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Title

Lockdown fatigue: A content analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in South African newspapers before, during, and after the termination of the National State of Disaster

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak's rapid spread, as shown by the high number of confirmed cases and fatalities, is proof that South Africa was one of the most severely affected African nations (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). A nationwide hard lockdown that put the nation to a standstill occurred in the country, which has an estimated 59 million population and a median age of 27 (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). Poor neighbourhoods took the brunt as people either lost their employment or were unable to work for extended periods of time. Additionally, due to a lack of medical assistance or overcrowded families, people from poor backgrounds were unable to obtain the appropriate medication or, if necessary, isolate (Khambule, 2020). Thus, the outbreak of the virus not only cost people their lives but also their livelihoods.

Scholars (Melki et al., 2021; Ahinkorah et al., 2020; Bin Naeem & Kamel Boulos, 2021) warn that COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation has proliferated in the media, posing a risk to public health, and undermining global efforts to combat the pandemic. The media's coverage at this time was crucial since it demonstrated how they play a role not just by delivering health updates and information but also in giving the public a forum to debate how this shutdown has affected their livelihoods. Therefore, how people interpret information is greatly influenced by the news media's framing (Alemayehu, 2020).

This thesis examines how South African print newspapers framed the COVID-19 pandemic a month before, during, and after President Cyril Ramaphosa proclaimed the abolishment of the National State of Disaster. This research topic was chosen because the virus received widespread media attention from all publications around the world, resulting in coverage of its outbreak, transmission, and protective measures, to name a few (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020; Poirer et al., 2020; Haroon & Rizvi, 2020). This chapter begins with an overview of the COVID-19 virus- both nationally and internationally. This is important not only for understanding its global spread and impact, but also for comprehending its implication in South Africa. The next section focuses on the steps taken by the South African

government to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The chapter finishes by posing the fundamental research questions that will steer this study and by establishing the demarcation of the subsequent chapters.

1.1 COVID-19: Background and Scope

The first case of Coronavirus was detected on November 17, 2019, in Wuhan, China, prompting the Chinese government to place the city under tight lockdown on January 23, 2020. Despite the government's best efforts to contain the virus, COVID-19 cases had risen to 80 000 by late February 2020 and had spread to other parts of the globe (Ngai, et al., 2020). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed the virus, which is caused by the SARS-CoV 2 virus and produces flu-like symptoms such as a dry cough, shortness of breath, and fever, a pandemic (Chitsamatanga & Malinga, 2021). The virus is transmitted in small individual droplets from an infected person's nose or mouth when they cough, speak, breathe, or sneeze, according to the WHO. While the virus can cause mild to moderate symptoms that differ from person to person, it can also cause significant sickness in those who have underlying medical disorders such as chronic lung disease, diabetes, or cardiovascular problems, to name a few (World Health Organization, n.d.). As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic, has received a lot of interest from the academic and social communities around the world, who want to use their resources and knowledge to help combat the disease. Although earlier pandemics had similar severe effects on people's lives, COVID-19 expanded faster. As a result of the virus, governments all over the world have been forced to develop tight and effective security measures, as well as to inform their citizens about them (Ngai, et al., 2020).

On March 1, 2020, a 35-year-old man, also known as patient zero, returned to South Africa from Italy with his wife and as part of a group. When the individual presented COVID-like symptoms to their doctor a few days later, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) confirmed that the individual's test results had come back positive for the COVID-19 virus (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). As a consequence, the number of positive COVID-19 cases in the country surged significantly, forcing the national

government to impose a rigorous lockdown for 21 days in order to stop the spread of infection. This attracted the attention of all media outlets, which dutifully reported on any official COVID-19-related material and gave updates throughout the country's outbreak.

Despite the rise of social media and its significance during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional news media outlets were the ones that gave essential information to society (Adanlawo, 2020). The importance of informing individuals about preventative and safety measures is critical because it will assist in limiting the spread of the virus and reassure them that their government is capable of handling the health crisis (Ngai, et al., 2020). Rapid changes in the climate, ecosystem, and population expansion, among other factors, are thought to be making pandemics more common and difficult to avoid and contain. Previous pandemic outbreaks, such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), as well as the current COVID-19 pandemic, have all had catastrophic consequences for the international economy, society, and politics (Zhou & Zhang, 2021). This study aims to investigate the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa given this backdrop.

Although there have been numerous research studies on COVID-19 and its impact on other continents (Tee et al., 2020; McCormack et al., 2021; Gibson Miller et al., 2020), there has been relatively little research on its impacts in Africa, notably South Africa. This study will examine media framing in print newspapers for the month before, during, and after South Africa's National State of Disaster ended. Researching frames is of particular relevance since news media producers create a variety of frames, not all of which are accessible to audiences when creating a social reality. Scholars have also argued that, despite the legitimacy of all mass media channels, print newspapers and legacy media in general were seen as more significant and trustworthy (Mihelj, et al., 2022). As a result of the country's digital divide (Mhlanga, 2021), it can also be argued that South Africans may have relied on legacy media. Thus, examination into how print media framed the COVID-19 pandemic is important. This is not to argue that the ongoing pandemic impacted South Africans differently from the rest of the globe; rather, it is to provide light on how the country's government handled the situation, as well as how the print media framed it.

1.2 South Africa: National State of Disaster

A pandemic necessitates large-scale, urgent government initiatives to communicate with the public, as well as a shift in public behaviour to counteract the virus's rapid spread (Ngai, et al., 2020). President Cyril Ramaphosa proclaimed a National State of Disaster on March 15, 2020, in accordance with the Disaster Management Act (57 of 2002), in order for the government to design a coordinated disaster management strategy to minimise COVID-19 cases. As a result, the government was required to provide aid, safeguard, prevent disturbance, manage the disaster's detrimental effects and other impacts, and protect the people (The Presidency, 2022). The country witnessed various laws enacted in response to the first wave of the virus, including the prohibition of gatherings of more than 100 people, school closures, an alcohol ban, and a slew of other restrictions. Additionally, the initial set of regulations allowed the government to free state resources to better combat the COVID-19 virus's rapid spread.

Later in March of 2020, South Africans were subjected to new restrictions that imposed a lockdown, effectively confining individuals to their houses (with the exception of vital personnel) and allowing them to leave only in an emergency, to buy groceries, or to collect social grants (ENSAfrica, 2020). In addition, multiple other regulatory instruments were established during the course of the various COVID-19 waves to give effect to the various lockdown levels. Also, scholars have noted that despite the interventions by governments in terms of medical equipment and staff, governments also had to deal with an infodemic (Radu, 2020). Digital media had dual roles since it contributed to and countered disinformation when the coronavirus outbreak began. The criminalisation of malicious COVID-19 falsehood (i.e., South Africa, Hungary), the establishment of special units to counteract disinformation (i.e., EU, UK), and advice to social media firms on removing controversial pandemic information (i.e., India) were among the priority COVID-19 actions for several governments across the globe (Radu, 2020).

Furthermore, the lockdown levels are said to be risk-adjusted approaches that are “guided by several criteria, including the level of infections and rate of transmission, the

capacity of health facilities, the extent of the implementation of public health interventions and the economic and social impact of continued restrictions” (South African Government, 2021). The lockdown levels, which run from one to five, are summarised as follows: Alert level 1 allows for mostly normal activity as long as health guidelines are followed, alert level 2 necessitates physical separation and restrictions on certain social activities, alert level 3 necessitates restrictions on many activities and in places of employment, alert level 4 necessitates extreme precautionary measures to limit transmission and outbreak among people with minimal activity to resume, and alert level 5 necessitates extreme measures to curb the virus and save lives (South African Government, 2021).

Dr Dlamini Zuma, former Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) authorised the declaration of a National State of Disaster in response to the growing health crisis, which constituted a serious impact on the life and well-being of South African citizens. This motivated the President and his steps to legislate effective measures to slow the rate of infections, relieve pressure on hospitals, offer relief to small businesses, implement a R350 social relief grant, and invest in infrastructure to help a large group of people who became ill as a result of the virus, among other things (South African Government, 2021). The National Disaster declaration was in place for two years before being lifted in early April 2022. With the exception of a few transitory measures, all regulations and measures enacted during the National State of Disaster, along with the lockdown levels, were repealed as of April 5, 2022 (Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2022).

These transitory measures- which expired after 30 days- allowed citizens to comment on the new health laws and the government to finalise and publish them in accordance with the National Health Act. These included citizens continuing to wear face masks indoors but not outdoors, continuing restrictions on gatherings that allow for 50% capacity, international travellers providing proof of a negative COVID-19 test that is no older than 72 hours, and the continuation of social reliabilities (Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2022). The next part describes the importance of evaluating the media's framing of the National State of Disaster, as well as the goals and organisation of the chapters to follow.

1.3 Research Relevance, Objectives and Outline of Chapters

1.3.1 Research Relevance

This research topic is important and relevant because the COVID-19 virus wreaked havoc on all aspects of society, forcing governments to implement various safety and preventative measures. As a result, South Africa was prompted to activate its Disaster Management Act, allowing the executive to issue regulations without the authorisation of the legislature for the first time since its democratic transition (Mancebo, 2021). As a result, it is critical to look at how the media framed COVID-19 coverage a month before, during, and after the National State of Disaster ended.

News media sources have an important role in shaping public perceptions and influencing key societal tent poles such as the economic system and election results. While there are numerous publications dedicated entirely to dealing with the pandemic in terms of epidemiology, medicine, and the economy (Ng, et al., 2021), there is very little research available on media framing of COVID-19 in South Africa, let alone media coverage of the country's termination of the National State of Disaster. Existing research on this topic focuses on the various types of media frames utilised and how these media frames shape audience behaviour (Wasserman et al., 2021; Dahal & Khatri, 2021; Milutinović, 2021; Msughter & Phillips, 2020). Moreover, it is noted that while other Sub-Saharan African countries used similar lockdown tactics, Uganda and South Africa used more broad and rigorous lockdown procedures (Haider, et al., 2020). As a result, this study will build on previous research in order to better understand not just how South African print newspapers framed the ongoing pandemic crisis, but also how the media covered the issue after the National State of Disaster was lifted. The latter aspect is significant since it has not been fully addressed during the current COVID-19 pandemic or prior pandemics.

As a result, this study aims to close the gap by building the groundwork for future studies and making a significant contribution to this research area. In doing so, the

theoretical chapter of the thesis, which is covered a little later, will draw on three theories: framing theory, crisis communication theory, and political communication theory. These ideas will serve as the foundation for this research's theoretical framework and will be thoroughly examined to demonstrate their importance in light of current public health concerns. Even if the use of these three ideas is unique and not frequently observed in studies of a comparable nature, it is nevertheless significant. Reason being that they are interrelated and will aid in understanding the study's overarching purpose, which is to evaluate how the COVID-19 crisis was framed in newspapers prior to, during, and following the lifting of the National State of Disaster in South Africa.

1.3.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to examine media coverage of how South African print newspapers framed the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures imposed by the government before, during, and after the National State of Disaster was terminated. As such, the following questions will be used to guide this research project:

1. What kinds of frames did major South African print publications use a month before, during, and after the National State of Disaster ended?
2. Which sources were used during the media's coverage of the investigated period?
3. Did the media provide information on the termination of the National State of Disaster?

1.3.3 Outline of Chapters

The topic of the study and background material were offered in this introduction- Chapter 1, which also served to contextualise the research. The following is the research's organisational structure, which distinguishes the information in each succeeding chapter.

The goal of Chapter 2, which reviews the existing literature on the subject, is to build on that literature, analyse it, and illustrate how it is pertinent to this study. The author will also show

how their work significantly adds to already published literature, with a focus on the global South.

Although the main inquiry for this study suggests using media framing as a theory, this thesis will integrate and demonstrate how the stated theory, along with crisis communication theory and political communication theory, complement one another and are therefore vital to include in Chapter 3. The theoretical framework will be created using all three theories.

The methodological approach with regard to the data for analysis will be examined in Chapter 4.

The study's results are presented in Chapter 5 in respect to the research topic.

Using the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework as a foundation, Chapter 6 presents a thorough and complete assessment of the study's findings.

In addition to serving as the research study's conclusion, chapter 7 will offer suggestions for more research.

1.4 Conclusion

The study topic was addressed in this introductory chapter, which mainly focuses on how South African newspapers covered the COVID-19 pandemic before, during and after the National State of Disaster was lifted. While giving a general introduction of the virus, this chapter focused primarily on COVID-19 in South Africa, the location of the research. This was crucial for setting the study question's background. In addition, this chapter covered the governments laws, the goals of the research study, its applicability, and offered an outline for the subsequent chapters. For better understanding the research area and expanding on it, the next chapter will evaluate the appropriate literature on the subject.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2. Introduction

Because of their unparalleled reach, the mass media, which encompasses spoken, written, and transmitted forms of communication, are crucial for educating the masses on issues that affect them. This is because they are skilled at educating and involving their audiences in contentious issues like the current global health crisis, COVID-19 (Catalán-Matamoros, 2011). As a result, the study of how the media contributes to coverage of public health emergencies has advanced significantly in the subject of both media studies and health communication. This is due to the fact that both disciplines have been identified as the gatekeepers of contemporary health communication since they influence what individuals read, hear, and think about health (Lwin, et al., 2021).

The mass media is an essential conduit because it offers a setting for the construction and promotion of the interaction between science and the general public. Therefore, the partnership between science and the media is essential for delivering credible information to a larger audience as well as health-related communication in lay terms (Lwin, et al., 2021). It is important to study the way in which the media covered public health crises to establish if and how the media shaped the public's agenda. It is worth noting that agenda setting theory holds the view that the media does not necessarily tell people what to think, but rather in part, direct their thoughts. This is a result of the prominence that the media gives to certain topics, which eventually draws attention from its viewers (Morissan, et al., 2020). Despite the fact that agenda-setting will not be covered in detail in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the researcher believes that it is nevertheless important to highlight in order to comprehend the type of media content that was framed.

Studies have challenged the assertion that, in addition to the obvious risks to people's health and lives, the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound effects on the economy, diplomacy, politics, and day-to-day activities of numerous countries worldwide (Wu, 2021).

Due to the media's tremendous impact, it is crucial to look into how news stories were framed and/or aligned to an agenda during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for this is because various governments all over the world have used the media as a means of informing their populace about their containment and intervention methods (Ebrahim, 2022). Political communication has a direct connection to this, and this will be covered in detail in the dissertation's theoretical framework.

This study focuses on South Africa but will incorporate literature from the global North and South. This will be done in order to not only showcase similarities but also differences in media framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be observed that the global South began to produce more research in recent years than in previous years on the subject at hand, which may be related to how quickly the COVID-19 virus was spreading at the time (Ekpenyong & Pacheco, 2020).

2.1 Media's role during public health crises

Although it might be said that the mainstream media is significant in our daily lives, they are especially important during outbreaks of infectious diseases. This is due to the fact that they have a dual burden: although they must, on the one hand, offer appropriate information to prevent the sickness from spreading, they must, on the other, counteract false information about the disease (Lwin, et al., 2021). In addition to the COVID-19 virus spreading quickly due to the uncertainties surrounding its outbreak, misinformation and disinformation were also propagated.

Misinformation is inadvertent and contains errors or inaccuracies, whereas disinformation is purposefully untrue, misleading, or deceitful (Rubin, 2019). Two categories of disinformation, reconfiguration, and fabricated misinformation were similarly covered in a study that examined how major news publications in Singapore operated as gatekeepers and refuted misinformation connected to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lwin, et al., 2021). Observations of fabricated misinformation include claims that an MRT facility was shut for decontamination due to the COVID-19 virus when, in reality, it was open. Reconfigured

misinformation includes a post on social media about a food delivery motorcyclist receiving a fine for wearing a cotton mask when the motorcyclist may have approached the policeman for directions (Lwin, et al., 2021). The study, which makes use of both qualitative and quantitative analyses, showed that inaccurate information on health and science, followed by government programs and scams were frequently reported by news media sources. These results are significant because, in times of crisis, the media should serve as an educator by demystifying medical terms and doing so quickly to prevent the spread of misinformation that could undermine efforts to mitigate the disease. Since crisis communication theory will be covered in the theoretical framework chapter, this kind of media education and information practically go hand in hand with each other.

Mach et al. (2021) also make the case that poor and insufficient scientific news coverage of public health emergencies in the past posed hazards and hindered the coordination of effective mitigation efforts. Laws governing pandemics call for swift, adaptive responses in the face of knowledge gaps, as well as the organisation of several public-health authorities and sectors, where news media play a key role in bringing together the different stakeholders. It is said that the Internet, which allows for the quick distribution of information, especially social media, has greatly aided in the spread of false information (Cuan-Baltazar, et al., 2020). According to research that specifically examined misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, roughly 25% of material on websites and apps like YouTube and Twitter, among others, contained medical erroneous information and unverified facts (Cuan-Baltazar et al., 2020; Kouzy et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). The news media, whether advertently or inadvertently, have been on the receiving end of false information, but they have a special responsibility to use their platforms to dispel and inform the public about false information. Amid public health crises, when there is a great demand for rapid information and a high priority, their importance as major information providers in society is particularly evident (Lwin, et al., 2021).

Misinformation only began to spread after the COVID-19 virus was recognised globally, according to a study that makes use of the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Model

(CERC), which essentially aids in directing authorities' communication methods at the various stages of the crisis and risk lifecycles. In addition, it appeared that lockdown levels, governmental regulations, and news media reports all contributed to the dissemination of false information (Lu, 2020). This study is significant because it uses existing misinformation graded reports from three renowned Chinese factchecking platforms to examine the themes and evolution of false information on the Internet during the COVID-19 outbreak in China, which made it one of the first studies to do so. The study thus established that between January and March 2020, the pandemic's ongoing five disinformation themes were manifested: updates on the crisis situation, information on diseases, prevention and treatment, government action and policies, and conspiracies (Lu, 2020). Given the significance of the aforementioned themes and the ambiguity surrounding the COVID-19 virus outbreak at the time, it is practically inevitable that people will accept what they read online.

Research has also shown that social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp Messenger, which are typically networks of shared realities, can influence and spread false information during times of public health crises. As a result, people are more vulnerable because they are receiving information from people they know on these sites (Ogola, 2020). Hence, it fell to news media outlets to dispel such untrue information in order to minimise public fear and panic while fostering efficient COVID-19 pandemic communication (Lwin, et al., 2021). Particularly, news outlets are deliberate in how they communicate with the public. The main goals are to inform the public, mould attitudes, and instigate behaviour change in the hopes of containing the outbreak and lowering morbidity and mortality rates (Ebrahim, 2022).

The consensus among scholars is that while social media and the Internet are important for speedily disseminating information, it was the national newspaper coverage of the current COVID-19 outbreak that facilitated conversations on public health crisis policies and solutions (Siddiqua et al., 2020; Nwakpu et al., 2020; Mach et al., 2021). This is primarily intended to highlight the significance of legacy media while in no way undermining the

significance of the various other types of mass media platforms. The mass media, in all of its manifestations (social, broadcasting, print, and online), is crucial for strategically communicating public health related topics and is frequently a reliable source of up-to-date news (Ebrahim, 2022).

Furthermore, the media are often referred to as the fourth estate or the watchdog since they “exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment, and mobilization” (Msughter & Phillips, 2020, p. 590). The media serves these purposes, making it essential to hold the government responsible for its acts, to inform the public about those activities, and to give people a forum in which to think through issues that are important to them. This is vital because, as has been demonstrated in the past and in the present, a link offered by the media can either encourage people to accept safety and preventative measures during public health crises or to dismiss them. In other words, the society at large benefits from the news media's publication of critical health communication (Catalán-Matamoros, 2011). Therefore, how the media presents public health issues is important to study since the information in their news articles will demonstrate whether they support or debunk false information.

Additionally, even though it is acknowledged that the media might not be able to treat the COVID-19 virus, they can help stop its spread. This can only be accomplished by routinely informing and updating the populace during public health crises (Igboeli & Ejimneonye, 2021). As previously said, although receiving substantial media attention, the ongoing pandemic was covered by general journalists rather than health journalists. According to researchers (Tejedor, et al., 2020), the news media was forced to deconstruct official communication regarding the COVID-19 virus that was received from the government and scientific specialists in order for the general public to comprehend. Igboeli & Ejimneonye (2021) assert that the media, regardless of the journalistic stories they cover, should continually work to uphold their duties to society by upholding high levels of truth, impartiality, reliability, and objectivity. The media also contributes significantly to the general achievement of the public's health goals and objectives by disseminating accurate health

information that strives to raise awareness and understanding of their health, avoid sickness, and promote healthy lifestyles (Van Scoy, et al., 2021).

Moreover, it is seen as effective health journalism practise when media professionals provide news based on evidence without coming across as sensational or alarming (Tejedor, et al., 2020). This study will continue by looking into how the media handled previous public health crises given this background. The aforementioned illustrates the essential function that the mainstream media, with a focus on legacy media, play. Moreover, this study will examine media framing not only during the national lockdown period, but also post-lockdown. By doing so, this study hopes to constructively draw attention to and expand upon prior studies on the subject. The section that follows examines how media sources around the world covered previous public health crises. This will show whether or not public health emergencies have received different media coverage throughout time.

2.2 Media coverage of previous public health crises

Over time, there has been an increase in the amount of news media coverage on public health crises. This is so because people look for solutions in a prompt and correct manner during times of crises (Ophir, et al., 2021). It is important that researchers analyse the content of the media because they have the potential to either exacerbate or alleviate health issues. The H1N1 flu pandemic, often known as the swine flu, sparked fear throughout the world in 2009, necessitating the usage of information from the media among other sources as noted by Staniland & Smith (2013). The government and health officials should be able to control the outbreaks of fear because of their connection with medical experts and their monopolistic control of corrective actions to stop the progression of the virus, according to scholars who examined how framing analysis contributed to understanding media representations during the H1N1 flu by reviewing relevant literature (Staniland & Smith, 2013).

Because of the uncertainty, the media depended on government officials for information and instead chose and highlighted sections of it they believed would be newsworthy, according to another study that did a content analysis of television news items in Australia (Fogarty, et al., 2011). In other words, the news media framed the concerns they thought were significant. The study's findings also show that out of the five TV channels investigated, media coverage of the virus was dominated by information on infection rates, how the virus propagated, a need for public calmness, and assurance from authorities, among other things (Fogarty, et al., 2011). These findings suggest that despite the infection being portrayed as extremely serious on broadcast channels, Australian news outlets did not convey worrisome information about the H1N1. In contrast, research comparing how print media in Sweden and Australia frame communication during the H1N1 pandemic showed that in Sweden, where it was up to citizens to maintain public health, there was a lack of accountability and communication from organisations (Sandell, et al., 2013). One may argue that the distinction between print and television's media framing arises from the former's capacity to deliver more in-depth reporting and the latter's requirement for rapid news updates (Bronner & Neijens, 2006).

A different scientific paper that examined worldwide content analytic data surrounding the H1N1 virus results revealed that the news media prioritised threat over preventative measures (Klemm, et al., 2016). These results also contradict what Fogarty et al. (2011) discovered in their investigation when looking at Australian television news. Therefore, research into how the media frames or covers public health crises is significant because it will shed light on future studies that aim to reduce the sensationalism of public health threats. Alarmingly framed pandemic coverage is thought to be detrimental because it may hinder public health organisations' ability to mobilise the public in the case of a more serious illness and deter people from following safety precautions (Sherlaw & Raude, 2013). The news media's duty to report honestly and promptly stays unchanged, even as public health crises evolve over time and pose new and distinct obstacles.

In comparison to SARS and other comparable pandemic flu concerns, coverage of the Ebola outbreak was lacking, according to a study that looked at media framing and the

threat of global pandemics through UK media. This is in spite of the fact that in 2015, the latter caused more deaths and infection rates than the former (Pieri, 2019). Researchers looked at how the Ebola outbreak was covered by the media in two daily Nigerian newspapers. Their findings show that instead of being driven by commercial interests, Nigerian media carried out their social duty to rid the country of the lethal virus (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016). The results of this study demonstrates that the media was not driven by how many copies they will sell but rather by the need to disseminate knowledge on how to stop the transmission of the virus. Nevertheless, research has demonstrated that people pay closer attention to the news in moments of crises (Van Scoy, et al., 2021).

Another study that looks at how the American media covered the Ebola outbreak in 2014 found that despite the expansion of Internet news sources over time, newspapers in the US continue to draw a sizable audience. In light of this, their study's findings suggest that the human interest, action, and conflict frames were more prevalent than attribution of blame, economic, and ethical frames (Luisi, et al., 2018). The authors also draw attention to the fact that while news media in other nations covered the Ebola virus, American outlets only joined the discourse when an outbreak hit the United States in 2014. Therefore, it is conceivable that the use of the many journalistic components that make a story newsworthy (Catalán-Matamoros, 2011), is the reason why media coverage of the Ebola outbreak in the United States took longer than expected.

Additionally, studies contend that the news media usually portrayed the Ebola virus negatively, which stoked mass hysteria and had detrimental rhetorical effects. Invasion, predation, threat to humanity, and conspiracy emerged as the main discourses in the report's discourse analysis of South African media reportage of the 2014–2015 Ebola virus outbreak (Moodley & Lesage, 2020). It is noted by the authors that illnesses like Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) have been compared to extra-terrestrial invaders, which fosters a sense of othering. The authors observe that as a result, South Africa's media framing of the Ebola pandemic in their reporting revealed a similar sense of alienation (Moodley & Lesage, 2020). Other research revealed that the UK's media coverage of the virus portrayed the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) as a fatal disease. This illness

provoked significant responses from the international health community and authorities due to its then unidentified infectious disease spread (Wallis & Nerlich, 2005).

This is comparable to the COVID-19 case study, which is covered in the following chapter. It is clear that how the media covers public health crises varies depending on the disease epidemic and the area, yet news media still play a key role in informing the public and slowing the spread of illnesses. They may not be able to change people's minds or cure infections, but they do have the ability to properly inform and educate the public about safety precautions (De Vreese, et al., 2011). Additionally, the media has the ability to diffuse public frenzy and disseminate assurances from authorities. The next section of the study will shed light on researchers who were interested in how the media framed or covered the new virus, despite the fact that scholars from all over the world and different disciplines have been drawn to the COVID-19 pandemic due to its vast scope.

2.3 Media framing during the COVID-19 pandemic

According to Morissan et al. (2020), the COVID-19 outbreak has received more news media attention than any health outbreaks in the past. The authors employed a deductive method approach using predetermined frames to discover which frames were prevalent in the top newspaper for Malaysia and Indonesia. As a result, their findings showed that the COVID-19 outbreak was primarily covered alarmingly in Indonesian newspapers whereas it was primarily covered neutrally in Malaysian newspapers. Additionally, the authors discovered that, despite earlier predictions that the media would use militaristic terminology when portraying a virus, this was not the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the exception of the sporadic use of overblown metaphors like "dangerous disease" (Morissan, et al., 2020, p. 803). Note that despite the fact that the Ebola virus outbreak is less deadly than the COVID-19 outbreak, this illustrates sort of the respect that the COVID-19 outbreak was dealt with compared to other disease outbreaks (Kilgo et al., 2018; Oyeniran & Chia, 2020). In their study's conclusion, the authors noted that media professionals should place more attention on solutions than infection rates because doing so just fuels fear and terror (Morissan, et al., 2020).

Similar findings were made in a study that looked at how South African mainstream print newspapers covered the COVID-19 outbreak and found that nearly half of the front-page news articles investigated were alarmist and negative in nature (Wasserman, et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study's findings demonstrated that no workable remedies were offered in media coverage, which created significant doubts about the media's function in times of crises. Such findings are crucial because they show how frequently the media contradicts the functions that were covered in the preceding part, which calls for further study to close the gap in terms of whether the news media fulfil their journalistic role. A significant point is made by Wasserman et al. (2021), who contend that while pandemic reporting may primarily fall under the general theoretical umbrella of health communication, it also draws on the theories of crisis communication and development communication. This study agrees with this and will demonstrate in its theoretical framework chapter how framing theory, crisis communication theory, and political communication theory are combined and enhance one another while examining media coverage of the present COVID-19 pandemic.

Numerous governments throughout the world have implemented their own safety and preventative measures in an effort to stop the virus's spread since the WHO labelled COVID-19 a pandemic and a cause for global concern (Mahase, 2020). In light of this, a study that looked into the discourses and tactics used by Serbian media discovered that it was framed in two patterns: healthcare and political instrumentalisation. The study also discovered that a significant section of the major media reported the information exactly as it appeared when it was provided by the government, notwithstanding their own intentions (Milutinović, 2021). The author continues by pointing out that their findings reveal that concerns like media freedom, the erosion of democracy, and the rule of law, among others, have been marginalised by political instrumentalisation tactics that were used by Serbian media and only serve to maintain political hegemony. In other words, research has shown how political leaders in countries like Serbia have used the COVID-19 pandemic to influence citizens to vote for them and how media coverage has benefited them (Milutinović, 2021). This also

goes against the purpose of the news media, which should give reliable and impartial information to its viewers.

However, studies consistently show how the news media skews its reporting by emphasising some parts of stories while downplaying others (Entman, 1993; Entman, 2007; De Vreese et al., 2011; Alemayehu, 2020). This falls under the framing category, in which the media can influence audience perception and society temperament, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, researchers believe that the way in which the public reacted to the COVID-19 virus was a direct outcome of how it was reported to them by the media (Dahal & Khatri, 2021). The economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were emphasised more than the health threat it posed, according to a study that examined the tone and framing of stories in a private and state-owned English daily in Nepali. Additionally, the study's findings show that state-run publications had a more positive tone than privately owned newspapers offered (Dahal & Khatri, 2021). The results regarding the tone of the articles are fascinating because they demonstrated how governments all over the world tried to portray their safety and prevention measures in a favourable light to avoid criticism from the public or non-compliance with laws. As already discussed by some scholars, it also exemplified how politicians, in spite of their duty to act as powerful leaders and supply periodically updated preventative legislation and regulations, seized upon the COVID-19 pandemic, and used it to their advantage (Milutinović, 2021). Although the focus of this study is on print newspapers' contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic, mainstream media as a whole also played a significant part.

Social media is one such tool; despite its shortcomings, it has also given governments the chance to readily connect with their constituents. According to Sitto et al. (2022), compared to other countries on the African continent, South Africa and Namibia were apparently the two hardest struck by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since both countries had positive infection rates and wave patterns, their lockdown policies were among the toughest. Although both governments' digital communication strategies got off to a promising start, the study that looked into them revealed that the aforementioned administrations were only reactive and had no interaction with their social media users

(Sitto, et al., 2022). As a result, people were unable to completely comprehend the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts, which caused them to look for information from unofficial sources and believe false information. The report also acknowledges the digital divide in countries like South Africa, which is an important issue. In essence, this refers to areas of the country that are remote and without Internet connectivity (Lembani, et al., 2020).

While it might be argued that people in places with poor internet access can buy print newspapers at their local grocery store, it is social media platforms that have the ability to regularly post important health updates, whether through the sites of the national government or news organisations. Individuals are then able to participate in online discussions and express any issues or suggestions they may have. Sadly, this is not the case for countries like South Africa, where the introduction of digital communication through official platforms did not meet expectations due to a large segment of the country being offline (Sitto, et al., 2022). Although the results of this study make a substantial contribution to the field of study, it is critical to point out that the results were derived from two politicians and an online webinar, which may be viewed as limiting. Despite this, the study's conclusions are still valuable for generalising the impact that the COVID-19 virus had on the implementation of the governments of South Africa and Namibia's digital communication strategies.

Political ramifications of the COVID-19 virus are acknowledged by Ogola (2020). In addition to dealing with the COVID-19 virus pandemic, the author observed that Africa is also dealing with a crisis of information framing. The reason for this is that there are numerous sources involved in the COVID-19 pandemic talks, including the government, civil society, religious authorities, and the general people, all of which ultimately offer various conflicting frames. Therefore, Ogola (2020) moves forward to comprehend the variations and stories in the interpretation of the virus on the basis of this. Although the study claims that various interpretations are welcome, an information framing issue only arises when it deviates from the crisis and turns into a dispute between the aforementioned persons and sectors (Ogola, 2020). Infodemics, which essentially allow for the deliberate quick dissemination of false information, can cause a great deal of harm to society, as was seen

when the false claim that alcohol can treat COVID-19 was widely disseminated on social media (Patwa, et al., 2021). This is only one illustration of the false information that was spread over social media.

In a study by Hubner (2021), the researcher looked at how two important news organisations covered COVID-19 before the virus was deemed a pandemic. The study's findings indicated that economic and social effects dominated media framing in a similar manner. In addition, a secondary aspect of its analysis looked at the sources cited in the first media coverage and discovered that civilians, members of interest groups, and politicians were the most frequently cited sources. The choice of sources and prevailing framing came about as a result of the scientific community's lack of consensus over the virus, which turned the emphasis away from a potential threat to society's health and toward the potential effects on society's way of life (Hubner, 2021). Scholars agree that, in contrast to earlier pandemics, later media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic primarily depended on information from the government rather than the scientific community (Hubner, 2021; Milutinović, 2021; Sitto et al., 2022).

It can be argued that the media informed the public of safety and preventative actions in accordance, despite criticism that they frequently fell short of their obligations since they are thought to amplify official messages without first ensuring that they are newsworthy (Ophir, et al., 2021). How quickly the media can spread information about a crisis is significant not just during the crisis but also after it has passed, according to a study that claimed news frames have an impact on a destination's reputation (Thirumaran, et al., 2021). This is because opinions expressed in the news media often reflect the efficacy or ineffectiveness of a location's crisis management plans. This can be seen, for instance, in the case of South Africa, which was put on England's "red list" after a new COVID-19 type was found there and was consequently prohibited from traveling to England along with other countries (Devlin, et al., 2021). This is why it is beneficial to include media framing theory together with crisis communication theory and political communication theory since they complement one another and help to fully understand how the media framed the COVID-19

pandemic. It will focus especially on the coverage provided by the news media both during and after the country's National State of Disaster. In order to determine whether there was a shift in media coverage and framing prior to the end of South Africa's National State of Disaster, it is critical to understand how the COVID-19 virus had been reported and framed during its outbreak and duration (Thirumaran, et al., 2021).

In comparison to editorials and opinions, news pieces about the COVID-19 virus pandemic increased, and were primarily covered by traditional media (Parvin, et al., 2020). According to the study, the level or impact of media intervention during public health crises is what counts most, regardless of the channel on which the information is disseminated (Nwakpu, et al., 2020). Curiously, a study that looked at how the COVID-19 outbreak was framed in Nigerian newspapers and how readers perceived it discovered that social responsibility was a bigger factor than economic motivations (Igboeli & Ejimnkeonye, 2021). These results support the media's watchdog function, which was previously identified, and are fascinating because media researchers contend that some news reports during the pandemic were sensationalised and overblown (Van Scoy et al., 2021; Sánchez-Figuera et al., 2021). In addition, researchers have argued that vaccination is the most effective method of preventing the COVID-19 virus from spreading, ranking ahead of communication as the second most effective method (Siddiqua, et al., 2020). In light of this, a study that examined how Pakistani media structured communication techniques relevant to the uptake of vaccines discovered that its media coverage was presented in an unusual manner. The study's authors saw that rather than offering new knowledge and reassurance, press coverage of the vaccine presented it in a way that promoted doubt, repercussions, action, and conflict (Yousaf, et al., 2022).

According to framing theory, the objective of framing health challenges like pandemics is to provide precise meanings, contextual insights, and useful cues in order to increase health awareness. Furthermore, media framing assists the public in defining issues and gets them geared up to take the appropriate steps (Yousaf, et al., 2022). As a result, it is crucial to look at how the news media covered the COVID-19 virus because it will show the different

frames that were used, which in turn affects how the public engages with and interprets media information. While prompt and efficient communication tactics by the government and health authorities for raising attention have indeed played a major role in controlling pandemic scenarios, the way these techniques are portrayed in the media encourages the public to take the necessary steps to stop the outbreak and lower morbidity and death rates (Siddiqua, et al., 2020).

2.4 Conclusion

By addressing and summarising current research on the subject from scholars around the world, this chapter has used a theoretical literature review. This was vital for placing the research questions for this study as well as for comprehending the discussions and issues surrounding the research topic. To reiterate, this dissertation's research goals are to 1). Investigate the kinds of frames major South African print publications used a month before, during, and after the National State of Disaster ended, 2). The sources used during the media's coverage of the investigated period, and 3). To examine if the media provide information on the termination of the National State of Disaster.

The aforementioned shows that experts agree that the news media's job during crisis situations is to inform and educate the public about health and safety precautions. Additionally, the media is crucial in conveying the public's concerns to government officials in order to inform laws and policies (Alemayehu, 2020). This chapter has also shown how, in contrast to earlier public health crises, the COVID-19 pandemic was framed and covered by the media in a distinct manner.

Studies have also revealed that, rather than portraying COVID-19 from a health perspective, the media frequently takes an economic or political approach (Dahal & Khatri, 2021; Milutinović, 2021). In light of this, this study will examine how the media represented the COVID-19 National State of Disaster during its duration as well as the time immediately following its end. At the time of writing, no attention has been paid to this topic area, but it

is critical because it can give media scholars and practitioners the skills, they need to address upcoming public health crises. By highlighting the key theories that will help in addressing the research issue, the next chapter will build the groundwork for this investigation.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3. Introduction

The current study investigates how the COVID-19 crisis was framed in print media. The author will examine how COVID-19 was framed in South Africa print media by focusing on media coverage in the month leading up to, during, and following the country's termination of its National State of Disaster. In order to establish the groundwork for the analysis of this research study, this chapter will explore and contrast three theories, namely: framing theory, crisis communication theory, and political communication theory. The three ideas are significant because they work well together, as will be shown in the parts that follow. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic being a crisis of unprecedented global proportion, governments around the world implemented various crisis management plans that were most effective for their respective countries (Sust, et al., 2020).

Therefore, in light of the foregoing, and in a departure from the norm for media studies research, the three theories are combined in the present study to showcase the importance of these theories in times of relaying pertinent time-sensitive health information. The globe has been profoundly affected by the unprecedented health crisis, which has caused widespread fear and anxiety. It had a significant impact on society, businesses, workers, and economies (Hamouche, 2021). Thus, this section of the research project agrees with Wasserman et al. (2021) and notes that while media coverage of pandemics is predominantly positioned within the broad theoretical foundation of health communication, it also draws on aspects of crisis communication and political communication theory. Scholars monitor frames to spot patterns in issue definitions, contrast coverage across

media, and look at variances between media types. This chapter therefore proceeds to comprehend the ideas related to the research questions as it relates to the news media on the basis of this foundation.

3.1 Framing Theory

Erving Goffman, who is credited with being the first to focus on framing as a communication technique, contends that frames are storytelling tools that help individuals comprehend and translate lived reality (Goffman, 1974). In other words, frames are interpretational schemata that enable people to categorise, pinpoint, and grasp occurrences. Entman (1993) updated this term, noting that framing a communicative text entail highlighting certain facts of a seen reality in a manner that reinforces a certain issue, definition, informal interpretation, moral assessment, and/or therapeutic prescription. Additionally, it was implied that Entman's (1993) definition of media framing considers the integration of agenda-setting and priming with media framing to be essential when attempting to comprehend media framing of certain news issues. This is due to the media's ability to present their reporting from varied angles, which ultimately has the power to affect public perception and induce attitudinal reactions that can either promote positive or bad behavioural changes (Dahal & Khatri, 2021).

Research studies frequently consider framing along with agenda setting. Agenda setting occurs when there is a significant association between the importance given to a topic and the media's emphasis on it. Priming, a further development of the agenda setting paradigm, also refers to adjustments in the criteria that people use to judge political performance (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). To put it another way, priming news information enables consumers to use current events to assess and form opinions about particular public or political individuals. This paradigm, which was developed in the field of political communication, presupposes that people create their opinions in response to prominent events or problems. Framing is distinct, claim Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), in that it may be applied as a construct at both the micro and macro levels. Micro level because framing defines how people use content and presentation elements to help them form opinions, and macro level because framing gives journalists a variety of delivery options to use.

Fundamentally speaking, frames are crucial tools for news media outlets to explain somewhat complex problems quickly and in a way that is understandable to lay audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Furthermore, framing is sometimes described as a technique used by the media to skew interpretation, necessitating a selective impact over how the general public perceives reality (Msughter & Phillips, 2020). The news media are able to accomplish this by giving certain issues a significant amount of publicity and by emphasising certain aspects of those stories while underplaying everything else (Boykoff & Laschever, 2011). According to researchers, media framing entails decisions about what is highlighted versus marginalised, included versus excluded from text, and openly versus implicitly ignored. These decisions are made in order to minimise other issues on the news agenda (Milutinović, 2021). The argument put up by scholars is that framing explains how media framing aids in our understanding of the outside world and that journalists are crucial in the creation of frames. This is due to the fact that framing shapes the discourse surrounding the facts rather than just reporting them (Turchi & Melton-Fant, 2022). Additionally, studies have noted that the writing style of news articles contributes to the saliency of subjects. The more vivid the terminology employed, the more salient the framing will be, according to research that explicitly examines framing through linguistic use (Turchi & Melton-Fant, 2022).

According to these definitions of framing, it can be inferred that framing is one of the theories that is most commonly used when media outlets report disasters. This is expanded upon by D'Angelo (2019), who emphasises the interrelationship between the ideas of frame/framework and framing. The author first points out that frames, or frameworks, can be thought of as the structures and guidelines that place communication process inside certain social contexts. The second definition of framing is the act of using language or paralinguistic communications to explain, interpret, and/or characterise a situation in order to try to persuade another person. Furthermore, it is assumed that the core tenet of framing theory is that a problem can be seen from a number of angles and be understood as having ramifications for numerous factors. As a result, communicative frames are known to organise everyday reality by giving meaning to an evolving sequence of occurrences (Chong

& Druckman, 2007). This serves as a reminder of the earlier observation that framing theory is very helpful for disaster study and analysis. Additionally, it highlights how framed media messages can have an effect. Mass media outlets are among of the most potent social structures since they have the ability to frame as well as determine the agenda. This includes the sources they use to support their arguments and the gender of those sources (Zoch & Turk, 1998). Due to the importance this gives to the information presented, it is crucial to discuss the types of sources that journalists use.

Additionally, this research holds that framing and the sources used to create news articles go hand in hand. This dissertation's findings chapter will demonstrate how sources featured a range of people and genders. Since the colonial eras, the issue of the gender gap—with women underrepresented—has been hotly debated, and it persists even in various African cultures as noted by Degarr & Okpeh (2016). Traditional news media, which has been a significant source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic, has the ability to encourage public discussion of important matters involving, among others, race, religion, and gender. Therefore, the media have the power to unite people who share a common background, childhood, or origin through media portrayal and representation, as well as to support and reinforce stereotypical beliefs and relationship patterns among individuals through its reportage and content (Degarr & Okpeh, 2016). Additionally, newspapers are frequently seen as taking a more serious approach to their daily reporting than other forms of traditional mass media of communication, such as radio and television. Newspapers are therefore expected to pay close attention to situations involving women who society perceive as inadequate (Degarr & Okpeh, 2016). The genders employed as sources in the *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *City Press*, and *The Sunday Independent* newspapers will thus be revealed by the data later in this research. The media's framing of both the substance and the people who provided it will make reference to this insight, which will be important.

The focus of much research on political science and communications literary works has been on how elites' messages—such as those from politicians, media organisations, and interest groups—influence individuals' frames and opinions. A framing effect is the term

commonly used to describe this process (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Scholars have long observed that literature in the fields of psychology, marketing, and behavioural economics has extensively examined how individuals' processing of information can change depending on the traits of the individual or group presenting it (Deslatte, 2020). One could argue that this is applicable even in the study of journalism. According to this theory, framing effects can be reduced in two different ways: first, by political ideology or affiliation, as well as assessments of a person's reliability; and second, by considering the function of messengers as messaging moderators (Deslatte, 2020). Essentially, individuals' and communities' decisions will undoubtedly be positively impacted by health messages that originate from sources they regard as reliable. Because society looks to government representatives and the media for leadership and counsel in perilous situations, their significance is crucial. Political interventions were made in various countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a worldwide health crisis.

Therefore, as it relates to the study's aims, the subsequent sections of this chapter will specifically address crisis communication theory and political communication theory. In the behavioural and social sciences, framing is a notion that is frequently utilised. Framing plays a significant role in the study of political communication, media and journalism, and health communication sciences (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019). The subsequent theories will also demonstrate how they both add to the primary theoretical framework—the framing theory—and how all of them are interconnected.

3.2 Crisis Communication Theory

Crisis communication theory needs to be included in this chapter because the COVID-19 virus was seen as a worldwide crisis. This is due to the fact that it will demonstrate how the theory helps with crisis management in general and serve as a starting point for addressing the research issues for this thesis. It has been emphasised that communication is a crucial part of managing crises (Coombs, 2011). A crisis could be viewed as a significant event that has a negative impact on the performance of a company, industry, the general

public, and/or its products and/or services. Additionally, it obstructs regular company operations and might endanger an organisation's survival (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Crises are sometimes thought of as unanticipated, major, and destructive events (Barton, 2001). A unique, unanticipated, and non-routine episode or series of events that creates considerable degrees of uncertainty and presents a genuine or perceived threat to the organisation's core priorities has also been characterised as a crisis by studies (Seeger, et al., 1998). Additionally, crisis communication experts point out that a crisis is an abrupt, significant threat that, if handled poorly, might have a negative effect on a business, market, or society (Coombs, 1999).

However, scholars also contend that a crisis may also mark a defining moment for the best or worse (Fink, 1986), and that it is not necessarily a terrible thing because it may also herald a significant change for both good and bad (Friedman, 2002). The categories "crises," "emergencies," and "disasters" have distinctions of their own, but they also have a great deal in common and overlap. As a result, these concepts are frequently used in combination in popular literature, such as "crisis and emergency management" or "disaster crisis management". It is critical to emphasise this information in order to fully grasp these notions, even though it was not the case for COVID-19 literature when looking at South Africa as a case study. It also is essential to stress that neither of these definitions has a fixed meaning but instead varies depending on the circumstance and environment (Al-Dahash, et al., 2016). Given that the COVID-19 outbreak was recognised by the WHO as a worldwide crisis, it is against this background that this research project will concentrate primarily on crises as a concept (Mahase, 2020). In order to control the pandemic, several crisis communication tactics were used by many nations in a variety of contexts. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, new laws, policies, and procedures, as well as changes in how societies function on a daily basis, were put in place (Adanlawo, 2020).

Dobrowolski (2020) contend that the COVID-19 viral outbreak has exposed flaws in a number of organisations and governments, which by itself suggests a crisis. Additionally, it is said that crises cannot be remedied in a single action or through ad hoc measures. Rather, it is reliant on crisis or contingency planning, as well as on the verification of such planning and

preparation before the crisis (Dobrowolski, 2020). Because of their unpredictability and unprecedentedness, crises like the COVID-19 pandemic represent a major threat to the operations of society. Although the nature of crises and the pertinent responses can take on many different forms, the one trait that all crisis communication and response teams in all countries needed to have was the capacity to act quickly to address an unanticipated scenario (Dobrowolski, 2020). Crisis situations challenge the readiness, governance, and endurance of organisations, systems, and society. Crisis communication experts contend that in order to successfully lead people through the many crisis stages and into recovery, leaders must exhibit a specific set of competences (McGuire, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, leaders are suggested to provide a hopeful yet realistic vision during times of crisis. According to research, a leader's capacity to communicate effectively, confidently, convincingly, and empathetically is crucial to influencing how people perceive the crisis and how well they judge the leader's ability to handle it (McGuire, et al., 2020). In order to establish direct ties and aid people in understanding complex data and facts in crisis situations, maintaining clear communication is fundamental. Thus, it is important to emphasise how the government and news media work together during these times and how they both provide the public with important information. People constantly consume news, and they are especially sensitive to the tone and content of messages during times of crisis, therefore it is crucial that messages are concise, accurate, and comprehensive (Adanlawo, 2020). According to Garnett and Kouzmin (2009), the media has a role in framing crises, educating the general public, and documenting the success of crisis management efforts. They do, however, issue a warning that there is a risk of exaggeration and distortion, notably in the absence of transparent, reliable, and correct information from authorities. Studies have also shown that crisis management requires the combination of abilities and characteristics that enable a leader to prepare for, handle, and draw lessons from crisis situations while being closely scrutinised by the public (McGuire, et al., 2020). Transparency, assurance, credibility, and trust are said to be crucial components in upholding the rule of law in times of crisis.

To put it another way, whatsoever preventative and safety measures are voted upon by the policymakers and the pertinent committees, they will only be adopted if the leader relaying them is believed to be reliable (Singh, 2020). A circumstance like the current pandemic crisis made it appropriate for the head of state to periodically reassure and address its citizens about updates and developments related to the pandemic. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report's findings, which showed that interest in the news fell from 67% in 2015 to 47% in 2022, suggest that despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the digital and print news media have seen a decline (Newman, et al., 2022). Nonetheless, they still played a larger role during this time as people awaited information about the situation (Van Scoy, et al., 2021). The government and media were entrusted with winning the public's trust by delivering current and accurate information, despite the fact that the head of state dispatched many task teams to handle the implementation of the nation's crisis management plan (Singh, 2020).

In light of this foregoing, this research study argues that it is crucial to incorporate crisis communication theory into its theoretical framework in order to better comprehend how the media covered the nation's pandemic management strategy in the wake of a National State of Disaster. Furthermore, it has been stated (Sitto, et al., 2022) that South Africa was one of the most responsive nations since it quickly acted by enforcing a national lockdown to prevent the spreading of COVID-19 infections. The political communication theory discussed in the next section is crucial since the COVID-19 virus was politicised (Tshidzumba & Juta, 2021). It will also help readers comprehend the role that the country's government authorities played throughout the unprecedented crisis.

3.3 Political Communication Theory

Political communication, according to scholars, entails the creation, transmission, reception, and processing of communications that could significantly influence politics either explicitly or implicitly (Tshidzumba & Juta, 2021). Furthermore, a crucial component is that the statement has a significant political effect on people's cognitive thinking, beliefs, and

behaviours as well as societies in general and the circumstances wherein they live (Tshidzumba & Juta, 2021). McNair (2011) concurs and takes this a step further by arguing that political communication is generally referred to as a deliberate dialogue about politics, which encompasses all kinds of communications from political figures, all communication directed at these figures from non-politicians, and all communication regarding these political leaders and their actions as covered in press reports. Politics has an impact on how people perceive and debate public health issues as well as how responses are created to enhance the public's health (Hatcher, 2020). The effectiveness of the bureaucracy's deployment will be impacted by the political leadership's communication on health-related topics. Communication is a strong weapon in public health, therefore how leaders discuss issues of public health matters. Public health initiatives are more prone to failure when a tool is exploited or misused (Hatcher, 2020).

Scholars also observed that during the COVID-19 lockdown, political communication and knowledge were becoming more and more important since they help with the enforcement and adherence to state policies (Tshidzumba & Juta, 2021). But scholars also warn against governments using force to ensure conformity, such as when the South African government stationed the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in particular regions. Political communication can be considered as a means of enforcing laws and regulations, but it must be careful to avoid inflaming tension and damaging the relationship between the government and its constituents (Tshidzumba & Juta, 2021). This theory is crucial for addressing this study's research objectives since it clarifies how governments interact with their constituents as well as how the news media functions as a whole. During the Coronavirus crisis, political communication as a framework showed how it may interact with citizens to break down the distance between the government and the people (Merkel, 2020). It gave the people a chance to speak up and establish trust as a result of this. The COVID-19 pandemic, which had a profound impact on all facets of society, is also said to have given governments the chance to be more sensitive to the concerns of their constituents (Tshidzumba & Juta, 2021). Despite the fact that there are numerous definitions of political communication, this study will focus on the few that were covered in this section

since they speak to various factors that were crucial in how the South African government handled the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Further to this, it is understood that newspapers have frequently been considered as a crucial component in supporting not only elections and responsive governance but also the growth of a deliberative society (Fletcher & Young, 2012). According to researchers, the government's involvement in talks and efforts to encourage citizen participation in the COVID-19 management are crucial. Therefore, prioritising political communication investment for times like these will not only contribute towards constant and clear up to date information but will also enable an active conversation with the news media (Van Scoy, et al., 2021).

The purpose of the study's final portions, which analyse print newspaper stories, is to demonstrate the relationship between political communication and the media's function during a crisis affecting public health. The reason for this is because the news media generally contributes significantly to the success of democratic processes, supporting the necessity of a cordial working relationship with political leaders (McNair, 2011). Additionally, it is clear from the aforementioned that while government officials have the power to engage with its constituents, it still requires the news media to cover and disseminate essential information to the public in order to highlight the importance of a crisis (McGuire, et al., 2020). Due to this, the present research contends that it is crucial to use political communication theory as a foundational element in its theoretical framework.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has established that framing theory, in addition to crisis communication theory and political communication theory, is imperative for addressing the study's research questions. As a result, this chapter began by examining framing theory as a communication strategy and the process it uses to organise information into certain frames. Framing theory, which was mentioned before, also stated that some topics are emphasised while others are neglected.

Secondly, this chapter included crisis communication theory because the WHO classified the COVID-19 outbreak as a global health crisis. The aforementioned theory described several definitions of a crisis while pointing out that there is not a single definition that applies to all crises; instead, each definition depends on the circumstances and intensity of the crisis. This part also illustrated how this idea is useful for articulating and implementing crisis management solutions during public health crises.

Thirdly, in order to understand the COVID-19 pandemic problem, this chapter relies on political communication theory. This segment demonstrated the significance of governance and trust between the state and its citizenry, as is customary during a state of national crisis. In times of crisis, it was said, society looks to the authorities for guidance as well as to the mainstream press for health-related news. The government representative delivering information and updates must therefore be dependable and trustworthy. With this background in mind, this chapter has argued the importance of incorporating framing theory, crisis communication theory, and political communication theory as part of its theoretical framework because it will serve as the foundation and significantly advance the research objectives of this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4. Introduction

A research methodology refers to the process that researchers must follow when doing their research. Hence, researchers use a variety of research approaches in accordance with the objectives and goals of their studies (Hansen & Machin, 2019). This research project intended to look at how South African print newspapers framed the news before, during, and after the National State of Disaster was abolished. In so doing, this study deployed a quantitative content analysis. On the basis of information gathered from either text or images, content analysis is said to draw reproducible and reliable conclusions (Riff, et al., 2014). Therefore, this research method was chosen for this project due to this rationale. Quantitative content analysis, one of the key research methods in communication studies,

has been acknowledged to have evolved over time for two significant causes among others (Deacon, et al., 1999).

First, researchers contend that scientists' desire to learn more about this study strategy was motivated by its purported ability to give unbiased and obvious proof. Second, due to the widespread and coinciding worries about the development and power of media organisations as well as their capacity to sway public opinion by distributing or promoting propaganda in support of or to delegitimise public figures (Deacon, et al., 1999). Additionally, this research methodology is recognised for helping in the identification and counting of specific qualities or dimensions of texts, and through this, being able to reveal something about the message, pictures, and interpretations of such texts and their larger societal relevance (Hansen & Machin, 2019).

By employing this particular research technique, media and communication scholars have been able to examine newspaper coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether it is in online or print media (Wasserman et al., 2021; Morissan et al., 2020; Dahal & Khatri, 2021). Considering this, the present research claims that this research approach is most suited to give reliable and comprehensive data in order to detect specific frames or developments within news media coverage.

4.1 Sampling

To examine the way in which South African news media framed the period before, during and after the termination of the National State of Disaster in the country, this study investigated four weekly print newspapers. Research have suggested in the past that there is essentially no inquiry on the reporting of primary health care and associated scientific evidence in South African print media (Akintola, et al., 2015). This might be related to the development and widespread use of the Internet, which has prompted viewers' attention to shift to digital media. As a result of this online change, research into social media and online newspapers is conducted more regularly than it is for print media. Nevertheless, despite the previously mentioned reduction in audiences' interest in legacy media or the paucity of

study into print media, new studies have shown that print media continues to play an essential role in the distribution of health-related information and raising public awareness (Pandey & Kumar, 2020).

Furthermore, it should be noted that since the public greatly relied on official communication and media coverage in general, it was common for this information to be distributed through traditional media (Pandey & Kumar, 2020). It is also important to note that the COVID-19 virus has brought attention to the digital divide, which is essentially the unequal distribution of and accessibility to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) across societies (SAIIA, 2020). Thus, this study specifically focuses on printed newspapers rather than other forms of media. The specific newspapers were also picked because they are well-liked, widely available, and credible among media experts. Additionally, these weekly publications are renowned for publishing in-depth and investigative pieces, both of which are essential when supplying the public with news and information about public health (Siddiqua, et al., 2020).

The present research firstly, examines media content from the *Sunday Times*. This weekly publication, which also has branches in nearby countries including Botswana, Lesotho, and Eswatini, is regarded as one of the largest in South Africa. This weekly flagship, which is owned by Arena Holdings and is produced by the Tiso Blackstar Group, is reported to have a readership of more than 3 million people (TimesLIVE, 2022). Secondly, the *Mail & Guardian's* news content is explored. The newspaper is owned by the private corporation Mail & Guardian Media (Pty) Ltd and is one of the newspapers that made it through the country's transition towards democracy. The weekly is credited with being among the first in the media sector to develop a website, earning the majority of its income from subscriptions and grants from various contributors (Mail & Guardian, 2022). Thirdly, the *Sunday Independent* is used for further analysis and also yielded the most articles on the topic under investigation. This Sunday-distributed weekly newspaper was one among the publications that the Sekunjalo Media Consortium recently purchased from the Independent News & Media (IOL, 2022). Fourthly, the *City Press*, which published the second-most pieces, was also utilised to look at how the COVID-19 pandemic was covered by the media. This weekly

newspaper was established in 1982 and is owned by Media24, a division of the global media and ecommerce company, Naspers (News24, 2022).

The chosen publications are some of the top publications in the country, and they all have the trait of providing in-depth and investigative analyses. Due to the fact that the audiences of the aforementioned publications are dispersed across the country and abroad, they also have a broad geographical reach combined. Previous studies (Dunway, 2013) have shown that media ownership has a significant impact on how media content is generated and delivered. To ensure that the outcomes of this study are distinct and original, it was decided to only employ newspapers that made use of different writing styles and had different audiences. Despite the fact that there are a variety of methods for picking a representative sample, it is believed that a research project should be open and upfront about the strategy used as well as the justification for choosing the data to be analysed. In addition, a sampling plan should also mention the following: choosing the platform format, the time frame, and samples of acceptable contents (Hansen & Machin, 2019). Therefore, this research project used Press Reader to compile pertinent news pieces from the *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Independent*, and *Mail & Guardian*. With the help of the UCT Library's subscription to the platform, users get access to Press Reader, a digital newspaper distributor that also lets them access print newspapers and magazines. News articles for the *City Press's* e-edition were acquired through the author's monthly subscription to Media24.

Only news stories from the four weekly publications' news sections were used in this study's sample. Included within the sample were front pages as well. Due to the fact that this study's main focus is on media coverage before, during, and after South Africa's National State of Disaster was lifted, it only examined coverage for the months of March, April, and May 2022. Even though there has been substantial pandemic media coverage since the virus first emerged, this research is just concerned with the aforementioned time period. In order to extract the items that are the most pertinent, it is crucial to emphasise this. It is reasonable to suppose that during this time, the lockdown regulations and the implications of the National State of Disaster's termination would dominate media coverage.

Moreover, because they are known for holding politicians accountable, the media is seen as the fourth estate. Thus, news coverage of the revisions to the lockdown regulations were anticipated. Although it is no easy feat, media coverage of such regulations is critical and necessary in order for any democratic system to flourish (Luberda, 2008). The analysis for this research project will be described in full in the section that follows, along with information on the categories that were used in the coding manual for this quantitative content analysis.

4.2 Analysis

This study used the framework of a related study by Morissan et al. (2020), in which the authors used a deductive analysis method to investigate newspaper coverage of the COVID19 pandemic. It is claimed that the deductive analytical method assisted to foretell the media frames that would appear in the newspaper (Morissan, et al., 2020). This study will borrow the frames used by Morissan et al. (2020) and will build on it in order to complement the objectives of this research study. When it comes to deciding what is noteworthy, it has been remarked that the media, and particularly the news media, follow its own rules (Mangani, 2021). Galtung and Ruge established the idea of news values to describe how journalists should prevent the subjectivity brought on by "selection distortion" (1965, p. 65). Updated news values over time include, but are not limited to, frequency, negativity, threshold, unambiguity, relevancy, and closeness, among other things (Meissner, 2015; Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The claim that news values are not necessarily universal and vary depending on cultural circumstances was reinforced by further study critiques (Meissner, 2015).

Studies have noted that with time news values change and therefore it is key to unpick news values that no longer fit in contemporary time as it will allow for researchers to understand what was included and excluded from media content. As journalists do not only deliver information and depict reality, but this is also particularly important when there are public health concerns. Instead, they create reality by defining occurrences and interpreting

them based on some of the event's components as proof (Gabore, 2020). As a result, it is imperative to understand how the print media framed their news stories and also to determine the news values that informed their media content. In so doing, the text of the newspaper stories, including the headlines, will be the unit of analysis for this research study.

This study focused on the three-month period of March, April, and May 2022. This period was chosen because it encompasses the month before, the month of, and the month following the evaluation and lifting of the National State of Disaster. In so doing, this study made use of a manual coding process and no software was used. The reason for this is because of the small sample of news articles collected. The following keywords were utilised in order to retrieve the pertinent news articles for analysis: COVID-19/covid-19 pandemic, COVID/Covid regulations, National State of Disaster, lockdown restrictions. It is also important to note that articles referencing the keywords at least twice were chosen in order to avoid choosing news stories that only briefly mention them without providing any context. While other sections of the newspapers may have also discussed the above keywords, this research study is specifically focused on news media and, as a result, only extracted articles from the news sections for the four weeklies.

Theoretically, all content analyses involve gathering a sample of media, creating categories of contents, assessing their presence, and then interpreting the findings in light of outside standards (Bertrand & Hughes, 2018). Since only one individual did the research, no inter-coder reliability checks were performed as would generally be the case when there are multiple authors. With the exception of newspaper type, name of publication, publication date, and headline, the coding manual for this study coded for nine categories. These categories included: framing of COVID-19 (reassuring, alarming, or neutral); did the article mention the end of the national state of disaster; dominant themes present (health, economic, political, other); voice 1, voice 1: gender; voice 2, voice 2: gender; article's

evaluation of continuing lockdown regulations (for, against, mixed, none); and role of media (monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative).

When examining the media frames borrowed from Morissan et al. (2020), it can be seen that the reassuring frame refers to content that offers solutions and inspires hope, the alarming frame does the opposite by reporting on death or infection rates using a negative tone, which also inspires fear and panic, and the neutral frame can be understood as only reporting the facts without taking a position. As a result, this category will be examined based on both the frequency with which it appeared in the news pieces under examination and whether it received media attention. As previously mentioned, the media serves as a crucial conduit between the government and society, and it is therefore vital that they provide critical information to the public so that people can make informed judgments (Igboeli & Ejimnkeonye, 2021). This study's major goal is to determine if the media informed its readers about the modifications to the lockdown rules.

Furthermore, in the category that examines overarching themes, political themes are those that discuss the government, politicians, and policies. Health themes are content that discussed health-related information. Economic themes are content that examined the economy and how the pandemic adversely impacted business operations. Scholars have argued that journalists should choose to use non-elite sources when they are reporting on a topic that affects the entire population (Freedman, et al., 2007). Scholars have also urged journalists to review their source selection because they often measure source legitimacy and usability according to sexual identity or occupation among other factors (Freedman, et al., 2007). This is because the choice of a source has a considerable impact on how media messages are received. In light of this, the researcher felt that the coding manual for sources should also include information about the genders of the sources. It should be noted that this research study only considers the genders mentioned in the extracted news articles, and those that were unidentifiable will be disclosed, in the interest of full disclosure and inclusion. To put it another way, the author inferred the gender of the sources from the pronouns used within the news articles.

The coding manual also includes a category that examined whether the news articles under investigation contained opinion on either the continuation of lockdown measures or

its termination. The news angle's viewpoint, whether it was in favour of the topic, opposed to it, or included a combination of both views, was coded in this way. Finally, a further category was coded to reflect the role that the media played throughout its coverage. For the sake of this study, the term monitorial refers to the media's watchdog function in terms of holding the powerful accountable (Amodu, et al., 2016). Facilitating in terms of giving a forum for discussion and debate. Radical in the sense that the news media adopted a stance on a topic rather than being impartial. Collaborative in the sense that it involves the government by collaborating in order to inform the public (Christians, et al., 2010).

The limitations of this investigation are described in the ensuing section. In doing so, this study will demonstrate how, despite its limitations, the paper still produces a wealth of information that can be used to identify patterns and trends in South African newspaper coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic during March, April, and May 2022.

4.3 Limitations

The goal of this study was to look into how the news media covered the time when the South African government and the necessary specialists specifically assessed the country's State of Disaster.

As a result, one of its limitations is that it only examined a three-month span. In order to obtain more comprehensive data, this study advises that future studies on the subject use a longer time frame. In order to keep the research aims as succinct as possible, this research project focused on this time period. Furthermore, this study's use of quantitative content analysis has made it aware of its limitations in terms of revealing the latent meaning concealed inside texts. Usually, content analysis is criticised by researchers for being insensitive and unable to draw conclusions from underlying meanings (Jensen, 2013). Nevertheless, this study holds that quantitative content analysis attracts traits of being unobtrusive and becomes effective in making sense of vast data (Stemler, 2000). As it solely looks at print newspapers, this study is likewise restricted. Thus, in order to present a more

comprehensive picture of mainstream news media, this study also advises future studies to include online newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. The author's decision to only focus on print newspapers was driven by the argument that newspapers generally have a higher level of credibility in society (Olusola, et al., 2017).

Sepedi (also known as Sesotho sa Leboa), Tshivenda, Sesotho, isiZulu, siSwati, Afrikaans, English, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and Setswana are the 11 official languages of South Africa (Britannica, n.d.). Since English is the only language used in the selected weekly newspapers, this is a limitation as the sample does not include other language offerings. To make comparisons fairer, only weeklies are included in the print publications that were chosen, which further restricts the sample size. Therefore, the study urges future research to include daily newspapers as well as newspapers in other languages. Given their investigative and in-depth analysis capabilities, weekly newspapers were deliberately picked for this research project (Abdulla, et al., 2002).

Despite conducting quantitative content analyses of the *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Independent*, *Mail & Guardian*, and *City Press* for this research study, it is unable to take into consideration the media as a whole. Consequently, this study only includes the aforementioned printed publications, and it uses the findings to highlight COVID-19 news reporting trends. These publications were chosen for this project due to their standing as some of the most read and widely distributed publications nationwide, and in the case of some, even internationally. In light of this, the author contends that despite the drawbacks discussed in this section, the project's findings will nevertheless significantly advance this field of study.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter explained the quantitative content analysis that was chosen as the research approach. This methodological approach helped with the analysis of significant amounts of data that were obtained from news stories in numerous publications. The *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Times*, *City Press*, and *Mail & Guardian* were among these newspapers,

in no particular sequence. In this chapter, it was stated that using this approach was important and that much other research had used it successfully. This project used the time period a month before, a month during, and a month after the powers-that-be removed the National State of Disaster to examine how South African print newspapers reported on in their various publications regarding the lockdown measures in place. It is important to look into this time period because it affected the many lockdown stages that people were subjected to and because of how long it lasted in the country. As a result, this chapter split into the subcategories of sampling method and analysis.

The methodology for compiling the data and the requirements for extracting pertinent news stories are described in the first subcategory by the author. The author identified their data by manually selecting terms from the pertinent news articles, as was described in the chapter. They featured the terms COVID-19/covid-19 pandemic, COVID/covid regulations, National State of Disaster, and lockdown restrictions. In the second subcategory, the author dives deep into the studies to discuss the types of coding categories that were used as well as their applicability. The sampling strategy and analysis work best together because they produce data that can be applied to future study in addition to providing answers to the project's research goals. There is also a part that provides further recommendations along with information on the limits of the research methodology and the study as a whole. This is significant because it sheds light on several crucial points that should be remembered before reviewing the study project's findings. Due to the fact that it effectively prepares the reader for the upcoming chapter, which will provide the results of this investigation, this chapter finishes on this note. The author discusses the findings from the aforementioned weekly print newspapers in more detail in the section that follows.

Chapter 5: Findings

5. Introduction

Researchers have argued that while huge data sets are useful for quantitative analysis because they highlight trends and patterns, small samples may still produce interesting data (Kitchin, 2017). This is because, despite their volumetric and velocity limitations—that is, the quantity of information and the rate at which the data is processed—small samples are purposefully designed to address certain research aims. Additionally, using small samples, researchers can concentrate on certain situations and identify the reasonable or irrational ways in which individuals engage and make sense of their surroundings, in this context the world of the mainstream press (Kitchin, 2017). In light of this, the research results from a quantitative examination of newspaper articles' content will be provided in this chapter.

This study previously highlighted scholars who carried out related research and discovered that the COVID-19 virus received a lot of news coverage worldwide (Wasserman et al., 2021; Nwakpu et al., 2020; Morissan et al., 2020). However, the findings of this study generally indicate that media coverage of pandemics differs from that of outbreaks. The coding manual that is included with this research project as an addendum contains the data for all four weekly newspapers that will be discussed in the next sections. It should also be noted that the results are based on the time frame from March 1, 2022, to May 31, 2022, as this is the time frame during which the researcher looked into media coverage before, during, and after the National State of Disaster was lifted. Although newspapers did not start publishing until a few days after March 1 and before May 31, 2022, this time frame was chosen to ensure fair outcomes. Once more, it is important to remember that even though this is a small sample, it will yield valuable information.

As a result, 63 news stories from the four analysed printed publications as a whole were gathered. These news stories were chosen and included in the study because they included the methodology's highlighted keywords at least twice. Each publication's results will be

covered separately in the parts that follow, along with graphs that will help to further explain the findings.

5.1 The Sunday Independent

For the time period under investigation, the *Sunday Independent* newspaper produced the majority of pandemic media coverage, thus the outlets' findings will be presented first. Out of a total of 63 news items, this publication produced 20 news articles, as seen in the attached codebook in the addendum from variable 27 to 46. From 06 March 2022 to 29 May 2022, news articles that mentioned the keywords listed in the methodology chapter were retrieved. It became clear during the coding process that the *Sunday Independent* did not publish more than 3 news stories on the subject in a single edition. The frequency of news articles created on the subject varies; occasionally, there is only one news article on the media reporting of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the headlines for the articles under investigation, there was a combination of headlines referring to the South African government, the COVID-19 vaccine, the social relief grant disbursements, and other topics. Figure 1 illustrates that, majority of the news articles for the *Sunday Independent* were framed in an alarming manner, followed by the reassuring frame and then the neutral frame. To put it another way, out of the 20 news stories, 9 had an alarming frame, 7 had reassuring framing, and the remaining 4 had neutral framing.

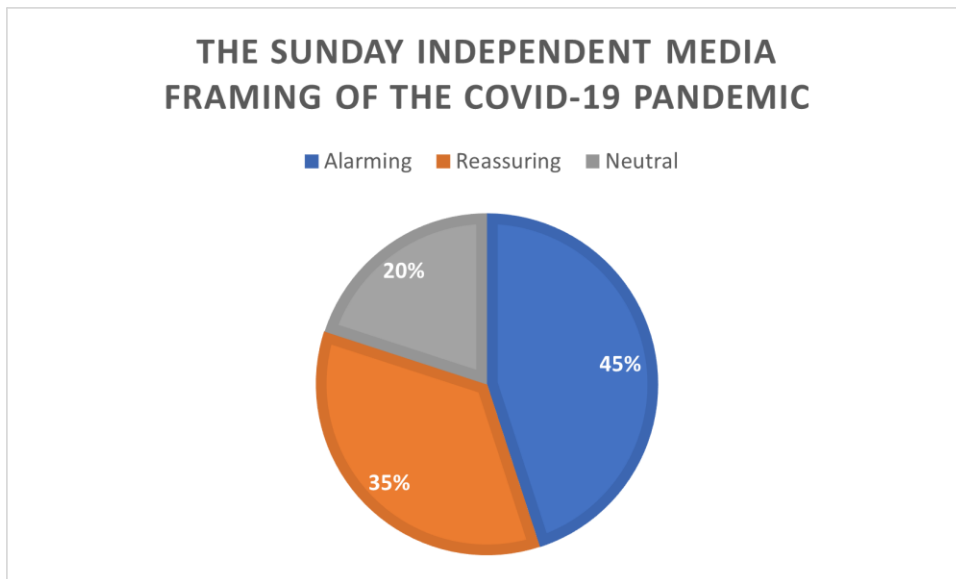


Figure 1

The way information was framed during this time period could only be understood by looking at how the COVID-19 pandemic was covered prior to, during, and after the National State of Disaster was terminated. Additionally, it revealed how frequently articles during the designated time period covered the COVID-19 crises. As a result, the *Sunday Independent's* data showed that while 35% of the news pieces reported the end of the national state of disaster, 65% of news stories did not. While a variety of issues appear to be examined in all the news articles, the economic theme dominated media coverage for the *Sunday Independent*. The political theme and the subsequent health theme are next, as shown in the study's findings. When the first two sources utilised in the news articles were coded, it was discovered that the bulk of the sources were made up of either representatives of businesses, government agencies, or civil society, along with unidentified or no sources. In addition, citizens were the second-most utilised source, followed by the medical community and politicians. Figure 2 displays these findings.

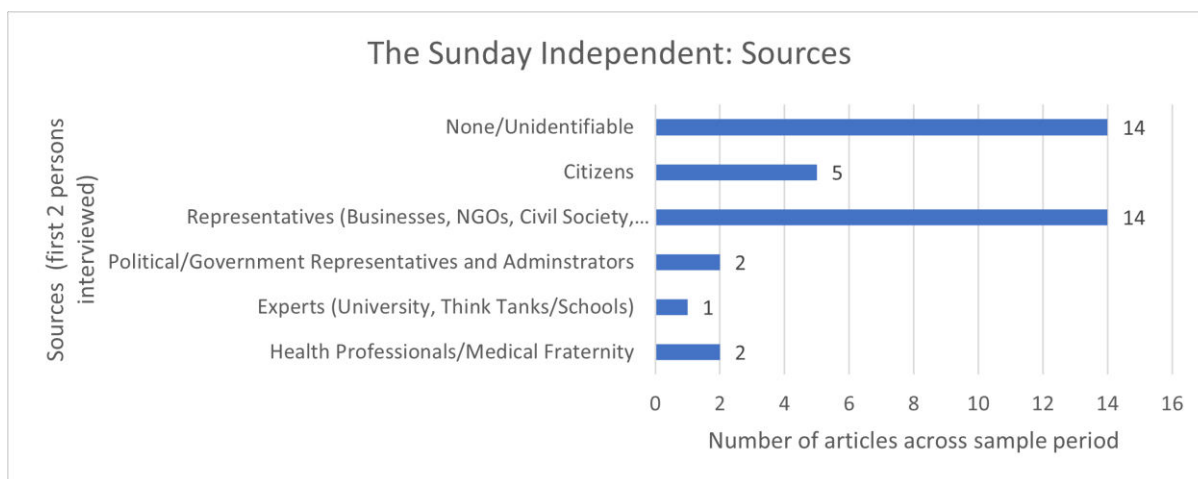


Figure 2

The gender of the analysed sources was also coded, and as was mentioned in the previous chapter, gender was inferred from the pronouns used in the news articles. Although gender binary is a limitation, it is still used largely in these types of research studies. Thus, for the sake of accuracy, the study will proceed with the genders listed in the news articles. The results highlight the fact that 50% of the sources were men, 29% were women, and 21% could not be classified based on their gender. As a result, it may be believed that previous studies (Zoch & Turk, 1998; Degarr & Okpeh, 2016) on women in the media is still valid given that women continue to be underrepresented and that their male counterparts are still seen as more reliable information sources.

Further, a category that looked at whether the news items evaluated the continuation of lockdown regulations coded for arguments for, against, mixed, or no argument. The findings showed that 55% of the articles under examination had no argument, 25% were against, 10% were in favour, and the remaining 10% contained a mix of arguments. Lastly, a category that examined the role of the media in terms of their news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country was coded. The statistics presented in the codebook showed that 71% of the time, the media performed the role of facilitation, 17% the role of monitoring, 12% the role of radicalisation, and 0% the role of collaboration. These are the *Sunday Independent's* coded results. The results of the *City Press's* news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa will be thoroughly discussed in the part that follows.

5.2 City Press

According to media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, The *City Press* had the second highest number of news articles. The data for this newspaper can be found in the accompanying codebook between variables 47 and 63. Out of a total of 63 articles in the analysed weekly newspapers, data for the publication came from 17 articles. Like the first newspaper, the *City Press* likewise issued news articles from 06 March 2022 until 29 May 2022. The headlines for the newspaper articles under investigation included, among other things, coverage of the South African military services, a rise in the COVID-19 infection rate, and state capture. Figure 3 illustrates how most of the pandemic coverage for this newspaper was done in an alarming frame, followed by a reassuring frame and lastly a neutral frame. So, out of a total of 17 news stories, 12 were presented in an alarming manner, 3 in a reassuring manner, and 2 in a neutral manner.

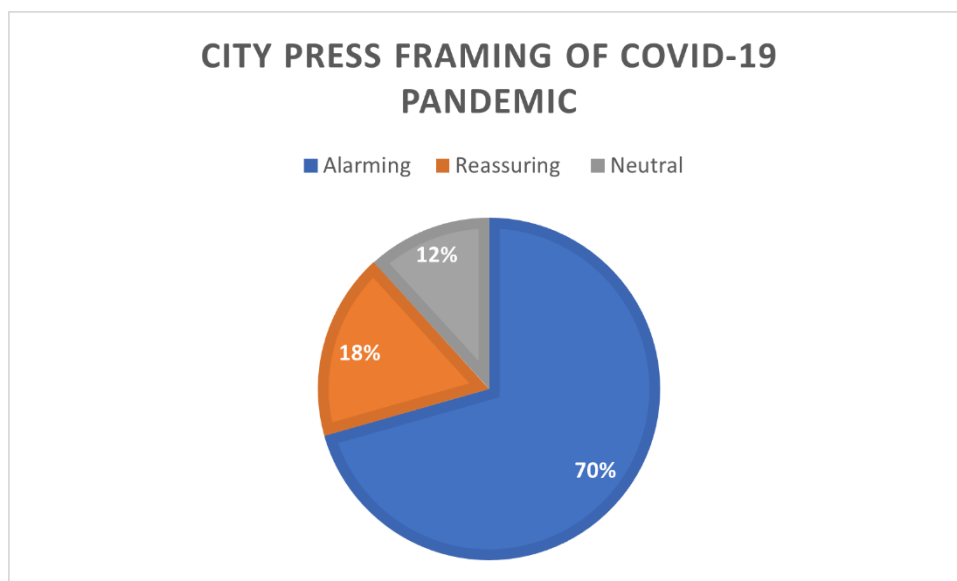


Figure 3

Furthermore, the results show that only one article commented on the lifting of the national state of disaster when the news stories were coded for this. The findings also showed that the health theme dominated pandemic coverage, with the political and economic themes coming in second and third, respectively. Additionally, when the author analysed the sources used in the *City Press*' pandemic coverage, politicians and government

officials monopolised the media coverage. In order to be accurate, it is important to note that unidentified or no sources have also been linked to politicians and other public officials, as illustrated in figure 4 below. The second most frequently cited sources were ordinary people, while the third most frequently cited sources were officials from businesses, government agencies, or civil society.

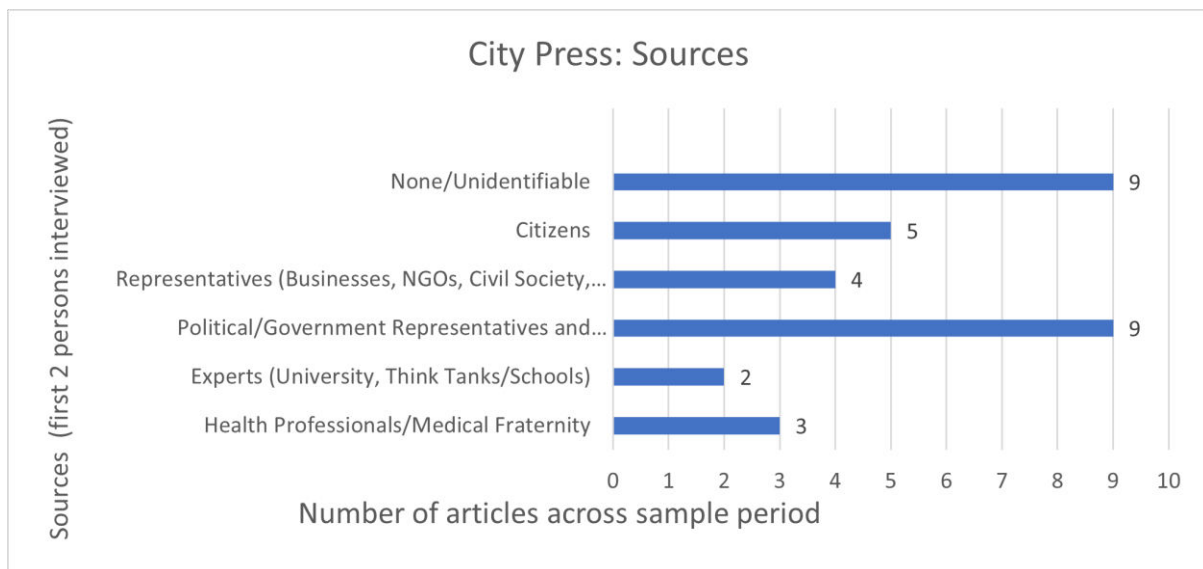


Figure 4

The category that classified the gender of the sources used revealed that, similarly to the previous publication, 56% of the sources utilised were males, 36% were women, and 8% were unidentified. Despite the fact that only one of the articles discussed the lifting of the National State of Disaster, the findings show that out of the 17 articles, 5 were critical of the current lockdown regulations, 1 was supportive, 1 had mixed feelings about it, and the remaining articles made no judgments at all. Similar arguments were made in news articles that opposed the continued lockdown laws, arguing that doing so violates citizens' fundamental human rights. Additionally, articles noted that the country is unable to advance as would normally be the case in terms of economic operations and educational institutions because of the ongoing lockdown measures. The category that codified the media's function during its media coverage for the aforementioned publication discovered that it largely served as a facilitator. This was then followed by the monitorial role, the radical role, and the collaborative role. The outcomes of the *City Press'* news coverage of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic was thoroughly detailed in this chapter. The next section will discuss how the

Mail & Guardian and the *Sunday Times* covered the COVID-19 pandemic, devoting particular attention to the months before, during, and after the country's national state of disaster was lifted.

5.3 *Mail & Guardian*

The *Mail & Guardian* produced 13 news stories from the data used to create the sample for this study. Between variables 14 and 26, the information gathered for this newspaper's sample can be found. Unlike the earlier publications mentioned in this chapter, this newspaper began delivering pandemic coverage between 25 March 2022 and 20 May 2022. This newspaper did not publish more than three articles on the subject per edition, similar to the earlier newspapers mentioned. Regarding the headlines for this newspaper, it had a lot more information on COVID-19 for its articles. These featured the COVID-19 vaccination, COVID-19 budgeting, and the State of Disaster, among other things. As mentioned earlier, the frames employed in this investigation were predetermined using those taken from Morissan et al (2020).

Just to reiterate, the reassuring frame contains content that discussed remedies and was written in a positive tone. The alarming frame accomplishes the opposite by reporting on mortality or infection rates, which likewise instils anxiety and panic. The idea behind the neutral frame is to simply convey the facts without taking a side. Hence, the findings of this study demonstrated that out of a total of 13 stories, 9 of them were framed in an alarming way, 3 in a reassuring way, and 1 in a neutral way. Figure 5, which shows that the alarming frame was the dominating media frame used by the *Mail & Guardian*, and the neutral frame was the least prevalent frame, further illustrates this.

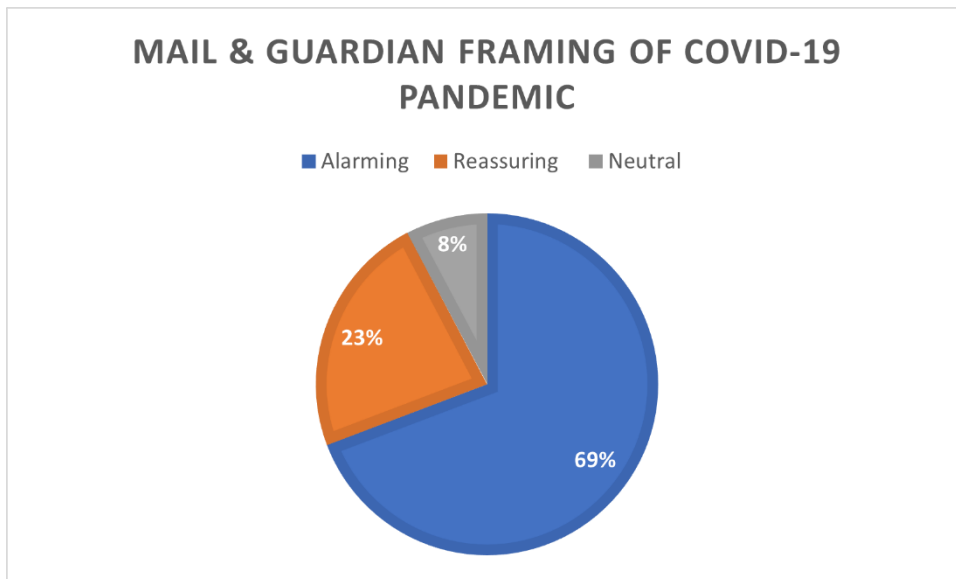


Figure 5

Furthermore, just 4 of the publication's 13 pieces mentioned the end of the National State of Disaster, despite the headlines of the article including information about COVID-19. This indicates that the state's desire to eliminate the lockdown laws that were in effect at the time was not an urgent discussion point in the press coverage. Health was the primary topic of discussion in the media for this publication, which was then followed by economic and political topics. Experts from universities, schools, and think tanks were primarily consulted when it came to the first two sources cited in the news reports published by the *Mail & Guardian*. It is also notable to highlight that a significant portion of the publication's coverage either lacked a source that could be identified or did not cite any sources. Furthermore, the other sources that were used appear to have been equally balanced. In other words, everyone had an equal chance to serve as a source for the newspaper, including members of the public, the medical community, legislators, and representatives from other sectors. The information gathered from the study's sample is shown in Figure 6 below.

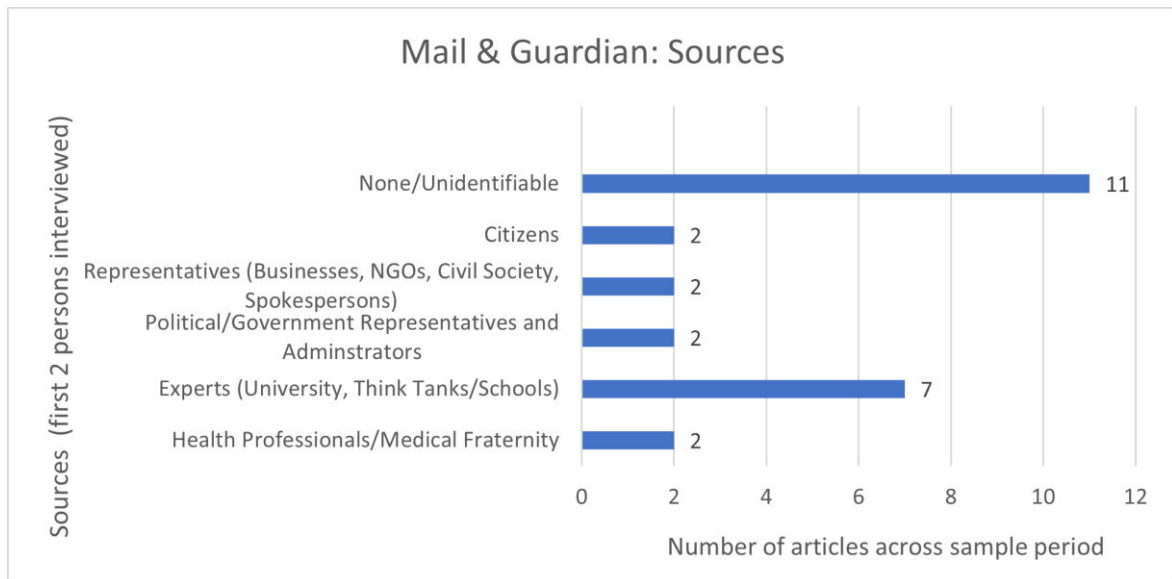


Figure 6

The *Mail & Guardian's* pandemic media coverage included sources of both genders, and the findings of the coding for gender revealed that 62% of the sources that predominated were male. Additionally, the findings showed that 19% of the participants were female, with the remaining 19% being made up of individuals whose genders could not be determined or coded. When determining whether the news stories under scrutiny for this particular publication supplied justifications in relation to the continuation of the country's lockdown measures, it was found that the majority of the articles had none. The data in the codebook that goes with it shows that 7 of the 13 pieces had no arguments, while 3 of the news stories were opposed to the ongoing lockdown measures being kept in place. Also, 2 of the stories in this publication's sample were in favour of maintaining the policies put in place to stop the virus's spread, and 1 of the articles had conflicting viewpoints.

According to this study's analysis of the media's function in reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, the publication primarily served a facilitative role. The second most prevalent role in the newspaper's media coverage was the monitorial one. The radical role and the collaborative role correspondingly came next. In other words, the findings reveal that even while different roles were played in different combinations during media reports,

the *Mail & Guardian* played all four roles. The results of the final news publication will be covered in the chapter's following part.

5.4 *Sunday Times*

The fourth and final newspaper to be looked at for its coverage of the pandemic is the *Sunday Times*, another weekly flagship. The link to the codebook in the addendum contains information between variables 1 and 13 related to the subject under study for this news publication. This newspaper likewise featured 13 articles for the time period allotted for this project, just like the previous one had. Stories that were available in the *Sunday Times*' news section were published between March 6 and May 22, 2022. The publication occasionally published a single story on the subject of the probe every edition. However, like the preceding publications, this one did not publish more than three news items on the subject. The COVID-19 vaccination and the economic and social effects the virus has on people were among the headlines for this publication. There was a similar balance between the usage of two of the planned frames in the media coverage of the pandemic, according to the category that coded for framing. This is due to the fact that the newspaper's coverage used framing that was both alarming and reassuring, accounting for 46% of the coverage in each case. Only 8% of the COVID-19 pandemic's media coverage in this publication used the neutral framing, as seen in figure 7 below.

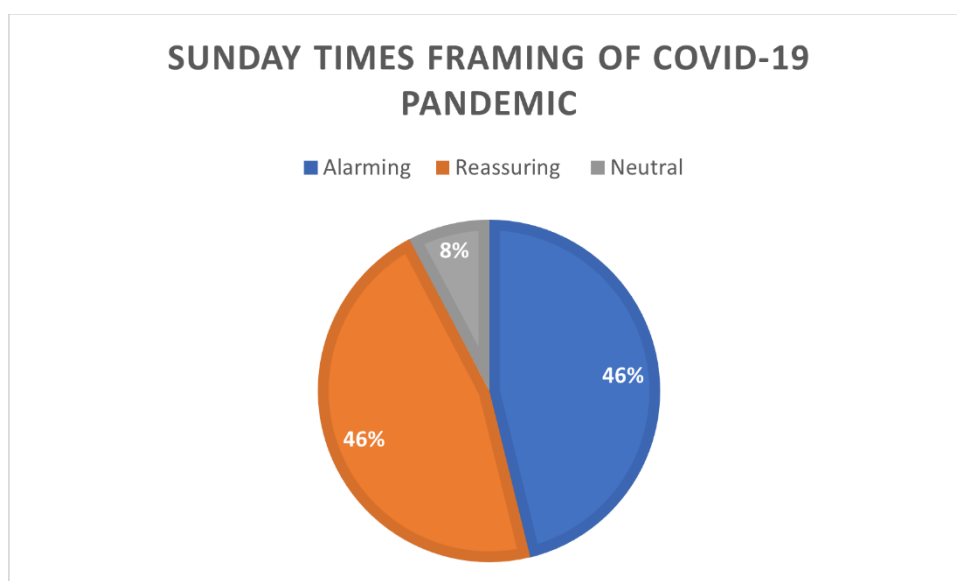


Figure 7

Furthermore, the following category which coded for whether the news content made mention of the state of disaster found that only one article spoke to this. The majority of the articles had a health focus, which was one of the themes that was prevalent. Following suit were the themes of politics and economy. The media coverage included a variety of diverse themes within each story, just like the other publications. This analysis discovered that business experts were the most frequently used sources when coding the different source types used for the *Sunday Times* media coverage. Health experts and the medical community then came after this. The fact that publications with no sources or unclear sources were the third most common is significant to note. The sample was then made up of citizens, politicians, and government officials, as well as representatives from numerous stakeholder groups.

Figure 8 below shows the outcomes in more detail.

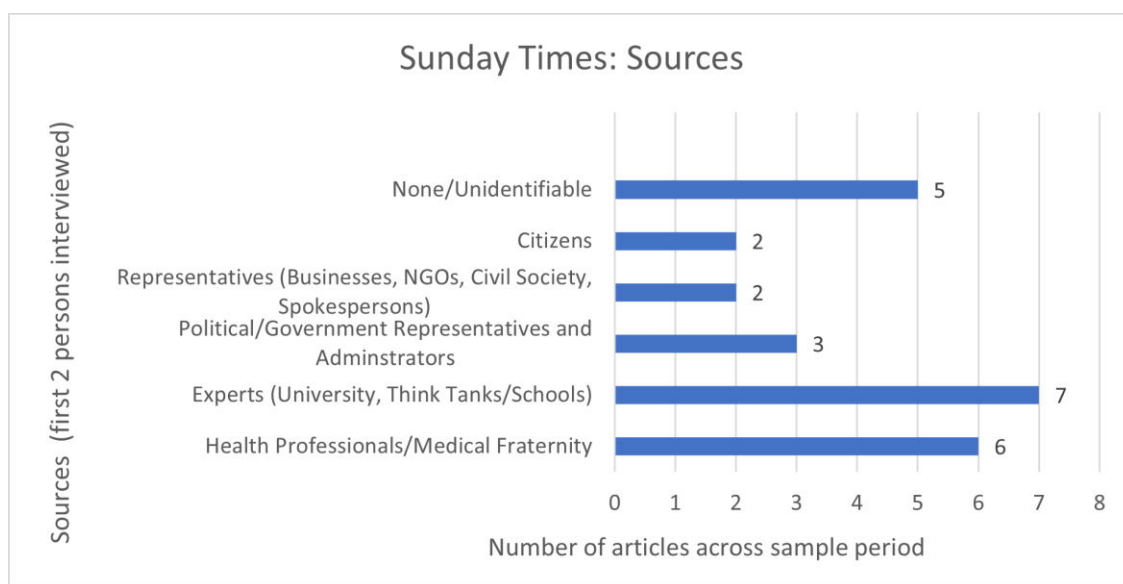


Figure 8

When it came to gender, 52% of the sources employed by the newspaper to report on the COVID-19 pandemic identified as female, while 48% identified as male. These findings contrast with the three earlier publications, where the sources were predominately men. The bulk of the articles took no position on the debate of the arguments for or against the

continuation of the national state of disaster, or on any arguments at all. In other words, while four news items took no opinion, three articles argued against it, three articles argued for it, and two stories supported maintaining the country's state of disaster at the time. Finally, this publication mostly served the facilitative function when coding to discover the role the media played within the researched time frame. Following the aforementioned role were the radical and monitorial roles. The *Sunday Times'* pandemic coverage made the least use of the radical role.

5.5 Conclusion

The *Sunday Independent*, *City Press*, *Mail & Guardian*, and *Sunday Times* were the four weekly newspapers analysed for this study. The main goal of this chapter was to highlight the study's findings in relation to each newspaper's media coverage one month before, one month during, and one month after the national state of disaster ended. Overall, and as will be covered in more detail in the subsequent chapter, the findings show that pandemic coverage was already declining in South Africa prior to the termination of the National State of Disaster. Considering the continuing COVID-19 pandemic at the time of writing, this information is intriguing because one would anticipate the news media to continue informing the public of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, as previously noted by previous research (Wasserman et al., 2021; Morissan et al., 2020), the media's alarmist framing of the COVID-19 crisis persists. The research also shows that little was said in the media concerning the lifting of the National State of Disaster or how it would affect the country after the lockdown. Given that the COVID-19 lockdown regulations have been in effect for a little over two years, it is likely that detailed media coverage will be given to this significant national shift. The *Sunday Independent*, which gathered the most information on the subject, was discussed first in this process. Out of a sampling of 63 articles, this publication provided 20 articles.

The findings revealed that this newspaper's media framing was alarming and that the sources employed were primarily, among others, representatives from several businesses. The *City Press* was the second newspaper that was thoroughly covered. Having 17 articles out of a total of 63 news items, this news source amassed the second-highest number of news reports for the sample of this research project. Findings indicated that the pandemic coverage in this publication was similarly handled in an alarming manner and that the sources that predominated its media coverage were politicians and people in government positions. The third newspaper covered was the *Mail & Guardian*. Similar to this weekly publication, it presented its coverage of the pandemic in an alarming manner. The data, however, showed that the sources for this newspaper were largely experts. The *Sunday Times'* media coverage of the relevant time period was then investigated.

The findings indicate that its media presented the topic under inquiry in a way that was both alarming and reassuring. Experts from numerous academic institutions and think tanks were also used as sources for its reporting. There was an equal amount of news coverage from the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times*, from which 13 pieces were taken for each newspaper. The newspaper has a modest sample size, but nonetheless supplied rich data and helped identify general trends and frames used by the four weekly flagships under consideration, as was previously indicated in this chapter. These observations will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6. Introduction

The research project's primary focus was on how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in South African print media, with an emphasis on the time before, during, and after the lifting of the National State of Disaster. In so doing, a quantitative content analysis was deployed to answer the following research questions: 1). How did South African print newspapers frame the period before, during and after the National State of Disaster was

lifted, 2). Which sources dominated media coverage of the investigated period, and 3). Did the media provide information on the termination of the National State of Disaster. The previous chapter examined the project's findings and found that the media's coverage was largely similar over the course of the inquiry for the four weekly publications.

The findings of the newspapers will be reviewed and analysed in this chapter in order to highlight the patterns and developments of pandemic newspaper coverage in South Africa. In order to contextualise the research study's conclusions, this part will also analyse the findings with reference to the study's theoretical framework as discussed in an earlier chapter. One may argue that the post-National State of Disaster, which is the time period this study is focused on, is a pivotal point in the country's history. The news media as a whole should be cautious about how they portray these events since they may convey sentiments that are indicative of a country's mitigation efforts' failures or successes (Thirumaran, et al., 2021). The following sections are organised into themes in order to emphasise the key findings of the study.

6.1 The COVID-19 pandemic was predominantly framed by the media as alarming

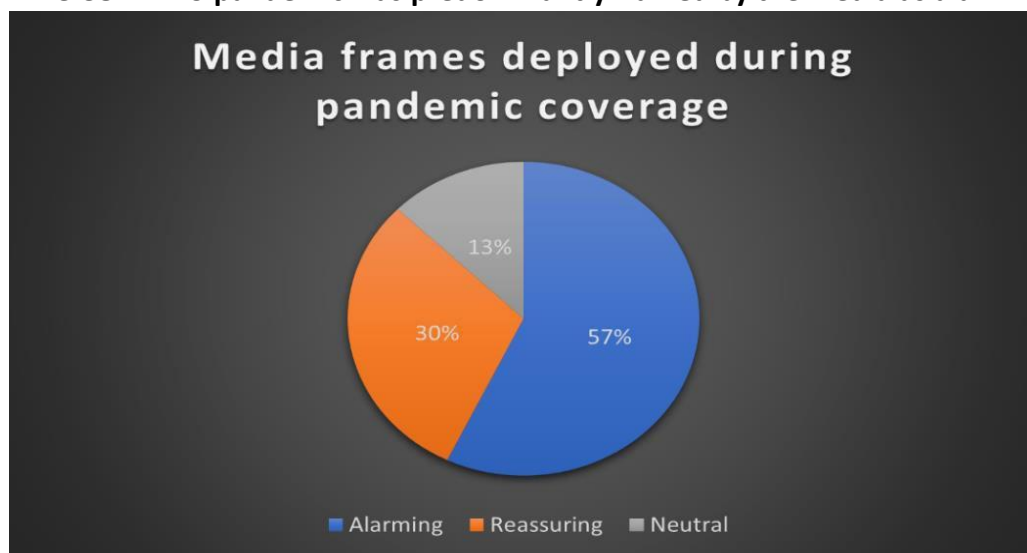


Figure 9

Although the media frequently embrace the frames that their sources have to offer, they also modify and construct frames when presenting news and interacting with sources.

Thus, framing can be characterised as the result of negotiations between both the mainstream press and its sources (Morissan, et al., 2020). As mentioned in the methods chapter before, this study examined the different framing techniques utilised in four weekly print newspapers' reporting. The findings show that the media's news coverage was primarily alarming in nature. Just to reiterate, alarming framing refers to media information that highlights the infection and mortality rates of COVID-19. It also refers to news articles with a pessimistic tone, which can quickly elicit concern or fear among readers (Morissan, et al., 2020). Figure 9 illustrates how 57% of press coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic included the alarming frame. These results are consistent with the research by Wasserman et al. (2021), which similarly discovered that South African newspapers used an alarming frame in their media coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak. These findings still remain true in spite of the fact that the study's authors did their research at a different time when there was still a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the COVID-19 virus.

A study conducted by Morissan et al. (2020) also discovered that media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesian newspapers was done in an alarming manner. It is argued that one of the most widely used theories for comprehending disaster news is framing (Siddiqua, et al., 2020). Therefore, it may be contended that how the media presented the country's State of Disaster was absolutely critical. Researchers postulate that in addition to alerting the public about the pandemic and the steps being taken to flatten its curves, the media also has the ability to influence public perception and opinion (Dahal & Khatri, 2021). As a result, the frames they employ to communicate such crucial information are vital because they can directly influence how people behave in society. It may be assumed that media information would be framed in a reassuring or neutral way and not in an alarming manner given that the country and the entire world are currently in a situation in which much doubt has been removed with regard to the symptoms and prevention measures of the virus. Unfortunately, this is not the case. It is evident that the media continued to frame media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in an alarming way (Morissan, et al., 2020), post-National State of Disaster.

Further, studies have also suggested that the media frequently adopts frames to make difficult subjects more understandable to the audience and allow them to generate opinions on the issue using language, visuals, or signs (Dahal & Khatri, 2021). Worryingly, the news media's decision to focus on using an alarming frame while reporting on the pandemic simply serves to frighten the public. Additionally, this appears to go counter to efforts made by the government of the country and the international medical community to contain the virus's spread. This is because the public will rely on information provided by the media and use it to make educated judgments, regardless of what the media puts on the public's agenda. Despite the advancements made since the virus's breakout (Dzinamarira, et al., 2021), the news media continues to perpetuate framing that is alarming. What is noteworthy is that, compared to when the COVID-19 pandemic was first emerging, the data provided for this research also show a decline in media coverage of the virus after the National State of Disaster was lifted. This is particularly intriguing in light of the fact that the country was still registering positive COVID-19 infections despite the fact that there were not as many cases of the virus as in the past (Sitto, et al., 2022). The country reported 1 888 new COVID19 cases on March 31, 2022; 6 527 new cases on April 30, 2022; and 2809 new COVID-19 cases on May 31, 2022 (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2022).

Moreover, while some news articles included updates on COVID-19 instances in the country those that were written in an alarming manner—they omitted to note how the lifting of the lockdown restrictions will help to continue the effort to stop the virus' spread. This finding supports the claim that the media sets agendas and that there is a direct correlation between the prominence of a topic and the media's concentration on it (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). To put it another way, this enables media professionals to organise news stories in a hierarchy based on the weight each topic is given. Agenda-setting and framing are frequently considered in conjunction with one another, according to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007). This is due to the fact that while agenda-setting is focused on recurrent exposure to news items, framing concentrates on the public's attention to news stories (McCombs, 2004). In other words, agenda-setting is thought to focus on story selection as a predictor of the general public, whereas framing focuses on the way specific issues are selected for media coverage or portrayed. Therefore, it can be argued that the

decrease in COVID-19 pandemic coverage during March, April, and May 2022 may have been caused by the media's perception that the situation was no longer important or relevant. This also suggests a lockdown fatigue from both the news media's side and the public in general.

Also, the reassuring frame was the second prevalent one used by the media in their reportage of the pandemic. Figure 9 above illustrates how 30% of the news reports in the limited sample were presented in a reassuring manner. It is interesting that the few articles that had a reassuring frame also did not use much health or medical experts, rather it was a mixture of business people, citizens, people in high-ranking posts such as heads of foundations or chief operating executives. Broadly speaking, frames are used to organise news stories in terms of causes, forecasts, remedies, and roles (Morissan, et al., 2020). According to the findings, the news stories that used a reassuring frame frequently discussed the prophylactic steps taken to stop the COVID-19 virus from spreading. Instead of only listing the measures enacted by the government, it also offered the insights of specialists from the medical field. The *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Times* were the only two newspapers that consistently used this reassuring frame more than the other newspapers, despite the fact that it was not the media's most widely used frame overall. It is suggested that news frames have a big impact on how readers think about and remember topics. They also give the audience guidance on how to comprehend a particular issue as it is presented in the mainstream media (Yousaf, et al., 2022).

To put it another way, people can more easily access the prevailing frames in the media. Therefore, it may be stated that the media's use of reassuring frames helped to inform the public about the required safety precautions. Additionally, it could be claimed that the reader's reaction to the reassuring frames lessened some of the anxiety brought on by the COVID-19 virus's ambiguity. This is crucial because it is possible that some people who have spent the last two years accustomed to living under stringent lockdown regulations were scared when the COVID-19 National State of Disaster was lifted. The media savvy audience gains knowledge about the situation and receives appropriate actionable cues, according to health communication studies. Thus, the framing phenomenon serves as

a health communication technique that may define how the general public views the problem and reacts (Yousaf, et al., 2022).

Lastly, the neutral framing was used the least in the media's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 9 shows that just 13% of the coverage in the four weekly print publications used a neutral frame. According to Morissan et al. (2020), Malaysian publications largely used a neutral frame when reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. These results were at odds with what the authors had learned from their investigation of Indonesian newspapers. The data indicated that when categorising articles with a neutral frame, these articles simply presented the facts and had no position or opinion on the subject. Furthermore, most of the time, these unbiased stories simply repeated material provided by the government or spoke with representatives from the business or education sectors. It is interesting to note that very few articles with neutral frames had sources in them. The data also shows that there are differences between the analyses of each particular newspaper; the *Sunday Independent* amassed the most stories with neutral frames, whereas the other newspapers under investigation only had one or two. While it is believed that one of the media's numerous roles is to inform the public about topics that impact them, the media also serves as a forum for discussion (Yousaf, et al., 2022). One may contend that the media failed to create a forum for substantive debate by presenting the public with news stories that had a neutral frame and few to no sources, according to the findings of this research study. The news media need to be careful about the kinds of frames they include in their news coverage because media framing can enhance how one processes information (Yousaf, et al., 2022). People are known to strongly rely on the media, and specifically print newspapers (Abdulla, et al., 2002), during times of health crises, making this critical in those situations.

As previously mentioned, framing public health crises enables scholars to comprehend not only the function the media played during such periods, but also the types of influences such frames had on people's behaviours (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016). This is crucial since it will reveal whether or not they adhered to health and safety rules. Since researchers have emphasised that combating the virus requires a team effort (Adanlawo,

2020), it is also important to note that people's daily news consumption, which influences how they make decisions, plays a significant role in this endeavour. Because of this and other factors, research into media framing is vital not only for the field of media studies but also for other disciplines that find it pertinent. It is reasonable to infer that there was a correlation between tone and the frames applied, even if the study's data showed that the majority of news pieces were framed in an alarming way. In other words, the findings demonstrated that articles with alarming frames sounded discouraging, whereas stories with reassuring frames sounded more optimistic.

Similar findings were made by researchers in their individual investigations, which revealed that there is typically a correlation between the media frames employed and the language or tone used in reports on the COVID-19 pandemic (Wasserman et al., 2021; Turchi & MeltonFant, 2022; Morissan et al., 2020). The findings make it clear that all four publications handled their news coverage similarly. One theory is that since broadsheet newspapers primarily serve middle-class and upper-class readers, they will continue to frame items in an alarming way in an attempt to captivate their readers' attention. Scholars have stated that quality journalism should be done by delivering evidence-based news with the appropriate viewpoint, rather than trying to spin news events or causing alarm (Tejedor, et al., 2020). The results, however, lead one to conclude that the news media actually chose news frames that would grab the interest of their distinct audiences in order to fulfil an economic motive to compete for readership. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the layoffs of several journalists in South Africa and elsewhere in the world as well as to pay reductions for some of them (Etheridge, 2020). Therefore, it could be assumed that framing their news pieces as primarily alarming was what aided with sales of their printed newspapers.

Another pattern that is prevalent in all four newspapers is the rise in reassuring language used to frame news pieces. Although it has been noted that this type of framing is the second most common, news items employing this frame include information on the benefits of lifting the lockdown ban in addition to content about the gradual opening of establishments. As a result, while the evidence suggests that framing that is alarming will continue, it also suggests that there has been an effort to balance media coverage. The rise

of the reassuring frame can be ascribed to the media's fourth estate function, which includes media content interpretation in addition to serving as a conduit between the society and the government (Msughter & Phillips, 2020). The following section thoroughly evaluates the sources that were used by the media to report on the time the national state of disaster status was revoked in the country.

6.2 The majority of the media coverage featured representatives from various agencies

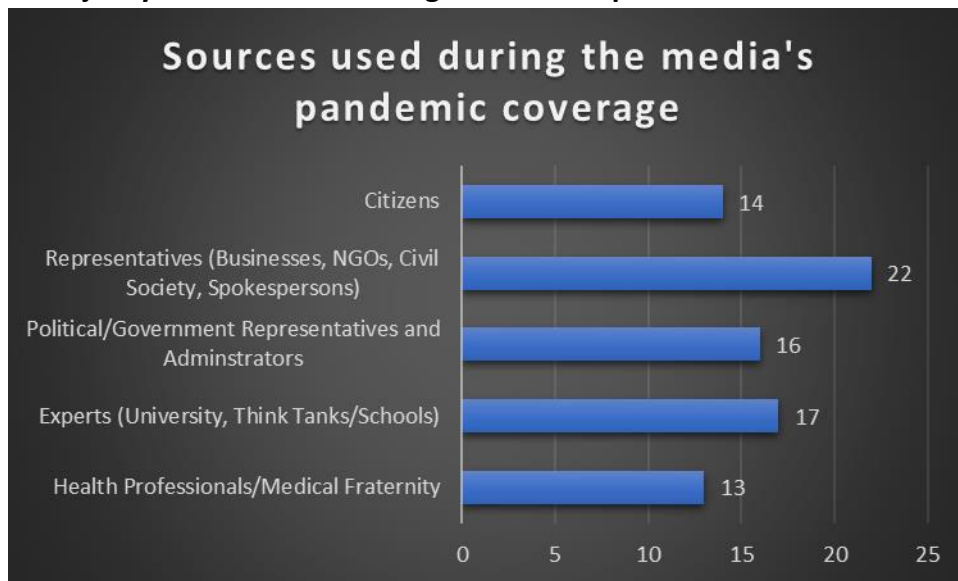


Figure 10

Studies assert that in times of outbreaks of infectious diseases, news outlets should include both healthcare professionals and scientific experts. The reason for this is that while authorities are in charge of setting public health policy, specialists have access to medical knowledge (Shih, et al., 2011). These sources are therefore considered to be dependable, accountable, and trustworthy. In comparison, the findings for this research study indicated a difference in how the media used representatives most frequently. Figure 10 above makes clear that sources from corporations, non-governmental organisations, civil society, and spokespersons for various organisations were utilised most in the media's reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, only the first two sources were obtained for each article that was coded in this analysis. In light of this, the overall number of articles and sources may appear to be somewhat different. For the sake of clarity, it is also important to note that

many of the news stories lacked sources, so this chapter will not go into great detail about it because the study was only concerned with sources that were actually used to report the news. The examination of this research project will not be hampered, however, by the omission of the category with no sources.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the group with representatives from different businesses or civil society in the country dominated media coverage as sources, the findings were mostly for the *Sunday Independent*, which also attracted the most news items for the sample, as shown by the individual newspaper analyses. The *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* used this category in conjunction with other categories for sources the least, while the *City Press* employed it the second highest. These findings are intriguing, especially in light of the fact that researchers remark that the health and medical communities are frequently contacted to provide information during public-health crises (Shih, et al., 2011). The findings showed that this was not the case because the most often cited sources were not scientists. In reality, the medical and health profession accounted for only 13% of media coverage, compared to 22% of sources from various representatives from businesses and civil society organisations, 17% from experts from universities or think tanks, 16% from politicians and government officials, and 14% from citizens.

Further, given the focus of the probe was on the termination of the National State of Disaster, one would anticipate that government officials or politicians would dominate media coverage as well. According to Tejedor et al. (2020), quality journalism techniques involve presenting scientific proof news in the right context and without stirring up fear or sensationalism. The researchers also agree with the claim made previously in this chapter that newspapers and other legacy media are considered to be more trustworthy and credible (Tejedor, et al., 2020). Therefore, on the one hand it may be argued that during the investigation phase, sources with scientific expertise as well as authorities could have benefitted citizens by describing what the cessation of the national state of disaster will entail for the general population. The argument can also be made in terms of the representatives dominating newspaper coverage that it possibly aided with providing

information on the economic situation of the country. Whilst on the other hand, the dominance of media coverage by the representatives of businesses and civil society organisations, it could be said, contributed to the dissemination of information about the country's economic predicament. In any case, it is critical that sources are cited in media accounts of public health crises, particularly while disease outbreaks are taking place because everyone is affected, with the poor being severely afflicted (Allen & Heese, 2020).

In light of the media's crucial role in quickly notifying the public about health concerns and teaching them about it (Alemayehu, 2020), it is necessary to examine the types of news sources used. In the country's media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts from either university, think tanks or schools were the second most frequently quoted sources. The majority of these sources, as seen in Figure 10, came from various fields of study at academic institutions, although some also came from organisations and think tanks. It is noteworthy to notice that when examining the findings of the individual newspapers, the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sunday Times* used this category of sources more frequently than *The Sunday Independent* and the *City Press*, which used them the least. The data shows that although though all four publications are weekly newspapers, there are still some distinctions between them, which become particularly clear when looking into the sources utilised. This, however, differs from the conclusions reached regarding how the newspapers framed the COVID-19 pandemic. Scholars that conducted a similar study in South Africa, found that scientific experts at the academic rank- also noted to be professors- dominated media coverage during the COVID-19 outbreak (Joubert, et al., 2022). It may therefore be assumed that pandemic media coverage attracted scientific specialists during the outbreak as a result of the uncertainty, which helps to explain the shift in sources from earlier research (Joubert et al., 2022) to this current study. Additionally, it is possible to say that the drop in the use of medical or scientific professionals is related to the fact that people now understand how to manage the COVID-19 virus and are eager to restart the economy.

Government officials, politicians, or government administrators were also the third most frequently cited source in newspaper reporting. According to the statistics in Figure 10, it is important to emphasise the fact that the medical community and health professionals were the least quoted. Moreover, it is acknowledged that the news media is essential to the overall accomplishment of public health objectives and goals (Tejedor, et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be stated that during a crucial time, such as when the country is getting ready for a post-pandemic era where the virus is still present but there are no frenetic lockdown laws, the media will endeavour to give its audiences access to pertinent sources (Lwin, et al., 2021). Regrettably, the data shows a variation in how different organisations' representatives are featured in the media, with academic experts and government or political officials coming in second and third, respectively. While it is crucial to highlight that each of these sources contributes significantly by offering their expert opinion (Karakaya & Glazier, 2019), citizens would have benefited from proportionate representation of sources across sectors. Additionally, it is possible to make the case that weekly publications have more time to find news sources than daily newspapers do. The press would not want to take the chance of missing newsworthy material, especially from state authorities, despite the fact that newspapers generally have limited space to accommodate the large volume of data they get from their news sources (Morton & Warren, 1992). In other words, it is expected that more state officials and health professionals will be requested to serve as sources when the country is forced to work through a crisis following a major public health disaster (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016).

In addition, the genders of the sources that were consulted were coded in this study. As was previously said but just to be clear, this study exclusively used binary genders, male and female. This is due to the fact that the code was activated based on the pronouns used in the news stories themselves. As a result, the findings demonstrated that males made up the bulk of sources, accounting for 53% of the total coverage. As indicated in Figure 11 below, women made up 35% of the second most prevalent gender in the media's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by genders that could not be ciphered at 12%.

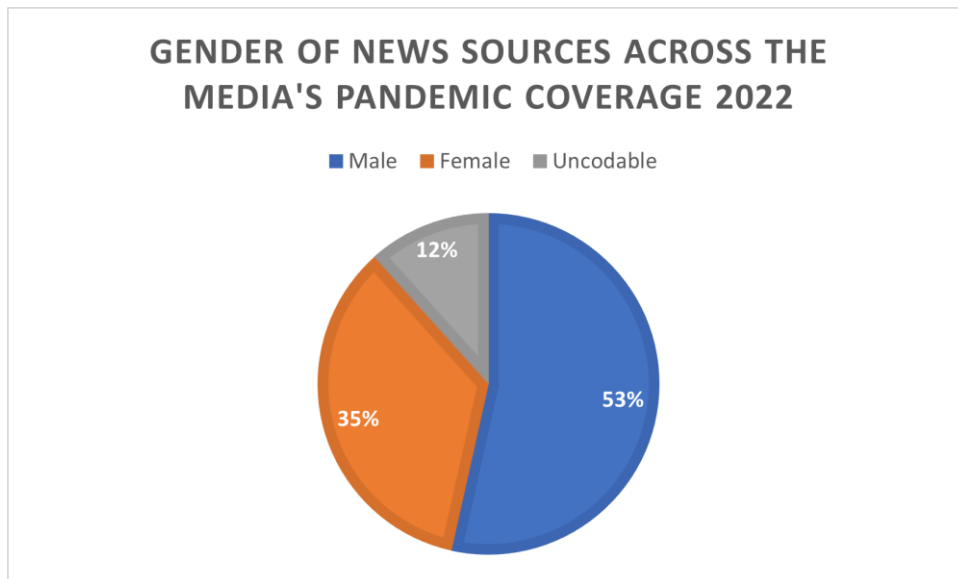


Figure 11

The findings of this project are consistent with those of a study done by Wasserman et al. (2021), in which the researchers discovered that male sources dominated in South African newspaper coverage as well. In terms of the mainstream media's selection of sources, gender equality is essential since people who speak out in public may have access towards both real and symbolic power (Niemi & Pitkänen, 2017). This is due to the possibility that people who are given authority and leadership roles in shaping public policy, identifying issues, and offering answers may also have an impact on how decisions are made and, eventually, how policies are implemented (Niemi & Pitkänen, 2017). One may assume that with the rise of non-binary genders and their inclusion in some South African laws (Venganai & Benhura, 2022) this reference needs to be placed properly, in addition to an equitable balance between the binary genders, there will also be room for people who identify differently in newspaper coverage. The data, however, clearly shows that this was not the reality. According to Niemi and Pitkänen (2017), the presumption that gender does not generally play a significant role in an equal society, and that the press is typically neutral and impartial and only interviews the finest experts, may expand the gender gap. This is because if fairness and parity are assumed to have already been achieved, there may be a larger danger of failing to recognise the behaviours that still add to the gender gap (Niemi & Pitkänen, 2017). So, considering this context, it was determined which sources dominate in South African newspapers by coding for both the gender and the type of sources.

In a public health disaster like the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative that everyone has a fair opportunity to express their views. The key justification for this is that scholars have argued that those who are the poorest of the poor have been impacted the most (Wasserman, et al., 2021). As a result, integrating their opinions in news coverage of situations impacting them will give them the chance to offer advice and possibly improve the situation (Dzinamarira, et al., 2021). The content created and distributed by the *Sunday Times*, *City Press*, *The Sunday Independent* and the *Mail & Guardian* will be comprehensively scrutinised in the part that follows, respectively. This will be done to determine whether the media effectively served as a source of information and a forum for discussion in the time leading up to, during, and following the lifting of the national state of disaster in the country.

6.3 The media provided little information on the termination of the national state of disaster

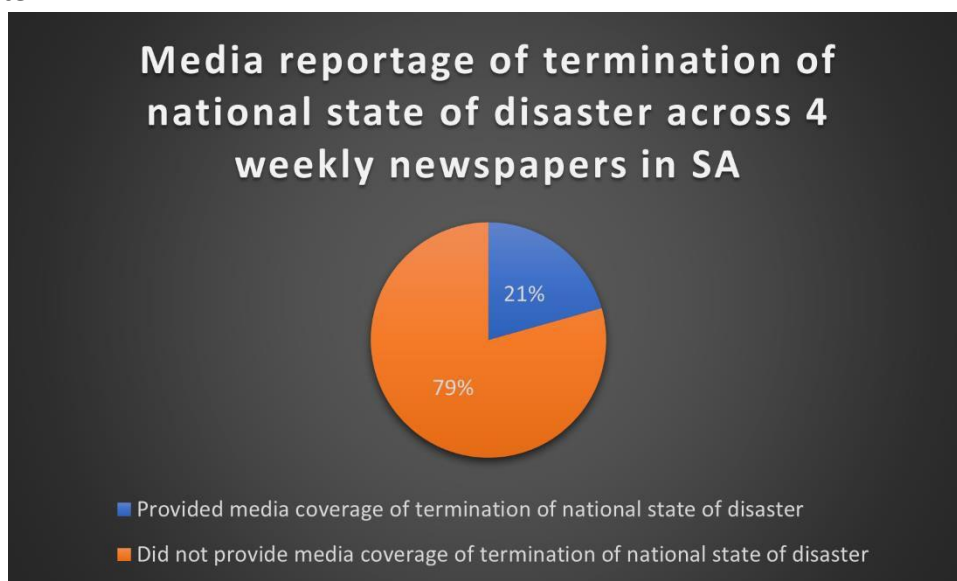


Figure 12

Worldwide health crises are said to be linked to varied degrees of economic chaos since they are frequently marked by population shifts, restrictions, and delays on the movement of products, and disruptions in supply chains (Hamadziripi & Chitimira, 2021). The socioeconomic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic were much more severe in South Africa than in wealthy nations since the country was still in the process of recovering

from other economic factors, including the 2007–2008 financial global crisis (Hamadziripi & Chitimira, 2021). Therefore, declaring and implementing a National State of Disaster in the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in accordance with the country's Disaster Management Act was a necessary step in order to act quickly and stop the spread of the novel virus. Although South African newspapers frequently covered the virus (Wasserman, et al., 2021), the study's findings show that coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic declined between March and May 2022, and that there was little coverage of the country's lifting of the National State of Disaster in general. It could be assumed that the news media and the public in general were becoming fatigued of the lockdown.

Figure 12 above illustrates this by showing that only 21% of news stories mentioned the ending of the national state of disaster. In addition, the national government's decision to lift the State of Disaster was not included in 79% of the press coverage. It is alarming that this topic has received such little media attention, especially in light of the fact that the lockdown alert levels that accompanied this National State of Disaster lasted for a little over two years and claimed so many lives. Since this was a measure that people had grown accustomed to, it is possible to argue that its removal would have attracted more media attention than the data gained generated. The *Sunday Independent*, followed by the *Mail & Guardian*, offered the most news coverage on the termination of the national state of disaster out of all the newspapers investigated. Except for one story in May for the *Sunday Independent*, the months of March and April saw the highest number of these pieces for both publications. In comparison, the *City Press* and *Sunday Times* produced the least stories, each offering only one throughout the course of the three months under investigation. It is important to note that despite the *Sunday Independent* providing the majority of the stories in the sample used for this study, the *City Press* nonetheless contributed more articles that omitted any mention of the termination of the National State of Disaster.

It is argued that the way the media frames reality means that some parts are exaggerated while others are minimised, disregarded, or hidden (Milutinović, 2021). The

media's lack of focus on educating or informing the public about what the lifting of the National Disaster Status entails may indicate that the media purposefully gave the issue minimal attention. The information gathered as a consequence shows how the media minimised a significant event for many South Africans who had been receiving almost two years' worth of frequent briefings from the media on the exact same laws that were abolished.

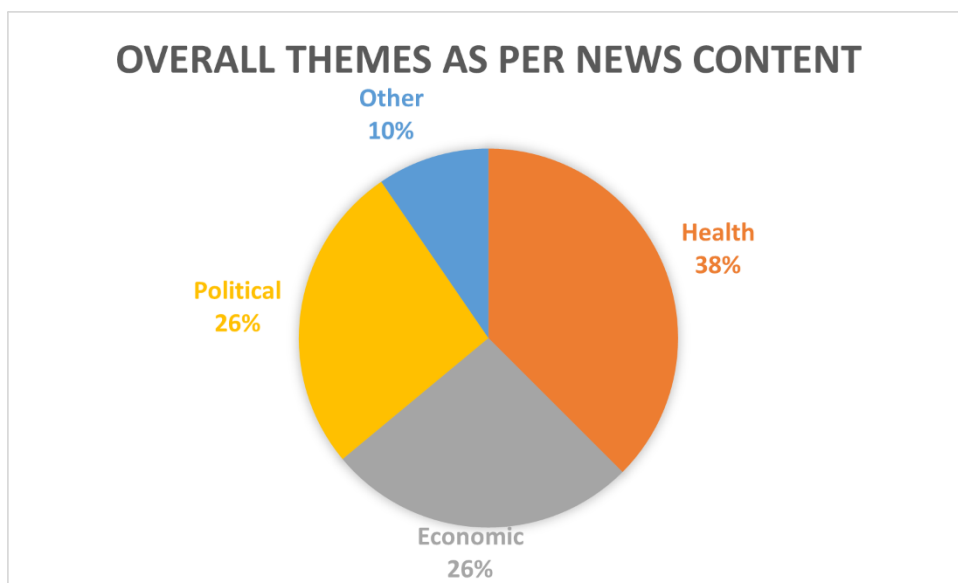


Figure 13

Figure 13 illustrates the total content output that was present inside the media's framing of the time period under investigation. The pie chart shows that 38% of the total media coverage or the bulk of news coverage was framed around a health-related issue. With each accounting for 26% of news coverage, equally, the findings also indicated a balance between the framing of news information in an economic and political manner. Last but not least, 10% of news stories were labelled as "other" and made up the remaining items that did not fall into either of the specified themes. Contrary to what scholars have claimed in the past, who have noted that media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic is often done to emphasise economic effects rather than health consequences (Dahal & Khatri, 2021), the data gathered for this study shows a difference in the type of information the media produces. The data shows that despite the small sample size and the lack of media

coverage of the lifting of the lockdown restrictions, the COVID-19 virus was generally discussed in the media. As a result of the media's reliance on government officials for updates, researchers have further argued that media coverage frequently reflects the goals and interpretation of the pandemic as set forth by politicians or government leaders (Milutinović, 2021).

Despite the fact that this study has consistently stated that there was an anticipation that media coverage would be filled with news about the lifting of the lockdown regulations, the facts contradict the statements of the aforementioned scholar. It is imperative to note that in the news stories on the lifting of the lockdown restrictions, experts or health professionals offered their perspectives on whether doing so would be a good or harmful thing. The majority of the time, the material was in favour of relaxing the lockdown rules, and some of the sources cited in the articles claimed that lockdowns had become tiresome. The stories that were framed in terms of both health and economy also made mention of how other countries were faring with fewer COVID-19 rules while still controlling their infection rates. It is important to note that the media created a forum for discussion by including sources in the few news pieces that mentioned the lifting of the National Disaster Status.

According to researchers (Turchi & Melton-Fant, 2022), media frames should be considered in the context of the social, political, and cultural environment in which they are developed and upheld. The framing that the media employ when producing news content have a direct impact on how citizens choose to respond to public health crises because the media are expected to do so responsibly, emphasising scientific evidence, risk information, and practical strategies to mitigate risks. The arguments made by scholars that communication is the second-most effective tool any country can employ to stop the spread of the virus, behind vaccinations' capacity to do so, provide further evidence for this notion (Siddiqua, et al., 2020). The content that is discussed in the media reflects the beliefs and viewpoints of all citizens, regardless of background, and ultimately influences the choices

that legislators make. Investigating the impact, the media plays in public health crises therefore goes beyond simply raising awareness of a subject and emphasises the perspective or direction of reporting on such issues (Nwakpu, et al., 2020). Despite this, some scholars believe the media is ineffective in times of crisis because they merely repeat material provided by the government without following the correct procedures to determine whether it is newsworthy (Ophir, et al., 2021).

The data for the period examined indicates a disparity in the news coverage compiled for the four weekly newspapers. This is due to the fact that it is clear from the news articles' entire content that the media obtained their own information from sources, most notably experts from various organisations. This study supports the arguments made in favour of a bottom-up method to choosing news sources (Wasserman, et al., 2021). Even while the bulk of those who suffered the most were those from low socioeconomic circumstances, the research repeatedly demonstrates that such individuals are still not selected as sources of information. It is also essential to emphasise the claim made by researchers that general journalists all had an increased burden of covering health beats when there are public health crises (Ogola, 2020). Thus, it may be argued that the additional beats general journalists had to cover contributed to the pandemic's decreased media attention. It is critical to emphasise that the lifting of the lockdown limitations did not occur suddenly; rather, a 30-day review period was instituted, during which time experts were allowed to offer any feedback or recommendations (Reuters, 2022). It is interesting that the media just casually brought up this information while reporting on the lifting of the National State of Disaster rather than conveying it to the public in detail. Weekly newspapers are praised for their capacity to offer more in-depth analyses seeing that they are afforded more time in comparison to daily news or other news media platforms (Abdulla, et al., 2002).

The findings demonstrate that, however, there was little mention of this reporting in the information examined regarding the lifting of the National State of Disaster and the subsequent 30-day review period. According to researchers, the news media not only

contribute significantly to crisis communication plans, but also significantly to post-crisis communication (Thirumaran, et al., 2021). One may argue that the post-National State of Disaster, which is the period this study is focused on, is a pivotal point in the country's history. The news media as a whole should be cautious about how they portray these events since they may convey sentiments that are indicative of a country's mitigation efforts' failures or successes (Thirumaran, et al., 2021).

6.4 Conclusion

In-depth analysis of the study project's findings, which mainly focused on how the media portrayed the country's termination of the National State of Disaster, was offered in this chapter. In doing so, this chapter looked at how the *Sunday Independent*, *City Press*, *Sunday Times*, and *Mail & Guardian* covered news stories. Even though only 63 of the news stories from the collection were used to draw generalisations and spot trends, the data was nonetheless comprehensive and contained a wide range of information. It is essential to note that no other research had examined how the aforementioned period was framed in the national media at the time this study was conducted, therefore its conclusions should be trusted.

First, the results showed that the media framed their coverage of the pandemic in an alarming way. This meant that periodically, media stories emphasised the number of COVID-19 infection cases, death rates, or the negative effects of maintaining lockdown levels in the nation. The tone of news reports that were phrased in an alarming manner was negative. Then came the reassuring frame, and lastly the neutral frame. The content of news articles with a reassuring frame included sources from universities, think tanks, or institutes who examined the benefits and drawbacks of ending the country's national state of disaster. The tone of news stories with the reassuring frame was optimistic, but the tone of articles with the neutral frame was more objective and non-biased.

Second, this chapter discovered that distinct organisations' representatives monopolised media coverage in the four analysed weekly publications. These included representatives from businesses, civil society, or spokespersons. The second-highest source cited was experts from different disciplines, who were followed by politicians and government officials. Medical and health related sources received the least amount of publicity. In other words, businesspeople were contacted more frequently than professionals who are specially equipped to deal with public health issues to get their opinions on the COVID-19 restrictions that are currently in effect and impending termination. The frequent appearance of corporate or non-profit organisation representatives implies that the media is interested in covering the recovery of the economy. The results also showed that media coverage of the pandemic was dominated by male sources. After that, there were female sources and sources whose genders could not be decoded. Since it may be considered that there hasn't been any shift in the media environment about balancing the utilisation of genders in order to challenge gender-based inequalities, the dominance of male sources remains problematic. This also suggests that the continued elevation of male voices above those of women serves as evidence of the importance placed on the former.

Thirdly, this chapter highlighted how the media gave scant attention to the end of the National State of Disaster, with the vast majority of news reports omitting all mention of it. It also emerged that, overall, pandemic coverage declined throughout the course of the inquiry in all four weekly newspapers. The *Sunday Independent* published the most news articles, with the *City Press* coming in second place and the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* coming in last. The final thoughts in respect to the study's research goals will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study focused specifically on the time before, during, and after the lifting of the National State of Disaster to explore how South African print newspapers framed the COVID-19 pandemic. As was noted in the preceding chapters of this study, a great deal of studies

has been conducted to comprehend how the news media covered the outbreak of public health crises, particularly the COVID-19 crisis. The focus of this study, however, was on investigating how the country's ongoing pandemic was reported in the news media, particularly as the country gradually moved from a State of Disaster to a post-pandemic phase. In so doing, the following research questions were used to guide the study: 1). How did South African print newspapers frame media coverage a month before, during, and after the national state of disaster was lifted, 2). Which sources dominated media coverage of the investigated period, and 3). Did the media provide information on the termination of the national state of disaster.

Based on a quantitative content analysis of four renowned weekly newspapers, the *Sunday Independent*, *City Press*, *Mail & Guardian*, and the *Sunday Times*, it can be said that the news media framed this pivotal moment in the country's history predominantly in an alarming manner. The substance of news items with the alarming frame contained material that was against the continuation of the COVID-19 lockdown regulations as well as content that mentioned COVID-19 infection and death rates. Further, the tone of these articles was frequently negative, which might easily inspire fear or anxiety. The findings showed that, in addition to newspapers framing their reporting in an alarming manner, media outlets also tried to frame their reporting in a reassuring manner, which was the second most popular frame. The content of news reports with the reassuring frame contained advice on how to continue using safety and preventative measures. In terms of how the COVID-19 pandemic has been handled generally and the potential benefits it may have brought, it also contains content that seems optimistic and encouraging. The neutral frame was also present in this study's sample and included news stories that were informative, non-biased and objective.

The results also showed that sources for media coverage during this time were predominantly comprised of people from businesses, nongovernmental organisations, and civil society. These outcomes were particularly intriguing because one would expect that health and medical professionals would dominate media coverage as sources to offer some insight on what the post-pandemic phase would entail as the country was departing its state

of disaster. The results, alas, showed that the medical and health professionals were not the most frequently used sources, instead they were the least used sources. It is also important to note that at this time, male sources were more frequently consulted by the news media than female sources. This shows that earlier studies on the underrepresentation of women in the media are still valid because the data showed that male counterparts dominated the news media as information sources. This implies, without necessarily denying, that more work needs to be done to make diverse genders more accessible as knowledge providers.

The news media's scant coverage of the country's choice to end the State of Disaster was another important finding of this study. Little of the media's reporting on this issue or even the repeal of the lockdown regulations was discussed. It is also worth pointing out that the virus received less media coverage during March, April, and May 2022 compared to previous months, which contributed to the small sample size. Contrastingly, throughout its outbreak time, it was extensively covered by the media (Wasserman et al., 2021; Morissan et al., 2020; Alemayehu, 2020). Given that the COVID-19 crisis has been ongoing for a little over two years, this study was carried out in an effort to comprehend how the media has covered it a month before, a month during and a month after the South African government made the executive decision to terminate the country's National State of Disaster.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in order to see whether media coverage of crises situations, specifically the COVID-19 virus, has changed over time. The theoretical underpinnings of framing theory, crisis communication theory, and political communication theory were used to analyse this study. Because all three theories complement one another, the combining of the theories—unusual for this type of study—has been made. Future research could build on this study and incorporate a qualitative analysis to further comprehend the latent meanings behind the media texts of this timeframe in order to better grasp the ramifications of these results. In addition, a social media study of the subject might be carried out to ascertain its role during the investigation period, particularly in light of misinformation. This study can also be contrasted to other African countries that had COVID-19 lockdown regulations that were similarly rigorous in order to observe how their

mainstream press covered the change from a National State of Crisis to a post-lockdown phase.

The COVID-19 pandemic virus spread quickly and claimed many lives, bringing South Africa and the rest of the world to a standstill. As was previously indicated, the country's declaration of a National State of Disaster was carried out in an effort to slow the COVID-19 virus's rapid spread and handle current cases. Therefore, it is imperative to look into how the country's pandemic coverage was presented by the news media in terms of the time leading up to, during, and following the termination of the National State of Disaster. At the time of writing, it has been a little over two years since the lockdown laws came into effect and thus prompted the significance of the news media's role in terms of informing citizens about the transition to a post-National State of Disaster.

In order to respond to the study's research objectives, the data firstly showed that the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in a predominately alarming manner in newspaper coverage during the months of March, April, and May 2022. Secondly, the sources of information that dominated the news media's coverage throughout the course of the three-month period were individuals from a variety of institutions, including the government, non-governmental organisations, and civil society. Furthermore, the results showed that male sources dominated newspaper reporting for the four weekly newspapers at the time of the inquiry. Thirdly, there was scarcely any mention in news articles about the lifting of the national state of disaster due to the general decline in newspaper coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline in news coverage for *The Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Times*, *City Press*, and the *Mail & Guardian* in the months before, during, and after South Africa's National State of Disaster suggests a lockdown fatigue in terms of informing and educating the public on lockdown regulatory issues in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Addendum

Link to study's codebook:

[Codebook for MA Thesis.xlsx](#)