the fact that these overseas countries were the ones with high infection rates. The story did not explicitly say it, but by mentioning the victim's travel history, it implied that the victim could have been infected while abroad. The view that by mentioning the travel history of victims, the insinuation is that the virus was contracted there, is further supported in reports such the one headlined "Rwanda's cases nearly double in a day, Ghana confirms 2nd death," which went on to state: "Of the confirmed cases, 20 are Ghanaians—majority of whom returned home from affected countries, while seven are foreign nationals from Norway, Lebanon, China, France and the UK." The language distanced the African countries concerned to point out that the growing number of cases in these contexts were being brought in by nationals who had been abroad.

> Also, the third person to die of COVID-19 complications in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a respected human rights lawyer and aided of President Felix Tshisekedi. . .He is likely to have contracted the respiratory illness during his trip to France for a medical check-up. (*Daily Trust*, 26 March 2020)

Topic 2: Stories About Economic and Financial Implications

The second topic for consideration was news reports on the economic and financial implication of the epidemics. The issue of the economic impact of the respective viruses was reported in three ways. Firstly, those news stories specifically outlined how African economies would fare in the wake of the virus. This usually expressed a negative outlook, emphasising that because these economies were not strong going into the pandemic, the effects of the disease outbreak, such as lockdowns and a

strained fiscus due to the more significant health needs, meant that they would be more weakened going forward.

> The lockdowns are causing hardship across the world but particularly in impoverished cities in Africa and Asia... "Two weeks is too long. I don't know how we will cope," said (Nigerian) student Abdul Rahim, 25 as he helped his sister sell food from a market stall. Impoverished Zimbabwe also began enforcing a three-week lockdown. (*Sowetan*, 1 April 2020)

Africa's negative economic situation is emphasised by highlighting the accounts of individuals who were already living in poverty before the outbreak and generalising these as "evidence" of these so-called pending hardships. It is most probable that if people who sell food in market stalls in Western nations were also interviewed, they would express the same sort of dread that these African fruit sellers expressed. This suggests that the example used to point to particular hardship in Africa was employed to emphasise a hardship applicable to fruit sellers irrespective of nationality. Conversely, when alluding to Western economies' recovery prospects, the reports quoted forecasts that referred to strengths that these economies possess that would enable them to bounce back. For example, a report in the 24 March edition of the *Daily Trust* put it as follows:

> "Advanced economies are generally in a better position to respond to the crisis," she said in a statement "Georgieva, however warned that many emerging markets and low-income countries face 'significant challenges,' noting there are already capital outflows from poorer nations." (*Daily Trust*, 24 March 2020)

The forecast seemed to emphasise that because these countries' economies were advanced before the crisis, they would be better placed in their responses. No elaboration was provided as to why this view was justified. This was despite the fact that several of these Western countries with advanced economies had longer lockdowns, more infections and deaths, and more millions of people who lost their jobs (World Bank 2020).

Finally, when looking at aid issues around the outbreaks, the reports were overwhelmingly about African countries asking and Western countries giving.

> Health Minister, Onyebuchi Chukwu yesterday said the United States has not yet responded to Nigeria's request for supply of the experimental drug used for treatment of the Ebola virus. (*Daily Trust*, 8 August 2014)

> [South African] President Cyril Ramaphosa called for richer countries to help African nations deal with the economic fallout. (*Daily Trust*, 27 March 2020)

These accounts emphasise the negative perspective of African countries as needy (Jarosz 1992) and the positive perspective of Western countries as having access to resources to assist their own citizens and donate to African countries in need.

Another peculiarity is that there were instances where it would appear that an African country had paid for medical supplies, and yet that was not clear because of how the report had been phrased. An example is a story headlined "COVID-19: fg takes delivery of medical supplies from Turkey" filed on 6 April in the *Daily Trust*. The first few lines read:

> The federal government at the weekend took delivery of first batch of medical supplies to contain the spread of Coronavirus pandemic and for treatment of COVID-19 patients. . .It was learnt that the flight left Nigeria early Saturday for the seven-hour flight to Turkey, lifted supplies and returned to Nigeria before midnight. (*Daily Trust*, 6 April 2020)

The article described the flight details without clearly spelling out that the Nigerian government procured these supplies. Since "from Turkey" was emphasised in the headline, the headline could be read as implying that Turkey donated these supplies. Only at the end of the article, when it says, "The Chief Operating Officer of Air Peace, Toyin Olajide, commended the federal government for its efforts to combat the Coronavirus disease," is there a suggestion that the government bought these supplies.

Topic 3: Stories About How Individual Countries Responded to the Virus (Excluding South Africa When It Comes to the Sowetan *and Nigeria When It Comes to the* Daily Trust)

The final category of stories to be considered is those that reported how individual countries responded to the respective disease outbreaks. These stories made up the bulk of the coverage for reports filed about Ebola and the Coronavirus. Some of the developments highlighted under this topic include coverage of social unrest, such as protests as a result of the disease outbreak:

PROTESTS IN EBOLA-HIT LIBERIA—*Sowetan*, 5 August 2014;
S/LEAONE LAW MAKES HIDING EBOLA PATIENTS ILLEGAL—*Daily Trust*, 25 August 2014;
ITALY TO EXTEND ITS NATIONAL LOCKDOWN—*Sowetan*, 30 March 2020;
COVID-19: COURTS START TRIAL BY VIDEO—*Daily Trust*, 10 April 2020.

There were many similarities in the coverage of domestic developments in Western and African countries, with the reports focusing on lockdown-related measures such as the implementation of lockdowns, laws that mandated mask-wearing and the evacuations of citizens. These reports employed very similar discourses, which confirmed that in these respects, the response globally had followed a similar approach in response to the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak. Where differences were observed was in the fact that considerably more attention was given to the social unrest that ensued in African countries. Some of the headlines about this were:

TUNISIA ORDERS ARMY INTO STREETS TO ENFORCE LOCKDOWN—*Daily Trust*, 24 March 2020;
BOY SHOT DEAD AS VIRUS CURFEW ENFORCED—*Daily Trust*, 1 April 2020;
VIRUS QUARANTINE SPARKS VIOLENCE—*Sowetan*, 22 August 2020.

There were no reports about the social discord that occured in America and Europe due to citizens not complying with the mandate measures, even though one is aware that there were public demonstrations in this regard. Not writing about these clashes in Western countries created the impression to readers that this social discord was unique to Africa.

For political developments, what one observed was that there was a greater likelihood to highlight individual politicians if they were American or European and a tendency to write generally about political developments in Africa. Examples of the headlines of stories about individual European and American politicians included:

PM ORBAN GETS SWEEPING POWERS TO TACKLE CORONAVIRUS—*Daily Trust*, 31 March 2020;
TRUMP TO DEPLOY NATIONAL GUARD TO FIGHT VIRUS—*Daily Trust*, 24 March 2020;
TRUDEAU WANTS TO RECALL MPS TO BACK MASSIVE CORONAVIRUS AID—*Daily Trust*, March 2020;
HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE: GOVT AGREES TO RELEASE DRUG AFTER TRUMP THREAT—*Daily Trust*, 8 April 2020.

In discourse analysis, who is named and who is anonymised is an important indicator of where power and privilege lie (Foucault 2019). As Rajagopalan (2003, p. 82) argues, "using names and surnames in politics is the first step toward media swaying public opinion either for or against reported personalities and events." In this case, naming these Western leaders gave them a greater sense of agency than African leaders who were not named. Their actions were attributed to them as individuals, whereas African leaders' actions were attributed to their governments. They thus came across as more powerful, positively emphasising their ability to lead. The literature on discourse and naming further argues that this act of naming and anonymising served a semantic function. Guimarães (2003, p. 54) states: "To name something . . . is to give it historical existence. It is not by chance how quickly the date of September 11, 2001 moved into the category of an event name."

Similarly, in the wake of the Coronavirus, the names Trump and Trudeau came to mean something, and they represented Western nations' responses to the pandemic. African leaders, however, were not named. This choice emphasised the power that individual Western leaders wielded while de-emphasising the power of African leaders.

Based on the analysis of these three topics, Table 2 visually categorises the coverage using van Dijk's ideological square framework. It shows that in their reports on European countries and the United States of America, the discourse's macro- and microstructures emphasised these nations' positive features and de-emphasised the negative ones. Conversely, concerning African countries, there was a tendency to de-emphasise the positive while emphasising negative aspects. They perpetuated the "us vs them" ideology that van Dijk's framework lays out by engaging in the same type of "othering" discourse used by Western newspapers when reporting disease outbreaks in Africa (Washer 2004). The fact that this type of discourse was used across two different outbreaks and by newspapers from two

Table 2 Fames in Western media

Emphasising positive ("us")	De-emphasising positive ("them")
Western countries were associated with providing aid Western countries were portrayed as having a cure Reporting that focused on Western countries coming out of lockdown Emphasising the agency of individual Western leaders	Reports on ceasefires being declared and observed by warring groups in reverence of a WHO request Focus on the number of people being evacuated from African countries even though the number of infections was less than Western countries in the case of Ebola Repeated warnings for Africa to brace itself for worse to come, even though it managed much better than its Western counterparts There was not much focus on easing and opening African economies, even though there was quite a lot of coverage on economies closing A death rate of around 90% was often referenced concerning the 2014 Ebola outbreak, even though in that particular rate, the rate was around 60%
De-emphasising negative ("us")	Emphasising negative ("us")
Westerners who died of Ebola were reported on in glowing terms Death in Western countries were reported on in abstract terms using mainly figures America defunded WHO Minimal reference to the deadly nature of Coronavirus and no reference to the way it killed people Very little focus on the impact of the pandemic on Western countries	Africans were portrayed as begging for aid Africans were portrayed as begging for medication Reports focused on protests and hospitals being destroyed Graphic accounts of Ebola and repeated reference to it as a deadly disease in the context of it having been prevalent in African countries More stories on individuals who died from the virus from African countries More stories on the impact of the pandemic on the economies of African countries

different African countries suggests that this perspective was not an isolated phenomenon. However, considering two newspapers only means that one cannot generalise this as a trend across African publications and points to future study areas where a more extensive comparative study can consider differences and similarities.

The prevalence of news reports from wire services such as Reuters and AFP was probably a significant contributor to the use of discourse that advanced the "us vs them" ideology. The reports might have been featured in African newspapers, and as this study revealed, might even have centred developments in Africa by the sheer number of reports on African countries. However, the discourse's macro- and microstructures show that the writers still espoused a worldview of Africa as the "dark continent." What was striking is that in the early stages of the global Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, African countries were doing a much better job of dealing with the outbreak, based on the infection and fatality rates, and the decisiveness with which governments acted when striving to mitigate the spread and economic ramifications of the virus. However, this narrative did not come through in these reports.

Instead, they focused on what was yet to come, based on predictions rooted in a view of African countries as impoverished and needy. This points to a need for African newspapers to find new ways of sourcing news reports on developments on the continent, rather than relying primarily on Western news wire services if they are to challenge the discourse that portrays the continent as one prone to death, disaster, disease and despair.

Secondly, it could be that deeply engrained in journalistic discourse is a perspective that normalises disparaging news reports on Africa. One such practice is the inclination to name Western leaders while anonymising African leaders. As discussed, newspapers gave American and European leaders agency while portraying African leaders as responders. Similarly, American and European victims of these diseases were reported using affirming and empowering discourse, while African victims were anonymised.

Conclusion

These findings suggest that it is not enough for African newspapers to emphasise reporting on the continent by ensuring breadth of coverage. Considering the number of relevant news reports, these publications appeared to prioritise developments on the African continent over those happening on the continents of Europe, America and Australia (Fig. 1). However, upon examining the number of reports on developments within individual African countries compared to developments in individual Western countries, Western countries appeared to get disproportionate coverage (Fig. 2). This supports a view that issues that affect Western countries tend to receive more in-depth news reporting, while reports on African countries are scant and often lack context (Chouliaraki 2008). This, in turn, suggest that even when allowed to address the paucity in coverage on African issues, African newspapers are inclined to prioritise stories on developments in Western countries. Linked to this, many of these reports had by-lines that suggested that they are from Western news wire services and did not necessarily originate from journalists based in Africa (Fig. 3). According to Strentz (1992), this would explain why the discourse "others" African countries, because the people who define news stories play a critical role in shaping and framing the information reported, and in this case, they were Westerners who still viewed Africa as the "dark continent" (Jarosz 1992).

When it comes to the findings related to the discourse used in these news reports, what emerges is that both the macro- and microstructures of the language perpetuate the "us vs them" ideology, where the discourses used in these publications exhibits negative self-representation of the African continent and positive other-representation of Western countries, in the same way as Western newspapers. Examples of positive other-representation of Western countries during the Coronavirus pandemic included reports that emphasised the agency of individual Western leaders and stories that focused on Western countries that were coming out of lockdown due to reduced infection and death rates. This kind of reporting was not

employed when reporting on African countries. During the Ebola pandemic, the stories often employed favourable terms when reporting on Westerners who died of the disease and negative ones, including "Liberian Ebola imposter" when referencing affected Africans. The fact that African countries kept deaths and infections during the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak to a minimum was de-emphasised. Instead, the emphasis was on the donations Western countries were making to African countries. Concerning the economic implications of the Coronavirus outbreak, the reports appear to have emphasised pessimistic forecasts on how African countries would be hard hit and very little was said about Western countries which suffered, comparably, more significant losses due to their numbers of the infected. The reports seem to have adopted a view that because Africa has been typically associated with poverty and lack, such a status quo will persist (World Bank 2020). Finally, when it comes to domestic developments in different countries, the emphasis was on what was going right in Western countries and what was going wrong in African countries. An example was that there were no news reports on the public outcry against government lockdown in Western nations, while there were several such reports about African countries.

This empirical study used van Dijk's ideological square framework to undertake a discourse analysis on how two African newspapers reported on the outbreak of two pandemics. The study aimed to analyse how these publications engaged in self-representation of African countries and other-representation of Western countries. As with other research on news stories about health matters, the study confirms that these reports are ideologically laden (Dudo et al. 2007; Luisi et al. 2018; Davis and Davina 2020). Follow-up studies need to be undertaken to discuss why these reports perpetuated the "us vs them" ideology that Western newspapers employed when reporting disease in Africa. Further studies should also be undertaken to analyse whether this phenomenon occurred only in Africa or found applicability in other developing contexts.

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Citizen Journalism and Health Communication in Pandemics' Prevention and Control

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Abstract Citizen journalism has introduced new ways of communicating and engaging the public. It has further created a shift in technology that enabled individuals to create and access more news faster than before. Thus, communicating health crisis no longer depends on the use of conventional media. The disruption in the communication landscape means that more people are now more conversant with the use of social media to create or access news. Citizen journalism has unlocked the information gateway and made pandemic reporting more viral and instantaneous, although with some shortcomings. Thus, news about the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic is readily available on the Internet and social media. This chapter, therefore, examines the impact of citizen journalism and health communication in pandemics' prevention and control. Underpinned by the Health Belief Model and Theory of Reasoned Action, the chapter offers an insight into how citizen journalism could be effectively employed to communicate the prevention and control of pandemics. Relevant literature was systematically reviewed, and it shows that access to pandemic messages no longer follows the conventional process of news making and consumption as many people now actively albeit, unprofessionally, participate in these processes. Howbeit, the dangers of such unprofessional practice are admitted.

Keywords Citizen journalism · Health communication · Pandemics · Prevention · Control · COVID-19

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Introduction

Communication plays critical roles during crises situations. The Internet and technology being the key enablers of communication in this digital age have opened up the communication space and by extension, decentralised, and democratised the space for more citizens' engagements and interactions. The advancements in the Internet and communication technologies in particular have empowered people to become information vendors. At disease onsets, there are usually high levels of uncertainties and vagueness around the facts about the outbreak (Allgaier and Svalastog 2015). In such situations, people naturally seek information that will ameliorate their anxieties and clear confusion on the severity of the disease or otherwise and to devise the best possible survival strategies. Consequently, examining the nexus of Citizen Journalism and Health Communication during pandemics such as the COVID-19 is very expedient in today's information proliferation and pervasiveness. This chapter, therefore, attempts to examine the roles of citizen journalism in communicating health messages that are appropriate in reducing hysteria and increasing the opportunities for possible control and prevention of pandemics. The chapter is designed to raise important discourses on journalism, health communication, and disease control; the interface of Citizen Journalism and Health Communication, and recognise the relationship as both functional and dysfunctional; the interplay of Citizen Journalism and communication during pandemics within some theoretical and practical contexts; and the importance of effectively applying the tenets of Citizen Journalism in managing health crises.

The Concept of Citizen Journalism: What Is Journalism?

There is no generally acceptable definition of the term "journalism". However, as Ugbo (2020) explains, "despite the lexical differences in definition, journalism as a concept cannot be said to be fluid because there is a convergence in the meaning ascribed to it" (61). From the etymological perspective, the word 'journalism' is derived from the Latin word "diurnalis" which means "daily register or a diary"—a book that documents daily events. Ugbo (2020) further opines that journalism could be likened to the daily bookkeeping practice undertaken by individuals in businesses. Each daily transaction is carefully recorded, and this is the same way the business of journalism as a profession operates. Therefore, journalism is the activity of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information using the mass media (Chinedu-Okeke and Uzochukwu 2020). "As a profession, daily events are deliberately sourced, processed, and disseminated to the general public to cater to their informational needs or serve other purposes as may be intended or otherwise" (Ugbo 2020, p. 61). In the words of Chandler and Munday (2019), journalism is an occupation or the process of gathering, writing, editing, reporting, photographing or broadcasting of current events on a particular subject to a wider audience through the

print, broadcast, or digital media. Thus, there is journalism for the print (newspaper, magazine), broadcast (radio, television, and cinema), or new media (Internet-based websites, blogs, phones, and now, social media).

Journalism can be distinguished from other reporting activities through different characteristics and principles. Whether broadcast or print, the journalist follows the same principles (timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequence, oddity, and human interest) and is guided by the same determinants/values (objectivity, accuracy, balance, currency, brevity, conciseness, and clarity) in gathering news materials. What makes one form of journalism different from another is determined by their adaptation of the principles to reflect the specific features of a particular medium in the reporting of an event (Subin 2015).

In recent times, the proliferation of the Internet and smartphones has revolutionised and redefined the scope and practice of journalism all over the world (Gilardi 2016). This change has created a shift in the creation and consumption of media messages, as people increasingly create and consume news through e-readers, smartphones, and other personal information technological devices, as opposed to the traditional forms via the newspapers, magazines, radios, or television.

Forms of Journalism

Journalism in this context is classified according to the media of communication. They are:

Print journalism: This is the form of journalism that is presented in print format. It could be a news report in form of written text or photograph that has been edited, packaged, and published in newspapers and magazines. The publication could be daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or periodical. According to the normative theories of the press, print journalism is meant to offer objective news and pluralistic opinions related to current social events. However, the significant decrease in the circulation of hard copies of newspapers and magazines evidently shows that people presently read the print version of newspapers and magazines less than in the past (Zeng et al. 2019).

Broadcast journalism: It is the field of news that disseminates its messages through the broadcast or electronic media like radio, television, and the World Wide Web using on-air, cable, and Internet devices. Such media disperse pictures (static and moving), visual text, and sounds. Broadcast journalism is the gathering and reporting of news events to the public via radio or television. The advent of the Internet has irrevocably changed the broadcast journalism practice all over the world (Taylor 2014).

Online journalism: Online journalism also known as digital journalism is a trendy form of journalism where news stories are disseminated via news websites and other Internet-enabled platforms. The essential contents of online journalism are presented in the form of text, audio, video, or interactive form, and disseminated through information and communication technologies (Jemielniak and Przegalinska 2020).

Using the new media has become a part of daily life especially for teenagers and youths. This recent form of journalism has democratised the process of journalism which was previously controlled by the traditional mass media (Wall 2015). News content of online journalism is mostly contributed by citizens on user-generated content sites, thus the emergence of citizen journalism that encourages the active participation of people who are not trained journalists or professionals in the process of creating and disseminating information.

Citizen Journalism Defined

The widespread and frequent use of social media has drastically changed the nature of journalistic reporting, resulting in the emergence of a new form of journalism known as "citizen journalism". Citizen journalism, also referred to as participatory journalism, is an "alternative and activist" (Radsch 2013, p. 2) form of journalism where citizens or general public play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news or information (Wall 2015).

The underlying principle of citizen journalism is that ordinary people, who are not professionals, can be the main creators and distributors of news contents (Seong-Jae 2016). The advent of new media, such as online news websites and social networking sites, in addition to the increasing popularity of smartphones, has made citizen journalism more viable across the globe (Gilardi 2016). Citizen journalism, which introduced new ways of communicating and engaging the public, has created a shift in technology that enables individuals to create and access more news than before and at a faster rate (Zeng et al. 2019). Citizens frequently report breaking news more quickly than professional reporters. Citizen journalists may be activists within the communities they write about, but there are some criticisms (as would be discussed in subsequent sections of this paper) from professional journalists that accused proponents of citizen journalism of abandoning the primary goals of objectivity and accuracy in reporting thereby lacking in quality and content (Seong-Jae 2016).

Enablers of Citizen Journalism

As stated earlier, the advent of the Internet and rapid advancement in technologies stirred up a paradigm shift in the conventional journalistic styles of news sourcing, reporting, and general content creation. These shifts expanded the available information production and flow channels and empowered citizens with the slightest knowledge of technology to create their own content. Thus, the Internet and the associated media are the primary enablers of citizen journalism. Specifically, social networking platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, WeChat, and WhatsApp encourage and facilitate citizens' engagements with other citizens who participate in creating news content through writing,

commenting, liking, linking, and sharing of such information. The widespread and frequent use of social media in recent years has created a number of opportunities and challenges for *health* and risk *communication*. There are many ways to use social media in healthcare, including promoting awareness, encouraging patient engagement, and sharing accurate health messages. Some of these enablers are discussed below:

Facebook as a social network site has proved a critical enabler of citizen journalism in all ramifications. It is among the most popular social networking sites (Miller 2019; Facebook Reports First Quarter 2021 Results; Hu 2016) with unlimited flexibility for content creation and dissemination of different forms of communication text (audio-visual and written texts). All it takes is access to the Internet and Internet-enabled devices for citizens to create profiles and begin an unfettered use of the platform as desired. The flexible feature of Facebook has empowered people to build a community and bring the world closer together. However, the unlimited access that Facebook provides offers functional and dysfunctional opportunities especially in moments of uncertainties such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the positive side, people get to report "on-the-spot" happenings and most often set agenda for reportage for the mainstream media. On the flip side, the swiftness of information dissemination and the gateless nature of the platform has made it one of the conduits for fake news and misinformation flow as most information circulated is uncensored and/or unverified. In recent times, Facebook launched certain algorithms to detect and filter out false or misleading content (Bakshy et al. 2015).

YouTube is another key enabler of citizen journalism. It is a social networking site that supports the sharing of videos (Allgaier 2019). The popularity of YouTube is explained by the active engagement of citizens on the platform. According to BBC News (2016), YouTube content creators globally upload over 100 h of content per minute and its users watch more than one billion hours of videos each day. Like Facebook, YouTube offers unfettered access to citizens to disseminate and consume video content within the privacy policy and terms of service regulating the platform. The enormous popularity of *YouTube* makes it a choice tool for nearly every healthcare marketing plan (Gilliland 2018). Since the outbreak of COVID-19, YouTube has remained a veritable platform where health professionals share information and citizens' access authoritative health and news information relevant to the pandemic.

Weblogs commonly referred to as "blog" is an online information website. It is a personal online space where citizens discuss subjects of common interest (Blood 2000). It is also an important enabler of citizen journalism. The emergence and growth of blogs in the late 1990s coincided with the advent of web publishing tools that facilitated the posting of content by non-technical or professional users who may not necessarily be computer or technologically savvy (Mutum and Wang 2010). Blogs are valuable platforms that serve a range of surveillance functions through the activities of ordinary citizens. As such, people rely on blogs for a range of information including disease outbreaks as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to being used to follow illness outbreaks in real-time, blogs and microblogs

have offered a means for understanding public perceptions of health and risk-related issues including medical controversies (Stephen 2017).

Twitter is a popular social networking site that allows users to disseminate information in 140 characters of text called tweets (Kim and Valente 2021). Its primary purpose is to connect and allow people share their thoughts with a large audience. However, the nature of Twitter provides the public with a way to ask questions directly, allowing public health professionals to provide information on a certain health issue.

Instagram is a free mobile check-in application for online photo-sharing and social networking. Instagram allows users to edit and upload photos and short videos through a mobile app. The number of SNS posts in photo form has been dramatically increased (Kim and Kim 2020). Public health authorities are not the exception, and this study explored the interaction of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), one of the representative public health authorities in Nigeria, with the public through photos on Instagram.

The Concept of Health Communication

The term "health communication" combines two concepts, "health" and "communication". On the one hand, "Health" in its simplest form is the general state of well-being of the body. "Communication" on the other hand, is the exchange of information, ideas, opinions, values, etc. between individuals or groups. Health communication, going by the definitions, connotes the idea of exchanging information, ideas, opinions, values, etc. that are relevant to health (Schiavo 2014; The Rural Health Information Hub 2018). In other words, it involves producing, packaging, and disseminating health information that will enable individuals, groups, and communities to develop the requisite knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and behaviours for a positive healthy living. The Rural Health Information Hub (2018) explains that health communication is a domain of communication and health care processes that are designed to guide, mold, and influence individuals or communities to make informed health decisions that improve their health and living conditions. As a communicative act, health communication employs the various conventional channels of communication to reach out to the intended audience. Health communication in essence is enabled by the channels of mass communication. Thus, it could be delivered through print or written channels such as posters, newspapers, magazines, billboards, pamphlets, handbills, brochures, etc. It could also be delivered through oral/verbal means including oral face-to-face contact, radio and television campaigns or jingles and via other electronic means including the Internet and social media and, or a combination of community-based approach and social marketing (Holmes 2008). The fundamental intent of health communication is to design health messages that empower and inspire people to make choices rooted in sound knowledge and result in positive changes in health behaviours and attitudes. The Rural Health Information Hub (2018) explains that health communication instils the

desired changes in individual and community health by creating such knowledge and awareness that increase people's risk perception; reinforce acceptable positive behaviours; influence social norms; increase the level of available support and health services; and empower individuals to adopt health behaviours that improve their health conditions.

Health communication reinforces the link between Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) of behavioural change communication. In other words, individuals, through such communication, are made more knowledgeable about certain health conditions and risk behaviours that must be watched for their safety and the safety of the entire community. Such knowledge building inspires and motivates individuals to develop positive attitudes that translate into the desired health practices for their wellbeing. Hence, Schiavo (2014, p. 5) explains that health communication aims to "engage, empower, and influence individuals and communities" to adopt a positive attitude to health. It is vital in communicating issues around disease prevention, control, and general wellbeing. To this end, health communication has generally and majorly focused on areas of disease prevention and control through health promotion. It predominantly aims at awareness creation for the adoption of healthy behavioural practices and to engender possible positive attitudinal changes. It is important to note that health communication is all encompassing as it touches on all concerned critical stakeholders in the health venture. As such, it is a two-way symmetrical approach to communication where all stakeholders are equal partners in the communicative acts leading to health. Schiavo (2014) maintains that health communication programme assumes a cyclical dimension when involving the people (target group), policymakers and professionals, and the healthcare providers. While it places responsibility on the people to adopt and sustain healthy behaviours, it behooves the policymakers and professionals to make and implement new policies and practices according to the exigencies of the moment, and health care providers to become more sensitive and develop the cultural competence needed in the culturally variant health service delivery systems.

Health Communication in Disease Outbreak and Prevention

Risk perception and general attitudes towards disease outbreak are largely influenced by belief systems and some local dynamics (Infanti et al. 2013; Schiavo 2014), especially in African settings (Ali 2020). As hinted earlier, these belief systems interfere with any planned health intervention programmes towards controlling or preventing outbreaks. Unarguably, emerging infectious diseases bring about critical dynamics in health behaviours and practices. At the stage of disease outbreak, there is usually an alteration in the status quo around the interpersonal relationship and certain cultural practices such as was experienced in the COVID-19 "new normal". In such circumstances, there is a heightened tension, hysteria, and confusion as was witnessed during the Ebola outbreaks particularly in Nigeria (Allgaier and Svalastog 2015). Part of the measures often deployed towards controlling and preventing the

infectious disease is communication that helps to provide clear information about the disease. However, as noted by Holmes (2008), communication experts and health care providers largely focus on one-way transmission of information relating to the disease without necessarily taking into cognizance the group and individual dynamics that at the same time influence individual's or groups' risk perception. Significantly, scholars have noted that individuals that make up the communities are not homogenous and must be approached as such (Kreuter and McClure 2004; Allgaier and Svalastog 2015). Each individual approaches the communicated messages with their unique characteristics from a personal cultural background, experiences, and disposition. These constitute what Allgaier and Svalastog (2015) described as "local context". Culture in particular goes a long way in shaping individual's and group's health behaviour and practices (Kreuter and McClure 2004). Hence, health communication must be tailored to factor in these contextual nuances. It must be target-oriented and designed in a way that it would respond to local contexts.

Effective health communication, therefore, needs to consider the nuances that touch on the implicit assumptions about the nature of the disease (which usually emanate from individual personal characteristics) and the best strategies towards addressing them. Although conspiracy theorists come up with many unscientific claims about the sources of emerging infections such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Banko 2020), the ability of the public to accept or reject such claims can be significantly shaped by the dominant narratives across various media channels. As many people surf the Internet for news, citizen journalism can capitalise on the dwindling fortunes of the legacy media to establish itself as the preferred destination by churning out only the real news that promotes public's belief in health systems. This would be further explained theoretically in the next section. Using the Nigerian example within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are public assumptions that are embedded in culture, politics, and religion. One of such assumptions is that the virus is not harmful to Africans as it cannot thrive under the African hot weather. Others perceived it as a "whiteman's" invention—Bioweapon (Banko 2020)—to control the teeming Nigerian/Black population, and in other instances, for economic gains—that is, to market vaccines that have already been produced as an antidote to the "laboratory invention". These assumptions implicitly blurred the line of accurate epidemiological knowledge that could unmask the mystery of the virus for a more effective treatment, prevention, and control. The assumptions at the same time diminished the people's risk perceptions and limited the level of compliance to the recommended safety measures. Situations like this could offer a better explanation for cases of defiance and resistance from the public like the low-vaccine uptake (Abraham 2011). The attitude of the Muslim-dominated Northern Nigerians towards polio and general vaccinations, for instance, exemplifies this point. However, the allegations of criminal conspiracies between politicians, health agencies, and the pharmaceutical companies to create and sustain disease outbreak and spread for economic gains could also be clear indications or signs of communication gaps or failures (Abraham 2011).

The most effective application of health communication in disease prevention and control adopts the community-centred prevention approach undertaken at the

individual, group, organisational, community, and multiple levels (Schiavo 2014; Infanti et al. 2013). Such disease preventive and control measures that are emphasised for health promotion include: adequate health hygiene (regular hand washing), regular physical exercise, maintaining healthy weight, good nutrition, responsible sexual behaviour, etc. To effectively communicate these measures requires good communication skills (Schiavo 2014). This is expedient because effective health communication bridges the gap between expected and achieved quality in health care with the concerned stakeholders including the government, health caregivers, patients and their families, and health care organisations.

Theories of Health Communication: A Focus on the Health Belief Model and Theory of Reasoned Action

There are several relevant theories that have been postulated to interpret health communication scenarios. They include, but are not limited to the Health Belief Model (HBM), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Diffusion of Innovations, Social Cognitive, and Social Learning theories (Jones et al. 2015; Marco 2010). For the purpose of this chapter, we are focusing on HBM and TRA which were considered more appropriate to this discourse. The HBM postulates that individuals are more likely

> to take action to prevent illness if they regard themselves as susceptible to a condition (perceived susceptibility), if they believe it would have potentially serious consequences (perceived severity), if they believe that a particular course of action available to them would reduce the susceptibility or severity or lead to other positive outcomes (perceived benefits), and if they perceive few negative attributes related to the health action (perceived barriers). (Jones et al. 2015, p. 566)

Health Belief Model also posits that certain cues, such as a person's unique local dynamics, can influence the final action such a person takes (Champion and Skinner 2008). The cues that call one to action can be situated within one's internal or external environment, and they can range from experiencing symptoms of the illness (virus) to an individual's exposure to awareness campaigns aimed at managing it (Bish and Michie 2010).

Due to some traces of ambiguity that tend to interrogate its applicability, scholars have called for variable ordering of the HBM (Jones et al. 2015). In the first instance, the variables might have comparable impacts on health outcomes. Through the HBM constructs, messages are assumed to shape human behaviour through one or more channels. In the context of this discourse, these channels represent the Internet and social media platforms through which citizen journalists communicate health crises. The HBM has also been referred to as parallel mediation (Jones et al. 2015) which can be conceptualised in terms of how the independent variable such as exposure to COVID-19 campaign) impacts on the dependent variable (e.g., people's behaviour towards vaccines/facemasks/sanitiser/handwashing/social distancing).

The second variable ordering assumes that the HBM might function as a causal chain or what Hayes (2012) described as serial mediation. Expanding this, Jones et al. (2015) noted for instance, that exposure to a campaign may possibly raise self-efficacy, while self-efficacy can influence the perceived barriers to the success of such campaign. In turn, the perceived barriers may likely predict people's behaviour or attitude towards the campaign. That is, *campaign exposure → self-efficacy → perceived barriers → behaviour* (Hayes 2012; Jones et al. 2015).

The third variable is the moderated mediation model which posits that an aspect of the HBM constructs serves as a moderator influencing others (Hayes 2012). In line with this, Champion and Skinner (2008) contend that the supposed threat and perceived severity could actually moderate the effects of other variables. Specifically, Champion and Skinner (2008) argued that increased severity is needed before susceptibility can significantly predict human behaviour. They further proposed that "perceived benefits" and "perceived barriers" might better predict behaviour when threat perception is higher. The foregoing has demonstrated the relevance of HBM to this discourse. As such this chapter draws on what works, by extending this discourse to assessing the critical roles of citizen journalism in the COVID-19 health crisis and what this portends for communicating health crisis in the future.

Indeed, a theoretical enquiry into this subject matter (see Nah et al. 2017) has found that citizen journalism has positive impacts on people's civic participation, which in the instance of this discourse can be measured via their adherence to health and safety protocols put in place to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. This understanding can be interpreted by behavioural change models, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which suggests that "improvements to attitudes and perceptions, in this case through the use of. . .citizen journalism, will result in a change of behaviour" (Nah et al. 2017, p. 65).

The main aim of TRA is to clarify the connections between attitude and behavioural intention. Elaborating on the significance of this theory, Marco (2010) insisted that behavioural intention is associated with beliefs. Put more succinctly, Marco argues that behavioural changes may likely emerge due to changes in attitude and/or subjective norms about such mannerism. In health communication milieu, citizen journalism can intervene in mobilising the citizenry into taking more precautionary measures against pandemic. Modifying human behaviours, especially those that stem from cultural norms and belief systems can be a herculean task. Nonetheless, citizen journalism can constructively contribute to making the people more conscious of their health and how to protect others by ensuring that scientifically-proven facts about the pandemic dominate the narratives.

Impacts of Citizen Journalism on Pandemic Control and Prevention

For emphasis, the concept of citizen journalism simply describes how ordinary people play "an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and

disseminating news and information" through, especially, the social media platforms (Bowman and Willis 2003, p. 9). In social media platforms, information sharing and opinions are democratised. This democratisation of the communication platforms gives voices to the voiceless and creates an avenue for freedom of expression; something that is missing in the mainstream media where only those with privileged affordances dominate the communication space.

Studies into the relationship between citizen journalism and health communication are by all indications sparse; however, they make strong contribution to scholarship. For instance, Bella (2011) extensively explored citizen journalism practice aimed at increasing citizens' response to humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of the Sudan peninsula. The study established a strong correlation for the use of citizen journalism for creating awareness and promoting people's response to humanitarian crisis that engulfed the region. Nah et al. (2017) also found that citizen journalism has a direct effect on civic participation and people's behavioural intentions using the theory of reasoned action. In the context of this discourse, citizen journalism is considered as a mobilisation tool for the masses to be aware of the dangers of health crisis and to take action in order to protect themselves and others. This is because citizen journalism can influence people's attitudes and perceptions.

Critics would quickly point at the negative impacts of citizen journalism in spreading falsehood during health crises which often result in unintended negative health impacts (Chou et al. 2009). Unarguably, false information peddled by citizen journalists could create more hysteria, cause panic purchases, and induce the gullible public to undertake unprescribed and undiagnosed medical regimens (Liu et al. 2020). In fact, such "informational virus" as Allgaier and Svalastog (2015, p. 497) described it, keep "mutating, multiplying, and adapting to new contexts" and interferes with the fight against the actual "biological viruses". Indeed, during the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Director-General of WHO, Tedros Ghebreyesus warned that "we're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic"—a new concept that describes the excessive spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about the virus (Ogbodo et al. 2020). Moyo (2009) elaborates on this fact by maintaining that "in a [health] crisis situation. . ., citizen journalism could worsen things by spreading untruths and half-truths which could lead to panic and disorder" (p. 12). This was particularly the case during the Ebola health crisis in 2014 when fake news peddlers pushed many to drink and/or bathe with salt as a preventive measure against the virus in Nigeria. This resulted in some health complications for many before they realised it was fake news. The same has been the case since the COVID-19 outbreak which has seen a spike in online fake news. There were instances of fake news in Nigeria such as the one that linked COVID-19 to a Western creation with the sinister intention to downsize the African population. This was also the general assumption about HIV/AIDS as was propagated in social media. Social media was also used to impress it upon Nigerians in particular that COVID-19 could not survive under hot weather like the African weather or that Africans have stronger body immunity that is resistant to such viruses. This largely accounted for the general belief by some top politicians and ordinary Nigerians that there is no COVID-19 in Nigeria, and by the time of this research, there was limited

opportunity and support for COVID-19 testing in Nigerian states like Benue, Cross-River, and Kogi (Onyeji 2020). While fake news is created or promoted mainly by bloggers in order to generate traffic on their sites, the effects can be incalculable in the long run if citizen journalists fail to use their channels more constructively.

However, about the functional impact of citizen journalism, useful warning signs were propagated by citizen journalists through social media and the Internet; here lies the forewarning function of citizen journalists (Liu et al. 2020). This forewarning function plays a critical role in raising an alert about dangers before they are even reported by the mainstream media. As noted by scholars (Allgaier and Svalastog 2015; Liu et al. 2020), there is usually a time lag between event development and the actual reporting arising from the inherent journalistic bureaucracy (including the gatekeeping processes) which requires the journalists and the media at large to decide a newsworthy event to be reported, investigate the event, source all the relevant information, authenticate for accuracy before finally reporting (Liu et al. 2020). The gateless nature of the Internet and social media has made citizen journalism spontaneous and has particularly enabled the widespread preventive measures against emerging infectious diseases including the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, during the Ebola outbreak in parts of Africa in 2014, news about the virus spread on social media through the help of citizen journalists, leaving many with useful tips about how to protect themselves against the pandemic. User-Generated-Content (UGC) emerged from such online debates/campaigns about the virus and this equally served as a platform for monitoring audience feedback. According to Mano and Milton (2016), audience feedback is a critical component of citizen journalism and all are equal participants in the communication contracts.

When COVID-19 emerged, a large proportion of Internet users resorted to citizen journalism, educating the citizenry and warning about the dangers of contracting the virus. Sometimes, most of the information made available on the Internet and social media platforms was derived from mainstream media. Nonetheless, social media, at the same time, perform the dual roles of mainstream media for many people who have little to do with radio, television, and newspapers because of the growing disenchantment over the politicisation of the pandemic and inherent sycophancy that polluted the outlets especially in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

Thus, the Internet increasingly opened up new frontiers for everyone including the citizen journalists who shared relevant information such as the preventive measures or new trends during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of what appeared like slow growth in the number of Internet users in parts of Africa, "a rather small minority of these Internet users has the capability to use it in ways that are creative and that augment their ability to participate effectively in today's knowledge societies" (Mansell 2004, p. 179). Through the Internet, citizen journalists also loosely referred to as *netizens* can easily package multimedia and interactive messages that can be accessible in various parts of the world. Contributing to this claim, Moyo (2009, p. 12) argues that through the Internet, "the non-professional journalists are not accountable to anyone but themselves, and their 'journalism' is not guided or constrained by any ethical norms or principles but rather by gut feeling and common sense".

Constructive Use of Citizen Journalism in Managing Health Crises

The easy access to a plethora of news production technologies has made many people not just consumers but producers of information in the twenty-first century. Technologies have increased the swiftness and ease with which people share information in text, picture, audio, and video forms (Gillette et al. 2007). The transformation hitherto of content consumers to media content producers is a vital development that has implications during a period of (health) crisis. In *We the Media*, Gillmor (2004), recalled that the 9/11 event, for instance, offered a foretaste into the future of news. Gillmor explained that "Another kind of reporting emerged during those appalling hours and days. Via email, mailing lists, chat groups, personal web journals—all nonstandard news sources—we received valuable context that the major American media couldn't or wouldn't provide" (p. 15). Periods of humanitarian crisis such as the 9/11 events and the outbreak of Coronavirus in 2020 exemplify how, irrespective of its shortcomings, citizen journalism thrived in providing real-time reports, a development that has transformed today's media landscape (Lule 2006).

Similarly, when crisis unfolds, communication interruptions happen and news can be both erroneous and incomplete (Gillette et al. 2007). In such a fearful atmosphere, media consumers may struggle to get the accurate and complete picture of what is happening from one media outlet. This is the time that citizen journalists step up the co-production of news on the Internet in order to provide instant, firsthand/exclusive information about the latest that often go beyond the conventional forms of news gathering and dissemination often criticised for its unidirectional nature and its overreliance on a small pool of sources (Siegl and Foot 2004).

By its nature, citizen journalism thrives under conditions of confusion, distrust, or panic. This is largely due to the pattern of message creation, context, structure, and dissemination. The message originates from the ordinary citizen who often packages such message within the context of affinity and identification with the ordinary citizens and is usually expressed in the citizen's everyday language. Thus, Würz et al. (2013) explains that citizen journalism thrived due to certain demographic similarities including background, group membership, structural similarity, and status consistency. These increase the likeness and trust of source thereby increasing the opportunities for persuasion and behaviour change to succeed as espoused by the TRA. For Chou et al. (2009), Internet-based social networks have a tendency to increase perceived social support and interconnectivity among individuals because some sense of identity and belonging are established. Health-related information sharing at this level is more democratic and patient/citizen/consumer-controlled. Citizen journalism via social media tends to be effective because people tend to believe the information from those they know and can readily identify with (Allgaier and Svalastog 2015).

Today's media ecology has further necessitated media convergence, and the pattern of news gathering and reporting has become even more diverse. As one of

the additions to the changing mediascape, citizen journalism is transforming news production and consumption. The implication is that news has become even more localised and prompt, but dangers of inaccuracy and deception are admitted. The mainstream media outfits have responded by restructuring media convergence and re-evaluating the relationships between them and the people once regarded as audiences. People who were once famed as audiences have become active newsmakers, albeit in an unprofessional manner. Through citizen journalism, constructive civic actions aimed at ameliorating the spread of the pandemic were enhanced. Health crisis is hard to manage, but citizen journalists can be more constructive and prioritise accuracy in place of half-truth while engaging in their alternative journalism.

Conclusion

Citizen journalism via the Internet and social media, from the discourses so far proved a viable platform for health communication targeted at disease control and prevention. While health communication should be community-oriented, citizen journalism is community-controlled. By implication, this suggests the imperative of harnessing the opportunities offered by citizen journalists who at the same time double as an integral part of target communities in delivering community-centred health messages. As already established from the discourses, a sense of kinship, cultural context, are built through citizen journalism which makes persuasion most probable especially for the public with hitherto low risk perceptions, although some dysfunctional roles are often inevitable as a result of false information, poor contextualisation, and interpretation of confounding health conditions. Again, the challenges of digital divide could be further accentuated due to lack of access to the Internet and gadgets for active engagement in message consumption and production for the majority of the grassroots citizens in developing countries like Nigeria.

In addition, this paper presents a distinctive contribution to health communication and citizen journalism. In doing so, it lends theoretical support to the idea of harnessing citizen journalism for mobilising the people to take responsibility during pandemics for optimal safety and protection for all. Enablers of citizen journalism should, therefore, be able to play unique roles in promoting only the scientifically proven measures while playing down those that pollute the sphere. During *periods of health crises as witnessed then across the globe, citizen journalists were expected to rejig their pattern of news reporting by motivating more and mobilising the masses than stoking fears and spreading falsehoods. This is especially important as people ditch legacy media for the Internet and social media for news and other engagements. Thus, communicating health crises across different citizen journalism platforms requires restructuring in order to achieve the desired result without misinforming the public.* Based on the foregoing, it was recommended that:

1. Adequate legislation could be put in place not only to regulate social media use but to increase citizen's media literacy on how to spot false information and to readily recognise the dangers and implications of false information dissemination.
2. There should be a deliberate synergy between the government, health professionals, and other stakeholders in partnering with ordinary citizens especially those who have proved to be influential on social media, otherwise known as "social media influencers". These citizens should be seen as critical stakeholders/ partners and part of the solution and not the problem in the prevention and control of disease outbreaks such as COVID-19.

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'This Is a Punishment to America' Framing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe's Mainstream Media

Allen Munoriyarwa and Albert Chibuwe

Abstract Drawing on framing, at both methodological and theoretical levels, this chapter examines the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in two mainstream Zimbabwean weekly newspapers. The chapter answers two questions: In what ways did the mainstream media in Zimbabwe frame the COVID-19 pandemic? To what extent did the coverage sync with the public sphere model of biocommunicability? We note that the private mainstream press largely adopted a thematic framing approach of the ruling regime's COVID-19 plan, by highlighting corruption, mismanagement, and overt politicisation of the pandemic. The state-controlled public press broadly adopted a episodic framing approach that focused on the state's COVID-19 intervention over time, mostly presenting these interventions as a success story. We argue that the episodic framing approach of the private press attempted to hold the state to account. The thematic framing approach of the state-controlled public press backgrounded the regime's failure to stem the pandemic tide and presented the intervention in 'sunshine journalism'. Both framing approaches violated established health reporting practices, as outlined in the biocommunicability model. We conclude that 'the hear, speak and see no evil news framing approach' of the public media and the anti-regime frames prevalent in the private press reflect prevalent media polarisation.

Keywords Framing analysis · Zimbabwe mainstream media · COVID-19. Biocommunicability model · The Sunday Mail · Daily News on Sunday

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Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how two mainstream newspapers, the state-controlled weekly newspaper *The Sunday Mail* and the privately owned *Daily News on Sunday*, framed the COVID-19 health crisis in the Zimbabwean context. By mainstream we mean media with a national reach (newspapers, radio, television) whether state controlled or privately controlled. The available literature on media and COVID-19 examined (Online—Twitter) citizens' responses to the government's COVID-19 response especially in the aftermath of the Defence Minister's utterances (Shumba et al. 2020). There was no research situated at the intersection of the pandemic and mainstream media discourses by the time of this research. This chapter sought to fill this lacuna through a comparative examination of how the two selected weekly newspapers framed the pandemic.

Post-2000 Zimbabwe has been characterised by numerous health pandemics. For example, before the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country in April 2020, the country had suffered a cholera and typhoid outbreak. The country was characterised by a collapsed health delivery system, poor sanitation, and lack of clean water in urban areas (Chigudu 2019). ZANU-PF's many years of national economic mismanagement, neglect, and corruption collapsed the health delivery system contributing to these pandemics. In early 2020, as the COVID-19 virus ravaged the USA, Zimbabwe's Defence Minister and the ruling party's national chair, Oppah Muchinguri, infamously remarked that the virus was God's punishment to the West for imposing economic sanctions on the country. This statement had the potential to undermine the country's response to, and citizens' perceptions of, the pandemic as it could have led to a 'false sense of immunity'. This, together with the citizenry's suspicions of corruption and lack of political will by the elite to improve the country's health delivery system (see Chigudu 2019), makes it worthwhile to interrogate how the mainstream Zimbabwean media framed the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chapter is organised as follows: The next section reviews existing literature on the media coverage of pandemics. It is followed by the theoretical and conceptual framework—framing theory (Entman 1993) and the public sphere concept of biocommunicability (Briggs and Daniel 2020), both of which are germane to this chapter. The theoretical framework is followed by a discussion of framing analysis which is the methodology adopted in this chapter. The findings section, the discussion, and the chapter's conclusion follow thereafter.

Literature on Media Framing of COVID-19

While the pandemic monopolised media attention, intellectual research on it was still work in progress. Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in the media, along crime-related frames. These included

protest frames and the hoarding of essential goods during the pandemic. Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) identified xenophobic frames especially in international media. Xenophobic frames blamed China for being responsible for the outbreak of COVID-19. These frames, they argue, led to the stigmatisation and stereotyping of Chinese people especially in countries where they are a minority. Jo and Chang (2020) argue that international media framing of the pandemic had a positive political influence on how Koreans viewed their government. They found that Korean media utilised an expanded framing which compared the quarantine and performance of Korea and other countries. But in the Korean case, media frames of the pandemic 'induced a positive change in people's attitudes towards the government [which led to] a major victory for the ruling party in legislative elections' (Jo and Chang 2020, p. 1). Thomas et al. (2020) noted that media frames of the COVID-19 were, 'largely based on societal issues with the theme of economic disruption prevalent' (p. 11). Like Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) they also identified frames of blame that were commonly implied based on the origins of the virus. But unlike Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020), Thomas et al. (2020) found frames that apportioned blame less frequently in the Australian media, that is, 'The Australian print media were slow to report on COVID-19 pandemic and were reluctant to apportion blame' (p. 1).

Two important takeaways emerge from this literature. First, the literature relied on different methods of data gathering and analysis. Most of them, however, relied on traditional content analysis methods of news corpus. Some of these studies relied on computer software-assisted analysis. For example, the study by Jo and Chang (2020) relied on Topical Model methods, while the study by Thomas et al utilised NVIVO software. Second, at the time, there was no known research on media framing of this COVID-19 pandemic emanating from the African context. Zimbabwe's mainstream media had been viewed as polarised and discordant. High levels of polarisation in the coverage of COVID-19 usually contributed to the politicisation of public attitudes towards COVID-19 (Hart et al. 2020). We hence seek to understand how the mainstream media framed the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter makes a contribution to literature on mainstream media coverage of the pandemic in a polarised media context in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

There are two concepts germane to this chapter. One is the framing theory (Entman 1993). The second one is the public sphere concept of biocommunicability (Briggs and Daniel 2020). Framing theory was utilised as theoretical and analytical lenses through which to understand communication texts (Burgers et al. 2016). Framing theory asserts that how a news issue is presented in the media makes a difference (Vreese 2017). Some scholars, such as Gamson (1992), see framing theory as an extension of agenda setting.

At the core of framing theory is the proposition that every news story carries with it verbal and/or visual information that directly or implicitly suggests what the problem is, how it can be addressed (Iyengar and Simon 1993), and who is responsible for it (Munoriyarwa 2020). These frames originate with journalists and their beliefs about how reality is constructed (D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010). Framing theory assumes that the media decide on what topics will be presented and how they will be presented (Entman 1993). How an issue is presented in a news medium can alter public perceptions of the issue. Framing assumes that audiences may interpret news in ways that agree with or contradict the preferred frames supplied by the journalists (Gamson 1992). It also states that frames are reinforced positively or negatively every time they are evoked (Burgers et al. 2016), and frame building is a systematic process that takes place over time (Entman 1993). Framing theory further assumes that many factors collide to influence journalists' selection of both the news item and the preferred frame. Among these factors are news values, news sourcing, editorial policies (Entman 1993), and individual journalists' biases, beliefs, values, and norms. Framing is thus arguably a subjective process. Framing theory helps us understand how these framing attributes like news values, news sources, editorial policies, were utilised by two mainstream media outlets to frame the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

The public sphere concept of biocommunicability, which is utilised together with framing theory, imagines the audience as 'composed of citizens rather than patients and consumers' (Briggs and Daniel 2020). Health information helps citizens and policymakers make collective decisions about the public interest (Hall and Meike 2019). The concept accepts health as 'contested, contingent and [a] firmly political concept' (Holland 2017, p. 2). This means, it is 'public flow of information that enable citizens to weigh in on public policies and government compliance with them' (Holland 2017, p. 2). Holland (2017) equates the public sphere concept of biocommunicability to civic-oriented health journalism, 'wherein, audiences are addressed as having a stake in health issues and journalists assume the role of assisting them in grasping the scope, relevance and potential impact of issues' (Holland 2017, p. 3).

At the centre of the public sphere concept of biocommunicability is the facilitative and the interpretive (Hall and Meike 2019) role of health journalism. These two roles envisage health news reporting as open to public debate, as opposed to linear conceptualisations of health communication that see (health) experts as communicating with an ignorant public (Briggs and Daniel 2020). The concept, furthermore, emphasises analysing and interpreting complex, 'health issues and discussing solutions' (Holland 2017, p. 11). We seek to establish how this was executed, if at all it was, in the selected newspapers. Under the public sphere concept conflicting views about a health issue will be selected, and 'controversy is framed as conflict between different stakeholders or (harmed) citizens' (Briggs and Daniel 2020, pp. 39–40). We were also interested in the conflicting and/or uniform framing of the COVID-19 pandemic by the selected newspapers. Thus, we examined areas of consensus and dissensus in the selected newspapers' framing of the pandemic.

Data and Method

Premised on a constructivist perspective, this chapter is based on three months of data gathered from two weekly newspapers—*The Sunday Mail* and *The Daily News on Sunday*. These are Zimbabwe's most popular weeklies with huge circulation and readership figures (ABC 2018). *The Sunday Mail* is publicly owned but government controlled, and the *Daily News of Sunday* is privately owned. However, there was speculation that the country's spy agency acquired a stake in Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), the publishers of the *Daily News on Sunday*. We examined the four possible elements of news frames (Entman 1993), in every story that we analysed. These are problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and recommendation. To identify these four elements of a news frame, we looked at how news stories constructed them using devices like news sourcing. How journalists source their news is important to the process of news framing (Burgers et al. 2016). Sourcing determines the frame that emerges, through preference (or the lack thereof) of voices in the story and the importance accorded to them through placement (Gamson 1992).

We also looked at words-lexical choices. Lexical and syntactical configurations do sway readers in shaping and understanding their messages (Gamson 1992). Other elements we look at include positioning of the news story in question. For instance, when a story is headlined, it assumes a framing importance (Iyengar and Simon 1993). In addition to this, headlines are also important as they reveal the 'framing slant' of the news story. Because the headline is the first news rhetoric device to be seen by the reader, it therefore serves the purpose of setting the agenda. Thus, we look at these aspects as elements that create salience (foregrounding) of news items and, simultaneously, backgrounding of others. This is important because beyond identifying the frames utilised in the analysed stories and themes emerging from the data, we seek to establish the agenda that the newspapers intended to set and the actions they wanted to take. It is not possible for a single chapter to analyse all framing devices in the analysis (Borah 2011). For this chapter, we draw on those elements discussed here.

This chapter relied on both hard news stories and opinionated journalism stories that appeared in both newspapers. By 'opinionated journalism' we adopt Steele and Barnhurst's (1996) definition of the term to mean any news pieces where journalists expressed their opinions and judgements of events and issues. This included, among other practices, editorials, news commentaries, opinion pieces, feature stories and many more. To avoid 'drowning' in data, we sampled two stories from each of the two weeklies for every week. This gave us a total of eight (8) stories from each of our newspapers per month and, thus, 16 stories from both in a month. We hence had 48 stories to read, as part of the corpus, in the three months sampled. These were the stories we subjected to framing analysis. We noted that some of the stories repeated the same issues, and we, hence, dropped them. This left us with a manageable sample of 33 stories. Framing analysis has been criticised for lacking specificities (Hallahan 2008) and, therefore, difficult to preclude causal relationships. Critics also say it is

too open-minded as it allows individuals to bring their own individual frames to the analysis (Borah 2011). But it remains a popular method in political and communication research because of its flexibility and ability to allow researchers to draw meaning from the texts.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

Our data showed that in *The Daily News on Sunday*, COVID-19 news stories framed the pandemic not just as a health crisis, but emphasised the governance and corruption frames. There was, in addition to governance and corruption frames, the prevalence of news frames that foregrounded a hopelessly inept government: lacking leadership, with a dysfunctional COVID-19 plan and deliberately driving the nation further into authoritarianism, under the guise of fighting a health pandemic. In *The Sunday Mail*, the health crisis was framed around two major frames: the containment and responsibility frame, and the mobilisation frame. The containment and responsibility frame was directly opposite to *The Daily News on Sunday*'s frames. *The Sunday Mail* emphasised the ability of the government in dealing with the pandemic and its ability to mobilise all sectors of society. Generally, *The Sunday Mail*'s frames foregrounded the government's robust and decisive action in fighting the pandemic.

COVID-19 as a Governance and Corruption Crisis

The corruption and governance frames were often juxtaposed in *The Daily News on Sunday*, and they were characterised by both institutional and individual focus. The paper framed government response to the pandemic as likely to further already existing corruption and mismanagement in the country. The pandemic was framed as bringing to the fore the lack of both transparency and accountability that the ruling party, ZANU-PF, had been accused of perpetuating by opposition political parties, CSOs and NGOs. For example, in an opinion entitled 'COVID-19: Business Unusual' (11/04/2020), the paper wrote:

> We rely on the goodwill of the international donor community like we always do in most crises…then we have the evil of corruption that is now rooted in ruling party officials' DNA…Resources will be misappropriated…and there will be outright thievery.

The corruption frame focused on a number of issues such as senior government officials attempting to benefit directly from COVID-19 relief measures especially emergency funds meant for personal protective equipment (PPE). There was also focus on weak institutional governance norms that promoted such corruption: 'the politicisation of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission…which has made it unable to fight corruption and root out rot' (*The Daily News on Sunday*, 15 June 2020).

The corruption frame generated a 'sub-frame' identified as 'the tampering frame'. This sub-frame emphasised malpractices within government that would militate against functional institutions ready to help fight the pandemic. The tampering frame expressed that the ruling ZANU-PF party would interfere with honest civil servants, which would effectively stymie efforts to fight the pandemic. For instance, in a story with the title, 'New Twist to US$60m COVID-19' deal (23/06/2020), the paper wrote:

> High ranking civil servants are operating under pressure to approve murky tenders from politically connected people. . .we saw the massive looting of resources during cyclone Idai. . .we are back full circle. . .as the pandemic rages. . .politicians are busy trying to create feeding troughs for themselves.

Corruption was also framed in metaphorical terms. Metaphors in language discourse allow people to grasp concepts in familiar terms. Corruption was framed in the metaphor of genetics. For example, the paper noted, '*the evil of corruption that is now rooted in ruling party officials' DNA*' (emphasis added). In another opinion, corruption was framed in terms of the disease metaphor, as it spread 'cancerously across the country's political elites.' In both cases corruption is presented as endemic and just as one cannot undo their DNA, the metaphor of corruption as engraved in politicians' DNA means that in Zimbabwe corruption cannot be undone. This is reinforced by the metaphor of corruption as cancerous. This implies that it is, like cancer, incurable, and just like cancer, it spreads fast, and devastatingly so, through Zimbabwe's body politic, courtesy of ZANU-PF as the 'vehicle' in this regard. Due to the cancer of corruption, death by COVID-19 was implied to be certain. The war metaphor was also evoked. In one story: 'If the government is sincere in its effort to fight the pandemic . . . it should declare a vicious war against corruption to avoid scarce resources being misappropriated for individual benefit'.

In terms of news sourcing routines, we noted that the corruption frame was buttressed by sources from NGOs, CSOs and opposition political parties' elites. These sources foregrounded the corruption frame and expressed fear that the government's plan to fight the pandemic would be useless if there were no corresponding efforts to fight the corruption pandemic. One senior opposition party official was quoted:

> Corruption is the second pandemic that will make ZANU PF's plan to fight COVID-19 useless. . . like all its other plans coined in the past. . . resources will be stolen. . .we all know that bigwigs in the ruling party will enrich themselves. (*The Daily News on Sunday*, 7 June 2020)

Framing is a form of agenda setting (Gamson 1992). In this case we notice that *The Daily News on Sunday* attempted to set an agenda of the ruling regime's corrupt tendencies, its ineptitude, and what we call its customary abandonment of citizens when they need help. For example, its lexical preference of terms like 'outright thievery', 'politicians creating a feeding trough', is testimony of this. Negative frames can create negative perceptions of the ruling regime, while positive frames can boost popularity of a ruling regime (Jo and Chang 2020). To understand *The Daily News on Sunday's* framing preferences, we need to understand two issues.

First, its history and then its sourcing routines. The history of *The Daily News on Sunday* is one of contestation with political power in Zimbabwe (Chibuwe 2016). It was one of the private-owned newspapers that had acted as a public sphere by speaking back to power in an environment which was less tolerant of dissent. Thus, the paper in its coverage of the pandemic pushed this adversarial view about the ruling regime's efficacy. This is reflected in words like, 'looting', and 'misappropriation'. The paper, hence, assumed a problem definition role in which the ruling regime was seen as part of an enduring problem through examples of terms like, 'generally corrupt regime'. The middle class of workers and business people were the cornerstone of *The Daily News on Sunday* readership and advertisers' base (Ruhanya 2019). This was the same class that had been 'politically noisy' and well known for its criticism of the regime. In fact, it was the same class that also formed the political base of support for the opposition. *The Daily News on Sunday's* framing of the pandemic, hence, represented the beliefs of the middle class viz-a-viz the regime's efficiency.

Framing an Inept Political Regime

The Daily News on Sunday, furthermore, framed a ruling party that was hopelessly ill-prepared to fight the pandemic. For instance, the paper took exception with two defence ministry officials over their fake news utterances regarding the pandemic. The Minister of Defence, Oppah Muchinguri, told a ZANU-PF gathering west of the country that COVID-19 was God's punishment to the USA for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe. The then Deputy Defence Minister, Victor Matemadanda, wildly added that the COVID-19 was caused by a bacterium, which the West is packaging in small containers, like teargas canisters, to eliminate Zimbabweans. These two statements drew widespread condemnation. The government had to take the rare stance of publicly censuring them. *The Daily News on Sunday* framed these statements as a culmination of the confusion, and directionless of the regime, supposed to come up with a crisis plan. On 22 April 2020, the paper wrote thus:

> It's hard to imagine that the minister and her deputy sit in cabinet. . . and they are part of the senior officials supposed to come up with a pandemic plan for this country. . .This is a national embarrassment. . .in functioning democracies, the two should have either resigned, or shown the door. . .but Zimbabwe is not such a country. . . Our government officials are not even ashamed to display ignorance in public. . .this is dangerous and life-threatening ignorance.

In another news piece titled, 'Doctors warn of COVID-19 Implosion' (17 July 2020), *The Daily News on Sunday* wrote:

> *with such people in power*, this country is not equipped to fight the pandemic. . .and chart the future beyond COVID-19. (emphasis added)

The government's remedies to the pandemic were framed in the paper as 'going to fail' because of 'inept officials occupying senior government positions' (*The*

Daily News on Sunday, 24 July 2020). There was also an emphasis in the news frames of the point that the ruling regime 'has long abandoned the poor'. In some of the news stories sampled, the government was framed as an obstacle to other actors who would want to help fight the pandemic. For instance, in an opinion piece titled, 'The Government must not use COVID-19 to move the country further into authoritarianism' (4 April 2020), the paper wrote:

> There are many actors among NGOs and CSOs, ready to help...but the government's relationship with these organisations means that there would not be such cooperation...a paranoid regime that is not comfortable with being eclipsed.

It is important to note that *The Daily News on Sunday* prefers the noun 'regime'. Regime is often used to refer to a government of an authoritarian nature. The newspaper also foregrounded a chaotic, disastrous and 'violent' approach to the pandemic by the government. In an opinion titled, 'Zim lacks cohesion in fighting COVID-19' (8 July 2020), the paper foregrounded, through its frames, the chaos rather clearly thus, 'contact tracing is non-existent...testing and treatment, is still not in motion...what we have seen is the military in the streets...trying to enforce a lockdown...on a battered population'.

Frames of government ineptitude were largely built on the previous frame of corruption discussed. To build this frame, the paper appropriated popular perceptions of a less-caring government (see *Al Jazeera*, 2020) and popular frustrations with the government's overall performance (see *Al Jazeera*, 2020). The government ineptitude frame also thrived on borrowing from history. The newspaper made frequent reference to government's ineptitude in many other instances of the past. For example, the paper referred to the government's underwhelming response to Cyclone Idai in 2019 that hit the eastern parts of the country, especially Chimanimani District. Thus, the frame foregrounded a government with a 'fog of secrecy', 'uncooperative' and used 'military...law and order approaches' even during the pandemic. Prevalent discourses under this frame included words like, 'a clueless government', 'messy approaches to the pandemic' and 'shambolic COVID-19 plan'. The paper cited NGO and CSO sources that drove the frame forward. Anti-government activists were also cited. And these framed Zimbabweans as:

> [The]...victims of the pandemic...who are not likely to get a coordinated response... and reprieve...from the regime.

Noteworthy is that the paper's frames did not change in the period under study—they remained negative about the ruling regime's efforts to combat the pandemic. These negative frames were strengthened by the paper's thematic approach to framing. D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010) note that thematic framing approaches provide a broader and inclusive context to an issue. As in this case, the government's attempt to address the pandemic was framed within the broad context of its well-documented failures to address previous pandemics of a different nature and its supposedly lack of empathy and efficiency. Thematic framing is the opposite of episodic framing, which focuses on isolated incidences and contexts (Iyengar and Simon 1993). As noted earlier, *The Daily News on Sunday* always sustained an

adversarial relationship with the state. The COVID-19 frames in this paper were broad enough to frame the ruling party's performance in other areas other than pandemic efforts. Thus, the paper, through its thematic framing approach, made an attempt to frame a regime's 'score card of performance' in all facets of leadership and governance. In the process, broader and contextualised failures of the regime were provided.

News frames according to researchers (Jo and Chang 2020) provide distinctive information and consensus information. Consensus information is about how events can relate to other previous events. For example, the way the pandemic's efforts are related to previous cholera pandemics of 2008, in *The Daily News on Sunday*. In 2008 the late former president Robert Gabriel Mugabe was still in power but in 2020 Emmerson Mnangagwa, Mugabe's long-term right hand until the fall out in 2017, was the president. Upon assuming office on the backdrop of a military coup dubbed 'Operation Restore Legacy' in 2017, Emmerson Mnangagwa was installed as the president with the General who orchestrated the coup being appointed vice president. Mnangagwa promised to fight corruption and to break Mugabe's violent politics and ruinous policies. However, by relating the Mnangagwa's COVID-19 performance to past-Mugabe regime failures, the *Daily News on Sunday* was saying the two regimes were the same. Thematic framing by the *Daily News on Sunday* showed that the paper did not distinguish between the failures of the Mugabe regime and the Mnangagwa regime. It arguably demonstrated that the newspaper considered Mnangagwa's presidency as simply a continuation of the same old Mugabe regime. This is buttressed by the corruption frame discussed above; it also demonstrates that just like under Mugabe, corruption was still much alive, if not more pronounced under the current regime. The paper also compared the regime's handling of the pandemic with that of other governments. Conclusively, the idea of comparing was still to expose the regime's failure in this regard.

Frames in the State-Owned The Sunday Mail

This section explores two prevalent frames in *The Sunday Mail*: the containment and responsibility frame, and the mobilisation frame.

The Responsibility Frame

This was a prevalent frame in the state-controlled but publicly owned newspaper, *The Sunday Mail*. The newspaper framed a government that was responsible and in complete control of the unfolding pandemic. For instance, in a story titled, 'Gvt hailed for its clear COVID-19 strategy' (24 May 2020), six weeks into the lockdown, the paper wrote:

> Experts have hailed the government for its clear strategy in combating COVID-19... The government was praised for coming up with a strategy that will mitigate suffering brought by the pandemic...and arrest the COVID-19 infection rates.

The capabilities of the government were framed in lofty discourses like, 'hailed . . .for quick-thinking', the 'engaged presidential COVID-19 crisis team'. The responsibility frame carried with it a moral evaluation tone of 'five-star performance' on the part of the government. In addition, to framing a responsible government, the weekly paper also framed various institutions of the state and government in rosy terms of efficiency and preparedness. For example, Zimbabwe's Health Service Board and the President's Office were hailed for 'keeping a close eye on the pandemic and the welfare of citizens' (*The Sunday Mail*, 5 May 2020). The responsibility for dealing with COVID-19 was, according to the paper, firmly in the hands of the government, which it singled out for praise. And underpinning the responsibility frame was a sub-frame of certainty. The paper was certain that the ruling regime would bring positive change to the pandemic's destructive effects and that the government's pandemic plan would work. Expressing its certainty, the paper in one opinion wrote thus:

> With stellar leadership that the country has under the second republic of President Mnangagwa, there is no doubt that the country will wither the pandemic storm. Since he ascended the presidency, His Excellency has prioritised people's welfare. . .it is even more urgent now.

This sentence, through the use of terms such as 'stellar leadership', 'the second republic of President Mnangagwa', 'there is no doubt', was designed to demonstrate that the Mnangagwa regime was different from Mugabe's. Mentioning the second Republic was designed to show that under the so-called second republic things would be done differently from the first republic. This was in contrast with the *Daily News on Sunday* that not only did not make reference to the 'second republic' but also created the discourse of an unbroken link between the Mugabe era and the Mnangagwa era. Simultaneously, the paper framed the pandemic as a 'real' issue worthy of collaborative action across the broad spectrum of the Zimbabwean society. But in so doing, the paper still foregrounded the government as the major player in whatever collaborative role with other players. In the process, the paper backgrounded all roles that other players would play in the fight against the pandemic. In an opinion titled, 'Reawakening the human spirit in COVID-19 fight' (8 June 2020), the paper wrote:

> joining hands with the government . . . heed the government's call . . . and pull resources to assist the government . . . add on to what the government has already mobilised.

The responsibility frame in *The Sunday Mail* was sustained by a pattern of news sourcing that preferred elite government sources. In most of its stories, the voice of the Minister of Health dominated news sourcing. There was also a preference for senior officials in the ministry as sources of news. The responsibility frame, however, glossed over some more serious concerns of the government's plan to fight the pandemic. For example, soon after the lockdown was declared on 31 March, a major PPE scandal worth US$60 million allegedly involving members of the president's own family erupted. *The Sunday Mail*, however, hid behind its 'praise and worship' frames of government effort to ignore the scandal. It only made reference to corruption in a 'non-committal headline titled, 'Strengthening transparency, during

COVID-19 response' (9 May 2020). Even the dilapidated public health system of the country was not referenced to. The rosy frames of the newspaper were not in sync with the reality of the Zimbabwean situation.

The Awareness and Mobilisation Frames

These two frames were inter-linked in *The Sunday Mail*. Under the awareness frame, *The Sunday Mail* devoted space to alerting the public about the novel virus, placing importance on its symptoms and mode of transmission. The frames that emphasised awareness were often in serious warning discourses. For example, *The Sunday Mail* wrote about, 'the public being warned to desist from high contact practices.' In one opinion titled, 'COVID-19 upsurge: the second wave or reckless behaviour?' (5 May 2020), the paper wrote in unusually strong language of awareness:

> The public ought to be warned that. . .this reckless behaviour will lead to more cases. . .the pandemic is just beginning and we cannot afford a few individuals endangering everyone else. . .the police should be out in the streets. . .this is about protecting lives. . .it simply cannot continue.

The newspaper also stressed in awareness discourses the virus' mode of transmission and the precautionary and proactive measures that people should take. As much as *The Daily News on Sunday* carried awareness frames as well, it was eclipsed, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, by *The Sunday Mail*. For instance, in a detailed op-ed titled, 'COVID-19 rules work when observed' (22 June 2020), the paper outlined in detail awareness about the pandemic and what the public should consider immediately to stop the spread:

> If we all follow the science. . .we will defeat the pandemic. . . be vigilant how we do our business. . . we are supposed to defeat the pandemic at all costs. . .washing hands, wearing masks. . .and maintaining social distance. . .are all proven ways of beating this pandemic.

In order to raise awareness, the newspaper went further, debunking myths, fake news and ill-founded rumours about the pandemic. In a way, the newspaper checkmated digital platforms that had become notorious for spreading false news during the pandemic. By so doing, *The Sunday Mail*, in this instance, was living to its expected standard as the 'fourth estate'.

Closely related to the awareness frame was the mobilisation frame. Under this frame, the government was framed as mobilising society against the pandemic. This was mainly done through Ministry of Health officials who were frequently quoted as sources and whose news supported the mobilisation frame. For instance, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Health was quoted saying:

> As Zimbabweans, we have defeated many foes. . .this pandemic can be defeated if all of us play a role. . .I want to appeal to everyone to unite behind the leadership of our president and together we will defeat this pandemic. (8 July 2020)

Government was also framed as successfully mobilising CSOs, NGOs and its various arms for the sole purpose of fighting the pandemic. The mobilisation frame

was supported by news sourcing that relied heavily on the president and vice president of the country. The appointment of the vice president Chiwenga to double as the Minister of Health was hailed by *The Sunday Mail* as part of this mobilisation. In one hard news story (29 July 2020), the paper wrote that, 'The Vice President's history of leadership in the military will be important in fighting the pandemic.'

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the frames prevalent in the coverage of the pandemic by selected mainstream newspapers in Zimbabwe. Second, the study sought to examine the extent to which this coverage aligned with the biocommunicability model of health news reporting. Four major frames were prevalent: the awareness and mobilisation frames, the responsibility frame, frames of an inept political regime frame, and the corruption frame.

We note that *The Daily News on Sunday* emphasised episodes of corruption and governance failure in its framing of the pandemic. But *The Sunday Mail* framed the pandemic along mobilisation and awareness frames that put the ruling regime in very positive light and in control of the pandemic. Such framing, by both newspapers, tended to, an extent, politicise the newsification of the pandemic by linking the pandemic to questions of governance, transparency and accountability. The coverage of the pandemic followed the ideological divisions and polarisation of the Zimbabwean mainstream media that has been well documented in journalism research (Munoriyarwa 2020). The public media have for long been the mouthpiece of the ruling class while the private media have been pro-opposition (Chibuwe 2016). Consequently, in covering the pandemic, the pro-regime media adopted a 'hear, see and speak no evil' approach in covering the regime's pandemic response. It was the 'sunshine journalism' approach that framed an infallible ruling regime. Further, it sought to portray the coup regime as better than the previous, however, this was implied rather than explicit. The private media saw a messy approach by a confused and corrupt regime, hopelessly unable to stem the growing tide of the pandemic. It also saw the current regime as a continuation of the incompetent and corrupt Mugabe regime which the leaders overthrew in a military coup in November 2017. Thus, in both newspapers, journalistic norms of objectivity, insisting on the presentation of both sides of an issue, were neglected. The ritual of balance, for example, was not practised as each newspaper practised a news sourcing routine that confirmed its ideological standpoint.

Noteworthy is that the *Daily News* on *Sunday's Mail's* coverage still synced neatly with the biocommunicability model conceptualised in the theoretical section of this chapter. Their pandemic news facilitated a dialogue about the crisis (Holland 2017). Furthermore, in line with the tenets of the biocommunicability model, the two newspapers still acted as interpretive platforms of the pandemic (see Hall and Meike 2019). Research data supports that this was adopted, to a greater extent, by *The Daily News on Sunday*. For instance, the paper's corruption frame opened public debate

about related issues of the pandemic—accountable and transparent distribution of resources in the fight against COVID-19. The paper's corruption frame made a number of generalisations. First, it framed corruption as 'endemic' and 'systemic'. Second, it framed corruption as a permanent feature of Zimbabwe's post-colonial governance culture, militating against any effort to better people's lives. Discourses of 'deep-rooted and widespread corruption' were prevalent. This, corruption frame reinforced the implied message that there was no difference between the Mugabe regime and the Mnangagwa regime. Thus, in line with the biocommunicability model, *The Daily News on Sunday* opposed linear conceptualisations of the pandemic that presented an 'all-saint' and efficient regime. As the biocommunicability model asserts, health communication should promote public debate and interpret complex health issues and discuss solutions (Holland 2017). Thus, to a larger extent, *The Daily News on Sunday's* coverage synced well with this model. Further, the *Daily News'* corruption and ineptitude frames were reflective of urban dwellers' perceptions of government's handling of previous health crises such as the 2008/2009 cholera epidemic (Chigudu 2019). This stance by the *Daily News on Sunday* was probably influenced by commercial imperatives since it mainly circulated in the largely pro-opposition urban areas. Indeed, being seen with a copy *of The Daily News* in certain rural areas invited trouble from ZANU-PF supporters especially during election times.

However, *The Sunday Mail's* coverage did not go beyond rudimentary provision of information for survival. It preferred not to open a dialogue about issues of governance, transparency or even critique the government's pandemic plan. In view of areas of consensus, the findings demonstrated that both newspapers deployed the awareness frame where they sought to raise awareness about the COVID-19 and debunk myths about it as well. *The Sunday Mail* did more than the *Daily News on Sunday* both qualitatively and quantitatively in this regard. This is arguably because of its pro-regime stance which meant that it did not want the regime strategy to fail. The consensus could be because COVID-19 does not discriminate between ruling party or anti-ruling party citizens. It infects and kills indiscriminately. *The Sunday Mail*, however, remained a political mouthpiece of the regime. For instance, despite the widespread condemnation of Oppah Muchinguri's statement about COVID-19 being a punishment to the USA, the paper did not cover the story. Even the former deputy Minister of Defence's claim that COVID-19 was caused by bacteria was not debunked in the paper despite these statements being outright example of disinformation.

Both newspapers' coverage of the pandemic reflected partisan polarisation. And this polarisation was reflected in elite news sources. On the one hand, *The Sunday Mail* preferred news sources that were pro-ruling party. These included institutional sources of news-especially state-linked institutions, and cabinet ministers or any other top government officials. On the other hand, The *Daily News on Sunday* preferred news sources from opposition political parties like the MDC Alliance. This sourcing routine reflected media polarisation at an elite level, an enduring feature of Zimbabwe's media landscape (see Chibuwe 2016; Munoriyarwa 2020). As a result of such sourcing preferences, the two opposing political ideologies

became not only manifest in news frames, but equally reinforced. The extent of this polarisation reflected on the levels of partisanship existing in Zimbabwe's media environment. Having noted these, arguably, the Zimbabwean case, partisan and polarised news framing might have led to increased levels of political gridlocks, disharmony and substantive polarised policy disagreements between the ruling party and the opposition in the parliament. This was already reflected on the offline disagreements between the two on a COVID-19 strategy. The two newspapers selected for this research were adding to this polarisation by presenting unbalanced news frames through their sourcing, lexical and syntactical choices described above. This might have reinforced attitudinal polarisation among readers of the two newspapers, especially on a sensitive and emotive issues like COVID-19 that affect people at personal and familial levels. Nevertheless, this polarisation and partisanship noted in news frames is a part of the agonistic public sphere expected in a media ecosystem. It reflects a robust exchange of ideas among citizens from different political divides.

Conclusion

This research examined how the state-controlled weekly newspaper *The Sunday Mail* and the privately owned *Daily News on Sunday* framed the health crisis in the Zimbabwean context. Key findings are that news frames about COVID-19 in the two newspapers tended to reflect the offline political polarisation existing in Zimbabwe. The two newspapers reflected the ideological chasm existing between the ruling party and the opposition. The polarisation, on the one hand, while reflecting a public sphere, albeit an antagonistic one clouded the issue at hand by framing the pandemic as a broad reflection of regime failure. On the other hand, the frames of regime praise in *The Sunday Mail* equally clouded a non-partisan and fact-based assessment of the regime's performance in combating the virus. Thus, the unbalanced news frames served a political ideology purpose. Reliance on two newspapers limited the generalisability of the findings to other mainstream newspaper outlets. Future research can add to this research by including a large sample and also include different media platforms like radio and online media.

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Part III
Regulation, Representation
and Marginalisation

Cybercrimes Law and Citizen Journalism Clampdown During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Tanzania

Eva Solomon

Abstract This chapter explores citizens' use of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania against the backdrop of the restrictive Cybercrimes Act 2015. Guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory and through Grounded Theory as a method of inquiry for data collection and data analysis, the study found that, of the 60 citizens interviewed, 75 per cent supported the Cybercrimes Act 2015 as a relevant law but acknowledged that the same Act limits the construction and dissemination of their Covid-19 messages. Only 18.4 per cent of respondents trusted information posted by ordinary citizens while 81.6 per cent trusted information from verifiable sources. Data analysis further reveals a weak citizen journalism practice occasioned mainly by six factors: limited freedom of expression, poor knowledge of Cybercrimes Law, citizen journalism values underutilisation, poor social media literacy skills, and limited message construction and dissemination. Nonetheless, respondents revealed that social media remained the most popular platform on which citizens discuss Covid-19 preventive measures amidst reduced social interactions. Equipping citizens with social media literacy skills was found to be important to reduce misinformation and disinformation. The chapter calls for a review of Section 20 of the Cybercrimes Act 2015 to enable citizens, especially during pandemics, to seek and impart information more effectively, devoid of fear of repercussions.

Keywords Social media · Regulation · Covid-19 · Tanzania

Introduction

As social media serve as tools of information during the Covid-19 pandemic that requires maintaining social distancing, communication has emerged as being as crucial as medical interventions (Lima et al. 2020). Thus, a focus on treating the

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pandemic should also ensure citizens communicate accurately and effectively. In the recent past, the world has witnessed the H1N1 swine flu in 2009, the Ebola virus in 2014 and the Zika virus in 2015, which have provided a framework for heightened use of social media in the information blitz (Duraisamy et al. 2020). With the WHO classification of Covid-19 as a severe global threat, citizens have embraced social media to satisfy their need to inform themselves and others about this pandemic.

Globally, research on citizens' use of social media in seeking and imparting information on Covid-19 has revealed some issues and challenges associated with citizens' reportage. These include fake news, misinformation, infodemic, information pollution, stigma, inaccuracies, untruths, crisis communication, government accountability, press freedom, and information democracy (Lima et al. 2020; Mirbabaie et al. 2020; Cinelli et al. 2020; Das and Wasim 2020; PAHO 2020; Sahni and Hunny 2020). Nevertheless, social media in citizen journalism practice during the Covid-19 pandemic remains exploratory as little is known about the situation, particularly in a developing country context like that of Tanzania, and against the backdrop of the infamous Cybercrimes Act 2015. In the context of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), this chapter therefore seeks to fill this yawning knowledge gap in the country.

Using the Grounded Theory method, this study explores citizens' use of social media in informing others and being informed on the Covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania against the backdrop of the restrictive Cybercrimes Act 2015. The chapter underscores the value and relevance of citizen journalism in contemporary times globally and in Tanzania in particular. In fact, citizen journalism provides an alternative media for ordinary citizens by giving them an opportunity to inform and be informed on issues that otherwise might be skipped by professional or mainstream journalists (Noor 2016). Generally, social media have become useful and important sites for news, public discussion and understanding of Covid-19, thus satisfying users' quest for information and understanding of the pandemic. For instance, citizens in Italy circulated news on Covid-19 via social media long before becoming headlines in the mainstream media (Das and Wasim 2020).

Despite an increase in social media research globally, challenges remain on how ordinary citizens in developing countries use social media and satisfy their need to seek and impart information on pandemics in a situation of not just limited journalistic skills but more significantly censorship and heightened control of health information. The context of Tanzania provides such an opportunity to study public discussion and understanding of Covid-19 through social media despite such limitations.

Background to the Study

Citizens' reporting of Covid-19 on social media in Tanzania was massive at the beginning of the pandemic, but when the Cybercrimes Law came into force, the circulation of Covid-19 information ebbed. In fact, Tanzania reported its first case of Covid-19 on social and mainstream media on 15 March 2020 when a woman who

had travelled from Tanzania to Belgium on 3 March 2020 had just returned and was diagnosed positive for Coronavirus on arrival in Arusha. She was treated in isolation and fully recovered. Through social media, her information and pictures were posted and she felt stigmatised.

By April 2020, four people were charged under the Cybercrimes Law and arrested for allegedly spreading false information on Covid-19 via social media (Xinhuanet 2020; Citizen 2020). By 29 April 2020, there were 509 Covid-19 cases, with 21 deaths reported officially (BBC 2020). The Tanzania government closed all schools and higher learning institutions, banned public mass gatherings (except congregations in churches, mosques and other houses of worship) and encouraged citizens to stay at home. Fearing the risks of starvation and economic consequences, the restriction of these public activities lasted only for three months (March, April and May). Unlike its neighbouring states, Tanzania imposed no travel restrictions and all her borders remained open. In June 2020, the late President John Magufuli declared that there were no new cases of Covid-19 in Tanzania and those recuperating in hospitals had been released. Even special centres established to either treat or hold suspected cases for observation were empty. Consequently, all public activities resumed within the same month.

In a nation of about 60 million people, 25 million are connected to Internet services largely via their handsets, which enables citizens, some as citizen journalists, to access information through social media platforms. Like the rest of the world, citizen journalism in Tanzania owes its origins to the introduction of social media platforms on the Internet. Currently, Internet access is no longer an urban phenomenon because of mobile phones, particularly smartphones, which have helped it penetrate both peri-urban and rural areas.

Free public discussions through citizen journalism have encountered their share of government backlash. Trained as a civil engineer, Maxcence Melo started a citizen journalism and whistle-blowing social media platform, *JamiiForums*, in 2003 to engage citizens in free discussion on various issues facing the country. *JamiiForums* became popular but also ruffled the feathers of the government, which led to the enactment of the Cybercrimes Act 2015, endorsed by the country's parliament on 1 April 2015. In addition, this law seeks to address issues of child pornography, cyber bullying, online impersonation, electronic production of racist and xenophobic content, unsolicited messages, illegal interception of communications, and publication of false information (Tanzania 2015).

It is against this background that an exploratory study was conducted to highlight citizens' use of social media through the practice of citizen journalism in Tanzania during Covid-19 amidst the challenges posed by the Cybercrimes Law 2015.

Theoretical Literature

Citizen journalism refers to journalistic activities of ordinary people, for example citizens themselves reporting on issues confronting them. Simply put, in today's nomenclature these are citizen journalists, a new breed of scribes (Noor 2016). These non-professionals, ordinary citizens, play an active role in collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information at the grassroots level (Choubey 2020).

Based on arguments advanced by scholars (Skjerdal 2012; Ocwich 2010; Bala and Domatob 2007; Mwesige 2004; Pieter 2008; Cliford et al. 2009; Banda 2007), there is a strong similarity in values among the following types of journalism practices: citizen journalism, civic/public journalism, advocacy journalism, development journalism and an African *Ubuntu* philosophy on journalism (Solomon 2014). These types of journalistic practices challenge the principles of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality, values at the core of Western/traditional journalism training and practice. Instead, they focus on accuracy, truth, fairness, timeliness, and proximity. They treat citizens as active participants and not passive consumers of information, focus on grassroots/ordinary people, render a voice for the voiceless, aim to improve ordinary people's lives, serve as a forum of discussion for various community issues, and emphasise participatory techniques. These values have varyingly come to shape and define citizen journalism practice. It is partly against this background of citizen journalism values that the chapter explores the reportage of Covid-19 in Tanzania by citizens through social media against the restrictive Cybercrimes Act 2015.

The success of citizen journalism practice owes much to the rise and unparalleled influence of digital social media platforms. It is closely related to the rise of the Internet as a medium of news, public information and social communication. With the rapid growth of the Internet in the 1990s, citizen journalism became globally popular from the 2000s (Palmer and Jérémie 2012). This advancement in digital social media has shifted citizens' dependency on mainstream media for receiving information to a dependency on social media for also constructing and disseminating information. The introduction of Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp and other mobile apps for social collection and dissemination of information contributes to promoting and emboldening citizen journalism practice.

There are three reasons that account for social media ascendancy as a citizen journalism platform. Firstly, they are user-friendly as they can be applied with minimum and/or no training. Secondly, the massive, scattered and heterogeneous numbers of social media users spread citizen journalism content to massive and wider audiences than traditional media outlets. Thirdly, continuous development of communication technologies and increasing Internet penetration has increased Internet users, enhancing content generation and dissemination (Jalli 2020). Though citizen journalism has become the most common concept, there are other phrases or coinages in use albeit with less frequency. These include participatory journalism, user generated content, new media, digital journalism, crowd-sourcing and social

networking, which primarily refer to the technology citizens apply in constructing, disseminating and receiving information (Moeller 2009). With social media, the process of receiving, constructing and disseminating information has thus far been participatory and democratic, enhancing citizens' satisfaction of their social and psychological needs concerning information.

The UGT has therefore become increasingly important with the rise of communication technologies and hence relevant to this study. Although the theory has been used in media research since the 1940s to explain how people use mainstream mass media to fulfil their needs, the theory has recently been used to explore why people use social media and to identify the needs people wish to satisfy by using them (Taskiran 2019; Picazo-Vela and Cruz-Sandoval 2013; Mehrad and Pegah 2016; Ruggiero 2018). It is regarded as the most influential theory in communication, focusing on the user as it argues that the most important role of the media is to fulfil the needs of the audience (Mehrad and Pegah 2016). It views users not as passive receivers of messages but as active users who consciously consume media messages to satisfy their social and psychological needs. As an audience/user-centred theory, the UGT is therefore an ideal theory to guide the exploration of citizens' use of social media in informing and being informed on the Covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania. The suitability of the UGT in this study lies in the fact that the list of gratifications people obtain when using social media, interaction, seeking and sharing information, socialisation, education, communication and expression of opinions (Picazo-Vela and Cruz-Sandoval 2013; Musa et al. 2016; Taskiran 2019), partly contribute to the key factors in the exploration of people's use of social media in informing themselves and others about Covid-19.

Grounded Theory Data Collection and Analysis Method

Grounded theory as a method of data collection and analysis originated from Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s when they were conducting a field study of dying hospital patients (Musa et al. 2016). It is defined as a theory derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis and the eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Initially, the Grounded Theory was mainly used in medical research but it has since been extended to many fields of study including journalism and mass communication (Jinghong et al. 2019; Martin et al. 2018).

Data Collection

This study involved 60 respondents (initial sampling), which led to another four respondents (theoretical sampling). The 60 respondents were obtained from Makumbusho Bus Stand area in Kinondoni municipality of Dar es Salaam City.

Table 1 Respondents (initial sampling)

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18–40	55	91.7
41–60	2	3.3
>61	3	5.0
Gender		
Male	33	55.0
Female	27	45.0
Education		
Primary	13	21.7
Secondary	37	61.7
Higher learning	10	16.7
Occupation		
Self-employed (traders)	26	43.3
Employees in private sector	5	8.3
Government employees	6	10.0
Hairdressers, bar attendants, college students, housewives	23	38.3

The figure 60 was the point at which the study reached an information saturation point. This area, being a city bus stand, connects to almost all the suburbs in the city, and is also the country's business hub. The selection of respondents was purposive, in the sense that only respondents who access social media platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic and are not journalists by profession participated in the study. All the respondents accessed social media platforms on their mobile phones. Their level of education was mostly secondary education (61.7 per cent); a few had higher learning education and much fewer primary education. The ages of the majority (91.7 per cent) ranged from 18 to 40. Their occupations were diverse: bar attendants, hairdressers, motorbike riders, shopkeepers, vendors, and government and private sector employees. There were also housewives and college students, such as medical and business students. With regard to gender, there were 55 per cent males and 45 per cent females. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Based on the Grounded Theory method, the study employed semi-structured face-to-face interviews to gather information from the respondents in a period of four weeks (20 July to 14 August 2020). On average, three respondents were interviewed per day. In-depth and extensive interviews were held with those respondents who had constructed and disseminated messages or had practised some form of citizen journalism. Interviews were appropriate for the nature of sample involved in the study. Although they were purposively selected, the researcher met the participants by chance at the busy Makumbusho bus stand before requesting an interview. Most questions were open-ended, which generated qualitative data; a few were closed-ended and generated quantitative data on a limited scale. Thus, the study is

largely qualitative. The interviews were recorded and noted down in summary form. They were then manually transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed and categorised according to the constant comparative method of data analysis of the Grounded Theory. Data collected during interviews were summarised in different categories, which were confirmed and modified throughout the analyses. The data analysis started immediately after the first interview and consisted of open, axial and selective coding. Open coding included repeated readings of the interviews and an in-depth, line-by-line analysis of the transcribed data. By means of open coding, data were coded under various headings according to their content with the purpose of opening the data up, as well as achieving a constant comparison of incidents and categories that emerged from subsequent interviews. At this stage the researcher identified many categories. The data were then divided into similar groupings and formed preliminary categories of information about the phenomenon being examined. In the axial coding, categories were linked, related and put together. In the final stage, selective coding, the categories were linked together, resulting in a core category. As a process of integrating and refining theory, categories were reduced and organised into themes to articulate a coherent understanding or theory of the phenomenon under study. Under the Grounded Theory, a number of categories grouped together form the foundation of a theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

On the other hand, the quantitative data arising during the study were subjected to statistical analysis. The Grounded Theory is a very flexible data collection and analysis method that accommodates both qualitative and quantitative data (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Chun et al. 2019). Just like in qualitative data, the quantitative data was also separated and compared across the various categories, which also contributed to theoretical sampling.

After this analysis of the first round of data, the ordinary citizens (initial sampling), data from the initial sampling directed the researcher to content developers of *JamiiForums* information on Covid-19 (theoretical sampling). Based on the theoretical sampling principle of the Grounded Theory, sampling depends on the concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory. Therefore, theoretical sampling can be fully planned when the study begins following the initial sampling. In other words, the initial categories that were developed by the initial sampling guided the remaining part of the field study. This made the process of data collection (with the theoretical sampling) more focused. Following the constant comparative analysis method, data obtained from theoretical sampling were compared with those of the initial sampling. After no further new ideas and insights emerged from the data, the study reached a 'theoretical saturation', a point in category development at which nothing new emerges during analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998)

Findings

The data analysis gave rise to a process leading to a core category, which explained the factors that influence the practice of citizen journalism during the Covid-19 pandemic. Six different but interrelated categories were identified as contributors to the practice of citizen journalism during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania. These were freedom of expression, knowledge, skills, values, construction and dissemination. The findings revealed limited freedom of expression: the respondents demonstrated fear to engage freely in citizen journalism practice during Covid-19, especially in constructing and disseminating messages due to the restrictive Cybercrimes Law. Whereas knowledge implies the understanding of the Cybercrimes Law, the study found that it was generally lacking among citizens. The lack of enough knowledge on Cybercrimes Law results in fear, limiting freedom of expression of citizens to engage freely in citizen journalism practice.

A few respondents (18.4 per cent) demonstrated higher levels of social media literacy skills while engaging in social media to be informed on Covid-19. The skills demonstrated by these respondents enabled the researcher to identify citizen journalism values. These categories (limited freedom of expression, poor knowledge of Cybercrimes Law, underutilisation of citizen journalism values and poor application of social media literacy skills) resulted in 88 per cent of the respondents' reluctance to construct and disseminate messages on social media and 81.6 per cent of the participants' reluctance to trust information on social media which had no verifiable or official sources. These categories negatively influenced the citizens' reportage of Covid-19 on social media as they resulted in the poor practice of citizen journalism, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania (Fig. 1).
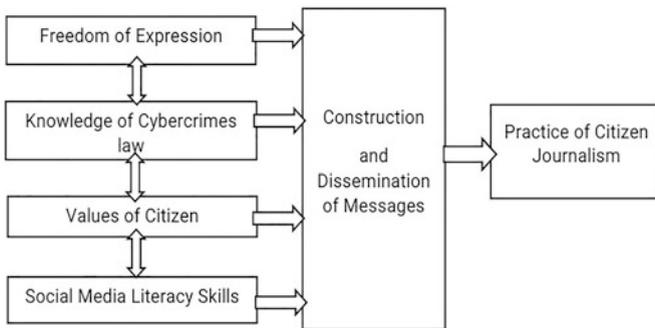

Fig. 1 Factors influencing citizens' use of social media in seeking and imparting information on Covid-19 in Tanzania

Core Category: Practice of Citizen Journalism

The findings show that six factors account for the downward trend of citizens' reportage of Covid-19 in Tanzania. These have been clustered into limited freedom of expression, poor knowledge of Cybercrimes law, poor application of citizen journalism values, and poor social media literacy skills, which led to limited construction and dissemination of Covid-19 content, and hence the inevitable poor practice of citizen journalism during the pandemic.

Freedom of Expression

Although the findings show that 75 per cent of the respondents support the Cybercrimes Act 2015 as a relevant law, the same Act curtails their freedom of expression in constructing and disseminating messages on Covid-19 due to widespread fear of the law. Their support of the law is based on the argument that it enhances information accuracy and protects people from unnecessary defamation and slander. In their view, the law also minimised stories that occasioned and spread fear in the community.

A handful of respondents (5 per cent) who were overtly against this piece of legislation firmly attested to how it limits people's freedom of expression. As explained by an online content developer: "Because of deep-seated fear of the law, people are not free enough to communicate, hence undermining their creativity in online content". Some 18.3 per cent of the respondents even reported fearing sharing the messages on Covid-19 they had received as they dreaded the consequences of doing so under this law.

Knowledge of Cybercrimes Law

Some 80 per cent of the respondents were aware of the law, although 75 per cent of those who supported the law admitted that they did not have enough information about it. They only knew that the law requires people not to spread lies, disseminate pornographic content or invade people's privacy. The little knowledge they had of the law amounted to fear of the law, increasing dread of its robbing them of freedom of expression.

Social Media Literacy Skills

Of the respondents, 81.6 per cent were doubtful about the information on Covid-19 posted on social media. They used several skills to confirm the accuracy of the messages. For example, 43.3 per cent of these respondents mainly trusted information on social media only if it was from official sources such as the Ministry of Health, or trusted social media platforms such as *JamiiForums*, WHO and blogs known for posting official information, such as the *Millard Ayo* and *Michuzi*. Another technique these respondents used to crosscheck the accuracy of the information was verifying the information on social media from mainstream news media, as revealed by 38.3 per cent of the respondents. To these respondents, the source of information was crucial in determining its accuracy. Implicitly, these respondents distrusted the information from mere ordinary citizens. These respondents explained that when the official sources stopped providing information on Covid-19, a few citizens started disseminating information from their own sources and this led to confusion.

On the other hand, 18.4 per cent of the respondents trusted information on social media as posted by mere ordinary citizens. These respondents demonstrated a higher level of social media literacy skills, as one of them noted: "If there is no official source, then I turn to the comments section. The comments contained there will give me some hints to determine whether the message is true or not". Another respondent said: "The message can be doubtful when reported differently by various social networks. There are huge possibilities that it might be flawed or contain errors. Moreover, depending on what I already know, I can determine whether the message is true or not". These respondents also used the context of the story to check its accuracy. The more familiar the environment, the more likely the story was accurate, as explained in the proximity value below.

Values of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism values are important in determining the presence and strength of the practice. Four types of values emerged strongly from the respondents during the study. These values are accuracy and truth; proximity; and forum of discussion and understanding.

Regarding accuracy and truth, a respondent explained: "In my neighbourhood someone died and there were rumours that it was because of Covid-19. Later the doctor's report showed that the cause was not Covid-19 but the family of the deceased had already been affected by the misinformation from the neighbours". Another respondent offered this view: "On social media platforms everyone has something to say. Different social media platforms presented different statistics on Corona-related deaths. This really confused me". In such circumstances, the respondents saw the relevance of the Cybercrimes Law, especially Section 16 which

prohibits the publication of false or falsified information. As they explained: "The Law is relevant because I don't want to be threatened by false or concocted stories concerning the pandemic, especially stories on the death count and how people were buried". "The Law is good as it reduces misinformation in the society", narrated another respondent, who added, "Not every death was caused by Covid-19. So, only authoritative sources can provide accurate information".

In the quest for accuracy and truth, the *JamiiForums* platform demands that citizens produce evidence-based information. This is a major guideline for posting information on the *JamiiForums* platform. As Maxcence Melo, the founder of *JamiiForums*, explained in an interview, "The *JamiiForums* content moderators check for accuracy before allowing the message to feature on the platform". This is a safeguard that has allowed *JamiiForums* to enjoy a reputation as a high-profile and reliable social media platform.

Proximity: Related to the values of accuracy and truth is proximity. In this regard, 18.4 per cent of the respondents who demonstrated social media literacy skills also explained that they highly trusted information on social media regardless of its source. One of them explained how they depend on the environment (proximity) to determine the accuracy of the information:

> I trust these messages because they are in the context that I can relate to. For example, someone posted a video of someone who collapsed on a busy street at Kariakoo [in Dar es Salaam city] and you can see City Council trucks picking the person up. Also, the City Council ambulances moving in streets that I could recognise, to collect ailing people suspected to have contracted Corona.

On the other hand, such respondents said they doubted messages on Covid-19 sourced from distant areas they were unable to relate to and authenticate the information communicated. For these respondents, proximity was an important value for verifying the accuracy of the story.

Forum of discussion and understanding: Despite the limitations imposed by legislations such as Cybercrimes Law, the respondents revealed that social media remained the most popular platform that satisfied citizens' various issues amidst reduced social interactions, for example sharing of information on Covid-19 preventive measures, working from home facilitated by online technology (i.e. Zoom, Webex meetings), arranging for marriage and burial ceremonies through WhatsApp, buying and selling of products through Instagram, and live streaming of music concerts. Implicitly, social media platforms are relevant in acquiring new life skills during Covid-19. Skills gained include doing business online, gardening, cooking different dishes, creating environmentally friendly carrier bags, animation and online learning. This finding is consistent with the UGT theory in terms of satisfying the needs of users.

Construction and Dissemination of Messages by Citizens

People were not willing to construct and disseminate messages on Covid-19. Of all the respondents, only 12 per cent admitted to having constructed and disseminated information. These happened to be all males. The messages constructed mainly focused on preventive measures, messages that were already placed on social media. Observations made during the interviews were that in fear of the Cybercrimes Law, respondents were also reluctant to answer questions on the construction and dissemination of messages. As one respondent remarked: "Why are you asking me that question? Do you want me to be jailed?" Finally, she categorically denied having constructed any message, largely out of fear of the repercussions of such an admission. This limits users' satisfaction from using social media for Covid-19 information. In this regard, a respondent attested: "The Cybercrimes Law makes citizens fear admitting that they constructed and disseminated messages on Covid-19 via social media, but actually they did". This scenario provides a glimpse of the citizen journalism practice during the pandemic in the context of Tanzania. Some respondents might have denied having constructed messages for fear of feeling the wrath of the Cybercrimes Act. The same tendency emerged on the *JamiiForums* platform where some message authors remain anonymous to the public.

JamiiForums insists on guiding citizens on social media use to avoid negative consequences. As Melo affirmed: "*JamiiForums* draws the attention of 83% of internet users in Tanzania, mostly the youths aged between 25 and 45 years. About 500,000 people visit the platform every day. To avoid civil unrest these citizens need to be guided in processing information, and therefore a need for the *JamiiForums* community engagement guidelines to stimulate respectful dialogue, creative thinking and a fully participatory approach". Melo mentioned some of the rules set out for all *JamiiForums* participants, including: (i) correct spelling, grammar and style in writing, (ii) proper citing of sources, (iii) not impersonating a public figure or forum member, or accessing or using someone else's account, (iv) questionable content: any material that is knowingly false and/or defamatory, misleading, inaccurate, abusive, vulgar, hateful, harassing, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, drugs, drugs, racist, threatening, invasive of a person's privacy, that otherwise violates any law, or encourages criminal offence.

The findings reveal that 53.3 per cent of the respondents relied on the *JamiiForums* platform for Covid-19 information.

Discussion

In the context of the UGT, this study explored how citizens use social media in reporting Covid-19 against the backdrop of the newly enacted Cybercrimes Law 2015 in Tanzania. The findings show that the respondents need freedom of expression, knowledge of the Cybercrimes Law, application of citizen journalism values,

and social media literacy skills to construct and disseminate useful messages on Covid-19 and, hence, satisfy their need for knowledge concerning Covid-19. These factors are important for an effective practice of citizen journalism.

Review of the literature shows that the concept of freedom of expression regarding citizens' use of social media in receiving, constructing and disseminating information has been debatable based on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Pearson 2013). The article states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression in seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers, if one respects the rights and reputations of others, protection of national security, public order, public health and morals. These limitations to freedom of expression call for responsible reporting, especially during a pandemic. However, worries persist on the ever-increasing government regulations of social media suppressing freedom of expression in countries around the world, for example China and the Asia-Pacific region (Pearson 2013)

Governments in different parts of the world have enacted laws aimed to curb emerging social and technological situations such as the Cybercrimes Law of Tanzania that curtails citizens' freedom of expression. Consequently, citizen journalists have to be educated on the implications of their truth-seeking and truth-telling as a routine part of the process of constructing, disseminating and receiving information (Pearson 2013). There is an implicit need for a mindful use of freedom of expression achievable through the acquisition of social media literacy skills and adherence to the *JamiiForums* community engagement guidelines.

Scholarly discussions have been questioning four main issues concerning citizen journalism values (Jalli 2020). Firstly, credibility: citizen journalism has attracted criticism pertaining to its ability to produce reliable news and how audiences determine whether the news from these citizens is reliable or not. In this study, for instance, 81.6 per cent of the respondents only trusted information on social media if it was from credible sources. Secondly, accountability: Internet users can hide behind pseudonyms and remain anonymous, hence limiting their accountability. This is likely to foster negativity. On its positive side, anonymity provides an opportunity for whistle-blowers to share confidential content with the public without jeopardising their own safety. For instance, citizen journalists in India and Bangladesh risk being attacked or even murdered when revealing sensitive information (Choubey 2020). This argument concurs with the current study as some respondents dreaded admitting that they constructed and disseminated messages on Covid-19. Likewise, some citizens on the *JamiiForums* platform prefer to remain anonymous, fearing for their safety. Thirdly, objectivity: in the absence of gatekeeping and the rush to be the first to break the news (competing with fellow citizen journalists and the mainstream media), information reported by citizen journalists is arguably not objective; it tends to be heavily influenced by opinion and bias. Fourthly, authenticity: citizen journalism bloggers have been accused of reproducing and recycling news instead of reporting fresh and original copy. Often, bloggers take content from traditional media or other sources and republish it on their sites on a

copy-and-paste basis with few adjustments. Sometimes it is just translation from one language to another.

Media literacy skills foster an active inquiry, critical thinking and interpretation of the messages people receive and create (Bulger and Patrick 2018), similar to the findings of the current study. Specifically, social/digital media literacy refers to a set of skills that helps users to improve their engagement with digital media and information sources in a participatory manner (Reineck and Lublinski 2015). The ability of citizens to co-ordinate, construct and disseminate information and actions is where social/digital media literacy differs from traditional media literacy. Social media literacy can help to nurture watchful, sceptical and well-informed citizens. Similarly, in the current study some respondents demonstrated impeccable levels of social media literacy skills, such as confirming the truth through familiarity with the environment. And in line with the UGT, these respondents satisfied their social and psychological needs concerning Covid-19 information.

Based on the literature review, the findings and the subsequent discussion show that citizen journalism practice in Tanzania by using social media during the Covid-19 pandemic offers various opportunities. Firstly, there is an upsurge in Internet access via mobile phones, particularly for those using smartphones. As noted earlier, 25 million people have access to the Internet through their mobile phones. This expanded usage also bolsters the practice of citizen journalism. Secondly, the Cybercrimes Law, particularly its Section 16, warns any person who publishes false or falsified information on social media that could defame, threaten, abuse, insult, deceive or mislead the public. Such a person is committing an offence and is liable to receive a fine of not less than five million shillings or imprisonment for a term of not less than three years, or both, once convicted.

The punitive action embedded in this section compels citizens to crosscheck and validate the information they disseminate, especially on sensitive issues such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In essence, abiding by the provision of this section requires citizen journalism to demonstrate values of accuracy, fairness and truth. And this is important on social media due to its immediacy and ability to reach a multitude of people within a short time. In fact, having many people spreading information carries the risk of sensationalism, rumour mongering, misinformation and disinformation. Thus, it is crucial for governments to fight both the pandemic and infodemic (Duraisamy et al. 2020). In Tanzania, the Cybercrimes Law helps to enforce compliance and make people desist from deliberate manipulation of fact, mudslinging and falsification of news. Nevertheless, as the findings indicate, citizens do check and even counter-check the accuracy of stories circulating on social media. The *JamiiForums* is also using its community engagement guidelines and content moderators to ensure that posts and associated comments are accurate and devoid of untruths before allowing them onto the platform for dissemination.

Thirdly, regarding social media literacy skills, the respondents were interested in the sources of information on social media, a crucial precautionary measure during a pandemic. Some respondents verified the information in mainstream media whereas others had recourse to their common sense. Further analysis shows that these respondents were well-informed and had a significant sense of information

management. They continued with their daily routines while adhering to directives from health experts. Perhaps this alertness could explain why Tanzanian has remained calm and courageous during the Covid-19 pandemic. In essence, this study confirms the UGT theory on the level of satisfaction respondents obtained from social media on Covid-19 information. Fourthly, *JamiiForums* community engagement guidelines provide a basis for disseminating accurate information from citizens as it underscores respecting all values of citizen journalism and beyond, such as accuracy, truthfulness, forum for discussion, proximity, moral decency, honesty and clarity.

On the other hand, the challenges to enhancing citizens' capacity to construct, disseminate and receive accurate information include, firstly, Section 20 of the Cybercrimes Law that a person shall not transmit or receive unsolicited messages. Doing so amounts to committing an offence and is liable to a fine of not less than three million shillings or to imprisonment for a term of not less than one year, or both, upon conviction. The pertinent question that arises here, as also asked by Ndumbaro (2019), is: What if the message is critical to survival but the receiver did not solicit it? This question is especially pertinent now during Covid-19 when citizens need immediate and current information to protect themselves. This section of the law therefore needs a review to reflect the Covid-19 scenario.

Secondly, an increase in Internet penetration via smartphones has transformed Internet access so much that it is no longer an urban phenomenon. It is also a rural phenomenon. Thus, citizens need to acquire social media literacy skills for them to practise citizen journalism effectively, especially during a pandemic. As the study findings reveal, only 18.4 per cent of the respondents used their social media skills to analyse information produced by non-professionals. The majority (81.6 per cent) relied on official sources or the mainstream media to crosscheck information they found on social media. Social media literacy skills among citizens are essential in the digital age because when people are stressed and uncertain, they can easily be swayed by disinformation, resulting in an infodemic.

Thirdly, there is the financial ability concern as those who cannot afford smartphones miss out on the accruing benefits reapable from social media platforms and citizen journalism. Also, financial challenges in accessing the Internet persist, especially for low-income earners.

Future Trends and Conclusion

This chapter has outlined six different but interrelated categories based on the study findings, namely, freedom of expression, knowledge of the Cybercrimes Law, application of citizen journalism values, social media literacy skills, and construction and dissemination of messages, as relevant for an effective practice of citizen journalism. This theory can serve as a guide for citizen journalism practice, especially during a pandemic. The theory can also serve as a precursor for further investigation of this phenomenon and related issues since it provides crucial

direction. Despite a weakened practice of citizen journalism during the Covid-19 pandemic as respondents revealed, citizen journalism through social media in Tanzania has a bright future characterised by a heightened Internet penetration in both urban and rural spaces, coupled with an increase in Internet access engendered by smartphones. In line with the UGT, the study demonstrates that social media have been crucial tools in satiating social and psychological needs of socialisation, information, education and discussion on Covid-19 during the partial lockdown. After all, the UGT's key element in social media is that users are active and interactive.

Moreover, Section 16 of the Cybercrimes Law, which seeks to curb misinformation, ought to be seen in a positive light as it can bring freedom and responsibility to citizen journalists. Additionally, the *JamiiForums* platform has set standards in ensuring information accuracy from citizens through its community engagement guidelines. This is an aspect that citizen journalists in Tanzania can integrate in their practice during such crises.

For future research, there is an interesting trend following a different approach to Covid-19 from the new President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, from March 2021, where authorities have been more open about the presence of the pandemic in Tanzania. In June 2021, the President warned of the third wave of Covid-19 where the country recorded 100 cases. She directed all Covid-19 precautions to be taken and urged Tanzanians to get vaccinated. This trend indicates a sharp turn from her predecessor, thus necessitating research concerning Tanzanian citizens and their reception, construction and dissemination of Covid-19 messages on social media platforms.

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Framing the AIDS Discourse: A Critic of Journalistic Source Norms in Uganda's HIV and AIDS Print News

Angella Napakol

Abstract Through reportage, media have played a key role in HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness in Uganda. Uganda's success in reducing the percentage of HIV infection together with key supportive factors such as political will have been discussed internationally. Media have been credited with relaying information about HIV/AIDS to different groups of people in the public and acting as change agents. This study looks at media as key players in the HIV and AIDS prevention journey in Uganda and therefore seeks to investigate how two major newspaper outlets; *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor* framed the issue of HIV/AIDS—looking particularly at the who, between authority and none authority sources contributed most to the HIV/AIDS narrative as news stories' sources. A quantitative content analysis was carried out of *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor* newspapers' articles spanning 20 years of coverage. Results indicate that despite the important role played, media depended more on authority sources of information compared to none authority sources. This paper argues that lay people such as PLWHA or their caregivers have lived experiences which if shared, could affect the adoption of recommended HIV/AIDS preventive measures.

Keywords AIDS discourse · News coverage · Framing · HIV/AIDS · Media · Prevention · Source norms

Introduction

Currently, over 38 million people globally are living with HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2020). More than forty years after its discovery, HIV and AIDS is still among the world's worst health challenges, not only because of its multifaceted nature but because since its discovery in the early 1980s, no guaranteed medical measures have been found to contain it. The disease has transcended boundaries, affecting all

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people irrespective of age, color, or social status. HIV and AIDS has infected about 76 million people since it was discovered in the early 1980s, claiming about 36 million lives by 2019 and about 38 million people lived with HIV and AIDS worldwide in the same year (UNAIDS 2020; WHO, 2020). At the close of 2020, about 38.6 million people worldwide lived with HIV and AIDS.

Although HIV and AIDS prevalence and burden vary amongst regions, Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected with roughly 28.9 million infections; accounting for approximately 76% of the infection worldwide (UNAIDS, 2020; WHO, 2020). Uganda is among countries worst hit by HIV/AIDS in the sub-Saharan region with a current rate of about 6.2% (UNAIDS, 2020); a great decline from about 18% in the early 1990s.

Prevention has remained the best mechanism to limit the spread of HIV and AIDS. The government of Uganda embarked on HIV and AIDS prevention since the late 1980s. Different educative and awareness campaigns were and are still being developed and circulated by government to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS. To be more effective in reaching the public, government engaged the media from the initial epochs of HIV and AIDS disease. Media outlets including broadcast, radio, and print became the main sources of HIV and AIDS information. Indeed, open discussion of HIV and AIDS related issues in the media was encouraged since such discussions were considered learning points.

The majority of people depend on the media for up-front, current, and comprehensive reporting. This is especially true of HIV and AIDS (Napakol 2011; Swain, 2005). The knowledge that most people have about HIV and AIDS is from radio, television, Internet, or newspapers. Scholarly research about the scope and focus of news coverage of HIV/AIDS worldwide is extensive, with researchers such as Stevens and Hull, (2013); Swain (1997; 2005); Mollyann Brodie et al., (2004); Nilanjana (2001); Kannick et al. (1996); Lupton et al. (1993); and Everett et al. (1991) noticing a great decline in and change in content of coverage of HIV and AIDS in press from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. This study however, looks at how HIV and AIDS discourse has been framed in Uganda's print media focusing specifically on use of official and non-official (In this paper, official, non-official and authority, non-authority sources will be used interchangeably) sources of HIV/AIDS stories.

Due to journalistic norms and values that encourage objectivity, together with practical constraints surrounding journalistic daily work, journalists are heavily reliant on official sources for collection and validation of information (Shehata 2007; Miller and Williams 2001; Molotch and Lester, 1974; Schlesinger, 1977; Tuchman, 1978; 1974). This gives official sources unvarying access to the media which consequently translates into influence of it (Campbell, 2004, p.86; Pamer, 2000; Powers and Fico, 1994). Research has shown that journalists tend to be prejudiced in favor of official news sources such as high-level politicians, government officials, scientific research and publications, or medical experts because such sources are readily available and considered credible (see Sigal 1973; Schlesinger and Tumbler 1994; Shehata 2007; 2010; Hall et al. 1978), a blind dependence that inadvertently disadvantages those that are not considered authority sources. This paper, however, argues for a redefinition of official or authority sources especially in

HIV and AIDS discourse and makes a case for inclusion of affected populations and their experiences as these can be powerful in shaping the HIV and AIDS narrative. Experiences that evoke emotion have been known to be powerful influences in social and behavioral change (Baljeet 2017).

Official Dominance Model, Journalistic Norms, and News Coverage

Research has shown immense support for claims that official actors influence how issues are framed in the news media. The official dominance model (Bennet 2007; Bennet and Livingston 2003; Hallin, 1986; Campbell 2004; Bennet 1990; Hall et al. 1978, Shehata 2007) argues that a symbiotic relationship exists between journalists and official sources where official sources offer information needed by journalists while journalists afford a vital platform for such sources to influence a mass audience (Shehata 2007). These actors and sources within established institutions in society hold a level of leverage with reference to defining societal problems and subsequently influencing the stipulations of policy debates (Shehata 2010). The model basically proposes that news coverage of issues concentrates on undertakings in government or reputable political institutions. For example, Bennet (2007) and Shehata (2010) argue that news coverage in politics is typically goaded by reporter's assessment of authority ranks in government. In other words, news reporters' attention on official sources goes beyond an issue of dependence to include consequence of general journalistic tendency to follow and report on actions of those in powerful positions (Shehata 2010, p. 125). Despite bias in choice of information sources however, several studies have suggested that critical voices may, under certain conditions, enter news coverage (Entman, 2004, Lawrence 2000; Shehata 2007). Sporadically, the routine pattern is broken, altering journalistic news criteria concerning who to include in news reports on a given topic. Though such changes might open a window of opportunity for unofficial voices (Shehata 2007, p.132), it is not enough to successfully challenge the dominant stance unless sustained over a longer period of coverage. These media waves, as they are popularly called, create an opportunity for none authority sources to shape and define beliefs and definition of social issues (Shehata 2007). The official dominance model is most commonly referenced in political communication, but it has relevance in health communication as well, particularly to the issue of HIV and AIDS which has long been politicized. HIV and AIDS assumes different facets and its discussion therefore traverses numerous spaces including political, medical and research, social and economic. Representation of other voices in HIV and AIDS reports therefore needs to be much more systematic. Oftentimes, the official sources' have been associated with knowledge, power, position, and authority (Sholle 1988)—the understanding that for a story to be credible, it must have authority or official voices as sources of information. There is need however, to redefine what powerful, credible, and authoritative

sources are. Having facts and knowledge about an issue such as HIV and AIDS is as powerful as having lived experiences of the same (Baljeet 2017). The ability to exemplify and bring to life effects of diseases such as HIV and AIDS through using the so-called none official sources could be as effective as letting people know about policies and decisions and the prevalence of the disease.

News Sources and Journalistic Norms/Routines

A source can be a person, document, record, or publication that contains, is involved with, or is affected by an issue. Oftentimes, such sources provide information that would aid a journalist to report or explain an issue to his/her audience. News gathering by journalists has for long been criticized for being unbalanced, involving a battle to control information flow (Davis, 2005, p. 24). Manning (2001) asserts that resources, both material and symbolic, are employed in an attempt to influence and control information flows supporting news production. In other words, sources with limited material and/or symbolic resources are sidelined in the shaping, control, and production of news, leaving the powerful sources with sizeable capability to set agendas and influence the narrative for most topics. Davis (2005) has argued that such power has been intensified by new technologies and introduction of free market conditions to public service broadcasting. As financial anxieties have supplanted public service standards, the will to resource overpriced news programs and reflective quality newspaper press have diminished. As a result, journalists have time and again been compelled to upsurge output without an equivalent upsurge in resources. In the end, the impression is that there is a deterioration in investigative reporting and in editorial standards, yet there is augmented dependence on authority sources.

Corporate and state sources have enormous government and economic resource advantages that independent, low power actors cannot match (Davis, 2005). In Sigal's (1973) study, for instance, American and foreign government officials accounted for 75% of all news sources. The state will always have the political, legal, and financial means with which to supply pressure to journalists, influence their movements, and/or court them. In Uganda, the leading newspaper, the *New Vision* is government owned (enjoined by the act of parliament to act "independent") thus the level of government influence is clearly evident. The *Daily Monitor* newspaper, despite being privately owned, also dependents on powerful sources— that is politically, economically, and academically—to gain information.

Also, one of the common factors in choice of sources is their legitimacy and credibility (Becker 1967). Some sources such as government and corporate institutions enjoy de facto legitimacy. Such sources also include politicians and are often easy to contact and considered more informed and credible. The discussion of "official or authority sources" has been ongoing for long with various researchers calling for recognition of experiences of affected and/or infected people (Paletz and Entman 1981; Sigal 1973; Becker 1967; Traquina 2004); Davis, 2000; Manning, 2001; Semujju 2015).

Tuchman (1978) emphasizes that the custom of news organizations establishing a routine of deploying reporters at different places and organizations engenders news workers partial to official sources. This practice, which Tuchman calls the "news net" referring to the "netlike formation of the dispersion of reporters" influences the way of life on the social world since it permits news events to transpire at selected places while ignoring "other" places thus a continuous marginalization of non-official news sources. In essence, such practice and reliance on routines, the news making procedures turn into bureaucratic tendencies of selecting affected news pieces from agents of a different bureaucracy: demonstrating that social actors are not equal in their access to journalists (p. 81). Traquina and Schudson echoed what Philip Schlesinger stated in 1978 that sources are by no means equal, both in status and in their access to journalists. The powerful, the economically and politically endowed can gain effortless access to and/or are pursued by journalists yet those who are less powerful cannot easily be contacted by journalists and their views are not pursued till their actions or behavior engender a social malady (Gans 1979, p. 81).

The journalistic routines and therefore; the day-to-day effort to navigate the professional exigencies of news production creates a painstakingly planned excessive access to the media by individuals in power and authority advantaged institutions thus almost single handedly shaping the discourse for most social issues including HIV and AIDS.

Sources, Dominance, and Coverage of HIV and AIDS

Chapman and Lupton (1994) argue that coverage of health and medical knowledge including that of HIV/AIDS is frequently piecemeal, overgeneralized, and reliant upon a limited number of powerful sources (Chapman and Lupton, 1994; Manning 2001, p.1). However, the most expert sources may not be powerful individuals and policy makers. Depending on the topic, some of the experts whose views need to be made known to the public may be of powerless individuals who simply have inside experience with the issue. When it comes to HIV and AIDS discourse in Uganda, such "experts" would include groups at high risk for infections such as women, children and the youths, fishermen, truck drivers, sex workers among others. Lived experiences and challenges of the people living with or affected by an issue lend a multilayered perspective to the knowledge of and prevention strategies to a multi-faceted disease such as HIV/AIDS.

Building on Shehata (2010), this paper draws from the official dominance model and journalistic routines and practices to discuss the ascendency of official sources in HIV and AIDS print media in Uganda, the marginalization of the sources with less political, social, economic, or educational power, and potential impact of skewed HIV and AIDS narrative. In this paper, official actors include government officials, medical personal, researchers, and international organizations such as the World

Health Organization, the United Nations, and other international agencies concerned with health.

Research Questions

RQ1: How common are official vs. non-official sources of information in HIV and AIDS related articles?

RQ2: How does the pattern of official vs. non-official sources vary over time?

RQ3: What international sources are most common among HIV and AIDS related articles?

RQ4: How does the pattern of international sources vary over time?

RQ5: Is there a difference in use of official vs. non-official sources of information for HIV/AIDS stories in the government-owned vs. private newspaper?

Research Method

This paper is part of a larger research that studied HIV and AIDS coverage in Uganda over a 20-year period. The study used quantitative content analysis methodology although qualitative analysis was used to establish categories for the coding scheme. The study period considered years from 1992 to 2011. Although data collection stopped in 2011, this being a historical as well as longitudinal study, it remains relevant because it is important to systematically evoke significant nuances of coverage of HIV and AIDS and their meanings so as to analyze how these have shaped and continue to shape the present discourse and policies on the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

The year 1992 is when the private newspaper *The Daily Monitor* started its operation in the country. Comparison about how ownership of the newspapers influences content was one of the objectives of the study, therefore analysis of earlier years when Uganda had just one daily newspaper, the government-run *New Vision,* was not useful. Also, many structural, social, and economic reforms related to HIV and AIDS were instituted in Uganda around 1992. Also, the study was divided into four phases to enable comparison of coverage among them. Phase 1 was from 1992 to 1994, Phase 2 from 1995 to 2000, phase 3 from 2001 to 2006 while phase 4 was from 2007 to 2011.

The *New Vision* daily newspaper was established in 1986. It has grown into a multimedia business focusing on newspapers, magazines, television, Internet publishing, and radio broadcasting (The *New Vision* Annual report, 2017). The paper has a daily circulation of over 38,000 copies countrywide. Although it is owned by government, the newspaper is enjoined by the act of parliament to remain independent. As such, The *New Vision* claims that it runs balanced information and reports

all facts while leaving the opinion of the matter to the readers (Napakol, 2011; Khamalwa, 2006).

The Daily Monitor was established in 1992 as an independent daily newspaper but was renamed in June 2005 as *The Daily Monitor. The Daily Monitor* has a daily nationwide circulation of over 32, 000 copies (*The Daily Monitor* Annual report, 2017). The paper refers to itself as "Uganda's favorite and only independent paper" (Vergaelen, 2001). It is highly critical of government and the president, resulting in its being labeled on occasion as an enemy of the state (Khamalwa, 2006). The two newspapers were chosen for the study because they are the main daily print media in the country and command the largest readership.

New Vision and *The Daily Monitor* archives were searched for issues that were published between January 1992 and December 2011. Two days a week were considered per publication and all articles about HIV and AIDS that were more than 200 words long were included for coding. Three research assistants were employed for article identification and coding. Overall, 1510 articles were drawn from the entire period of study for both newspapers.

Fourteen percent of the sample was randomly selected for the calculation of inter-coder reliability test. Krippendorff (2013; 2004) recommends coding between 10 and 15% of the sample for inter-coder reliability. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) also recommend coding at least 10–25% of the sample to test for inter-coder reliability. A total of 200 articles out of 1510 were coded for inter-coder reliability test. Overall reliability was kappa = 0.91.

Data Collection: Sample Selection and Procedure

Categories were generated by a qualitative analysis of a few news texts gathered during the preliminary study and then coded as all-inclusive variables in manual content analysis (Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 1998; Meyer, 1995; Simon & Xenos, 2000; Sergic, 2005). In the preliminary step, an in-depth analysis was carried out so as to produce possible operational categories that make up the coding scheme.

Coding Scheme

For an article to be included in the study, its content had to be at least 50% about HIV and AIDS. Articles included for analysis were either in the news, features, science/health features, editorials, opinion, commentary, or in the regular column. Only hard news and editorial comments showing the position of the two newspapers were considered. Letters to the editor, photo features, cartoons, and news analysis were not included in the research. The entire story was read to determine the usage/reference of different sources.

Sources were divided into local and international. Under local sources the sub-categories were coded as follows; (1) HIV and AIDS experts (These included,

for example, medical experts, NGO workers-specializing in HIV and AIDS issues within the country); (2) Government (These included anyone that was part of government, e.g. politicians, government/ministry spoke's persons, etc.); (3) People living with HIV and AIDS (When article indicated its source as an HIV+ person); (4) Women (When a woman infected or affected by HIV and AIDS was cited as the source of information); (5) Children (This group included youths, both infected and/or affected by HIV and AIDS); (6) People with disability (This when an article sought or considered views of persons with disabilities); (7) Scientific Research (An article was coded thus if the information therein was sourced from a scientific study within the bounds of the country); (8) Married people (This also included people in long-term relationships/cohabiting couples); (9) N/A (An article was coded so if it had not mention of any of the above sources).

International sources were divided into the following sub-categories: (1) international organizations (e.g., WHO, UNICEF, UNAIDS, or HIV and AIDS experts); (2) scientific research (any research study conducted outside of Uganda); (3) Associated Press (AP); (4) United Press International (UPI); (5) Reuters; (6) Press Association (PA); (7) Agence France-Presse (AFP); (8) African news agencies; (9) N/A (An article was coded as N/A if it had none of the international news sources above).

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Simple frequencies of categories were analyzed with the assumption that frequency can be interpreted as a measure of importance or value (Keyton, 2006, p. 240). Chi-square tests were done to establish if differences were significant.

Results

A total of 1510 stories were realized for the period studied and the year 2008 had the highest number of stories, see Fig. 1. *New Vision* had the highest number of stories about HIV and AIDS throughout the 20 years under study, with n = 867, while *The Daily Monitor* covered a total of n = 642 (Fig. 2). Fluctuation of coverage was common throughout the period of study and to both newspapers.

Research question one asked how common official sources were compared to non-official sources among HIV and AIDS related articles. Overall, official sources were used more (n = 2423) as information sources for HIV and AIDS news stories compared to non-official sources who were used n = 260 times.

Among official sources, HIV and AIDS experts were most referred to (n = 868) followed by international sources (n = 794) then government (n = 566). Use of non-official sources was generally poor, leading with people living with HIV and AIDS (n = 171) while married/couples in long-term relationships (n = 4) with n = 1 were the least used as sources. See Table 1 for the summary.

Research question two asked how the pattern of official versus non-official sources varied over time. Official sources were used more during all the four phases under study, with a steady increase in frequency after each phase except in phase four where a slight decrease was noticed (see Fig. 3). The leading sources through the four phases were still medical experts, international sources and research at the tail of official sources; however, in phase four, the use of People Living with HIV and AIDS surpassed scientific research (n = 77 and n = 64, respectively) (See Table 2).

Research question three and four asked what international sources were most used among HIV/AIDS related articles and what was the trend of usage during the four phases of the study. In general, international sources, which were also considered part of formal sources were used more than the total none official sources. Table 1 shows that the total international sources' usage was n = 794 compared to the total non-official sources' usage which was n = 260. In fact, international sources were used even more than government of Uganda sources (n = 566). Table 3 shows details of international sources' usage.

Among the most used international sources were international organizations such as World Health Organization (n = 360) followed by scientific research (n = 227) while the least used were African News Agency (n = 14) times in all the twenty years of study. The *New Vision* newspaper used more international sources compared to *Daily Monitor*, see Table 3 for details. Chi-square tests indicated a significant difference of $x^2(7) = 43.32$, $p \leq 0.000$.

There was not much noticeable variance in usage of international sources through the phases other than in phase four (see Table 4) where a decline in all sub-categories except *African News Agency*, which registered a slight increase, was realized.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results of the study indicated that official or authority sources far outnumbered non-official sources in HIV and AIDS news reports in Uganda. This should not come as a surprise because most research about news sources on different topics has arrived at similar inference (see Lacy et al. 2013; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Shehata 2007; Semujju 2015 etc.). However, for health news, especially for multi-faceted issues such as HIV/AIDS, the apprehension is about the representation of content and whether such content, obtained mainly from authority figures, affects policy and social and behavioral change efforts in a way that causes actual positive impact on those that need services. As explained early in the text, official/authority sources in this paper include government officials, scientists, research publications, medical experts, and international organizations. Non-official sources included people living with HIV and AIDS, women, children, and youths, and people with disabilities, married/cohabiting persons, all of who are listed among the risky groups. The leading sources of information for all twenty years were medical experts, international sources, and government officials. The gap between the least used formal/authority source and the most used non-official sources is 25.65%. The

difference is substantial and worrying especially at a time when complacency to HIV and AIDS is still high. Despite advancement in medication, affordability of ART, and assurance of a prolonged life, people need to understand the intricacies and difficulties of living with HIV/AIDS including economic and social complications that can only be illuminated by people living with or people directly affected by the disease.

One would argue that most official sources carry knowledge intended to educate and create awareness, which cannot be comfortably got from ordinary information sources however, scholars such as argue that knowledge, power, and authority are mutually reinforcing and that he that has power also tends to have the knowledge. Unfortunately, for health news, especially HIV and AIDS news, which is covered with hope to change behavior, powerful and authority information sources tend to reinforce a single narrative which, albeit good, can benefit from inclusion of other actors, with a varying knowledge but equally compelling (Sholle 1988).

Results also showed that married and/or cohabiting people and women were consistently the least used sources for information for HIV and AIDS stories. In 2010 and 2015, the Uganda MDG report recorded increase in HIV infection among married and cohabiting persons and they accounted for 43% of new infections. At the same time, women have been consistently recorded as bearing the brunt of HIV and AIDS, not only in Uganda but Africa as a whole. They are the most infected compared to men but most importantly, they are the caretakers of relatives, siblings, or children thus the importance of their voices in the HIV and AIDS discourse at an international and national level. International sources, although part of official sources, were studied specifically to understand their influence on HIV and AIDS narrative in Uganda over the twenty years studied. As results showed, international sources were the second most used sources in all the four phases, with marked increase after each phase except for phase four. These sources were even preferred to Uganda government officials. In his study about transnational signification, for instance, Karnik (2001), who studied diffusion of knowledge about risk groups found that Indian news outlets, "borrowed" knowledge about HIV and AIDS from international agencies without, in most cases, paying attention to context. He used an example of Haitians being listed among risk groups in India yet India had never had Haitian immigrants. Karnik emphasized that there was need to look inwards, and communicate HIV and AIDS from a context of people that one is communicating to if worthwhile coverage is to be realized. It cannot be concluded from this study what information Ugandan journalists sourced from international organizations and news outlets but it has shown that the narrative we have or have had about HIV and AIDS is profoundly shaped by external forces.

There were some differences in use of sources by the government-owned and privately-owned newspapers. Sources such as HIV and AIDS experts were almost equally consulted by both newspapers, as was the case with People Living with HIV and AIDS and scientific research. However, government was used more by *New Vision* (n = 348, 40.1%) than *The Daily Monitor* (n = 218, 33.9%). The results are not surprising given that *New Vision* is government owned and has been involved as a government mouth piece in the fight against HIV and AIDS. On the other hand, *The Daily Monitor* accessed more women and children sources, albeit on low scale,

compared to the *New Vision*. Sources such as people with disabilities and married people were hardly included for HIV and AIDS information during the period under study. As argued before, these unofficial sources of information are sometimes only required in case of extraordinary circumstances or event that include them and their voices cannot be ignored. However, much as it is important to get accurate and credible information from authority and "knowledgeable" people the voices of those experiencing the brunt of HIV and AIDS need a mouth piece that can usher the rest of the population, including HIV and AIDS prevention experts and policy makers into their daily encounters and challenges and ultimately effectively affect behavior change and policies that concern them. Instead of quoting the affected people as victims, they should be given a platform, as sources, to espouse the HIV and AIDS issue as well shape the public belief and perceptions about its spread, treatment, prevention among others. An example is the promotion of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART). Government sources and scientific/prevention experts have given precedence to the importance of ART and positive living but do not highlight the daily challenges that people who depend on ART for survival face. Inclusion of "other" voices to bring such perspectives to the fore is paramount because HIV and AIDS is a multifaceted disease that needs to be tackled from different positions in society, including perspectives that frame its discourse.

Appendix
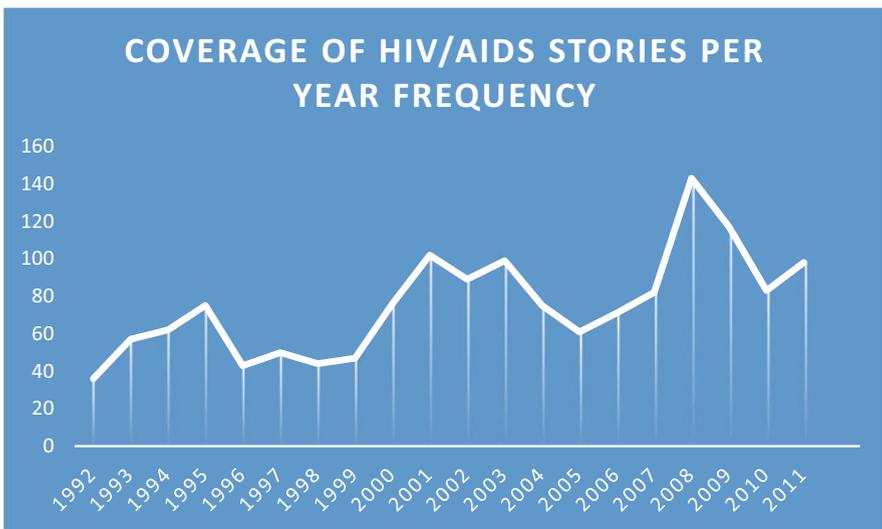
Fig. 1 Coverage of HIV/AIDS stories per year
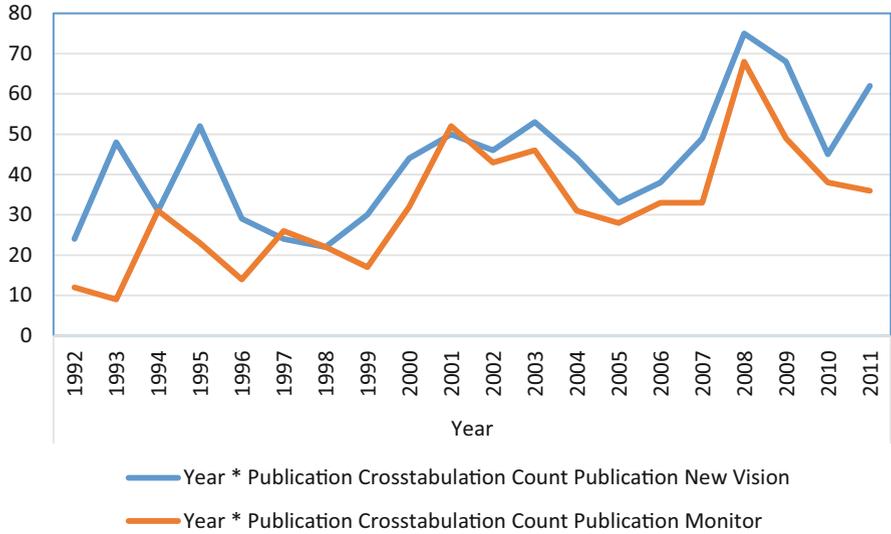
Fig. 2 Coverage of HIV and AIDS stories by *New Vision* and *The Daily Monitor* over the 20 years
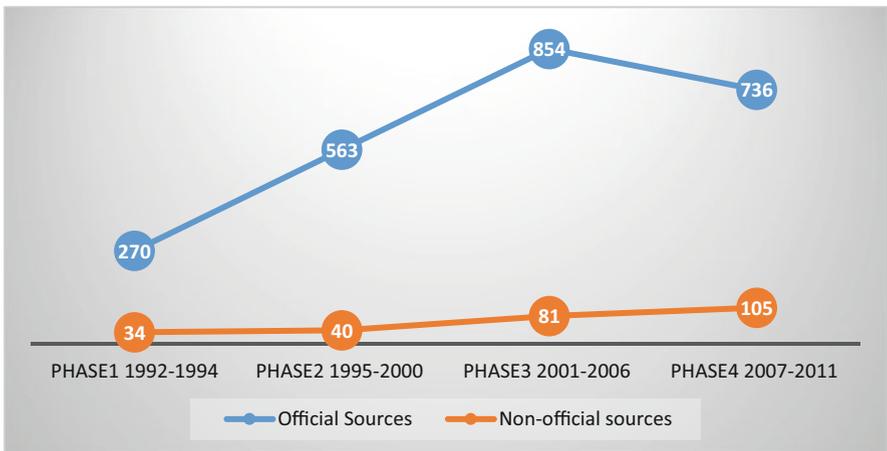
Fig. 3 Official Vs none official sources 1992–2011

Table 1 HIV and AIDS information sources, 1992–2011

Sources	Publication		Total
	New Vision	The Daily Monitor	
Official sources			
HIV/AIDS experts	509	359	868
International sources	505	289	794
Government	348	218	566
Scientific research	118	77	195
			2423
Non-official sources			
People living with HIV/AIDS	98	73	171
Women	18	40	58
Children	4	15	19
People with disability	4	4	8
Married people/long-term R/S	1	3	4
			260

Table 2 Use of sources during the four phases on the study

	Year in Phases			
Official Sources	Phase1 1992–1994	Phase2 1995–2000	Phase3 2001–2006	Phase4 2007–2011
HIV/AIDS experts	84	172	301	311
International sources	119	236	253	186
Government	46	113	232	175
Scientific research	21	42	68	64
Non-official sources				
People living with HIV/AIDS	15	24	55	77
Women	8	14	20	16
Children	7	2	2	8
People with disability	3	0	3	2
Married people/long-term R/S	1	0	1	2

Table 3 Use of international sources by *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*

International Sources	Publication		Total
	New Vision	Daily Monitor	
International organizations	213	147	360
Scientific research	138	89	227
Associated press	30	8	38
United press international	8	0	8
Reuters	76	12	88
Press association	3	1	4
Agence France-Presse	32	23	55
African news agencies	5	9	14

Table 4 International sources-phase one to phase four

International Sources	Year in Phases			
	1992–1994 Phase1	1995–2000 Phase2	2001–2006 Phase3	2007–2011 Phase4
International organizations	52	93	133	82
Scientific research	39	68	68	52
Associated press	1	10	15	12
United press international	0	2	3	3
Reuters	24	43	13	8
Press association	0	1	0	3
Agence France-Presse	3	18	18	16
African news agencies	0	1	3	10

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'Weapons of Oppressors': COVID-19 Regulatory Framework and its Impact on Journalism Practices in Southern Africa

Tshuma Lungile Augustine, Trust Matsilele, and Mbongeni Jonny Msimanga

Abstract The chapter examines the regulatory frameworks that were put in place by governments in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region to combat the outbreak of COVID-19 and the impact it had on journalism practices in the region. African governments with the help of World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines crafted laws and policies which prohibited gatherings. These measures limited the conduct of journalism, i.e. gathering and dissemination of news, during the pandemic. While these laws were implemented to avert the virus, we argue in this chapter that some regimes used the pandemic to muzzle the media. We analyse laws that were gazetted in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and South Africa to combat/ address COVID-19, and evaluate their impact on the practice of journalism in the region through the lens of securitisation theory. The securitisation theory indicates that by declaring something or phenomenon a threat, it ensures that such a phenomenon is moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policymaking. Methodologically, the chapter uses document analysis which is the systematic evaluation and review of documents. The study found that Zimbabwe and Tanzania enacted laws meant to restrict journalistic practice and information management flow under the cover of the pandemic. The laws enacted were targeted at critical and oppositional media. South Africa was a complete opposite as journalists were capacitated by the state to function properly during the pandemic even when other citizens' rights were limited during the lockdown period.

Keywords Media regulation · COVID-19 · SADC · Journalism practices · Health crises

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Introduction and Context of the Study

The world, by no doubt, came to a standstill as it experienced the worst ever pandemic of the century in 2020. Initially reported in December 2019, in Wuhan, China, the novel COVID-19 virus that was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) continued to ravage economies and people's lives. This pushed countries into recessions, forcing sudden severe restrictions to people's daily activities. Globally, people had to adopt a 'new normal' way of life which introduced social distancing, wearing of face masks, quarantining, and regular use of sanitisers. COVID-19 introduced new challenges such as misinformation and disinformation which saw public figures appropriating social media platforms to counter false narratives (Mututwa and Matsilele 2020). However, one of the key challenges that came along with the pandemic was that it offered authoritarian minded leaders in both the Global South and Global North the opportunity to muzzle the media and consolidate power. Thus, governments continue to place political goals above public health. Some leaders continued to see it as an opportunity to censor journalists and at the same time undermine checks and balances to their power. Basing on the foregoing scenario, this chapter broadly proffers scholarly inquiry into how the COVID-19 pandemic eroded liberties of journalistic work in the countries under study by analysing laws and policies legislated during the course of the pandemic. The authors considered how laws and statutes enacted became weapons to oppress the masses or the weak. In this milieu, the chapter examines the negative impact of regulatory frameworks on the practice of journalism in the countries under study. African governments under the guise of 'following' WHO guidelines crafted laws and policies which included prohibiting gathering and conduct of journalism—gathering and dissemination of news—during the pandemic.

There are two main arguments: First, while the novel virus required that governments moved swiftly to avert the virus that had turned to be a global pandemic, the chapter argues that some regimes used the pandemic to undermine civil liberties through enacting laws that curtailed freedom of speech, enhanced surveillance, and silence of the media. Secondly, during the course of the pandemic, various laws were enacted to curb the spread of 'fake news'. However, such laws shielded the government from scrutiny and rendered the elected officials' omnipotent consequently oppressing citizens. This chapter analyses laws governing media operations in—Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Tanzania enacted to combat/address COVID-19.

The silencing of the media, however, is reflective of the broader concerns of the state of democracy in Southern Africa that was always under scrutiny given its poor record of human rights violations and flawed electoral processes (Sachikonye 2011; Breytenbach 2002). Some of the countries in the region that often top the list for authoritarian rule and defying democratic practices include Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, and Angola where voices of dissent are silenced, activists and journalists disappear or are abducted, and rigged elections are normal (Chuma et al. 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya 2020; Moyo 2019; Melber 2004; Matsilele 2013).

This study gives a brief contextual background of the countries under study and reviews literature on laws that previously curtailed freedom of expression, association, and assembly which inevitably had a significant impact on the practice of the journalism profession. The study provides a conceptual paradigm adopted by the researchers and it is followed by the research methodology. Lastly, the researchers provide an analysis of laws that affected journalism during the period under study, i.e. March to December 2020.

Research Context: A Look into Selected Countries

The study looked into laws and policies promulgated in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Tanzania. The trio is also in the SADC region. The countries were selected based on their diversity of the manner in which media freedom was entrenched during the period under study, i.e. March to December 2020. These three countries brought different dynamics to the study. For Tanzania, there was an observable entrenching and consolidation of one-party state under the late former President John Magufuli with weaponisation of laws at the centre. Zimbabwe was under a prolonged dual political and economic crisis which saw basic rights revoked during the coronavirus pandemic period. The country became a pariah under the leadership of the late former President Robert Mugabe and did not change under the incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa whose reign was marred by open shooting of unarmed civilians by members of the armed forces in August of 2018 and January of 2019. The abuse and intimidation of journalists continued unabated. Thus, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ruhanya (2020, p. 4) observed that 'The Mnangagwa regime is a direct child of Mugabeism; indeed, Mugabeism is its recurrent theme.' South Africa, however, remained an outlier in the continent that saw a flurry of legal challenges as government made pronouncements that would reduce civil liberties as mechanisms to contain the spread of the virus. The narrative helped give context to how these three countries over two regional blocks employed legal instruments to contain the spread of the virus and consequently limited, undermined, and reconfigured how journalism and journalists were expected to practise within the context of a contagious pandemic. Thus, the difference in the state of media freedom in these three countries provided rich accounts and phenomena for exploration of the journalism industry. This study, therefore, is a springboard for further research on the broader aspect of media regulation and journalism practices in the region.

A Review of the Political and Legal Landscape in Southern and Eastern Africa

After gaining independence in 1961, Tanzania embraced a one-party political system until 1992 when the Chama Cha Mapinduzi party introduced a multi-party system

(Ngasongwa 1992). The present political system of Tanzania closely resembles an imperfect liberal democracy (Cooksey & Kelsall 2011; Gray 2015). The current political climate in Tanzania has, to a large extent, been shaped by former President Magufuli who gained power in 2015 (Tkalec and Umbach 2020). His rule was based on state-led economic prosperity with centralised decision-making; anti-corruption campaigns; and denying expression of political opposition, civil society, and media (Eriksen 2018, 34). When Magufuli took over, one of the first cost-cutting measures that raised eyebrows was a ban on live coverage of parliamentary proceedings. Protests against this and other measures by an ever more vocal opposition were met with an indefinite ban on political rallies in June 2016 (Paget 2017, 157). The widespread use of laws which were enacted just before former President Magufuli came to power has been described as 'constricting the freedoms of speech, of the press, and of assembly' (Paget 2017, p. 156). Magufuli's censorship went beyond the mainstream media and civics to think tanks and policy reports. For example, the 2013 Statistics Act which was promulgated 'curtailed the independence of researchers by dictating which organisations may generate and publish national statistics' (Paget 2017, p. 157). The use of social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp changed the nature of political communication and engagement globally. Such a development is explained by digital dictatorship which refers to governments using technologies to monitor their citizens through tracking their movements, habits, and thoughts with unchecked power. In Tanzania, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the lives of millions of people and hence increased the financial burden in the areas of the agriculture sector, health, hospitality, tourism, education, and the banking sector, among others (Saleh 2020, p. 24).

In Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, the existing police systems are a legacy of colonial rule shaped by post-colonial histories (Mpofu & Matsilele 2020; Makwerere et al. 2012, 130). The country's media system was largely divided between private and state-controlled. With the ruling party (ZANU-PF) having turned itself into state and government, the public media was transformed into the party's mouthpiece (Chuma et al. 2020; Ncube 2017; Santos and Ndhlovu 2016). As such, journalists from the state-controlled media enjoyed more privileges than their counterparts in the private media. Private media, which was critical of the state, suffered major criticism and a harsh operating environment which forced some to close down (see Tshuma 2019; Nyarota 2006). On the same note, punitive measures and draconian laws were implemented in early 2000 to regulate the media and the examples included the Broadcasting Services Act (2001), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2001, and the Interceptions of Electronic Communications Act (2007). Since the November 2017 coup, President Emmerson Mnangagwa's administration insisted that it is on course of delivering the 'Zimbabwe that people want' (Tshuma 2019) which also included the entrenchment of media freedom. However, events indicated that media freedom was yet to be delivered as journalists continued to be harassed and jailed.

South Africa is one of the few countries whose state of democracy is still a marvel to many. The country was born after years of institutionalised racism, segregation, and apartheid. The apartheid system permeated the entire fabric of the economic, social, and political life. As Alhadeff (2018, p. 11) one of the journalists who operated during the apartheid system noted, 'Operating at the helm of what was a staunchly anti-apartheid newspaper, it was a constant challenge to expose the iniquities of the system and inform the public of what was really happening without breaking the law.' The apartheid system enacted laws that defended the racist system while criminalising attempts to expose its evils. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, a new democratic and constitutional dispensation was ushered in opening spaces for free media and civil liberties. South Africa has a diverse and pluralistic media environment that is supported by several press freedom advocacy organisations that regularly challenge encroachments on media freedom. The courts and regulatory bodies have consistently reaffirmed freedom of the press and the right to information, handing down judgements and rulings in support of open and accountable government and media independence (Freedom House 2017). However, the changes in the macro environment came with challenges. As Wasserman (2013, p. 71) notes, 'the opening up of a democratic public sphere, the intensified impact of globalisation with the end of the country's isolation and the redefinition of civil society in relation to a now-legitimate state had profound implications for the way the South African media conceived of their role in normative terms'. Wasserman adds that, while the news media often insisted on freedom and independence on the basis of their claim to 'serve the public interest', their opponents in the government argued that nobody elected the media, and that therefore elected officials, rather than the media, were the legitimate custodians of the public interest. As these debates continue, the tensions between the governing party, the African National Congress (ANC), and the media, the constitutional guarantees ensured that freedoms and protections given to the media are not compromised. It is this context under which this study took place.

Theoretical Framework: Insights into the Securitisation Theory

This study is informed by the securitisation theory. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, governments were quick to label it a security threat as it led to effects that were largely affecting and crippling the socio-economic and political performance of governments. As such, 'it is by labelling something a security issue that it becomes one' (Wæver 2004, p. 13). Therefore, the pandemic was rendered a 'threat' and had to be combated through legal statutes. Hence, by stating that a particular referent object, in this case the state and its people, was threatened in its existence, government as securitising actors claimed having the right to effect extraordinary measures to ensure that people were safe and everything goes back to normal (see

Willems 2014; Taureck 2000; Wæver 2004). Furthermore, the securitisation theory indicates that by declaring something or phenomenon a threat, it ensures that such a phenomenon is 'moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policy-making' (Taureck 2000, p. 55). Against this background, the outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in the state of emergency being declared, the enactment of virtuous regulations which did not go through normal legal procedures as there was a need to 'swiftly' deal with it.

According to Wæver (2004), to prevent 'everything' from becoming a security issue, a successful securitisation consists of three steps. These are (1) identification of existential threats; (2) emergency action; and (3) effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free of rules (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 6). To present an issue as an existential threat is to say that: 'If we do not tackle this problem, it is neither unmanageable nor incoherent' (Taureck 2000, p. 55). However, this study largely focused on the emergency as the pandemic forced governments into an emergency mode. However, security and emergency are social and subjective constructions. Thus, this means security is 'no longer has any given (pre-existing) meaning but that it can be anything a securitising actor says it is' (Wæver 1998, 2004). In this vein, Wæver seems to be aware of the abuse of both the term security and its declaration by actors by arguing that 'security should be seen as a negative, as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics' (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 29). As such, he advocates for a strategy of desecuritisation whereby 'securitisation is reversed and issues are moved out of 'the threat — defence sequence and into the ordinary public sphere' where they can be dealt with in accordance with the rules of the (democratic) political system' (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 29).

Methodological Premise

The study analyses laws and regulations that affected the conduct of journalism in the countries under study. The researchers assessed laws and regulations that were implemented from March to December 2020 when governments of the countries under study implemented lockdown measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. For Zimbabwe, they assessed the Freedom of Information Act, Statutory Instrument 2020–083, Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment), and the Criminal Law [Codification and Reform] Act. For South Africa, they considered the Bill of Rights while in Tanzania they analysed the Tanzania Electronic and Postal Communications Act. The laws and regulations for this study were subjected to document analysis. This form of analysis '. . .is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material' (Bowen 2009, p. 27).

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

South Africa: The Bill of Rights and Constitution Guarantees during the Pandemic

There are three interventions the South African government made in response to the practice of journalism during the pandemic and curbed mis- and dis-information campaigns. Firstly, the government made a deliberate decision to ensure professional journalists continued with the practice as this would assist in the fight against disinformation. Secondly, the government legislated emergency funding towards media to ensure jobs was saved, and lastly, the disaster management act criminalised spreading of fake news on social media. The three interventions from a legislative and regulatory position are discussed thus:

During the course of the pandemic, the South African government classified journalists as essential workers which meant they could operate without threats of the state security apparatus. This approach by the South African government demonstrates the extent to which the country was prepared to go in safeguarding the rights of journalists to practise even as other countries withdrew journalistic privileges and rights to practise. Commenting on the role journalists played, President Ramaphosa affirmed, the media had fulfilled its watchdog responsibility by exposing corruption and maladministration leading to a national debate and investigations of high-profile political elites (Swart 2020).

Beyond being allowed to practise, the government also committed to make regulatory interventions that would allow improved advert spending in a number of news media to help protect jobs and ensure viability. As SANEF noted: 'The first and most visible casualty was the magazine industry with the closure of two magazine publishers with the loss of 97 jobs at the one publisher and up to 250 at the other. Away from the limelight, small, independent, hyperlocal print publications were also ravaged.' These dire consequences were also reflected in job losses with estimated 300 to 400 journalists losing their jobs. Workers at three of the so-called Big 4 print media companies were forced to take salary cuts of up to 45%, and temporary layoffs were widely implemented. To ensure the survival of some media houses, the government promulgated legislation that saw government emergency funding of up to R10 million dedicated to the community media.

The initiative by the government was also supported by the Social Justice Initiative in conjunction with SANEF where emergency funding was put in place for journalists who lost their livelihoods as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This funding was a result of intervention by MTN South Africa. Ramaphosa urged local donors and humanitarian entities to lend a hand towards independent and investigative journalism and encouraged the private sector to continue supporting the media sector through advertisement spent and collaborating with news media in producing innovative content in line with world media trends (Swart 2020). Thus, the package was part of the emergency measures that institutions took having

declared the situation a security threat (Taureck 2000; Wæver 2004). Journalism is a profession that safeguards the interest of the people; hence its survival also safeguards the national interests as its normative role is also to collaborate with the state when its security is threatened, in this regard, by the pandemic (see Christians et al. 2010).

The South African government also promulgated laws to help clamp down on fake news. The National Disaster Management Act enacted laws that sought to police publication of content meant to mislead other citizens regarding the pandemic, the infection status of any individual, and misleading citizens regarding government policy positions on the pandemic. The Act stated that anyone who commits such an offence would face a fine or up to six months imprisonment or both. One of the country's citizens, Steven Birch, was arrested in April of 2020 for allegedly circulating a video on his social media pages where he told South Africans that the country's coronavirus testing kits were contaminated and could infect people (Hyman 2020).

Tanzania: Human Rights Violations and Gagging the Media

Journalists and the media, as the bearers of information, are often targeted by different regimes and receive the first onslaught. In July 2020, setting the tone for muffling the media, the Tanzanian government repealed the 2018 Tanzania's Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations and replaced them with the Tanzania Electronic and Postal Communications. The 2020 regulations aggravated the crackdown on free speech as they required the registration of bloggers, online discussion forums, radio, and television webcasters. Democracy detects that the media, as the fourth and fifth estate, becomes independent and also functions freely without any hindrance (Mpofu & Matsilele 2020). However, while performing their normative roles (see Ndlovu & Sibanda 2020; Christians et al. 2010), in July 2020, Kwanza Online TV was the first casualty after it was suspended for 11 months for allegedly publishing an 'unbalanced, biased, misleading and disruptive story on the state of Covid-19 in that country'. The station's crime was that of publishing an alert issued by the US warning its nationals about the spread of COVID-19 in Dar es Salaam, which the Tanzania Communication Authority Content Committee deemed to be false, misinforming, and malicious, intended to cause panic and harm the country's economic activities such as tourism.

The attack on the media in the guise of fighting the pandemic led to government's suspension of the online licence for *Mwananchi* daily newspaper after it published a picture of the late President John Magufuli surrounded by many people. The newspaper questioned Magafuli's stance on the pandemic since he assembled crowds in the wake of the need to practise social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. According to the TCRA, the paper breached the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations as its report was allegedly

misleading and caused confusion in the community. The media is duty bound to educate people on various issues with such a mandate being more pronounced on health communication where people are supposed to be aware of what they ought to do and not to do (Mututwa and Matsilele 2020). More so, with the media expected to hold leaders accountable (Tshuma 2019), the framing of Magafuli as not promoting social distancing and other WHO guidelines was ideal for the media to do. Furthermore, Talib Ussi Hamad, a journalist with the Tanzania *Daima* daily newspaper, was suspended for six months for his reports on the Covid-19 outbreak in Tanzania. Albert Sengo, a journalist working with Jembe Radio FM in Mwanza region, was also charged in court for publishing online content on his 'unregistered' online GSENGO TV. As such, Albert Sengo's case showed that enacted laws affected citizen journalists. Citizen journalists are regarded as a parallel market of information as they operate outside the economic armpits of the power bloc (see Moyo 2009). As such, they increase public debate and offer an alternative to the state-sponsored narrative often churned by its controlled media. Therefore, the clampdown on freelance journalists by the Tanzanian government muffled citizens' voice on important issues around COVID-19. There is no doubt that the future of democracy in Africa seems bleak given the fact that the media which should act as an agent of representation and free from state and government control is being muzzled by the government which wants it to tow the 'official'. Securisation theory helps to further explain the conduct of governments during the pandemic. By viewing media reportage as a 'threat' to the economy, it invites the state to put punitive measures to address such a 'threat' (Wæver 1999). However, the 'threat' is a creation by the state which wanted to block the media from being critical of its blunders.

Right to freedom of expression and access to information are the lifeblood of any democratic society. Awadhi Lugoya was arrested and accused of wrongful use of social media, for opening a Facebook account called 'Coronavirus Tanzania' and using it to purportedly spread 'misleading information' about the pandemic. Mariamu Jumanne Sanane, a third-year student at the University of Dar es Salaam, was arrested in April 2020 after she claimed on social media that there were 230 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and four deaths in Tanzania. Furthermore, Afrikana Mlay was arrested over accusations of spreading false information on social media, to the effect that the government was hiding the number of coronavirus disease cases in the country. The police claimed that the post was 'intended to create panic and discourage efforts being undertaken by the government in fighting (the) spread of the virus'.

The move by the government to muffle citizens in the guise of curbing fake news on Covid-19 shows that authoritarian rule was now a new form of governance in Tanzania. Citizens were being prosecuted for airing their views meaning that they no longer had the supreme power since the government was no longer 'of the people, by the people, for the people', but the will of the few individuals in government.

Zimbabwe: Harassment, Intimidation, and Abuse of Journalists

Zimbabwe has, over the years, continued to use laws to abuse and intimidate journalists (Melber 2004; Moyo 2004). More so, these laws mostly targeted private and international media houses reporting on the Zimbabwean story. Most journalists from these media houses aced arbitrary arrests and continuously landed in court by virtue of reporting 'negative' stories about corruption scandals, politics, and human rights violations mostly perpetrated by the ZANU-PF-led government. The trend of harassing and intimidating journalists started during the rule of Zimbabwe's long-time ruler Robert Mugabe, and still continued under the 'New Dispensation' era under incumbent leader Emmerson Mnangagwa. The Covid-19 pandemic provided the Zimbabwean government good ground to intimidate journalists under the guise of laws and lockdown regulations.

One of the major highlights of harassment of journalists[1] and undermining of their role/duty were arrests linked to operating without 2020 accreditation cards that were issued by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC).[2] Accreditation cards enabled journalists, both local and international, to perform their duties legally. However, the ZMC had not issued accreditation cards for the year 2020, despite continuous harassment, arrests, and threats of journalists by the police and state security forces (Reporters Without Borders 2020). Such events invoked the right to media freedom that is clearly stipulated in the Zimbabwean constitution. More so, Section 62 of the Freedom of Information Act stipulates that 'Every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information; freedom of artistic expression and scientific research and creativity; and academic freedom' (Freedom of Information Act, 2019) as invoked since it kept citizens informed of developments and measures that were implemented by the government and important stakeholders in combatting the Covid-19 pandemic. Advocacy bodies such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) were instrumental in assisting media practitioners in filling an urgent chamber stipulating that 2019 accreditation cards were valid and could be used by journalists in 2020 since they had not been issued yet. However, much as the interdict prohibiting police officers and state security from harassing journalists was passed, there was still continuous harassment and intimidation of journalists (Ilkka 2020). The arrests were part of government efforts of restricting the freedom to inform in arbitrary and disproportionate ways. Such acts by the police and state security saw Zimbabwe ranked 126 out of 180 countries and territories in the Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) 2020 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters

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[1] Journalists such as Nunurai Jena, Panashe Makufa, and Kudzanai Musengi are some examples of journalists harassed by the government because of 2019 accreditation cards. Reporters without borders, however, report that there where at least 20 cases of this nature in Zimbabwe.

[2] ZMC is a statutory body that regulates the work of journalists and issues accreditation for them to conduct their duties.

Without Borders 2020). Over 20 cases of harassment and intimidation where reported (Reporters Without Borders 2020).

As already alluded to, journalists continued to be harassed for conducting their duties even after being classified as essential workers and the approval to carry out their duties using outdated 2019 press cards. For instance, two journalists, Frank Chikowore and *263*Chat news website reporter Samuel Takawira, were arrested for 'violating' lockdown regulations of social distancing and a ban on hospital visits. Their charge was published in the Public Health Gazette (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) that stipulated various measures that were related to social distancing and rules governing the lockdown. Their arrest, in part, confirmed the freedom of press that was in jeopardy since the Mugabe era (Melber 2004; Moyo 2004). The two journalists attempted to interview MDC Alliance members—Netsai Marova, Cecilia Chimbiri, and Joana Mamombe[3] who had been allegedly abducted by state security officials (Ndebele 2020). However, the two journalists were denied permission to cover the story on grounds of violating the lockdown regulations, were arrested for four days, and only released after paying a fine (Mavhunga 2020). In part, using such regulations and intimidation by the state were a way of preventing the two journalists from investigating a potential human rights abuse story. Their arrest was one of the many tactics used by the state to intimidate journalists covering stories that implicated the Zimbabwean government in abuse of human rights.

While the Covid-19 pandemic continued to ravage the already fragile Zimbabwean economy, politicians and their associates were involved in looting funds meant for hospitals. Prominent among the looting and corruption cases in Zimbabwe was what became known as the Covigate/Draxgate scandal initially broken by prominent Zimbabwean journalist and *Zimlive* editor Mduduzi Mathuthu in April 2020. The exposé was later carried by prominent Zimbabwean Hopewell Ch'nono using his Twitter account, drawing interest from not only Zimbabweans but the international community. The scandal mainly involved Zimbabwe's Minister of Health Obadiah Moyo awarding a multi-million-dollar deal contract for Covid-19 testing kits, drugs, and personal protective equipment to a shadowy company, Drax Consultants. The scandal also dragged in Emmerson Mnangagwa's son, Collins Mnangagwa. According to the exposé by both Mathuthu and Chin'ono, it is estimated that the Zimbabwean government, through the Minister of Health, awarded Drax Consult contracts worth USD 60 million. The corruption scandal also saw the two journalists use their Twitter accounts to call for a national wide protest on 31 July 2020. However, the Covid-19 exposé by the journalists saw them face the full wrath of the law with Chin'ono charged with Sect. 187(1)(a) as read with sect. 37(1)(a)(i) of the Criminal Law [Codification and Reform] Act: 'Incitement to

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[3]Netsai Marova is a human rights activist and the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance's (MDC Alliance) deputy organising secretary. Cecilia Chimbiri is member of the MDC Alliance and Youth Assembly Vice Chair. Joana Mamombe is a member of the MDC alliance and Member of Parliament of Harare West. The three were arrested and allegedly abducted after a flash demonstration that violated COVID-19 regulations.

participate in public violence'. Chin'ono was also accused of using his Twitter account @daddyhope to call for the removal of a constitutionally elected government through an uprising. By using such a law, Chin'ono's right to liberty was infringed upon. Much as Chin'ono was charged for incitement of public violence, and sentenced to prison for 45 days, his political crime and judicial persecution were more on his reporting and views on corruption. However, Mduduzi Mathuthu was not arrested, since he hid after being intimidated by police and security forces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, journalists who operate in authoritarian regimes like Zimbabwe and Tanzania had their liberties taken away as the government regarded their critics as a threat likely to cause harm. The findings demonstrated that laws were passed in the guise of fighting the spread of fake news by which its definition could be manipulated by the state to thwart and punish voices critical to the governmental rule. Through the securitisation theory, governments treated the pandemic as a security threat. The laws that were enacted to control the flow of information were not justifiable. While there was a need to regulate the media so that it could not tear the nation apart through misinformation and disinformation, or spreading of hate speech, the harassment of journalists in both Zimbabwe and Tanzania showed that laws were not about information dissemination but were designed to shield the corrupt and incompetent government from scrutiny.

On the one hand, Tanzania and Zimbabwe shared similar traits in the manner in which laws and policies were enacted to control the media's role during the pandemic. Harassment, torture, arrest, and closure of the media houses were key negative issues resulting from laws and policies that were enacted by government to 'combat' the COVID-19 pandemic. Journalists were treated with disdain as they became a 'security threat' which resulted in their harassment while on duty. The authoritarian regimes took advantage of the crisis and silenced journalists who were questioning their flaws in addressing the health crisis. Thus, the health crisis further put the journalism profession in deep crisis. On the other hand, South Africa's treatment of the media was the polar opposite of what transpired in other selected countries. The government recognised the power of the media in information dissemination for education of the masses about the pandemic. As such, laws and policies were enacted to support the media as an essential service provider during the pandemic, and this further meant strengthening the democratic practices in the nation-state. Ultimately this study observed that for countries operating under a hybrid system (Zimbabwe and Tanzania) there was a natural tendency to implement laws that curtailed democracy and by extension press freedom. South Africa, one of the few countries in the continent with a good record on press freedom and human rights culture, ensured that journalistic and press freedom were safeguarded during the pandemic.

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Media Discourses on Gender in the Time of COVID-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe

Bhekizulu Bethaphi Tshuma, Lungile Augustine Tshuma, and Nonhlanhla Ndlovu

Abstract Media institutions always have a public obligation to disseminate news that is fair, balanced and gender sensitive, more so in times of crisis. Within the context of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, it is important that media provide a diverse, balanced and gender sensitive coverage that reflects existing inequalities in a society rather than merely prioritising statistics of the infection and its death rates. Informed by poststructuralist feminist theory and normative roles of the media, this chapter investigates the discursive parameters of gendered media discourses within the context of COVID-19. This chapter presents results from a case study of two main daily newspapers—the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*—circulating in the country by investigating their representation of gender. Findings indicate that while there was generally more coverage of issues affecting women, both newspapers reinforced deeply rooted biases in their reporting. The findings further show that the emphasis was on gender-based violence with statistics indicating that it was on the rise during lockdown. We argue that newspapers must always strive for sensitive reporting that challenges hierarchical gender relations if the transformative potential of the media is to be realised.

Keywords Covid-19 · Gender · Print media · Frames · Zimbabwe

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267

Introduction and Context

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, an outcome of the Fourth International Conference on Women, highlighted gender stereotypes and limited women in decision-making roles as major challenges impeding equality of men and women. The declaration further identified media as major areas of concern constituting "the most important yet challenging area of work for advancing gender equality" (Lowe-Morna 2002, p. 1). Since then, the relationship between gender and the media has been considered as an "add-on" in AU gender equality frameworks. The media are seen as central to the construction of gender ideologies hence they constitute a central site of struggle in which gendered identities are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Thus, they have a significant impact on the ways in which gender is defined and understood hence the focus on investigating the Zimbabwean media discourses on gender in this chapter. Furthermore, the media do not only mirror reality but also shape public opinion and culture (Ross and Padovani 2017). Largely dependent on the ways in which they are used, the media can contribute to the promotion of gender equality. Williams (2000) argues that by using sensitive contents and language, and non-stereotypical representation of women and men, the media can enhance the equality of men and women in communities, which the study is concerned with. More so, the media have huge potential in advancing and empowering women by enabling them to participate and to be heard in the process of development and transformation (Bhagwan-rolls 2011).

However, 25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Africa and the rest of the world are still grappling with gender equality as shown by the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Five on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all girls and women, which encourages states to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women. In Africa, underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women is intensified and further reinforced by patriarchal traditions and social customs that presume women's inferiority to men (Kareithi 2014). With regards to Zimbabwe, Tapfumaneyi and Rupande (2013) posit that despite the widespread conscientisation on the need to balance the gender scale for the betterment of society, women continue to suffer unfair and abusive portrayal in the media. They also note that even media organisations such as Zimbabwe Union for Journalists (ZUJ), have often decried that while Zimbabwean media have increased the coverage of women and children, the extent and manner of coverage is highly unsatisfactory. More recently, Hove's (2017) study on the portrayal of women in Zimbabwe's tabloid newspapers found that women were largely stereotyped as witches, gossips, adulterers and prostitutes. Similarly, Mlotshwa (2018) found that the *Chronicle* played an ambivalent role in erasing Ndebele ethnic women's voices while making them "hypervisible" through their portrayal as loose and uneducated. Lowe-Morna (2002, p. 1) argues "the key challenge confronting us is how to change mind-sets hardened by centuries of socialisation

and cemented by custom, culture and religion" towards the realisation of gender equality, and media is key to dissolving this challenge.

Accordingly, this chapter is concerned with unpacking the discourses on gender during the COVID-19 pandemic in two main daily newspapers—the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*—circulating in the country. The study seeks to answer these questions; how did the two newspapers portray gender in the coverage of COVID-19 stories? Was the coverage fair, balanced and gender sensitive? Within the context of COVID-19 global pandemic, it is important that media provide a broader picture that looks at women and other marginalised groups in communities rather than just prioritising statistics of the infection and its death rates. Without gender sensitivity in media coverage, there is a danger of reinforcing deeply rooted biases that can have long-lasting and devastating effects on how the society responds to crisis and ultimately to gender equality. Noteworthy, within the Zimbabwean context, the media has always been highly censored by the government, (Mbikwana 2020), hence the need to interrogate the function of the media during a pandemic in such an oppressive environment. With the government continuing with its legacy of human right violations, such "oppression is and has been of a highly gendered nature, disproportionately affecting the lives of women" (Toyana 2020, p. 2). As a result, digital platforms became a sphere where bloggers, especially feminists, expressed their displeasure and abuse of power by the state. Therefore, the COVID-19 era raised various gender discourses that people discussed. As such, this chapter seeks to explore the discourses on gender during the COVID-19 pandemic in mainstream newspapers.

"The Other Room": Global Media and Gender Context

Ahead of his country's elections in 2016, Nigerian President General Muhammadu Buhari was asked about his wife's potential vote, and he responded: "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen, my living room and the other room." His views were consistent with previous findings that patriarchy had an effect in the manner in which women were treated on economic matters, politics and also their representation in the media (Ndlovu 2020; Tshuma 2020). By stating that his wife belonged to the "kitchen and the other room," Buhari privileged the all too familiar gendered narrative which perpetuates the view that women belong to the private sphere, while the public sphere was reserved for their dominant male counterparts. Generally, there is sufficient evidence of underrepresentation of women as subjects in the media coverage. According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP 2020) report, unequal gender power relations are entrenched and validated, and in which gender stereotypes are replicated and reinforced by the world's news media. Ndlovu and Madziwa (2009) note that within the African continent, journalistic gender lens in source selection was not only male centred, but it was also skewed to a certain kind of masculinity when selecting interviewees for all types of views, from "expert" opinion to "ordinary" person testimonies.

Furthermore, although women represent more than half of the population in many African countries, they are underrepresented or misrepresented throughout all existing media whether online or offline, news media or entertainment (IAWRT 2015). Their voices are not heard, they are likely to be portrayed in a stereotypical manner and they are less likely to hold influential positions in the media and ICT (GMMP 2015). The global media monitor also noted that in Africa women's relative presence in the news had increased from 19% in 2010 to merely 22% in 2015. Prejudices about gender in the media content are not accidental; they are a result of choices made by the gatekeepers in media houses (Toyana 2020). Broadly, in African societies, social structures and systems, which are mainly influenced by patriarchy, have seen the reproduction of gender roles in the manner in which the media frames men and women. It has been noted the media "eclipsed women's success", given that the media has, in most cases, been complicit in belittling women and according them second citizenry status, resulting in it (media) being blamed for its reportage which has stalled the achievement of gender parity.

In this chapter, gender is conceptualised as a social construct as roles which are assigned to men and women are not inherent. Thus, as Butler (1990) argues, no one is born a man or woman, instead people are socialised into specific gender roles as they grow up. Thus, gender is defined as the set of roles, behaviours and attributes that society defines as appropriate for men and women (Baker 2008; Unger 1979). As such Butler (1990, p. 33) argues that "gender is performative, a social construct and never-ending process, a work in progress and in practice, which are continually engaged in." These conceptualisations and understandings of gender support earlier feminist views that one is not born a woman but becomes a woman (Beauvoir 1989). These observations show that both men and women can equally perform most roles and should be framed in equal light. Hence the case of modulating and portraying men in masculine positions and as real leaders is seen as a myth. Therefore, gender inequalities are rooted "in social and cultural attitudes" (Giddens 2009, p. 616) with the media representation being a "by product of deep misogyny in society" (Van Zoonen 1994, p. 19).

In this milieu, a plethora of studies have been conducted on health communication and gender. Some studies have assessed health communication strategies by non-governmental organisations (Chasi 2007). The findings have shown that NGOs are critical in conducting health awareness campaigns and also educating families on health-related issues. More so, key findings have seen the move by NGOs to include both men and women in packaging their health strategies (Chasi and De Wet 2006). In a study on Zimbabwe's online feminists, Toyana (2020) argues that oppression in Zimbabwe was and had been of a highly gendered nature, disproportionately affecting the lives of women. In the political realm, female politicians and activists who dared to criticise the state were often labelled prostitutes or whores, in "grammar that was perpetually reanimated in Zimbabwean political discourse" (Mudiwa 2020, p. 2). However, studies solely dedicated to assessing the "gender" of health communication are scant. This chapter therefore sought to fill this gap by assessing how the print media in Zimbabwe incorporated gender-related discourses in their reportage on the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies relating to COVID-19 in Zimbabwe

investigated how different forms of media were being utilised to access information on COVID-19 from a tourism perspective (Tarakini et al. 2021) and from a public health perspective; Shumba et al. (2020) focused on people's perception on the government's response to the pandemic. In the African context, existing studies examined the conduct of print media in communicating health issues. In Nigeria, studies found that print media were dominated by government officials with people who were affected by given disease or pandemics being silenced (Torwel and Rodney 2010). In addition, broadcast radio which is easily accessible to many populations in Africa was found to be thwarting citizens' voices, especially community health workers, of whom the majority are women (Umana and Ojebode 2010, pp. 257–260). Health communication in Zimbabwe has largely not been given much scholarly attention despite the view that there has been a surge in many health cases which include HIV/AIDS, malaria, typhoid and cholera. Much of the scholarly interest has been on politics due to the perennial hostile political Zimbabwean system (Tshuma 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly led to unprecedented changes in the economic and socio-cultural landscape world over. The media landscape was not spared either. These changes led to a re-evaluation of the media's role in society with urgent questions as to how the media responded to the unfolding crisis. The four theories of the press (Siebert et al. 1956), albeit revised a number of times (McQuail 1983; Christians et al. 2009), provide a critical starting point to interrogate the role and task of the media in society (Christians et al. 2009). These theories continue to offer a blueprint for making sense of the media's roles and keep evolving as they adapt to different societies and rapid technological advancements. The limitations of the normative theories are well documented in literature but this section highlights the framework that was useful for this study. The monitorial and facilitative roles are useful for understanding of the ideal relationship between the media and society, particularly in times of crisis. As Baran and Davis (2012) note, normative theorising on the media's role in society is chiefly concerned with accuracy, objectivity and public sensitivities, issues which this chapter addresses.

Christians et al. (2009) identify four normative roles of the media as monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative. The monitorial role pertains to the media functioning as informer and educator to the public with an emphasis on the quality of information, that is, accurate, relevant and verifiable. The collaborative role is concerned with aligning the needs and expectations of the state with those of the media, which normatively speaking, implies a relationship built on mutual trust. In the facilitative role, the media ought to promote dialogue and deliberative democracy. In this way the media "facilitate the process of negotiation over the social, political and cultural agenda" such that "norms and institutions are open to challenge and debate, and derive their legitimacy from the actual agreement of citizens"

(Christians et al. 2009). Whilst the monitorial role tends to take certain power structures for granted and strives to make such social configurations work, the radical role in contrast, recognises that power holders hold an unfair advantage in communication flows. As such, the role of journalists in the radical role is defined by a commitment to absolute equality of all members of the society and thus articulate concerns of the marginalised and challenge injustices perpetuated by hegemonic powers. This has led to the proliferation of emergent publics that fall outside of the mainstream media, much like Fraser's subaltern counter publics (Fraser 1989).

Reformulating the original Habermasian public sphere to suit contemporary contexts, Fraser (1989) argues that the subaltern counter publics are marked by alternative publics in which members of subordinated groups (such as women, children, people of colour, etc.) come together to discuss matters of direct concern to them. The groups constitute "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser 1992, p. 122). Accordingly, subaltern counter publics specifically originate under conditions of dominance and subordination and notably feminist studies, which informs evaluation of the media discourses on gender, are included in this rubric of radical theorising of the media's role in democratic societies.

This chapter thus considers the media discourses on gender within a critical feminist theoretical lens that is driven by an emancipatory agenda. As such, we employ poststructuralist feminist theory that is concerned with critiquing social institutions and discourses that maintain a patriarchal social order and whose values are espoused broadly within feminist media studies. Broadly speaking, feminism— which defies a single definition because of its troubled history—refers to a transformational movement aimed at destabilising unequal power relations through critiques of sexual hierarchy (Steiner 2014; Van Zoonen 1994; Weedon 1987). Feminism is therefore expressly political and the feminist media theory in turn, is informed by "feminist principles and politics in researching media processes and organisations, regardless of whether the media content expresses a feminist ethos" (Steiner 2014, p. 359). Feminist media studies are thus primarily concerned with investigating media production, its content and its consumption as central sites for the struggle and negotiation of gender relations and identities (Van Zoonen 1994). With its primary focus being the content of news during the COVID-19 pandemic, this chapter therefore emphasises the role of media as sites of meaning that had a tremendous impact on the construction of subjectivity and identity. As Santos et al. (2018) argue, the value of critical feminist perspectives in addressing the gendered nature of news is demonstrated by an explicit concern with how the existing gender order maintains existing inequalities.

As such, there is an established concern with re-evaluating standards of newsworthiness to give visibility to gender issues by ensuring that there is equal coverage of women and other disadvantaged groups. There should be emphasis on creating emancipatory narratives and media practitioners should advocate for the inclusion of alternative voices as sources and opinion makers as well as promote the use of non-sexist language. Our understanding of gender is informed by anti-essentialist

"poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (Weedon 1997, p. 40). Understanding language use as a social practice (Talbot 2010), signals the central role that language plays in society. While texts bear ideological imprints of their producers through language use, they are also interpreted in varying ways by their audiences hence news media are therefore critical in this scenario as they should be central in creating an alternative knowledge base that is empowering to women and challenges common sense notions of gender (Brooks 1997; Talbot 2010). This frames understandings of the coverage of COVID-19 by the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*.

Methodological Premise

This qualitative oriented chapter analyses emerging media discourses on gender during the COVID-19 pandemic reportage. As such, this chapter analyses news stories produced by the two main daily newspapers, the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*. Although Zimbabwe has four mainstream daily publications, *The Herald, NewsDay, Daily News*, and *Chronicle*, this chapter, selected the *Newsday* and *Chronicle* for the following reasons. The *Chronicle*, a state media publication, was one of the leading publications in the country with notable followers on its social media pages. The publication had 92,000 followers on Twitter and 102,125 on Facebook, at the time of writing. It was instrumental in the dissemination of COVID-19 related information, especially in the Southern part of the country, where the researchers were based. The *NewsDay*, a privately owned publication under Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) had 811,882 followers on Facebook and 539,246 on Twitter at the time of writing. Both publications were instrumental in the coverage of gender aspects during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter covers a nine-month period, that is, from April 2020 soon after Zimbabwe introduced its first lockdown to December 2020 when the government arguably relaxed most of the restrictions and fully opened the country. Archival research was deployed for data gathering, with purposive sampling used to select hard and feature news stories for analysis using qualitative thematic content analysis. Feature stories were selected for analysis because they normally reflect a newspaper's position on a particular issue (McNair 2003). In contrast, hard news stories were selected because of their presumed factual and impartial characteristics. From over 100 stories that came out from the search, researchers noticed that although most of the stories were about COVID-19, most of them were not about the pandemic and gender; they simply mentioned the latter in passing. Consequently, 18 purposively sampled articles (*Chronicle* 9 and *NewsDay* 9) were subjected to qualitative content analysis. These stories were harvested through a key word search, COVID-19 + Gender, from these newspapers' websites. Resultantly, preliminary reading of the stories allowed researchers to select stories that were primarily focused on gender as opposed to those that mentioned it in passing.

Qualitative content analysis is particularly useful because it allows researchers to decipher the hidden meaning of media texts, allowing an insight into the general ideological trends of a given period (Larsen 1991). Qualitative researchers also support their interpretations by "weaving quotes from the analysed texts and literature about the contexts of these texts into their conclusions" (Krippendorff 2004, p. 88). A form of qualitative content analysis known as framing analysis was applied predominantly in this chapter. In media studies, framing analysis is concerned with identifying specific themes within media texts. In its basic function, it seeks to show "how the language and structure of news items emphasise certain aspects [and omit others]" (Billig et al. 2005, p. 2).

Findings

The key findings of the study relate to gender equality challenges, lack of community voices and gender-based violence. There was an attempt by the media to highlight gender and gender equality challenges during the pandemic albeit with parochial voices of ordinary citizens. The two publications also made an effort to shine light on gender based violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant child marriages. This analysis notes that while the media highlighted these issues, the coverage was full of official sources, detached from grassroot issues affecting ordinary voices. Concerning gender, the media appeared to promote a narrow conceptualisation that merely focused on women and girls.

Gender and Gender Equality Challenges and Lack of Community Voices

Within this thematic category, there was an attempt by the two publications to weave in issues of gender and gender equality and challenges thereof. This chapter submits that the media made an effort to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on gender and gender equality initiatives thereby playing a commendable monitorial role. On this point, the media reported on government programmes and initiatives with regard to women empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, in a story on October 2, 2020 by Farirai Machivenyika titled, *Zim(babwe) remains committed to achieving gender equality*, the *Chronicle* reported that: "Women in the small and medium enterprises sector have also benefitted from the $18 billion economic stimulus package availed by the Government following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Similarly, in a story titled "Reduced income fuels GBV," published on September 11, 2020 and written by Brenna Matendere, the *NewsDay* tackled measures that the

Zimbabwe Gender Commission was implementing to protect the gains of gender equality scored so far.

Most importantly, the two publications prioritised women's issues as they included gender issues in their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the stories reflected how COVID-19 impacted the lives of women. The media tended to focus on different categories of vulnerable women, such as, the elderly, pregnant and those in the informal sector. The following cases provide this testimony. In a *Chronicle* story written by Mthabisi Tshuma on April 1, 2020 titled "*Coronavirus: Isolation centres for pregnant women*" the publication stated that:

> There is a need to have COVID-19 isolation centres that can accommodate pregnant women during the lockdown period... because the COVID-19 pregnant woman cannot be mixed with other pregnant women at a maternity ward as they might infect others.

Equally, in the *NewsDay* story titled "COVID-19 has deepened inequalities: Minister" Phyllis Mbanje (2020), reported that "the impact of COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities and vulnerabilities particularly for women and girls." In this case, the media was seen playing a facilitative role by putting women issues on the public agenda. This function, which Christians et al. (2009, p. 158) call the facilitative role is when "news media promote dialogue among their readers and viewers through communication that engages them and in which they actively participate." Much more, through this role, the media facilitated the process of negotiation over social issues and through this process created interactive dialogue between citizens who engaged one another on equal standing and promoted grassroots voices as opposed to elite dominance (Christians et al. 2009).

Noteworthy, the media highlighted some of the challenges that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two publications attempted to illuminate the various ways that women were particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. They both highlighted the economic and social impact of COVID-19 on women and other vulnerable groups to some extent. In a story headlined, *Climate change compounds gender crisis*, written by Thandeka Moyo-Ndlovu on October 22, 2020 the *Chronicle* newspaper wrote: "The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurity and other social challenges, leaving women and girls in impoverished communities, marginalised people, refugees and other displaced people vulnerable."

On the other hand, Veneranda Langa of *NewsDay* on July 31, 2020 reported that because of existing social problems in Zimbabwe, women were more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper reported that: "The shortage of water has forced women to fetch the precious liquid from boreholes where social distancing is difficult to observe, increasing the risk of contracting COVID-19." In this case, the media may be credited for shining light on the gender differences in the vulnerability to and impact of the health pandemic. In particular, the flagging of traditional gender roles to show how they played out in worsening the effects of the pandemic on women is consistent with feminist media theory's concern with affording visibility to women and other disadvantaged groups. In this case, the media should be lauded for championing women's challenges during the pandemic therefore, putting them

on the public agenda. However, simply highlighting the issue without explicitly challenging the stereotypical representations and the burden of care women and children face, implicitly renders the media complicit in reinforcing conditions of inequality. To this end, the radical role of the media advocates for structural change that "literally goes to the roots of the power relations in society, challenging the hegemony of those in power and offering an alternative version not just for some building blocks but for the whole structure of society" (Christians et al. 2009, p. 181). Critical feminist perspectives foreground the critique of patriarchy in perpetuating asymmetrical power structures (Evans 1995; Weedon 1997). Journalism within the radical role should seek to redistribute social power from the powerful to the disempowered.

Furthermore, while the media highlighted the plight of women and other vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic to some extent, such efforts fell short owing to failure to include voices of ordinary women and other vulnerable groups. Instead, the media chose to prioritise elite voices such as government ministers and women leaders in the Non-Governmental Organisation sector. In most of the stories about affected women, the media failed to give them an opportunity to speak for themselves. Rather they were routinely represented and spoken for. For instance, in the *NewsDay*'s story, *COVID-19 has deepened inequalities: Minister*, written by Phyllis Mbanje on August 11, 2020, the Minister of Gender was the main source and there was no attempt to include voices of ordinary women to share their daily experiences on the matter. Again, the *Chronicle* in a story, *Women entrepreneurs hardest hit by COVID-19*, prioritised the views of Elena Ruiz, the United Nations Women's Economic Empowerment regional policy advisor for West and Central Africa. The story does not quote voices of women entrepreneurs for them to share their stories. This over-reliance on elite sources by the media to talk about women's issues serves to perpetuate the marginalisation of women.

COVID-19 and Gender Based Violence (GBV)

The fundamental role of the media is that of "making something or someone visible" (Bucher 2012, p. 1164), or as argued by Entman (2004, p. 1) media frames select "some aspect of a perceived reality" and make them visible or salient. In this paper, we consider Gender Based Violence (GBV) as the salient or visible key issue that was emerging through COVID-19 related stories. Analysis of the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* shows that media foregrounded problems faced by women under the state's imposed lockdowns with emphasis being mainly on GBV cases which were increasing as a result of victims being "locked down with the perpetrators." However, from the onset, this paper notes that victims of GBV can be either male or female and while we acknowledge that the largest number of victims were females, it is journalists' duty to unpack the aspects of GBV so that it does not turn out to be "women based violence." As such, in their reportage, they exposed causes of an increase in GBV cases which included "food insecurity" as a result of the lockdown

that "disrupted people's ability to earn a living and access affordable food and goods" which ultimately contributed to an increase in GBV in Zimbabwe by about "60% during the COVID-19 induced lockdown," as "90% of GBV cases were intimate partner violence and women remained the most affected group" (Moyo-Ndlovu and Matutu 2020).

The *NewsDay* also carried similar discourses about the pandemic with GBV as a major issue. For the victims of GBV, the lockdown was a disservice for them as "restrictive movement measures as per COVID-19 requirements had already been noted as a barrier to reporting, relocation and/or accessing health services" (Kadau and Malomalo 2020). According to Fourie (2005, p. 163), normative roles of the media provide a yardstick against which media performance, accountability and quality could be measured and if need be, controlled. Through the facilitative role of the media, the media was expected to help bring out issues and assist in coming up with solutions for betterment of the community (Christians et al. 2009). Thus, the media reportage suggested that GBV was of interest and it needed to be discussed in the public sphere by all citizens so as to reach a consensus. Furthermore, providing statistics, the *Chronicle* reported that "from March 2020 when COVID-19 first hit the headlines in Zimbabwe to the end of May 2020, about 6906 women reported abuse to five major Non-Governmental Organisations that dealt with gender-based violence" (Moyo-Ndlovu and Matutu 2020). Statistics further showed that physical violence increased by 43.8%, emotional violence increased by 80.3% and economic violence increased by 42.4% during lockdown. Notably, in journalism, statistics are a currency which is used to show the gravity of the matter. As such, the picture painted by the statistics was that COVID-19 had a negative impact on victims of GBV, of whom the majority were women.

However, discourses on GBV were framed as associated with societal gender roles as disruption on the economy owing to the pandemic "increase tensions within intimate relationships and disrupt gender roles" resulting in men "failing to fulfil their gender roles as providers, resorting to violence as an outlet" (Mbanje 2020). The media thus showed, as prescribed by postcolonial feminist theory, that women suffer from what they call "double colonisation" which refers to ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialisation and patriarchy (Mututwa and Matsilele 2020; Petersen and Rutherford 1986). This further means that in the postcolonial society, "her colonised brother is no longer her accomplice but her oppressor" (Tyagi 2014, p. 45). Therefore, men are framed as perpetrators while the government, as the decision maker and solution provider, "still maintained zero tolerance to all forms of violence against women" (Gonye 2020).

With women being in danger from their male counterparts, this chapter found that *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* provided solutions to cases of GBV by covering different institutions that were calling for the establishment of one stop centres across all districts in the country for GBV survivors, as statistics showed an increase in abuse during the national lockdown period. Thus, "one stop centres were meant to improve access to quality and comprehensive services for survivors of gender-based violence under one roof" (Moyo-Ndlovu and Matutu 2020). In some cases, civil society

organisations were lauded for having managed to secure shelter centres for victims of GBV. In this milieu, guided by the normative roles of the media, the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* were "shaping public beliefs and desired behavior or empowering readers to action to think, interpret and view health issues through critical, accurate and clear news presentation and interpretation" (Torwel and Rodney 2010, p. 238).

COVID-19 and Child Marriages

One of the important areas that the media focused on during this pandemic was child marriages. As indicated earlier that COVID-19 had varied effects on the social well-being of citizens in their different demographics, one of the challenges was child marriages. It was widely reported in the media that because of COVID-19 and lockdown related restrictions, many teenagers engaged and others were forced into marriages. In a story titled *"Girls vulnerable as COVID-19 drives child marriages"* written by Andile Tshuma on July 21, 2020, the *Chronicle* newspaper reported that:

> Girl child advocate and Parliamentary portfolio chairperson on Education, Mrs. Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga said child marriages were being worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic and that there were many girls being married off, however with few being reported.

Similarly, the *NewsDay* in a report titled *"COVID-19 lockdown spawns child marriages"* written by Cliff Chiduku on July 11, 2020 noted:

> The report noted that deepening poverty owing to loss of livelihoods brought about by COVID-19 drove many families to marry off their under-age daughters. This happened despite Zimbabwe outlawing child marriages in 2016.

From a normative point of view, this chapter argues that the media attempted to give a multi-faceted approach by focusing on critical interests such as women. By shining light on the impact of COVID-19 on the girl child, the media was arguably setting an agenda for community leaders and policy makers to take action.

It is also important to point out that in its coverage of child marriages within the context of COVID-19, the media advocated for action from key persons. Most of the stories cited sources such as parliamentarians (Priscilla Misiharambwi-Mushonga), Women Affairs Minister Sithembiso Nyoni, Church leaders and gender activists. This is termed the mediation function of the media in that news media intervene between events and sources on the one hand and individual members of the public (Christians et al. 2009). Christians et al. (2009, p. 140) noted that under this normative function of the media, "news is selected according to the anticipated informational needs of audiences. [. . .] guided by criteria of relevance, significance and reigning normative frameworks for the public arena." By going beyond daily government statistics, the media managed to expose the issues that faced girls during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this chapter acknowledges the active role played by the media to expose girl child abuses, it did not afford them an opportunity to speak.

Most of the stories tended to utilise activists, politicians and in some instances reports that tended to generalise.

Discussion and Conclusion

The chapter acknowledges the radical ways in which gender relations can change in crisis situations such as war, epidemics or economic restructuring (Connell 2011). To this end, the COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on the gender order which should be reflected, to some extent, in the reporting around issues of gender. In as much as it takes years to observe shifts in the gender order, we observe that there was a notable increase in gender related coverage in both newspapers since the onset of the pandemic and this was arguably correlated to the inevitable increase in COVID-19 related news stories. This is a positive development considering that issues affecting marginalised populations have traditionally been excluded in mainstream media. In this regard, both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* made headway in giving visibility to how the pandemic variously affected women and children.

However, a mere increase in the number of stories pertaining to women does not automatically translate to gender equality. Feminists have long established that being visible or accessible to others does not necessarily translate into liberation, therefore one should, in turn, ask "Who does visibility benefit and on what terms is it offered?" (Mann 2014, p. 1). We should therefore be mindful that the "turn to gender" by the Zimbabwean press could be more superficial than beneficial when considering that ownership and managerial influences have a bearing on what gets accepted as newsworthy. The lack of informed critique in media discourses on gender could be attributed to the fact that women are rarely represented in the production structures. Rather, they are simply the writers who do not get to decide on the framing of stories and as a result, discriminatory practices in selecting stories and sourcing thrive. We therefore agree with Van Zoonen (1994) that the gendered nature of news can indeed be traced back to the structure of news production (Carter and Steiner 2004). The patriarchal framing of stories however is not surprising considering that the contemporary gender order in Zimbabwe continues to presume women's inferiority to men (Ndlovu 2020).

We also noted that there were more female reporters reporting on COVID-19 and gender related news than male reporters. Of the nine stories selected for analysis in each publication, only two were written by male reporters in *NewsDay* and three articles were written by male reporters in the case of the *Chronicle*. This is consistent with the longstanding stereotypical belief that women are better at or more interested in covering soft news (Van Zoonen 1998). It is also hardly surprising considering the fact that hard news is predominantly equated with masculine traits and soft news with feminine traits; with men dominating in political, government and economic news and women more likely to report in the science and health, social and legal categories (North 2016). Furthermore, more COVID-19 and gender related stories appeared in the features section (and therefore "soft") than in the general news

section. When they did make it into the main news, they involved reports from the United Nations, government and other elite sources, which elided the need for alternative voices and remained problematic, as argued earlier.

With regards to the diversity of issues covered, both newspapers should be applauded for highlighting a diversity of issues affecting women during the pandemic. In as much as some of the issues were not traditionally "feminist" they advocated for a policy of equality and advancement for women. As already established, the bulk of stories covered GBV followed by water and health, reproductive rights, rural women as well as issues affecting vulnerable children/orphans and child marriages. Notably, the *Chronicle* tended to offer more contextual background on articles related to women and the girl child. *Newsday* articles in contrast tended to be brief and not proffer possible solutions. Be that as it may, a more in-depth concern with ordinary women could have improved coverage for both newspapers as they tended to speak "about" them and "for" them rather than having affected women (and children) speaking of their experiences directly. In all the published stories, there were 34 elite voices with eight (8) of them being male voices. Ordinary female voices were three (3) and there were no male voices. We therefore argue for participation on (ordinary) women's own terms.

In conclusion, the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* made strides against the "symbolic annihilation" of women by the mass media (Tuchman 1978), but this attention appeared cosmetic because the standards of newsworthiness remained underlined by a standardised perception of what makes news (Harcup and O'Neil 2001; Byerly and Ross 2006). It is worrying that hard news is still structured and delivered with a predominantly male perspective that is disempowering to women which encourages the reproduction of stereotypical masculine and feminine identities. A truly transformative journalism would constitute of more representation of women as agentic citizens and challenge hierarchical gender relations that continue to confine women to the private sphere. Given that media institutions carry a public obligation to disseminate news that is fair, balanced and gender sensitive, this responsibility is paramount in times of crises—be it economic, political or health related—where media practitioners are implored to make it more than a priority to provide a diverse, balanced and gender sensitive coverage that reflects existing inequalities in a society. We propose a radical rethinking of the media's role in advancing a feminist ethos in a changing Zimbabwean context, particularly during a pandemic with emerging conditions of precarity that have devastating consequences yet to be fully appreciated. This research centred on news content exclusively but further research on female journalists' experiences in the newsroom during this time could be insightful.

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