COMMUNICATING HEALTH CRISES: FRAMING OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC BY SELECT GHANAIAN NEWS PORTALS

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Adzato-Ntem for immensely contributing to my education.

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“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17)”.

This thesis is a product of my hard work and dedication, but only with the support of numerous others who were instrumental in the success of this study.

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ABSTRACT

Like many countries, the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in Ghana in March 2020 and the attendant manifestations impacted the country drastically, leaving behind unforgettable memories. Yet, there has not been any significant study on how the pandemic was covered at the critical time of the outbreak and the ramifications thereof. Thus, this study investigated media portrayals of the coronavirus pandemic in four selected Ghanaian online news portals to understand the overall nature of media coverage of the pandemic and its impact on media consumers' perceptions. Six specific objectives were addressed: to investigate the core issues the media focused on, to identify the core frames that dominated media reportage of the pandemic, to investigate the primary sources of news, to investigate the main phases of coverage that characterised Ghanaian media coverage of the pandemic, to understand the core factors that accounted for the selection of frames that were engaged in reporting the pandemic, and to understand how the media coverage influence people's perception and behaviour about the pandemic.

The research was underpinned by the Media Framing and Agenda Setting theories of communication alongside a qualitative approach that collected and analysed three data sets. First, purposive sampling was used in collecting and content analysing data from four online Ghanaian news portals: *citinewsroom.com*, *gna.org.gh*, *peacefmonline.com*, and *myjoyonline.com* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. Second, four health reporters from each selected news portal were purposively sampled and interviewed to help the researcher understand their framing choices. Finally, convenience sampling was used to select respondents for focus group discussions and participatory workshops to understand the perceived effects of the pandemic news coverage on Ghanaians. The data from these three sources were analysed and the results, triangulated.

The study found that political issues constituted the major issues that dominated media coverage of the selected Ghanaian media outlets during the pandemic, and the issues were reported using 'politics' frames. It implies that most of the pandemic stories were sourced from political elites and government officials, with less from health experts and the international media. The results also indicate that the selected media reported issues more from social and political perspectives. However, the four selected media were also found to report misinformation, leading to confusion and fear among the public. Consequently, the results provide insights into how media organisations can better report on public health emergencies, thus contributing meaningfully to the larger goal of improving health communication during crisis situations. The study, therefore, recommends that the media provide responsible reportage during health crises as a crucial contribution to shaping public perception and effectively influencing people's response efforts in such situations.

KEY TERMS: Health Crisis, Coronavirus Pandemic, News Portals, Communication, Portrayal, Public Perception, News Framing, Media Coverage, Infodemic, Epidemiology

KEY TERMS

An infodemic: refers to too much information, including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It causes confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines public health response. (World Health Organisation, n.d.)

Coronavirus: a disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a global outbreak of coronavirus – an infectious and acute respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (World Health Organisation, n.d.).

Covid-Novation: A term coined by the researcher to describe news stories that highlight novel solutions and creative approaches to address problems and challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also encompasses how individuals and organisations have innovatively capitalised on opportunities presented by the pandemic.

Decoding: refers to the process the recipient of the information uses to interpret and understand a message. Based on the complexity or simplicity of the codes being interpreted, the recipient of the information would either easily recognise the codes to make meaning or seek help from some established social conventions (Hall, 1973; Murdock, 2017).

Disinformation: information designed or spread knowing it is false or manipulated as part of an intention to deceive and cause harm. The motivations can be economic gain, ideological, religious, political or supporting a social agenda. Misformation and disinformation may cause harm, which comprises threats to decision-making processes and health, environment or security (World Health Organisation, 2024).

Encoding: involves the organisation and operation of symbolic codes that an information disseminator uses to convey a message or meaning through verbal or non-verbal means. The information disseminator uses specific rules that are easy to understand to present the message within a semantic chain of discourse (Hall, 1973; Zhao, 2014).

Epidemiology: is “the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations, and the application of this study to the prevention and control of health problems” (Last, 2001, p. 62).

Fake news: is defined as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers” (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213).

Framing: refers to “as the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (Entman, 2007, p. 164).

Health communication: is a multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach of communicating to reach different audiences and share health-related information with the goal of influencing, engaging, and supporting individuals, communities, health professionals, special groups, policymakers, and the public to champion, introduce, adopt, or sustain a behaviour, practice, or policy that will ultimately improve health outcomes. (Schiavo, 2013, p. 7)

Misinformation: is the “spread of false information without the intent to mislead. Those who share the misinformation may believe it is true, useful or interesting, and have no malicious intent towards the recipients they are sharing it with” (World Health Organisation, 2024).

Public Health Emergencies (PHE): refers to crises that adversely impact the public health system and its protective infrastructure, primarily water, sanitation, shelter, food, health and energy and resulted in unprecedented direct and indirect mortality and morbidity that is increasingly beyond the capabilities of traditional disaster management and its providers (Burkle Jr, 2019, p. 33).

Public perception: refers to a type of information obtained from a group of people or their general awareness about a particular issue or event (Dowler, Green, Bauer & Gasperoni, 2006).

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACDP - Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness

AFA- Arm-wrestling Federation of Africa

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

AIT - African Independent Television

APC - All Progressives Congress

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

CDC - Centers for Disease Control

CDD - Centre for Democratic Development

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CSIRO - Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

CSR - Corporate Social Responsibilities

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

FDA - Food and Drugs Authority

FGM - Female Genital Mutilation

FM - Frequency Modulation

FOSDA - Foundation for Security and Development in Africa

GAF - Ghana Armed Forces

GAMA - Greater Accra Metropolitan Area

GBC - Ghana Broadcasting Corporation

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GES - Ghana Education Service

GFL - Ghana Federation of Labour

Ghana CARES - Ghana Covid Alleviation and Revitalisation of Enterprises

GHS - Ghana Health Service

GJA - Ghana Journalists Association

GMA - Ghana Medical Association

GNA- Ghana News Agency

GNACOPS - Ghana National Council of Private Schools

GSS - Ghana Statistical Service

HIV- Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IGP - Inspector General of Police

JHS - Junior High School

KIA - Kotoka International Airport

MB - Megabyte

MCE - Municipal Chief Executive

MERS - Middle East respiratory syndrome

MFWA - Media Foundation for West Africa

MP - Member of Parliament

MTTD - Motor Transport and Traffic Department

NCA - National Communications Authority

NCCE - National Commission for Civic Education

NCDC - Nigeria Centre for Disease Control

NDC - National Democratic Congress

NEDCO - Northern Electricity Distribution Company

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisations

NHIA- National Health Insurance Authority

NLC - National Liberation Council

NTA - Nigerian Television Authority

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PCR - Polymerase Chain Reaction

PDP - Peoples Democratic Party

PNDC - Provisional National Defence Council

PPE - Personal Protection Equipment

PR- Public Relations

SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

SARS-CoV - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus

SARSCOV-2- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2

TUC -Trades Union Congress

TV - Television

UGMC - University of Ghana Medical Centre

UK - United Kingdom

UNAIDS - United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime

USA - United States of America

USD - United States Dollar

WACCBIP - West Africa Center for Cell Biology and Infectious Pathogens

WHO - World Health Organisation

ZGL- Zoomlion Ghana Limited

Table of Contents

DECLARATION i

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

KEY TERMS v

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS vii

LIST OF FIGURES xv

LIST OF TABLES xvi

CHAPTER ONE 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND 1

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Background to the Study 2

1.3 The Coronavirus in Ghana 12

1.4 Statement of the Problem 13

1. 5 Research Questions 15

1.6 Research Objectives 16

1.7 Significance of the Study 16

1.8 Scope of research 18

1.9 Organisation of Dissertation 19

1.10 Chapter Summary 22

CHAPTER TWO 23

LITERATURE REVIEW 23

2.1 Introduction 23

2.2 About the coronavirus 25

2.3 Spread of the Coronavirus 26

2.4 Impact of Coronavirus on the Economy 29

2.5 Health Communication 32

2.5 The Media and Health Reporting 34

2.7 News Worthiness and News Values 39

2.8 News Values and Global Health Crises Reporting 40

2.9 Health News Reporting in Ghana 42

2.10 Ethical Issues in Health Reporting 44
2.11 The Media and Pandemics 46
2.12 Media Coverage and Public Perceptions of Health Issues 52
2.13 Media Coverage of the Coronavirus 56
2.14 Media Framing of COVID-19 62
2.15 The Media and Coronavirus Pandemic: A Focus on Tone of Coverage 66
2.16 Online Media Coverage and Framing of the Coronavirus 67
2.17 Ghanaian Media Coverage and Framing of Pandemics 71
2.18 Ghanaian Media Framing of the Coronavirus Pandemic 73
2.19 Phases of Media Reportage on Pandemics and Health Crises 74
2.20 Phases of Media Reportage on the Coronavirus Pandemic 77
2.21 Global Health Crises and Information Disorder 79
2.22 Information Sources in Media Coverage of Pandemics and Heath Crises 81
2.23 Information Sources the Media Accessed in Coronavirus Reportage 83
2.24 Coronavirus Pandemic and Information Disorder 86
2.25 Chapter Summary 88

CHAPTER THREE **89**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK **89**

3.1 Introduction 89
3.2 Agenda-Setting Theory 91
3.3 Framing and Agenda-Setting Theory in Reporting Pandemics 99
3.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Agenda Setting Theory 101
3.4 Framing Theory 104
3.5 Entman's Conception of Framing Role in Media 105
3.6 Contemporary Viewpoints of Researchers on Types of Frames 108
3.7 Types of Frames 115
3.9 Strengths and Weaknesses of Media Framing Theory 120
3.10 Chapter Summary 123

CHAPTER FOUR **125**

METHODOLOGY **125**

4.1 Introduction 125
4.2.2 Interpretivism 126
4.3 Research Approach 128
4.4 Research design 130
4.4.1 Content Analysis 131

4.4.2 Case Study ... 133
4.5.1 Population of the Study ... 136
4.5.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size ... 137
4.5.3 Sample Criteria ... 137
4.5.4 Purposive Sampling Technique ... 140
4.5.5 Constructed week sampling ... 142
4.5.6 Convenience Sampling ... 144

4.6 Data Collection Phases ... *146*
4.6.1 Phase One: Content / Document Analysis of the four selected news portals to identify dominant issues and frames ... 147
4.6.2 Phase Two: Content / Document Analysis of the four selected news portals to identify major news sources and news phases of the pandemic. ... 148

4.6.3 Phase Three: Interview with 1 journalist each from the 4 selected news portals ... *148*

4.7 Data Collection Technique ... *152*
4.7.1 Document Analysis ... 152
4.7.2 Interviews ... 153
4.7.3 Focus Group ... 154
4.7.4 Workshop ... 157

4.8 Period of Data Collection ... *161*
4.8.1 Data collection for content analysis ... 161
4.8.2 Data collection for Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and the Participatory workshop. ... 162

4.9 Unit of Analysis ... *163*

4.10 Coding Unit and Coding Procedure ... *164*

4.11 Data Analysis and Interpretation / Thematic Analysis ... *165*
4.11.1 Content Analysis ... 165
4.11.2 Thematic Analysis ... 166

4.12 Validity, Reliability and Rigour of Research ... *173*

4.13 Ethical Issues ... *176*

4.14 Chapter Summary ... *178*

CHAPTER FIVE ... **179**

ANALYSING THE MEDIA REPORTAGE OF THE PANDEMIC IN SELECTED GHANAIAN MEDIA (PHASE ONE) ... **179**

5.0 Introduction ... *179*

5.1 RQ1. What are the main issues that dominated the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies? ... *181*
5.1.1 Issue One: Government Response ... 183
5.1.2 Issue Two: Impact of the Pandemic ... 190
5.1.3 Issue Three: Scientific & Medical Information ... 200
5.1.4 Issue four: Covid-Novation ... 206
5.1.5 Issue Five: Data and Statistics ... 210
5.1.6 Issue Six: Covid Corporate Social Responsibility ... 218

5.2 RQ2. How was the pandemic framed in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies? ... *223*
5.2.1 Frame One: Political Frame ... 225

5.2.2 Frame Two: Social Frame 234
5.2.3 Frame Three: Public Health Crisis Frame 242
5.2.4 Frame Four: On-the-Brighter-Side Frame 248
5.2.5 Frame Five: Economic Frame 254

5.3 Chapter Summary *258*

CHAPTER SIX **262**

SHAPING THE NARRATIVE: A FOCUS ON THE NEWS SOURCES AND PHASES IN THE REPORTAGE OF THE PANDEMIC IN GHANA BY THE SELECTED MEDIA (PHASE TWO) **262**

6.0 Introduction *262*

6.1 RQ3. Who are the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic? *262*
6.1.1 News Source One: Government Officials and Politicians 267
6.1.2 News Source Two: Medical Experts and Health Organisations 268
6.1.3 News Source Three: Affected Communities 271

6.2 RQ4. What were the various phases of the media's coverage of the pandemic and what news frames characterise d each phase? *278*
6.2.1 Phase One: Early Responsiveness 280
6.2.2 Phase Two: Heightened Concern 284
6.2.3 Phase Three: Critique and Review 288
6.2.4 Phase Four: Community Activism 292
6.2.5 Phase Five: Resilience and Recovery 295
6.3 Chapter Summary 300

CHAPTER SEVEN **304**

BEHIND THE LENS: UNCOVERING THE FACTORS SHAPING FRAME SELECTION AND CHALLENGES IN REPORTING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN GHANA (PHASE THREE) **304**

7.0 Introduction *304*

7.1 Factors that Affected the Selection of Frames and Stories *305*
7.1.1 Geographic Perspective 306
7.1.2 Editorial Policies 308
7.1.3 News and Information Sources 313
7.1. 4 Impacts of the Pandemic 317

7.2 Key Challenges Journalists Faced While Reporting on the Pandemic *321*
7.2.2 Lack of Training in Health Reporting and Communication 324
7.2.3 Health Risks and Trauma 326
7.2.4 Fake News 329

7.3 Chapter Summary *331*

CHAPTER EIGHT **334**

SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN GHANA (PHASE FOUR) **334**

8.0 Introduction *334*

8. 1 Impact of Media Coverage of the Pandemic on Perceptions and Attitudes of Ghanaians towards the Coronavirus *336*
8.1.1 Fear and Panic towards the Coronavirus Pandemic 337

8.1.2 Adherence to Safety Protocols and Vaccination 344
8.1.3 Conspiracy Theories 347
8. 2 Chapter Summary *354*
CHAPTER NINE **356**
SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS **356**
9.0 Introduction *356*
9.1 Summary of Chapters *357*
9.2 Summary of Key Findings *359*
9.2.1 Main Issues that Dominated Coronavirus Reportage in Ghanaian Media 359
9.2.2 Dominant Frames Used to Report the Pandemic in Ghana 362
9.2.3 Major News Sources Used to Report the Pandemic in Ghana 364
9.2.4 Key Phases of Media Coverage of the Pandemic in Ghana 367
9.2.5 Key Factors that Influenced the Selection of News Frames 367
9.2.6 Implications of Framing Techniques Adopted by Media Organisations on the Public 368
9.3 Conclusion *369*
9.4 Recommendations *373*
9.5 Suggestions for Further Research *374*
REFERENCES **377**
APPENDIX 1: PHASE 1 CODING PROTOCOL **411**
APPENDIX 2: PHASE 2 CODING PROTOCOL **419**
APPENDIX 3: PHASE 3 DETAILED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS **422**
APPENDIX 4: PHASE 4 DETAILED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE JOURNALISM STUDENTS **423**
APPENDIX 5: PHASE 4 DETAILED PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP GUIDE FOR **424**
APPENDIX 6: CATALOGUE OF STORIES **425**
APPENDIX 7: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS **437**

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Employment Rates in Accra and Kumasi During and After Lockdown (Adapted from Dzansi, Kim, Legakos and Telli, 2021).....31
Figure 2: Data Collection Phases.....146
Figure 3: Phases of the Coverage of the pandemic and the News Frames characterised each.....279

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Frequency distribution of selected media portals and their monthly coverage of the coronavirus pandemic.....143
Table 2: Breakdown of Data Collection Phases and Associated Data Collection Tools and Research Questions.....150
Table 3: The Six Issues with their Sub-categories 167
Table 4: The Six Frames with their Sub-categories.....171
Table 5: Frequency of level of the dominant issues/theme.....182
Table 6: Frequency Level of the Dominant Frames.....224
Table 7: Percentage of News Attribution to the Major Sources in Reporting the Coronavirus Pandemic......264
Table 8: Major News Sources, Examples, and Percentages.....265

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Perception creation is an integral aspect of social living. Our perception and expectations of ourselves and others in a social environment are essential to social life. Some of these perspectives are intentions and attitudes formed because of social interaction and media contact (Baran & Davis, 2003). Hence, media framing can cause people to accept or choose one meaning or representation. The deliberate choice of a frame for media text by media organisations or personnel empowers the news media [1]to stress that aspect of reality until it becomes salient.

Newspaper framing has undergone some rapid developments since its inception in the mid-1970s. The once-exclusive sociological theory coined by the 20th-century sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974 has become a multidisciplinary theory also used in communication studies. The main idea behind the framing theory is that communicators (media workers) see some parts of reality as more important and choose to focus on those parts while leaving out other parts of reality when they write and distribute media texts. (Goffman, 1974). Framing in mass communication, as argued by McQuail (2005), presumes that the media pay attention to not only the events they report but also some aspects (frames) of those events, which can ultimately affect the perception and reaction of the public.

Entman (1993) argued that framing is choosing some parts of reality and making them stand out more in a communication text to support a problem, its cause, or the morals

[1] *Media* has been used in this thesis to refer to the news media of newspapers, radio, television, online news portals, etc. It captures all forms of platforms, organisations and personnel that engage in news coverage and dissemination in society.

and/or treatment suggested for the things being talked about. Framing is mainly about the constant patterns of thinking, interpreting, presenting, choosing, emphasising, and leaving out what symbolic managers (media workers) use to organise discourse, whether spoken or seen. Therefore, framing allows news reporters to quickly and routinely process and package information to efficiently transfer them to their audiences (Gitlin, 1980). News framing can influence how a certain society thinks or behaves. The framing theory, thus, suggests that media texts are selectively used to influence the thought process of a group of people or society.

The focus of this study is to understand how the news media in Ghana framed issues regarding the coronavirus pandemic. The core of this argument is the supposition that the media are a powerful tool that shapes the perceptions and attitudes of media consumers through their framing tendencies. This study dwells on the framing capacity of the media to understand how the news media in Ghana framed and covered the pandemic and critical issues surrounding it in the country. Studies have shown that media framing of issues has critical implications on how people perceive issues in society. This study sought to investigate to what extent the media in Ghana framed the coronavirus pandemic and how these framing mechanisms impacted perceptions about the pandemic.

1.2 Background to the Study

In December 2019, the first case of an unknown strain of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) emerged in Wuhan, China. By January 11, 2020, the first fatality case of the then-unknown variant of SARS-CoV was recorded in China. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the virus as a

'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' due to the increased ravaging rate of the virus across the length and breadth of the globe.[2]

After several thorough sequencing examinations of sampled respiratory tracts, the novel Coronavirus, named COVID-19 or formerly 2019 novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), was discovered. By May 15, 2021, over 150 million people have tested positive for the virus, with more than 3 million related deaths (CDC, 2020; Kuiken et al., 2003; Taylor, 2021; WHO, 2021).

Over the years, the discovery of the coronavirus disease has set in much debate about where it comes from, with scientists divided on the exact origin of the virus. Many theories have suggested a human creation of the virus, with some claiming that the virus was genetically developed in a laboratory. However, the genetic analysis of the virus has revealed that the virus was not humanly developed in a laboratory (Anderon et al.,2020; Douglas, 2021) Studies have associated the current Coronavirus with those found in bats, with almost 96 per cent identical strains identified. The Bat has been named as the potential reservoir or host for the virus (Wu et al.,2020). Patients with coronavirus disease have been reported to present fever, cough, and breathing difficulties (Wang et al.,2016). Other patients have recorded further symptoms, including vomiting, nausea, and diarrhoea (Wang et al.,2016).

Studies have shown that the coronavirus disease can be transmitted through several means from person to person. As a respiratory infection, the virus has been associated mainly with droplet transmissions carried through aerosol particles through the mouth or nose (Leung et al.,2020). There has been continuous concern about the ability of

[2] https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19

low-income countries, especially those in Africa, to handle the pandemic independently (Afriyie et al., 2020). This has been true in the face of the management of the coronavirus across many African countries, compared to their European counterpart. According to Chattu et al. (2021) and Moyo et al. (2023), Africa is already battling many infectious and non-infectious diseases, and the coronavirus pandemic has come to complicate the already weak health system. Given this, the World Health Organisation and the United States predicted the devastation of the continent in terms of infections and deaths from the virus, projecting infections of around 44 million and 190,000 deaths in Africa by the end of 2020. However, this prediction failed because the numbers did not reflect what was predicted. This notwithstanding, the United States repatriated almost 1500 citizens from various African countries despite the low infections and death rates in Ghana and the rest of the African continent.

Low-income countries have been of particular interest and concern to European countries because of the lack of protective equipment such as facemasks, gloves, hand sanitisers, and equipment that could be used to diagnose the disease in its early stages (Afriyie et al., 2020).

With the increase in the number of infections across many countries, there were concerns that the attention that given to the COVID-19 virus and its attendant issues would significantly divert attention from equally important ailments and infections/diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and cancer. Thus, while these diseases continued to distract many health facilities in Africa, more health activities and interventions concentrated on the coronavirus. The potential ooutcome is the possibility of totally ignoring other equally important health concerns, such as HIV, Malaria, and other serious infections, and concentrating on the coronavirus, which has posed itself as more destructive and communicable than these existing

infections. This may lead to a situation where the spread of these diseases could increase at the blindsight of health experts and the public. However, Ghana took some precautionary measures against the spread of the disease, following recommendations from the World Health organisation and what had been implemented by other countries such as the United States and other parts of Europe. These measures included lockdowns and the mandatory wearing of nose masks, among other health protocols from the World Health Organisation.

By January 2022, Ghana's land and sea borders remained closed, and only flights were allowed into the country with some mandatory health and safety protocols at the various airports. For example, passengers arriving at the Kotoka International Airport were required to possess a negative COVID-19 test result. In addition, passengers were required to undergo mandatory testing upon arrival to confirm the test results they carried and determine their status on arrival. That is not all: as a further measure, passengers were expected to undergo two weeks of mandatory quarantine, after which they would be tested again before joining their families. Ghana recorded its first two confirmed cases of the novel virus in Accra, the country's capital, on March 12, 2020. The confirmed cases were imported from Norway and Turkey (Ministry of Health, 2020). As of May 15, 2021, Ghana had recorded at least 85,000 confirmed cases with over 650 deaths (WHO, 2021). The President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo, announced a partial lockdown after the first two cases were recorded.

The country went on a partial lockdown from the beginning of March 2021 for the next 14 days (Afriyie et al.,2020) in the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions. Explaining the rationale for the partial lockdown, the government of Ghana said the measure was to limit and stop the spread and importation of the virus to other regions, contain what

the country was already battling with, be able to care for those who were already seriously sick, limit the impact of the virus on both the social life of Ghanaians as well as the economy and strengthen domestic production or capability to produce some basic protective equipment (Afriyie et al., 2020).

The number of COVID-19 cases increased from the time the partial lockdown came into force, and the government, by April 2021, had to extend the lockdown mandate for another week. By this time, the number of cases had reached 641. As the lockdown continued, the government of Ghana, through Zoomlion Ghana Limited, embarked on a nationwide disinfection exercise meant to cushion preventive activities and safety protocols laid down by the Ministry of Health. The government received praise and commendation as one of the few African countries to have taken the fight against the coronavirus seriously. For example, Ghana was ranked number one in Africa to have conducted more tests per million people (Long et al.,2020).

The media were the main source or medium of education and passage of relevant and important messages about the virus during the time (Atiku, 2021; Nyarko & Serwornoo, 2022). The trend of reports was similar across all media channels, both locally and internationally. Across the globe, local and international coverage of the virus, since its discovery in December 2019, escalated exponentially, with media reports covering distinct perspectives on the virus's evolution, causality, and preventive measures (Time, 2020). As a significant institution with a symbiotic relationship with society and encumbered with the responsibility of disseminating information, media scholars contend that the media exert extensive influence on their audience's perception, reality, and decision-making process (McQuail, 2010; Schram, 1993).

According to Russell and Powers (2020), information crisis was one of the most prominent features during the COVID-19 pandemic, manifested in the amount of information shared about the virus since its discovery and spread across the world. In their view, this information crisis was fueled by misinformation, which risked confusing the public and destabilising the efforts of health experts and governments. The scholars also decried the situation, stating that news about the pandemic seemed to come faster as the quarantine days went slowly. In the words of Merrill Brown, founder, and CEO of The News Project, 'the health tragedy that governments were fighting has been compounded by an information tragedy.' This information tragedy includes wrong information regarding the number of infections and misinformation about the infection.

As the Director-General of the World Health Organisation reported, the WHO was battling two epidemics simultaneously: the coronavirus disease and what he called an 'infodemic' (World Health Organisation, 2020). According to the Director-General, misinformation about the coronavirus spread faster than the virus itself: a situation that made it more challenging to fight the virus. Authors (Garcia-Saiso et al., 2021; Patwa et al., 2021) across the globe posited that the extent of disinformation about the coronavirus has been fueled by both religious groups as well as misleading news on information-sharing platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram (Malhotra, 2020), cited in Russell and Powers (2020).

At the same time, the vulnerability of the public has been linked to the recent existence of the multiplicity of media where misinformation thrived and spread, owing to the fact that the public, in times of health crisis, was vulnerable to news coming from many sources and angles (Baker et al., 2021). In addition, a criterion was observed with the trend of media reportage, which was noticed in advertising revenue losses that

accompanied the impact of the infection (Russell, 2020). The implication of this situation regarding the media was that the media struggled to counter misinformation about the virus (Russell & Powers, 2020). The media established themselves as a relevant element in society, especially in enhancing the dissemination of information about society's overall well-being. Ophir (2018) argued that the media's role as a significant agent in the health sector in any given society is highlighted during outbreaks, epidemics, or pandemics. Ophir (2018), thus, underscored the relevance of the media during global health challenges such as Ebola, MERS, SARS, and now Covid-19. The role of the media during a pandemic is critical in not only disseminating specific information about the outbreak but also in creating the necessary awareness about preventive and containment measures as well as how best to enhance the chances of survival in such unpredictable times (Prieto-Ramos et al., 2020). Hutchinson and Dalton (2018) note that in a BBC's guide on the appropriate means of communicating during a global health crisis, there is sufficient evidence that the media are pivotal in reassuring, motivating, and promoting calm during public health emergencies. In view of this, this study is focused on investigating the Ghanaian case of media framing of the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Framing explains how social issues are disseminated and how information is encoded with meaning by the media for easy decoding by the audience. The media project and determines what is and is not worth news reports about an issue or event (Chilisa, 2012). The framing theory is a philosophical assumption that justifies how and why media texts are shaped and contextualised by the media (McQuail, 2005). As noted by Goffman in Jibr (2019), frames are cognitive constructions that direct the (re)presentation of events in the media. Boykoff and Laschever (2011) further explain that the media dedicates extensive coverage to a particular event or issue in framing.

Thus, through framing, the media makes an issue or event more salient and guides its audience's attention to some specific issues, events, or persons.

The mass media, as a relevant channel of information dissemination and regarded as a key element of society, have been known to play a vital role in shaping the perceptions and realities of their audience. Their immense influence on how people perceive the world makes them a very important facet of people's lives. Studies have provided empirical data on media portrayals of various topics and how these portrayals influence perceptions, realities, and behaviours.The media in Ghana actively engaged in the coverage of the pandemic even before the virus hit the country's shores (Quakyi et al., 2021). Thus, by focusing on news happening in the international world, the media in Ghana reported on key incidents that occurred in line with the pandemic in other nations. Coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic was noted to have hiked remarkably after the virus entered the nation. Some scholars note that there was significant coverage of the pandemic in the country owing to the vibrancy with which the media focused on the pandemic. Ultimately, the media in Ghana, like other media in other nations, identified as engaged actively in framing issues concerning health problems in the country (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2020). For instance, Gadzekpo et al. (2023), Diedong (2013) and Thompson and Ofori-Parku (2020) found in their studies on different health problems that the media in Ghana is constantly engaged in framing issues while they cover health issues in the nation. These studies provide evidence to support that the media in Ghana were inevitably engaged in framing strategies that aided the overall coverage of the pandemic. The question, which is the core of this study, is – what frames were adopted, how were these frames developed, how did they impact overall news coverage processes, and what were their impacts on media consumers in the country?

The media is known as the primary source of information regarding health-related issues. As a result of the media's far-reaching pragmatic influence, Armstrong, Carpenter, and Hojnacki (2006) argued that coverage and reports of health issues are among the priorities of many media outlets. They further underscored the relevance of the media in public health emergencies. They argued that public health issues such as Ebola and Zika virus received substantial coverage in the media both at the local and international levels. Nisbet (2006), in a study about avian flu, observed that 80 per cent of the respondents indicated that they obtained information about the flu from the media. Tong (2006) studied the portrayal of AIDS in Chinese media and discovered that the media in China portrayed AIDS as more of a public health issue rather than a human disaster or medical-scientific issue. The study further revealed that the media's portrayal of the disease influenced public opinion and attitude towards the epidemic (Ibid). Studies about the coverage of Avian influenza and Ebola in Nigeria reported that many Nigerians adopted the recommended prevention and control protocols because of the emphasis of the Nigerian media on public awareness and the risks associated with the outbreaks (Fawole et al., 2012; Asaolu et al., 2016). In a study of television news coverage of SARS by CNN in the UK and BBC in the US, the findings showed that both CNN and BBC portrayed the virus as a public health concern. Despite this similarity, the study also discovered a contrasting portrayal of the economic impact of the disease on the two distinct countries. The Canadian media also portrayed the disease as a public health issue (Berry et al., 2007). As regards the novel coronavirus, in particular, studies from Ogbodo et al. (2020) examined media framing of the pandemic at the global level. They established that there were significantly high media reports of the virus globally, with human interest and fear, among others, portrayed in most media reports of the global crisis. Similarly, Mutua &

Ong'ong'a (2020) identified in their study of online news media framing of the pandemic that the media can be used both to educate and misinform the public about the novel pandemic. The study also identified human interest and the attribution of responsibility as part of the dominating frames of the virus.

As an emerging global crisis, Kartika & Lestari (2020), in a comparative study, looked at the framing of the novel virus in Germany and Indonesia and revealed two contrasting portrayals of the virus in these countries. Whereas the media in Germany portrayed the virus as a health problem, the Indonesian media presented it as a financial challenge for their government and people (Ibid). In consistency with human interest frames portrayed in some studies (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020; Ogbodo et al., 2020), other research works about the portrayal of the pandemic highlighted racial prejudice, political influence, fear and death, domestic and elderly abuse, induced fear, as well as psychological stress as the dominant frames of the media's portrayal of the novel virus (Anwar et al., 2020; Onwe et al., 2020).

However, studies on the virus in Ghana have been presented in other contexts and from diverse perspectives. Asante & Mills (2020), in a study about the virus in Ghana, focused on the social and economic implications of the pandemic in marketplaces in urban Ghana, while Media Foundation for West Africa (2020) focused on the presence of the virus in Ghana from a broader array of issues which included safety of journalist, availability, and accessibility of information, and the economic sustainability among others. These studies do not address the issue of how the media (re)presented the global health crisis to its audience in Ghana. Thus, examining the portrayal of the virus in the Ghanaian media is crucial to understanding the role of the Ghanaian media in a health crisis as well as the role of the media in the various phases of a pandemic.

1.3 The Coronavirus in Ghana

The global effect of the COVID-19 epidemic has been felt throughout the length and width of nations and continents since its emergence in January 2020. By March 2020, Ghana had experienced a massive surge in the number of reported COVID-19 cases, indicating a rapid pandemic spread. (Ghana Health Service, 2020). Given that 21 cases had been discovered in just seven days, some health professionals and specialists predicted that the infection rate would be exponential in the following weeks. According to Ghana's Ministry of Health, the initial two instances were two individuals who had returned from Norway and Turkey (Sarpong & Obeng, 2020). The infected people were reported to reside in three cities, Accra, Tema, and Kumasi, as of March 20, 2020.

The epidemic has been classified as highly infectious in Ghana and other regions of the world since it spreads from person to person through contact. Unfortunately, by March 20, 2020, when the most recent cases were reported in Ghana, the epidemic had extended to the community level. The Ministry of Health and the Ghana Health Service formed tracer teams to track down affected people's contacts, and as of March 20, 2020, 300 people have been identified. Because the pandemic appears to be airborne, health officials have taken further precautions to prevent the virus from spreading (Sarpong & Obeng, 2020).

On April 2023, the Ghana Health Service reported 171,527 confirmed cases. The number of active cases by April 2023 had reduced significantly as a result of the various interventions such as vaccination programs. However, the statistics prior to the mass vaccination programs revealed high levels of active cases and mortality rates. Fortunately, with the wide deployment of vaccines in the country, levels of recoveries and rates of spread have been managed quite well.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

By May 15, 2021, due to the ravaging effect of the novel coronavirus pandemic, which started in December 2019, more than 3 million people had lost their lives, while over 150 million of the world's population have been infected with the virus (WHO, 2020). News coverage of the virus took centre stage as local and international media provided first-hand information and detailed coverage of the evolving, multifaceted global crisis. Whereas some media reports portrayed the evolution, causes, and preventive measures of the global pandemic, other media reports focused on creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in the face of an unfolding global pandemic (U.S. et al., 2020; Ogbodo et al., 2020).

According to Ogbodo et al. (2020), health crises always spark the influx of information, which at many times can be overwhelming and requires extra care to sieve through the amount of information churned out during these times. In other words, like the coronavirus, a lot of information, including misinformation about the crisis, is widespread. This makes it extremely difficult for the public to know exactly which information in the public domain is right. Ogbodo et al. (2020) also pointed out that the media need to report on the pandemic in a way that reduces the risks of the crisis rather than promoting its spread. As has been argued, the media play an important role in disseminating information. Therefore, the media's use of some words or expressions in reporting health issues can affect how the public understands the information. As Mebane et al. (2003) reported, the media framing of the coronavirus pandemic can affect the public's fear or lack of fear about the virus. It was reported that President Donald Trump's media activity also played a very important role in shaping people's perceptions and actions regarding the coronavirus. For example, when Trump tweeted about the efficacy of Chloroquine, there was a panic rush for the

drug and other related malaria drugs that were touted by the President as a good treatment for the coronavirus (Ogbodo et al., 2020). Ogbodo et al. (2020) further recount that at the same time, an overdose of the malaria drug was recorded in Nigeria because of media publication of the recommendations from President Donald Trump. The public's reaction to media information during a crisis, according to Ogbodo et al. (2020), has long-term implications for public health.

The above discussion means, during a health crisis, media coverage of news and the spread of information regarding the crisis must be carefully framed so that it does not complicate the already bad situation. According to (Martin et al., 2019), health authorities such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organisation's (WHO) ability to connect to the public through the media can determine the extent to which the public has access to relevant information or misinformation. This also means that it is important for the health authorities, seeing the important role of the media, to use it to give accurate and timely information to educate the public.

In the view of (Liu et al.,2011), framing issues from these organisations can affect how the public sees the crisis in the early days of its discovery. Thus, when bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) do not adequately position and frame the crisis/health condition, it may negatively affect how the media and the public view and understand the crisis. Framing issues is important in setting a tone and context for discussing and viewing issues (Entman, 2007). It allows the public to identify the most important issues during the pandemic. Thus, media framing of the Coronavirus pandemic has critical implications on how people perceive and understand critical issues concerning the pandemic. This typifies the overall relevance of framing the pandemic as it aids in the proper contextualisation of events for consumption.

Despite existing literature on the portrayal of the novel coronavirus by the media, few studies have examined the media portrayal or framing of the virus and the disease. Studies about the virus in Ghana have come in various contexts and from diverse perspectives (MFWA, 2020; Haider et al., 2020). These studies look critically at Ghana's COVID-19 measures, government approaches to control the spread of the virus, and the media's roles in controlling the surge in the pandemic. These studies, however, have not critically investigated the Ghanaian case of framing of the pandemic and its implications. As such, this study seeks to investigate how the Ghanaian media portrayed the novel coronavirus pandemic through a qualitative content analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions of selected online newspapers, journalists, and audiences.

1. 5 Research Questions

I. What are the main issues that dominated the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

II. How was the pandemic framed in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

III. Who are the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic?

IV. What were the various phases of the pandemic and what news frames characterised each phase?

V. What influenced the choice of frames used by the selected Ghanaian journalists for the coronavirus reports?

VI. How did the framing of the coronavirus in Ghana affect the perception and attitude of the Ghanaian public towards the virus?

1.6 Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives.

I. To determine the main issues that dominated online reportage of the coronavirus pandemic among the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies.
II. To examine the dominant frames of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies.
III. To explore the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic.
IV. To design a conceptual framework of the phases of the pandemic and the news frames that characterised each phase.
V. To ascertain factors that influenced the choice of frames adopted by the selected journalists in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic.
VI. To assess the possible implications of framing of the coronavirus on the public.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Media studies are a critical means of understanding how the media in any given society represents issues inherent within that society (Agorde, 2017; Kalyongo & Winfield, 2009). Thus, to critically understand how society behaves, what issues they consider essential, and cultural dynamism, it is essential to evaluate how the media covers issues within the society. Hence, media studies or studying media coverage of issues in any society has critical implications for understanding society's operations. Within the field of health reporting, the media has assumed a critical role in advancing

and impacting policies and regulations. Media coverage of health issues is essential in impacting society's health conditions.

This study investigated how the media in Ghana covered the coronavirus pandemic in light of how key issues were framed and reported within the online media space. The core of this study is to understand how the media in the country covered and framed arguably the biggest pandemic the nation has experienced. Media studies of this nature hold significance in diverse ways concerning policymaking, implementation, practice, and media scholarship.

This study holds immense significance, especially within the area of policy formulation and implementation in the fields of health reporting and pandemic management. The study hopes to be critical in informing regulations and policies that will guard health reporting, especially in Ghana. The study seeks to unearth the key issues that the media focused on and the frames adopted in reporting on the pandemic. Moreover, the study considers how these issues and frames impacted media consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards the pandemic. The findings can be considered essential in guarding journalists and news editors on which frames are critical in shaping public perceptions of health issues and which can cause positive or negative reactions. The study can hence be considered a crucial element in improving the country's health reporting. Furthermore, the study hopes to be impactful in informing policy direction on fake news and misinformation, especially within a critical area such as health reporting.

The study further aims to be essential to other researchers interested in researching how local and global media cover and frame key health issues. Beyond this, the

findings are critical to researchers in understanding how the media generally covers critical issues of social and politico-economic interest to society.

Furthermore, the study was interested in understanding how frames influenced the perceptions and attitudes of media consumers during the pandemic. The study hence limited its scope to select only media consumers in media-specific universities. To do this, the study selected students from the Institute of Journalism in Accra, Ghana alone. The findings and conclusions of this study should be understood based on this scope.

1.8 Scope of research

The current research is about how the media covered the coronavirus pandemic. It explores how selected media case studies framed issues about the coronavirus and the impact of such frames on the audience's understanding of issues about the virus and its spread. The scope of this study focuses keenly on how online media covered the pandemic in Ghana. The study focuses on four main online media platforms - *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh.* Thus, this study focuses on collecting and handling data from these online media organisations. Furthermore, the study limits itself to a one-year study period spanning March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. The researcher did not consider publications on the four platforms before or after this study period. The study was also focused on understanding how journalists developed frames while reporting on the pandemic. To achieve this, the study sampled journalists for interview sessions. The study focused only on journalists who had covered the pandemic.

1.9 Organisation of Dissertation

The core of this study is to investigate how online media in Ghana covered and framed the coronavirus pandemic. The study also focuses on investigating the implications of the nature of coverage and framing approaches on the perceptions of media consumers on the pandemic in the nation. There is also some attention paid to investigating the core reasons journalists adopted and used these frames to represent the pandemic and the issues surrounding it. The study is made up of nine chapters. **Chapter One (1)** introduces the study, highlighting the context, problem description, goals, and research questions. The chapter discusses critical issues that situate the problem and significance for the study. The chapter raises and discusses the primary arguments that formed the basis for this investigation. There is a lot of relevance paid to key issues such as how the media covers and frames global health issues and the implications the approaches to framing such crisis of global magnitude have on global media practice, media consumers and social institutions such as politics and governance.

It also chronicles the outbreak and spread of the coronavirus pandemic and how it affects people globally and in Ghana. The chapter helps put the study in context as it also provides the research objectives, its significance, and how subsequent chapters are arranged. The study's objectives consider investigations into the frames that were adopted to cover and represent issues concerning the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana, the main issues that the media focused on, and how the media developed these frames and their implications. The study further considers investigating the potential implications of the adopted frames on the perceptions of media consumers on the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, the study's importance and scope are described. Empirical and conceptual literature on media coverage of the novel

Coronavirus have been reviewed in **Chapter Two (2)**. Thus a critical overview and synthesised analysis of key literature are presented in the second chapter of this study. The chapter discusses key concepts such as the media and its roles in health reporting, the emergence and spread of the coronavirus pandemic and how the media covered and framed this pandemic. Through out the review of the key concepts that form the base of this study, there is a lot of attention paid to illustrating the extent of literature on different topics connected to this study and the nature of media coverage of global health issues and the reasons behind the frames adopted by global media. It also analyses the body of research on how COVID-19 was covered and reported by the international and Ghanaian media. The chapter also demonstrates knowledge in their area of research. **Chapter Three (3)** critically examined the study's theoretical framework. This chapter also discussed two communication theories, the Media Framing and Agenda Setting theories, which were adopted to develop the theoretical framework. The Agenda Setting and Media Framing theories comprise two of the most used media communication theories adopted in media studies over the past decades. These two theories provide critical understanding of how the media behaves and influences the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of media consumers. These two media effects theories have been discussed at greater length in chapter three with critical focus on how they explain how the media reports and represents issues in order to influence the perceptions of media consumers over time.

Chapter Four (4) goes over the approach taken by the researcher to investigate Ghana's coronavirus pandemic's media coverage. The chapter also includes details about the research design, paradigm, population, sample criteria, sample size, and sampling procedures. A critical discussion on the research paradigm is provided in this chapter. The study primarily followed the interpretivist paradigm to ensure that the

researcher was able to interprete critical findings and make sense of it within the Ghanaian social context. This was necessary to ensure that this study was not done out of its appropriate context but considered relevant nuances that provided meaning to the study.

Also, part of the chapter details data collection methods, procedures, and data analysis techniques adopted for this study. In addition, the chapter describes the four distinct phases that direct the phases of data collection. The chapter concludes with a description of how this study used thematic analysis and a discussion of some of the major themes and their subcategories. The results of the data analysis are presented Chapter Five. The chapter presentation follows the key phases that formed the first and second research question of this study. In essence, data analysis and presentation of findings for the first research questions are done in this chapter. Based on the qualitative content analysis, the chapter reveals and discusses the most dominant themes adopted by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in reporting the coronavirus pandemic. In order to address the second research inquiry, which also relied on the content analysis of 200 sampled news articles published on the four news platforms during the designated period of investigation, the chapter proceeds to examine the prevailing frames utilised by the chosen media outlets in their coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. **Chapter Six (6)** attempts to answer the third and fourth research questions. This chapter gives the findings and explores the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic. It also attempts to conceptualise a framework of the phases of the pandemic and the news frames that characterised each phase. **Chapter Seven (7)** presents the outcome of the qualitative, in-depth interviews of journalists on factors that influenced their choice of frames adopted in reporting the coronavirus

pandemic. **Chapter Eight (8)** presents findings to the last research question, which sought to understand the possible implications of framing the Coronavirus on the public. In conclusion, **Chapter Nine (9)** summarises the findings and discusses how the study contributes to the literature on the media reportage of global health issues. The chapter also offers recommendations for future studies.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter of the study focused primarily at discussing critical issues that provide contextual information and arguments for the investigation. The chapter examined the how the media covers and frames global health crisis as well as the coronavirus pandemic. There are also critical discussions on the implications of the media's roles in shaping attitudes and perceptions and the implications of media framing on diverse issues. The study's goals, objectives, research questions, and background on the phenomenon under investigation were all introduced in this introductory chapter. It also described how the coronavirus pandemic began, how it spread, and how it affected Ghanaians and others worldwide. It was crucial to provide background information about the topic, its history, and its growth because that literature provided a foundation for comprehending the research problem. Also contained in this chapter is information about areas of research and the significance of the study. This chapter also stated the research scope and the entire study's chapter organisation. The next chapter will discuss the relevant concepts and literature relating to this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis is focused on reviewing empirical and conceptual literature on issues concerning media coverage of the novel coronavirus. The chapter critically examines existing literature concerning how the global and Ghanaian media covered and reported COVID-19. To place the literature review within context, the chapter also pays critical attention to how the media has covered pandemics and global health issues over the years while focusing more on the Ghanaian case of media coverage of pandemics.

Literature reviews are a critical aspect of research projects. A literature review concerns the gathering, classifying, and evaluating of existing research works from diverse sources. A literature review extensively evaluates research articles, reports, and empirical studies. The aim is to summarise these documents and synthesise the knowledge (Ramdhani et al., 2014) to give the researcher a broad view and understanding of the critical concepts and theories they have adopted in their research. As Kabir (2016) puts it, a literature review is a means through which the researcher demonstrates knowledge in their study area. Furthermore, a literature review informs about the core theorists and their contribution to knowledge.

According to Hart (1998), a literature review is essential as it aids in distinguishing what has been done in research from what needs to be done. Hart (1998) further posits that a good literature review gives the researcher adequate knowledge of the concepts, variables, and theories relevant to the study. A good literature review enables the researcher to synthesise ideas and theories adequately.

Cantero (2019) argues that there exist three forms of literature reviews: chronological, thematic, and methodological. Chronological literature reviews concern the gathering and organising of literary works in chronological order of publication. With chronological reviews, the reviewer is concerned mainly with presenting and synthesising knowledge in literature based on years of publication. They are sequential and allow the researcher to observe the changes in knowledge on the issue over time. Cantero (2019) suggests that thematic literature reviews are organised by topics or issues. Thematic literature reviews are often concerned with theming significant topics within the literature. According to Cantero (2019), thematic literature allows the research to go from general topics to more specific issues and hence allows for detailing within the literature. Finally, Cantero (2019) captures methodological literature reviews as structured based on the methodologies of the literature. This form of literature review pays much reverence to the methodologies adopted in the various literature.

The literature review conducted in this section follows the thematic literature review approach. As Cantero (2019) mentions, thematic literature reviews are critical to assessing documents' details as such reviews discuss the central points of the various literature. Furthermore, they provide a more organised approach to structuring the review based on ideas. The structured approach based on the flow of thought becomes an added advantage. This allows the review to follow a more thematic narrative and expressive format.

This chapter, therefore, looks critically at the core points of discussion within the literature on the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature review is structured to consider a broader look at the general issues of the global health crisis. It later narrows the

discussions towards media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana to emphasise the overarching themes present in the literature than any other thing.

2.2 About the coronavirus

The coronavirus disease was first observed in Wuhan, a city in the Hubei province of China, in December 2019 and gradually spread to the rest of the world. On March 11 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. According to Siddiquei & Khan (2020), at the time, the coronavirus pandemic could impact the global economy in monetary and nonmonetary terms. They argued that the coronavirus threat is hovering worldwide, among governments and across countries, that are trying their best to fight it in the best way possible. Experts have described the coronavirus pandemic as a public health issue that has occasioned containment policies that have led to economic slowdowns across the globe (Canutu, 2020). In this respect, COVID-19 is also a development issue. For instance, Gondwe (2020) notes that the economic downturn experienced in Africa because of COVID-19 is estimated to have reduced national GDP by up to 7.8%. The author further posits that the pandemic had even more adverse effects on revenue mobilisation, with some of the strongest economies with sound revenue systems losing up to 5% of revenue. In Ghana, it is estimated that about 35.7% of firms had to fold because of the economic downturn, especially during the lockdown periods. Furthermore, 16.1% of these firms could not resuscitate even after the lockdown period (Ghana Statistical Services, 2020). The implications of the pandemic on economic development, in particular, have been dire. The virus has had a massive impact on the entire world economy. Since its inception, the virus has been labelled by the World Health Organisation as a high-risk one even today (Siddiqui & Khan, 2020). The Coronavirus is caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARSCOV-2), which has had a

detrimental effect on global healthcare systems with a ripple effect on every aspect of human life as we know it. Nicola et al. (2020) highlighted the extent of the outbreak, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring the COVID-19 outbreak as a global emergency on January 30, 2020.

To slow down the spread of the disease, governments were forced to enforce strict border controls, shutdowns, quarantine, and travel restrictions (Scientific American Blog Network, 2020; Aljazeera, 2020; GOV.UK, 2020). All these interventions sparked fears of an impending economic crisis and recession. Siddiquei & Khan (2020) pointed out that the Coronavirus could impact the entire world economy in financial and non-financial terms. Though China had effectively controlled the virus with many proactive actions, the grim scenario emerged in European countries such as Italy, Spain, France, and Germany, where the spread of the virus is exponential. The spread of the coronavirus was so vicious that Europe became the new epicentre of the disease. Apart from the European countries, Iran and the USA also faced severe consequences of this deadly virus. Apart from its impact on life, the economic repercussions were also severe. According to the OECD, the Coronavirus may have proven to be the biggest threat to the economy of countries worldwide. Oxford Economics lowered its Chinese growth forecast to only four per cent in the first quarter of 2020 from six per cent. As a result of the negative impacts of the virus on the economy, China's growth rate had been predicted to be only 5.4 per cent for the whole year of 2020, far from the 6.1 per cent recorded in 2019.

2.3 Spread of the Coronavirus

According to reports, the first case of the novel disease was a case of a person who had first experienced symptoms on December 1, 2019. Between December 8 and

December 18, 2019, seven cases were later diagnosed with the virus, with two of them linked to the Wuhan seafood market. Media reports suggest as well that Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, alerted his colleagues of his discovery of a resurgence of SARS, which was reported to have killed at least 349 people in China from 2002 to 2003. On December 8, China recorded the first batch of infections. By December 31, the Asian country had reported the SARS virus's resurgence to the World Health Organisation. Between December 31, 2019, and June 14, 2020, a total of 798067 persons were infected, while 435,181 infected persons were confirmed dead. By then, the virus had already started spreading to other parts of the world due to the increased mobility of people globally. Although the virus had emerged from China, the Asian continent remains one of the least affected continents in the world.

The continent of Europe recorded the first coronavirus infection on February 21, 2020, in the Northern parts of Italy (Cerqua & Di Stefano, 2021). It is on record that the European region was the most affected continent in the world. As of January 2023, an estimated 270 million cases of Covid-19 infections were recorded in the whole of Europe. While Italy saw perhaps one of the most devastating infection and mortality rates, available records indicate that by January 2023, France, Cyprus and Austria had overtaken the number of cases in Italy (Zahid & Perna, 2021). By January 20, 2020, the United States of America recorded its first case – indicating the virus's arrival in the Americas regions. According to reports from the World Health Organisation, the USA is the most affected nation, with an estimated 106,678,503 confirmed cases of the viral disease. WHO reports that as of April 26, 2023, 192,187,133 cases were confirmed, with nearly 3 million deaths recorded (Elflein, 2023).

The first cases of COVID-19 in Oceania were reported in late January 2020. The first country in Oceania to confirm cases was Australia. On January 25, 2020, Australia

reported its first case in Victoria. Shortly after, other countries in Oceania, including New Zealand and several Pacific Island nations, also reported their first cases. WHO reports that as of April 2023, the region had recorded over 202 million infections with 410,281 deaths (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

The first case of COVID-19 in South America was reported in Brazil. On February 26, 2020, Brazil confirmed its first coronavirus case in São Paulo. After this initial case, the virus spread to other countries in South America, leading to varying levels of impact across the continent. As of May 2023, the region had recorded 61,021,914 infections, with as many as 84,780 deaths recorded (Elflein, 2023). The first cases of COVID-19 in the Middle East were reported in late January and early February 2020. Iran was the first country in the region to announce cases officially. The first two cases in Iran were confirmed on February 19, 2020, in Qom. Shortly after, the virus spread to other parts of Iran and neighbouring countries in the Middle East. Other countries in the region, including the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and others, reported their first cases in February and March 2020 (Elflein, 2023). The region recorded the second least number of infections and deaths since its first case – 23,347,992 infections and 350,921 confirmed deaths. The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Africa was reported in Egypt on February 14, 2020. The affected individual was a foreign national, and the case was detected and confirmed in Cairo. Subsequently, other African countries began to report their first cases, and the virus spread across the continent. Since recording its first case of the viral disease, Africa has recorded just 9,522,906 and 175,343 deaths – the least recorded by a continent in the world (Cerqua & Di Stefano, 2021).

2.4 Impact of Coronavirus on the Economy

The last time the world suffered a global shock was in the aftermath of Lehman's collapse in September 2008. Baldwin and Tomiura (2020) argue in their book 'Economics in the Time of COVID-19' that the evidence from the global crisis of 2008 to 2009 provides evidence of the likely outcome of the depression coronavirus will have on the world economy. Boone (2020) estimates that the base scenario, in which the outbreak was contained in China and a few other countries, could imply a growth slowdown of about 0.5 percent in 2020. In their most severe scenario (with a very high infection rate), their impact on 2020 growth is four times higher than adverse cases. In this scenario, Japan has been affected the most by losing almost 10% of GDP, followed by Germany and the US, with losses of about 8% each.

A range of policy responses is essential both in the short term and in the coming years. In the short term, central banks and treasuries must ensure that disrupted economies continue functioning while the virus outbreak continues. Governments have a critical role in the face of real and financial stress (Warwick & Fernando, 2020).

While cutting interest rates is a possible response for central banks, the shock is not simply a demand management problem but a multi-faceted crisis requiring monetary, fiscal, and health policy responses. Quarantining affected people and reducing large-scale social interaction is an effective response. The wide dissemination of good hygiene practices, as outlined in McKibbin and Fernando (2020), is a low-cost and highly effective response that reduces the extent of contagion and, ultimately, the social and economic cost.

According to Siddiquei and Khan (2020), the coronavirus pandemic has thrown the entire tourism sector into chaos, affecting production and productivity, supply chains,

stock markets, and economic fallouts between nations. According to them, the coronavirus has dragged back economic activities and has had many trickling effects on many parts of the economy. As a trickling-down effect of the virus on the Chinese economy, the growth rate of the transport, hospitality, food, and beverages industry was gravely affected.

Data available in the first quarter of the pandemic showed that the coronavirus pandemic has negatively impacted the global economy, and experts are predicting a global recession greater than that of the 2008/2009 recession. This suggests that there is more to be expected from the impact of the infection on the economy than is currently being experienced across the globe in different sectors of the economy. It also means that countries must be prepared for the worst. Both developed and developing nations are experiencing the adverse impacts of COVID-19. According to the OECD (2020), it may be the biggest threat to the world economy.

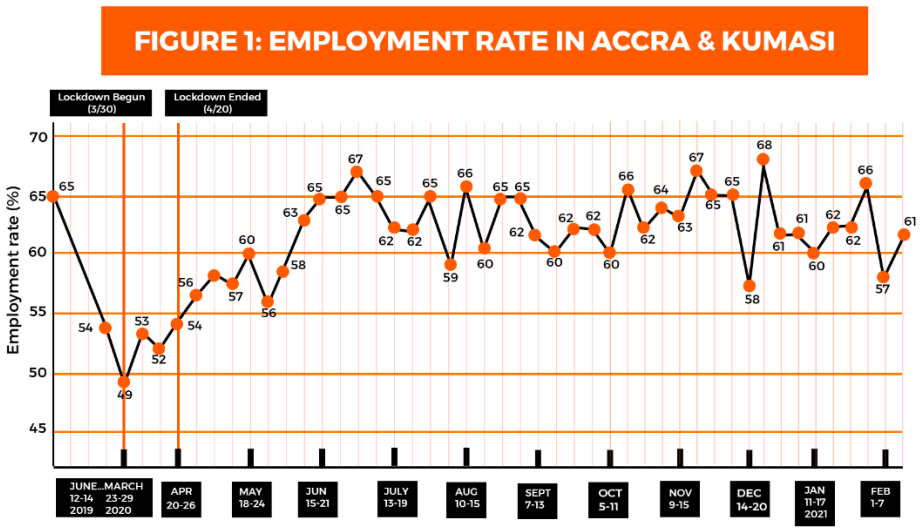
Apart from its impact on life, the economic consequences were also severe. For instance, the virus had thrown the entire tourism sector across the globe into chaos, affected production and productivity, supply chain, and stock markets, as well as economic fallout between nations, businesses are losing revenue, factories were closed in China, and millions of people were locked in their homes. Not only did the lockdown affect people individually. Because of the restrictions on movement to prevent the spread of the virus, people could no longer visit tourist attractions within and without their respective countries (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020). This had severe economic ramifications for the tourism economy.

According to the United Nations, countries such as Ghana may take up to 10 years to show signs of recovery from the economic implications that came with the pandemic

(United Nations, 2020). Dzansi, Kim, Lagakos and Telli (2021) aver that in Ghana, the sharp decline in commercial consumption of electricity and the hike in domestic consumption of electricity typifies how the pandemic grounded commercial economic activities to a halt. The authors found that between 2020 and 2021, the electricity consumption of firms was reduced by up to 12.7%, while domestic use of electricity increased by 10.4%. This indicates a decrease in commercial activities because of the pandemic.

Additionally, Dzansi, Kim, Lagakos and Telli (2021) mention a significant decline in employment during the lockdown periods in Ghana. Since then, employment rates have not been stable even after the pandemic had passed. The chart below provides data collected on employment rates in two cities in the country – Accra and Kumasi. The data indicates a crucial drop in employment during the lockdown periods. Furthermore, the chart shows that employment rates in Ghana have struggled to equal or beat rates that existed before the lockdown period even after the lockdown periods.

Figure 1: Employment Rates in Accra and Kumasi During and After Lockdown (Adapted from Dzansi, Kim, Legakos and Telli, 2021)



2.5 Health Communication

Health communication is a vital component of public health practice, helping to disseminate knowledge, influence habits, and shape policy (Atikins & Wallack, 1990;Agrawal, 2009). It includes the research and application of communication methods to inform and influence individual and community health-related decisions. Effective health communication has the potential to improve health outcomes, illness prevention, and chronic condition management (Tones & Tilford, 2010).

Health communication strategies are developed with a critical focus on the targeted audiences they are to speak to while also focusing keenly on the type of health problem the strategies are to address (Webster, 2007). According to Fox (2012) identifying and understanding the target audience is crucial for tailoring messages that resonate with specific groups. Factors such as age, gender, cultural background, and health status should be considered (Sudhansubala & Preethi, 2016). Essentially, health communication messages are developed and focused on the cultural perspectives of the audiences in mind, recognising varying values, beliefs and customs of audiences. (Tones, Tilford, 2010)

Several authors have been critical in expounding the relevance of health communication. In the current dispensation of information, health communication approaches place a lot of emphasis on media and digital platforms that are targeted at ultimately influencing the health behaviours of media consumers (Sudhansubala & Preethi, 2016; Tones & Tilford, 2010; Agrawal, 2009). The media (traditional, digital and social media) are hence a critical tool in health communication in recent times. Some authors have noted that the best health communication approaches place emphasis on the hybridisation of these three media platforms to ensure effectiveness

in changing perceptions and behaviours (Teichmann et al.,2020; Sudhansubala & Preethi, 2016).

The core of health communication seeks to achieve some different objectives. The reliance on diverse media platforms indicates that health communication is concerned primarily with information dissemination (Leaks et al., 2010). Health communication approaches ultimately, target critical audiences to inform them on critical health related issues. The result often sought is to increase public awareness (Sudhansubala & Preethi, 2016). Health communication is critical for increasing public understanding of health concerns such as infectious diseases, chronic disorders, and preventative actions (Teichmann et al.,2020). Accurate and timely information enables people to make educated healthcare decisions (Teichmann et al.,2020).

Essentially, health communication is targeted at influencing positive health behaviours. Health communication may encourage behaviour changes that lead to better living by sending out clear and appealing information. Campaigns against smoking, obesity, and substance addiction demonstrate how communication tactics may impact public behaviour.

The emergence of crucial health crisis such as Ebola and Covid-19 has further shown the relevance of effective health communication, especially at the global level. During health emergencies, such as pandemics or natural disasters, efficient health communication is critical for situation management (Sastry & Dutta, 2017; Handebo et al., 2020). It aids in the rapid dissemination of crucial information, lowers fear, and informs the public about safety precautions. Most importantly, evidence suggests that health communication strategies have been crucial in influencing perceptions and

positive behaviours in light of the rapid spread of diseases during global health crises (Teichmann et al.,2020; Sudhansubala & Preethi, 2016).

2.5 The Media and Health Reporting

The media (both digital and traditional) are often the first and primary source of information concerning health issues worldwide (Wilson et al., 2009). The media's role in information sharing and as a core source of information has been even more actualised with the advent of digital media technologies and the internet, making information search and sharing easier and faster (Oladepo et al., 2021). The media has thus assumed an entrenched and ever-essential role in keeping people well-informed and educated about health-related issues across the globe.

Scholars argue that while the media continue to perform their role in health reporting, albeit with some crucial challenges, the general expectations of media consumers and trust in the media to provide accurate, unbiased, factual, and timely information about health issues seem to grow at a rapid pace. This situation means that media's role in the health sector is both crucial and at the same time tasked with a considerable responsibility (Leask et al., 2010; Saraf, R, & Balamurugan, 2018). The roles of the media in recent times have transcended the performance of basic functions such as simply reporting on illnesses. Contemporary media roles have taken up tasks beyond simply crossing borders to inform about pandemics and their impacts. Now, as some scholars argue, the media's role in the health sector covers a plethora of areas, such as the deliberate influence of health behaviours and perceptions (Isik et al., 2019), affecting national and trans-national health policies (Bou-Karroum et al., 2017) as well as playing the sentry function (Hao et al., 2013).

The seeming attention that the media is currently paying to health problems did not exist many years ago, although the media used to touch on a few health issues in their reportage as and when they reared their heads. The situation, however, seemed to change with the prevalence of newspapers and during the times of media pluralism that revolutionised the media industry. Also, the emergence and proliferation of broadcast media and TV news production significantly increased the frequency of health news reporting and the quality of such reports (Gollust et al., 2019). The seeming low levels of media reportage on health issues resulted from diverse factors that barred journalists from adequately reporting on health issues, thus accounting for a general inadequacy in health reporting by the media. One such factor that marred health reporting was the lack of collaboration between journalists and health professionals.

This lack of collaboration meant journalists could not access enough information and explanations of health issues from health professionals. Hence, journalists who did not generally have good backgrounds in health and medical issues opted to either report less of such news or not report at all (Wilson et al., 2009). Additionally, unethical media reporting false information prevented medical professionals from giving out sensitive medical information to journalists for fear of misinforming the public (Chapman, 2007). Notwithstanding these challenges, which in any case are still prevalent in recent times, media coverage of health issues has seen a general improvement in both quality and frequency of reportage (Leask et al., 2010). This has been especially so since the introduction of electronic and digital media platforms. Gollust, Fowler and Niederdeppe (2019) posit that TV news media, for instance, account for a significant degree of media health news coverage. Additionally, digital technologies and social media have

further improved media coverage of health issues in diverse ways (Singh, Awani, A, & Tiwari, 2016; Ventola, 2014).

The proliferation of health beat reporting and specialist medical reporters in recent times has also ensured improved standards of health reporting within the media. Research journalists with more interest in medical issues and the backing of passionate editors have contributed immensely to the development of health reporting over the years (Leask et al., 2010). This is thus an indication that media coverage of health issues has been on a positive hike within the past few decades.

Although digital and internet-enabled media have dominated health news coverage over the past few years, TV news broadcast remains the most popular source of information on health issues (Burzynska et al., 2015). Hence, many media consumers tend to access television as their primary source of information concerning news (Hao et al., 2013). Gollust et al., (2019) account that TV news coverage of health issues is expressed in four main roles of the media.

Gollust et al. (2019) argue that the media oversees gathering and reporting public events and information (surveillance); providing context and meaning for health issues (interpretation); cultivating community values, beliefs, and norms (socialisation); and attracting and maintaining public attention for advertisers (attention merchant). Burzynska, Binkowska-Buury, and Januszewics (2015) account that TV content on health issues covers a plethora of issues. The scholars note that TV content covers issues such as editorial news programs, physical activity and nutrition, content on selected stimulants, content on cancer and other diseases, public service announcements on health issues, and health and edutainment content. The researchers further note that one of the most potent forms of TV content on health

issues is edutainment – often in the form of TV serial movies. For instance, they mention that Grey's Anatomy is one of the most potent TV serials portraying global health issues.

Literature concerning media coverage of health issues is almost filled with empirical studies on print media (newspapers). A healthy level of attention has thus been paid to studies concerning newspaper coverage of health issues in the world (Dieding, 2013; Ciboh, 2010; Akintola & Hoskins, 2015; Gugsa et al., 2015). Diedong (2013) found in his study of three newspapers in Ghana that traditional straight news stories dominate newspaper news coverage of health issues. This is followed loosely by features and opinion pieces on health issues. Additionally, the study found that most of the stories published on diseases centred on discussing symptoms, causes, and treatments.

The study, however, found that both straight news and editorial pieces did not make policy recommendations. The research found that 24% of the stories were sourced from government officials, while 14% were sourced from the media. Ten per cent of the stories were sourced from professionals and interest groups, 9.74% from non-governmental organisations, 5.84% from individuals, 5.19% represented scientific research, and 4.55% from staff. Spokespersons represented 3.25%, medical experts 2.6%, and anonymous sources, international organisations, drug manufacturing companies, and other corporations were 1.27%. This indicates that sources of news on health issues from the newspapers were spread across various diverse sources.

Radu and Banjac (2012), in their study of Zambian newspaper coverage of health issues, found that newspaper coverage of health issues in Zambia was considerably low. Additionally, there was more focus on international health stories than national or

local ones. As Diedong (2013) found in his study, Radu and Banjac (2012) also found that there were considerably smaller numbers of analytical and editorial stories than straight news stories. Most of the literature concerning newspaper coverage of health issues across the globe follows this trend, with much concentration being paid to the frequency and type of reportage of health news stories. Indeed, the majority of the findings also follow a similar fashion, indicating that while newspaper reportage of health news stories is not entirely extinct from newspapers, the frequency and quality are declining (Bello, 2015; Lopes et al., 2018; Chen & Lawrie, 2018; Bawab, AlQahtani & McElnay, 2018; Dzokoto et al., 2018).

The relevance of the media in the health sector is not only depicted in its reportage alone. The agenda-setting function of the media plays a pivotal role as well. The agenda-setting function of mass media is a theory that examines the impact of media on the general population. To put it another way, agenda-setting theory states that the media emphasises topics in such a manner that media audiences or members of the public value them as well. As a result, their ideas may be influenced or shaped (Wiess, 2009). This function of the mass media permeates all other functions, ensuring that health issues are salient in public discussions (Lambe, 2008).

Conclusively, the media are crucial allies in global health issues. The media's role in informing, educating, and advocating in the health sector cannot be overemphasised (Ankem, 2006). Indeed, the media and the digitalisation of media platforms have created a system where sharing information concerning health issues has become easier and faster. People who naturally need the information to survive now do not wait for health information but can easily access such information on their own and interact directly with health professionals in real time (Kordzadeh, 2016).

2.7 News Worthiness and News Values

In journalism, the idea of news worthiness and news values concern those guiding principles that are adopted by journalists, news editors, and media organisations in judging the viability of an event, issue, or story as worthy of being covered or discussed within the media space (Boukes et al., 2020). News worthiness refers to the standards that editors and journalists apply to evaluate whether stories, issues, or events are worthy of being covered and published (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). A story's potential interest or value to the public is what determines whether it is newsworthy. Media workers often use this idea to rank stories and spend resources more effectively (Boukes et al., 2020). On the other hand, news values concern the principles for judging newsworthiness. Media outlets use these metrics to judge the importance and desirability of prospective news articles (Harcup & O'Neil, 2017). News values determine the prominence that media organisations give to news stories, which is often emphasised by the length and placement of stories (Cotter, 2010).

News values are attributed to the writings of Galtung and Ruge (1965), who provided a list of 12 descriptors in their seminal work in 1965. Thus, the original postulations of Galtung and Ruge (1965) indicate that there are 12 main news values that are adopted in journalism. These descriptors have seen some modifications over the years and have transcended to become a key element of journalism practice and studies in recent times. They include timeliness, proximity, prominence, impact, conflict, relevance, oddity, human interest, negativity, unambiguity, familiarity, personalisation, and frequency and consonance (Boukes et al., 2020; Harcup & O'Neil, 2017; Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Other authors have over the years proposed different news values to explain what journalists look out for in news stories before deciding to publish them. Regardless of the different variations, there is consensus that journalists are guided

by these descriptors when identifying what must be published in newspapers and shown on TV (Harcup & O'Neil, 2017). The idea behind these news values is the argument that journalists and news editors consider issues that have relevance to society, are in close geographic proximity to news audiences, and are odd occurrences when presenting the news. Furthermore, news values express that news about prominent people in society and news about conflicts are newsworthy. In essence, there is a key sense of consumerism that journalists and editors consider when selecting issues that should make the news. They consider those events, persons, and issues that consumers would prefer and project them as news in society (Galtung & Ruge, 1965).

2.8 News Values and Global Health Crises Reporting

News values play a critical role in journalism practice. Within the scope of global health reporting, there is an even greater reliance on the use of news values to select, order, and determine which issues concerning the health crisis are transmitted to news audiences (Yu & Siyang, 2023). In the current information age, where there is an enormous demand for information and a matching supply of it to news consumers, news values are crucial to ensuring that media coverage of global health issues is informative, and focused on preventing the escalation of the crisis and instructing on strategic ways to mitigate it (Siyang & Yu, 2023).

Timeliness is one of the most important news qualities to consider during a global health crisis. Since diseases may spread swiftly and have far-reaching effects, news organisations should make sure the public is informed about the most recent illnesses. News reports that are timely can help spread awareness, educate readers about preventative actions, and provide them with updates on the state of affairs. News

organisations may be extremely helpful in keeping the public safe and informed during a global health emergency by putting a high priority on timeliness.

In the context of global health issues, proximity is a crucial news value (Siyang & Yu, 2023). This alludes to the notion that individuals are more drawn to and impacted by local occurrences (Boukes et al., 2020). In the context of a global health emergency, proximity might mean several things. The outbreak may have started in a far-off nation, but its effects are being felt all across the world. News organisations may contribute to humanising the problem and illustrating its worldwide reach by showcasing the experiences of individuals and communities impacted by the crisis (Siyang & Yu, 2023). Siyang and Yu (2023) found in their study of the New York Times and the China Daily that proximity was one of the main news values that shaped news production during the coronavirus pandemic. However, the study found that China Daily focused more on proximity by presenting more local news.

Relevance is a key component of news value in the context of the global health crisis. This speaks to the notion that news items have to be pertinent to readers and directly affect their lives. According to Siyung and Yu (2023), impact is crucial when it comes to a global health crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic. The spread of illnesses is a pressing and highly important issue since it may have an impact on people's health, well-being, and livelihoods. News organisations can stimulate more attention, concern, and action in response to a global health issue by emphasising the impact of the crisis on news audiences. Siyung and Yu (2023), as well as Yu and Siyung (2023), found that the media in China and the United States focused on projecting the impact of the pandemic on the lives of citizens to establish relevance for news media audiences during the coronavirus pandemic.

Closely linked to this is the use of the human interest news value to report global health crisis (Sharp et al., 2022). Human interest stories go beyond the numbers and statistics to highlight the feelings and experiences of those who are personally impacted by an event (Boukes et al., 2020). News organisations may encourage empathy, understanding, and solidarity among their viewers by telling the tales of those affected by a global health crisis. By highlighting the human cost of a problem and humanising the subject, human interest reporting can eventually inspire more action and support (Sharp et al., 2022).

In summary, news values significantly influence how global health crises are covered. Studies have, however, shown that during pandemic periods, global media tends to focus keenly on impact, eliteness, relevance and timeliness to report news concerning the pandemic (Sharp et al., 2022; Siyang & Yu, 2023).

2.9 Health News Reporting in Ghana

The roles of the media, especially in health reporting in Ghana, cannot be over-emphasised. As part of their broader information-giving and education role, the media educates the masses on the right health behaviours to adopt and which to shun. In the event of a major health crisis, the media is responsible for creating the needed awareness and enlightening the public about the dos and don'ts of the health issue. The Ghanaian media have not been effective at performing their information and educational functions regarding health reporting. The media's role in the nation's health sector can be primarily described as more active than passive owing to their dynamic nature of reportage on health issues (Thompson & Yeboah, 2013; Kolamong, 2020). This is evidenced in the quantity and quality of straight news and feature news stories that the media often publishes on health-related issues in the country (Diedong, 2013; Agyei-Mensah et al., 2022). However, Obeng-Quaidoo (1985) mentions that the

Ghanaian media has not always been attentive to health issues. He accounts that the history of the media in Ghana is highly focused on political issues and that focus on health-related issues is more of a recent phenomenon. Furthermore, he iterates that a qualitative review of the representation of health within the Ghanaian media in the past shows a more descriptive approach lacking interpretive elements.

Asante (1996) also found that media reportage in Ghana on health-related issues focused on framing health issues within government and political contexts. Hence, health reporting in Ghana, so far as the historical development of Ghana's media is concerned, was largely political. Ofori-Birikorang (2009), however, iterates that this phenomenon has seen a slow and positive shift toward more active and qualitative reportage of health in the media. Quite a few studies, therefore, capture the idea that Ghana's media has improved reportage on health issues in the country over time. A number of the studies have been extensive on understanding how the media reports on critical diseases and epidemics as well as pandemics such as Meningitis (Smith & Tietaah, 2017), Cholera (Donkor & Maimaiti, 2019; Adzo, 2020), HIV/AIDS (Halabi et al., 2012; Laar, 2010), Ebola Virus Disease (Seidu, 2018; Michna, 2016), SARS and more recently the coronavirus pandemic. These studies suggest a seemingly active nature of media reportage on global health concerns and suggest that the Ghanaian media has assumed a central role in reporting epidemics and pandemics. These studies show the selection of varied news sources and the adoption of diverse frames through which health issues (especially ailments and diseases) are captured in the Ghanaian media.

Some studies have also focused on how the media has been instrumental in Ghana's health policy development and implementation. Ofori-Birikorang (2009) studied media coverage of the National Health Insurance Scheme between 2005 and 2007. The

study found that the media adopted diverse frames while covering the health insurance policy in Ghana. The study showed that the media showcased high levels of responsible reportage as they focused mainly on the insurance scheme and not the other implications of the policy. Ofori-Birikorang (2009) concluded in his study that the media adopted diverse frames that highlighted the policy positively. Positive frames were channelled to incite positive behaviours towards the policy. Other studies (Atinga et al., 2022; Thompson & Ofori-Parku, 2021; Amu et al., 2018) have also shown in the line arguments of Ofori-Birikorang (2009) that the media in Ghana does not only focus on reporting diseases but pay attention to health-related policy development and implementation as well.

2.10 Ethical Issues in Health Reporting

The influence of health reporting on public opinion, behaviour, and policy means that it has substantial ethical ramifications (Leask et al., 2010). To preserve public confidence, guarantee correct information is disseminated, and advance public health, ethical health reporting is crucial (Boga, 2023). The information that journalists provide has to be accurate. Contextualising and making complicated health concerns clear are crucial for preventing misunderstandings by the audience. Through dependable sources, they confirm information and prevent false information from spreading (Wallington et al., 2010; Leask, 2010).

Additionally, disseminating information based on evidence and preventing the propagation of untrue or deceptive claims are important aspects of ethical health reporting (Nambiar, 2011). It is more crucial than ever for journalists to confirm the veracity of their sources and information before reporting on health-related topics in the era of social media and false news. Journalists may make sure that their reporting is supported by solid scientific facts and does not contribute to the spread of false

information by speaking with medical professionals and using reliable sources (Boga, 2023; Shaikh et al., 2024).

In addition to assisting in the public's education about significant health concerns, this upholds the integrity and credibility of the media industry.Health reporters should aim for impartiality, delivering facts free of prejudice or undue influence by political, business, or personal interests (Bhathur, 2017). This is commonly done when health reporters utilise multiple information sources while reporting on crucial health concerns (Rao, 2014). Ensuring objectivity in health reporting is paramount. To present a balanced viewpoint, coverage should incorporate many viewpoints, particularly on contentious or complicated health (Bharthur, 20917).

The overarching aim of including ethical principles in reporting in crucial health issues is to ensure the safety of patients and the general public. In essence there has been calls to ensure that reporting must prioritise public health and safety, ensuring that information is delivered in a way that promotes healthy behaviour and adherence to health norms (Wilkins, 2006; Nurit & Guttman, 2020).

Ethical reporting should avoid instilling needless fear, panic, or injury. Sensationalism and alarmism should be avoided to avoid creating unnecessary tension and worry among the general public (Nambiar, 2011).

Health reporters must respect people's privacy and confidentiality, particularly patients and healthcare professionals. Personal health information should not be shared without consent. When reporting on particular incidents, personal information must be anonymised to preserve people's identity and privacy (Wilkins, 2006).

2.11 The Media and Pandemics

Infectious illnesses have wreaked havoc on societies throughout history. Infectious illnesses are re-emerging and developing at an unprecedented rate. Over the last decade, the globe has seen various disease outbreaks and epidemics caused by more than 20 infectious agents, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Balkhair, 2009). Over the past few years, the emergence of coronavirus-associated diseases (SARS and MERS) has proven a strong indication that pandemics persist in the world despite significant advancements in the global health (de Wit, van Doremalen, Falzarano, & Munster, 2016).

According to health officials from the Ghana Health Service, the first two cases of the coronavirus disease in Ghana were recorded in March 2020 when two visitors from Norway and Turkey entered the country, which led to a serious monitoring and contact tracing of the disease in Ghana. As of April 2020, Ghana had recorded 408 cases, forcing the government to take measures to control the spread of the disease. The Ghana Health Services required international travellers to go through mandatory quarantines. With enhanced contact tracing and testing efforts implemented across the country as a further measure against the spread of the virus, the government also introduced a lockdown of all borders to restrict international travel and importation of the virus into the country (Amponsah & Frimpong, 2020).

Pandemics are pertinent public health problems that plague the entire world. In a more simplistic definition, a pandemic concerns an epidemic that spreads globally. Thus, a pandemic is the outbreak of some infectious disease that spreads worldwide (Grennan, 2019). Since the emergence of arguably the world's biggest pandemics in the 17th century, the construction of the concept of 'Pandemic' has been a topic of

debate among scholars and health professionals. In its early constructions, the terms pandemic and epidemic were used interchangeably (Morens et al., 2009). Over time, the distinction between the two concepts became clear. The term pandemic became known between the 17th and 18th centuries as a large form of an epidemic that spreads across a vast geographic space across the world.

Regardless, placing a single well-knit definition on the concept of 'pandemic' is challenging. Morens, Folkers and Fauci (2009) state that describing a pandemic is easier than defining the concept. The authors posit that pandemics have wide geographic extensions, move in a traceable transmission from place to place very quickly, have high attack rates and explosiveness, have minimal population immunity, and are highly contagious and severely destructive. These expansive descriptions, however, lead to the point that pandemics are indeed "large-scale outbreaks of infectious diseases that can greatly increase morbidity and mortality over a wide geographic area and cause significant economic, social, and political disruption" (Madhav et al., 2017, p. 38). Evidence shows that pandemics have become more likely over the last century because of increased global travel and integration, urbanisation, land use changes, and higher exploitation of the natural environment (Jones et al., 2008).

The media has played a consistent role in communicating about pandemics over the past years. With the proliferation and intensification of media platforms across the world, the media has assumed an even more crucial role in how pandemics are communicated to audiences. Discussions on the role the media plays in tackling pandemics and epidemics have intensified, especially with the growth of public health concerns such as HIV (Brodie et al., 2003) and COVID-19 (Umar et al., 2021). Dennis (2009) posits that the intense attention that the media pay to reporting on pandemics

and epidemics has re-emphasised the need for more attention to be paid to the development of a niche form of journalism – health journalism (also known as medical journalism). Dennis's argument thus is that although health journalism may exist, the recent emergence of pandemics has exposed the low levels of attention paid to health journalism over the years. There is, therefore, the need to intensify this form of journalism to equip the media to perform their functions better in the face of global health crises.

As soon as the pandemics rear their heads, even when considered epidemics, the media informs audiences beyond the shores of the country facing a particular health problem. Often, this is because potential pandemics match perfectly with news value criteria (O'Neil & Harcup, 2009; Galtung & Ruge, 1970). These include value factors such as unexpectedness (sudden outbreak) as well as predictability (a new pandemic has been predicted for a long time), intensity increase (growing number of patients and fatalities), negativity (chance of a cataclysm), relevance (actual risks involved), meaningfulness (fear of an epidemic, personal risks), unambiguity, continuity (daily updates), and unpredictability; as to whether it will it be a severe pandemic or not? (Vasterman & Ruigrok, 2013).

To add to this, the media also seeks to contextualise the depth of the seriousness of pandemics by placing them in context with other pandemics that have plagued the world in the past. For instance, at the emergence of pandemics, the media re-visualises iconic images of the medieval plague (Black Death) and the Spanish flu (both of which are amongst the most significant pandemics to have hit the world) to frame the pandemic as deadly and create fear of it as a means of limiting its spread (Alcabes, 2009). Thus, framing pandemics to contextualise them with dread appeals is one of the core contributions of media in helping to limit the spread of pandemics.

Authors such as Chiang and Duann (2007), De la Rosa (2007), Larson et al. (2005), Lakoff (2004) and Fung, Namkoong and Brossard (2011) observed in particular that media coverage of pandemics is often clothed in fearful tones. Thus, the literature suggests that media frames of pandemics often portray fear to audiences while capturing the causes, predictions, solutions, and authorities' responsibilities during a pandemic.

As a result of the tense frames that are often employed by the media when reporting on pandemics, media coverage of pandemics can be alarming and sometimes sensational. Some studies give evidence of the fact that media coverage of global pandemics such as the Avian Flu and SARS were often overly sensational, overly emotional with charged language, and focused too much on worse-case scenarios (Berry et al., 2007; Dudo et al., 2007; Fung et al., 2011). For instance, Da Silva and Massarani (2010), in a study of Brazilian media coverage of the A/H1N1 pandemic, re-emphasise a seeming over-sensational nature of reportage, leading to a panic among media audiences.

Some studies, such as Hilton and Hunt (2010), disagree that the media over-sensationalised and over-hyped pandemics in their reportage. While studying British newspapers' coverage of the H1N1 pandemic, the study found that media reportage was neutral, non-alarmist, and quantitatively adequate on the flu. Fogarty et al. (2011) reiterated this finding when they studied Australian TV news coverage of the pandemic. They found that while media coverage of the flu was non-alarmist, about 63.4% of TV news related to its seriousness in Australia. When Holland and Blood (2010) also studied media coverage of the Swine Flu in Australia, they reached similar conclusions. They found that the media portrayed a blend of seriousness and reassurance rather than broadcasting alarming content about the flu. Collinson and

Heffernan (2014) studied the impacts of mass media during an influenza epidemic in Canada, including 'media functions' that alter transmission rates in mathematical epidemiological models, to analyse the effects of mass media during an influenza epidemic in Canada. Their findings suggest that the fate of an outbreak is determined by the media function used. The parameters that have the most significant impact on critical epidemic outcomes are different for each media function. They conclude that the functions employed to describe the influence of media during an epidemic will impact the disease model's outcomes. Media reports on pandemics also centre quite significantly on issues such as infection rates (Husemann & Fischer, 2015; Rubin et al., 2010), preventive measures (Zafri et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020), and mortality rates (Brodie et al., 2003).

It is often difficult to detach media activities from the politics of societies. Literature suggests that even while reporting on serious issues such as pandemics, the media (either local or international) tend to include political angles or concentrate on political issues as well (Hart et al., 2020; Tabong & Segtub, 2021; Tisdell, 2020). While doing a content analysis of two newspapers and selected broadcast media from India, Gupta and Sinha (2010) found that global health issues heavily competed against political content even when the health issues were topical issues across the globe. Additionally, they found that media coverage of global health issues was framed by geopolitical lines, with the Indian media leaning favourably towards the use of Western biomedicine and techniques as against homoeopathy and herbal medicines.

In another study that factored political strands in media coverage of pandemics, Hart, Chinn and Soroka (2020) concluded high levels of politicisation and polarisation in COVID-19 news coverage in the United States of America (USA). The researchers found that, on average, the name of a political actor or group was published in line

with COVID-19 news more than twice as much as the name of a scientist or science research institution. They found further that between March and the end of May 2020, news concerning COVID-19 received the most political treatment with the consistent mention of political actors, groups, or government policy. Aside from this, empirical evidence also suggests that the politicisation of news regarding pandemics tends to influence citizen behaviour toward pandemics. For instance, Van Green and Tyson (2020) found that Americans have differing opinions on the government's response, their trust in experts, and their support for preventative measures. For instance, 83 per cent of Republicans think President Trump's approach to COVID-19 is outstanding or excellent, compared to only 18 per cent of Democrats – and this is a result of the partisan nature of the American media.

Furthermore, the public is divided on how scientists are being seen and how the epidemic should be managed. While Democrats were much more confident than Republicans in 2019 that both medical scientists and scientists, in general, would act in the public's best interests, this gap widened dramatically in April 2020, particularly among medical scientists, as Democratic confidence increased while Republican confidence remained flat (Funk et al., 2020).

The media, therefore, assumes a critical role in the era of pandemics. The normative roles of the media (i.e., to inform, educate, and entertain) are fully functional, with critical attention being paid to other crucial roles such as agenda-setting, framing, priming, and advocacy during the era of global pandemics. Additionally, the media are essential in shaping people's perceptions and attitudes toward pandemics.

This role shapes how people perceive susceptibility to pandemics, causes, preventive measures, and vaccination procedures (Vai et al., 2020). The preceding suggests that

the literature on media coverage of pandemics leans more toward the coverage of the print media (Ophir, 2018). While this is true, broadcast media and digital media have also become key media aspects of pandemic reportage in the last few years, especially in the case of more recent pandemics such as H1N1, the Zika virus, Ebola, and COVID-19. Studies such as (Krawczyk et al., 2020; MacLeod, 2021; Mach et al., 2021) confirm that digital media has assumed an even more crucial role in understanding how the media covers global pandemics.

2.12 Media Coverage and Public Perceptions of Health Issues

The media has become even more powerful in recent times while adopting roles that reach far beyond just reporting the news. Aside from the vastly influential normative roles that the media plays, it has also become an essential tool that shapes the attitudes and perceptions of media consumers. Thus, the media's role in recent times is not just limited to providing information and educating media consumers. Beyond these roles, the media is chiefly responsible for influencing how people think about specific issues within society. Tied with critical functions such as the agenda-setting function, framing, and gatekeeping roles of the media, the media can effectively create public perceptions about and, in the same way, re-create how people think of critical social issues.

The media is considered an even more crucial asset in global health reporting. This is largely because how the media covers health-related stories and issues and the levels of salience the media places on these issues have critical implications for how media consumers perceive health issues (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). According to Weinstein et al. (2020), media narratives of health issues are one of the core contributors of how people first understand the causes of and solutions to health problems and other essential related issues in the world today. To a considerable

extent, how the media covers and frames health-related issues enables the development of critical health beliefs and attitudes that are directly developed due to the perceptions people have formed from media narratives on the health problem (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Thus, as Weinstein et al. (2020) argue, media reports affect the perceived dangers of health problems, perceived levels of susceptibility, and the levels at which people feel responsible for their health. Hence, during the COVID-19 pandemic era, for instance, it was mainly observed that how the media framed the virus was critical to public perception of the dangers of contracting it and the relevance of wearing nose masks.

Weinstein et al. (2020) note that since media coverage is essential to shaping public perceptions, the media must adopt more effective frames and impactful narrative techniques, especially when the health problem being considered is a disease. They argue that narrative techniques that lean too closely towards entertainment may not be too impactful. Hence, the adoption of other frames, such as fear and death frames, may create the needed perceptions of fear of diseases that are essential in managing the health problem (Demirtas-Madran, 2021; Fatima, 2020; Otterbring et al., 2021). Weinstein et al. (2020) note that media coverage of policies and solutions to health problems ensures a sense of hope among media consumers. Weinstein et al. (2020) further note that the adoption of hope frames and encouraging narratives are also critical in instilling some confidence in media consumers to reach solutions. Otterbring et al. (2021) argue that adopting positive frames may also produce negative perceptions and behaviours from media consumers. The authors argue that media coverage of global health crises that includes survival and hope frames may create risk-averse perceptions of the disease. This often results in media consumers developing a shallow sense of susceptibility to the disease. In the case of global

pandemics such as the H1N1 and COVID-19 pandemics, this has led to high infection and mortality rates. Van Bavel et al. (2016) argue against this by noting that while positive frames may encourage lethargy and a lack of compliance among media consumers during pandemics, the adopting of negative frames such as death frames, loss frames, and the like are more likely to produce positive health perceptions and behaviours from people. Hence, adopting negative frames is ideal and tends to influence media consumers to be more attentive to the pandemic.

While studying how the media covered the Yellow Fever and Avian Flu Young, Norman, and Humphreys (2008) found that media consumers attached higher levels of severity to diseases that appeared more often in the media than those not so frequently reported on. Furthermore, their study found that the forms of frames adopted in reporting these two diseases contributed to the levels of fear and panic that people attached to the diseases. Chang (2011) also investigated the impact of media coverage and framing of the H1N1 pandemic in Taiwan. A content analysis of Taiwanese newspapers found that the media focused mainly on using alarm frames while reporting on the virus. It was found that the use of the alarm frames evoked fear and increased perceived severity and vulnerability among media consumers.

Some studies have also been conducted to understand the influence of media coverage and framing of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for public perceptions of the disease. While establishing quite varied findings, most of these studies lean towards the idea that media coverage of the pandemic and how the media framed issues concerning the disease influenced how media consumers perceived the virus, especially in areas of adherence and fear perceptions towards the disease. A study conducted by Melki et al. (2022) showed that high levels of media exposure to fear frames and other negative frames resulted in high compliance among media

consumers in Lebanon during the COVID-19 season. The study found that the more people were exposed to media messages that portrayed the pandemic as dangerous, the more media consumers perceived the virus as dangerous. This further resulted in the willingness to adhere more often to prevention measures. Another study by Leigh et al. (2020) confirms that media coverage and framing of the Coronavirus pandemic critically impacted how the public perceives issues regarding the pandemic. The study found that media coverage had some levels of influence on how respondents perceived preventive measures such as social distancing and frequent washing of hands. Leigh et al. (2020) note that media coverage and framing of the pandemic were essential in shaping media consumers' perceptions of the virus.

Faasse and Newby (2020) found in their study which investigated media coverage implications on media consumers' perceptions of the coronavirus in Australia, that respondents perceived the pandemic considering misconceptions and misinformation. Faasse and Newby's (2020) study concludes that how the media covered and framed issues concerning the pandemic was crucial to creating and accepting varied forms of publicly held conspiracy theories and misconceptions. Therefore, the study concluded that media coverage of the pandemic led to different conspiracy theories, misconceptions, and misinformation. Nagler et al. (2020) contend that public perceptions of the virus within the context of conspiracy theories and misinformation were typically occasioned because of the different narratives within the media during the pandemic era. Hence, Nagler et al. (2020) conclude in their study that conflicting information within the media and conspiracy theories propagated through the US media influence people to believe these perceptions.

Some of the studies also showed that how the media covered the virus and the narratives adopted had critical implications on public perception of vaccines and

vaccination programs (Machingaidze & Wiysonge, 2021; Wilson & Wiyosonge, 2020; Gershon & Gneezy, 2021). These studies suggest how the media reported on the pandemic influenced vaccine hesitancy levels among media consumers. The literature, therefore, aligns media coverage and exposure to perceptions of vaccines and vaccination programs across the world.

2.13 Media Coverage of the Coronavirus

The emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) hit the world with perhaps one of the biggest destructions globally. Diverse human activities have been shaped in a rather radical and reactionary manner since the virus outbreak, with many facets of human endeavours developing crucial make-shift measures to adapt to the current way of life the virus had introduced. Media activities around the globe have also been shaped just as global politics, economics, and cultural life have been (Tunez-Lopez et al., 2020). This is particularly evidenced in the strategies that media organisations adopted over the last three years while reporting on a novel virus that plunged the entire world into darkness.

Tunez-Lopez, Vaz-Alvarez and Fieiras-Ceide (2020) argue that broadcast organisations in European nations such as Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland underwent significant structural changes to provide in-depth reportage on the novel coronavirus at the advent of the spread of the virus. The researchers found in their study of top TV stations in the nations mentioned above that the pandemic forced the stations to develop new programs, which were more health-inclined and did not exist as part of their usual program line-up.

Furthermore, there was an observed switch from the usual technical and professional approach to news reporting on health issues to a more emotional approach when reportage of COVID-19 began to dominate media spaces in these media organisations. In addition, there was a formal hybridisation of normative TV content production and online content production. Hence, the researchers found that media organisations have begun blending online media content with the usual TV broadcast format to present news and other content. Dependence on internet-enabled software grew, and news production processes were altered towards remote journalism content (Tunez-Lopez, M, Vaz-Alvarez, & Fieiras-Ceide, 2020).

The impact that the coronavirus pandemic has had on global media is well-seaded in literature, with some scholars looking critically at the structural and strategic changes international and local media have had to undergo in order to not only survive a business but also function as crucial estates of societies (Sheresheva et al., 2021; Hugh, 2021; Hall, 2020). Conversely, some scholars have also paid considerable attention to how the media have covered the emergence and spread of the virus (Kiptinness et al., 2021; Zafri et al., 2021; Uribe, 2020; Sharp et al., 2021). In times of pandemics and other large-scale public health problems, the media become a reliable source of information for most people apart from government and health officials (Tunez-Lopez et al., 2020). Speck (2020) claims that while confidence levels of media consumers may differ based on the type of media platform, it remains a given nonetheless that the media is crucial in providing accurate, timely information to audiences during pandemics. For instance, Speck (2020) finds in his study that Germans, Italians, British, and French media users relied on more TV news bulletins to access COVID-19-related information than any other form of media. 47 per cent (47%) of the sample studied in these nations combined access to different social

media platforms, but only 14 per cent considered the platform a reliable source of information. Even fewer citizens (9%) turned to radio channels for news concerning the pandemic. Despite the seeming differentials amongst the various media platforms, the media as a single entity was captured as the most popular and reliable source of information regarding the pandemic.

The media focused on different issues when reporting on the novel coronavirus. Sharp et al. (2021) account after they studied Irish media coverage of COVID-19 that the media in Ireland focused more on human interest stories, such as the spread of the virus among women and children as well as mortality rates, rather than technical issues such as viral loads, antibodies, and testing procedures. The researchers were also interested in the ethical dimensions of media reportage vis-a-vis how the media used official government reports in their coverage. The study found that the media exercised high levels of professionalism while dealing with government reports as news sources on COVID-19. The study found that Irish media did not misrepresent the content of government reports; however, they exercised some selectivity in choosing which contents were broadcast and which were not.

Within Africa, some studies have looked at the media-COVID-19 coverage nexus (Dralega & Napakol, 2022; Chibuwe et al., 2022; Apuke & Omar, 2021; Wasserman et al., 2021). While these studies generally provide similar findings from studies done in Europe and other Western nations, they provide the basis for contextualising empirical knowledge of the phenomena in the continent. Evans (2021) focused on two national newspapers in the Kingdom of Eswatini: The *Times of Eswatini* and the *Eswatini Observer.* The study focused on how the virus's coverage and representation changed when 'new information' regarding the infection surfaced. The journey of the virus in space and time and its profile in the press were investigated,

from being represented in a distanced form to becoming a localised panic. When the virus gained broad notice, news reports focused on its outbreak, then moved on to its internal development and how the government dealt with it. The findings demonstrate that political indexing helped to cover the COVID-19 epidemic. The perspectives of people in authority were substantially replicated in the media, particularly the presentation of lockdown restrictions as reasonable and justified.

Apuke and Omar (2021) also investigated TV news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The focus was on the privately held African Independent Television (AIT) and the government-controlled Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Apuke and Omar (2021) intervieweed a total of 30 to learn about their perspectives on the pandemic's coverage in the media. The researchers discovered that the TV stations gave appropriate attention to COVID-19 concerns.

The reportage of COVID-19, on the other hand, received more attention from the private media. By implication, the private media aired more COVID-19 items on its primetime programs, which often also served as the initial headline. They also had more stories that were shown for 61 seconds or more. The studies also revealed that the government-controlled media mentioned more government officials, whilst the commercial media focused more on the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). To add to this, Apuke and Omar (2021) also found while investigating the tone of coverage of the pandemic that private media's coverage was harsher and more negative tone, and most of them incorporated visual and motion video.

Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) examined how the COVID-19 pandemic was covered in the international news media. The BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, and People's Daily featured. The findings revealed that the media was critical in delivering information throughout the early phases of the outbreak, influencing public views of

the virus and leading to its containment. This finding contradicts research by Basch et al. (2020), which looked at Google videos from January to February 2020 and showed that mortality rates were the most frequently cited topic across all videos. In a study that combined different media types in Nigeria (TV, radio, and newspapers), Gever and Ezeah (2020) tried to investigate the levels of emphasis the media placed on reporting COVID-19. The study found that until the virus entered Nigeria, the media paid little attention to it. However, there was an immediate upsurge in coverage of the disease in Nigeria as soon as the virus hit the country.

The role of the media in presenting timely information not just within some locality but in international coverage is essential during the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, there is a need for the media to engage in comprehensive coverage of the virus even in its initial stages. This is further evidenced in Zhou et al.'s (2020) study of media coverage of the spread of the virus during its early phase. Using a deterministic dynamic mode to examine the interaction of the disease's progression, media coverage intensification, and cumulative mortality rates and rates of infections, the researchers conclude that the media was essential in mitigating the pandemic when it played its roles effectively and immediately when the virus emerged. Thus, the study found that using the media to inform people during the early phases of the outbreak was critical in managing rates of infections and mortality.

As Zhou et al. (2020) established, media coverage of the outbreak in its initial phases has been critical to combating the virus. In agreement, Gozzi et al. (2020) also account that this strategic media mitigation of the outbreak is a result of the media's potency in driving attention toward the pandemic. Gozzi et al. (2020) conclude in their study that public attention and response were determined and driven by media coverage and not necessarily the spread of the virus itself. In essence, they discovered that when the

prevalence of the disease grew, so did media coverage. As the findings of this research reveal, news media coverage of the pandemic grew in tandem with rises in viral incidence, particularly local incidence in Eswatini, where the study was conducted.

The findings Nwaku, Ezena and Ogbodo (2020) made in their study suggest quite rightly that although media coverage may grow within nations in tandem with the severity of the pandemic, the frequency of coverage among media organisations differs significantly. Their study employed the quantitative content analysis approach to study how Nigerian and Chinese media framed the coronavirus pandemic. The study considered four newspapers (2 each from the selected nations): The *Sun, The Vanguard, The Guardian,* and *The Punch.* The study's findings revealed that *The Punch* reported on the outbreak more often than any other newspaper. This was followed by *The Sun, The Guardian,* and *Vanguard* newspapers, respectively. Across the selected newspapers, ten frames of stories about the events surrounding the coronavirus epidemic were discovered. Awareness, confinement, fatality, conspiracy, political influence, impact, mobilisation, support/aid, misinformation, and stigmatisation/boycott framing are some of them.

Scholars argue that the tone of media coverage of issues adds to how media consumers comprehend them. Many studies found that media coverage of the Coronavirus was toned in diverse ways. Literature suggests that different newspapers use different tones while covering the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Dahal and Khatri (2021), while conducting a content analysis of two Nepalese English language newspapers, *The Kathmandu Post (*privately owned) and *The Rising (*state-owned), that the tone employed in media coverage of *The Kathmandu Post,* which is privately

owned, was more negative than that of *The Rising* newspaper, which was owned and managed by the state.

2.14 Media Framing of COVID-19

Framing is an essential element of media coverage of pandemics that contextualises stories and creates some meaning for media consumers (Hirneisen, 2020).

Media framing is critical to understanding how the media covered the COVID-19 pandemic. A study by Bolsen, Palm and Kingsland (2020) appropriates the relevance of media framing in the pandemic coverage. The study further advances the argument that media coverage through the diverse frames they employ shapes audiences' perspectives, attitudes, and knowledge systems. Bolsen, Palm and Kingsland (2020) studied how different media framed the virus's origins and its impact on audiences exposed to such frames.

The study tested two frames that emerged from American and Chinese media on the pandemic's origins: either from zoonotic (animals) or from human-engineered scientific research. The study revealed that Chinese media framed the pandemic as originating from zoonotic origins and not created in laboratories in China. Conversely, American media frames suggested human creation as the virus's origin. The study further found that persons exposed to one form of frame, i.e., zoonotic frames, tend to believe that the virus emerged from animals and got transmitted to humans. Persons who were exposed to frames that favoured the theory that the virus was created in Chinese labs tended to have strong beliefs in that regard. This study indicates that frames are crucial elements of media reportage that form how people perceive issues surrounding the pandemic.

The power of the media frames during the pandemic era of the is so powerful that media organisations use it as a political strategy in international political competitions.

At the advent of the pandemic, Americans, for instance, became very critical of China for its role in the virus's origins. A study by Jia and Lu (2021) suggests that American media sought to dent the image of China because of the kinds of frames they adopted while reporting on the pandemic. The researchers found that most of the frames that covered the pandemic in US's *Wall Street Journal* were negative and designed to accomplish three main tasks – name and shame China for mismanaging the origins of the virus, blame China for the emergence of the virus and tame China's economic ascendency because of the impacts of the pandemic. Hence, frames that the *Wall Street Journal* adopted simply sought to blacken the international image of China as the main perpetrator of a global crime because of their inability to curtail the pandemic.

In a similar study by Chinese media researcher Wu (2021), the researcher tried to investigate the differentials evident in the frames adopted by US and Chinese media in reporting the Coronavirus. Unlike Jia and Lu (2021), Wu (2021) was not interested in competing themes and frames that played out in international politics and supremacy during the pandemic. Wu (2021) was interested in how different media from different nations depicted the pandemic, although they reported on the same event.

The study sampled from *The New York Times, The Washington Post* (from the United States of America), *China Daily, and Global Times* (from China) to investigate this phenomenon. The study revealed that while the US newspapers focused more on themes or frames such as family and friends and daily life within the pandemic era, Chinese media focused more on the domestic economy and international relations. The construction of these themes underpins the direction of agenda-setting that was of interest to newspapers. Thus, by emphasising themes and frames that depict the economic survival and development in China by the Chinese media, audiences tend

to pay more attention to the economic dimensions of the pandemic than anything else. The same is true for all the other frames and themes identified within the research.

The intensity and life span of pandemics have a crucial bearing on the kinds of frames the media employs when reporting on them. (Blakely, 2003). Fatima (2020) provides critical evidence of this in her study of editorial pieces in the *New York Times.* She considered January, February, and March 2020 as timelines for her studies while subjecting editorial pieces of the newspaper to qualitative content analysis. The researcher found eight constructive (solution-oriented, future-oriented, public empowerment-oriented, mathematical, co-creation, concern, and solidarity frames) and seven negative (blame attribution, conflict, consequences, sensational language, and denial) frames from the analysed contents.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the structure and appearance of frames alter over time as the severity of the crisis varies. This transformation necessitates adaptable coverage and a shift in focus to newly developing concerns. Overall, the study found that more than half (53.9%) of the sampled editorial pieces (n = 26) had negative frames as against 47.1% which had constructive frames. Nkapku, Ezema and Ogbodo (2020) also conducted a content analysis of newspaper coverage of the pandemic in multiple newspapers in Nigeria. Their study considered the major frames that *The Sun, The Guardian, Vanguard,* and *Punch* newspapers. The study found ten major frames after investigating 1070 reports published in these newspapers. These included frames such *as* awareness frame, containment frame, fatality frame, conspiracy frame, political influence frame, effects frame, mobilisation frame, support frame, *and* misinformation frame*. As* Fatima (2020) acknowledges, the researchers also found varying frequencies of frames used in reporting the pandemic by various media organisations. However, the containment frame was found to be one of the

most used frames across all four newspapers, with the conspiracy frame being the least employed.

Kiptinness and Okoye (2021) also investigated framing strategies adopted by newspapers in Eastern Africa, focusing on Kenya and Tanzania. The framing theory evaluated frames communicated during COVID-19 coverage in Kenya and Tanzania between February and April 2020. A quantitative assessment of the Daily Nation and Citizen newspapers revealed distinct patterns of viral framing in the media. The findings suggest that eight main frames were employed in the reportage of both newspapers. They include basic frame, preventive frame, treatment, medical, social effects, economic effects, political frames, *and* personal frames. The findings indicate that social effects frames were employed most in the reports of both newspapers from the two nations. However, an individual assessment of the coverage from the nations indicates that while the *Daily Newspaper* in Kenya dwelt more on framing the pandemic as a social problem, *The Citizen* of Tanzania employed a dominant basic frame and depicted the challenge as a global problem.

Literature on media framing of the coronavirus pandemic, therefore, suggests a wide range of diverse frames that many organisations employ to contextual stories concerning the disease and direct public perceptions regarding the spread of the pandemic. Frames that were employed in reporting the coronavirus pandemic are organisation specific. Regardless, some frames can be considered pertinent within the literature, indicating that such frames were widely employed and effectively utilised as well. Frames such as human-interest frames, frames that focus on the economic impacts of the pandemic, and frames that look at the political angles of media reportage, amongst others, run through empirical literature, as evidenced here.

2.15 The Media and Coronavirus Pandemic: A Focus on Tone of Coverage

One aspect of media coverage, especially within health communication in recent times concerns the tone of coverage that media organisations engage when reporting in health issues (Apuke & Omar, 2021). Media scholars have indicated the relevance of ensuring that media reports on global health crisis take the form of some tone of coverage to exact the role of the media in mitigating health crisis situations. These tones are often positive, negative and neutral in nature and they reflect the perspectives that the media intends to project while reporting on health issues. Furthermore, the tone of media coverage of issues adds to how media consumers comprehend them (Ritchart et al., 2024).

A number of studies provide evidence on how tones were adopted and used in the coverage and framing of the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, Literature suggests that different media organisations and forms used different tones while covering the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Dahal and Khatri (2021), while conducting a content analysis of two Nepalese English language newspapers, The *Kathmandu Post* (privately owned) and *The Rising* (state-owned), that the tone employed in media coverage of The Kathmandu Post, which is privately owned, was more negative than that of The Rising newspaper, which was owned and managed by the state. Other studies have also noted the use of negative and harsh tones within media coverage of the pandemic. Apuke and Omar (2021) also found while investigating the tone of coverage of the pandemic that private media's coverage was harsher and more negative tone, and most of them incorporated visual and motion video to express negative and harsh tones during their coverage of the pandemic.

Ritchart et al., (2024) also note that the media engaged in the use of positive and encouraging tones when reporting on the pandemic. This tone was maintained and

was dominant across news media content in the USA from the emergence of the pandemic through to the vaccination phases in the country. According to Tunez-Lopez et al. (2020) the media switched between neutral tones to a positive emotional tone when the pandemic intensified. Thus, the study suggests that unlike what was observed among USA media platforms, media tone of coverage of the pandemic changed in line with the intensification of the pandemic.

Krawczyk et al's (2020) study of 172 news portal across 11 nations provide evidence that online news media also engaged in representing the pandemic in different tones. Sentiment analysis run on the data indicates that while the tone used by the sampled news portals was negative, considering the context within which they were employed, they cannot be considered holistically negative. Thus, media coverage of the pandemic was not entirely negative, although using such negative themes as death, fear, and crisis run through the reportage.

Essentially, the literature show that negative, neutral and positive tones have been adopted by different media organisation as they covered the pandemic. These tones capture media coverage forms such as urgency, concern and anxiety that have been used by the media to cover the pandemic.

2.16 Online Media Coverage and Framing of the Coronavirus

The role and relevance of online and digital platforms in the practice of media across the globe today cannot be overstated. The significance of online media platforms has developed a significant revolution in the global media space in many ways (Sey, 2011). Information sharing has become easier and faster (Villi & Noguera, 2017), while media consumers now have access to many media products and information on demand (Ogidi & Utulu, 2016). Within health news coverage, new media or online media

platforms are vital formats of media that media consumers access for information and education. The empirical literature suggests a comprehensive utilisation and impact of global online media during the coronavirus pandemic (Krawczyk et al., 2020; Uribe, 2020; Zhang & Shaw, 2020; Basch et al., 2020).

There is no doubt about the level of significance and relevance online media platforms placed on reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. It is to be noted that the restrictions imposed because of the pandemic resulted in a subtle decline in the operations of traditional media as most organisations began to look at digital platforms for operating. As a result, there was a boom in online media activities as the primary source of information concerning the pandemic in the decline of traditional news sources (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021; Sheresheva et al., 2021). For instance, Krawczyk et al. (2020) investigated news production trends on online platforms in 172 major online news portals across 11 countries to ascertain the role and relevance of online news portals in the wake of the challenges facing traditional news organisations. They sampled 26 million news articles across the selected online platforms for a quantitative study. The researcher found that 25% of headline stories in English-oriented news portals concerned the coverage of the novel COVID-19. Additionally, sentiment analysis run on the data indicates that while the tone used by the sampled news portals was negative, considering the context within which they were employed, they cannot be considered holistically negative. Thus, media coverage of the pandemic was not entirely negative, although using such negative themes as death, fear, and crisis run through the reportage.

While Krawczyk et al. (2020) focused on the frequency of reports concerning the pandemic on online platforms, other studies have looked critically at investigating themes, issues, and frames that online news platforms use in their coverage. Basch,

Kecojecivic and Wagner (2020) present some crucial findings from studies of such ilk. They looked at the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in online versions of highly circulated US dailies. The researchers considered 5,285 news articles from *Wall Street Journal Online, USA Today Online, and New York Times Online.* Using theme analysis, all articles were loaded into Dedoose mixed-methods software. The number of times each identified topic appeared in evaluated articles and extracts illustrating the theme was counted. "*Financial effect of COVID-19*" (11.6 per cent), "N*arratives of afflicted persons*" (7.0 per cent), "*Death and death rates*" (6.8%), "*Public precaution advice*" (6.2 %), and "*Quarantine*" (6.2 %) were the five most prominent topics in evaluated publications (5.9 per cent). The online news platforms reported not only the numbers (infections, ventilators, deaths, and economic losses) but also the context of the pandemic, such as the economic impact, efforts to slow the spread of infection, the transition to working from home, the presence of health disparities, the scientific search for reliable COVID-19 tests, and the impact on supply chains.

Onwe et al. (2020) studied online news reportage of the coronavirus while looking critically at the different frames employed by online media. This study aimed to see how three online publications - *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times*, and *Daily Post* presented the COVID-19 epidemic in Nigeria. The study's design is based on Frame Analysis Theory but also uses Relational Content Analysis. Fear and death, government and political power, and palliative frames emerged as the prominent frames among the three online publications analysed for three months.

The researchers concluded that online newspapers reported about the COVID-19 outbreak in a way that made readers nervous before the pandemic's final emergence. In a similar framing analysis of global media coverage of the coronavirus, Ogbodo et al. (2020) also found nine (9) distinct frames that popular online news media across

the globe employed while reporting on the pandemic. The study collected 6,145 online news items from eight leading global media outfits in the Americas' *New York Times* and *CNN*; Africa, *The Punch*; Asia, *People's Daily;* and Europe*, BBC, Daily Mail, Vatican News*, and *Le Monde*.

These eight media organisations are both elite, religious, and popular and have a global reach in this era of social media. The study found frames such as economic consequence, human interest, conflict, morality/religion, Attribution of Responsibility and Blame, politicisation, ethnocentrism, fear or scaremongering, and hope frame. The study concludes that Human Interest frames dominated global media framing of the pandemic. Other frequently used frames included Attribution of Responsibility or blame frames, scaremongering or fear factor frames, and economic consequence frames.

Uribe (2020) was also interested in examining online news frames employed by the US media during their pandemic coverage. Furthermore, she sought to investigate the dynamics involved in how, over a given period during the pandemic, the frames employed by the media changed or evolved. The study used the content analysis approach to investigate this phenomenon within online news portals *CNN, Fox News,* and *The New York Times,* using January 1st, 2020, to March 13th, 2020, as the time frame. In all, 70 articles were sampled for Uribe's study. The study found that over time, coverage of the online media platforms thickened in intensity, with the media organisations paying more attention to the pandemic because of the frequency of their publications. Thus, Uribe (2020) observed a significant rise in news publications regarding the pandemic on all three media platforms as the pandemic grew in the US. Furthermore, the study found that the media focused on 17 core issues while reporting the coronavirus pandemic. The researcher themed the focus of the stories as

international coverage of the virus, implications for the USA, the role of China, US government response, the response of international governments, linkage to SARS/MERS and Ebola, Health care systems, Lockdown, implications for travelling, public health emergency, racism, and xenophobia, testing, and vaccination, economic impact, personal effects, religion, little threats, number of mortalities or fatalities. Uribe (2020) found these themes as the core of media reportage of online media in the US. Uribe (2020) also observed a media-specific change in how these themes were represented. Hence, Uribe (2020) found that over time, some themes were captured in the different media organisations in line with the way these organisations covered the pandemic. This indicates that media coverage, focus, and framing of issues varied greatly over time and from one media organisation to another.

2.17 Ghanaian Media Coverage and Framing of Pandemics

Evidence from the literature suggests that although not documented well, the Ghanaian media has engaged in some forms of active reportage on the issue of pandemics both in and outside the country. The Ghanaian media has been central to reporting on pandemics and global health crisis issues and is crucial in changing behaviours and attitudes towards these pandemics (Benefo & Takyi, 2002). It will be acknowledged that within the enclave of pandemic reporting, behavioural change is an essential role that the media is tasked with. Regarding this effect, the Ghanaian media have been crucial (Perry, 2006). Indeed, while observation of the Ghanaian media and its coverage will reveal some high levels of attention to reporting on pandemics, the available literature is scant, especially with the exclusion of studies concerning the coronavirus pandemic. A majority of the scant literature, however, centres mainly on how the Ghanaian media has reported on the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the forms of frames that have been adopted in this reportage.

Smith and Tietaah (2017) focused on Ghanaian media coverage of Meningitis outbreaks in Ghana in two online media organisations in Ghana – graphiconline.com and *myjoyonline.com*. The study was focused on evaluating the adopted frames and the levels of prominence and sources of information used by the media. The study found that stories on the pandemic received much attention in the media. The study further found that 'action' and 'consequence' were the major themes the two media organisations used to represent Ghana's pandemic. Additionally, the findings made by Smith and Tietaah (2017) indicate that the media sourced most of their news stories from government officials and health experts. Very little attention was paid to affected individuals and members of the Ghanaian community.

Sesenu (2016) also adopted the qualitative content analysis approach to investigate media coverage of HIV/AIDS in the *Daily Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* from 2000 to 2015. The study supported the idea that media coverage of pandemics in the country is in phases and that there is often a peak phase where media coverage is heightened. The study also found a decline phase where the media focuses less on the coverage and framing of issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in response to changing trends within society and policy. Evidence from the study also supports the use of government official news sources as dominant sources of news for the coverage of HIV/AIDS in the country. As identified by the researchers, the frames adopted in the coverage of the stories included political frames, prevention frames, funding, and transmission frames.

Concerning the frames adopted in the coverage of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Jones (2017) found that the stigmatisation frame was adopted often in broadcast news coverage more than any other frames used in the media. Hence, the study found that

broadcast media in the country focused keenly on the representation of the disease as a stigmatisation disease.

Not many studies on the Ebola virus pandemic exist of Ghanaian origin, which can be attributed to the fact that the pandemic had minimal direct effects on the nation. However, a study that prompts some interest for the subjects this study is Thompson's (2021) probe into Ghanaian media discourse on the Ebola vaccine trials in Ghana. The study looked particularly at how the media covered the news of vaccine trials in the country – a critical phase in the cycle of pandemics. Hence, this study assumes some relevance in understanding the various phases that the media engaged in while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. Thompson found that the vaccine trial phase was negatively represented within the Ghanaian media. The adopted frames drew on socio-cultural and political contexts to downplay the relevance of such trials in the country. Furthermore, the study found some partisan-political framing adopted within the pandemic's coverage processes.

2.18 Ghanaian Media Framing of the Coronavirus Pandemic

An observatory sweep of the literature in Ghana prompts the idea that there is very little readily available literature on how the Ghanaian media covered and framed the pandemic in the country. Draga et al. (2022) adopted a rather complex approach to studying the coronavirus pandemic in diverse African nations. The study paid critical attention to the government's use of Facebook pages in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe. The study is critical for analysis because the researchers present critical insights and dynamics to the digital media reportage of the virus. The findings show that the government adopted scare-mongering frames to represent the

virus, especially in Ghana in the initial pandemic stages. However, media messages on Facebook shifted to frames of hope towards periods after the lockdown.

The social media narrative on the pandemic in Ghana presents a critical means of understanding the core issues that social media focuses on within the COVID-19 discourse. Tabong and Segtub (2021) found in their study that the social media narrative on the pandemic was centred on critical issues, such as the misconceptions about black people possessing immunity against the virus. Additionally, the study found that the social media narrative in Ghana covered the conception that locally manufactured gin (*akpeteshie)* could cure the virus.

2.19 Phases of Media Reportage on Pandemics and Health Crises

According to Downs (1972), the media rarely focuses on a particular issue for long. That is to say that media coverage or representation of issues is in some way transient and does not stick to specific issues for very long. To properly conceptualise this phenomenon exhibited by the media, Downs (1972) developed the idea of the 'issue-attention cycle' of the media to signify the seeming tentative nature of coverage the media accords issues. The implication is that the media often covers issues in different phases and that media coverage of socio-political and economic issues is not mono-dimensional.

For whichever issue the media reports on, diverse phases or stages of reportage are adopted. These phases are often mutually exhaustive and exhibit distinct characteristics (Shih et al., 2008). Many case studies have shown that journalists and the practice of journalism in recent times have become more event-based than anything else. As a result, journalists tend to focus on reporting on events rather than issues (Singer & Endremy, 1994). These event-based forms of reportage imply that

media reportage of issues adopt a phase-based approach as events prompt different phases of coverage (Shih et al., 2008).

Downs (1972) posits that the media often adopts a five-stage approach in reporting crucial health crises. This phase-based approach covers the entirety of the lifetime of pandemics and epidemics, from their break-out to the identification of potential vaccinations and the eventual decline of the health crisis. According to Downs (1972), the first stage that the media focuses on or engages in is the problem identification stage or phase. Downs (1972) captures that this is the initial phase, and hence, the health crisis has yet to attract much public attention. In this phase, only a tiny proportion of society, often experts and small interest groups, are aware of the health crisis. Media coverage at this stage is often very measured. There is often very little media attention on the health crisis as it has yet to evolve into a large-scale pandemic. The media, therefore, engages in sporadic reporting of the health issue with little detail.

As Downs (1972) captures, the second phase comprises reporting on the increasing public attention being paid to the health crisis slowly developing into a pandemic. Public awareness is heightened in this phase as mirrored or reflected by the media. The media discusses the dire consequences of the health crises in line with death tolls, property loss, and the effects of regular social and economic living. The media also discusses and reports on the financial implications of averting the health crisis.

The third phase focuses on how the media covers efforts by responsible stakeholders in dealing with the pandemic, while the fourth phase deals with the gradual decline of the pandemic as a result of efforts engaged by responsible stakeholders. In the fourth phase, media coverage is focused on reporting the pandemic or health crisis as a declining phenomenon with a significant decline in spread and consequence. In the

last phase, media reports on the health issue declined significantly, with the media beginning to place less significance on issues concerning the health crisis. There is often very little reportage on the health crisis, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Pan and Meng (2016) viewed the various frames that the media adopted while covering the flu pandemic through the lenses of a three-stage crisis management approach. The authors perceived that the frames adopted by the USA media were expressed in three main stages – pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. Pan and Meng (2016) argue that the flu pandemic, like all forms of pandemics, is a crisis and exhibits three stages in its life cycle. They mention that the flu pandemic had a pre-crisis phase where the flu was not defined as a pandemic, a crisis phase where it became a global pandemic, and a pre-crisis phase where experts developed vaccines and the flu was averted. According to the researchers, media coverage and framing mimicked this three-stage approach. Hence, they found that all the media-adopted frames had pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases.

Kanyika and Elia's (2021) study, which covered how the media covered HIV/AIDS in Tanzania over time, showed that, ultimately, the media were involved in just two phases of reportage when covering the epidemic. They found in their study that the media had a phase of heightened reportage to capture the sense of urgency and the need to pay attention to the pandemic as soon as numbers on the disease hike. The second phase of the reportage in Tanzania is often characterise d by an increasing decline of reports on the pandemic as the numbers also decline. Kanyika and Elia (2021), therefore, posit a two-phase approach that was used in reporting on the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Tanzania.

Indeed, media coverage of the different pandemics that have been observed in the world is but a typical reflection of the global media culture of placing prominence and salience. The coverage of pandemics across the globe has assumed an episodic and event-based nature. The media places importance on certain events that happen during the pandemic and later shifts its attention to other issues as and when they emerge and are perceived as important (Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman, & Abedin, 2020).

2.20 Phases of Media Reportage on the Coronavirus Pandemic

Very little literature exists regarding media coverage and framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in a phase-based approach. Thus, while many studies have focused on the coverage and frames adopted in media coverage of the pandemic, scant literature looks at the phase-by-phase approach the media adopted while reporting on the pandemic.

Zafri et al. (2021) focused on newspaper coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. The findings posited by these authors prompt the assumption that there exists a four-staged approach that the Bangladesh media adopted in reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that the first stage of the approach covers preparedness. In this phase, media coverage is highly characterise d by awareness creation of the pandemic. The media's coverage is also focused on assessing the risk management tendencies of its home nation while also deliberating and broadcasting the possible preventive measures available to prevent the pandemic.

The first phase is often characterise d by a heavy emphasis on the early warning signs and systems for detecting the pandemic. Phase two of the approach covers how the media focuses on the response of experts, governments, and all other significant stakeholders in dealing with the pandemic. The researchers argued that the media focused on testing, tracing contacts, and isolation during this stage. The media also

focused on and framed issues regarding functional healthcare systems, governments' strategies for enforcing lockdown measures, and distribution of primary health and vaccination aid. Zafri et al. (2021) also noted that the second phase of media reportage hinged on framing and covering frontline workers and incentives provided by governments to them.

The third phase of media coverage, as identified by Zafri et al. (2021), was the recovery reportage phase. In this phase, there was much emphasis on the effectiveness of the various response strategies adopted in stage two. Hence, the media was focused on the coverage of acceleration activities towards recovery, response activities, and the provision and effective use of stimulus packages. Stage four media reportage was focused on mitigation strategies that were adopted. The media focused on the development of drugs and vaccination exercises across the world and in Bangladesh. The media was also focused on reporting on education and capacity-building strategies that had been adopted, as well as the policies that were developed and adopted by the Bangladeshi government. Gerlach (2016) and Hirneisen (2020) agree that three core phases often characterise media coverage of health crises. In his study of how the *New York Times* covered and framed the coronavirus pandemic, Hirneisen (2020) found a similar three-phased approach to coverage. The author contends that during phase one, the sounding of the alarm phase, the media's reportage concerns essentially raising awareness of the coronavirus pandemic. Media reports in the *New York Times* focused on reporting on the levels and speed of spread and mortality rates of the pandemic. The newspaper also adopted diverse frames that purported the need for humanitarian aid, philanthropy, and other aid forms in the hardest-hit nations.

The second phase considers a mix of diverse reportage frames and nature that cover national preparedness, security systems, and aids that the hardest-hit nations are receiving. There was also some focus on the increasing spread of diseases in new areas. The authors advance that due to the increasing number of media organisations and the seeming falling standards of journalism, the phase also exhibits diverse levels of misinformation and disinformation.

Phase three, as advanced by Hirneisen (2020), describes how the media focuses on disease containment strategies and their impacts on decreasing the spread of the disease. Media frames are developed to provide hope for averting the disease as the media focus on improved medical systems and equipment as well as drugs to mitigate the spread of the disease and its eventual eradication.

Therefore, the knowledge within the literature shows that global media adopted a phase-based approach while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. The studies that have been reviewed showed a strong inclination toward the idea that the media engaged in a more event-based approach that made their reportage more episodic. Hence, the media focused on reporting the different events that characterise d the coronavirus pandemic (Oyeniran et al., 2022). This could have mainly resulted in the multi-phase approach that was adopted in their coverage of the pandemic.

2.21 Global Health Crises and Information Disorder

According to Umar (2020), information disorders have become crucial topics especially in recent times following global crisis situations such as wars, economic recessions, and pandemics. While the value of accurate, truthful information is a powerful tool to dealing with some of the world's greatest crises, information disorder, characterised by falsehood, misinformation and disinformation, is an even more powerful weapon (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). Pennycook ad Rand (2021) explains

that information disorder entails inaccuracies in information intended to be disseminated to a group of people. Essentially, information disorder consists of disinformation and misinformation. Misinformation covers the spread of false information due to ignorance, errors and without the intent to deceive. Disinformation, on the other hand, entails the intentional spread of false information with the intent to deceive the receivers of the information (Sadiku et al., 2018).

Information dissemination during global health crises such as pandemics is essential. Hence, as Pennycook and Rand (2021) indicate, information disorder during crisis periods has negative influences on averting the crisis. During a health crisis, the spread of false information, either intentionally or without intent, has critical consequences on how the crisis is mitigated (Sell et al., 2020). Since people rely on information to keep themselves aware of health crises, preventive measures, and cure strategies, false information, when left unchecked, can worsen the health crisis. Thus, disinformation and misinformation on transmission, treatment, and preventive measures can lead to misguided perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. This may have a key influence on the rise of infection rates and, consequently, lead to hikes in mortality rates (Tsirintani, 2021).

Studies provide evidence that fake news or information disorder is rampant during health crisis periods. For instance, Sell et al., (2020), in their study of fake news prevalence during the Ebola crisis in the US, found that as much as 10% of Ebola related tweets contained false information or were completely false. Other studies that have studied prevalence of fake news on different health crisis situations in the world conclude on the extent to which information disorder prevails during such times and the challenges it pose to mitigating these health crises (Oyeyemi & Gabarron, 2014; Maciel-Lima et al., 2015).

One of the dangers that information disorder pose during global health crisis is that it develops public mistrust in authorities (Rogers & Massac, 2020). False information might erode public confidence in medical professionals and institutions. Studies have shown that expert sources are crucial in providing scientific and instructive information during health crisis (Gecer et al., 2020; (Gecer et al., 2020; Montesi, 2021). Information disorder contends this and create a situation where false information become accepted rather than expert information. This might lead to a decline in adherence to public health recommendations and guidelines, which would accelerate the disease's spread and prolong the crisis (Conigliaro et al., 2024).

Information disorders in the form of misinformation and disinformation are thus key challenges that affront the mitigating of health crises across the world. Their prevalence tends to influence health behaviors and limit the role of expert information towards the mitigation of the crisis.

2.22 Information Sources in Media Coverage of Pandemics and Heath Crises

The media is essential in global efforts towards averting pandemics and other health crises. Their predominant role significantly hinges on providing society with accurate and timely information about the health crisis. Furthermore, the media are a dispensable tool in educating the mass society about pandemics and other health crises. The media are essential information tools that millions of people derive information from to order their lives during the breakout of the pandemic (Brodle et al., 2003).

Information sources that the media access while reporting on health crises and pandemics sometimes vary and hinge on political, economic, and scientific aspects. Largely, most of the studies within the literature have not been very particular about

investigating the information sources journalists use in reporting on pandemics and health crises. However, some studies prompt that scientific expert sources and political and governmental sources remained among the highest and most frequent sources in media coverage of pandemics.

For instance, Holland, Sweet, Warwick and Fogarty's (2013) study in Australia on the conflict of interest of expert sources on the swine flu does not directly identify scientific expert sources as prominent news sources. However, the authors assert that expert news sources were the most prominent news sources that journalists paid attention to while reporting the pandemic in Australia. Kato, Ishikawa, and Kluchi (2016) also made similar findings in their study of the H1N1 pandemic in the Japanese media. Their study noted that expert sources remained the most used source of information within the media during the hike of the pandemic. However, they mention government sources as also assuming some forms of prevalence as media attention on the pandemic began to see some decline.

Mandeville et al. (2013) were keener on understanding the roles of academics in fighting the swine flu. The authors' argument was based on the notion that academics play crucial roles in a media discourse of health issues and that their commentary on critical health issues was essential. The core of the study was, hence, to evaluate the role of academics in media discourse on influenza in 12 newspapers in the UK. The authors noted the prominence of academics as crucial news sources within the media. However, Ministers of Health of the various nations studied were quoted and sourced more times than academics. The authors, therefore, conclude that Ministers of Health and Academics were two of the most quoted sources of news information sources that the UK media used.

Pribble et al. (2010) focused on the media's news sources while reporting on the West Nile Virus. The study found that experts were considered news sources for media coverage of the virus. However, like other studies on other health crises and pandemics, experts were not widely and frequently accessed as government and political sources. On the contrary, Berry, Wharf-Higgins, and Naylor (2007) found while studying media coverage of the outbreak of SARS that expert sources were contacted and quoted more than any other forms of sources.

Media news sources on pandemics and other critical health crises are centred on health and science experts and political and government sources. Hence, the literature on the most used sources of news information that journalists accessed while covering pandemics and other health crises are mainly expert and health sources, as well as government and political sources.

2.23 Information Sources the Media Accessed in Coronavirus Reportage

Reports suggest that during the rise of pandemics, media consumers access very different media platforms (Matthews et al., 2023). Media audiences are natural 'information-hungry' people who carve their lives around information from the media (Hwang et al., 2021). The quest for information during pandemics is no different. Studies have mentioned that audiences access media information from radio, TV, and online sources. Studies on the coronavirus pandemic show that radio broadcasts, the government, and health professionals were the most accessed information about COVID-19 (Umeta et al., 2022; Amara et al., 2022). However, the question remains: While engaged in coverage and framing of the pandemic, what information sources did the media access?

Some studies have investigated the information sources that the media accessed during their reportage on the coronavirus pandemic. It appears there is not a large plethora of such studies that express the information sources that the media accessed during their reportage of the coronavirus across the globe. However, the few existing pieces of literature capture the knowledge that the media adopted a multi-source approach in covering and framing the pandemic. Some studies, such as Apuke and Omar (2021), present a vivid picture of the diverse types of news sources that the media accessed while engaged in COVID-19 reportage, while others have looked at the role of just single sources in the media's reportage of the virus. Morani, Cushion, Kyriakidou, and Soo (2020) were more interested in using a mono-source approach to understand how much the media adopted and used health experts in their pandemic coverage. Hence, their study presented single news sources as the media's most accessed and relevant news information source.

Studies that follow the multi-source approach present that the media did not use just one source but multiple sources while reporting on the pandemic. Apuke and Omar's (2021) study points to the idea that the media's news sources are in some way politicised and divided along the lines of media ownership. Their study focused on how Nigeria's public and private media covered the pandemic. They conclude that there existed two main sources of news information that broadcast media used during their coverage. The news sources included government officials and the Nigeria Center for Disease Control. The study found that public media focused on government officials as news sources while private broadcast media focused on the Center for Disease Control as news sources. Other news sources include COVID-19 victims, expert technicians, the World Health Organisation, and the health agency (Apuke & Omar, 2021).

The argument advanced by Mach et al. (2021) in their study advances that news sources accessed during the pandemic were geared towards gaining scientific knowledge or heightening sensational reporting of the pandemic. Hence, they prompt that the news sources that the media accessed in some selected newspapers in the USA either adopted scientific knowledge-based sources or sensational sources. Scientific news sources included the coverage of experts, health professionals, and affected persons. Meanwhile, sensational news sources are captured as partisan politics and government news sources.

A similar and more recent study by Mach et al. (2021) focused on 15 news media outlets in the United Kingdom and how they used news information sources during their coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. Matthews et al. (2023) also found that the news sources accessed in the UK during the pandemic were divided along the lines of expert and political sources. Matthews et al. (2023) found that media outlets paid more attention to political news than scientific and expert news sources.

Mellado et al. (2021) also focused on identifying news sources as one of their objectives in a cross-national analysis of media coverage of the pandemic. However, they focused on social media posts from media organisations in the Americas region. The study showed a dominance of political sources of news within Latin America. The study also found some significant prominence levels given to health and citizen sources. The researchers argue that these three news sources were the dominant news sources across three social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter (now known as X), and Instagram, where media organisations published news about the pandemic.

Dahal and Khatri (2021) also indicate that the media was involved in using multiple news sources while covering the pandemic. Their study focused on how two Nepali

newspapers- -*The Kathmandu Post* and *The Rising Newspaper* covered the coronavirus pandemic. The authors indicate that these two newspapers focused on a wide range of sources while reporting on the virus. These include migrant workers, political leaders, government officials, business owners and managers, women and children, and health workers.

The literature on news sources that the media adopted while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic, therefore, as has been shown, is not so extensive. Authors have looked at news sources more indirectly than directly. However, information within the literature on the news sources used by the media during the coverage of the pandemic leans towards the idea that government officials, political party leaders, affected persons and groups, as well as health workers and professionals, were the most accessed news sources that the media engaged during their reportage.

2.24 Coronavirus Pandemic and Information Disorder

The dissemination of misleading information during a health crisis, whether done so on purpose or accidentally, can have a significant impact on how the crisis is handled (Sell et al., 2020). It was not surprising, therefore, when the World Health Organisation was forced to announce a state of infodemic alongside the pandemic (WHO, 2019). Studies have shown that there were high levels of fake news prevalence among media consumers, especially on social media, during the coronavirus pandemic era (see for instance, Hua & Shaw, 2020; Barreto et al., 2021). These studies indicate that there was a large volume of false information about the origins of the virus (Polsen & Palm, 2020), its spread (Jalaludin et al., 2024), prevention, and cure (Enders et al., 2020). For instance, during the early phases of the pandemic, there were reports that suggested that the virus was created from Chinese conditions of eating rats, snakes, and bats . Other narratives described the virus to have been developed as a biological

weapon created by the Chinese. There were also news of the virus being caused by 5G masts and signals across Europe. There existed information disorders that also suggested that Africans had a stronger immune system as a result of the warm climate conditions, and hence the African was not prone to contracting the disease (Hua & Shaw, 2020; Barreto et al., 2021).

One of the areas where false information and fake news prevailed the most among media consumers covered issues of vaccination. A number of studies note that different media platforms promoted false information about vaccination drugs and programs and the implications for persons who vaccinated (Skafle et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022). This led to varying degrees of vaccine hesitancy and consequently had negative implications for mitgiating the pandemic (Lee, 2022).

Public distrust of authority is one of the risks that information disorder posed during coronviurs pandemic. The public's trust in medical experts and organisations may be damaged by misleading information (Awan et al., 2022). Research has demonstrated that during a health emergency, professional sources are essential for supplying factual and educational information. This is denied by information disorder, which also fosters an environment in which unreliable information spreads more widely than reliable information (Awan et al., 2022). This resulted in a drop in following public health rules and recommendations, leading to rise in infection rates and consequent mortality rate hikes (Enders et al., 2020, Skafle et al., 2022). Information disorders provide an obstacle to the global health crisis mitigation effort. Their frequency tends to affect health-related behaviours and reduce the contribution of expert information to crisis mitigation.

2.25 Chapter Summary

This part of the research discussed the relevant concepts and literature related to this study. Previous studies by scholars have been discussed to put the work into perspective and provide a foundation for this current work. The review has revealed the lack of research on media framing of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. Therefore, much of the discussions have been extracted from studies in Nigeria and elsewhere. Although the coronavirus pandemic received quite good scholarly attention, it has little to do with framing or how the media in Ghana framed discussions around the pandemic. The chapter also provides literature on the coronavirus pandemic, the soread of the pandemic and it's impact on economies. Its also provide an overview of health communication, the media and health reporting; specifically media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. Aside discussions of news worhiness, news values and information sources and disorder the chapter also discussed ethical issues in health reporting.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework is a blueprint or a guide for a study. It is a framework based on an existing theory in a particular discipline (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). According to Anfara and Metz (2015), a theoretical framework covers any empirical or quasi-empirical theory that explains social and psychological processes. The essence of the theoretical framework is to provide the foundation upon which a study is constructed. It is a well-structured system of a scientifically proven theory or set of theories that provide some explanation for phenomena (Fulton & Krainovich-Miller, 2010). A researcher often borrows from the ideas of a theoretical framework to integrate elements of findings from their study. This is often linked to the study's general assumptions, hypotheses, or research objectives (Mensah et al., 2020).

A theoretical framework comprises ideas put forth by academics in the area of study that one intends to investigate. These theories are a theoretical framework for data analysis and result interpretation. To put it in another way, the theoretical framework is a structure that condenses ideas and hypotheses that are developed from empirical research and published literature and then synthesises them to give a theoretical background or foundation for data analysis and interpretation of the meaning in research data (Mensah et al., 2020).

The overall aim of a theoretical framework within empirical research is to ensure that the findings have more meaning and are acceptable to the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the use of a theoretical framework provides the findings of a study with more generalisability. Theoretical frameworks act as guiding principles that guide the

entire research and firmly place the findings in a body of accepted studies. They direct and give the study impetus (Adom et al., 2018). Imenda (2014) perceives that the theoretical framework of a study is the life of the study. This suggests that much of what a researcher inquires about in a study rests on the shoulders of the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework, therefore, becomes a schema for placing what has been found in the study. Without a properly defined and described theoretical framework, the result of a study is likely to contain very little meaning and contextualisation.

A good theoretical framework has good implications for not only structuring the study. It provides the basis for accepting some particular data gathering and methods practices over others. Also, a strong theoretical framework becomes essential in interpreting and drawing contextual meanings out of the findings made from the research. Hence, a theoretical framework has implications that link almost all of the studies, from identifying the problem to literature review and then data analysis and interpretation of the study (Anfara & Mertz, 2015).

This Chapter discusses the theories related to the study. The Agenda-Setting theory and the Framing theory are offered as guiding concepts within which the present study is situated. While the agenda-setting theory presents a level of analysis in which the media is seen as an important driver of salient topics, the framing theory presents the second level of analysis in which the media are seen as deliberately choosing parts of topics to present to the public, thereby sharing public discussions and dictating the contexts in which topical issues are discussed.

3.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

As the fourth estate, the news media plays a normatively significant role in contemporary society. They are the conduits via which people learn about issues that are not directly related to them. They also provide information and perspectives that promote debate, discussion, and democracy. As a result, the news media significantly impact people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Such influences cut across a wide range of issues, affect a diverse range of demographic and social groupings and cut across countries and cultures. Agenda-setting, priming, and framing are three related but conceptually separate theories that have gained academic traction during the last half-century in political communication and public opinion research. These theories have deeply shaped the collective understanding of how individuals perceive and respond to their political and social worlds.

Agenda-setting theory began by being used to explain how the media affects behaviour changes during elections (Cohen, 1963). However, in recent times, several studies have explored how the media prime and frame issues (not just political) to the audience. According to (Nor, 2014), the mass media can be responsible for shaping public opinion and agenda. This agenda in the work of (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) can be set intentionally or unintentionally by the media.

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw proposed the agenda-setting idea in 1972. After watching the role of the media in the presidential election in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, they came up with this notion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). They polled 100 people in the town to determine the most critical topics on the political agenda at the time and then compared that list to the amount of media exposure these subjects received. It became evident that the more coverage an issue received in the media,

the more important it was regarded to be by the public. The agenda-setting effect was coined to describe this phenomenon. The agenda-setting idea can be summarised as follows: "The mass media influence our perspectives of the world and focus our attention by selecting and displaying news on a daily basis, affecting our thoughts on the key subjects of the day" (McCombs, 1978, p. 90). In the view of McCombs (1978), this idea states that there are at least three ways in which we can explain the influence of the media. First, there is awareness. Often, with news items, if the media does not mention them, the people have no knowledge of them. It is a simple influence of knowing and not knowing in which the media can make a difference. Then, there is the influence of priorities. The media prioritises the subjects and determines what they find more important issues than others. As stated earlier, the audience tends to copy these priorities from the media agenda onto the public agenda. In between these versions of influence is the third agenda-setting effect, salience. The media emphasises one issue more than the other, after which one issue is regarded as more salient on the personal agenda.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) also hypothesised that the mass media have the power to influence the public agenda. In their study, McCombs and Shaw found that the public interest most often reflected the media's agenda. They further stated that audiences do not only learn about a given issue but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a piece of news and its position.

In recent times, the agenda-setting idea refers to the news media's effect on audiences through its selection of which stories are considered noteworthy and which are not, as well as the importance and space given to each (Govender, 2010).

The agenda-setting theory explains the link between the rates at which a given story is consistently repeated by a media outlet and the dominance of conversations in the public sphere, which is not determined by the audience's importance. Through the daily selection of and display of news items, editors and news directors tend to direct the audience's attention by influencing what the audience perceives as an important issue of the day (McCombs, 2004). By extension, effects on public policy may occur (McQuail, 2000). Thus, the basic premise of the theory explains how the news media covers certain issues and influences public debates (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This is to say that agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media places on specific issues (e.g., based on the relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In other words, Kafle (2014) explained further that media can force people to think about events; however, media cannot force audiences on what they should think about. Also, the media selects parts and pieces of reality to present to the public, which is called the media agenda. The public sees through the eyes of the media and focuses on the issue that interests them (Zain, 2017). A person's public perception then becomes a reality. Len-Rois et al. (2009) also postulated that agenda-setting describes the media's influence on how the public perceives the importance of issues in the news. Hayati (2014) also sees the agenda-setting theory of the media as to how the media's coverage of news determines which issues become the focus of public attention.

The media in broadcasting news stories place salience on some specific issues than others. It influences audience perceptions, values, focus, and priorities (Nor, 2014).

The mass media audiences forms their own opinions or focuses on issues considered worthy of inclusion in their mental agendas due to the media's influence.

Agenda-setting theory describes how media, through mediating information, creates the audience's motivations and needs. The audience looks up to media for guidance on where they should focus their attention about events, information, or aspects of society. Consequently, the media do not tell audiences what to think but rather what to think about (McCombs et al., 1997). This theory is effective because it clarifies why an issue is prioritised by a large number of people and because it predicts how a diverse audience will respond to the same message. There is a continuing debate between scholars, and the debate circles around the core questions of media influence, namely, how directly and to what degree the media sets the public agenda. Some recent studies propose that personal variables can mitigate the effects of media agenda-setting on individuals or audiences (Matsaganis & Payne, 2005; Gross & Aday, 2003; McCombs & Shaw, 1997). These majorly contributed to the background education and understanding of the media audiences on the issue or agenda presented by the mass media (Carter, 1996). Their opinions are more difficult to be influenced by the information they receive from the mass media (Matsaganis & Payne, 2005; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009; Coleman, 1993).

Moreover, such influence from the mass media in forming an opinion is impossible for those who live far away from the information provided or those who find it difficult to access information from the mass media (Lippmann, 1922). Broadly, as a result of technological changes, the abilities of the so-called mainstream media to influence an agenda for the general public are challenged and threatened by the ever-increasing array of information sources made available by developments in new communication technologies (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; McCombs, 1993). The agenda-setting theory,

therefore, presents a foundation for investigating how the media sets the agenda based on waste management-related issues. The agenda-setting theory also gives a basis for investigating how the agenda set by the media affects people's behaviours or perceptions of waste management issues. Kayode & Adeniran (2012) have indicated that editors act as gatekeepers of mass-mediated messages and promote a media agenda by prioritising certain issues. They can offer sustained and prominent coverage of an issue while others are marginalised or ignored (Kayode & Adeniran, 2012).

According to McQuail (2000), agenda-setting is a process of media influence (intended or unintended) by which the relative importance of news events, issues, or personages in the public mind is affected by the order of presentation (or relative salience) in news reports. It is assumed that the more the media attention, the greater the importance attributed by the news audience. The media influence is not on the direction of opinion but only on what people think about it. Media influences the topics the audience thinks about but not the direction of the public opinion itself (McQuail, 2000). Van Dijk states that the power of media is symbolic and persuasive, having the potential to control the media consumer's mind but not their actions (Coulthard & Caldas-Coulthard, 1996). Alhassan (2015) asserts that readers learn not only about a given issue but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. Alhassan (2015) added that the media exerts considerable influence on certain issues by persistently presenting objects suggesting what individuals in society should think about, know about, and or feel.

According to the Agenda-setting theory, the mass media (including the print media) have significant control over the audience through the choice of stories that are considered newsworthy and how much prominence. Earlier propositions about the

agenda-setting theory suggested that while media do not tell us what to think, they may tell us what to think about (McComb & Shawn, 1972). Similarly, Griffin (2011) notes that the agenda-setting theory reaffirms the power of the press while maintaining the individual's freedom to choose. The agenda-setting theory estimates that individual members of the society reflect on issues already raised and then make personal submissions based on their subjective reasoning. The theory states that the things people discuss, think, and worry about are powerfully shaped and directed by what the news media choose to publicise. Cohen (1963) refined Lippmann's idea about agenda-setting theory and wrote: The Press is significantly more than a supplier of information and opinion. It may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think.

Furthermore, it follows that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their interests but also on the map drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read. The proposition here is that the news media set the agenda for the public in the sense that their coverage of issues helps define what they should be thinking about on a given day. Baran & Davis (2010) said, "Cohen's writing became the basis for what we now call the agenda-setting function of the mass media (p. 294).

In short, the media can put the agenda-setting machinery in motion. However, if the audience is not interested in it, it will not sustain the discussion to make the media successful at telling people what to think. Through agenda setting, the media can get the public talking about issues. Suppose the media is to cover news on waste management extensively. In that case, people will get to know about our waste management condition in the country, and it will also change their perception of how

to dispose of waste properly. Agenda-setting is related to the framing concept, which characterises the effects of media (McQuail, 2000).

It is important to note that the agenda-setting theory has expanded beyond the influence of the news media on the public to enhance the broader consequences of agenda-setting effects on attitudes and opinions (McCombs &Chyi, 2004). In short, the agenda-setting theory does not necessarily tell people how they should think about issues but the issues they should think about (Hayati, 2014). It also looks at the consequential impact of the media agenda on people's opinions and perceptions. The theory explains how the media create awareness and concern on specific issues by placing salience on such issues.

The newspapers, for example, emphasise some headlines more than others by the positioning of the news item, the font size, infographics used, and the page allocated for a story. The broadcast media also sets the agenda for a news story by the amount of time given to the story, in-depth analysis of the story, the positioning of the story, and infographics attached to the story. The agenda-setting theory has become an essential aspect of media communication. McCombs and Shaw (1972) affirm, In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping reality. According to Reese (1991), agenda-setting is not only applied in mass communication, but its facets extend to other social sciences.

In public health communication, health practitioners are faced with the challenge of using the media to influence good health practices while countering the same influence when it encourages unhealthy choices (Leask et al., 2010). On the occasions of disease outbreaks and pandemics, hitting the right pitch is crucial and difficult. The new media is fast changing the face of communication in the world. As reported by

Datareportal.com, the world has about 4.80 billion internet users, representing 60.9% of the world's population. However, the traditional media still has a more extensive penetration and can influence the public agenda. By reporting certain events and not others, the news media signals to the public and policymakers about the most important issues of the day (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). This assertion is underscored in the work of (Demers & Viswanth cited in Wallington et al., 2010) as they agreed that the media's agenda influences citizens, community leaders, and policymakers. Thus, the media plays a vital social function in society. It does not only present the information to the public but also increases public opinion on the matter.

The news media prioritise health emergencies. They give twenty-four-hour cyclical updates on major health concerns in society. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional and new media platforms were flooded with information regarding safety protocols on how to prevent or otherwise reduce the infection rate of the virus (Mbikwana, 2020). Information on policy interventions from governments, active cases, hospital bed situations, deaths, testing mechanisms, and safety protocols was easily accessible on various media platforms.

In the work of (Barry et al., 2011), they argued that in consonance with the agenda-setting theory of (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the relative volume of public news coverage tends to correlate with policy and public attention. Buttressing the point, they stated that media attention to childhood obesity between 2001 and 2004 corresponded with national policy attention to the problem. This included major reports by the US Surgeon General and the Institute of Medicine and public perceptions of the issue's importance. In contrast, Armstrong et al. (2006) revealed that the print and TV news attention to diseases was not correlated with mortality. They also found out that the greater the disease burden for the black relative to white, the less news media

attention was given to that disease. Their findings infer that while the news media may have a role in telling the public and policymakers to care about health issues, intrinsic biases influence which issues garner this valuable resource of attention.

3.3 Framing and Agenda-Setting Theory in Reporting Pandemics

In disseminating information on health issues and pandemics like the novel coronavirus, Avian flu, Ebola virus, etc., the media employed and continue to employ critical but fundamental strategies to create awareness and lessen the havoc the disease may cause by projecting safety measures. This indispensable role of the media also helps shape policy and politics. As Barry in Siddiqua et al. (2020) stated, "In the next influenza pandemic, be it now or the future, be the virus mild or virulent, the most important weapon against the disease will be a vaccine. The second most important will be communication". The media employs agenda setting- the process of presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the results that a large section of the public view that information as important than others (Renita et al., 2008), and media frames- how the media define a social issue, articulate its causes, offer moral judgment, and or suggest what might be done to address it (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Agenda setting and framing are important elements of the news media coverage of health emergencies.

In the advent of a severe disease outbreak, the media plays an integral role in creating awareness and communicating remedies for tackling the disease. In the work of (Dolan et al., cited in Duru, 2016), they found that a significant number of patients indicated that they rely on news media more than other sources for general health information. The mainstream media are often the first source from which people learn about advances in modern medicine (Duru, 2016). This role of the media is nothing

different from the basic functions of the media: to educate, inform, and entertain its audience. However, hitting the right price is critical, as miscommunication can have dire consequences. The media coverage of societal issues has great potential to change lives and impact positively on society, notwithstanding the accompanying demerits. According to Wallington et al., (2010), news coverage of health issues impacts individuals' knowledge and attitudes and the agenda of institutions and policymakers. Siddiqua et al. (2020) alluded that effective communication strategies for public awareness have played a vital role in handling pandemics. These have sparked researchers to examine media coverage of health issues and their societal effects from various theoretical frameworks.

Public health communication is a sensitive field; thus, the media employs various strategies to disseminate information to get the required results. According to Viswanath (2008) and Kristen (2012), health communication is the study and application of the generation, creation, and dissemination of health-related information, health-related interactions among individual social actors, and their effects on different publics, including community groups and institutions. Health communication entails different levels of analysis, which, according to Viswanath, (2008), include individual, interpersonal, social network, organisational, and mass or societal levels. Each level of communication requires different strategies to meet the expected target.

A study by Abdullah et al. (2020) found that massive coronavirus news dissemination provokes audiences to behave inappropriately. The authors used the theory of agenda-setting, which elaborates on the process of forming an opinion in national television media and the theory of media exposure to analyse the impact of exposure to COVID-19 dissemination on social media. The results of that study: first, the process

of forming an opinion by the public media has not been done proportionally; the information dissemination of the coronavirus had covered the dissemination of other important cases, such as legal and corruption issues. Second, the effect of COVID-19 news dissemination on social media had an impact on people's health and a multi-effect on the economic, religious, and psychological conditions. The multi-dimensional impacts are responsible for setting the exposure of COVID-19 news dissemination as the single issue that makes the diversion of opinion and other issues occur, such as legal and corruption cases, which are no longer public talk.

Medina et al. (2021) highlights the role of the agenda-setting platform in shaping public opinion on the COVID-19 vaccination program. Their study found that massive information dissemination through media can be an effective tool in educating the public regarding the efficacy of anti- COVID-19 vaccines both for self-preservation and the promotion of the common good.

3.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Agenda Setting Theory

One of the core strengths of the agenda-setting theory is its ability to effectively describe the power of the media to shape the opinion of the public. The theory presents a robust approach to explaining how media activities, events, materials, and content are able to influence the perceptions of media consumers on critical issues and consequently influence their opinions on such events and issues (Wu & Coleman, 2009). The theory argues that by covering some issues consistently over time, and dwelling on the issues in a particular way, consumers exposed to this activity of the media begin to also pay more attention to these issues and think that those are the most important issues in society (Mccoombs, 2000). Hence, one of the strengths and perhaps the core advantage of the theory is its tendency to effectively describe this

power of the media on the perceptions of consumers on social issues. Effectively, the theory is a key contributor to understanding the media effects tenacity of global media. The theory provides researchers with a framework to comprehend how the media affects the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of consumers (Mccoombs, 2004).

Furthermore, the Agenda Setting theory also presents critical insights on the gatekeeping function of the media (Kamau, 2016). The theory is a key descriptor of how the media and persons working within the media operate in society - primarily as information intermediaries (Gucdemir & Ozsalih, 2018) . The theory's argument that the media presents to media consumers what to think about explains how the media is essential as an intermediary tool acting between social events and the audience (Valdeon, 2020) .

Another critical strength of the Agenda Setting theory is its tendency to fit accurately in other disciplines beyond media studies. The theory has been applied in other studies such as politics, marketing, and health communication in recent times (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This makes the theory a viable one for studying social problems that leans on media studies and other disciplines, as this study does.

However, some scholars have enunciated key shortcomings of the study that must be discussed. For one, the theory does not offer a thorough explanation of causality; instead, it concentrates on the association between public agenda and media agenda (Naser, 2020). It is difficult to determine a clear causal relationship between media content and public perception since there are many other factors and cultural forces at work (Ariel et al., 2017). A critical point of discussion within media studies concerns how media consumers behave when receiving media content. This brings up discussions of whether audiences are passive or active (Sparviero, 2019). One of the

shortcomings associated with the theory is that it assumes that media consumers are passive and simply follow the trajectory the media sets in developing and discussing social agenda (Takeshita, 2006). Furthermore, the theory's appreciation of the media's ability to shape agenda presents ethical concerns on how best to exercise that influence. Media organisations need to find a way to reconcile their own commercial or ideological goals with the needs of the public (Naser, 2020).

In light of the critical strengths and weaknesses that are associated with the Agenda Setting theory, the study adopts this theory as part of the theoretical framework for the study. The study adopts the theory for a number of reasons. Firstly, the theory provides the needed framework to understand the degree of salience of online media attached to the pandemic, especially across the nations that were studied in this research (Mccoombs, 2000). The theory also provides the theoretical backing and understanding for which issues the media focused on and, ultimately, for which reasons (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Secondly, the relevance of this theory is expressed in how it tends to aid researchers in making sense of and explaining how media consumers of coronavirus pandemic information in the media perceive the virus (Kim et al., 2021). Studies have shown that how the media covered the pandemic was influential in shaping the perceptions of media consumers towards the pandemic (Kan, 2021; Kim et al., 2021). Studies of this nature have relied critically on the use of the Agenda Setting theory to explain how media agenda shape these perceptions. Furthermore, the researcher was able to evaluate the efficacy of public health messaging by identifying the components of the pandemic that the media focused on the most through the use of the Agenda Setting theory. This involves assessing how well important health guidelines and information were covered by the media and the extent to which this was done.

3.4 Framing Theory

In media communication, getting an audience to make a particular judgment may not be as hard as many people believe; however, the framing theory of the media works to do this. According to Kafle (2014), framing is a very important concept to understand and interpret the news daily. The theory implies that news is presented (framed) to influence the choices people make about decoding that information. In other words, Iyenger (2005) indicated that at the most general level, framing refers to how opinions about an issue can be altered by emphasising or deemphasising some aspects of that issue. That is, framing helps not just to understand the news but also to help identify the intention and the process of newsmaking. Framing is based on the assumption of how an issue is understood by audiences based on how it is characterised in news reports (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The Framing theory has been used in communication since the beginning of human communication and was first proposed by Ervin Goffman in 1974 (Jesse & Myer, 2020). Goffman's work on frame analysis posited that people interpret what is happening around their world through their primary framework. According to him, the usefulness of the primary framework is not dependent on other frameworks. Goffman (1974), therefore, proposed two distinctions within the primary frameworks (i.e., the natural and the social). To Goffman, both the natural and social frameworks play an important role in helping individuals interpret data presented to them daily. The natural frameworks identify events as physical occurrences, taking a natural quote and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events (Arowolo, 2017).

In contrast, social frameworks are built on natural frameworks where individuals view events as socially driven occurrences due to the whims, goals, and manipulation of

other social players (people). These frameworks and frames they create in our communication significantly impact how people analyse, process, and communicate data (Goffman, 1974; Arowolo, 2017). Goffman's underlying assumption is that individuals are capable of using frameworks daily. Whether they are aware of them or not, they are constantly used to understand information in the media (Arowolo, 2017).

On a more complex level, one of the first scholars to illustrate framing as a complete theory of mass media was Robert Entman (1993), who defined media framing as a process by which the media "select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in a way that can promote a certain definition, interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993. p. 52). Entman (1991) also sees framing as how media shapes the news to elicit specific responses from viewers and readers. He found that with framing, media emphasises what is politically influential and the dominant frame in a set of news stories, which will most likely affect political outcomes (Entman, 1991).

3.5 Entman's Conception of Framing Role in Media

According to Entman (1993), like Goffman's idea of framing, Entman argues that media frames can influence public opinion in how they transfer information from a media source to social and individual awareness (Entman, 1993). To him, these frames serve as the structures through which individuals understand and organise information (Reber& Berger, 2005; Scheufele, 2004). To elaborate further, media framing encompasses the selection of some aspect(s) of an issue in each various piece of information and making 'salient' the selected aspect by allowing certain attributes to be highlighted and others to be omitted in a communication context to influence the audience (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Entnam, 1993; Knight, 1999).

Increasingly, the salient aspects given certain attributes influence the audiences' opinions regarding a given issue by making it more likely important than others. These selected aspects are then processed and stored in memory (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 2004). In addition, Entman (1993) indicated that frames can also be used to divert attention to or even ignore pieces of information, which is just as powerful as highlighting specific areas or characteristics of a story. There is a danger in understanding or omitting information because it limits the knowledge the public is exposed to.

However, the terms "frame" and "framing" are two different terms that must be clearly distinguished before analysing news content. Cartee (2005) states that 'frame' and 'framing' are not necessarily synonymous, although they are used interchangeably sometimes in many works of literature; nonetheless, she further argued that "framing is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organisation defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy", (Cartee, 2005, p. 24). Meanwhile, "frame", on the other hand, is the central organisation of ideas that give the complete sense to an issue using selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Cartee, 2005).

Entman (1991) claims that news frames help to establish meaning when interpreting the news. Framing theory, therefore, explains that the media create this frame by introducing news items with predefined and narrow contextualisation to influence public opinion. Also, frames can be designed to enhance understanding or are used as cognitive shortcuts to link stories to the bigger picture. While there is a clear conceptual intersection between the concept of framing (Weaver, 2007), the idea of framing is akin to the 'second level' of agenda-setting, which "examines the relative

salience of attributes of issues, as McCombs (2005) and Ghanem (1997) described in detail.

Framing theory postulates three functions of media frames: selection (who or what to show), emphasis (how much to show), and exclusion (what not to show) (Billings, 2004). The framing theory also stresses that by doing the stated functions, the media have the power to shape a story positively or negatively, with the negative portrayals having a more substantial influence on the audience than positive portrayals (Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001). The theory identifies that information can be presented in several ways: how it is organised and disseminated through the media and how the public understands and uses the information they have been given (Terkidsen& Schnell, 1997).

According to Entman (1993), in understanding information churned out to the individual on a daily basis, the media frames can be found in four areas of the communication process, which are elaborated on as follows. First, frames can be found with information communicators influenced by their frames and schemes when deciding what information to publish and highlight. Secondly, frames can be found in the presence or absence of certain attributes within the actual text. The simple placement or repletion of certain frames in a text is enough to increase the likelihood that an individual will store it in memory. The third location in the communication process where frames can be found is with the receiver. Frames can affect the public's thoughts and insights by determining what information they are exposed to and confirming or disconfirming previously stored beliefs.

Finally, Entman concluded this thought by emphasising that today's culture is overwhelmed with frames usually shared and accepted by the social majority of that

particular culture (Entman, 1993). According to Kusi (2017), these frames can be spread throughout society because of the consistent exposure and omission of information in the media. Nicely (2007) says one reason media frames have become so common within a social culture is that they can be found at all levels of the communication process.

For much emphasis, media producers and editors do not necessarily utilise media frames to sway in a perverted manner or manipulate the public purposely, but instead to report a story using a limited amount of space concisely and effectively (Nelson et al., 1997). It is a well-established fact that journalists use familiar frames to help the public make their own decisions (Bronstein, 2005). Framing can influence the audiences' worldview through the "construction of news." Another point worth emphasising is that "framing does not predetermine the information an individual will seek, but it may shape aspects of the world that the individual experiences either directly or through the news media and is thus central to the process of construction" (Neuman, Just, &Crigler, 1992, p. 61). Framing is compelling to make individuals see the world in a particular way that news providers want them to believe and see. However, they may not realise it as it might only affect the readers or audiences on a sub-unconscious level.

3.6 Contemporary Viewpoints of Researchers on Types of Frames

There is no doubt that media framing of issues has significant implications on how people perceive societal issues. Framing in mass media focuses on drawing public attention to specific issues – agenda setting. Then, it takes a step to create a frame through which the audience will understand such issues (Arowolo, 2017). Thus, framing aims to draw attention to specific details of the objects of news coverage and

the objects themselves. Nibset (2009) also believes that framing is an essential aspect of media communication strategies that contribute to shaping the audience's perception and societal disposition to events covered by the media.

It is a modality that the media adopts in selecting and presenting its content to produce different perspectives for the audience (Jibrin, 2019). Jibrin further indicated that framing enhances the presentation of news content from various perspectives, producing different versions for emphasis or enhancing crucial issues and events (Cited in Aondover & Deborah, 2020).

Tolley (2016) also argued that the media uses framing to simplify complex issues and allow the audience to easily comprehend and form their opinions on those issues through text and infographics. Framing can wobble public opinion on an issue, significantly affecting how the public perceives, understands and responds to it (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017 cited in Aondover & Deborah, 2020). Bigman, Chinwe, and Pauline (2021) stated that the media focus on certain events and place them within a field of meaning and interpretation to the audience. Iyorza and Ekwok (2020) opine that "under the media framing theory, the media presenters, producers, or writers highlight the issues and make sense of events for the audience". They further state that the theory assumes that the media play vital roles in enabling its audience to regulate, accept, or form negative or positive impressions about an event.

The media frame issues in different categories depending on the nature and context of the issue. These categorisations of frames help provide specific perspectives of issues that require large-scale text analysis beyond manual annotation alone. Entman (1991) proposed that, unless the narrative is compared, frames are difficult to detect thoroughly and reliably, becoming the framing devices that can appear as natural and

normal choices of words or images. That is to say, the nature of media frames is not easy to identify. Entman (1991) further elaborated on identifying frames in news stories. He classified media frames into five categories. Conflict – conflict between parties can be prioritised, as opposed to the actual decision made; Human interest/Personalisation – presenting a story with a human face, personality is promoted over more important aspects; Consequences – consequences can be wide-ranging. Pursuing a policy may be unwise in terms of unity within a party or coalition or in terms of the status of a nation globally. Morality – media coverage can often be moralised, sometimes due to political actors' indiscretions or alternative policies being seen as morally questionable. Responsibility – attributing responsibility, either for a cause or a solution (cited in Arowolo, 2017).

Aondover and Deborah (2020) argued that other categories of frames are issue specific. They further alleged that although issue-specific frames do not allow for explaining patterns, they provide details. Issue-specific frames stem from the idea that certain issues have inherent frames from within (de Vreese, 2005; Samuel, 2021). In the work of Johnson and Samuel (2021), they mentioned another type of frame called the generic frame. According to Mahl and Geunther (2021), Generic frames represent typical layers of contextualisation in stories and are broadly applicable to a range of different news topics (i.e., across topics). Examples of generic frames are the human interest or responsibility frames (Dirikx & Gelders, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Amber et al. (2013) and Aondover and Deborah (2020) identified another type of frame called the innocence frame. According to Amber et al., the innocence frame emerged in the mid-1990s, together with frames related to evidence, due process, classism, and racism, which all gained attention on the plans of the innocence frame. For policy-

based issues, Amber et al. (2013) noted that there is a policy frames codebook that is intended to provide a general system for categorising frames across policy issues. Fourteen (14) categories of frame dimensions are comprised alongside other categories that are hoped to apply to any policy issue.

The media in public health communication apply all the elaborated frames in the previous paragraphs to influence individuals' perceptions and opinions on the issues. These frames help individuals form negative or positive impressions of the issue. Aondover and Deborah (2020) analysed the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in the headlines and contents of the Daily Trust newspaper and the Vanguard newspaper in Nigeria from February 27 to May 14 2020. Their thorough content analysis found 136 frames on the COVID-19 pandemic. They categorised the frames into 15 dimensions, with economic frames recorded as the dominant frames within the period with 30 different frames. Political frames, external regulations and reputation frames, policy prescription and evaluation frames, and health and safety frames were among the highest-scoring frames in their research.

These two newspapers focused much of their attention on the economic consequences of the ravaging pandemic. The words Aondover and Deborah (2020) stated that through the media framing of issues, people's psyches had been positioned to view the COVID-19 pandemic from economic and political points of view. Based on the direction of the media framing, Nigerian citizens, especially those of the North, did not believe in the virus; rather, they looked at it from the economic and political point of view (Aondover & Deborah, 2020). Chukwunyere (2020) also studied three newspapers' coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and found economic frames as one of the dominant frames in the newspapers' articles, with storylines tilting

toward the economic implications of the virus instead of creating awareness and preaching safety measures.

The findings of Aondover and Deborah (2020) are slightly different from that of Bigman, Chinwe and Pauline (2021). For the latter, the AIT and Channels television coverage of the pandemic in Nigeria saw the two stations reporting more on social distancing (health frame) than lockdown and ban on social and economic activities (economic frame). However, the authors noted that the AIT, affiliated with the opposition APC, recorded more negative stories than Channels Television, an affiliate of the governing PDP, which recorded more positive stories. Thus, the political affiliation of the two media organisations greatly influenced their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Ophir et al. (2021) examined the framing of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Italian media and its relationship with community mobility. The study identified three frames dominating the Italian media. The first frames found were the scientific frames, which focus on death tolls, infection rates, specific outbreaks and infections, and the virus's biological nature. This frame is also congruent with Kott and Limaye's (2016) medical frame. Their study also identified the social frame, which comprises stories in areas of business, global socioeconomic impact, political parties, and government stimulus packages. The third frame identified is the pandemic and containment frame. This frame embodied topics such as quarantine, online schooling, suspension of sports events, and the movement of art and cultural events online.

These frames changed over time as the Italian cases were increasing astronomically. The media shifted the attention from the scientific frame to the pandemic and containment frame when necessary. As the cases of the virus rose, the media framed

their news coverage socially. This implies the news stories focused more on businesses hard hit by the virus, global economic effects, and the government's relief packages (Ophir et al., 2021).

Ophir et al. (2021), in examining the effects of the media frames on mobility patterns within communities in Italy, revealed that the social frame that emphasised social and economic issues was associated with a rise in mobility and a decrease in time spent in residential areas as against the COVID-19 safety protocols of social distancing and self-isolation (staying home). The containment and pandemic frame that emphasised the seriousness of the disease and policies to mitigate the effects of the virus resulted in an overall decrease in mobility and an increase in time spent in residence. Although its impact was minimal, the scientific frame recorded similar results as the containment and pandemic frame. The data suggest that the media's framing of COVID-19 issues influenced mobility and people's perception of the virus.

Mutua and Ong'ong'a (2020) analysed the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic online by four international news media organisations: BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, and the People's Daily from January 1 to February 29, 2020. Their findings revealed that these major news outlets framed their reports on COVID-19 into five categories: economic consequence, human interest, impact, attribution of responsibility, and health severity.

During the period, however, the health severity frame was the most dominant frame depicting the news organisation's strategy of communicating the seriousness of the diseases to its audience. In January, BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera news coverage of the pandemic viewed it as a Chinese problem leading to stigmatisation and Sinophobia of the Chinese by people from other countries for fear of contracting the virus (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020). McCauley et al. (2013) also observed during the H1NI flu outbreak

in 2009 that the news media coverage of the disease fiddled with activating fears that Latinos and Mexicans were responsible for the spread of the virus. Similarly, Govender (2017) noticed that the media framing of Ebola as an African problem fueled xenophobia in several US schools as African students were chased away for fear of contracting the Ebola virus.

Poirier et al. (2020) also explored the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in 12 Canadian media organisations. They examined front-page articles of Francophone and Anglophone media and found disparities in the various frames used. In all, six frames were deduced from their analysis, with the dominant frame being the health risk frame. Frames such as the Social Impact frame, Chinese frame, and the health frame received different coverage in both the Francophone and Anglophone Canadian media. Other frames, such as the Economic Crisis frame, Western Deterioration frame, and Helping Canadian frame, all received substantial coverage in the Canadian media from January 11 to April 11, 2020.

Siddiqua et al. (2020) noted that in unpredictable times of the pandemic, the media gains greater attention as it sets the agenda for the public to debate and helps people to know more about the risk related to the virus. In examining Pakistan's newspapers' coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, (Siddiqua et al., 2020) found several frames of the media in their reportage on the virus. Siddiqua and other researchers grouped the various frames into three themes: Scientific development related to the pandemic, Scale of the pandemic, and Social and economic impact. According to Siddiqua et al. (2020), Pakistani newspapers devoted most of their stories to educating the readers and warning policymakers about the growing scale of the virus.

Adiprasetio et al. (2020) examined the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indonesia's detik.com by categorising the frames in relation to the five types of frames by Entman (1991). The finding of their study shows that the most widely used frame on the website in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic is the attribution of responsibility frame. The authors also noted that there was a sense of a negative tone toward the Indonesian government in its management of the crisis.

3.7 Types of Frames

A review of the literature shows various types of framing identified by most researchers interested in this area of study. Hence, no agreed number of frames is used mainly in the news media. What is being observed is that the type of frames identified and used is dependent on the agenda/focus of the researcher. In this study, the researcher has focused on four significant frames (Issue frame, Journalist frame, News frame, and Audience frame) to demonstrate how framing works in the media arena.

To start with, 'Journalist frames' are located within journalists' thoughts about an issue, person, or event. Brüggemann (2014) defined journalist frames as "cognitive patterns of individual journalists' thought demonstrated on the subject matter. This idea is consistent with Scheufele (2004), who defined them as "consistent patterns of expectations" and a "consistent bundle of schemata". Functionally, a journalist frame forms a context for understanding, interpreting, and ultimately expressing the facts of an issue, making it akin to the issue frames of sources who associate with journalists because they wish to use news stories as a technological platform for social advocacy and public persuasion. In practice, therefore, a journalist frame is an issue-specific position based on contextual orientations, such as values or belief systems of the journalist that inform the coverage of the specific issue (Nelson & Willey, 2001),

making it similar to an audience frame, another frame type in the news framing process.

Issue frames, sometimes known as advocacy frames (Sniderman & Theriault, 2004; Entman et al., 2009), are held and expressed by individuals who construct an argument from considerations, which are reasons for favouring one side of an issue over another (Zaller & Feldman, 1992). The Journalist or audience does not generate this type of frame but emanates from existing public discussions. Often expressed as an equivalency frame based on attributes (e.g., frame a positive or the negative evaluation of a topic in terms of success/failure) or on goals (e.g., frame the desirability of a goal based on obtaining a gain or suffering a loss) rather than as strict choice-reversed risk options, issue frames come across as opinions or policy statements from individuals, groups, or organisations about a specific issue. Issue frames can make solid and compelling arguments or weak, ineffectual arguments (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The term “compelling arguments” is often used by researchers who investigate second-level agenda-setting, which holds that news framing is a stage of agenda-setting (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). There are cogent repudiations to this approach on a theoretical level (Scheufele, 2000), one of which questions the proposition that arguments are compelling when they are salient in news coverage. To Chong and Druckman (2007), for example, a strong frame is not one that “makes the most noise”; instead, “a frame’s strength increases with its perceived persuasiveness”. Issue frames must be distinguished from news frames for two reasons. First, issue frames originate from organisations outside the news media and often work with collective action frames to achieve internal goals (Noakes & Johnston, 2005). Second, issue frames are often significantly altered after being processed by journalists via newsroom frames (Miller et al., 1998).

Audience frames, sometimes known as individual frames (Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele, 2004), are rooted in a person's mental associations of words and ideas about a topic. According to Druckman (2001), audience frames are frames in thought, a term distinguishing them from frames in communication in news and issue frames. Typically, audience frames are conceived as being held by receivers of news or news audiences rather than by journalists or their sources (Entman, 1993). The terms "thought" vs "communication," along with the entailment that audience frames are neatly located within the minds of news receivers, present somewhat arbitrary analytical distinctions. "Frame in thought" is a misnomer in that the content of audience frames depends not merely on internal cognitive mechanisms but rather on social interactions between people who consume news and between those who receive news and those who make it. Frames in thought are expressed in conversations, discussions, and arguments (Price, Nir & Cappella 2005); furthermore, they are shaped, reinforced, and revised as part of one's political socialisation (Baden &Vreese, 2008).

Nonetheless, good reasons exist to distinguish audience frames from the other three frame types. In contrast, anyone be it a journalists, sources, and audiences– can be a news consumer in the ecology of news framing; not everyone is beholden to the exact framing mechanisms while making and distributing news. For example, although this is still an empirical question, erstwhile audience members who become journalists are not influenced to the same degree by newsroom frames as professional journalists are. Moreover, whereas issue frames are typically studied in terms of the strategic construction and expression of advocacy viewpoints, audience frames are typically studied in terms of memory and storage (Chong & Druckman, 2007). For these reasons, the study of audience framing is centrally concerned with understanding

cognitive mechanisms within individuals exposed to news stories and, ultimately, to news frames.

News frames or media frames, terms which some scholars distinguish (Brüggemann, 2014) and others do not (Scheufele, 2004), refer to written, spoken, graphical, and visual message modalities that journalists use to contextualise an event, issue, or person within one or more stories. In practice, news stories in all media – print, broadcast, and online – routinely blend these modalities. Nevertheless, news framing researchers identify visual frames as a special type of modality-based news frame (Coleman, 2010). Visual frames lack an explicit propositional syntax (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Hence, articulating their meaning depends to one degree or another on spoken and written language. Significant strides have been made in understanding the syncretic unit of visual frames. Like issue frames, news frames are frames in communication and are typically conceptualised as frames of emphasis. Researchers distinguish between generic news frames and topic-specific news frames, which they mainly study on word-based modalities of news.

In part, what distinguishes journalist frames from issue frames and audience frames, as Scheufele (2006) suggested, is that journalistic frames "are not idiosyncratic, but rather is established in newsroom discourse". It, however, does not mean that audience frames are unpredictable unless one knows the news diet to which an individual is exposed. Indeed, much research shows that audience frames are a product of individuals' selectivity of news and interpretation of frames in the news they select (Baden & Vreese, 2008). Instead, unlike audience frames and issue frames, the frame held by a journalist, particularly those who report the news rather than editorialists and news hosts who are supposed to offer opinions, is not as important in processes of social influence as the conditions in which a journalist's frame is formed.

One reason for this is practical, for the norm of objectivity holds that journalists who report the news are supposed to mute their frames in the texts of stories.

3.8 Factors that Influence the Selection of News Frames in the Media

News Frames are an essential element of news coverage of issues. The frames that media personnel adopt while reporting on issues within society have critical implications on public perceptions about the issue (Entman, 1993). Thus, media frames are largely essential media tools used to shape people's perceptions of social issues. Leask, Hooker and King (2010) note that while media coverage of framing techniques and their implication abound in literature, not a lot of attention is paid to how journalists select news frames and angles while they report on critical social issues. Some authors argue that journalists' decisions on how to frame stories and which frames to place salience on should be of equal interest to media studies (Gans, 1997; Leask et al., 2010; Hodgetts et al., 2008). Qureshi (2023) acknowledges that the media is influenced by eight core issues when reporting generally on social issues. The author explains that commercial pressures, source availability, journalistic interpretations, and editorial policy are core issues journalists consider when selecting news frames and angles. Qureshi (2023) further notes that other essential factors, such as audience appeal, newsroom culture, news sensationalism, and socio-political climate, determine how journalists frame stories in the media.

Kitzinger (1999) suggests that the media is critical in the social construction of risks during a health crisis. Thus, as Kitzinger (1999) argues, the media, through selecting and promoting specific frames and news angles, is essential in constructing feelings and perceptions of risk among media consumers during a health problem. Journalists often engage in the use of frames when covering global health problems. Using frames

allows the journalist to apply contextualisation necessary for media consumers to correctly interpret and understand health issues news (Dan & Raupp, 2018). While this is true, Leask, Hooker and King (2010) argue that understanding the key issues that influence media professionals in their selection of news frames and angles is critical to how the public perceives the entire health problem. Not many studies have covered what goes into the selection of frames and news angles in the media while they report on global health issues (Leask et al., 2010). Some of the studies that have delved more profoundly into this area have found that a vast number of issues result in how media personnel select news frames while they report on global health issues (Chang et al., 2009).

While exploring news media coverage of global health problems such as the outbreak of the avian flu Leask, Hooker and King (2010) found that the media considered a host of different issues while considering the forms of frames to adopt and pay attention to. The authors found, among other things, that media personnel considered media professional requirements such as balance and fairness. Furthermore, the study found that general media-related challenges such as operational constraints and funding also shaped the forms of news and frames that the media focused on while it reported on the Avian Flu. Leask, Hooker and King (2010) further found that the types of news sources that media personnel pay attention to and cover during pandemics are essential in informing the forms of frames and news angles that are developed within the media.

3.9 Strengths and Weaknesses of Media Framing Theory

The media framing theory has been adopted as a crucial theory within media studies over the past decades. This is primarily as a result of the strengths of the theory. One

of the core strengths of the theory, for which it has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this study, is that it provides critical insights on explaining how the media influences the perceptions of media consumers (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2015). The theory tends to explain how the media shape how people perceive issues by constructing a framework through which issues are observed by audiences (Scheufele, 2004). The theory effectively selects some aspects of issues and projects them while downplaying other aspects (Borah, 2011). Media analysts engage in studying media framing theory to be able to understand how the media does this and for what reasons. Some media scholars (for instance, Borah, 2011; Koon et al., 2016) have linked this advantage with the role of the media in influencing public policies. Thus, some authors have argued that as framing is able to shape the perceptions of the public on critical issues, it is able to influence how people perceive policies and eventually lead to their implementation or cancellation.

Another critical strength of the media framing theory is that is illuminates media biases and manipulations (Entman, 2007). The theory projects the idea that the media engages in the biased selection of issues while projecting them in some particular light. Critical understanding of the media aids studies such as this in uncovering how the media is able to, in a subjective manner, select some aspects of issues and project them from some pre-determined perspective. Essentially, the theory aids in understanding critical elements that account for these biases and manipulations of social issues, such as advertising and political influences (Morstatter et al., 2018).

Regardless of these strengths, some crucial weaknesses exist and have critical implications for this study. For instance, the scholars argue that the concepts of framing and frames are vague and difficult to conceptualise comprehensively (Borah, 2011). Thus, different researchers developed frames differently, and hence have

different interpretations of what frames constitute. For a study of this nature, this raises concerns about ambiguity and mutual exclusivity. For instance, what constitutes political frames may have some key overlapping connections with what constitutes government frames. Frames are therefore difficult to isolate and may be difficult to conceptualise in a mutually exclusive manner (Carragee & Roefs, 2004).

Another core challenge of the framing theory that is worth noting is that the theory is limited to developing linkage, mainly correlations and not causation (Jou et al., 199). The framing theory tends to predict an association with the nature of media coverage of issues and public perceptions and attitudes without specifically indicating how media coverage causes behaviors and attitudes (Borah, 2011). In this regard, the theory presents some forms of critical limitations, as the study would not be able to make causal inferences on the association between online coverage and framing of the pandemic and its implications on the perceptions and attitudes of media consumers. Some authors have also indicated that a critical shortcoming of the framing theory is that frames evolve over time because they are dynamic, complex, and possess overlapping characteristics. Hence, what one frame may mean today and for one study may mean something completely different over time (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). This makes it difficult to conduct longitudinal studies, as, essentially, the researcher may find an unrealistically large base of different frames (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2015).

The key advantages and shortcomings of the framing theory make it ideal for this study. The study adopts this theory as it allows the researcher to effectively identify frames that the media used to represent issues in their coverage. Frames are structures developed by the media to help the media and media audiences make sense of issues in society (Entman, 2007). Furthermore, the tendency of the framing

theory to predict media bias and subjective manipulation helps the researcher draw inferences on the issues that influence media biases in their coverage of the pandemic and its implications on audience perceptions, policy, and media studies.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter of the study looked critically at the theoretical framework for the study. A theoretical framework serves as a plan or road map for a research project. It is a framework that is built on a theory that is currently accepted in a particular field. (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). A theoretical framework, in the words of Anfara and Mertz (2015), is any empirical or quasi-empirical theory that explains social and psychological processes. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to serve as the foundation for the investigation. It is a well-organised system of a theory or group of hypotheses supported by science and explains a phenomenon (Fulton & Krainovich-Miller, 2010).

The Media framing and agenda-setting theories were adopted to develop the theoretical framework for the study. Both theories are popular theories within the field of media and communication studies. They have been adopted in a wide range of studies that have looked at media coverage and framing of health issues (Leask et al., 2010; O'Keeffe et al., 2020; Picard & Yeo, 2011; Diedong, 2013) and pandemics (Zafri et al., 2021) (Vasterman & Ruigrok, 2013; Krawczyk et al., 2020; Klemm, Das, & Hartmann, 2016).

The findings expressed in most of the literature lean toward accepting that the media (broadcast, print, and online) adopted multiple frames while covering COVID-19, as has been the case with the coverage of previous pandemics and health issues in general. Adapting diverse frames enables the media to accurately represent the pandemic to audiences while placing salience and importance on certain issues

concerning the virus. The next chapter will discuss the methodology adooted for this study. This will include the research approach, population, sampling and sampling techniques adopted for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study's goal was to investigate media portrayals of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. The researcher employed a systematic approach in collecting, analysing and interpreting the relevant data to achieve this study's main objectives. The research methodology can be considered a structured way to collect and analyse data for a study. Typically, the research methodology encompasses the research paradigm or worldview, qualitative or quantitative techniques, data collection instruments, and techniques for data analysis and interpretation (Igwenagu, 2016). In simple terms, the research methodology is a systematic means of solving the research problem. It captures the science by combining different techniques and steps to attain the overall aim of the research. Most importantly, as some authors pointed out, the research methodology covers the logic behind the deliberate selection or adoption of tests, methods, and techniques (Patel & Patel, 2019).

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the methodology adopted by the researcher in investigating media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. The chapter covers the research paradigm, research approach, research design, and data collection techniques adopted for this study. The chapter adopts the qualitative research approach associated with the interpretivist research worldview or paradigm as the fundamental methodological approach to understanding how the online media in Ghana covered and framed the coronavirus pandemic on the continent.

4.2 Research Paradigm

The concept, *research paradigm*, is derived from the Greek word, 'pattern'. Research paradigm entails the basis upon which research perspectives are captured, and they

are increasingly becoming a critical aspect of media studies and research in general (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), Thomas Khun (1962) first used the term paradigm to mean the philosophical means of thinking. Subsequently, researchers have adopted the idea that addressing research problems requires a worldview or philosophical standpoint from which the problem can be perceived and then investigated. Hence, researchers possess very different perspectives about problems and how they set out to solve them.

Hughes (2010) argues that the research paradigm simply concerns the way researchers perceive or see the world. In other words, Hughes (2010) underscores that the research paradigm is "the way of seeing the world that frames a research topic" (p.35). Thus, the research paradigm captures the worldview of a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Lather, 1986; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The research paradigm also means the set of beliefs researchers hold about how a particular research problem exists in society and how the problem ought to be investigated and addressed. The research paradigm is a primary indication of the researcher's inherent or innate beliefs about the world in which they exist. These beliefs form how they see a research problem and, consequently, how they believe it should be solved or addressed (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

4.2.2 Interpretivism

The study follows the interpretivist paradigm. According to interpretive scholars (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Black, 2006; Bliakie, 2004), there is no one ideal way to learn, and people's perceptions of reality can be influenced by their interactions with the natural world (Ryan, 2018; Bryman, 2008). Scholars contend that interpretive researchers emphasise the importance of contextualising data interpretation and analysis.

Because observation and interpretation are the cornerstone of the interpretive paradigm, the interpretivist's research approach needs to gather evidence by observing events and inferring meaning from them (Chowdhury, 2014; Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, it is stated that the interpretive researcher plays a critical role in deriving conclusions from the observations, presenting the findings within a particular social context, and not exclusively involved in the research process (Leitch et al., 2010).

Researchers who align with interpretivism assume primarily that reality is only a result of social construction. Thus, what researchers perceive as real is socially constructed. Hence, social reality is constructed based on social constructions such as language, shared meanings, and consciousness (Myers, 2008). Therefore, the ideal thinking of interpretivists is that knowledge and processes of its creation are not independent of social consciousness. Unlike positivists, who believe that knowledge is found objectively, interpretivists believe in a more subjective derivation of knowledge (Collins, 2010).

To better understand an event and identify the complex problems and phenomena in the particular context the situation is embedded in so that researchers can understand what has happened and how it has happened, interpretivists also adopt a relativist ontology in which an event may have multiple interpretations rather than being a fact that can be determined using a specific method (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2007). According to ontological and epistemological perspectives, the meaning of reality is socially formed through the experiences of social narrators, which may cause socially situated events to become more resonant. Referring to this idea, interpretivist researchers should be aware that there may be multiple interpretations of the conclusions drawn from the data, so it is their duty to devise methods for recognising

and comprehending the diversity of ways that people experience the problems and circumstances in various cultural contexts (Hammersley, 2013).

One of the core benefits associated with the interpretivist paradigm of research is that this paradigm can use diverse and varied points of view to explain a phenomenon and not just describe them. The paradigm allows for a more expansive explanation to achieve a better comprehension of social phenomena as well as their relevant contexts (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Furthermore, many different research methods and approaches exist at the disposal of interpretivist research. The researcher can use the narrative approach, case study, and ethnography to understand social occurrences deeply (Saunders et al., 2012).

Considering the varying advantages associated with the interpretivist paradigm to research, the researcher adopted this philosophical worldview to understand how the Ghanaian media covered the COVID-19 pandemic adequately. The paradigm allows the researcher to interpret events of media coverage and framing while considering relevant social contexts and drawing out multiple interpretations from the data gathered.

4.3 Research Approach

The research approach concerns the plans and strategic procedures a researcher considers for a study. The research approach entails broad assumptions of data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation of the collected data. The research plan involves several decisions regarding the study's overall aim and specific objectives (Bhawna & Gobind, 2015).

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2007), there are mainly three (3) approaches to research design. These include the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods

approach. The choice of a research approach relies heavily on the objectives and purpose of the study (Opoku et al., 2016). It is thus essential to consider the purpose of a study before selecting the appropriate design that will maximise the potential to increase knowledge of the phenomenon to be studied. According to Opoku, Ahmed, and Akotia (2016), these comprise selecting a research design. They define the research approach as "the philosophy and the framework fundamentally related to the entire processes of the research" (p. 33).

This research adopts a qualitative approach to understanding the portrayal of the novel coronavirus in the Ghanaian media. Qualitative research is an inductive approach to exploring meanings and insights into a particular phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Levitt et al., 2017). Punch (2013) explains the qualitative approach as a type of social science research concerned with non-numerical analysis and seeks subjective interpretation from data collected. Walia (2016) further describes qualitative research as more concerned with words than numbers and as a type of research approach that examines the world in its natural environment. Similarly, the current study sought to identify issues that were made salient in the Ghanaian media about the reportage of the coronavirus by examining the main issues and frames that dominated online reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana and how they influenced the understanding of the audience of the pandemic through the analysis of news stories.

Also, a rigorous mathematical computation is not the focus of the study because the study is more concerned with delving into the explanations and the interpretations of the media's coverage of the coronavirus pandemic through the (re)presentation of the issues that arise from studying the data collected and this is reiterated by Hancock et al. (2007) who explain that qualitative research focuses on reports of experience or on data which cannot be adequately expressed numerically. The authors argue further

that qualitative research aims to create explanations for social occurrences. In other words, it seeks to aid us in comprehending the social environment in which we reside and the reasons behind why things are the way they are. It is focused on our world's social features. Therefore, qualitative research is a systematic way to comprehend a social issue fully.

Contrary to the quantitative research approach, qualitative studies usually concentrate on describing and/or interpreting a social event. It aims to infer meaning from an event or to comprehend its significance. To add to this, Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.3) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach. "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them".

4.4 Research design

The research design refers to the overall strategy that one chooses to address the problem, which requires the integration of different components of the study coherently and logically, thereby ensuring efficient solving of the problem. It constitutes the blueprint for collecting, measuring, analysing data, interpreting, and reporting conclusions (Kumar, 2015). The study adopted content analysis. The content analysis allows for a direct examination of communication using text, qualitative and quantitative analysis, valuable historical and cultural insight over time, closeness to data, and insight into complex models of human thought and language usage. The focus of qualitative content analysis studies is often on describing and/or interpreting a social event through the lenses of the media. It seeks to understand the importance of an event or deduce its meaning (Given, 2008). Qualitative content analysis is often

critical to studies such as this current one because it allows for high levels of interpretations of events as reported by the media. Thus, adopting a qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to delve deeper into textual data to make sense of actual social occurrences.

Furthermore, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) account for the use of the orderly classification of textual data, presenting the approach with a sense of systemised approaches in developing themes and patterns that aid the explanation of social phenomena. Marying (2002) mentions that content analysis allows the researcher greater control over the textual data. This leads to high levels of accuracy and trustworthiness of the data and their interpretations.

Zhang and Wildermuth's (2007) argument gives a clearer basis for the adoption of qualitative content analysis as an analytical tool for this study. They argue that the media presents a better picture of the entire society. Hence, researchers seeking a better understanding of social events must consider how the media covers such events. Qualitative content analysis becomes critical as it is one of the most widely used approaches to analysing how the media depicts social phenomena.

4.4.1 Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a research technique that describes the content of communicative messages in a systematic manner. In quantitative content analysis, the researcher is interested in sampling text, selecting the relevant text, unitising these texts, and contextualising the text (Krippendorff, 2013). The essence of qualitative content analysis and the purpose for which the researcher has employed it as a study design for this study is emphasised in its objective nature, relevance in analysing media texts and products, validity, and reliability (Krippendorff, 2013; Lock & Seele,

2015). Thus, the relevance of content analysis to research is multifaceted and deep-seething.

This study applied qualitative research processes to content analyse news reports on the COVID-19 pandemic published in the selected news portals. The goal of qualitative research is to create explanations for social occurrences. In other words, it seeks to aid us in comprehending the social environment in which we reside and the reasons behind why things are the way they are. It is focused on our world's social features. Therefore, qualitative research is a systematic way to comprehend a social issue fully. Contrary to the quantitative research approach, qualitative studies usually concentrate on describing and/or interpreting a social event. It aims to infer meaning from an event or to comprehend its significance (Given, 2008).

Hence, qualitative content analysis involves interpretation, theorisation and meaning-making of data by breaking down some textual content into categorical segments and establishing patterns within these categorisations. Moreover, the qualitative content analysis design is one of the most widely used research designs in media studies in recent times. (see, for instance, Parniyan, Pasyer, Rambod, Momennesab, & Nazarina, 2023; Sirilli, Mloka, Mselle, Kisenge, & Mbugi, 2022; Nombembe, 2023). Wimmer and Dominick (2011) explained that the design efficiently investigates media content in detail and aids in accurately and efficiently analysing news articles and their aspects, including headlines, leads, and paragraphs.

Therefore, the adoption of qualitative content analysis as the research design in this thesis was based on the merits associated with the design as explained above. The design enabled me to efficiently analyse the media texts objectively selected for

analysis, yielding a comprehensive interpretation of how online media covered and framed the coronavirus pandemic.

4.4.2 Case Study

This study further employed case studies to critically examine the portrayal of the pandemic in the selected Ghanaian media. A case study is a research approach used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. Yin (1984, p. 23) noted that the case study research method is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." It is an established research design used extensively in various disciplines, particularly in the social sciences (Sarah et al., 2011). According to Dul and Hak (2008) and Ebneyamini, Reza and Moghadam (2018), case study research designs have become one of social science's most important, widely used, and potent research methods. Johansson (2003) attributed this to the fact that the approach to inquiry is flexible and allows the researcher to delve deeper into social phenomena. This is often of interest to qualitative researchers because they are interested in providing rich-thick descriptions of social issues.

A case study is a qualitative study that examines complicated social issues. As a result, it relies on multiple sources of evidence and requires data to be covered in a triangulating manner. It also benefits from the earlier development of theoretical propositions for data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003). Case studies can be used to explain, describe, or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur (Yin, 2007), offering additional insights into the gaps in its delivery or why one implementation strategy might be chosen over another. Case studies are

designed to suit the case and research question, and published case studies demonstrate wide diversity in study design (Hyett et al., 2014).

Consequently, the researcher studied and critically analysed the online publications of selected Ghanaian newspaper portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021.

There exist different forms of case studies available to the social science researcher: single case study designs and multiple case studies (Dul and Hak (2008); intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study designs (Stake, 1995). Yin (2003) also indicated three types of case studies – exploratory case studies, explanatory case studies and descriptive case studies. An exploratory case study is used to ascertain an initial understanding of a phenomenon or social event. An exploratory case study focuses on developing a basic understanding of an issue or discovering key critical issues regarding a social event. Descriptive case studies are research approaches that are used to provide descriptions of phenomena. They seek to describe a social event and provide a clear picture of what a social issue looks like.

On the other hand, an explanatory case study is used to answer critical questions such as 'how' and 'why' of a particular social phenomenon. They are particularly helpful in helping the researcher understand the core reasons behind the occurrence of a social phenomenon.

A case study is a detailed assessment of an event or a series of events. Yin (2013) notes that a case study is an empirical investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life setting or context. Rhee (2004) affirms that case studies are critical in studying phenomena in their natural contexts. They are also critical in assessing events when little is known about them. Furthermore, they allow the researcher to study a few events or issues in detail and depth. Stake (1995) explains that the core of Case study

research design is to study a single phenomenon with particularity and complexity. This means that case studies emphasise studying single issues or series of issues in depth.

Yin (1994) intimates that exploratory case studies are case studies that answer the 'what' type of questions. Hancock and Algozzine (2016) note that exploratory case studies often attempt to answer questions about the feasibility of a subsequent study. They are often cursory and usually adopted in surveys. Meanwhile, descriptive and explanatory case studies offer more detail in researching phenomena. They answer the 'why' and 'how' types of questions. Explanatory case studies are case studies that seek to establish cause-and-effect relationships (Rhee, 2004). This case study is primarily concerned with explaining how things occur and why. Descriptive case studies often attempt to describe a phenomenon within its context comprehensively. The goal of descriptive case studies is to describe the event or series of single events in great depth (Yin, 2013)

The research followed the descriptive case study approach to achieve this study's objectives. According to Yin (2013), the descriptive case study approach allows the researcher to describe the phenomenon under study in detail while also establishing the context of the phenomenon and how it affects the phenomenon. This study is interested in understanding how the media in Ghana covered and framed the coronavirus pandemic in the country. The descriptive case study research design aided the researcher in collecting and analysing data to offer a comprehensive and detailed description of how the media engaged in their report. Most importantly, the descriptive case study design is instrumental in aiding the researcher in investigating media coverage and framing of the pandemic with the Ghanaian setting or context, as advised by Yin (2013) and Stake (1995).

4.5.1 Population of the Study

A study's population refers to a group or set of things to which the research findings apply. (Shukla, 2020). In other words, the population of the study is a set of all the units that capture or possess the variable characteristics that are of interest to the researcher. The population of a study provides the basis for the generalisation of findings made in the study (Polit & Hungler, 1995).

The population of this study includes both objects and human subjects. The object population was all news stories published on the coronavirus pandemic on *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. The first three are private media organisations, while the last one is a state-owned media organisation. *Peacefmonline.com* was selected because it is a privately owned online platform for a dominant local language radio station in the country. The researcher was primarily interested in collecting data objectively and honestly. Hence, the decision was to select two media organisations, each from private and state-owned media organisations, and a news platform that represented local language news readership. Apuke and Omar (2021) and Umar and Dango (2020) underscore the relevance of adopting both private and public news media selection in studying media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. They argue that adopting such a strategy allows for high-level objectivity in collecting data from news media content.

March 12, 2020, was when the first coronavirus case was reported in Ghana, and March 24, 2021, was exactly four weeks after Ghana received the vaccine and started rolling it out. (World Health Organisation, 2022) The COVID-19 pandemic is still evolving, but the researcher believes the timeframe was long enough to elicit requisite

information to guide his understanding of how the Ghanaian media portrayed the coronavirus pandemic from its outbreak to the vaccination period.

Journalists from the four media organisations considered for this study, media and media and communication students, and some selected media consumers constituted the human population. Interviews with the journalists provided information on motivating factors for the choice of frames used in reporting the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, focus group discussions with media and media and communication students and the workshop for selected media consumers provided the researcher with an understanding of how the framing of the coronavirus pandemic by the Ghanaian media affects the perception and attitude of the Ghanaian public towards the virus.

4.5.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Sampling is the technique of systematically selecting a few units from a larger population to study. In agreement with this, Alvi (2019) explains that sampling is the process through which a sample is extracted from a population. According to Cochran (1997), sampling affords the researcher three significant advantages. Sampling presents the researcher with greater speed in handling data, greater accuracy, and greater scope (p.2). The sampling strategies adopted for this study ensured that the researcher collected systematically relevant information without wasting effort.

4.5.3 Sample Criteria

This study considers a sample of four online news portals in Ghana that engaged in active coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in the country. The organisations include *citinewsroom.com, myjoyonline.com.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*. The mentioned organisations were selected for this study due to their relevance in the

Ghanaian news media industry. *Gna.org.gh* was selected primarily because it is the online wing of Ghana's wire news agency – *Ghana News Agency*. As such, the organisation is one of the core news organisations with principal access to key Corona news information in Ghana. *Myjoyonline.com*, a private news organisation, is ranked by Sem[3]rush (a website ranking index) as the ninth most visited website and first most visited online news media organisation in Ghana. This implies a wide readership base in the country and prompts an indication of good news circulation in Ghana. The researcher also selected *peacefmonline.com* because it represents the nation's most listened-to local dialect radio station. The following constitute the criteria for selecting the media organisations for the study:

a) The accessibility of original stories from the websites: The researcher intentionally ignored news aggregator websites in the country, such as Ghanaweb.com. The study did not include such news portals as they mostly aggregated news stories from other news portals. This posed the threat of publishing the same or very similar news stories differently from other websites, which could impede the levels of accuracy in the data the researcher desired. News aggregator websites also posed the threat of including stories that may not be directly related to the geographic scope of interest (Ghana) or the critical phenomena the researcher was interested in studying.
b) The ease of access to archives: The researcher paid critical attention to online media platforms with well-organised news archives. This was chiefly influenced by the need to collect data quickly and in an orderly manner so as not to waste

[3]

[3]https://www.semrush.com/partner/tuyadigital_4278126/?irclickid=wWx1trSvlxyNWhnSQJRNWxz7UkASSoxu4xPg2s0&irgwc=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw67ajBhAVEiwA2g_jEOuI5AtkltQCh7TQaqHdlzBBeYkuU-AajJRZIQgSBkx5CmFvi5BMMBoC0zwQAvD_BwE

time and other resources collecting data. Ghanaian news websites that did not have well-organised news archives were not selected for this study to reduce the time wastage involved in data retrieval and collection. The selected online news portals had organised news archives, making data collection easier and orderly and preventing the researcher from missing essential stories.

c) Standardised news writing house style and ethical considerations: The researcher was interested in selecting news platforms that paid critical attention to news writing standards while being ethically responsible for journalism and news reporting tenets.

Furthermore, to accurately assess the perceptions of the Ghanaian public on media coverage of the coronavirus and the perceived impacts on their behaviours, the study also considered selecting respondents from diverse groups of urban participants who have access to and use either one of the identified online news media platforms selected for this study. The study focused on accessing data from these respondents to determine the perceived effects of media news information from the selected online media organisation on media consumers. The researcher limited the selection criteria of the respondents to persons who have core knowledge of media activities and are privy and well-vested in media information. The researcher was hence interested in selecting from a population of respondents who are avid online news users.

To ensure the success of this selection, the researcher decided to select media and communication students from the Institute of Journalism, University of Media, Arts and Communication. This decision was informed mainly by the thought that such students are budding members of the journalism community, young and active users of digital media platforms (Flores-vivar & Aguilar, 2009). Hence, such respondents have access to online news platforms that reported the pandemic and have a better appreciation of

journalistic pieces done on the pandemic by these platforms. Thus, the selection of respondents was driven by the need to collect data from subjects with access to online news media platforms in Ghana and understand the contents therein. Further, such respondents are better positioned to appreciate the possible impacts of the news concerning the coronavirus pandemic on their lives.

Additionally, journalists who actively participated in the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana from the selected online platforms were sampled for this study. The researcher emphasised reporters of health news teams in various media organisations. In organisations where such specialisations did not exist, the researcher selected a key member of the health news team or health reporter from the media organisation. This is primarily influenced by health reporters being the main sources of coronavirus-related information during the pandemic. They had a better understanding of news related to the pandemic and, hence, knew how to interpret the news for easy comprehension. In the process of doing this, health news reporters also have a better understanding of the angles they assume in their reportage and the frames their news stories take. Effectively, such reporters or editors are better placed to help the study understand the reasons for the presence and or prominence of some frames over others.

4.5.4 Purposive Sampling Technique

The study used the purposive sampling technique to select all news stories related to the coronavirus pandemic on the four media portals. The researcher used embedded search engines on the various news platforms and news tags to identify all coronavirus-related news stories published within the period under review since those stories are the only relevant ones to the study. According to Etikan et al. (2016, p.2),

the purposive sampling technique, “also called the judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses.” This sampling technique involves the selection of a sample because they are proficient and well-informed about a phenomenon of interest. In selecting, Purposive Sampling techniques are primarily used in qualitative studies. They may be explained as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes for answering a research study’s questions. Maxwell (1997) further defined purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which specific settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide better than other choices. In using the purposive sampling technique, all news articles about the coronavirus pandemic that were discovered to have been published from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021, on *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* were taken into consideration because that period marks the outbreak, second wave, and vaccination phases of the pandemic, which are relevant to the study. A total of 3819 news stories on the coronavirus pandemic were discovered to have been published on the four selected news portals with the breakdown as follows: *myjoyonline.com*, 257; *peacefmonline.com*, 627; *gna.org.gh*, 1507 and *Citinewsroom.com,* 1428.

The purposive sampling was used primarily to select four (4) journalists actively involved in the pandemic coverage for various media houses in Ghana. The purposive sampling approach was used to select one (1) health reporter each from the four (4) media organisations whose coverage is considered for the content analysis engaged in this study. This enabled the researcher to understand the thought processes and reasoning behind selecting some frames and what led to developing frames used in the coverage of the pandemic. Ideally, journalists selected from the organisations

whose content was used would have key insights into what samples (news stories) were used and why they were used. Hence, the research adopted the purposive sampling approach to select key journalists from the media organisations drafted for this study.

4.5.5 Constructed week sampling

The constructed week sampling technique is a sampling approach that is widely used within the content analysis tradition (Luke et al., 2011). This sampling approach is a stratified sampling method in media studies in which the final sample is a representation of all seven days of the week (Hester & Dougall, 2007). The constructed week sampling approach allows the researcher to sample news stories from selected days to represent all seven days of the week (Riffe et al., 2005). Mishra (2016) advises that for studies of such a nature as this one, there is the need to ensure a limited number of respondents for diverse reasons. The writer accounts that, since sampling using this approach is backed by the qualitative tradition, there is an emphasis on the depth of information and not the number of respondents.

Hence, the researcher must pay more attention to retrieving detailed information than collecting information from many respondents. Furthermore, Luke, Caburnay and Cohen (2011) account that the constructed week sampling approach is a simple approach that allows the researcher to engage in content analysis of media content to sample in a way that is representative of all seven days within the week.

Considering that 3819 news stories on the coronavirus pandemic were published on all four news portals within the period under review, a smaller number of stories were chosen using the constructed week sampling for the analysis because it was not possible to analyse all 3819 news stories for this study within the timeframe.

The Table 1 below shows the frequency distribution of selected media portals and their monthly coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. According to Riffe et al. (1993) and Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005), sampling a large number of news stories while engaged in content analysis where there are many stories is often a waste of resources. It may lead to inefficiency in the coding of the stories. Luke, Carburnay and Cohen (2011) states that within the field of health reporting, selecting a single story from a weekly publication over an extended period is essential in sampling enough stories for media studies. Hester and Dougall (2007) also note that due to the frequency of publications on online media portals and the transient nature of news online, sampling single stories weekly on subjects of interest is adequate for content analysis. This study, therefore, leaned on the sampling recommendations of Luke, Caburnay and Cohen (2011) to sample the first story published every Monday on various news media websites.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of selected media portals and their monthly coverage of the coronavirus pandemic

MONTHS	**NUMBER OF STORIES**				**TOTAL**
	JOY FM ONLINE	*PEACE FM ONLINE*	*GNA*	*CITI NEWSROOM ONLINE*	
MARCH 2020	74	148	199	161	**582**
APRIL 2020	25	102	251	494	**872**
MAY 2020	23	82	277	157	**539**
JUNE 2020	17	81	189	125	**412**
JULY 2020	42	47	217	142	**448**
AUGUST 2020	34	30	58	40	**162**
SEPTEMBER 2020	9	22	25	28	**84**

OCTOBER 2020	7	4	24	32	**67**
NOVEMBER 2020	9	17	33	30	**89**
DECEMBER 2020	8	25	22	14	**69**
JANUARY 2021	6	22	87	81	**196**
FEBRUARY 2021	2	36	72	74	**184**
MARCH 2021	1	11	53	50	**115**
TOTAL	**257**	**627**	**1507**	**1428**	**3819**

Hence, based on the constructive week sampling approach and in line with Caburnay and Cohen's (2011) recommendations, this study sampled 208 news stories resulting from four news stories sampled from Monday publications of the four websites, 52 from each of the four news portals. After gathering all the stories on the coronavirus pandemic, the researcher selected 4 stories each from the four media portals monthly, 1 each week. A total of 2719 paragraphs were considered from 208 sampled stories. It is essential to note that the sampling criteria (as discussed in previous sections of this chapter) were also adhered to strictly while sampling news stories.

4.5.6 Convenience Sampling

Alvi (2016) notes that the convenience sampling technique is a type of probability sampling technique that allows the researcher to include those who are easy or convenient to reach for the study. The convenience sampling approach allows the researcher to select respondents or participants who are readily available for the study to be included in the research. The technique is crucial when selecting respondents who share similar characteristics and helps the researcher save time as they only

include respondents who are readily available to be included in the study (Etikan, 2016). The researcher adopted this approach by sampling thirty-two (32) participants from the Institute of Journalism to achieve this study's objectives. This was to ensure group dynamism, response variation and enhanced depth of richness of the collected data. It was also to aid the researcher in capturing a broader range of perspectives and experiences related to how the media coverage of the pandemic has influenced their understanding and behaviour towards it.

Additionally, the study adopted the selection of thirty-two students to investigate the impact of media frames regarding the pandemic in Ghana because the researcher was concerned about reaching data saturation. In qualitative research, saturation has received broad support as a methodological guideline. It is generally understood to mean that more data gathering and/or analysis are not necessary given the data that have already been gathered or examined (Saunders et al., 2018). Hence, as the data collection phase reached saturation, limiting the sample size to 4 groups with 8 members each as participants became necessary.

One of the core objectives of this study is to understand the influence and impact of the frames adopted by journalists from the four selected online news portals during their coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. The study hence sampled the thirty-two students from the Institute of Journalism to achieve this objective since such participants have adequate knowledge of media activities.

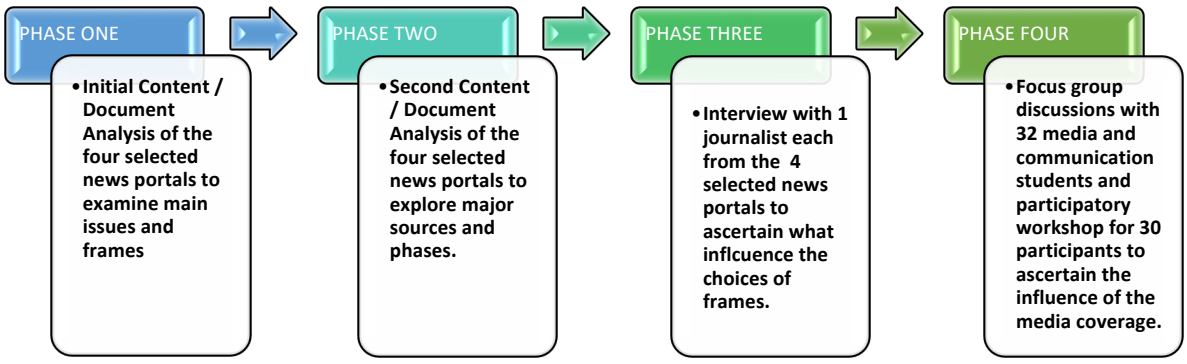
Also, thirty (30) media consumers were sampled using the convenience sampling approach. The 30 participants were sampled from different demographic backgrounds and placed in Groups A and B, comprising 15 members each. The groups were strategically selected, with Group A consisting of members with high levels of

education and employment. In contrast, members of Group B consisted of members with basic and secondary school education, no employment, or self-employed with petty jobs. The convenience sampling allowed for the selection of participants who were easily accessible and readily available. Selecting 30 media consumers based on convenience ensures convenience in reaching out to potential participants and saving time and resources for recruitment. Also, because the target population of media consumers is relatively homogeneous, this approach provided a reasonable representation of the population while allowing the researcher to gather the needed information within the constraints of the resources available to the researcher.

4.6 Data Collection Phases

The study adopted a systematic approach to collecting data. This was done to ensure that data collection was orderly to improve accuracy and remove possible avenues for mistakes and oversight. Additionally, there was the need to engage a systematic chronological means of collecting data to ensure that the data collected corroborates and complements each other in a manner that helped the researcher accurately evaluate the research objectives of this study effectively.

Figure 2: Data Collection Phases



4.6.1 Phase One: Content / Document Analysis of the four selected news portals to identify dominant issues and frames

The data collection phase first involved content and document analysis of the news stories published on the four selected online news portals. According to Krippendorf (1980), document analysis is the primary approach used to collect data secondary data. Using content/document analysis as a research methodology is a methodical and unbiased way to describe and evaluate occurrences. It is possible to group words into fewer content-related categories through content analysis and document analysis because, per Cavanagh (1997), words, phrases, and the like share the same meaning when classified into the same categories. This allows the researcher to test theoretical hypotheses to understand the data better.

According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a rigorous process for reviewing and evaluating materials. Like other analytical methods used in qualitative research, document analysis demands that data be carefully examined and interpreted to foster meaning, gain insight, and provide empirical knowledge.

Relative to this study, the selected sample was retrieved from the various online news platforms and assessed effectively using content and document analysis techniques. The initial phase, which engaged the two analysis techniques, was essential in addressing the following research questions. Like other analytical techniques in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be scrutinised and construed to stimulate meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data collected at this phase was to answer the research questions below:

> RQ1. What are the main issues that dominated the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

RQ2. How was the pandemic framed in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

4.6.2 Phase Two: Content / Document Analysis of the four selected news portals to identify major news sources and news phases of the pandemic.

The second data collection phase was also a content analysis of the news published on the four selected online Ghanaian media portals, this time to establish the main sources behind the news story understudy and the various phases of the pandemic as reported by the selected media. Data gathered at this phase was to attempt to answer the following research questions.

RQ3. Who are the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic?

RQ4. What were the various phases of the pandemic and what news frames characterised each phase?

4.6.3 Phase Three: Interview with 1 journalist each from the 4 selected news portals

Phase three of the data collection process engaged in-depth interview sessions with one health journalist each from the four selected online news media portals. The researcher scheduled and conducted face-to-face meetings with identified health reporters of the various organisations used for the research.

The interviews were scheduled to address the following research question.

RQ5. What influenced the choice of frames used by the selected Ghanaian journalists for the coronavirus reports?

4.6.4 Phase Four: Focus Group Discussions with media and communication students and Participatory Workshop for Media Consumers

The fourth phase of data collection concerned focus group discussions with media and communication students. A participatory workshop selected media consumers to understand their appreciation of the media frames and how they helped shape their understanding of the pandemic. The researcher focused on media and communication students for the focus group discussion mainly because they are perceived as budding journalists who understand the journalism terrain and, hence, better understand news writing, framing and media activities. The participants from the focus group discussions were selected from the Institute of Journalism, Ghana's premier Journalism and Communications University. The thirty-two selected students were sampled using the convenience sampling approach and drawn in 4 discussions of 8 members each. Focus group discussions should consist of between 4 to 10 members to aid the researcher in controlling data obtained from the respondents (Masadeh, 2012; Creswell, 2007).

Participatory workshops are increasingly becoming more recognised and used in qualitative studies in recent times. (Ormgreen & Levinsen, 2017) The research approach allows the researcher to work with selected participants towards developing a rich, thick data set that effectively aids the researcher in exploring their research objectives (Rossi & Sein, 2003). Workshops are built around a creative environment for interaction that enables participants to talk about present circumstances and develop suggestions for how this could evolve using generative design tools. The researcher had the chance to watch the participants engage and bargain during the workshop. The information gathered during the workshop included observations-based field notes, recordings on video and audio of group conversations, photographs of the group in action, and—last but not least—the models, sketches, and prototypes that were created as a result of the workshop process (Storvang et al., 2017).

Thirty (30) participants were sampled from different demographic backgrounds and placed in two groups – group A, consisting of 15 members and Group B, consisting of 15 members. The groups were strategically selected, with Group A consisting of members with high levels of education and employment, while members of Group B consisted of members with basic and secondary school education with no employment or self-employed with petty jobs. The selection was done to ensure data was collected from the best representation of the Ghanaian population. The two groups were also developed to prevent extraneous issues of inferiority and superiority complex amongst participants, which could have impeded the collection of rich and accurate data.

The focus group discussion and the participatory workshop were designed to answer the following research question:

RQ6. How did the framing of the coronavirus in Ghana affect the perception and attitude of the Ghanaian public towards the virus?

Table 2: Breakdown of Data Collection Phases and Associated Data Collection Tools and Research Questions

Data Collection Phase	**Data Collection Technique**	**Associated Sample**	**Associated Research Questions**
Phase 1	Content Analysis and Document Analysis	3819 news stories on the coronavirus pandemic sampled from myjoyonline.com, peacefmonline.com,	RQ1. What are the main issues that dominated the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian

		gna.org.gh, and Citinewsroom.com	media used as case studies? RQ2. How was the pandemic framed in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?
Phase 2	Content Analysis and Document Analysis	3819 news stories on the coronavirus pandemic sampled from myjoyonline.com, peacefmonline.com, gna.org.gh, and Citinewsroom.com	RQ3. Who are the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic? RQ4. What were the various phases of the pandemic and what news frames characterising each phase?
Phase 3	Interview Sessions	Interview with 1 journalist each from the myjoyonline.com, peacefmonline.com, gna.org.gh, and Citinewsroom.com	RQ5. What influenced the choice of frames used by the selected Ghanaian journalists for the coronavirus reports?

Phase 4	Focus Group Discussion Participatory Workshop	32 media and communication students and 30 participants for participatory workshop	RQ6. How did the framing of the coronavirus in Ghana affect the perception and attitude of the Ghanaian public towards the virus?

4.7 Data Collection Technique

The study made use of both primary and secondary data to reach the objectives of the research. Primary data was collected from the identified online newspapers, the sampled journalists, and the sampled students from the Institute of Journalism. The researcher adopted document analysis to collect and analyse data from the mentioned online news platforms. Furthermore, the study also used interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from human subjects (journalists and journalism students sampled for the study).

4.7.1 Document Analysis

The main technique employed for data gathering was document analysis. Content/document analysis as a research method is a systematic and objective means of describing and measuring phenomena (Krippendorff, 1980; Sandelowski, 1995) and is also used as a method for analysing documents. Content analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data. It is possible to categorise words into fewer content-related categories through content

analysis because, according to Cavanagh (1997), words, phrases, and the like share the same meaning when classified into the same categories.

Bowen (2009) observes that document analysis is a methodical procedure for reviewing or assessing documents. The news articles that were used in the study were obtained through a combination of a search of the database of news sites of the selected online news portals in Ghana and by using the Google Advance search tool, which allows for a specific search (confined to a particular website) to be conducted online. The stories were copied together with their hyperlinks into separate Microsoft Word documents according to the news portals for easy identification. The stories were also labelled with their headlines, dates of publication, and names of authors provided. The various links were also attached so the researcher could always revisit the stories on the sites if needed**.**

4.7.2 Interviews

An unstructured interview is a data collection method that relies on asking participants questions to collect data on a topic. Also known as non-directive interviewing, unstructured interviews do not have a set pattern, and questions are not arranged in advance. In research, unstructured interviews are usually qualitative and can be very helpful for social science or humanities research focusing on personal experiences (Given, 2008).

The researcher conducted the interview using open and closed-ended questions, which were responded to in a face-to-face interview with the selected participants from their respective media organisations. Open-ended questions allowed them to freely share their experiences, insights, and opinions. Follow-up questions were posed to go deeper into certain areas of interest and to seek clarification or elaboration if needed. The interviews were conducted in a suitable environment devoid of noise, in private

conference rooms and offices within each of the media organisations. This created a setting that was favourable for direct and honest communication.

The interview guide was designed to guide the conduct of the interviews with selected journalists to elicit information on their motivation for the choice of frames adopted in reporting on the pandemic. Face-to-face interviewing provided a richer comprehension of the journalist's experiences and the observation of non-verbal signs, improving data quality. Throughout the procedure, the interviewer enabled a conducive and professional environment, which helped each journalist have an open and interesting conversation. Throughout the interviews, active listening techniques were employed to show genuine interest and encourage journalists to expand on their thoughts. Probing questions were used to delve further into specific aspects, explore different angles, and encourage journalists to reflect on their experiences in greater detail. The journalists who spoke on anonymity were assured by the researcher of non-disclosure of their names or the publication of any personal information that could be traced to them as individuals.

4.7.3 Focus Group

A focus group is a group of participants who discuss a topic of interest (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). A focus group often comprises a few persons who share very similar characteristics and aims to elicit information from persons within a group while paying critical attention to behavioural aspects within the group (Nyumba et al., 2017). Furthermore, the researcher was able to access deep insightful data while observing the participants as they answered questions first-hand. The face-to-face brought the qualitative researcher closer to the participants enabling the researcher to access essential non-verbal communication cues that supported the analysis and conclusions

of the study (Gibbs, 2021). As indicated by Nyumba et al. (2017), the interactive nature of FGDs enabled the participants to express themselves, giving the researcher access to detailed, richer, and nuanced information (Kitzinger, 1995; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). The group settings and dynamics stimulated participants to be discursive and provide more ideas from diverse perspectives

One of the core advantages of the focus group is that the researcher can save time and resources as compared to other forms of data collection, such as the use of interviews. Grouping respondents allows for fast and easy access to information, which interviewing would ideally have taken time to achieve.

The study sampled thirty-two (32) students from the Institute of Journalism and placed them in four (4) groups of eight (8) members for the focus group discussions. The researcher, who is well-trained in ethical conduct and data management issues in research, led the sessions.

The discussions took place in the conference room at the Institute of Journalism, a suitable and comfortable setting arranged to encourage open and collaborative conversation among the participants.

The researcher maintained a neutral and unbiased stance throughout the discussions, facilitating an inclusive and respectful environment where participants felt comfortable in expressing their opinions. The face-to-face approach allowed for non-verbal cues and group dynamics to be observed, contributing to a richer understanding of the participants' perspectives. The specific approach that was adopted is stated below:

a) Introduction and ice-breaking: The sessions began with the researcher's introduction, emphasising the study's purpose and objectives. Ice-breaking activities were conducted to create a relaxed atmosphere and foster rapport

among the participants. The researcher ensured that the participants understood the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of the information shared.

b) Group dynamics and guidelines: The researcher established guidelines to ensure a respectful and inclusive environment. Participants were encouraged to actively engage in the discussions, listen to others, and avoid dominating the conversation. The researcher facilitated the establishment of group dynamics to encourage equal participation from all members.

c) Discussion guide: A discussion guide, specifically designed for the research objectives, was developed to guide the conversations. The guide consisted of open-ended questions and prompts related to the portrayal of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghanaian media. It allowed participants to express their opinions, experiences, and perspectives.

d) Active listening and probing: The researcher actively listened to the participants' responses, allowing them to freely share their thoughts and ideas. Probing questions were used to delve deeper into specific points, encourage elaboration, and explore different perspectives. This approach stimulated meaningful discussions and encouraged critical thinking.

e) Time management: The researcher ensured sufficient time for each discussion topic or question. Time management techniques were employed to keep the discussions focused and on track. Participants were given equal opportunities to contribute their viewpoints, and the researcher ensured that the discussions did not exceed the allocated time for each session.

f) Note-taking and audio recording: The researcher took comprehensive notes during the discussions to capture key points, themes, and interesting insights.

With participants' consent, audio recording was used as a backup to ensure accurate data capture and analysis.

g) Ethical considerations: Ethical guidelines, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly followed throughout the focus group discussions. Participants were assured that their identities would be anonymised and that their responses would be used solely for research purposes.

h) Conclusion and debriefing: At the end of each session, the researcher summarised the key points discussed and thanked the participants for their valuable contributions. Participants were allowed to ask questions, share additional insights, or seek clarification on any aspect of the research.

4.7.4 Workshop

According to Ahmed and Asraf (2018) although qualitative workshops are not very popular, they are increasingly becoming a key data collection tool for qualitative researchers. Workshops are a critical means of collecting detailed data from respondents. The research methodology enables the researcher to collaborate with chosen participants to create a rich, thick data set that successfully supports the exploration of the research's research objectives (Orngreen & Levinsen, 2017). During the session, the researcher will see how the participants interact and argue (chapter). Photographs of the group in action, video and audio recordings of group conversations, observations-based field notes, and—last but not least—models, sketches, and prototypes produced as a result of the workshop process may all be included in the information obtained during the workshop (Hillsdale & Erlbaum, 1993). Workshops can be used as a research tool to confirm information gathered through interviews or to improve focus group interviews by having the participants co-

generate fresh ideas (Hillsdale & Erlbaum, 1993; Storvang et al., 2017). The workshop approach aims to create an inclusive and participatory environment where participants from different demographic backgrounds feel valued and have equal opportunities to contribute (Erlandson et al. 1993). According to Ahmed and Asraf (2018) and Lain (2017), the relevance of workshops for qualitative research is rooted in their ability to foster intense engagement between participants. Discussion-based activities in workshops create constructive feedback between participants and the facilitator. Erlandson et al. (1993) argue that the intensity of the engagements during workshops as a result of it being very focused and the creation of feedback establish the credibility of the data gathered. Effectively, this adds to the rigour and robustness of the study. Ahmed and Asraf (2018) further argued that workshops typically make use of the purposive sampling approach. This means that by using this approach, the researcher can gather data from only participants who are highly knowledgeable in the area under discussion. This is essential in collecting rich and detailed data for the researcher. Other critical advantages such as allowing the researcher access to participant observation and persistent observations also make workshops a crucial qualitative data-gathering tool needed for this study (Ahmed & Asraf, 2018). Hence, as Ahmed and Asraf (2018) indicate, using workshops also ensures that the researcher also become a participant observer which provides an added advantage for data collection when conducting studies of this nature.

The researcher adopted the use of workshops alongside the use of Focus Groups because both data collection techniques provide strategies that complement each other. For instance, qualitative workshops typically make use of a larger sample size than FGDs. This saves the researcher time and resources while still accessing detailed information. Furthermore, Ahmad and Asraf (2018) aver that workshops are

more purposeful toward collecting problem-solving data. Focus Group Discussions make use of smaller sample sizes to collect data on the perceptions and attitudes of participants on a particular topic of interest. This often lead workshops to generating more problem-solving data (Ahmad & Asraf, 2018) than focus groups which tend to describe, and explore issues (Nyumba, et al., 2017). The workshop was conducted at a community centre, a venue that allowed for comfortable seating, audio-visual aids, and facilitated group interactions. The setting and handling of discussions were carefully designed to facilitate active participation, foster collaboration, and promote shared learning and understanding among the participants. The specific participatory research procedures undertaken are reproduced below:

a) Welcome and introductions: The workshop was opened with a welcome message from the researcher, setting a positive and inclusive tone. Introductions were made to familiarise participants with each other, creating a sense of community and promoting networking opportunities.
b) Ice-breaking activities: Ice-breaking activities were carried out to establish a comfortable and welcoming mood. These activities assisted participants in getting to know one another better, making relationships, and overcoming any initial uncertainty or shyness.
c) Workshop objectives and agenda: The workshop objectives and agenda were presented to the participants, ensuring that everyone was aware of the purpose, structure, and expected outcomes of the workshop. They were also assured of their anonymity and made to fill out, sign and return consent forms. This helped set the stage for focused discussions and active participation.
d) Group formation: Participants were divided into two groups, Group A and Group B, with careful consideration given to diverse demographic backgrounds. The

grouping aimed to foster diverse perspectives, encourage cross-learning, and promote inclusive discussions.

e) Facilitated discussions: Facilitators, well-versed in the workshop topic and skilled in managing group dynamics, led the discussions. They ensured that each group had equal opportunities to share their perspectives, ideas, and experiences. The discussions were guided by a predetermined agenda and relevant discussion prompts.

f) Active participation and collaboration: Participants were encouraged to actively engage in the discussions, sharing their viewpoints, insights, and personal experiences. The facilitators fostered an environment where participants felt comfortable expressing their opinions, asking questions, and challenging ideas constructively. Collaboration and mutual respect were promoted among the participants.

g) Visual aids and interactive tools: Visual aids, such as presentation slides, videos, or infographics, were used to enhance understanding and stimulate discussions. Interactive tools, such as brainstorming sessions, small group activities, or case studies, were employed to encourage active engagement and exchange of ideas.

h) Breakout sessions and plenary discussions: Breakout sessions were organised within each group, allowing participants to have in-depth discussions on specific topics or themes. These sessions were followed by plenary discussions, where key insights and findings from the breakout groups were shared and discussed collectively.

i) Recap and reflection: The workshop included moments of recap and reflection, where participants were encouraged to summarise key takeaways and reflect

on the relevance of the discussions to their own experiences and perspectives. This helped solidify learning and encouraged participants to consider potential actions or changes in their media consumption behaviour.

j) Closure and next steps: The workshop concluded with a summary of the discussions, appreciation for participants' contributions, and a brief outline of the next steps, such as potential follow-up actions, further engagement, or dissemination of workshop outcomes.

4.8 Period of Data Collection

4.8.1 Data collection for content analysis

The data collection was done in four phases. The first phase was to collect data from the four news portals covering the periods from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. The study collected data from the selected media platforms from stories dated March 12, 2020, because Ghana recorded its first coronavirus case on the said date. Media reports on the virus in Ghana, its spread in the country, and other significant issues relevant to the country began on March 12, 2020. News reports in the Ghanaian media before March 12, 2020, were mainly foreign news and hence do not fit the scope of this study. The data collection period ends on March 12, 2021, because the data marks exactly four weeks after the roll-out of vaccination programs in the country. This marks another crucial phase in the pandemic cycle in the country and, hence, is appropriate to be included in the study period. The researcher was also interested in studying media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana over one year, hence the decision to end the data collection period on March 12, 2021. It is essential to note that one year is ample to study media contents and their influence on media consumers as this study does. (Luke & Caburnay, 2011). The one-year period is also ample to access new media content that populated the Ghanaian online media space during diverse stages

of the pandemic, including the early stages when the media announced the entry of the virus, its spread, the lockdown periods, the quest for vaccines and preparation for the deployment vaccines in the country.

In sum, the researcher collected data from the identified online platforms from March 12, 2020, to March 12, 2021, as the time provides an accurate representation of the various stages of the pandemic in the country – from its entry, prevalence, and spread and efforts to curb the pandemic. Media coverage of the pandemic is expected to be rife and abundant for the interests of this study. It is significant to note that even though news stories collected from the news portals were between March 12, 2020, and March 12, 2021, they were only gathered by the researcher for analysis in March 2023 after the meeting of all ethical requirements and had been permitted for data collection. Human data was also collected during the same time.

4.8.2 Data collection for Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and the Participatory workshop.

The second, third, and fourth phases of data collection, which involved human data, were collected from June 1, 2023, two days after the President of Ghana officially declared the end of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana, through to May 2023. Final-year media students from undergraduate the Institute of Journalism have been selected for focus group discussions to find out how the media coverage of the pandemic influenced their understanding of the pandemic and how that affected their behaviour towards the pandemic. The participatory workshop for media consumers was also conducted during the same period.

Choosing a date closely aligned with the official declaration of the pandemic's end in Ghana ensured the discussions' relevance and timeliness. Participants' recollections of their experiences and perceptions during the pandemic were still fresh, allowing for

more accurate and detailed insights. Also, conducting focus group discussions after the official end of the pandemic allows for a comparative analysis between participants' experiences and perceptions during the pandemic and their expectations and attitudes in the post-pandemic phase. This comparison can yield valuable insights into the media's performance, the effectiveness of communication strategies, and the public's evolving relationship with the media. In capturing fresh and immediate reactions, the journalists were interviewed shortly after the President's official declaration and their reflections, i.e., insights into their experiences, challenges, and triumphs in reporting the pandemic throughout its duration recorded.

4.9 Unit of Analysis

It is not enough to identify or define a problem to be investigated; instead, the problem must be measurable and able to be analysed. Specifying how a problem should be measured involves stating the actual units of objects or occurrences that must be observed or measured to study a particular phenomenon (Kumekpor, 2002). One of the procedures in content analysis is selecting and classifying a unit of analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 2009). In their view, the unit of analysis is the smallest but the most essential component in content analysis. A unit of analysis must not be secretive or known to the researcher alone but must be available publicly and for verification by other persons interested (Kumekpor, 2002).

Tankard (2003) proposed 11 framing mechanisms for identifying and measuring news. This 11-framing mechanism includes headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics, charts, and concluding statements and paragraphs. The unit of analysis is the basic unit of text to

be classified as “the specific segment of content that is characterised by placing it in a given category” (Holsti, 1969, p. 116).

In line with the above statement, this current study used paragraphs as the main unit of analysis in examining how the pandemic is portrayed in the Ghanaian media. The unit of analysis for this study is a news paragraph because paragraphs contain a complete thought. Also, it will be necessary for the researcher to analyse paragraphs of the news stories to understand the latent meanings of the texts. The data was then coded and categorised into inductively generated code categories. The same unit of analysis will be applied concerning data that will be gathered from the interview and focus group discussions.

4.10 Coding Unit and Coding Procedure

Coding is a prominent and, to some extent, un-detachable part of qualitative research. Researchers who often engage in qualitative content analysis in media studies often employ coding to analyse and make sense of media products and features being investigated. According to Creswell (2015), coding concerns the entire process of analysing qualitative text by taking them apart to see what they contain and placing them back together to make meaning of them. The relevance of coding qualitative texts is that media content is often dense, and interpreting them can be a hectic process for the researcher. Coding allows media products to be grouped, organised, and interpreted quickly and simply.

The study followed Creswell’s (2015) recommendations on the coding procedures to generate codes for this study. The researcher first collected the data set and skimmed through it to make himself familiar. The researcher then categorised information from the media texts through a line-by-line process while paying attention to latent and

manifest meanings of words and sentences. Sentences, phrases, and paragraphs with similar meanings were categorised and given short code names.

A term or brief phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative feature to a part of language-based or visual data is known as a “code” in qualitative research (Saldana, 2016). The researcher then wrote the codes and applied them to analyse the sampled media texts. The codes were developed into a coding guide used to analyse the media texts. The coding guide is attached to this report as an appendix. It is essential to state that the entire coding process and the development of coding units were done manually. Hence, no coding software such as NVivo or MaxQDA was used. Richards and Richards (1994) argue that although code-generating software is crucial and allows the entire coding process to be simple and fast, it can be problematic. This is so because such software tends to skip crucial ideas that the researcher might experience and use when engaged in manual coding processes. Coding software often engages in a code-and-retrieve system that the researcher must review vehemently. The researcher might as well just engage in manual coding to save time for doing what might have appeared to be double work. Furthermore, Richards (2015) argued that immersive qualitative studies produce thick, rich descriptions of the phenomena under study. Using coding software does not allow the researcher to immerse themselves in the data and produce rich, thick descriptions.

4.11 Data Analysis and Interpretation / Thematic Analysis

4.11.1 Content Analysis

Content Analysis involves analysing and interpreting media content, which can be either text, audio, or audio-visual. According to Zhang and Wildermuth (2009), the use

of content analysis as a data analysis and interpretation technique allows the researcher to carefully prepare the data, code them, and efficiently interpret the data in a manner that can form the praxis to develop theories and validate existing theories. The approach allows for thick, rich descriptions of phenomena.

Data collected from the document analysis of online media on the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana were analysed using qualitative content analysis. It helps to categorise and code words, themes, and concepts within the texts and then analyse the results (Luo, 2019). Content analysis can be used to quantify the occurrence of certain words, phrases, subjects, or concepts in a set of historical or contemporary texts.

Following the recommendations of Parveen and Showkat (2017) and Neuendorf (2017), upon selecting and retrieving the sampled news stories from the online platforms, the researcher skimmed the materials and made a list of sub-themes that emerged in line with the concomitant research questions for analysis. The sub-themes were categorised and developed into major themes. It is essential to note that the codes and themes were developed with both latent and manifest meanings of the texts present in the sampled news stories.

4.11.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a technique that engages systematic identification and processing strategies to offer insights into data (Braun & Clarke, 2012. Thematic Analysis enables the researcher to recognise and make sense of shared or community experiences and meanings. The goal of Thematic Analysis is not to pinpoint particular and peculiar meanings and experiences that can only be found in a single data item. Therefore, this technique is a way to recognise the characteristics shared by how a

topic is spoken or written about and interpret such characteristics). Braun and Clarke (2012) further posit that the approach is flexible, allowing the researcher to look at the data in varying and different ways. The approach allows the researcher to analyse the data set literally or focus on the latent or semantic aspects of the data.

The researcher analysed the data by categorising, coding, and developing themes and concepts from the primary units of analysis. The researcher familiarised himself with the data and paid close attention to every paragraph of the sampled news stories. Data was organised to make meaning of them and thereby generate initial codes. The generated codes were combined to create categories. The themes were examined and divided into sub-themes. The identified categories and themes were used to develop meta-themes and generate preliminary conclusions for presentation as study findings.

Table 3: The Six Issues with their Sub-categories

Issues	Description	Sub-categories
Government Response	This theme includes the selected media's report on the measures taken by the government, state enterprises, and government agencies to control the spread of the virus, as well as efforts to support and assist affected communities.	• Governance and Politics • Restriction – social gatherings, Travel bans, funeral bans, • Police enforcement – arrest, Lockdown, • State-sponsored educational and sensitisation campaigns • Mandatory quarantine, Closing & Reopening of schools. • Provision of PPEs etc.

		• Economic relief to individuals and SMMEs by government • President's Nations Addresses and matters arising.
Covid Corporate Social Responsibility	The theme describes how the media also focused on interventions of private businesses, non-governmental organisations, and individuals through their coverage of donations and support.	• Supports of corporate organisations to public health institutions and frontline workers • Organisational measures taken by firms against the pandemic. • Corporate support and relief measures to their customers • Corporate supports and charity donations to affected communities.
Impact of the pandemic	Categorised under this theme of impact comprised of stories how the pandemic has affected the lives and wealth of the nation, organisations and individuals.	• COVID-19-restrictions- social distancing; lockdown; ban on mass gatherings, closure of schools and churches. • Impact of covid-restrictions • Economic impact of pandemic on business and livelihoods • The economic impact of the pandemic at domestic and international level

		• Impact of COVID-19 on education • Effect of the pandemic on religious lives of Ghanaians
Data and Statistics	This theme described how the media relied on data and statistics, such as case numbers and death tolls, to provide information about the spread and impact of the virus.	• Stories related to mapping the evolving trends in domestic infection cases; facts and figures related to infected, recovered patients and critically ill patients. • Death toll counts - number of pandemic related deaths. • Global and international case counts • National and regional representation of cases
Scientific & Medical Information	This theme focuses on the scientific aspects of the pandemic, including stories on the origins and spread of the virus, the development of treatments and vaccines, and the latest	• Preventive & protective measures such as; Recommendations for personal protective actions, Washing of hands, Social distancing, Wearing masks • Education, warnings and recommendations from scientist,

	research and findings related to the pandemic.	medical doctors, and health practitioners. • Medical updates; health related precautions, new findings regarding the causes and symptoms of pandemic • Treatment and Development of vaccines. • Scientific Development related to pandemic.
Covid-Novation	The name Covid-Novation a coined term by the researcher combines "Covid" and "innovation" to represent news stories that focus on the positive impacts of the pandemic. Stories under this theme imply the pandemic has stimulated new and creative solutions to existing problems.	• Creative ways of fighting the pandemic: online schooling, virtual churches, using Zipline's network to deliver its COVID-19 vaccines. • Opportunities that have characterise the pandemic and how they have been ceased. • How the pandemic has accelerated digital innovations and transformations.

Table 4: The Six Frames with their Sub-categories

Issues	Description	Sub-categories
Public Health Crisis Frame	This frame focuses the media use portrayed the virus as a health crisis by frame emphasising the potential harm and danger posed by the pandemic, as well as the need for public health measures and interventions.	• Up-to-date information about the virus and its transmission, as well as medical treatments and interventions. • Preventive measures: COVID-19 safety protocols • Spread of the virus • Scale of pandemic: Statistics such as new cases, death toll, severe conditions, recovering rates, discharged rates. • Contact tracing & Testing. • Prominence infection and deaths-Death of high-profile people because of covid
Political Frame	This frame adopted by media evaluates government response and efforts in addressing the pandemic, including measures taken to control the spread of	• Government interventions: relief packages to frontline workers, free water, and electricity • Government Policies & Restrictions: border closure, closing and reopening of schools, lockdown, Mandatory quarantine.

	the virus, as well as support and assistance to affected communities. It also includes the role of political parties and leaders in managing the crisis.	• Ensuring compliance: Police enforcement – arrest, Executive instrument • Exposure of weak health and economic systems • Covid-related expenditure and corruption • Accusations and counter accusations of political players
Economic Crisis frame	This frame focuses on the economic impacts of the pandemic, including job losses, business closures, and the effects on the overall economy.	• Effect of pandemic on businesses and the effects on the overall economy: shutdown of businesses, shutdown of institutions • Effect of pandemic restrictions to businesses: including job losses, business closures, low sales. • Financial loses and gains of individuals and businesses. • State revenue loss
Social Frame	This frame includes news that focuses on the social impacts of the pandemic,	• Pandemic's social consequences - challenges faced by individuals and marginalised groups, private or personal lives of individuals,

	including the effects on communities, families, and individuals, and how people are coping with the restrictions and changes brought about by the pandemic.	personal stories of responders, individuals and groups are affected. • Illness, death, loss, and resilience • Emotional and psychological impact • Count of infected individuals / lives lost. • Show of support and care to individuals and affected persons
On-the-Brighter Side-Frame	As the name suggests this frame was used to frame the pandemic as a catalyst for positive transformation, innovation, and digitisation.	• Focus on the many ways on novelty and adaptation new ways of doing things in managing the crisis. • Positive impact of the pandemic. • Promotion of hygienic living & positive social environmental changes • Business innovations as result of the pandemic

4.12 Validity, Reliability and Rigour of Research

Validity and reliability are very important issues in every qualitative research. Validity refers to the correct procedures applied to find answers to a research question and

the quality of a measurement procedure that provides accuracy. Reliability refers to the quality of a measurement procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy (Creswell, 2007). The validity of the research instrument is concerned with the meaningfulness of the research components. This is essential because researchers are concerned with whether they are measuring what they intended to measure. Keyton (2001, p. 72) states that "instead of focusing on what is found, most qualitative researchers focus on the reliability and validity of the techniques or process used in collecting and analysing data. In qualitative research, validity is achieved when the written account or description accurately represents the features of the communication observed," but Krippendoff (2004) believes that it is not always necessary to use all these methods in checking the validity of a study.

Creswell (2014) provides eight validation strategies in testing for validity in qualitative research. These processes include triangulation, using member-checking to determine accuracy on the part of participants, using rich and thick descriptions, presenting negative case analysis, spending prolonged time in the research field, using peer debriefing, using external auditors, and bracketing of biases. He further states that qualitative researchers should adopt at least two strategies in their studies.

As such, among others, the rigour and validity of this study were achieved through the complex data collection processes adopted. The study adopted the use of content analysis, interview sessions and workshops to collect appropriate data for the study. The use of these three techniques ensured data accuracy as they were used in a complementary manner - each technique addressing key issues present in the other. More importantly, the deliberate use of workshops further improves the rigour of data collection and findings for the study. According to Erlandson (1993) qualitative worskhops improve the rigour of data gathering as it acts as a technique for

corroborating data collected using other data collection approaches. Workshops formed a critical data technique for this data.

Furthermore, the data analysis also expresses the rigour of this study. First, the use of the thematic analysis approach to consolidate and analyse data across the three data collection phases is a key indicator of the rigorousness of this study. The thematic approach was used to analyse and triangulate data from the three data collection techniques which indicate that information was only reported from the data when they were observed as themes across the dominant parts of the three data collection phases. Secondly, this study adopts a thick and rich description of the phenomenon under scrutiny to ensure the researcher went beyond the provision of just manifest meanings to latent meanings of the stories about the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. The researcher provided a rich description of an entire data set to give the reader a comprehensive sense of the predominant or important themes. The identified themes, codes, and analysis reflected the content of an entire data set. A detailed description of one or group of themes within the data was also provided.

Validity, reliability, and rigorousness of the data collected, and of the entire study, were also achieved through the efforts of the supervisory researcher of this study. The researcher's supervisor ensured that questions in the interview guides and the coding schedule consisted of the right levels of accuracy to measure the variables and phenomenon the researcher was interested in investigating. To ensure this, the researcher actively vetted the various components of the coding schedule and interview guides to reach the desired accuracy in measurements.

4.13 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are a prevalent aspect of social science research. The researcher must ensure that data collection and analysis are done ethically in line with professional and academic standards (Arifin, 2018). Researchers who collect data from human subjects or respondents often face ethical challenges, and the researcher must ensure that all ethical avenues are exhausted. Studies that do not concern human subjects also often have ethical dimensions that need to be addressed effectively (Orb et al., 2001).

This study critically assessed online media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic and its impact. As part of data collection for media content analysis, the researcher sought permission from the respective selected media organisations. This was done to avoid issues of data mongering from online media organisations. The researcher also checked with the various media organisations for the authenticity of the publications before including them in the study.

Human subjects sampled for this study were treated with the utmost ethical standards, such as confidentiality and privacy. Consent for interviews and focus group discussions was obtained voluntarily (see Appendix 7). Conelly (2005) advises that researchers should strive to achieve consent freely. No member of the sampled group was coerced to partake in this study. An informed consent form was delivered to all participants before the data collection phases to obtain their consent for participation before the phase was rolled out. The consent form included a brief of what the research entails. Participants were given up to one week to respond to the consent form. Forms that were signed were traced, and the corresponding respondents were included in the study. Participants were also asked permission to videotape the interview and focus group sessions. During the interview and focus group sessions,

participants were advised to alert the interviewer if they felt uncomfortable during the sessions.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, the researcher did not allow the participants to mention their names during the data collection phases. The study did not include personal details that might have been recorded during interview sessions, focus group discussions and workshops; instead, pseudonyms and names were used to represent the various participants. Additionally, code names were developed to represent the real names of respondents to keep them anonymous. Furthermore, information that participants specifically asked to be off the record was treated as such. No information shared in confidence during the data collection stages was printed or included as findings in this study.

The researcher also ensured complete commitment and adherence to the research ethical requirements of the University of South Africa (UNISA). The research succumbed to rigorous ethical checks at each stage of the research as part of standard ethical procedures. The researcher also provided proof of ethical viability through the provision of an ethical clearance form requested by the research board of the University of South Africa. In addition, the supervising researcher briefed the principal researcher on all ethical dimensions prevalent in studies such as this. There were intermittent checks on the ethical dimensions involved in the study by the supervising researcher to ensure that the study fulfilled the ethical requirements of the university and the social science fraternity.

It is also imperative to note that the researcher did not find any conflict of interest and declared no conflict of interest.

4.14 Chapter Summary

The focus of the study was to investigate how the Ghanaian online media covered and framed the coronavirus pandemic and the perceived impacts of the reportage on the media consumers in the country. This chapter presented an elaborate and step-by-step account of the methodology adopted for this study. The study grounds itself in interpretivism as a research paradigm for understanding the different perspectives on media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana and its impacts on behaviours and attitudes. The chapter discussed the research design and the need to adopt the content analysis for the study. The chapter also discussed the population, sampling and sampling technique adopted for the study. It also presents information on the data collection period for online news stories which covered between March 12 2020, and March 24 2021. The data collection period covers the period of the virus' first entry into Ghana through to the roll-out of vaccination programs in the country. The data collected from the various phases of data collection were analysed using thematic analysis and content analysis techniques. The findings from the data collection and analysis were interpreted and reported in themes in line with the research questions of this study. The next chapter presents and discusses findings from data collected in Phase One, which sought to examine the portrayal of the pandemic in the selected media portals.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSING THE MEDIA REPORTAGE OF THE PANDEMIC IN SELECTED GHANAIAN MEDIA (PHASE ONE)

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is the first of four chapters that analyse the portrayal of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media portals and the views of journalists some categories of media consumers. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study, provides background, and establishes the significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviewed literature relevant to the study whereas the theoretical framework underpinning the study was outlined in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 focuses on the research methodology, which examines how data were collected and analysed to achieve the study's objectives. The literature reviewed revealed the media's important role in influencing the behaviour and understanding of the audience on matters including health issues. This justifies the need to investigate how the four select media portray the pandemic and how it has influenced audiences' understanding and perception of the coronavirus pandemic.

The next four (4) chapters present data from the four data collection phases that were conducted as part of the study. Phase One (1) is a content analysis of the news published on the four selected online Ghanaian media portals to determine the main issues and dominant frames used in reporting the coronavirus pandemic in Chapter Five.

Phase Two (2), a content analysis of the news published on the four selected online Ghanaian media platforms portals, establishes the main sources behind the news story under study and the various phases of the pandemic as reported by the selected

media in Chapter Six. Phase Three explores the motivation or reasons behind the choice of frames by the journalists using interviews in Chapter Seven. Phase Four presents data from the focus group discussions and workshops of selected news audiences on their appreciation of the media frames and how they have been influenced by the news stories on the coronavirus pandemic in Chapter Eight. Each data collection phase was analysed individually to ensure that the findings provided insight for the next data collection phase.

This chapter addresses the first data collection phase through the content analysis of stories published about the coronavirus pandemic on the four selected Ghanaian news portals.

This chapter presents the data collected in Phase One to specifically address the first two research questions:

1) What are the main issues that dominated the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?
2) How was the pandemic framed in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

This chapter commences with the presentation of results and discussions of the data collected in phase one. The findings and discussions of the two research questions mentioned above by reducing data obtained into themes and analysing them using relevant theories and literature in Chapters Two and Three of the study. The results presented are based on a qualitative content analysis of selected news articles on selected Ghanaian news portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021.

5.1 RQ1. What are the main issues that dominated the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

McCombs and Shaw (1972) have also hypothesised that the mass media have the power to influence the public agenda. In their study, McCombs and Shaw found that the public interest most often reflected the media's agenda. They further stated that audiences do not only learn about a given issue but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a piece of news and its position. News, therefore, is everywhere, but the news is what the editor probably says it is, as it plays a key role in determining what we should see, hear, or know through the media. In recent times, the agenda-setting idea refers to the news media's effect on audiences through its selection of which stories are considered noteworthy and which are not, as well as the importance and space given to each (Govender, 2010).

First, there is awareness. Often, with news items, if the media does not mention them, the people have no knowledge of them. Because it is a simple influence of knowing and not knowing in which the media can make a difference, the first research question examined the main issues made salient in the news media by the selected media platforms portals in reporting about the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. It sought to ascertain the key themes/issues given the most prominence by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* during the coverage of the pandemic from March 12, 2020, the day Ghana recorded its first case of the coronavirus pandemic to March 24, 2021, exactly a year after that. In examining how the pandemic is portrayed in the Ghanaian media, the study investigated paragraphs of the sampled news stories to published on the four selected news platforms as the main unit of analysis. (Holsti, 1969). A total of 2719 paragraphs were considered from

200 sampled stories. The selected news media set the agenda and helped define for the public what they should be thinking about as far as the coronavirus pandemic was concerned as the themes of Government Response, Covid Corporate Social Responsibility, Impact of the Pandemic, Scientific & Medical Information, Covid-Novation, Data & Statistics were revealed from close reading and immersion into the obtained 200 news articles (Baran & Davis, 2010).

Table 5: Frequency of level of the dominant issues/theme

ISSUES / THEMES	JOY NEWS	CITI NEWS ROOM	PEACE FM ONLINE	GNA	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Government Responses	181	153	282	229	845	31%
Impact of the Pandemic	181	117	220	178	696	26%
Scientific and Medical Information	166	43	103	119	431	16%
Covid-Novation	50	141	64	81	336	12%
Data and Statistics	52	82	37	37	208	8%
Covid Corporate Social Responsibility	72	111	8	12	203	7%
TOTAL	702	647	714	656	2719	100%

Source: Field Data, 2023

As can be observed from Table 5 above, the theme of 'Government Response' is the most dominant issue that the selected media platforms portals have reported in reporting the virus in Ghana. It has the highest percentage score of 31%. of all the news stories sampled during the coronavirus pandemic. The second most dominant issue was the 'Impact of the Pandemic' with a percentage score of 26%. With 16% of

all sampled stories, the issue of ‘Scientific & Medical Information” came third. Another key issue that dominated the reportage by the four selected media platforms portals within the period under review is Covid-Novation, which has 12%, making it the fourth most dominant theme. Data and Statistics and Covid Corporate Social Responsibility were the fifth and sixth most dominant themes, with 8% and 7% of coverage, respectively.

The various issues that dominated the media coverage of *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* during the coverage of the pandemic for the one year under study have successively been described and buttressed with direct quotations from the selected news media.

5.1.1 Issue One: Government Response

The four selected media portals understudy: *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*, covered a range of issues related to the coronavirus pandemic. Most dominant amongst them is the issue of Government Response. This theme has the highest frequency of codes. With 845 codes out of 2719 representing 31% of all news stories under review, the theme of Government Response places the fight against the coronavirus pandemic squarely at the doorstep of the Ghana Government. The theme includes news stories highlighting the measures taken by the government, state enterprises, and government agencies to control the virus’s spread and mitigate the pandemic’s ravaging effect on the citizenry. The efforts of the Ghana Government in reducing the plights of citizens due to the pandemic have been duly reported using this theme. Stories that were categorised under this theme essentially had to do with, first and foremost, stories about the President’s National Address, a periodic address by the President of Ghana to keep people abreast with

efforts taken by the government in the fight against the virus. Most new stories were published from various angles each time the address was given. The periodic address became one of the significant sources of news for most media houses. For instance, a story published by *Peacefmonline.com* titled; “Points from President Akufo-Addo’s 13th Coronavirus Address to The Nation” typically sought to highlight key issues that the president touched on in his live nations address.

> President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo since the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus in Ghana has been outlining some measures his government is putting in place to combat the spread. (*Peacefmonline.com,* June 29, 2020)

The stories also captured updates from the President’s address as far as the case counts are concerned as can be seen in the excerpt below.

> President Akufo-Addo announced that Ghana’s total confirmed cases of the novel Coronavirus have risen to 17,351 with 12,994 recoveries. This represents 75% of the positives. (*Peacefmonline.com*, June 29, 2020)

Aside from the President’s periodic national addresses, the government, through its various ministries, used press conferences and media briefings to communicate the government’s actions to the citizens. These platforms also served as avenues for the government to respond to allegations from political opponents or civil society who criticised the government’s management of the pandemic or questioned any actions they had taken. Headlined; “Protection of Country’s Borders Is for Safety of Ghanaians Not Tribalism – Oppong Nkrumah.” This news story was about the government’s response to one of the criticisms of the government by the leading opposition party about deploying security personnel into specific communities. In Ghana, 2020 was an election year, and amidst the pandemic, preparations such as new voter registration exercises were still ongoing. The opposition National Democratic Congress at the time accused the government of deploying military men into the Volta Region, which

happened to be the stronghold of the opposition party, to intimidate them. (*Peacefmonline.com*, June 30, 2020). According to the opposition party, the security forces were deliberately sent there to prevent more of their support base from registering to partake in the elections through the use of military intimidation.

> Government has condemned the minority NDC's posturing over the deployment of security personnel into border towns to prevent the influx of persons from neighboring countries. According to the government, the deployment of this personnel is to tighten the country's borders to curtail the importation of the coronavirus and to maintain the country's peaceful atmosphere ahead of the compilation of the voters' register. (*Peacefmonline.com*, June 30, 2020)

> Addressing journalists at a Press Briefing in Accra on Monday, June 29, 2020, the Defence Minister, Dominic Nitiwul criticised the NDC for fueling ethnocentric politics and creating a false sense of ethno-tribal agenda amidst the government's strategy to maintain security within the country. (*Peacefmonline.com*, June 30, 2020)

In the government's defense, as seen in the above excerpts, the Minister of Defence referred to the allegations as false and mere political allegations. He explained that security forces were not sent to intimidate any Ghanaian but to defend the border towns and maintain security in the country. He further explained that the Volta Region was not the only region where such security forces had been deployed but other regions, so that could not have been singled out for political intimidation.

In a news story published on November 8, 2020, on *Citinewsroom.com* titled; 'COVID-19: Incentive package for health workers extended to December – Nana Addo', the reporter narrated how the President of Ghana extends an incentive package for health workers in Ghana after granting them an income tax holiday for October, November, and December of the same year.

> "I am happy to announce that the incentive package for health workers has been extended to the end of the year. Again, all frontline health workers as defined by the Ministry of Health will continue to receive their

> additional allowance of 50 percent of their basic salary for the month of October, November, and December," said the President. The President first announced the three-month tax holiday for health workers at the beginning of April 2020. (Daisy Palinwinde Jacobs, *Citinewsroom.com*, November 8, 2020)

From the above excerpts, the leader of the government, the President, is reported to be showing care to frontline workers at the front of the fight against the coronavirus in a bid to encourage them to stay fast and keep on their excellent service despite the health risks associated with their works. The same news portal has reported news of such more social interventions, as seen in the excerpt below.

> "You will recall that, in our quest to help shield you from the effects of the virus, Government took the decision to provide relief to Ghanaians, which included the absorption of electricity and water bills. This relief package ended in December. However, with the continuing difficulties occasioned by the pandemic, I want to state that Government intends to continue to support the most vulnerable in our society. (Nii Larte Lartey, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 6, 2021)

The excerpt above is the quote from the President of Ghana, Nana Akuffo-Addo, in a news report where he announced a continuous free utility for a segment of the population who are considered vulnerable and do not consume much power or water. This was after a three-month supply of free water and light to all Ghanaians as the country grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As stated earlier, also under this theme are news reports on what the various state agencies are doing into helping to educate the public to obey all safety protocols and preventive measures in combating the spread of the coronavirus. A story published by *myjoyonline.com* titled; "NCCE Calls for Proper Disposal of Used PPEs" is one of the many news reports under this theme on how state agencies have championed educational and sensitisation campaigns in educating the public on ways to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

> The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) has called for the proper disposal of used Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to ensure other people especially children do not come into contact with them. (*Peacefmonline.com*, July 30, 2020)

The above quote was part of a news report about Mr Amatus Talaar, the NCCE Programmes Officer for the Lambussie District, during a sensitisation programme for the Muslim community on environmental governance concerning COVID-19. The NCCE officer was reported advising participants on how to wear and dispose of the PPEs properly so that others, including children, will not be exposed to already used PPEs.

The roles of other key state agencies in the fight against the coronavirus were all recorded under this theme. The Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) is one of those agencies whose activities have been widely covered, especially their role in testing and subsequent approval of the coronavirus vaccines.

> The Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) says it will not permit the administration of unauthorised Stupnik V vaccines that find their way into the country. (Phoebe Martekie Doku, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 29, 2021)

> "Of course, we can check it out when it gets here to see if there's a problem with it, the only thing I want to assure Ghanaians is that the FDA will not sit unconcerned for medicines and vaccines that are not of good quality to be administered to people. (Phoebe Martekie Doku, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 29, 2021)

As the above excerpts show, the FDA was seemingly building people's trust and confidence in the coronavirus vaccines that would later be distributed. The FDA is the only state agency with the mandate of approving food, drugs, or any edible substance before the public can be allowed to consume; hence, their role in assuring the people of the efficacy of whichever vaccine they will approve was very necessary.

Also under this theme are stories about restriction – social gatherings, travel bans, funeral bans, and police enforcement – arrest, lockdown, mandatory quarantine, closing and reopening of schools, etc., as seen in the selected excerpts below.

> President Akufo-Addo has issued a directive for the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to direct officers of the Ghana Police Service to ensure the rigorous enforcement of the law on mask-wearing in all public places. (Geraldine Amoah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, January 17, 2021)

> HEADLINE: 85 people arrested for not wearing nose masks in Koforidua (*gna.org.gh* January 23, 2021)

As can be seen in the quotes above, the selected media reported measures the Government and its agencies or institutions put in place to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 safety protocol to the extent of arresting people who go contrary to the set protocols. It also includes stories about restrictions and bans, such as the closure of school night clubs and the ban on public gatherings that could serve as a breeding ground for the virus.

The government response theme which dominated media coverage of the pandemic seem to suggest that the government played crucial roles in the mitigation of the pandemic in the country. The reliance on the theme which resulted in its popularity across the media organisations studied imply that the government was actively involved in key issues regarding the pandemic. By extension this findings has critical implications on a number of issues. First, this shows that the media, which is a key element in seeking accountability in society performed their responsibility as they focused keenly on government officials and their activities during the pandemic (Acharya, 2023). Hence, by focusing more on government response, the media sought to dwell on the journalism's accountability principles, to check the activities of the government. This is further expressed in the Agenda-Setting responsibility of the

media (Mccoombs, 2000). The media is able to set the agenda by focusing on some issues for a very long time, offering both qualitative and quantitative coverage of the issue. This issues becomes salient among media consumers and they focus more on it (Wu & Coleman). Thus, by focusing on the response of the government during the pandemic, the media seem to be setting an agenda that dwells on the activities of the government during the crisis. Consequently, themes that focus on positive government response would set the agenda, heralding the government as performing their duties while the inverse happens for negative government response themes and stories. Essentially, media responsibility of seeking accountability from those in power during health crisis is expressed within this finding.

Furthermore, this has key implications on the role of the media in mediating public trust in government institutions and strategies during pandemic periods (Nisch, 2020). The findings suggest intensity in the activities of the government during the pandemic. Coverage of this nature may have implications for drawing public trust towards the government in their efforts to mitigate the crisis.

Secondly, the findings has key implications for the practice of democracy. Essentially, the study noted an extensive coverage of the pandemic from government response strategies. This is expressed in the degree of focus the media paid to government response as shown in the study (refer to table 5). The media and their operations on the government as well as how the government responds to media activities on them is an indication of the existence and maturity of democracy in the nation (Livingstone et al. 1994). The extensive focus on government responses show the healthy exercise of democracy during the health crises. Essentially, this provides key lessons for media and political operations within democratic nations during health crises periods.

5.1.2 Issue Two: Impact of the Pandemic

The issue of 'Impact of the Pandemic' ranked second in the analysis of the 200 sampled stories on the four selected news portals: *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* within the period under review in finding out the most dominant issues covered by the media in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. This theme includes stories or categories of stories that focus on the effect of the pandemic on the wealth and health of the country and its citizenry. The selected media under this theme reported on the economic effects of the pandemic, such as the closure of businesses, loss of jobs, economic recovery efforts, etc. This is in line with the findings of Siddiquei & Khan (2020) that measures and interventions taken to control the spread of the pandemic have affected the populace monetarily and non-monetarily.

For instance, titled; "Lockdown caused 42,000 layoffs, reduced wages of over 770,000 workers", a story published on Citinewsroom on August 3, 2020, narrates the shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Ghanaian businesses, forcing many firms to cut costs by reducing staff hours, cutting wages, and in some cases laying off workers, particularly within the 3-week partial lockdown aimed at curtailing the spread of the virus. See excerpts below.

> HEADLINE: 85 people arrested for not wearing nose masks in Koforidua (*gna.org.gh* January 23, 2021)
>
> The Business Tracker Survey showed that about 770,000 workers (25.7% of the total workforce), had their wages reduced and about 42,000 employees were laid off during the country's COVID-19 partial lockdown.
>
> Also, the pandemic led to a reduction in working hours for close to 700,000 workers. (Nerteley Nettey, *Citinewsroom.com*, August 3, 2020)

According to the story, the survey results from a new COVID-19 Business Tracker Survey conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. The news story also explained that the phenomenon's cause could be linked to the country's COVID-19 partial lockdown as businesses received shocks in supply and demand for goods and services. Again, it was stated that close to 131,000 businesses had challenges accessing finance and expressed uncertainty in the business environment.

Studies have found that the pandemic's lockdown situations negatively impacted businesses in Ghana. Asante and Mills (2020) found in their study that due to the lockdown Ghana was forced to experience, businesses had to shut down prematurely. Their study noted further that the immediate aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic had occasioned an economic environment that did not allow new businesses to thrive. Some studies (although limited) suggest that media coverage of the pandemic in the country followed an issue-framing approach. Thus, researchers such as Owusu et al. (2023) and Tabong and Segtub (2021) have found that the media focused on framing critical issues while covering the pandemic in Ghana. Related to this finding, some studies (Foli & Ohemeng, 2022; Otchere, 2020) have put forward the idea that much attention was paid to economic issues related to the pandemic while it was being covered.

> The average decrease in sales, according to the findings, was estimated at 115.2 million Ghana Cedis, with firms in the trade and manufacturing sectors (including exporting firms) largely affected. More than half of these firms had difficulty sourcing inputs due to non-availability or an increase in costs, leading to challenges in covering revenue shortfalls. (Nerteley Nettey, *Citinewsroom.com*, August 3, 2020)

The extract evidences a report published by the Ghana Statistical Service on the collapse of businesses in Ghana around and after the pandemic. The report suggests

and agrees with the findings made in this study that many businesses in Ghana folded as a result of the economic downturn occasioned by the lockdown during the pandemic. The report indicates that about 35% of businesses established at least two years before the pandemic had to close due to the lockdown (Ghana Statistical Services, 2020). Other studies have found in line with what has been found in this study that the pandemic was a major Achilles heel to many SMEs in the country (Li et al., 2021; Asante & Mills, 2020; Amoah et al., 2021)

Around the same time, Joyfmonline.com also published scores of stories under this theme, one of which was titled “Cashew farmers lament huge financial losses due to COVID-19 Pandemic.”

The story also highlights how the Ghana National Cashew Farmers Association members struggle to recoup their investment after being forced to sell produce at 25% below the standard rate because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

> The price of the commodity has fallen worldwide as a result of COVID-19-related restrictions, and the farmers are taking a hit. Produce that should sell at ¢8 was sold for ¢2.5 in some areas. (Joseph Opoku Gakpo, *MyJoyOnline.com*, August 10, 2020)
>
> Joy News’ Agricultural, Environment, and Technology Desk found that the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the world’s largest importers of raw cashew nuts, including India, China, and Vietnam, to cut down their orders as processing factories close due to lockdowns. (Joseph Opoku Gakpo, *MyJoyOnline.com*, August 10, 2020)

The woes of the participants of Ghana’s agricultural economy because of the pandemic have vividly been narrated by the writer, as can be seen in the excerpts above.

The pandemic did not only affect owners of businesses, but the rippling effect has been felt by almost all workers, as reported by the media. There was also a decline in

employment due to the lockdown (Dzansi et al., 2021). Stories of the impact of the pandemic on workers have also been categorised under this theme. There were stories about the plight of workers in the wake of the economic hardship the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) had caused businesses. For instance, *Peacefmonline.com* published a story on how three labour unions have called for an immediate tripartite engagement on the plight of workers between the government, employers, and workers on the best way forward. According to the news report, the three unions, Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL), and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, observed that although businesses were in a dire financial situation following the pandemic, any decision on the fate of workers should be taken through consensus.

> With April coming to an end, some employers and employees are concerned about the payment of salaries as the coronavirus continues to bite. Already operators of hotels and airlines have sent their workers home because of low patronage of their services. Some businesses are also offering salary cuts to their employees. (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020)

> In his contribution on the issue, the Director of Research and Policy at the TUC, Mr. Kwabena Nyarko Otoo, stressed that any move by employers to unilaterally decide the fate of workers would be dangerous. “Even though we empathise with the employers in this challenging moment, the TUC is saying that we need a tripartite action involving employers, employees, and the government on the way forward.” (*Peacefmonline.com,* April 28, 2020)

The excerpts below express the concerns of the labour unions. The same news report also emphasised how the closure of schools has affected the country's private schools and measures taken to mitigate that by the owners of the private basic schools in Ghana, as seen in the excerpts below.

> Meanwhile, the Ghana National Council of Private Schools (GNACOPS) has said that it has written to the Office of the President and the Ministry of Finance for a stimulus package to support over

> 400,000 members, especially teachers, reports Emmanuel Bonney. (*Peacefmonline.com,* April 28, 2020)
>
> It said that had become necessary following the closure of schools. (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020)
>
> "We want to get something for our teachers since we have not been operating for over a month now as most of the schools were not able to collect their fees so the government would have to come to their aid," the Executive Director of the GNACOPS, Mr. Enoch Gyetua, told the *Daily Graphic*. (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020)

The theme of the Impact of the Pandemic also includes news stories focused on the social and cultural implications of the pandemic, including changes in daily life, school closures, and the impact on events and gatherings. In one of the stories published on *Myjoyonline.com*, the reporter narrates how lives have been lost, including the lives of health workers at the forefront of the pandemic trying to save lives.

> "We are losing human resources that we cannot afford to replace almost immediately."
>
> "My colleague pharmacists who have lost their lives, my colleague doctors, nurses who have lost their lives, I know at least 30 of them. These are health human resources." (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, January 16, 2021)

In the above excerpts**,** pharmacist and a Fellow of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), Kwame Sarpong Asiedu, was reported lamenting about the surge of the virus in the country and how it was killing people and reducing the skilled workforce of the country. He shares personal experiences of health workers he knows who have lost their lives in the fight against the pandemic.

According to some media reports, the plights of some Ghanaians have been directly caused by the pandemic and events associated with the pandemic. According to a news report on *Citinewsroom.com*, "while the world is feeling frightened by the coronavirus pandemic, cybercriminals are taking full advantage of the situation by finding new ways to trick people into installing malware," as cited below.

> According to the latest research by security firm Checkpoint, hackers are using the “COVID-19” code to sell malware and exploitation tools on the dark web. For example, below is a Facebook account hacking tool sold for $300 with “a 15% coronavirus discount.” (*Citinewsroom.com*, March 19, 2020)
>
> On the other hand, bad actors are also sending bogus product offers such as a cheap MacBook Air, which is likely to be a fake or stolen product. So, you shouldn’t trust these. (*Citinewsroom.com*, March 19, 2020)

The story further stated that scammers are creating more and more sites with fake home testing kits and apps claiming to protect people from COVID-19. The story also indicated that the research team at Checkpoint also noted that there has been a rapid rise in the number of coronavirus-related domains; 6,000 of them were registered last week. The security firm noted that out of coronavirus-based domains registered in the last three weeks, only 93 (0.8%) domains out of the newly registered ones were malicious. However, more than 2,200 sites (19%) were found to be suspicious. Tabong and Segtub (2021) have argued that one of the biggest challenges Ghanaian authorities faced while combating the pandemic in the country concerned misinformation and misconceptions. The authors note, in line with what has been found in this study, that digital media technologies such as social media and websites were used to advance myths and misinformation about the pandemic in the country. They note that the core implication of misinformation that characterised some of the conversations about the pandemic concerned the degree to which misinformation affected the effectiveness of mass communication towards behavioural change among media users. Indeed, it can also be drawn that as a result of the nature of misinformation that clouded communication about the pandemic, media consumers found it difficult to consume the right forms of information concerning the pandemic in the country.

Not left out from the list of stories under this theme are human interest stories underscoring the plights of the vulnerable in society. Boydstun et al. (2013) acknowledge that media framing often reflects social happenings rather than elements developed by journalists. Thus, they argue that what dominates media spaces as frames of issues are often developed due to what society is already paying attention to. Hence, consistent with this, the study found that the media tended to focus more on human interest issues during their pandemic coverage. This can be born from the natural human need to receive information on what defects in natural happenings (for instance, diseases) have on society.

A news report titled: 'COVID-19 has doubled plight of black girls – UNFPA Country Representative' published on *Citinewsroom.com* narrates how the outbreak of COVID-19 has doubled the plight of the 'black girl', especially in the developing world, as their welfare was being overlooked.

> "Being a black girl is hard. Being a black girl in the West is harder, as racism and gender inequality present additional inhibitions." (*Citinewsroom.com,* August 16, 2020
>
> "But even far more difficult is being a black girl in the developing world, where there is very little interest by cultural or political authorities to build a society that safeguards their rights and is conducive for them to thrive," he said. (*Citinewsroom.com*, August 16, 2020)

The quotes above are from Mr. Ojuolape, the Country Representative for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), emphasising the adverse effects of COVID-19 COVID-19 on the welfare of the less privileged on the continent.

According to the news story, Mr. Ojuolape said the pandemic had thwarted global efforts to end child marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which were comparatively more common in Africa (*Citinewsroom.com,* August 16, 2020). He prognosticates that the situation could result in an additional 13 million child marriages

and another two million cases of FGM as a result. He justified the prediction with the explanation that the coronavirus pandemic has also disrupted the availability of contraceptives for women and girls as the supply chain has faced repeated disruptions. A report published by UNICEF exacts the truth in this finding. The report acknowledges that efforts to reduce child marriage across the globe drastically have been affected gravely as a result of the implications of the pandemic. The report acknowledges that as a result of the degree of halt that the pandemic had caused efforts to reduce child marriages worldwide, up to 10 million girls risk being child brides in the next decade. This shows some of the social implications of the pandemic that the media in Ghana sought to focus on while covering the pandemic. Indeed, this presents a critical case for studying the framing of social issues that emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on some critical social issues such as this, it can be drawn that the media was also focused on framing the pandemic, considering its social implications globally.

Foli and Ohemeng (2022) note that while the pandemic's economic implications were widely felt worldwide, the coronavirus's impacts on social living were even more drastic. The authors contend, in agreement with what was found in this study, that the sudden change in social policies to curb infection rates was the basis of global economic downturns. This study found that the media was also particular in highlighting how the pandemic influenced Ghana's social living beyond economic indicators.

News stories categorised under the theme of "Impact of the Pandemic" did not exclude stories on how the pandemic affected Ghanaians' everyday social lives. News reports under this theme also indicate that the pandemic has disrupted many social activities and people's religious lives. For instance, a headline on *Citinewsroom.com* on March

17, 2020, reads: “COVID-19: Chief Imam bans Friday prayers after President’s directive”. In the story, the National Chief Imam, His Eminence Sheikh Prof. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, the leader of all Muslims in Ghana, has suspended Jumah prayers for Muslims following a directive by President Nana Akufu-Addo. According to the news story, the Jumah prayer is a congregational prayer session that Muslims hold every Friday, just after noon, instead of the Zuhr prayer.

Muslims in Ghana pray five times each day (Hienz, 2008). As a result of the pandemic and restrictions, Muslims were banned from their usual rituals of gathering to pray five times in a day. In effect, that which has never happened before because of how seriously Muslims take their daily prayers happened because of the devastating nature of the pandemic. Osei-Tutu et al. (2021) posit that being a religious nation, Ghana felt the impacts of the pandemic even more when restrictions hit religious meetings across the country. The authors mention further that one of the key elements of the COVID-19-religion nexus was how the media reported on restrictions in churches and mosques. According to them, media framing techniques and strategies effectively maintained restrictions, especially within the religious space where the Ghanaian citizenry had much following. The quotes below support that in which the national leader of Muslims in Ghana banned all religious activities.

> A statement sighted by Citi News and signed by National Executive Secretary for the National Chief Imam, Alhaji Awaiso Bio said, “Jumah prayers in Ghana have been suspended beginning 20th March 2020 for the next four weeks.” (*Citinewsroom.com,* March 17, 2020)

> The statement also called for all religious and social gatherings to be suspended until the outbreak is contained. (*Citinewsroom.com*, March 17, 2020)

The Muslim community was not the only one affected, as can be seen from the excerpts below.

> President Akufu-Addo during his second address to the nation on the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in the country on Sunday, March 15, 2020, directed all public gatherings including religious activities to be suspended for four weeks. (*Citinewsroom.com,* March 17, 2020)

> The government has banned all public gatherings including conferences, workshops, funerals, festivals, political rallies, church activities, and other related events as part of measures to stop the spread of coronavirus in the country. President Nana Akufo-Addo in a national address on Sunday [March 15, 2020] said the ban will be in force for the next four weeks. (*Citinewsroom.com*, March 17, 2020)

As seen in the excerpt above, in the second address of the President to the nation on the measures being taken to combat the pandemic, he listed some restrictions that should be keenly followed in protecting people against the virus. In this address, five days after Ghana recorded its first two cases, the President banned all public gatherings of water nature and for whatever purpose. Be it that that year was an election year in Ghana, even political rallies have been banned. This really was a cause of discomfort in people's social and religious lives and, in a way, an infringement on their human rights and freedom. Sporting activities of every nature have also been banned. Even international competitions that have long been planned to take place have all been cancelled, as seen in the excerpts below.

> The Arm-wrestling Federation of Africa (AFA) has reaffirmed its decision to suspend the 2020 Africa Arm-wrestling championship in Ghana due to the coronavirus outbreak globally. (*Gna.org.gh,* June 3, 2020)

> The event according to the members should be suspended until there is a clearance on social gatherings by various governments, with borders opened and a cure found for coronavirus. (*Gna.org.gh*, June 3, 2020)

Foli and Ohemeng (2022) acknowledge the dire implications of the pandemic on Ghanaians' social living. Their study noted that the lockdown and other restrictions institutionalised by authorities had impacted the social lives of many Ghanaians. This study draws that beyond the economic impact of the pandemic, the pandemic had

occasioned a significant break in the regular social lives of Ghanaians. This connects further with the idea that media narratives that sought to highlight these issues were keen on advancing the idea that media pushed the narrative that the pandemic had disrupted social life in the country (Abedi & Mills, 2020; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2020).

5.1.3 Issue Three: Scientific & Medical Information

The total number of codes for the issue of Scientific & Medical Information was 431, representing 16% of the codes for the six themes. This makes it the third most dominant issue used by the four selected Ghanaian news portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021, in reporting on the pandemic.

This theme includes all stories that focus on the pandemic's scientific aspects, including the virus's origins and spread, the development of treatments and vaccines, and the latest research and findings related to the pandemic. Consistent with Ophir et al. (2021), whose examination of the framing of the novel coronavirus pandemic in the Italian media revealed the scientific frames, this frame focused on the biological nature of the virus.

First and foremost, the virus was reported as scientifically caused and can only be controlled by adhering to scientific protocols. The media, therefore, published stories about the nature of the virus, its transmission, and medical treatments and interventions. Tolley (2016) argued that the media simplifies complex issues; through this theme, the selected media made the scientific and biological theories and concepts surrounding the virus easily understood by the audience and formed their opinions through the news stories.

One such story that defines the pandemic and the nature of the virus was published on *gna.org.gh* titled: “Study: Virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces for 28 days”. The story highlights a study by Australia’s national agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), whose findings suggest that COVID-19 can survive on surfaces such as mobile phones and bank machines for up to 28 days. According to the same media reports, whose excerpts are below, the virus can live on certain surfaces longer than previously thought, which means that new findings about the virus keep emerging to replace older ones as the virus mutates. The media, however, makes sure the public is constantly informed through news reportage that has been categorised under this theme. (Tabong & Segtub, 2021; Chouhan, Vasita, & Goswami, 2020).

> The findings from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australia’s national agency, reveal that the SARS-oV-2 virus can live on certain surfaces for far longer than previously thought. (*gna.org.gh* October 12, 2020)
>
> “At 20 degrees Celsius, which is about room temperature, we found that the virus was extremely robust, surviving for 28 days on smooth surfaces such as glass found on mobile screens and plastic banknotes,” said Debbie Eagles, deputy director of the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP), which undertook the research. (*gna.org.gh* October 12, 2020)

Media reports citing scientist, medical doctors, and health practitioners as recommended ways of fighting the virus has been categorised under this theme. This confirms the findings of Siddiqua et al. (2020) that Pakistani newspapers dedicated most of their stories to educating the readers and warning policymakers about the virus and its deadly potential. For instance, in a story published on *Myjoyonline.com* titled: “Ghana urgently needs more testing and isolation to fight COVID-19 – Pharmacist”, a pharmacist was reported proposing new strategies to be adopted in Ghana to help curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

> Kwame Sarpong Asiedu who is also a Fellow of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), said the surge of the virus in the country is a result of the decrease in testing and isolations. .” (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, January 16, 2021)
>
> “That is the problem we are facing because we are not testing and because of that people are not also isolating, they are spreading more than ordinarily, they would do.” .” (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, January 16, 2021)

From the quotes above, the pharmacist blames the surging number of coronavirus cases on the absence of adequate testing and isolation. In the same story, he explained that because people were not being tested, they do not know their status. Because they do not know their status, those who are unknowingly positive do not isolate but instead infect others. Proper testing and isolation would have reduced the spread. He also indicated that people ordinarily do not walk to testing centres to have themselves tested but only do so when they require mandatory testing results to travel out of Ghana, as quoted below.

> “For instance, you require a test to go to Canada, Dubai, China so people are testing to leave the country. So, you have just about 10 percent of the total test that is happening in-country.” (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, January 16, 2021)

In the same story, just as other stories sampled and categorised under this theme, the media reported scientific means recommended for personal protection and prevention of the virus.

In the bid to educate people to keep safe, safety protocols such as wearing protective clothing, etc. are recommended, as seen in the excerpt below.

> He also called on parents and teachers to help in educating children on the need to constantly wear facemasks and observe the protocols as “we cannot perpetually lock our children.” (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, January 16, 2021)

Under this theme, the media provided information about the virus, its transmission, and medical treatments and interventions. Through news stories classified under this theme, the selected media portals confirmed or denied rumours about issues relating to the coronavirus pandemic.

For instance, in a news publication titled “Erectile Dysfunction Among Men Due Toto Coronavirus Infection Is Real – Urologist”, the media confirmed claims that some men who recovered from Coronavirus infection are experiencing erectile dysfunction. In the news report, Dr. Bernard Toboh, a Consulting Urologist at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, also noted that Coronavirus could affect an infected person’s heart, blood vessels, and nerves, as well as testosterone and sperm production, which could negatively affect one’s sexual performances in the bedroom. As shown in the quotations below, under this theme, the media educated people about the nature of the virus and medical updates on new findings about the virus when they found them.

> He said the issue of erectile dysfunction among some men due to Coronavirus disease was veritable, which is a post-traumatic disorder, and had been recorded in jurisdictions or areas with high infections, but only anecdotal evidence in Ghana. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 30, 2021)

> The Urologist noted that the increasing body of knowledge on Coronavirus had shown that the infectious disease was multi-systemic and could bring a whole lot of side effects to infected persons as well as those recovered from the disease. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 30, 2021)

> "And so the Coronavirus is known to cause depression and suppressed the production of testosterone and sperm," Dr. Toboh observed. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 30, 2021)

Also, according to media reports, the virus mutates and develops into different variants. Media reports under this theme constantly inform the audience about the latest variants of the virus and steps taken to ascertain and control its spread.

Citinewsroom.com published a story titled, “Testing for new coronavirus strain ongoing in Ghana – GHS,” about the Director of Public Health at the Ghana Health Service, Dr. Franklin Asiedu-Bekoe, informing the public of an ongoing testing exercise to determine if the new variant of the coronavirus has emerged in the country. The story indicates that the new development happened days after Nigeria, our neighbour, recorded cases of the new virus variants.

> The discovery in Nigeria according to some could cause fear and panic after similar variants of the new virus that appear to be more contagious were announced in the United Kingdom and South Africa. (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, December 26, 2020)
>
> “We have adopted the strategy of testing people before they enter the country. We have made PCR testing mandatory. We also do antigen tests. When we get the positives, we pass them on to Nuguchi to do the sequencing, they did it two months ago and did not identify any new virus strain. What they are doing now, with the advent of the new virus variant is, they are collecting the samples to see whether there are any in Ghana.” (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, December 26, 2020)

The extracts above highlight how the selected media understudy reported strategies adopted to ensure any new virus variants are identified and checked to prevent further spreading.

The media also reported on issues related to disinformation and misinformation about the pandemic, including false cures and treatments and conspiracy theories, which were categorised under this theme. Some quotations illustrating that from the sampled stories are presented below.

> President Akufo-Addo advised the populace to dismiss the many conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 vaccines. (Geraldine Amoah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, December 16, 2021)
>
> According to him, contrary to these unfounded theories, the vaccine is not purposed to kill anyone. Neither can it change one’s political affiliation. (Geraldine Amoah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, December 16, 2021)

The quotes above are from a news story on the 27th National Address of President Akufo-Addo on steps taken to fight COVID-19, where it was disclosed that €20 million has been set aside to accomplish the establishment of the National Vaccine Institute for the supervision of domestic production of COVID-19 and other vaccines. The President debunked misleading information about the coronavirus vaccines in the same address reported in the news story. He stressed the fact that the vaccines were not meant to kill anyone and could also not change anyone's political affiliation, as has been rumoured.

In a similar instance, the same news portal reported instances of other health professionals discrediting negative and false information being circulated about the COVID-19 vaccines. This confirms Barry's position in Siddiqua et al. (2020) that the second most important weapon against any pandemic should be communication, second to a vaccine.

One such instance is a news report published on February 13, 2021, by an Immunologist and Research Fellow of the West Africa Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens at the University of Ghana, educating people about the need to be circumspect in their sources of information about the pandemic.

> But, Dr. Bediako, together with three other experts wants the general public to debunk any negative view on the vaccines, especially from people portraying as medical professionals on social media. (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com,* February 13, 2021)
>
> "When you hear somebody on YouTube video, on Facebook, wearing a white coat, saying they are a doctor, presenting certain claims, do the due diligence on those people," he advised. (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, February 13, 2021)

The quotes above demonstrate one of the ways the selected media has reported on the education of people on the need to believe and have confidence in the scientific steps and products such as vaccines in eradicating the pandemic.

5.1.4 Issue four: Covid-Novation

The fourth most dominant issue covered by the selected Ghanaian news portals, *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*, within the period under review in reporting the coronavirus pandemic was Covid-Novation. 12% of total coverage was dedicated to the themes as it records 336 codes from the total 2719 codes of the 200 stories sampled. The name Covid-Novation, a coined term by the researcher, combines "Covid" and "innovation" to represent news stories that focus on the positive impacts of the pandemic. Stories under this theme imply that the pandemic has stimulated new and creative solutions to existing problems. The selected media has published valuable opportunities that have characterise d the rather deadly pandemic.

For instance, the economic prospects of the pandemic have been emphasised by President Akufo Addo in a story titled, "COVID-19 has presented numerous opportunities to build a self-reliant, resilient economy – Akufo-Addo". According to the story, the President admonished Ghanaians to work hard and learn not to rely on global economies as they failed them in the trying moments of the pandemic. In emphasising the need for Ghanaian businesses to ensure self-reliance, the President in the story has cited how many countries that have been relying on China as a supply chain have been thrown out of business when China closed its borders as a result of the pandemic. The excerpts below illuminate the points made above.

> President Nana Akufo-Addo has noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented the country with numerous opportunities that can be nurtured to build a stronger, self-reliant, and resilient economy. "The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that when you are over-reliant on global supply chains when something like that happens you are truly exposed," he said. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 11, 2020)

Some stories portrayed how people have seized opportunities that have been presented as a result of the pandemic to their advantage. According to news reports, Ghana witnessed a near shortage of hand sanitisers a few days after Ghana recorded its first two cases. What was a near disaster was averted when local producers grabbed the opportunity brought by the scarcity of disinfectant to increase production. The Ghana News Agency published a story six (6) days after Ghana had recorded its first two cases titled; “Local hand sanitiser manufacturers working to restock market.”

> Some local manufacturers of hand sanitisers say they are speeding the production of the disinfectant, which has seen a very high demand since the confirmation of COVID-19 in Ghana, to replenish supplies by the end of the week. (*Gna.org.gh* March 18, 2020
>
> However, some authorised importers of the product say they are uncertain about when they would receive their next consignment, especially as many of the manufacturing countries were also affected by COVID-19. (*gna.org.gh* October 12, 2020)
>
> In an interview with the Ghana News Agency, on Wednesday, Madam Solace Juliana Adjah, the Chief Executive officer of Jesewe Enterprise, manufacturers of ‘Jewese Hand Sanitiser’, said although they supplied the market with thousands of bottles of the sanitisers a few days before Ghana recorded her first two cases, on Thursday, March 12, the market rapidly run out of that stock. (*gna.org.gh* October 12, 2020)
>
> She said the next supply, was also sold out a day after the confirmation of the disease. (*gna.org.gh* October 12, 2020)

The excerpts above from the story demonstrate how local manufacturers of hand sanitisers averted the near crisis. The use of hand sanitisers was one of the recommended ways of preventing the spread of the coronavirus. It, therefore, was not surprising when hand sanitisers ran out of stock. Moreover, because the pandemic is global and has affected even international producers, it would have been very disastrous for Ghana to keep relying on authorised importers of the product who, according to the story, were uncertain when they would receive any new stocks. Local producers came to the rescue by producing to satisfy the market demand.

What is more significant about this development is that local authorities have been reported to have begun to train their residents in sanitiser production to curb the spread of the virus, as seen below.

> Authorities at the Asokore Mampong Municipal Assembly have begun training some individuals within the area to go into mass production of hand sanitisers which will be distributed to residents for free. (*Citinewsroom.com*, April 5, 2020)

News stories under this theme also reflect the cumulative effects of how Ghanaians took advantage of COVID-related opportunities. A story by *Citinewsroom.com* titled "Over 10,000 jobs created for local production of PPE – Deputy Trade Minister" summarises some of those gains.

According to the story, the government claimed about 10,000 jobs were created during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the local production of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The story also stated that the government saved over $16.8 million within the period, as quoted below.

> "Some of the savings we made and because we made these face masks in Ghana. We saved over $16.8 million dollars. We didn't need dollars to go and import these masks." (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com,* October 21, 2020)

It is essential to note that stories categorised under the theme *of Covid-novation* also included news stories published on the platforms that portrayed the pandemic as a catalyst for positive change. It also portrayed how COVID-19 was driving innovation and social progress.

In an article titled, "COVID-19: The 'Future of Work' Is Adopting the Hybrid Approach of Working Remotely – HR Director, Vodafone Ghana", the Director of Human Resources at Vodafone Ghana, Hannah Ashiokai Akrong, has reported advising leaders of organisations and businesses to adopt the hybrid approach of working

remotely within COVID-19 and beyond. She explains that COVID-19 has influenced how organisations work throughout the world, increasingly compelling companies to mobilise technology to aid work.

Also, part of the theme of Covid-Novation are stories of how some organisations, groups, and individuals are surmounting the inconveniences brought by the pandemic and restrictions by the government by resorting to modern and more technologically inclined ways of doing things. For instance, stories were published about how international religious groups have adopted virtual means of worship. One such story was about the Jehovah's Witnesses' decision to hold their global convention virtually through their websites. This event has hitherto been hosted in large physical spaces such as stadiums and big halls.

> The global annual convention of Jehovah's Witnesses would, for the first time, be held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the congregants viewing the programmes digitally. (*gna.org.gh*, July 25, 2020)

As indicated in the excerpts above, this new move by the church is novel as it has never been done virtually before but for the pandemic. In another story published by *Peacefmonline.com*, the ECOWAS Heads of State Summit was held virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions and disruptions. The writer indicated writes;

> At the 58th Summit of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held virtually, it was agreed that the cost of the Covid test for in-bound ECOWAS nationals is pegged at fifty United States dollars ($50) at the Kotoka International Airport. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 31, 2021)

Also categorised under this theme are stories about how the pandemic has accelerated digital innovations and transformations. Amidst the pandemic's devastations, there seems to have been some technological advancement associated with events reported in the media.

For instance, in a story titled; “GSMA Report: COVID-19 Pandemic Puts Digital Transformation Back on Agenda,” the writer states how the pandemic has improved people’s communication, shopping, work, and educational experiences. It also narrates details of the report on how digital transformation is no longer just a question but an action for many industries.

> While the report found that the pandemic has upended people's lives, health, and business sectors, people were using technological innovation to adapt to new ways of life during these uncertain times. "In this unprecedented situation, people are quickly adapting to innovative ways of connecting and doing business empowered by connectivity, and digital transformation is no longer just a question but an action for many industries," the report said. (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 29, 2020)

The story also highlighted the launch of an app by the Vice President to aid in contact tracing and the identification and isolation of people who have come into contact with infected people. *Citinewsroom.com* also published another story on how the Government of Ghana uses Zipline’s network to deliver its COVID-19 vaccines to ensure rapid, equitable access across the country.

This makes Ghana the first country in the world to deploy drones nationally to deliver COVID-19 vaccines.

> The world’s first and only national-scale drone delivery service, Zipline, today began the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to selected health facilities within its service area in Ghana. (*Citinewsroom.com*, March 2, 2021)

5.1.5 Issue Five: Data and Statistics

Data and Statistics emerged as the fifth (5th) most dominant theme used by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. Under this theme, stories were found to have been

published on the virus using numbers and data on the coronavirus (Uribe, 2020). The media used statistics in communication, the infection rates, rate of recovery, and death tolls in providing information about the spread and impact of the virus. Codes about the nature of the virus as it has been observed or experienced in Ghana compared to elsewhere.

> The president said the country's COVID-19 recovery rate has improved from 75% to 89.5% in one month. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 27, 2020)
>
> He indicated that hospitalisation and death rates have consistently decreased over the period, adding that the country had one of the lowest on the continent and in the world. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 27, 2020)

In the excerpt above, the President of Ghana has reported updating Ghanaians on the state of the pandemic in the country. He was apprising the populace about the rate of recovery and the rate of death and hospitalisation, which he said were positive. He also reported comparing the comparatively better situations in Ghana to deadly conditions elsewhere and projections that Ghana and Africa would be worse.

The theme of Data and Statistics has also been exhibited many times in news stories announcing new infection cases or deaths when new cases are recorded.

A story titled; "COVID-19 Kills 4 More Sending a Total Number of Deaths to 810" on *myjoyonline.com* is one such story that provided a local update on new cases as well as a cumulative figure on the cases.

> The Ghana Health Service has revealed that four persons have succumbed to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 18, 2021)
>
> According to the Service's most recent update, all the casualties happened on Tuesday, July 13, summing the deaths recorded so far to 810. Thus, sending the active cases to 2,601 with 95,024 recoveries. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 18, 2021)

The excerpt above indicates an attempt by the writer to update readers on the total number of cases as of the time. The emphasis on the number of cases and presentation of some form of statistical developments in the extracts further lays claim to the fact that the media focused on numeric and statistical issues concerning the country's pandemic. Furthermore, the findings indicate that while reporting the pandemic from a numeric and statistical point of view, some reporters tried to publish stories that presented a regional breakdown of the pandemic in the country. Hence, the media also gives a region-by-region breakdown of the number of infections across the nation, breaking down the cumulative cases per region;

- Greater Accra Region – 53,942
- Ashanti Region – 16,805
- Western Region – 5,968
- Eastern Region – 4,519
- Central Region – 3,552
- Volta Region – 2,650
- Northern Region – 1,661
- Bono Region – 1,468
- Bono East Region – 1,463
- Upper East Region – 1,320
- Western North Region – 923
- Ahafo Region – 844
- Upper West Region – 500
- Oti Region – 466
- North East Region – 231
- Savannah Region – 132 (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 27, 2020)

As the name of the theme denotes, the media reports the numbers and publishes data on how those numbers came about as provided by the authorities. For example, the excerpt below was from a news story published three (3) days after Ghana recorded its first two cases.

> As of noon on Sunday, March 15, 2020, six cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed in Ghana. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com,* March 15, 2020)

> Director of Public Health at Ghana Health Service, Dr. Badu Sarkodie who provided updates on the country's cases on Sunday said all the cases were imported into the country. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com,* March 15, 2020)

As can be seen, the author did not only report the new cases as confirmed by the sources but also added that the newly confirmed cases were all imported cases. Across the literature on media coverage of the pandemic, especially in Ghana, there is the consensus that the media engage more often in the use of data and statistics to report on the pandemic in the country and outside of the borders of Ghana as well (see for instance Efiyah, 2021; Boateng & Buatsi, 2022; Quakyi et al., 2021). It could be observed on many online media platforms an integration of COVID-19 infection and death rates trackers that were visibly shown on the homepages of many news websites. This confirms the finding that the media focused a lot on reporting numbers, percentages, and statistics as part of their overall coverage of the pandemic in Ghana. That better places the issue in context as readers could tell how it got transmitted and could reduce the fear that, at that time, the virus was in their communities and had begun spreading. It can also help stakeholders decide where to tackle the spread from most.

While scant literature shows that the media paid attention to reporting on statistical data and numeric issues relative to the pandemic in the country, some studies lean towards the supposition that media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana was highly contingent on data reporting. Studies (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2020; Boateng & Buatsi, 2022; Quakyi et al., 2021) have mentioned that media reports remained keen on showing data related to the pandemic in the country. Boateng and Buatsi (2022) mention that the use of statistical and numeric data showed the extent of infection and mortality rates of the pandemic. Similarly, it can be drawn from this

study that the seeming focus on data and statistical representations in media reports concerning the pandemic was crucial in media efforts to paint the picture that the pandemic was severe.

As the virus was a global pandemic, the four media portals under review found it necessary to inform readers about the cases or rates of infection in Ghana and keep the audience abreast of what is happening outside their country, as cited below.

> So far about 169,175 people have been infected by the virus globally with 6,499 deaths recorded. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com,* March 15, 2020)

In the extract above, the author provided statistics on the global situation of the pandemic and also went on to provide data on where this all started when the virus was first recorded: China (Asante & Mills, 2020). The story did not miss out on the number of countries affected then. These specifics may provide better context for the readers. Nienhaus (2023) and Leask et al. (2010) note that media framing lays much emphasis on creating context for media consumers. Thus, media studies scholars note that one of the key tenets of the media framing theory is the development of contextualisation for media consumers. Hence, the study found that the media had engaged in adequate contextualisation of events to ensure that media consumers understood the issues they reported during the pandemic.

This further situates the story in the Media Framing theory and gives the finding even more theoretical basis. Framing stories provides social and cultural contexts that enable readers to properly understand the stories they have read (Asiamah et al., 2022; Gozi et al., 2020). Hence, as the media framed issues concerning the pandemic considering the provision of statistics, the media framed their stories effectively to portray the stories in a more socially and culturally relevant manner.

Media studies have been critical in evaluating how the media framed the pandemic as dangerous through how the media appeared to have focused keenly on statistical representations (Ogbodo et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Gozi et al., 2020). Ogbodo et al. (2020), in particular, note that the media in Africa keenly focused on the coverage of the pandemic through the broadcast of statistics. In the same way, the findings made in this study suggest a strong focus on statistical media coverage of the pandemic to portray the severity of the disease in Ghana.

This theme also portrayed the severity of the virus not only through the numbers but also the calibre of people who have been affected. The news, “More than 110 health workers test positive for COVID-19 in Central Region”, published by the Ghana News Agency, communicates the gravity of the pandemic to most readers. The use of data and statistics in that story can communicate much fear and the severity of the pandemic to the readers. Health workers were not only crucial in the fight against the pandemic but were the very people also championing educational awareness about preventive measures. In effect, they should have known better how to stay safe. Therefore, a news story communicating an infection of that magnitude will put fear in most readers. This agrees with existing empirical knowledge that argues that media framing of health issues relies highly on statistical data to promote fear and severity (Leask et al., 2010; O’Keeffe et al., 2023; Gollust et al., 2019). Media studies contend that media consumers are highly influenced by media coverage of health issues and diseases, in particular through the promotion of data and statistics (Mechanic, 2005; Kington et al., 2021; Kanchan & Gaidhane, 2023; Gollust et al., 2019).

Similarly, a news report about the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital’s CEO could also communicate the virus’s severity. According to the story, the CEO played a phenomenal role in ensuring people’s safety in his region. The story with excerpts

below also reveals the loss of one of the staff of the hospital and the infection of over 200 staff of the same facility.

> The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, Oheneba-Owusu Danso has been admitted to a special ward of the hospital after reportedly testing positive for COVID-19. (*Citinewsroom.com*, September 8, 2020)
>
> The CEO has been instrumental in helping treat the virus in the Ashanti Region, as he has set up a COVID-19 testing laboratory to support existing operations. (*Citinewsroom.com*, September 8, 2020)

The media often uses different strategies to influence the adoption of favourable health behaviours during a global health crisis (Asiamah et al., 2022). In any case, behaviour change communication is one of the prominent functions of the media when they are engaged in reporting global health crises (Gollust et al., 2019). The use of data and statistics have been found to be a critical means of enforcing perceptions of severity among media consumers (Boateng & Buatsi, 2022). This study found that as part of reporting on the pandemic using Data Statistics themes, the media also focused significantly on counting the number of prominent members of society who had also been infected.

Under this theme of Data and *Statistics, the* media also published scores of stories on how the coronavirus pandemic has infected some prominent politicians and government officials. Sub-titled; "Ghanaian politicians vs. Coronavirus" *Citinewsroom.com* chronicles *several* government officials who tested positive for *COVID-19*. Find selected excerpts below.

> Senior Minister, Yaw Osafo-Maafo has tested positive for COVID-19. This was announced by the Minister for Information, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah today, July 7, 2020. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)

> A Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, Carlos Ahenkorah who also tested positive for the virus resigned because he visited a voter registration center, contrary to advice by his doctor to self-isolate. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> The Chief Executive Officer of the Forestry Commission and former General Secretary of the governing New Patriotic Party Kwadzo Owusu Afriyie, popularly referred to as Sir John died on July 1, 2020, at the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital as a result of COVID-19 complications. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> Ghana's Health Minister, Kwaku Agyeman Manu also tested positive for the virus about three weeks ago and received treatment at the University of Ghana Medical Centre in Accra. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), Dr. Lydia Dsane-Selby, also tested positive for Coronavirus during the same period. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> Mayor of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, K.K Sam who also tested positive for the disease, however, passed on. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> The MCE died on Friday, June 12, 2020, while receiving treatment at the University of Ghana Medical Centre where he was rushed after falling sick. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> The Education Minister, Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh, was also detained at the University of Ghana Medical Centre on June 24, 2020, over fears of COVID-19 infection. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)
>
> Within the same period, Dan Botwe, the Minister for Regional Reorganisation and Development was also admitted to the University of Ghana Medical Centre "upon feeling unwell". (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 7, 2020)

The excerpts above portray the pandemic as a respecter of none as it did not spare even the Health Minister, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), the education minister, or other elites and leading government members. It even claimed the lives of some of them, such as the Mayor of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, the Chief Executive Officer of the

Forestry Commission, and the former General Secretary of the governing New Patriotic Party.

Media coverage of famous persons in society was observed as one of the core strategies used to depict the severity of the pandemic. Lebni et al. (2020) note that the coverage of celebrity involvement in the pandemic, either through reports of their infections or efforts towards vaccinations, was critical to framing the pandemic. It is, therefore, well situated as this study found that reports of infection by the health minister depicted the level of severity of the pandemic to media consumers. (Lebni, Irandosst, Mehedi, Sedighi, & Ziapour, 2020)

Also under this theme are stories using data on the coronavirus vaccines. According to a news story on *myjoyonline.com*, "About 75% of people who test positive at KIA are unvaccinated – GHS". In the story, the Director-General of the Ghana Health Service said that he is dedicated to ensuring that the new vaccination requirement for overseas travellers considerably reduces the number of COVID-19 infections.

> "We need to do something to reduce the importation by ensuring that the people who are vaccinated are the ones who are coming in and data we are seeing shows that about 75% of all the people who test positive at the airport are unvaccinated," he added. (*MyJoyOnline.com,* December 12, 2021)

5.1.6 Issue Six: Covid Corporate Social Responsibility

The total number of codes for this was 203, representing 7% of the codes, making it the sixth-ranked. The theme includes stories about how organisations have responded to the pandemic by supporting people and communities as part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) initiatives. In a story titled, "Jumia announces actions to support governments' fight against coronavirus," the writer reports Jumia's initiatives to support governments in their fight against COVID-19 through the facilitation of social

distancing by enabling consumers to buy online. According to the story, the objectives of Jumia's initiative would be achieved through offering contactless delivery options, as they eliminated physical contact and potentially reduced person-to-person infection. The excerpts below express that.

> Jumia has offered the support of its integrated ecosystem which include a marketplace, logistics, and online payments to governments and other countries in Africa, as part of the global action against COVID-19. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, March 25, 202)

According to the story, Jumia also waived the commission on specific sanitary products to help consumers get them at the lowest price and implemented measures to control prices.

There have also been news stories published on the four selected platforms on how some businesses designed new business models to cater to their situation brought about by the pandemic. In a news story, published by *Citinewsroom.com*, titled; "COVID-19: Yango gives discounts on rides to and from some hospitals", the ride-hailing service Yango has announced that it will give discounts on rides to and from some selected hospitals in Accra. According to the company, that was their contribution to assisting frontline health service workers and creating safe transport accessibility as they go to and from their workplaces.

> "Yango sees that the health workers on the frontline are making a difference, and continue to put their lives on the line, and believes that by offering to make trips more affordable to the selected places of work, they will get to enjoy comfort at an affordable price as they lead in the fight against the pandemic. Thus, starting today, Yango is giving everybody 30% off all trips to and from selected hospitals that apply automatically," Kadotien Soro, General Manager for Yango West Africa has said. (Jeffrey Owuraku Sarpong, *Citinewsroom.com*, April 2, 2020)

This theme also focuses on how companies have adapted their CSR activities to address the pandemic, including donating funds or products to support health.

Hospitals, polyclinics, and frontline health workers most prone to infection have enjoyed some support from corporate organisations, as seen in the stories quoted below.

> HEADLINE: Aker Energy donates personal protective supplies worth ₵195,000 to Ridge Hospital
>
> Aker Energy has donated 1,000 disposable personal protective equipment (PPEs) and 500 boxes of gloves worth ₵195,000 to the Greater Accra Regional Hospital. This is to help the facility in its management of COVID-19 cases which have so far affected 152 people and killed five. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, March 20, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: StanChart extends COVID-19 support to hospitals and health centres beyond Accra
>
> Standard Chartered Bank has extended a hand of support, through the donation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital in Kumasi, the Tamale Teaching Hospital, and Prampram Polyclinic. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 31, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: Stanbic donates COVID-19 test kits and PPE to GHS, others
>
> Stanbic Bank has donated COVID-19 items to three healthcare institutions, namely Ghana Health Service (GHS), the Cardiothoracic Unit of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, and 37 Military Hospital, to help in their fight against the pandemic. (*Citinewsroom.com*, June 12, 2020)
>
> Insurance group, Hollard Ghana, in support of the fight against the spread of COVID-19 has donated hundreds of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to the Kamina Barracks Hospital, Northern Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (NEDCo), Regional office of the Ghana Education Service, staff and management of the Tamale Airport, and the Tamale-Bolgatanga Transport Union all in the Northern Region to ensure their safety. (*Citinewsroom.com,* June 1, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: MTN presents surgical nose masks to two health facilities
>
> The MTN Ghana has presented 3,000 pieces of surgical nose masks to the Sunyani Regional Hospital to help protect health workers from contracting the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the course of their duties. The telecommunication company also presented 2,500 pieces of protective gear to the Kwatire Polyclinic in the Sunyani West Municipality. (*gna.org.gh*, September 13, 2020)

In the first excerpt, Aker Energy, a Norwegian oil exploration and production company, presented PPEs and other items to the Ridge Hospital in Accra. However, the story stated that the donations were in response to an appeal for aid from the hospital. The second excerpt also shows another corporate organisation donating to hospitals outside the national capital: Kumasi, Tamale, and Prampram. In a similar story, Hollard Ghana, an insurance company in Ghana, was reported to have supported Kamina Barracks Hospital, NEDCO, GES, and others with PPE. The fifth excerpt is also about a donation to a polyclinic by MTN Ghana. What is also worth mentioning is that some organisations, aside from the donations, ran their own Social Marketing campaigns to educate people on the need to be safe, as seen below.

> …..He said MTN had launched a campaign dubbed "Wear it or Me" to remind the general public of behavioral change and the need for them to wear nose masks and observe social distances (*gna.org.gh*, September 13, 2020)

The media also focused on interventions of private businesses and non-governmental organisations and their support to other frontline workers such as the security forces. According to news reports published on *Citinewsroom.com,* the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) had to adjust its budgetary plans in order to extend support to some security agencies in fighting crime amidst the pandemic. This is to show that the support was an afterthought but was necessary due to the circumstances of the time. The quote below illustrates that:

> The UNODC had to rearrange its funding and programme to cater to these law enforcement agencies with PPEs while they fight crime and embark on frontline duties during the 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. (*Citinewsroom.com*, December 4, 2020)

The theme also focuses on stories that have potential PR gains for companies. Some new stories portray the organisations positively, which may lead to them deriving PR gains such as increased brand awareness or improved reputation from their CSR

activities during the pandemic. Some companies were reported to have donated free samples of their products. For instance, Samsung has donated 500 units of Galaxy A2 Cores to be used by frontline health workers to improve communication and monitor the movement of testing and care resources. The excerpts of the story below stated that there was a collaboration with MTN to provide free data for six months. It can be inferred that if put to use, at least those health workers will be exposed to the Samsung brand, especially the Galaxy A2 Cores.

> This was a strong factor in Samsung's decision to support the country. Samsung has donated 500 units of Galaxy A2 Cores to the efforts.
>
> "As COVID-19 continues to make its way across the country, our thoughts are with the people of Ghana. We are dedicating our resources to help and will continue to work with the government. We also believe that all companies should unite to work together with the country's leaders and corporates now more than ever, our partner, MTN Ghana, will provide free SIM cards with 500 MB of data every month for 6 months for the devices we are donating," said Eugene Nahm, MD Samsung Electronics West Africa, Ghana Branch. (*Citinewsroom.com*, July 1, 2020)

The media under this theme also highlighted the efforts of some individuals who supported in their capacities and not their organisations. A news story titled; "NCA's Prince Ofosu Sefah donates COVID-19 relief items to Kwahu South District" was about how an individual donated to support eight communities to aid the fight against the pandemic.

> Deputy Director-General in charge of operations at the National Communications Authority (NCA), Prince Ofosu Sefah has donated some items to eight communities within the Kwahu South District of the Eastern Region. Items donated include 8 modernised hands-free Veronica buckets, medicated soaps, tissues, sanitisers, face masks, and rubber buckets all amounting to the tune of about ¢20,000. Beneficiary communities include Twenorase, Obo, Obomeng, Mpraeso, Asakraka, Bepong, and Atibie. (*Citinewsroom.com*, November w, 2020)

Pang and Meng (2016) and Kanyika and Elia (2021) noted that one of the critical areas of focus for media personnel and reporters, while engaged in coverage of global health issues, hinges on creating some humanistic perspectives to issues. They note that while covering pandemics and health issues from a humanity point of view through coverage of mortality rates and implications of health issues on human life, the media also focus on things other people are doing to mitigate the crisis and help others. Hence, as has been found in this, the media are also keen on reporting issues that concern how other people are helping affected persons. This, as Pang and Meng (2016) note, is critical in painting health issues from a humanistic point of view.

5.2 RQ2. How was the pandemic framed in the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies?

The importance of framing in aiding the understanding and interpretation of news (Kafle, 2014) and how opinions about issues can be altered through emphasising or deemphasising particular facets of that issue (Iyenger, 2005) have been discussed in Chapter 3 of the study. Therefore, how the coronavirus is portrayed in the media has the potential to either increase or decrease the number of cases. Studies have shown that the nature of reportage and the angles and frames adopted by the media can influence health behaviours and perceptions about the pandemic (Dan & Raupp, 2018). Based on the kinds of frames the media broadcasts, views about the virus's development, defence, and control mechanisms can be strengthened.

The second research question examined the frames adopted by the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies. It sought to ascertain the most dominant frames used to portray the pandemic by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*. The study analysed the media coverage of the four platforms for a year, starting from March 12, 2020, during coverage from March

12, 2020, which marked the day Ghana recorded her first case of the coronavirus infections to March 24, 2021, exactly a year after Ghana's first COVID-19 case was recorded.The study again adopted the use of paragraphs from the news stories as the main unit of analysis in examining how the pandemic is portrayed in the Ghanaian media. (Holsti, 1969, p. 116). A total of 2719 paragraphs were considered from 200 sampled stories. The frames that emerged from close reading and immersion from the data obtained are the Political Frame, Economic Frame, Social Frame, Public Health Crisis, and On-the-Brighter-Side-Frame.

Table 6: Frequency Level of the Dominant Frames

FRAMES	JOY NEWS	CITI NEWSROOM	PEACE FM ONLINE	GNA	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Political Frame	181	153	282	229	845	31%
Social Frame	215	196	131	176	718	26%
Public Health Crisis Frame	218	125	140	156	639	24%
On-the-Brighter-Side Frame	50	141	64	81	336	12%
Economic Frame	38	32	97	14	181	7%
TOTAL	702	647	714	656	2719	100%

Source: Field Data, 2023

From the Table 6, , the 'Political Frame' is the most dominant frame used in portraying the coronavirus pandemic by the four selected Ghanaian media. With 845 codes of the 2719 total codes, it has the highest percentage score of 31%. With 718 codes representing 26% of the total codes sampled for the study, the "Social Frame' is the second most dominant frame adopted by the media. The third most dominant frame is the "Public Health Crisis Frame" with 24% of codes. The frames "On-the-Brighter-

Side Frame" and "Economic Frame" were the 4th and 5th most dominant frames employed by the media with 12% and 7% of codes, respectively.

These themes that dominated the media's reportage of the pandemic by the selected media houses have been sequentially explained and supported with direct extracts.

The various issues that dominated the media coverage of *myjoyonline.com, citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*. during the coverage of the pandemic for the one year under study have sequentially been explained and supported with direct extracts from the selected news media.

5.2.1 Frame One: Political Frame

Political connotations are a critical perspective in media framing of health issues (Dan & Raupp, A systematic review of frames in news reporting of health risks: Characteristics, construct consistency vs. name diversity and the relationship of frames to framing functions , 2018). Media studies suggest that political frames are an essential aspect of how the media reports on global health issues. Some studies (Jo & Chang, 2020; Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020; Nienhaus, 2023) that have been keen on understanding the frames and issues that the media focused on while reporting the pandemic confirm as has been found in this study that political frames or political issues were an integral part of how the media covered the pandemic. It therefore suffices to note that political frames or the framing of political aspects are an essential element of health news reporting. Solvoll and Hoiby (2023) posit that when the media fail to include political perspectives in their reportage of global health issues, they miss a critical perspective that is likely to affect their overall coverage of the health issues. Some studies have argued, particularly as related to findings from media coverage of the pandemic that political frames and issues were a focal point for media framing of

the pandemic globally (Afrin, Harun, Prybutok, & Prybutok, 2022; Solvoll & Hoiby, 2023; Chung, Hyerim, Lee, & yang, 2021). The consensus within the literature on media coverage of the pandemic is that when the media present political frames, they tend to pay more attention to the efforts of governments during and post the pandemic and during vaccination periods (see for instance Uribe, 2020; Chung, Hyerim, Lee & Yang, 2021). Hence, political news frames on the pandemic cover what actions various governments took while alleviating the pandemic in different countries.

The Political Frame used by *myjoyonline.com, citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*. in portraying the pandemic focuses on governance, leadership and partisan aspects of the management of the pandemic. This includes government response by way of policies and actions adopted in controlling the spread of the virus and the criticisms that came with it by political opponents and civil society. This frame includes stories about government policies that have been put in place, as well as laws that the government has passed to manage the pandemic. Similarly, previous researchers have revealed the political dimension of the coronavirus pandemic, such as how the media included power dynamics and partisan narratives of the pandemic (Hart, Chinn, & Soroka, 2020; Tabong & Segtub, 2021; Tisdell, 2020), how global health issues were greatly competing against political content (Van Green and Tyson, 2020), and how nations are divided into party lines on how the pandemic has been managed (Funk, Kennedy, & Johnson, 2020).

There were stories categorised under this frame of how the Ghana Government's intervention by way of financial commitment to cushion affected people painted a picture of a caring and working government that is ready to support its people. There were also stories on how the government was criticised for being irresponsible in allowing the virus to enter the country in the first place when it could have been

prevented by closing the borders. Stories also published under this frame highlighted the commitment of political parties to the fight. The extract below is from one of the numerous stories that painted a heroic picture of the government through their interventions.

> Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta says the US$100 million fund to fight the COVID-19 pandemic has been received and is available for disbursement in accordance with the public financial management procedures and rules. (*Peacefmonline.com*, March 30, 2020)

Below are some selected excerpts from various stories that portrayed the Government's positive interventions such as education and sensitisation, fumigation of public spaces such as schools, provision of mandatory vaccination, and creation of emergency helplines amongst others.

> According to President Akufo-Addo, all Junior High Schools across the country have been fumigated and disinfected. The government has also procured and distributed 45,000 Veronica buckets; 90,000 gallons of liquid soap; 90,000 rolls of tissue paper; 40,000 thermometer guns and 750,000 pieces of 200-millilitre hand sanitisers to the schools. (*Peacefmonline.com*, June 29, 2020)
>
> "Our strategy remains the same. One is to be strategic about where all our facilities are providing vaccination. We are also going around taking the vaccine to the people. We are also doing mobile vaccination where people will go to the lorry park and see a car parked giving a vaccination. (Jeffrey Nyabor, *MyJoyOnline.com*, November 28, 2021)
>
> The Ministry of Health says the country has put in place adequate measures to detect possible COVID-19 cases at the Kotoka International Airport. A Deputy Health Minister, Dr. Bernard Okoe Boye speaking at a press conference organised at the Kotoka International Airport, said the measures put in place will help prevent any infected person from slipping through the system. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, August 31, 2020)
>
> The National Information Centre has announced that phone line 311 has been designated as an additional helpline for citizens across the country to obtain and provide information on COVID-19 to guarantee their maximum safety.
>
> Additionally, a WhatsApp number: 0555311311 has been assigned to aid public communication with the requisite authorities and to

> provide reliable and quality data on events, contact tracing, and all other emergencies. (*gna.org.gh*, April 1, 2020)
>
> The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) has called for the proper disposal of used Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to ensure other people especially children do not come into contact with them.
> Mr. Amatus Talaar, the NCCE Programmes Officer for the Lambussie District, made the call during a sensitisation programme for the Muslim community on environmental governance in respect of COVID-19 at Yakadi and Bilaw communities in the Upper West Region. (*Peacefmonline.com*, July 30, 2020)

The president for instance was reported to have passed an Executive Instrument banning social gatherings such as sporting activities, political rallies, crusades, beaches, festivals, drinking bars, and nightclubs are still prohibited.

> "I have, by Executive Instrument, provided for these new directions, and extended the suspension of the remaining public gatherings, as set out in E.I. 64 of 15th March, until 31st July. Here, I refer to the suspension of sporting events, nightclubs, cinemas, drinking spots, bars, beaches, festivals, funerals, political rallies, and large religious gatherings such as crusades, pilgrimages, and conventions," the President indicated (*Peacefmonline.com,* May 31, 2020)

To ensure srict adhereance to the pandemic containement measures, the government empowered law enforcement bodies and agencies through the enactment of new laws to contain the spread of the pandemic. The president in one of his speeches as reported by the media buttress as quoted below.

> “Let me also reiterate that the ban on public gatherings, religious or social, is still in force. Anyone, irrespective of status, religion, or ethnicity, who is found to be flouting them will be dealt with fully in accordance with the law,” President Akufo-Addo stated in his address to the nation on Friday on the COVID-19 outbreak in the country. (*Peacefmonline.com*, March 29, 2020)

Indeed, reports have been published on how city authorities and security forces ensured compliance with the COVID-19 protocols, and in some cases, even arrests were made. The finding agrees with Hirneisen (2020) who accounts that aside from

the focus on political elite members of society who formed a huge part of political frames of media coverage of the pandemic, the media also focused on the activities of other government officials.

> HEADLINE: Accra Metropolitan Assembly prosecuted 2 for not wearing face masks in public.
>
> A joint 'Operation Covid Safety' and Sanitation Taskforce comprising officers from some Assemblies in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), Ghana Police Service, and Zoomlion Ghana Limited were at the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange in Accra to enforce the wearing of nose masks in the city. (Fred Smith, *MyJoyOnline.com*, August 1, 2020)

According to the story, the Sanitation Taskforce led by the Accra Mayor was deployed to sections of the capital city to compel commuters, traders, and passengers into both private and commercial vehicles to abide by the protocols or face sanctions.

Asiamah, Osei-Mensah and Sackey (2022) note that media framing of issues has critical implications on how media consumers perceive issues in the world. In other words, how a particular issue is framed has consequences on how media consumers see it and make sense of it as part of the social world. Afrin et al. (2022) note that political framing is a prominent aspect of global health news reporting. They note that media framing of the pandemic in the USA was highly based on partisan political issues and perspectives. They acknowledge that although the media covered a key issue within the health sector, it could not delink political implications from reports of the pandemic. This also included partisan contestations on key issues that concerned the pandemic. As was found in this study, the media in Ghana relied on political framing to present issues of the pandemic to media consumers. Thus, part of the Politics Frame is party politics controversies and political accusations and criticisms. We also need to know what other scholars say about politics framing.

As 2020 was an election year, the two main political parties used COVID-19 and how it has been managed by the government to their advantage. Uribe (2022) found similar findings when she investigated online news framing of the pandemic in the USA. The study found that political frames that the media adopted while covering the pandemic in the USA involved how key political parties and players sought to leverage the pandemic and how it was being fought for political points. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) note that framing is a crucial media tool that is used to direct the perceptions of media consumers toward some intended area. Hence, as media framing focused on party-based political perspectives it can be drawn that the effort (either intended or unintended was to lead media consumers towards thinking about the framing of party-based political issues could be interpreted as leading media consumers to think of the pandemic in light of what political parties in Ghana as well as the government did while fighting the virus.

The study found that while the ruling government always touted its efforts in the fight against the deadly pandemic to score political points, the opposition NDC also criticised the actions of the government and how badly issues had been handled. In a story titled; “Bawumia’s dumsor, COVID-19 comparison ‘makes no sense’ – Kwakye Ofosu” on *Citinewsroom.com*, a former Deputy Minister of Communications, Felix Kwakye Ofosu has reported having chided the Vice President, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia’s for the comparison of Ghana’s power crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic makes no sense. According to the story, the Vice President at a media engagement touted the Government’s efforts to ensure a resilient and buoyant economy despite the harsh conditions presented by the coronavirus pandemic. He added that they had managed the coronavirus crisis far better than the erstwhile NDC government had managed the power crisis. Below are the excerpts of his reactions.

> Mr. Kwakye Ofosu said it is wrong to compare the two issues especially when one is leading to the loss of lives, closure of borders, and social discomfort while the other results in the loss of products and a slight slowdown in businesses. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 1, 2020)

The government on the other hand has also been reported to have been reprimanding the opposition to stop politicising the pandemic. In one of the news stories Ghana's Information Minister, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah was reported saying the country risks losing focus on the fight against COVID-19 if the growing politicisation of the pandemic is not stopped. This came at the back of the Vice President's accusation and ill comments against the opposition leader, former President, John Dramani Mahama. Media focus on such discourse and the framing of news such as these are highly likely to develop a highly perceptive and political media audience as well. As Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) argue media framing leads audiences to be thinking within the borders that the frames have suggested. Thus, as the frames point towards some misappropriation by the opposition political party, media consumers are also likely to perceive the opposition as interested in taking advantage of the pandemic to make the government unpopular. Below are the comments of the information minister calling for the depoliticisation of the pandemic.

> "Some of the very respected persons who are making these calls today, were very quiet because as at that time, their political leaders and their candidates were championing political agenda but now when the political actors in the government also respond politically, now you are hearing people saying, 'let's deescalate the politics'. The nation, in all honesty, stands a real risk of losing focus and degenerating into partisan political banter while the key real issue of COVID-19 and managing it is relegated to the background." (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, May 5, 2020)

In other instances, news reports were published about how the main opposition political party has claimed they would have better managed the pandemic if they were in power. As part of their Manifesto, the opposition National Democratic Congress

(NDC) has even published a blueprint for bringing the country back on its tracks when given power.

The news story titled; “NDC to confront post-Covid era holistically” listed some of the measures the opposition party planned to put in place when voted into power. Some excerpts have been cited below.

> We must prepare for viruses that are far more dangerous in terms of their infection and mortality rates than SARS II. The next NDC government through the National Strategy would strengthen testing capacity; and introduce national, regional, and district testing centers together with accredited private laboratories. (*gna.org.gh*, October 30, 2020)

The incumbent government, probably having realised that the opposition was playing on some of the actions and inactions of the government to their political advantage, equally developed and communicated rebuttal information which the media paid attention to as well. In the story captioned; “Patrick Boamah blasts Mahama for promising to write off COVID-19 loans if elected”, an NPP member of Parliament was quoted lambasting the former President, who doubles as the flagbearer for the opposition party, for some promises he had made on his campaign tour. He referred to the campaign promise of the opposition party as unfortunate. According to the story, the NDC flagbearer was promising to forgive Ghanaians the loans the government had given them to support their businesses when voted into power. The quotes below summarise that.

> As part of his campaign tour of the Greater Accra Region, Mr. Mahama told the residents of Dawhenya in the Ningo Prampram constituency that, loans accessed by traders under the COVID-19 stimulus package will not be re-paid if he is elected President of Ghana on December 7. (Daily Palinwinde Jacobs, *Citinewsroom.com*, October 29, 2020)

Partisan political contestations are a critical part of Ghanaian society. This is highly entrenched, so much so that this present study found evidence of political

contestations in how the media framed the pandemic in the country. As Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) argue, media framing is essential in aiding media consumers make sense of the information they receive from the media. This study found that political framing and angling were adopted in reporting the pandemic to media consumers. The use of the political frames indicates, as has been mentioned, the nature of partisan politics in the country. Aside from this, the findings point to the fact that even while reporting on health issues, the media focuses on political issues to frame the issues as national problems correctly (Afrin et al., 2022).

The prioritisation of political frames in the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic have critical implications for health communication and general reporting. For one the dominant use of political frames in reporting on the global health issues may erode attenttion and trust of health experts (Misganaw, 2020). Thus, when the media focuses too much on reporting health issues from political lenses there is the tendency that people become sceptical of what health experts say. This eventually has implications on how the health crisis is averted.

Typically, such media activities may tend to breed inconsistencies in health information dissemination as political frames may simply emerged out of political interests and representations surrounding the health issue. Projecting political frames only diminish the attention paid to health related frames and may further exacerbate the health problem (Solvoll & Hoiby, 2023).

Furthermore, public opinion on health problems can become polarised due to political framing, which links political identities with health-related behaviours and attitudes (Afrin et al., 2022).. For instance, receiving a vaccination or donning a mask might be viewed as political activities as opposed to public health initiatives. Consequently, this

increases public apathy towards mitigation measures Decreased collaboration with public health initiatives between political groupings due to polarisation might undermine attempts to control health problems.

Aside from the implications that the reliance on political frames in reporting on the pandemic has on global health communication, there is also the tendency that this form of reporting may corrode media credibility and breed biases in reporting (Rodelo & Muniz, 2019). When the media focuses on political angles and frames when reporting on what must be considered from a national and objective lens, journalistic integrity, objectivity key ethical standards may suffer as reporters may lean to political factions when engaged in the use of political frames (Hanglgli & Kriesi, 2010).

5.2.2 Frame Two: Social Frame

The Social Frame is the second most dominant frame adopted by all four news portals sampled for the study. As shown in table 5.2 above, the Social Frame received 718 codes, representing a significant 26%. As the second dominant frame, the Social Frame was used to report the pandemic's social consequences. This includes how the pandemic affected communities, families, and individuals and how the affected people were coping with those challenges coupled with the pandemic's restrictions (Sharp et al., 2021).

Studies such as Ogbodo et al. (2020), Nwakpu, Ezema and Ogbodo (2020), Otchere (2020), as Mills (2022) have already established that the use of social frames or frames that suggest the media sought to project the pandemic as a social problem dominate media coverage of the pandemic. The study finds, in tandem with the finding made by Chu-Ling (2022), that social frames were frequently adopted frames that the media used. Chu-Ling (2022) found while studying the media in the USA and New Zealand

that social frames were the most prevalent frames that the media had adopted in reporting on the pandemic in the country.

Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) present that media framing concerns how media organisations place salience on some issues and depict them in a particular light such that audiences believe the issue is the most important. Therefore, in line with the rudiments of the media framing theory, the findings made in this study suggest that the media sought to present the pandemic as a social problem. Thus, while framing the pandemic with social frames, the media sought to depict the pandemic as not a natural or health-related issue but one with social consequences.

The pandemic has been reported using the frame on how it has affected individuals' and families' social lives and well-being. Social gatherings for various reasons, such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals, are things of great importance and value to Ghanaians as those are platforms to show love and support to the people involved. The pandemic and its accompanying restrictions have shattered these and many others. *Peacefmonline.com* reports on January 31, 2021, with the title, "Funerals, Wedding, Parties Banned as Akufo Addo Reintroduces Covid Restrictions", where the President of Ghana was reported to have reintroduced more restrictions to help control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Part of the story, cited below, narrates the restrictions re-placed by the President. In effect, families could not gather in their usual numbers for the usual activities, including paying their last respects to the deceased, which used to be a very crucial aspect of Ghanaian tradition and culture. Parties, fun fair activities, and merry-making usually characterise the month of January in Ghana. Meanwhile, the President had shut down places for relaxation, such as beaches, nightclubs, and pubs. Restaurants are also to provide takeaway services and not allow sit-in customers strictly.

> Therefore "until further notice, funerals, weddings, and parties have been banned" (*Peacefmonline.com,* January 31, 2021)
>
> "Private burials, with no more than twenty-five (25) people, can take place, with the enforcement of the social distancing, hygiene, and mask-wearing protocols," Akufo-Addo said. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 31, 2021)

Another story by *peacefmonline.com* described the consequences of the restrictions on families and how they have responded to them. Part of the story titled “City Authorities Hold Mass Burial For 33 Unclaimed Bodies in Sunyani” observed that the President’s directive of “no funeral should exceed more than 25” people had discouraged many families from burying their dead relatives. This also led to the mortuaries being choked. As a result, the city authorities were forced to bury some unclaimed bodies without the knowledge of their relatives to create space in the mortuary. The quote below buttresses that.

> The Sunyani city authorities have buried 33 unclaimed bodies to decongest the Sunyani Regional Hospital morgue which was congested due to the government’s directive on public gatherings to stem the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020)

Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) argue that media framing emphasises contextualisation. Thus, in framing issues, the media develops and engages socially relevant frames so consumers can make sense of the news information they are receiving. Thus, frames inconsistent with the audience are likely to convey information that the audience may reject (Agorde, 2017; Arowolo, 2017). It was observed that media frames that concerned social issues, as shown in the extract above, laid claim to the social contextualisation of the Ghanaian culture, especially regarding burial rites and celebration of the death of family members. The findings indicate that social frames were among the most adopted frames by the media in Ghana. This prompts

that the media had engaged in using social frames through coverage of the pandemic's impact on the pandemic's implications on burial cultures in Ghana.

The Ghanaian society is critical of burial ceremonies as it is seen as a passage rite into the world of ancestors (Adom & Adu-Mensah, 2022). Hence, news stories published on the restrictions of burial ceremonies indicate restrictions on a highly revered cultural practice. For this reason, the writer found it necessary to include it in the report. In the extract, for instance, the writer makes mention of a huge number of unclaimed bodies by families for burial as a result of the pandemic. This is an anomaly in Ghanaian culture, where the burial of a family member is considered a must. In effect, reports of such nature sought to frame, from a social perspective, the pandemic's impact on Ghanaians' social lives.

To further express how the media frames the pandemic as a social issue or with the social frame, the study found some focus on how the pandemic had affected critical socio-cultural practices such as religious and faith-based practices. Ogbodo et al. (2022) and Lesniczak (2022) found in their respective studies that religious frames were a dominant frame the media paid attention to while covering the pandemic.

This actualises that religions and faith practices have not been excluded as the restrictions affect churches and mosques. Churches have begun to fellowship online. The president had banned churches and mosques from meeting to fellowship, which he later reviewed in his 10th Address to the Nation. In his 10th Address to the Nation on measures being taken against the spread of COVID-19, the President said that effective June 5, 2020, churches and mosques can start meeting with a maximum congregation of 100. They had also been limited to only 1 hour of service.

A publication of *Peacefmonline.com* on July 31, 2020, titled “COVID-19 Overshadows Eid Celebrations”, describes how that year’s celebration of the Eid al-Adha festival by Muslims has been affected by restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The story reports the absence of the Islamic tradition of gatherings of Muslim families and friends to share meals. The streets are unusually empty, with no groups of women and children moving up and down in excitement. Many Mosques in the country have reportedly suspended prayer meetings due to strict government orders to control the spread of the virus. Also, as quoted below, that year’s Hajj pilgrimage has been adverted adversely.

> The Eid celebrations coincide with the Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, where the number of pilgrims - usually around two million - has been limited to 10,000 this year. (*Peacefmonline.com*, July 31, 2020)

For an African nation where cultures are built around physical interactions and community-sharing, the restrictions had occasioned a swift sway away from the ordinary for many people (Asante & Mills, 2020). The selected media, therefore, framed all issues and events that restricted social interactions as social problems to contextualise the impact of the pandemic properly.

Ghana is a football-loving country, and the sports authorities have been running campaigns to bring back the love for football in the country post-COVID. The pandemic, however, made matters worse as restrictions have gravely affected the game of football in Ghana. Football tournaments and other sporting activities have been banned due to the pandemic. The Ghana Premier League was suspended on March 16, four days after Ghana recorded its first two cases. Even when it was to be resumed weeks later, the football matches were to be played in empty stadiums to prevent the spread of the virus; hence, fans were not allowed to come in and support

their favourite soccer teams. Though any sporting activity involves more than just the players, the Deputy Sports Minister, Perry Okudzeto, believes the idea of the Ghana Premier League being played behind closed doors could be explored. This has been quoted below.

> "It's important that this is managed in a holistic way. That's why the President of the Republic [Nana Akufo-Addo] is managing it the way it ought to be so we cannot be in isolation as a sector we have to be sort of be in the mix of what generally is been done to manage the case in Ghana. We would have to get to the point where the government decides it's okay to have public gatherings," Mr. Okudzeto said. (Owukaku Ampofo, *Citinewsroom.com*, May 24, 2020)

The findings made in this study regarding social frames, especially concerning how the media focused on how the pandemic had disrupted social activities, tie in more significantly with the severity frames. Thus, as the excerpts have shown, the need to halt social events was instigated by fear frames that dominated the media during the early phases of the pandemic. This supposes the implication that some media frames may be developed as sequels to other pre-existing frames, as argued by Boydstun et al. (2013).

The frame was used to highlight the challenges faced by marginalised groups, the personal stories of affected people, and the emotional and psychological impact the pandemic has had on them. The challenging experiences highlighted by the media through the use of this frame include illness, death, loss, and resilience. etc., with the headline, "Physically challenged trader tells the story of how she lost her capital to coronavirus." parts of the story read.

> Mary Bediaku, paralysed in both legs, indicated that she lost her ¢6,000 capital of her clothing business due to the closure of Ghana's land borders as part of restrictions to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. (Fred Quame Asare, *MyJoyOnline.com*, September 22, 2021)

The rather emotionally touching story of the 44-year-old petty trader who was born healthy with no disability but suffered a heavy fall and got her right leg fractured at a tender age was narrated by the reporter. According to the report, Mary got paralysed in her lower body, hence became bedridden. The story narrated how Mary was not deterred by her conditions but engaged in the trading of clothing, which she was living on until the closure of the Ghana-Togo border due to the coronavirus pandemic. The story detailed how she "could buy clothing worth ¢6,000 in Lome-Togo, which she sold at various market centres in the enclave, and how the commodities then became expensive, and she was compelled to resort to another trade when the government decreed the closure of Ghana's land borders."

She detailed that she "could buy clothing worth ¢6,000 in Lome-Togo, which I sell at various market centres in the enclave. However, the commodities became expensive, and I was compelled to resort to another trade when the government decreed the closure of Ghana's land borders." The new trade could not sustain her, and her living conditions worsened by the day. According to the story, Mary now struggles to put food on the table of her seven-member family, including her husband, who got paralysed, too, through a motor accident.

Many of these stories were highlighted using the social frame. Also, with the title, "COVID-19: Over 200 000 Seafarers Trapped on Ships - GMA Says," the story was told of how over 200 000 seafarers were stranded on ships due to the outbreak of COVID-19. These seafarers were reportedly waiting to be repatriated globally due to the worldwide travel restrictions imposed on countries to curb the spread of COVID-19. The Director-General of Ghana Maritime Authority, Mr. Thomas K. Alonsi, was quoted in the story below.

> He said the majority of these stranded seafarers have exceeded the stipulated twelve months maximum at sea as adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) - this is a result of broader closure and visa requirements which have made crew changes impossible. (*Peacefmonline.com*, July 29, 2020)

Recognising the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on deprived families, an intense level of attention was also given to the Social Frame as it was also used to project the benevolence extended to the pandemic's victims by some individuals, businesses, and organisations. These supports came in forms of aid or support and charity donations by many organisations as part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities to the helpless in society, relieving the burdens brought up to them by the pandemic. This frame might have motivated more organisations to replicate the same support in their communities. The title of one of the stories seems to justify this point: "Prudential Life, United Way Ghana donates COVID-19 relief items to vulnerable households". The study observed from the story that in their bid to reduce the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on vulnerable families and households; the two organisations partnered to provide food, health education, safety kits, and home learning activities to cushion the distanced households.

Aside from the distribution of 300 food boxes to struggling families, the education of 500 individuals on COVID-19 prevention and safety through sensitisation using the local language, the engagement of 300 children in home-based literacy activities with each child receiving a literacy booklet, the distribution of 500 hygiene kits including nose masks, hand sanitisers and handwashing soaps and the donation of medical supplies and health equipment to Ayeduase Community Clinic, the two organisations have been reported to have launched a COVID-19 relief fund for more of such

benevolence. More of such support, as reported by the news portal, has been quoted below.

> Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Prudential has shown a passion for providing relief to its stakeholders by being the first to introduce free COVID-19 cover for its existing and potential customers; a financial literacy program – 'Cha-Ching Kids At Home,' which are activities developed to help parents enhance their children's financial literacy while at home and then in July, launching a USD 80,000 COVID-19 relief fund and partnering with United Way Ghana, UNFPA and the University of Ghana School of Languages to help alleviate the effects of the pandemic in underprivileged communities. (*Citinewsroom.com*, October 14, 2020)

Aside from the numerous separate donations from corporate bodies to affected people, a National COVID-19 Trust Fund has also been set up to receive support from corporate organisations, institutions, and individuals across the country to provide relief packages to affected people.

> The Fund says out of the GHS 57 million, over GHS 40 million was used to purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health facilities leading the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com*, December 28, 2020)
>
> "The COVID-19 National Trust Fund has provided a variety of support packages to sections of individuals, groups, associations, and institutions since its establishments in March this year towards the combat of the pandemic." (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com*, December 28, 2020)

5.2.3 Frame Three: Public Health Crisis Frame

Even though the selected Ghanaian news platforms portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021, dedicated a total of 57% of coverage was to the Political Frame and Social frame in reporting on a health pandemic, it is also clear from Table 5.2 above that out of 2719 codes from the 200 sampled stories for this study, 24% of coverage

been 639 codes were dedicated to the use of the Public Health Crisis Frame. The selected stories reported the virus from the lenses of this frame by reporting the coronavirus pandemic as a public health concern. The media achieved this by concentrating on the health angle of the pandemic. Undoubtedly, the coronavirus pandemic was a health issue that was scientifically caused; hence, the media used this frame to provide scientific and medical information about the pandemic. The frame was used to emphasise the potential harm and danger posed by the pandemic by constantly informing and educating the public about the nature of the virus and its variants as they emerge. News on new findings regarding the causes and symptoms of COVID-19 were conveyed using this frame. As a result**,** the use of this frame may generate some amount of fear in the public. This is consistent with the health severity frame Mutua and Ong'ong'a (2020) found in their analysis of the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic by the BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, and the People's Daily.

In a story titled, "Testing for new coronavirus strain ongoing in Ghana – GHS" on *Citinewsroom.com*, the writer suggested that the presence of the virus in Ghana could cause some fear and panic since news about the nature of the new variants is very unpleasant. The writer says, as quoted below;

> The discovery in Nigeria according to some could cause fear and panic after similar variants of the new virus that appear to be more contagious were announced in the United Kingdom and South Africa. (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, December 26, 2020)

Months after, a news story headlined "COVID-19: Deadly Indian strain detected in Ghana" was published on June 21, 2021, by *myjoyonline.com* to announce the presence of a new variant of the virus. According to the news story, the new contagious variant of the virus, the Delta variant, originates from India and has been recorded in Ghana. (*Citinewsroom.com,* December 26, 2020) This news may cause a lot of fear and panic amongst the populace, coupled with the fact that, per the story, the new

variant is one of the 45 variants currently in Ghana. The extracts from the story below demonstrate the point further.

> "Overall, we have about 45 or 46 different variants. The trend shows that all these normally come from travelers. However, now that the Delta (Indian Variant) is taking over, it's just a matter of time before it will come here in large quantities. So we have a few here, but it's going to increase," Professor Awendare explained to Daniel Dadzie on JoyPrime's Prime Morning. (Kwaku Asante, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 21, 2021)

This frame was also employed to keep people constantly updated by providing accurate and up-to-date information about the virus and its transmission, as well as medical treatments and interventions. These updates also include the news about the spread of the virus, the number of cases, death tolls, and measures adopted by health authorities to control the spread.

The media continuously published updates on the total number of infections, the number of people in severe conditions, the recovery rate, and the number of people discharged from the hospital at any given time. This was to make people believe the virus was real and was affecting many people. For instance, it was reported in one of the stories published on April 2, 2020, by *Citinewsroom.com* that "Ghana records 195 COVID-19 cases"**.** The story reported that "on April 1, 2020, the Minister of Health, Kwaku Agyeman Manu, announced that Ghana's COVID-19 cases had risen to 195. The story also indicated that, as of the time, the Greater Accra Region had the highest number of cases, with 174. All this was for people to realise the need to stay protected and see the cases around them as real-life issues that can affect any of them.

The adoption of this frame showed that the media sought to portray the virus as highly infectious regardless of a person's age, gender or social and political status. A number of studies (Afrin et al., 2022; Lebni et al., 2020) that focused on how media covered and framed the pandemic note that the media had engaged in using severity frames

to depict the idea that the coronavirus disease was highly contagious. It also portrays the virus as one that can infect both poor and rich, young and old, and elite and ordinary people in society. Lebni et al. (2020), for instance, note that the Iran media had adopted severity frames to showcase the virus's potency. Lebni et al. (2020) acknowledge, most notably, that the media focused on infections of prominent members of society, such as celebrities, to highlight that the virus could infect anyone.

There were scores of stories focusing on some prominent members of society and how they or their relatives have been affected in one way or another by the virus. Titled "COVID-19: Chief Justice goes into 14-day isolation" published by *Citinewsroom.com*, describes how how a prominent member of Ghana, the Chief Justice, Kwasi Anin-Yeboah, had gone into a 14-day self-isolation in compliance with COVID-19 protocols. Even though the story did not confirm whether the Chief Justice had contracted the virus, at least the fact that he had to isolate himself sends a message to the readers that no one was insulated from getting infected. The extracts below buttress the view.

> "Respectfully, His Lordship the Chief Justice has from 6th July 2020, on the advice of his doctors, embarked on a fourteen (14) day self-isolation in compliance with COVID-19 protocols." (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 8, 2020)
>
> Some courts have also been closed with some members of the judicial services confirmed to have tested positive for the virus. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 8, 2020)

It was also observed from the story that some courts have been closed as some members of the judiciary service had been confirmed positive for the virus. It was also reported that cases listed to be heard by the judges at the time have all been rescheduled to unconfirmed dates to reduce the number of infections at the law courts.

The story, "Over 20 Police Officers Recover From Coronavirus," has also been published by *peacefmonline.com*. Over 20 police officers with the Ghana Police

Service who tested positive for the novel coronavirus have fully recovered, and according to the report published on May 31, 2020, seven (7) of the officers from the Upper East Region had contracted the virus after being exposed to infected persons in the line of duty. The report also suggests that some of the officers who were stationed at Adenta and in other parts of the country had contracted the virus because of their contact with some suspects they handled earlier who tested positive. Another such story published on *gna.org.gh* with the title, “More than 110 health workers test positive for COVID-19 in Central Region” is also likely to cause some panic as it communicates the severity of the virus, such that even health workers who “should know better” could not escape it. These and many other narratives, coupled with news of the infection and death of some prominent Ghanaians as a result of because of the pandemic, created an alarming picture, of how viral the virus was and how it poses a public threat to everyone. Below are how the various selected media portals reported the case counts.

> Ghana has within the last seven months recorded a cumulative figure of 45,012 COVID-19 cases and 43,898 recoveries. The COVID-19 - related death toll currently stands at 283. Out of the number of active cases, six are in critical condition, three are on ventilators, and 16 are in severe condition. (*Citinewsroom.com*, September 8, 2020)
>
> President Akufo-Addo announced that Ghana’s total confirmed cases of the novel Coronavirus have risen to 17,351 with 12,994 recoveries. This represents 75% of the positives. The total number of active cases is 4,245 with 112 deaths. “This represents 0.6% of positives and it is one of the lowest death rates in the world.” (*Peacefmonline.com*, June 29, 2020)
>
> Dr. Quarshie-Ngissah said about 80 percent of infected persons were asymptomatic and stressed the need for all to keep to the safety protocols, especially the wearing of face masks, observance of social distancing, and washing of hands regularly with soap under running water. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, February 10, 2021)

> Ghana has so far tested 646,697 cases, representing 20,000 per million population and an 8.4 percent positivity rate. (*gna.org.gh*, June 4, 2020)

From the news stories analysed, the Public Health Crisis Frame was not only used to report the ravaging effect of the pandemic on the public alone, but it was also used to communicate how all attention by all governments and health authorities was given to the pandemic to the neglect of other equally deadly but non-communicable diseases.

In a story titled “COVID-19 threatening progress made in the Fight against Malaria – First Lady”, the reporter narrates the lamentation of some concerned authorities on how the pandemic is threatening the country’s progress in controlling malaria cases. In the story, the first lady explained how the virus has put much strain on the health sector, making it lose focus on the fight against all other ‘deadly and dangerous diseases. The quotes below vividly express her concerns.

> “Indeed, efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 are necessary to protect health systems and the population at large, yet these efforts, must not compromise access to life-saving malaria prevention, diagnosis, and treatment services or threaten to reverse decades of hard-fought progress against malaria,” Mrs. Akufo-Addo said. (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 25, 2020)

The media also used the Public Health Crisis Frame to promote the need for public health measures and interventions—news on health-related precautions, recommendations for personal protective actions, and the development of vaccines. Stories have been published about religious leaders and influential people in society educating and urging their followers or members to take the precautionary measures seriously and abide by them. One of the church leaders was reported in the news telling his congregation, “We all should come to that awareness now that COVID-19 is real." According to the news story titled “Lawrence Tetteh Urges Christians to Abide By COVID-19 Protocols”, the Founder and President of the Worldwide Miracle

Outreach, in his Christmas message, told the congregation not to joke about the presence of the virus as anyone could be infected at the slightest mistake. The quote below expresses his advocacy.

> "Anybody at all can become a victim of the pandemic, so we have to be very mindful not to let down our guards as we celebrate the yuletide," he said. (*Peacefmonline.com*, December 24, 2020)

The frame was also used to fight a public health threat that was deadlier than the pandemic itself: misinformation about the pandemic. In allaying some fears that came with the pandemic, the media also used this theme to sensitise people to calm their fears. The media educated people against misinformation and fake news that got circulated about the pandemic. For instance, in a news story titled, "It's Not Possible for Scientists to Kill Everyone with A Vaccine - Prof. Osafo,", published by *peacefmonline.com* on February 1, 2021, some anti-vaccine claims and conspiracy theories were refuted.

According to reports, there have been several stories about the vaccines, with some people claiming it has dire health repercussions for those who take the vaccines. Some also claim it is the mark of the beast, 666, stated in the Bible, and others believe the vaccines are aimed to kill about 3 billion Africans, among many more unproven theories. All these were rebutted in the news report by the Head of Psychology at the University of Ghana, Professor Joseph Osafo, who has urged Ghanaians to dispel the conspiracy theories surrounding the COVID-19 vaccines.

5.2.4 Frame Four: On-the-Brighter-Side Frame

In as much as the pandemic was anything pleasant and was framed as such, the media platforms portals understudy dedicated 12% of frames to the frame of On-the-Brighter-Side. As the name suggests, this frame was used to frame the pandemic as

a catalyst for positive transformation, innovation, and digitisation. Using this frame, the selected media focused on how the pandemic and its associated restrictions brought novelty, adaptation, and positive social, and environmental changes.

In an attempt not to downplay the pandemic's negative impacts or severity, the media highlighted the positive impact of the pandemic. For instance, the pandemic and some measures taken by authorities to control the spread of the virus have led to a positive environmental impact. Air pollution and carbon emissions were reduced as industries shut down or reduced production. Travelling and vehicular movements have also subsided due to lockdowns and work-from-home policies. News stories analysed also revealed the reduction in road accidents in Ghana. *Citinewsroom.com* on September 4, 2020, published a story titled, "COVID-19 has reduced road crashes in Ghana – MTTD", where the Motor, Transport, and Traffic Department (MTTD) of the Ghana Police Service has indicated that the incidents of road crashes in the country have declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted people's movement.

The story implied that the directives of the President in controlling the spread of the virus, such as the three-week partial lockdown of Accra and Kumasi, the epicentres of the virus, including Kasoa and Tema, most likely contributed to the good news. The quotes below lucidly express that.

> According to the Director in charge of Education, Research, and Training at MTTD, Superintendent Alexander Kwaku Obeng, these measures have not only reduced the spread of the virus but also incidents of road crashes. (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, September 4, 2020)

> "Between 21st March and April, a lot of Ghanaians were in their homes. And as I'm speaking, a lot of students are back home because of social distancing because of that, virtual communication has reduced physical interaction. And it has impacted the same on incidents of road crashes and issues of indiscipline." (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, September 4, 2020)

The pandemic also enjoyed some credit for reducing political tension two weeks into Ghana's general election. Death is painful, and no one should rejoice or benefit from the death of others. However, according to the President of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and the death of former President Jerry John Rawlings, who also was reportedly killed by the coronavirus have reduced the political tension two weeks into Election 2020. According to the story, previous election years, particularly 2008, were characterise d by "bone-rattling close to a disaster of unthinkable proportions", all because of media recklessness. Nevertheless, the sadness brought up by the death of the Former President has calmed tensions from both parties as they mourn him. The pandemic has also seen the major political parties limiting their electioneering campaigns, which sometimes leads to violence and chaos.

The presence of the pandemic has also increased public awareness of the importance of public health measures. The COVID-19 health protocols stipulated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and amplified by the Ghana Health Service include regular handwashing under running water and intermittent sanitisation of the hands, which have generally contributed to some Ghanaians' improvement in personal hygiene. Massive awareness has also been created regarding social distancing and vaccination. The *gna.org.gh*, on March 29, 2021, twelve months after the virus outbreak in Ghana, published a story about how some residents in the Tema Metropolis attributed improvements in their hygiene to practising the health protocols outlined since the coronavirus outbreak. These health practices can also help prevent other diseases. One of the residents said, "Previously, I didn't pay much attention to washing my hands, but now every minute I wash my hands, and immediately I reach

home, I wash my hands and make sure I wear them very well and not only with water but with soap."

Other instances where the On-the-Brighter-Side Frame has been used was in communicating how the pandemic had compelled individuals, businesses, and governments to innovate and find new solutions to challenges brought up by the pandemic, some of which long existed before the pandemic but have worsened by the pandemic. Remote work, online education, and contactless delivery services have all been boosted because of the pandemic. In addressing challenges brought up by the pandemic in the educational sector, some universities introduced new ways of learning and even assessing students. The University of Ghana introduced a shift education system for the 2021/2022 Academic year. In a news story published by citinewsroon.com, the Dean of Student Affairs of the university explained that the new system is to create a conducive academic environment that will comply with COVID-19 Protocols while ensuring that most students benefit from the school's digital infrastructure as well as ease density on the campus. These quotes from the story justify the innovation.

> "We have practically lost a semester because the academic calendar usually starts from August to the end of July, but now the school will be reopening in January. So, that requires some sort of alteration to the calendar and due to COVID-19, it might not be prudent to have all the students on campus within that same period." (Daisy Palinwinde Jacobs, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 2, 2021)
>
> "The arrangement for the undergraduate program is that final year students and first-year students will come in first and when they are done then year two and year 3 students come next," he stated (Daisy Palinwinde Jacobs, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 2, 2021)

A news story titled "School reopening: JHS to run semester system – GES" on *Citinewsroom.com* also described changes that the government and Educational Ministry have made to the basic school educational system. The basic education

system that used to run trimesters has been changed to accommodate the challenges brought up by the pandemic while still guaranteeing both the safety of the children and quality education.

> "JHS will be running semester programs this time around. We will make sure that the basic protocols are observed. We will provide reusable face masks. Schools will not be available for outside activities." (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 4, 2021)

Plans were also made for the Senior High School educational system on how they can also continue learning amid the pandemic, as stated below.

> On Senior High School education, Professor Opoku-Amankwa indicated that "we have prepared the calendar to capture the time lost while the students stayed at home. We now have what is called the all-year-round calendar. It starts from January to December. We expect that examinations will be written between September and October, after which the year will end. There will be a double track for the second-year students. As the president indicated, we are phasing out the system." (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 4, 2021)
>
> He also noted that "TV, radio, and online classes will still continue to augment the face-to-face teaching and learning." (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 4, 2021)

Stories have also been published on how Ghana, the first in the world, deployed drones nationally to deliver COVID-19 vaccines. According to the report by *Citinewsroom.com*, the 600,000 doses of AstraZeneca shipped from the COVAX Facility from the Serum Institute of India will be delivered nationwide using drones to ensure rapid, equitable access. The excerpts below illustrate that.

> The world's first and only national-scale drone delivery service, Zipline, today began the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to selected health facilities within its service area in Ghana. (*Citinewsroom.com*, July 1, 2020)

> Nearly half of Ghana's population lives outside of cities, and those 12 million people are difficult to reach with time-limited, cold chain-dependent vaccines. Zipline's network provides Ghana with a resilient, efficient, and equitable distribution strategy. (*Citinewsroom.com*, July 1, 2020)

Also, in a story titled "Jonas Nyabor writes: Ghanaian engineers racing to build the country's first low-cost ventilators," the *Citinewsroom* reporter Jonas Nyabor narrates the progress of work on Ghana's first locally made low-cost ventilators, all made from low-cost materials by Prof. Fred McBagonluri, President of Academic City College and a team of other scientists. These and many other stories of how Ghanaians have responded to the pandemic through innovation have been told using this frame. The health sector has also seen some development and investment due to the pandemic. These investments in physical infrastructural and human capacity developments will strengthen healthcare delivery even after the pandemic. Ghana was reported to get a National Vaccine Institute as €20 million has been set aside for its establishment per the news published by *myjoyonline.com* on December 16, 2021.

> Delivering his 27th address on measures taken to fight COVID-19, on Wednesday, President Akufo-Addo stated that the Institute will supervise domestic production of COVID-19 and other vaccines. He added that it will be led by the private sector and business community. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, September 16, 2021)

As observed in the excerpt above, when completed, the facility was intended to supervise the domestic production of the coronavirus and other vaccines. This, when established, will boost vaccine production in the country. This may not have been possible had the coronavirus pandemic not hit hard in the manner it did. Human capacity development has also greatly improved, especially in the health sector. *Citinewsroom.com* reports how the capacity of some African scientists has been built in an eight-week-long training by the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research,

University of Ghana. The training was aimed at building the capacity of laboratory scientists to detect, manage, and prevent infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

> Participants were equipped with knowledge and skills in Virology, Bacteriology, and Parasitology and trained on how to help to detect the Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in their respective countries. (*Citinewsroom.com,* March 19, 2020)

5.2.5 Frame Five: Economic Frame

The Economic Frame appeared as the sixth most dominant frame the news portals used to report the coronavirus pandemic. This frame portrays the economic impact of the pandemic on individuals, businesses, organisations, and the government. Stories framed using this frame include reports on job losses, business closures, and the effects on the overall economy. It also includes stories on financial losses and gains, the shutdown of businesses, and its effects. Though the coronavirus pandemic is a health-related issue, the virus was reported to have affected the health and wealth of many. Like other African countries, Ghana has witnessed an economic downturn due to the pandemic (Gondwe, 2020).

The pandemic and some strict measures set up by the government to control the spread have had a financial bane on businesses, individuals, and groups. Stories of how businesses and groups have been affected economically abound in the stories sampled. For instance, the Ghana National Association of Private Schools was reported to have pursued financial aid to pay their teachers' salaries. Though students in public schools enjoy free education, students in private schools pay fees every term, which enables their owners and management to run the schools effectively. Salaries are paid from those fees and the provision of some infrastructure. However, the president's directive to close all schools and universities to control the spread of the

virus has affected school management adversely. Since schools have been closed, parents no longer pay fees, affecting salary payments to the teachers in those schools. As quoted below, the Greater Accra Region Chairman of the organisation pleading for the president's intervention also justifies the need for support.

> "We have appealed to the President, Nana Akufo-Addo, through the Minister of Education to come to the aid of our schools in these hard times." (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 28, 2020)
>
> "Our main source of income is school fees and once children have gone home, parents are not working as of now so nobody will come to pay school fees," he said. (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com,* April 28, 2020)

Players in the tourism and hospitality industry also have their share of economic woes brought on by the pandemic. A story by *citinewsroom.com* titled "COVID-19 lockdown: Hotels demand government's intervention to pay salaries" describes the distress hotels face due to the ban on mass gatherings and closure of airports. According to the story, all the hotels in the Greater Accra region were closed down, and thousands of workers have been sent home. The Ghana Hotels Association was therefore pleading with the government to support the payment of staff of its members who have been asked to stay home due to low patronage of their facilities. As quoted below, the President of the Ghana Hotels Association, Dr. Edward Ackah-Nyamike, also justifies the need for government support.

> "The stimulus package we are talking about is more or less about how to maintain our staff. A lot of the hotels have been able to pay salaries for the month of March, but the challenge is going to be one of April. Quite a number of them have shut down and the big question is what happened to the staff. So we are hoping that, if possible the government could support paying some of the staff members and keep them on the payroll so that when things get better. We don't want to lay off workers after all the investment in training and then when things change we have to go and recruit again which will be far more expensive. We are not asking for full salary support but something that can sustain them." (*Citinewsroom.com*, April 1, 2020)

Even petty trades and market women have all suffered low sales because of the pandemic. *Peacefmonline.com* published a story on December 25, 2020, titled "COVID-19 market sales disappointing". The story recounts complaints by various business owners and market women about low Christmas sales due to the pandemic.

Abedi and Mills (2020) found in their study that petty traders in the marketplaces in Ghana were among the section of Ghanaian workers who were hit hardest by lockdown regulations occasioned by the pandemic. The Ghanaian economy is quite dependent on petty trading in the country's markets as it is a highly non-formalised industry (Akuoko et al., 2021). As a result, the closure of markets and the implications of the pandemic in petty trading essentially had critical implications on the country's macro-economy. To a large extent, and in line with the arguments espoused by Abedi and Mills (2020), the findings affirm that Ghanaian petty were one of the group of workers most severely affected by the pandemic-related-retrictions.

Ghana's cocoa regulator, COCOBOD, a government organisation, was also not spared as reports suggest it struggles to pay cocoa agents after the COVID-19 pandemic hit exports. With lockdown restrictions at destination ports, shipment from Ghana, the world's second-biggest producer, has reduced. According to the news story, this slowed exports and curtailed sales, making it almost impossible for the regulator to pay purchasing agents for cocoa beans bought from farmers. This situation has not only caused a financial loss to Ghana but has the production potential soon. The excerpts below buttress the point.

> The West African nation has suffered a potential sales loss of $1 billion after prices declined from a high in February, the cocoa regulator said in April. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, June 14, 2020)
>
> The losses will likely be exacerbated by lower-than-forecast production for a second straight year after plant disease and adverse weather ravaged crops. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, June 14, 2020)

Finances of individuals have also been hit hard by the outbreak of the pandemic. Reports by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) have revealed that about 22 million Ghanaians out of the projected 31 million population have experienced a drop in income since March 16, when various restrictions due to coronavirus were introduced. Essentially, 77.4 per cent of households in Ghana have experienced the decline. According to the news story, the restrictions led to every seven out of 10 employees not working in the previous seven days. The situation also affected the survival of many households as they used to live on income from their work. The quotations below cite how grossly some households have been affected.

> The GSS stated that close to three-quarters of households indicated that they could easily purchase staple foods while another 15 percent reported not being able to buy at least one staple food in the seven days prior to being interviewed due to financial constraints. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 3, 2020)
>
> The Professor mentioned that a fifth of households did not have regular access to water, 8.6 percent of the household could not buy medicine when they needed to and 6.1per cent of households tried to access it but was unable to. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 3, 2020)

The woes of individuals and businesses are to transcend the life or existence of the pandemic, as Ghanaians have been advised to prepare to pay more taxes after the pandemic. According to a deputy minister-designate for Finance, Abena Osei-Asare, as reported in a news story, the government will after the pandemic introduce new taxes to raise revenue to deal with the excesses of the pandemic. According to the government official, the government is aggressively working to increase the country's revenue to GDP from 13% to 20% by 2023, as done by countries within the sub-region, which is why taxes are necessary. Extracts of the story are cited below.

> Ghanaians should be prepared to pay more taxes as the government seeks to embark on an aggressive domestic revenue mobilisation drive to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy. (Abednego Asante, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 2, 2021)

> According to a deputy minister-designate for Finance, Abena Osei-Asare government seeks to introduce several tax policies between 2021 and 2023 aimed at raising the needed resources to offset the deficit created by the novel coronavirus. (Abednego Asante, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 2, 2021)

The findings made in this study concur with the findings of other researchers (Tisdell, 2020; Asante & Mills, 2020; Amoah et al., 2021; Media Foundation for West Africa, (2020) who posit that the media sought to report on the pandemic through an economic frame. These studies and this present study confirm that economic frames were adopted often by the media while it reported on the pandemic. This was seen, from a theoretical perspective, as concurring with the tenets of the Media Framing theory as well. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) argue that media framing theory covers how the media, intentionally or unintentionally, depict social issues within a certain light so consumers can easily make sense of key issues. The study found that for audiences to understand the pandemic's implications on businesses, firms and economic regulations, there was the need to adopt and often present issues from the economic framing angle.

5.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents findings for the data collected in Phase One. The study sought to examine the portrayal of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media portals- – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. This chapter addresses the first two research questions. In answering the first research question, content analysis was used to analyse 200 sampled news stories published on the four news portals within the period under study. Based on the qualitative content analysis, the following themes emerged as the most dominant themes used by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in reporting the coronavirus pandemic:

Government Response, Impact of the Pandemic, Scientific & Medical Information, Covid-Novation, Data & Statistics, and Covid Corporate Social Responsibility.

The theme of Government Response comprised stories about measures and interventions taken by the Ghana Government in controlling the spread of the virus and mitigating the plights of the excesses of the virus on the citizenry, especially the frontline workers and the vulnerable. The theme of the Impact of the Pandemic includes categories of stories that highlight the devastations caused by the pandemic and how it has made life worse for ordinary citizens and businesses. The financial and non-financial effects of the pandemic and the consequences of some measures taken in fighting the virus have been included under this theme.

Scientific and medical Information themes comprised stories about the pandemic's scientific nature, be that the virus is biologically generated. It also comprises stories about the nature and origin of the virus, how it should be prevented or managed, as well as news and medical updates relating to new findings and the development of the vaccine. The Covid-Novation theme was coined to reflect the category of news stories classified under it. Combining 'COVID-19' and "innovation" stories classified under this theme underscored the emergence of novel and creative ways of solving existing problems and challenges due to the pandemic. It also concentrated on how some individuals and organisations have seized some opportunities that the pandemic has presented innovatively. Also revealed was the theme of Data and statistics through which the media communicated the spread of the virus through numbers and statistics. Using this theme, the media reported the rate of transmission, rate of recovery, and death cases locally, nationally, and internationally in creating awareness of the severity of the pandemic and the need for people to ensure safety. The four news portals adopted the Covid Corporate Social Responsibility theme to call attention to

the benevolence of some individual organisations through their support and donations to affected people, the vulnerable in society and their stakeholders. It also captures how some businesses have supported state institutions and hospitals in their bid to protect lives and ensure a robust and fit health system to fight the virus. Thus, the findings of this study support the propositions of Baran & Davis (2010) that in covering issues, the media set the agenda for the public in defining what the public should be thinking about at a given period.

Close immersion into the 200 sampled stories also helped address the second research question of how the pandemic was framed by the four selected Ghanaian media used as case studies for this study. The frames that emerged from the data obtained are Political Frame, Economic Frame, Social Frame, Public Health Crisis, and On-the-Brighter Side-Frame.The Political Frame was used to stress the actions and actions of political actors in Ghana regarding the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. In highlighting the government's responses to the fight, it also underscored the partisan nature of the government's interventions and the counter criticisms of opposition parties on how best the pandemic could be handled. Be it that part of the period under review was part of Ghana's electioneering period, both the ruling party and the opposition party sought to score political points using the pandemic and its issues. The selected media used the Social Frame to stress the social effects of the pandemic as new stories highlighted how the virus and the restrictions have affected the livelihood and well-being of individuals and families. It focuses on the human-interest aspect of the pandemic and throws a spotlight on some victims and the vulnerable.

The media also adopted the frame of Public Health Crisis in painting the virus as a deadly virus that poses a health threat to the whole world, from the elites to the

ordinary persons. In focusing on framing the pandemic as a public health concern, the media concentrated on the health angle of the pandemic and constant education and sensitisation of the public about the mode of transmission and the preventive measures to be adopted. Also, the frame of the On-the-Brighter Side foregrounds the positive transformations because of the pandemic and how the pandemic spurs growth, novelty, and digitisation in Ghana's response to the pandemic. Finally, the Economic Frame accentuates the economic bane that has resulted from the pandemic, and it has negatively impacted the finances of individuals, businesses, organisations, and even governments. The economic blight caused by the lockdown and business closures and how these affected Ghanaians' economy and standard of living have been emphasised by the media's use of this frame. The next chapter presents results from data gathered in Phase Two in exploring the major news sources behind the stories and the phases of the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic.

CHAPTER SIX

SHAPING THE NARRATIVE: A FOCUS ON THE NEWS SOURCES AND PHASES IN THE REPORTAGE OF THE PANDEMIC IN GHANA BY THE SELECTED MEDIA (PHASE TWO)

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses findings from data generated and analysed from Phase Two of the data collection, which was also based on a qualitative content analysis of selected news articles on selected Ghanaian news portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. This chapter attempts to answer research questions three (3) and four (4) stated as follows:

> RQ3. Who are the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic?
>
> RQ4. What were the various phases of the pandemic and news frames that characterised each phase?

Through data reduction and thematic analysis of obtained data, the findings, and discussions of the two research questions mentioned above have been thematised using relevant theories and literature discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this study (see Chapters 2 & 3). This chapter begins with the presentation of results and discussions collected in Phase Two on the major news sources consulted by the selected media portals in reporting the coronavirus pandemic.

6.1 RQ3. Who are the major sources behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic?

The media is a crucial weapon in efforts to prevent pandemics and other health catastrophes on a worldwide scale. Their primary responsibility heavily depends on

delivering timely and correct information to society about the health situation. Additionally, the media are helpful in informing the public about pandemics and other health problems. The media are crucial information sources that millions of people rely on to plan their lives when pandemics first appear (Brodle et al., 2003). When reporting on health crises and pandemics, the media frequently consults various information sources that draw on the perspectives of political, economic, and scientific specialists.

According to reports, media consumers access a wide variety of media outlets as pandemics spread. (Matthews et al., 2023). Media consumers are naturally 'information-hungry' individuals who base their entire existence on the information the media provides. (Hwang, Borah, Shah, & Brauer, 2021). Information seeking is no different during pandemics. According to studies, people get their media information via online, radio, and television sources. According to studies on the coronavirus pandemic, the government, radio broadcasts, and health professionals were the most frequently accessed sources of information about COVID-19 by audiences (Umeta et al., 2022; Amara et al., 2022). However, the information sources accessed by the media while covering and framing the pandemic remained a matter of concern. Therefore, the third research question examined the major news sources behind the news stories about the coronavirus pandemic by the selected Ghanaian news portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. The analysis of the sampled 200 news stories published by the four selected news portals reporting the coronavirus pandemic is shown.

Government officials and Politicians, Medical Experts and Health Organisations, Affected Communities, Corporate Executives, International media, and others as the major news sources accessed by and referenced in the news stories. News stories

and quotes were attributed to these sources in the news stories analysed. Below is the table showing the major sources and their percentage of news source attribution by the four selected news portals.

Table 7: Percentage of News Attribution to the Major Sources in Reporting the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Sources	Peace Fm Online	GNA	Joy Fm Online	Citi Newsroom	Total	Percentage
Government officials and Politicians	46	35	19	28	128	45%
Medical Experts and Health Organisations	10	18	20	8	56	20%
Affected Communities	12	16	7	7	42	15%
Corporate Executives	8	8	3	11	30	11%
International media and others	7	3	7	9	26	9%
TOTAL	83	80	56	63	282	100%

It would be observed from Table 6.1 that 'Government officials and Politicians' had the highest percentage score of 45%, being the most sourced by the media in the news stories sampled. The second and third most sourced persons or entities were 'Medical Experts and Health Organisations' and 'Affected Communities' with 20% and 15% appearance each. 'Corporate Executives' received 11% of attribution of the coronavirus pandemic stories by the four selected media portals. It would also be observed that 9% of new sources were the 'International media and others'. Part of these findings are like those of Australia (Kato, Ishikawa, and Kluchi, 2016), in their study of the H1N1 pandemic in the Japanese media, revealed expert sources and government sources were the most used sources of information within the media.

Table 8: Major News Sources, Examples, and Percentages

Sources	Examples	Perce-Ntage
Government officials and Politicians	The President, Information Minister, Presidential Spokesperson, Director of Communications at the Office of the President, Presidential adviser, First lady, Deputy Sports Minister, Presidential Advisor on Health, Deputy Health Minister, The Director-General of Ghana Maritime, Managing Director of the Ghana Airports Company Limited, Minister of Finance, Food and Drug Authority (FDA), Director of Public Affairs of the Service, The Motor, Transport, and Traffic Department, (MTTD) of the Ghana Police Service, National Commission for Civic Education, NPP and NDC manifesto, Former President, Former Flagbearer of the opposition NDC, Member of Parliament (MP), Former Deputy Minister of Communications etc.	45%
Medical Experts and Health Organisations	World Health Organisation (WHO), Ghana Health Service (GHS), Doctors, Urologist, Epidemiologists, Researchers, The Director of Public Health at the Ghana Health Service,	20%

	Scientific Studies and Reports, Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS), Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS), Country Director for UNAIDS, Immunologist and Research Fellow at the West Africa Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens, University of Ghana, Pharmacist and a fellow at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana, Head of the West Africa Center for Cell Biology and Infectious Pathogens (WACCBIP) of the University of Ghana, Research conducted by Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) etc.	
Affected Communities	Recipients of donations, Business owners Ghana National Association of Private Schools, Secretary of the Ghana National Cashew Farmers Association, President of the Association of Cashew Processors Ghana etc.	15%
Corporate Executives	General Manager, CEO, Country Director, Managing Director etc.	11%
International media and others	CNN, BBC, social media, Religious Leaders, Economist, Country Representative of the	9%

	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNFPA Executive Director, World Bank Country Director for Ghana, Chief Imam, undisclosed or unconfirmed sources.	

The various news sources are subsequently chronicled and supported with direct quotations from the selected online news media.

6.1.1 News Source One: Government Officials and Politicians

With 128 codes of the 282 codes of news sources accessed by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic, 'Government officials and Politicians' were the most sourced persons and entities. Government officials and Politicians include the president, the president's speeches and addresses on the pandemic, ministers, public officials, and heads of Public and State Agencies. The government's effort in the fight against the pandemic and updates on the pandemic had been communicated through interviews with Government officials and Public Officers that mattered, as seen in the excerpts below.

> President Nana Akufo-Addo in a national address on Sunday [March 15, 2020] said the ban will be in force for the next four weeks. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com*, March 15, 2020)
>
> Deputy Sports Minister, Perry Okudzeto believes that the idea of the Ghana Premier League being played behind closed doors is one that could be explored. (Owuraku Ampofo, *MyJoyOnline.com*, May 24, 2020)
>
> Dr. Anthony Nsiah-Asare, the Presidential Advisor on Health, says the Risk Response and Social Mobilisation Team would embark on aggressive testing for COVID-19 during the two-week restriction of movement in 'hotspot' areas. (*Peacefmonline.com*, March 30, 2020)

> The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) has revealed that about 22 million Ghanaians out of the projected 31 million population have experienced a drop in income since March 16, when various restrictions due to coronavirus were introduced. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 3, 2020)

Also included under this category are leading members of the two major political parties: the opposition National Democratic Congress, NDC, and the ruling New Patriotic Party, NPP. As major newsmakers in the country, they had been frequently consulted by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* for information, criticisms, and updates on the pandemic and its management. In line with the findings of Matthews et al. (2023) in their analysis of 15 news outlets in the United Kingdom, the selected four media portals for this study gave more voice to politicians than health experts. Some claims and counterclaims have been reported and attributed to politicians and politically aligned people and groups, such as the excerpt cited below.

> HEADLINE: Gov't Responds to Minority Claims on COVID-19 Response Plan. (*gna.org.gh*, May 8 13, 2020)

This finding raises concerns about how the media prioritises information sources during a health emergency and its possible effects on how the general population perceives and comprehends health-related issues.

6.1.2 News Source Two: Medical Experts and Health Organisations

Since the media was also framed as a health crisis, the second most sourced group was the media 'Medical Experts and Health Organisations' with 20% news attribution. Journalists from the four selected news platforms interviewed and sourced medical professionals as part of their news sources in reporting on the pandemic. Similarly, Kato, Ishikawa, and Kluchi (2016) asserted in their study of the H1N1 pandemic in the Japanese media that expert news sources received the most prominence and

attention. This was, however, contrary to the assertions of Chapman (2007) that unethical media activities of false reportage prevented medical professionals from feeding the media with sensitive medical information needed to write their reports accurately. This news source category comprises three main subcategories of persons and entities: Medical Experts, Health Organisations, and Scientific Studies and Reports. Again, contrary to the findings of (Mandeville et al.,2013), whose findings point out the roles of academics in fighting the swine flu as a major news source, the outcome of this study agrees with research that revealed expert sources as one of the major sources of information during a health crisis (Berry et al., 2007; Pribble et al., 2010).

Health organisations, specifically the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Ghana Health Service (GHS), and local health institutions such as the West Africa Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens and Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana also relied on information and direction by the media. The quotes below support the use of these sources.

> The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified this coronavirus variant, first found in India last year, as a "variant of global concern." (Kwaku Asante, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 21, 2020)

> The Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) has urged Ghanaians to remain cognisant of the existence of the novel coronavirus. (Kenneth Awotwe Darko, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 22, 2021)

> Referencing data from the World Health Organisation's Regional Office for Africa, the Pharmacist said that over 80% of positive cases in the continent have not been identified. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, October 28, 2021)

> The Director of Public Health at the Ghana Health Service, Dr. Franklin Asiedu-Bekoe says testing is ongoing to determine if the new variant

> of the coronavirus has emerged in the country. (Edna Agnes Boakye, *Citinewsroom.com*, December 26, 2020)

The viewpoints and ideas of Medical Experts such as doctors, epidemiologists, urologists, and researchers also sought to provide accurate information and updates about the coronavirus, its transmission, and preventive measures. Find below some selected excerpts on the media's use of these sources.

> As an Immunologist, somebody who has studied the virus, we all understand how quickly we need to deploy because the virus is constantly changing. If we are too slow, the virus will change and we will have to transfigure things all over again. (Miriam A. Cobblah, *MyJoyOnline.com*, February 13, 2021)

> Dr Bernard Toboh, a Consulting Urologist at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, says the claim that some men, who recovered from Coronavirus infection are experiencing erectile dysfunction is real. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 30, 2021)

> A pharmacist and a fellow at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana has countered the claim that the country had reached its peak of coronavirus infections. (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com*, May 6, 2020)

The role of academics in health discourse and as key news sources have been reemphasised by this study (Mandeville et al., 2013). Reports, research papers, academic journals, and government reports, which were classified under Scientific Studies and Reports as the third subcategory of entities under this category, were also relied on by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* for their reportage on the coronavirus pandemic in educating and informing the public as quoted in the quotes below.

> Research conducted by Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), has revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted the livelihoods of about 770,000 Ghanaian workers, especially, women and vulnerable groups across the country (*gna.org.gh,* August 27, 2021)

> Research conducted by Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), has revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has

> adversely impacted the livelihoods of about 770,000 Ghanaian workers, especially, women and vulnerable groups across the country. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 27, 2021)
>
> The Business Tracker Survey showed that about 770,000 workers (25.7% of the total workforce), had their wages reduced and about 42,000 employees were laid off during the country's COVID-19 partial lock-down (Nerteley Nettey, *Citinewsroom.com*, April 29, 2020)

The quotations highlight the fundamental relevance of academic study and scientific research as important information sources during the coronavirus pandemic. This stresses the crucial role of academics in health discourse and is consistent with the findings of Mandeville et al. (2013). The utilisation of academic publications, government reports, and research papers, all of which fall under the sub-category of "Scientific Studies and Reports," demonstrates a dedication to using evidence-based journalism to inform and enlighten the public. According to well-known communication theories like the agenda-setting Theory, which holds that the media can affect public perception and priorities by stressing subjects, these sources offer a foundation of trust and dependability. The media's dependence on academic and research sources in this situation contributes to a greater knowledge of the pandemic's effects on Ghanaian workers, particularly women and disadvantaged populations. By referencing reliable study results, the media not only shares important information but also helps to foster a more informed and nuanced public conversation about the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. This technique highlights the synergy between academia and journalism by facilitating an evidence-driven narrative that can direct public policy and responses during health crises.

6.1.3 News Source Three: Affected Communities

Smith and Tietaah (2017), in a study on the coverage of Meningitis outbreaks in Ghana by two media organisations, graphiconline.com and *myjoyonline.com*, found that the

media focused on government officials and health experts but paid the least attention to affected individuals. Conversely, the news portals understudy - *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* highlighted the plights of the vulnerable and victims of the pandemic by sourcing the 'affected communities' and giving them a voice. The affected communities include businesses, individuals, and organisations suffering from the pandemic, infected persons, relatives of infected persons, and the deceased. Below are some quotes from stories on the affected communities.

> HEADLINE: Physically challenged trader tells the story of how she lost her capital to the coronavirus. (Fred Quame Asare, *MyJoyOnline.com*, September 22, 2021)
>
> The Northern Regional Chairman of the Hotels Association, Mr Cosmos Alhassan, said the association had 60 members and all the hotels had laid off their workers as they were not in operation. (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020)
>
> Ghana National Association of Private Schools has revealed that it has appealed for financial support to aid its members who haven't been paid due to the closure of schools. (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 20, 2020)

While the media reported their experiences and challenges, it also focused on donations and support given to such people, as seen in the excerpt below.

> Receiving the items, Dr. Anos thanked Hollard for distributing the nose masks to the institution's staff, which he said would go a long way to protect them and their patients. (*Citinewsroom.com*, June 1, 2020)

The excerpt highlighting the role of affected individuals, victims, or beneficiaries of COVID-19 donations as media sources holds significant implications in news reporting during a health crisis. This practice aligns with communication theories such as the "Voices of the Affected" or "Victim-Centered" approach, which underscore the importance of giving voice to those directly impacted by an event or crisis. (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). For instance, by highlighting Dr. Anos and his appreciation

for the donation of nose masks, *Citinewsroom.com* is an example of how the media may humanise and personalise pandemic-related topics. By empathising with the needs and feelings of those affected, this method gives the news a compelling human element.

The voices of recipients of COVID-19 gifts, such as healthcare professionals, are included, offering personal perspectives, and highlighting the beneficial effects of business or community support initiatives. This is consistent with research on crisis communication, which highlights the value of emphasising community reactions and resilience in trying circumstances (Coombs, 2007). By highlighting recipients' gratitude, the media helps create a narrative that promotes group togetherness and spurs additional deeds of kindness. It illustrates the media's dual function as a news source and a force for fostering societal harmony under challenging times.

6.1.4 News Source Four: Corporate Executives

In communicating efforts by corporate organisations to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their operations and finances, the media depended on corporate executives and leaders for information. As some businesses and organisations had decided to support affected people and extend support to victims of the pandemic, the media highlighted their good deeds as they were given voices to explain their forms of support and their motives. The excerpts below buttress this media's usage of Corporate Executives as a source of information.

> Diana Owusu-Kyereko, CEO of the company said, "We are proud to partner with relevant authorities to help fight against COVID-19 and support our communities which continue to support us. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, March 25, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: Stanbic donates COVID-19 test kits and PPE to GHS, others

> Chief Executive of Stanbic Bank, Alhassan Andani said the pandemic has taught humanity the importance of oneness, especially in times of distress. (*Citinewsroom.com*, June 12, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: Access Bank supports less privileged in the COVID-19 fight Commenting on the donation, the Managing Director of Access Bank, Olumide Olatunji**,** noted that the novel Corona Virus had, without doubt, brought a large measure of untold hardships to many people across the country, especially the vulnerable and less privileged in society, as they have been deprived of their meager livelihoods. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, May 28, 2020)

The media's reliance on corporate executives and leaders as sources of information during the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly when communicating corporate efforts to mitigate the effects of the crisis, holds significant implications. This practice underscores the interplay between the media, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and crisis communication and can be understood through relevant theories and literature. The statements from corporate leaders often highlight their commitment to supporting communities during challenging times. This reflects the understanding that businesses are embedded within communities and are responsible for contributing to community well-being (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Media coverage serves as a platform to communicate these efforts to the wider public. Also, the inclusion of statements from CEOs and corporate leaders in media coverage reflects the media's recognition of businesses' role in society beyond profit-making. Scholars like Carroll (1991) have emphasised the four dimensions of CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. By featuring the voices of corporate leaders, the media acknowledges the philanthropic aspect of CSR, where businesses contribute to the community's well-being during crises.

6.1.5 News Source Five: International media and others

The International media and other sources, such as social media, religious leaders, and economists, collectively got 9% attribution. Be it that the pandemic is a global

crisis, *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* monitored and reported valuable information about the pandemic from the international media such as BBC and CNN when they deemed it necessary. This was for their readers to appreciate better the nature of the pandemic and compare the situations relative to how they occurred in Ghana.

The journalists from the four selected media portals monitored the social media platforms to observe public discussions and opinions about the pandemic and reported newsworthy posts about emerging trends and issues.

> "Data shows clearly that B.1.1.7 (first reported in the UK) is now the predominant strain driving local transmission in Ghana," the Director of the WACCBIP, Dr. Gordon Awandare said in a Facebook post. (Nii Larte Lartey, *Citinewsroom.com*, February 6, 2021)

Also under this category of sources are development partners and economists, knowing their crucial role in media discourses of development and issues of both health and wealth of the country. The critical roles these sources played were essential in highlighting the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on Ghana by the selected media platforms, as can be seen in some excerpts cited below.

> Meanwhile, Economist, Dr. Lord Mensah, is urging the government to direct its incentives aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on businesses to critical sectors of the economy such as agro-processing. (*Citinewsroom.com*, April 1, 2020)
>
> World Bank Country Director for Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, Pierre Laporte also stated that "The survey shows that COVID-19 has had a deep impact on Ghana's private sector, through several channels. (Nerteley Nettey, *Citinewsroom.com,* August 3, 2020)
>
> Mr. Niyi Ojuolape, the Country Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), has applauded the Government of Ghana (GoG) for the effective management of the COVID-19 crisis. (*Peacefmonline.com*, August 29, 2020)
>
> The UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, recently highlighted that more women and girls now risked losing the ability to

> plan their families and protect their bodies and their health as a result of the pandemic. (*Citinewsroom.com*, August 16, 2020)

Notably, religious authorities were used as sources in news articles during the COVID-19 outbreak in Ghana. This practice is essential given the crucial position that religious leaders play in Ghanaian society. Their opinions and voices significantly influence public attitudes and actions in Ghana since many people frequently turn to religious leaders for advice, spiritual solace, and moral direction (Smith, 2003). Stories reviewed revealed that some religious leaders such as Pastors, Prophets, Apostles, and Reverend Fathers from the Christian religions and Imams from the Islamic religions were reported to have used their pulpits and mosques to sensitise people and encourage the observance of the COVID-19 protocols as can be seen in some excerpts below.

> Apostle General of the Royal House Chapel, Rev. Sam Korakye Ankrah admonished his congregants during service on Sunday to strictly adhere to the protocols as cases begin to rise. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 18, 2021)

> The National Chief Imam, His Eminence Sheikh Prof. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu has suspended Jumah prayers for Muslims following a directive by President Nana Akufu-Addo (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, March 17, 2020)

According to communication theories like the “Influential Opinion Leaders” theory, which emphasises the influential role that specific people or groups, like religious leaders, can play in disseminating information and influencing public opinion (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), using religious leaders as sources in news stories is in line with this. Religious leaders are frequently seen as trustworthy and powerful by their flocks, which enables them to communicate effectively in difficult situations (Rosengren et al., 2006). By featuring religious leaders in their coverage of the pandemic, the media not only provide a platform for these leaders to share critical information and guidance but also acknowledge the broader role that faith and spirituality play in the lives of the

Ghanaian population (Mbiti, 1990). This practice recognises the diverse sources of information and support individuals turn to during challenging times, reflecting the media's commitment to presenting a well-rounded and holistic view of the pandemic's impact on society (Gifford, 2007).

When the media was unsure about some sources or could not verify information accessed later, they reported using words such as "undisclosed" or "unconfirmed" to describe the sources instead of attributing the information to a particular individual or entity. The selected quotes below affirm the usage of unconfirmed sources.

> In a circular available to Citi News**,** the Chief Justice began his isolation on July 6, 2020. While the circular did not state emphatically whether or not Justice Anin-Yeboah had tested positive for COVID-19, it said the decision was based on the advice of his doctors. (Jonas Nyabor, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 8, 2020)

It could be seen in the second excerpt above that *Citinewsroom.com* did not specify the source of the circular nor stated who signed it but went ahead to use the information contained in the circular probably because they trusted the source but decided to keep it discrete. Similarly, in the excerpt below, *Peacefmonline.com* used the word "verified sources" but probably kept the source's anonymity because it involves the security service.

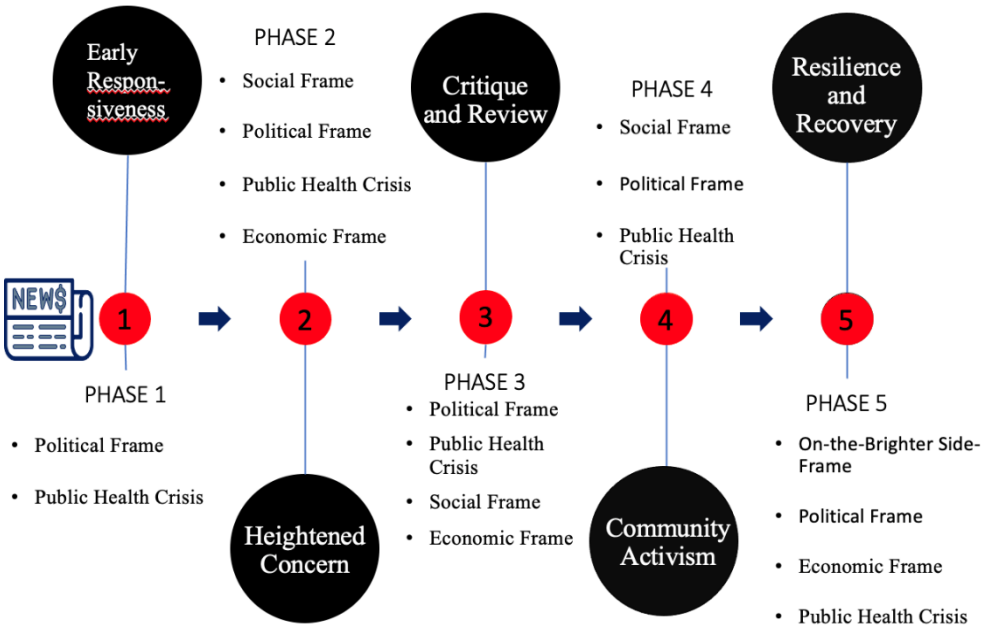
> It has been confirmed that over 20 police officers with the Ghana Police Service who tested positive for the novel coronavirus have fully recovered. According to verified police sources, the first batch of infections involved a policeman who was on escort duties to the Upper East Region while the other was also returning to his duty post in the same region after holidays and faced the same fate. (*Peacefmonline.com*, May 31, 2020)

6.2 RQ4. What were the various phases of the media's coverage of the pandemic and what news frames characterise d each phase?

The media hardly ever focuses on a particular problem for a very long time, according to Downs (1972). Issues are occasionally reported or portrayed in the media and are rarely focused on for an extended period. Downs (1972) created the concept of the "issue-attention cycle" of the media to represent the apparent hesitant nature of the media, giving topics to grasp this phenomenon shown by the media adequately. This has the connotation that the media frequently covers social, political, and economic topics at various stages and that this coverage is not one-dimensional. Different phases or stages of reporting are used for any issue the media covers. According to Shih, Wijaya, & Brossard, (2008) these phases frequently mutually exhaust each other and have unique traits. In any case, case studies have demonstrated that journalists and the practice of journalism in general in recent years have grown more event-based than anything else. As a result, journalists frequently concentrate on covering events as opposed to issues (Singer & Endremy, 1994). These event-based reporting styles suggest that media coverage of issues takes a phase-based approach, as different occurrences trigger different coverage phases (Shih et al., 2008). Like in many other nations, Ghana's media has covered the coronavirus pandemic in various ways as it has evolved and adapted to changing circumstances. The third research question examines the various phases adopted by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in the coverage of the pandemic and the frames that characterise d each within the period under study. As stated earlier, this second phase of the data-gathering process for this study also involves content analysis of the 200 sampled news stories, reducing them into themes and analysing them using relevant theories and literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The findings of this

study indicate that *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* adopted a five-phased approach in reporting the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. The study supported the literature that media coverage of health issues occurs in phases: an outbreak, a peak period and finally, a decline in reportage (Senanu, 2016). The content analysis of news stories as part of this study revealed Early Responsiveness, Heightened Concern, Critique, and Review, Community Activism, and Resilience and Recovery as the phases of media coverage of the pandemic by the four selected news platforms in Ghana.

Figure 3: Phases of the Coverage of the pandemic and the News Frames characterised each



Source: Field Data, 2023

The Figure 3 above illustrates the various phases of the coverage of the pandemic by the four selected news portals and the news frames that characterise d each phase. The diagram displays**:** Early Responsiveness, Heightened Concern, Critique, and Review, Community Activism, as well as Resilience and Recovery, which have been

explained below, and the news frames that were most prevalent in those phases. The news frames, namely, Political Frame, Economic Frame, Social Frame, Public Health Crisis, and On-the-Brighter-Side Frame have been well explained in Chapter Five of this study.

6.2.1 Phase One: Early Responsiveness

The first phase of the pandemic coverage in Ghana by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* is 'Early Responsiveness'. The analysis of the news stories revealed that the media at this phase adopted the Political frame and Public Health Crisis frame discussed in Chapter Five of this study (see Chapter 5) in reporting about the pandemic. The selected media in the early stage of the pandemic reported using the Public Health Frame to respond to create awareness about the virus, making available information about its symptoms, mode of transmission, and how widespread the virus was global (Mbikwana, 2020). The media reportage at this stage is heavily characterise d by awareness creation about the pandemic (Zafri et al.,2021). The media concentrated on covering the development of the virus in the nation, its causes, and the initial steps the government took to restrict its spread during this phase, which started in March 2020 when the first instances of COVID-19 were confirmed in Ghana. The media covered the virus's birth in China and its spread to other nations at this time. Although some media outlets reported on the government's initial response to the crisis, there was not much coverage of the pandemic in Ghana. This phase is like Downs' (1972) first stage of media focus, known as the 'problem identification phase' where the media, for the lack of adequate information, attracts public attention. This phase marks the media's initial reaction to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, the media served as a crucial information source, disseminating news about the first confirmed cases, government

responses, and early preventive measures. The emphasis is on informing the public about the virus, its transmission, and the necessary precautions. This phase aligns with the media's role as an early warning system, which is critical in keeping the public informed during the early stages of a crisis (Bennett & Reese, 2003).

Simultaneously, during the Early Responsiveness phase, the "Politics" frame likely dominated media coverage. This frame involved reporting on government actions, policy decisions, and political responses to the pandemic. It also included discussions about border closures, quarantine measures, and the allocation of resources. The media's focus on the political dimension highlights the significance of government leadership and decision-making in responding to a public health crisis. Using the Political Frame, some of the stories at this phase also focused on stranded Ghanaians abroad, especially in countries with high cases of the pandemic at the time, and the political debate of whether Ghana's government should evacuate them. The excerpts below describe the situation where the two major political parties debated whether the government should sponsor the evacuation of all stranded Ghanaians abroad, especially students.

> A few weeks ago, the government was described as "bankrupt" and "expired", the repetitive call of the Minority in Parliament and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) on the government to fly back home Ghanaians who are stranded in other countries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (*Peacefmonline.com*, May 29, 2020).

> "It is our considered view that just as our government is able to open our airports, despite the closures, for foreign nationals to be evacuated, the government should do the same by providing a narrow opportunity under strict evacuation protocols of screening, testing, and quarantining when necessary, in order to secure the safety of Ghanaians abroad (*Peacefmonline.com,* May 29, 2020).

This phase of Early Responsiveness, characterise d by the Politics frame, can influence public perceptions of how effectively political leaders manage the situation

and set the tone for subsequent phases. At this stage, when the virus was eventually recorded in Ghana, awareness was increased, and more attention was focused on the government's responses and interventions to curb the spread, protect the populace and mitigate the plights brought about by the people by the pandemic. There were also at this phase stories on governments' efforts to prevent the virus from entering Ghana. In a story titled, "The coming week will be crucial in Ghana's war against coronavirus," *MyJoyOnline.com* described how the government has set up a committee whose mandate was to ensure the virus does not enter the country.

> President Akufo-Addo set up the National Technical Coordinating Committee to ensure the virus was not imported into Ghana or at best that it was detected early and contained if it entered the country. (Fred Kuukua Smith, *MyJoyOnline.com*, March 22, 2020)

At this stage, there were also stories published on some of the initial interventions by the government. The Government of Ghana has started a periodic Nation Address, which became a major platform used by the President to communicate to the public about the pandemic and the government's plans and interventions. This periodic address became a very reliable source of news and information for the media houses. For instance, on March 17, 2020, five days after Ghana recorded its first two cases, *Citinewsroom.com* reported in a news story about some Government interventions by way of directives set to control the spread of the virus. The President was quoted in the story, as can be seen below.

> "I have decided in the interest of public safety and the protection of our population to review the public gathering advisories earlier announced as follows: Firstly, all public gatherings including conferences, workshops, funerals, festivals, political rallies, sporting events, and religious activities, such as services in churches and mosques, have been suspended for the next four (4) weeks," the President said (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, March 17, 2020)

The excerpt above is from the Second Address of President Akufu-Addo on the coronavirus outbreak, where he directed that all public gatherings should be suspended for four weeks. News stories about recording new cases, contact tracing, and testing also characterised this phase. News stories indicating statistics about global and community spreads have also been published.

> As of April 15, 2021, the country's active COVID-19 cases is (sic) 1,334 with 89,604 recoveries. (Kenneth Awotwe Darko, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 1, 2021)
>
> HEADLINE: COVID-19 kills 4 more sending the total number of deaths to 810 (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 18, 2021)
>
> The fact that you are testing more means you will identify more but it also means the disease is spreading more and that's why in our opinion we are nowhere near our peak. But according to the pharmacist, the reproductive number which refers to the number of people who get infected from one person shows whether or not the factors of spread are prevalent. (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com*, May 6, 2020)

The quotations above are important in the context of the "Public Health Crisis" framing at this phase because they offer important details and figures on the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. They assist the media in spreading accurate and timely public health information, which is crucial in times of health emergency. For instance, the story on *MyJoyOnline.com* provided vital statistics on the number of active COVID-19 cases and recoveries in Ghana as of a specific date. It informs the public about the current state of the pandemic, indicating the scale of infection and the progress in recovery. The second quote, published on July 18, 2021, *MyJoyOnline.com*, reported the number of COVID-19-related deaths, emphasising the human toll of the pandemic. It conveys the seriousness of the public health crisis by highlighting the loss of lives. Lastly, the last quote from the same news portal provides insights into the testing and spread of the virus. It highlights the relationship between increased testing and the identification of more cases, which is essential for understanding the dynamics of the

pandemic. Additionally, the reference to the reproductive number indicates the media's role in explaining complex epidemiological concepts to the public, contributing to public health literacy. Such information is crucial for public awareness and helps individuals gauge the severity of the crisis then of the pandemic's early stage.

6.2.2 Phase Two: Heightened Concern

As explicated by the agenda-setting theory, there is a relation between the degree to which a given story or aspect of a story is given much attention through consistent repetition by the media outlet and how that issue dominates the public sphere. What issues or aspects of issues become dominant in the public domain is not determined by the audience or what is important to them but by the news stories selected by editors or gatekeepers that focus their attention (McCombs, 2004). Through framing, the audience's perception of the seriousness of the pandemic has been influenced by events that have been covered and presented to the audience (Nibset, 2009: Jibrin, 2019). As the pandemic continues and the number of cases increases in Ghana and globally, the media's report has begun to focus more on the local impact of the pandemic and how it has affected the country's various sectors (Hirneisen, 2020). The selected media at this phase adopted multiple frames in reporting the pandemic. The frames used by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in the second phase were the Social Frame, Political Frame, Public Health Crisis Frame, and Economic Frame. Using the Social and Economic frames, the selected media at this phase reported how the virus affected Ghanaians' socio-economic lives. For instance, a news story titled "22 million Ghanaians' income affected by COVID-19 – Ghana Statistical Service" published on *MyJoyOnline.com* chronicles the destructive impact of the pandemic on the livelihood of Ghanaians. The news report on a survey by the Ghana Statistical Service also reveals that the

coronavirus restriction has led to every seven out of 10 workers not working during the survey period.

> The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) has revealed that about 22 million Ghanaians out of the projected 31 million population have experienced a drop in income since March 16, when various restrictions due to coronavirus were introduced. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, August 3, 2020)

News stories also focus on congestion in the mortuaries because of the numerous deaths and how relatives of the deceased refused to bury them because of the ban on mass gatherings. In some instances, mass burials have been done by City and health authorities just to decongest the mortuary and create space for more dead bodies.

> The Sunyani city authorities have buried 33 unclaimed bodies to decongest the Sunyani Regional Hospital morgue which was congested due to the government's directive on public gatherings to stem the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020)

> Mad. Owusu-Banahene indicated the Regional Hospital's mortuary was choked because families had failed to collect and bury their deceased relations because of the government's restrictions, hence the need for the mass burial (*Peacefmonline.com,* April 28, 2020)

Using the Political Frame, the selected media also focused on the level of governmental interventions and what health authorities are doing to curb the menace of the pandemic. As the effect of the pandemic amplified, the media also reported new interventions to combat the pandemic. The media reported the lockdown's effects on localities, including its economic and social repercussions and the government's initiatives to aid and support impacted citizens and companies. During this phase, the media covered the government's initiatives to increase testing, establish isolation facilities, and equip health professionals with personal protective equipment (PPE). There have been news reports on governments' granting incentive packages to health workers and frontline workers to keep them motivated toward the collective fight

against the pandemic. One such measure reported was efforts to enforce strict compliance with the COVID-19 safety protocols, with stories of people being arrested and arraigned before the court, as seen in the excerpts below.

> An Accra Circuit Court on Thursday sentenced 10 persons, including a journalist, to a fine of ₵12,000 each for not complying with the COVID-19 restriction orders. In default, they would each serve a four-year jail term. (Jonas Nyabor, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 5, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: Accra Metropolitan Assembly prosecute 2 for not wearing face masks in public.
>
> A joint 'Operation Covid Safety' and Sanitation Taskforce comprising officers from some Assemblies in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), Ghana Police Service, and Zoomlion Ghana Limited were at the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange in Accra to enforce the wearing of nose masks in the city. (Fred Smith, *MyJoyOnline.com*, August 1, 2020)

Using the Public Health Crisis Frame, this phase of Heighten Concern is also characterise d by disseminating information about preventive measures, new guidelines, and updates on the latest scientific developments related to the pandemic, as seen in the excerpts below.

> Dr. Bernard Toboh, a Consulting Urologist at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, says the claim that some men, who recovered from Coronavirus infection are experiencing erectile dysfunction is real. (*Peacefmonline.com*, January 2021)
>
> HEADLINE: COVID-19 virus does not spread fast in buses – Ghana Health Service boss
>
> The evidence so far in the country does not support the risk of transfer of COVID-19 in cars like other diseases, Dr Patrick Kuma-Aboagye, the Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) has said. (*MyJoyOnline.com*, July 28, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: COVID-19: Deadly Indian strain detected in Ghana (Kwaku Asante, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 21, 2021)

This phase also recorded increased news stories about fake news and misinformation about the pandemic and how that information has been countered with correct information in educating the public. For instance, the quote on *Peacefmonline.com* of

a Consulting Urologist cited above is crucial since it draws attention to a new COVID-19 worry. Media coverage of the potential connection between COVID-19 recovery and erectile dysfunction is essential for educating the public about important health issues.

People paid extra attention to health-related news during the "Heightened Concern" phase; therefore, the media has a duty to address new concerns and accurately tell readers about any potential negative impact the virus may have on their health. Also, the significance of the quote of Dr. Patrick Kuma-Aboagye, the Director-General of the Ghana Health Service, cannot be overemphasised as it responds to public worries about the virus's ability to spread in enclosed settings like autos and public transportation. During the "Heightened Concern" phase, people seek guidance on protecting themselves from infection. The statement from the Director-General of the Ghana Health Service helps clarify the risks associated with using transportation and provides reassurance based on available evidence. It contributes to informed decision-making and risk mitigation among the public. During the "Heightened Concern" phase, monitoring and reporting on the emergence of new variants is essential for public health. Education has intensified, and the need for people to go for testing and eventually take vaccines was also increasing. Barry in Siddiqua et al. (2020) argue that communication should be the next most crucial weapon in the fight against any pandemic, such as influenza, besides vaccines. Communication about the pandemic and how people can be protected is done through how the media articulates the issues around the pandemic through framing (Chong& Druckman, 2007). Using the Public Health Crisis Frame, this phase of Heighten Concern is also characterised by disseminating information about preventive measures, new guidelines, and updates

on the latest scientific developments related to the pandemic, as seen in the excerpts below.

6.2.3 Phase Three: Critique and Review

The media at this phase started scrutinising and critiquing the government's response as the epidemic progressed, including the steps to stop the virus from spreading, the availability of personal protective equipment, and the imposition of restrictions and lockdowns. As this phase was characterised by the Political and Public Health Crisis frames, the Critique and Review phase was an examination of how effectively or otherwise the government has managed the pandemic. News reports at this phase portrayed the government's efforts in protecting lives and mitigating the people's plights as commendable and, in the same way, portrayed it as one that needs improvement. Some Ghanaians and foreign entities have been reported to have been satisfied with the government's approach to managing the pandemic. For instance, the Country Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has been reported in the news to have applauded the Government of Ghana (GoG) for effectively managing the COVID-19 crisis. In a story titled "UNFPA Country Representative Praises Ghana for Effective COVID-19 Crisis Management", published by *Peacefmonline*.com on August 29, 2020, the report justified his remark by stating that "the government took the situation of the outbreak of the pandemic seriously right from its onset, with the President announcing a 100-million-dollar start-up funding for the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), strengthening health systems and infrastructure among other things. Some decisions of the government, such as the reopening of schools, lifting some restrictions despite the rise in cases and the reopening of the country for the Christmas holiday, have received some criticisms. There have also been news stories of how some independent-minded

people accused the government of massaging the figures related to coronavirus cases and deaths. The government was accused of inflating the figures to make the situation look alarming to get foreign donor support. However, the media's critical assessment of the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic during the critique and review phase is combined with an analysis of the epidemic's social, economic, and political effects on specific people, groups, and society. News stories exposed some of our weak systems, such as health, economy, and education, which the pandemic has worsened. News of congested classrooms and dormitories, hospitals with inadequate patient beds, and lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) have been highlighted at this phase.

This phase is critical because it sheds light on the government response's advantages and disadvantages and increases public understanding of the pandemic's wider effects. The media communicated the countereffects of some government interventions and how they have impacted lives negatively. In one of the stories published by *Citinewsroom.com* titled, "COVID-19 lockdown: Hotels demand government's intervention to pay salaries", the writer narrates stories of how the lockdown has affected businesses, especially those in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Problems faced by the educational sector were also highlighted, especially the plights of teachers and managers of the private basic schools in Ghana. The extract below buttress that.

> Mr. Quaye has revealed that due to the abrupt closure of educational institutions, the salary payments of members have not been paid. Our main source of income is school fees and once children have gone home, parents are not working as of now so nobody will come to pay school fees," he said. (Seraphine Akua Dogbey, *MyJoyOnline.com*, April 28, 2020)

Adopting the Economic Frame and the Social Frame discussed in Chapter 5 of this study, the media also examined the pandemic's social and economic effects during the Critique and Review phase, including how they will affect social inequality, employment, education, and mental health. Utilising the "Economic Frame," the media explores the pandemic's economic effects, including employment losses, economic downturns, and changes in consumer behaviour. This research helps people and businesses make educated decisions by giving the public a deeper understanding of the economic issues they can encounter (McQuail, 2010). Using the Economic frame at this phase too, the media explained how the epidemic disproportionately affects some industries and underprivileged groups of society. It also highlighted differences in financial support, access to healthcare, and income inequality, sparking conversations about the need for just economic policies (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000). Similarly, the media at this phase, through the Social Frame highlighted societal inequities that surfaced during the crisis. It also brought up issues of social justice and the requirement for inclusive policies by highlighting discrepancies in access to critical services such as healthcare, education, and other basic needs (Lippmann, 1922).

News reports have been published on how some Civic Society Organisations and labour unions have also proposed better ways of resolving issues surrounding the pandemic and its backlash effects. For instance, a story titled "COVID-19: Labour Unions Want Tripartite Engagement on The Plight of Workers", published by *Peacefmonline.com*, recounts proposals for a multilateral engagement to discuss the bad conditions of Ghanaian workers in the wake of economic hardship brought up on businesses by the pandemic. According to the story, three labour unions, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL), and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), situations brought up by the pandemic demand that

the government does not take decisions alone instead any decision on the fate of workers should be taken through consensus. Below are quotes from the Director of Research and Policy at the TUC, Mr Kwabena Nyarko Otoo.

> Any move by employers to unilaterally decide the fate of workers would be dangerous. Even though we empathise with the employers in this challenging moment, what the TUC is saying is that we need a tripartite action involving employers, employees, and the government on the way forward. (*Peacefmonline.com*, April 28, 2020).

The government and its pandemic management have also been criticised heavily by the opposition party. The opposition NDC has accused the president of relegating science to the background in most of his decisions and that he seemed more interested in his re-election than the safety of Ghanaians. The Member of Parliament (MP) for Tamale North, Alhassan Suhuyini, in a news report, defended the need for the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its Flagbearer, John Mahama, to criticise the government amid the COVID-19 pandemic where necessary. The Member of Parliament has been quoted below.

> If there is nothing wrong with praise, there should be nothing wrong with criticising… others can feel free to praise, others should also feel free to criticise. If you want to say criticising amounts to politicking, then what would you say of praising? (Delali Adogla – Bessa, *Citinewsroom.com*, May 9, 2020)

In a story titled "GH¢12m Spent on Hot Meals" by *Peacefmonline.com* on July 31, 2020, the Minority in Parliament challenged the government's expenditure of an amount of "GH¢12 million on hot meals for hot meals" that cooked food the government has sponsored to be served the poor and vulnerable during the lockdown. The lack of transparency in procuring the coronavirus vaccines and the government's rollout plan for the vaccines has also been widely criticised. Most importantly, by examining the social and economic effects of the pandemic during this phase, the

media held institutions and policymakers accountable for their responses. It fostered a critical review of government policies and crisis management strategies, encouraging transparency and improved decision-making (Coombs, 2007).

6.2.4 Phase Four: Community Activism

As the coronavirus continues to affect more people and take lives, the media's coverage entered the phase of Community Activism, where they reported local initiatives and grassroots responses to the pandemic. Using the Public Health Crisis Frame in all the phases preceding this fourth phase made it more apparent to most individuals and organisations that the pandemic was more severe than they thought and that the damaging effects were dire. This sparked community-level prevention efforts, self-protective actions in protecting oneself and charity support for persons affected by the pandemic. The media's role is not only to report but also to inspire and mobilise collective action (Tierney et al., 2001). Using the Social Frame, the media covered some community actions, especially group or corporate support to the most vulnerable. Stories have been published about the construction of a 100-bed Infectious Disease Centre, funded through a crowdfunding initiative by the Ghana COVID-19 Private Sector Fund. Stories have been published on rural and community enforcement of COVID-19 protocols. The Ghana News Agency published a news story titled, "COVID-19: Volta Region declares 'no mask, no outing'" on April 29, 2020, in which the Volta Regional Minister directed all Municipal and District Assemblies in the region to as a matter of urgency enact by-laws to enforce all COVID-19 protocols in the various communities. This was to decentralise the enforcement of the safety protocols at the local level.

Community education and outreach were a key focus in this media coverage phase. Community religious groups and organisations were reported to have engaged in education and sensitisation programmes to increase awareness of the pandemic in their communities and provide information on personal protective measures that can be adapted to control the spread of the virus. The information includes best practices for social distancing, hand hygiene, and mask-wearing. News stories have been published on strategies adopted to reach out to the citizenry at the community level on the need to stay safe. On August 7, 2020, The Ghana News Agency published a story on how health promotion officers in the Ashanti Region have been trained to engage communities on risk communication as part of efforts to halt community spread of COVID-19 in the region. Part of the story reads as follows.

> The training was to build the capacity of participants to understand community engagement as a health promotion and disease prevention strategy and expose them to challenges in community engagement. (*gna.org.gh*, August 7, 2020)

News about sensitisation exercises in schools and other places in schools and other identifiable groups have also been done under this phase. For instance, *Citinewsroom.com* made a story on how sensitisation exercises have been carried out in schools and Identifiable groups such as the Ghana Artisan and Visual Arts, the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association, and the National Association of Beautician and Hairdresser in the Awutu Senya East Municipality. The quote below expresses what some of the beneficiaries have been taken through.

> “Students from schools such as Odukpong Senior High School and Insaniyaa Senior High School were taken through the preventive measures, mode of spreading, symptoms, wearing of a nose mask, and stigmatisation because we believe they will also carry the education down to their families at home,” she said. (Calvis Tetteh, *Citinewsroom.com*, July 30, 2020)

Aside from education, the four selected media also focused on how some individuals and communities have been supported with the tools and equipment, such as Veronica buckets, liquid soaps, and hand sanitisers, needed to practice the safety protocols. This was necessary because most people could not afford the safety kits and needed support. For instance, in a news report on *Citinewsroom.com* titled, "Rotary Club of Accra-East distributes PPE to the residence of Tabora Santana," the reporter narrates how the residents of Tabora Santana benefited from distributed protective items, which included 300 re-useable Rotary branded face masks, 150 bottles of hand sanitisers, 100 strips of vitamins C and educational flyers on COVID-19. The members of this community probably were chosen as beneficiaries because they could not have afforded them.

The education and support, in a way, empowered them not only to observe the protocols but also to check on each other. Ghanaians became critical of anyone who flouted the COVID-19 rules intentionally. A story was published on how Ghanaians collectively chastised a Deputy Minister for Trade and Industry, Carlos Ahenkorah, who breached the COVID-19 protocols by visiting a voter registration centre after he had tested positive for the virus. The story reports that many Ghanaians took to social media to chastise him and call for his resignation. According to the story, some people even called on the president to sack him from his position as Minister. The calls persisted until he resigned. Part of the story is quoted below.

> A Deputy Minister for Trade and Industry, Carlos Ahenkorah has resigned from his position. This comes after he admitted breaching COVID-19 protocols by visiting a registration centre despite being aware that he has tested positive for the virus Jonas Nyabor *Citinewsroom.com*, July 3, 2020)
>
> Following his remarks, many Ghanaians took to social media to criticise the legislator for moving into a public place when he was

> supposed to isolate himself due to his COVID-19 status. (Jonas Nyabor *Citinewsroom.com*, July 3, 2020)

Also, under this phase, the media reported on the constitution of community taskforces in ensuring compliance with the COVID-19 protocols to minimise the further spread of the coronavirus pandemic and reduce its impact. An example is the story, "Agortime-Ziofe constitutes taskforce to secure Ghana-Togo illegal routes," published by Ghana News Agency on April 3, 2020. The story describes the establishment of a task force in Agortime, Ziope District in the Volta Region. The task force, which comprised personnel of the Police Service, Immigration, and some locals or ordinary community members, was mandated to help secure unapproved routes between Ghana and Togo in the areas. The story also reports that this community action was necessary as motorcycles were conveying people through unapproved routes into the country when the government had closed all borders to prevent the import of foreign cases.

6.2.5 Phase Five: Resilience and Recovery

Pan and Meng (2016), in analysing media reportage about the flu pandemic in the US media, categorised the coverage phases into three main stages - pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. They pointed out that the flu pandemic had three distinct phases: a pre-crisis period when the flu was not well defined and declared as a pandemic, a crisis stage where it was declared a global pandemic, and lastly, a post-crisis stage where it was produced, and the flu was contained. The Resilience and Recovery phase of the media's coverage of the pandemic in Ghana by the selected media portals can be likened to Pan and Meng's (2016) post-crisis stage.

This phase was observed to be the last phase of the media coverage by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* within the period under review, from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. Employing the On-the-

Brighter-Side Frame, at this stage of the coronavirus pandemic, media attention was given to how communities and individuals were coping with the pandemic's ongoing challenges and trying to recover from its effects. The media concentrated on reporting the path to recovery as the pandemic started to recede, including the financial burden of the pandemic, the return to normalcy, and the initiatives being done to create a more resilient future while still using the On-the-Brighter-Side Frame. The selected media understudy reported on new ways that individuals and businesses have adopted to keep life moving in the face of the pandemic. One such was reported by Joy News on January 18, 2021, titled, "For schools that can run virtually, let's encourage them to – Senyo Hosi". In this report, the Trustee of the Ghana Private Sector COVID-19 Fund, Senyo Hosi, suggested that schools that have the capacity to run virtually should be encouraged to do so. There were more reports on how schools and churches have moved their activities online to navigate their way through the pandemic. On January 2, 2021, one of the biggest universities in Ghana was reported by *Citinewsroom.com* to have announced plans to run a shift system of education for the 2021/2022 Academic year. The Dean of Student Affairs of the university, Godfred A. Bokpin, justified the intention behind the changes, which was to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 Protocols while ensuring that students are educated. The quotes below buttresses that.

> "We have practically lost a semester because the academic calendar usually starts from August to the end of July, but now the school will be reopening in January. So, that requires some sort of alteration to the calendar and due to COVID-19, it might not be prudent to have all the students on campus within that same period." (Daisy Palinwinde Jacobs, *Citinewsroom.com*, January 2, 2021)

Using the Political Frame, the media also looked at how governments and other organisations are assisting with recovery efforts, including allocating funds and putting

rules and programs in place to aid those impacted by the pandemic personally and professionally. It also includes measures taken to return to normalcy. *Peacefmonline.com* on August 30, 2020, published a story with the headline, "Ahead of Reopening Airports Aviation Ministry Partners Zoomlion to Disinfect Kotoka", which describes how the Aviation Ministry, in partnership with Zoomlion Ghana Limited (ZGL), has disinfected the KIA and its open spaces to make it safe for passengers and the workers.

In a story titled "Health Ministry Assures of Adequate Safety Measures Ahead of the Reopening of Air Borders," *Citinewsroom.com* also reported measures that have been put in place to prevent imported cases from passing through the airport undetected as they prepare to open the Kotoka International Airport commercial use. According to the news story, some of those measures require that passengers arriving in Ghana get PCR test results from a certified laboratory. The Deputy Health Minister, Dr. Bernard Okoe Boye, who spoke with the reporter, explained as quoted below.

> "We want to ensure that we don't go back to high numbers in terms of the case count so as a concerned Ministry, we insisted on having a safe reopening of our international airports. And we are happy to say that so far the measures that have been put in place to guarantee a very safe airport. That's because we have mechanisms that are able to identify and pick persons with the virus. (Ernest Arhinful, *Citinewsroom.com*, August 31, 2020)

At this stage, the media also focused on financial support offered to businesses to help them revive their businesses to continue their contributions to the total economic revival of the country. "US$100m Fund to Fight COVID-19 Ready, GHS1bn For SMEs – Ofori-Atta" was the title of a story published by peacefmonlie.com in which the finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta confirmed the receipt of US$100 million fund which will be disbursed to businesses to help them build back. Below are some excerpts from the story that explain the government's motive behind the support.

> The President is determined to cushion the economic and social difficulties this coronavirus is visiting Ghanaian businesses and people. (*Peacefmonline.com*, March 30, 2021)
>
> Our task, therefore, is to minimise the huge threat of job losses and the impact of job losses. The President and his team are thinking outside the box to ensure that that the principles of fiscal discipline are not jettisoned and, yet, still ensuring that people have money to spend." (*Peacefmonline.com*, March 30, 2021)

On the contrary, using the Economic Frame, news stories have been published on how businesses and individuals are likely to be affected by tax impositions and policies. *Myjoyonline.com* published a story with the headline, "Government to embark on aggressive domestic revenue mobilisation drive to mitigate COVID-19 impact", in which Ghanaians were advised to be prepared for more taxes as the government seeks to embark on an aggressive domestic revenue mobilisation drive to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy. In the story, the deputy minister-designate for Finance, Abena Osei-Asare, hinted that the government hopes to increase the country's GDP from 13% to 20% by 2023. The minister also supported the need for new tax policies to raise more revenue to cover up for what has been lost to the pandemic. The quote below reinforces that.

> According to a deputy Minister-designate for Finance, Abena Osei-Asare government seeks to introduce several tax policies between 2021 and 2023 aimed at raising the needed resources to offset the deficit created by the novel coronavirus. (Abednego Asante, *MyJoyOnline.com*, June 2, 2021)

On the contrary, news stories have been published using the Economic Frame on how businesses and individuals are likely to be affected by tax impositions and policies. *Myjoyonline.com* published a story with the headline, "Government to embark on aggressive domestic revenue mobilisation drive to mitigate COVID-19 impact", in which Ghanaians were advised to be prepared for more taxes as the government seeks to embark on an aggressive domestic revenue mobilisation drive to mitigate the

negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy. In the story, the deputy Minister-designate for Finance, Abena Osei-Asare, hinted that the government hopes to increase the country's GDP from 13% to 20% by 2023. The minister also supported the need for new tax policies to raise more revenue to cover up for what has been lost to the pandemic. The quote below reinforces that.

> HEADLINE: NPP outlines post-Covid transformation agenda (*gna.org.gh*, October 30, 2020)
>
> The New Patriotic Party Post-Covid plan tagged: "The Ghana Covid Alleviation and Revitalisation of Enterprises" (Ghana CARES) Programme is Ghana Beyond Aid in Action. The NPP in its Election 2020 Manifesto, explained that the implementation of the Ghana CARES programme would restore growth to Pre COVID-19 levels. (*gna.org.gh*, October 30, 2020)
>
> HEADLINE: NDC to confront the post-Covid era holistically.
>
> The National Democratic Congress (NDC) has developed a post-Covid era blueprint to holistically fix the deep cracks in Ghana's health system and upscale the nation's emergency preparedness. (*gna.org.gh*, October 30, 2020)
>
> The NDC in its Election 2020 Manifesto tagged, "The People's Manifesto" explained that the COVID-19 Pandemic made a tremendous impact on life in Ghana "We must prepare for viruses that are far more dangerous in terms of their infection and mortality rates than SARS II Coronavirus" (*gna.org.gh*, October 30, 2020).

The media at this stage of recovery also used the Public Health Crisis Frame to create awareness about the coronavirus vaccines. There were also some news reports on vaccination and the need for people to trust the vaccine's efficacy and make themselves available for it. The media also covered concerns and arguments about vaccine efficacy, safety, and accessibility. This phase is very similar to the third phase out of four phases identified by Zafri et al. (2021), where the Bangladesh newspapers focused on mitigation strategies adopted by the Bangladeshi government to curb the spread of the pandemic.

6.3 Chapter Summary

Results of the data gathered in Phase Two are presented in this study chapter. This study aimed to evaluate how the coronavirus pandemic was portrayed in four selected Ghanaian media portals – *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* from March 12, 2020, to March 24, 2021. This is the second of four chapters on data presentation and analysis of this study and addresses research questions three (3) and four (4). After content analysis of the 2719 paragraphs of the selected new stories published by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* within the twelve (12) month period under review, five major news sources were discovered to have been behind news stories about the coronavirus pandemic. The five major news sources accessed by and referenced in the news stories are Government officials and Politicians, Medical Experts and Health Organisations, Affected Communities, Corporate Executives, International media, and others. Government officials and Politicians include the President, ministers, public officials, and heads of Public and State Agencies who were at the forefront of the pandemic, as well as leading members of the two major political parties; the opposition National Democratic Congress, NDC, and the ruling New Patriotic Party, NPP who were constantly consulted by the media during the pandemic.

The second category of sources which was Medical Experts and Health Organisations comprised of subcategories of persons and entities such as Medical Experts, Health Organisations, and Scientific Studies and Reports. This category of sources, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Ghana Health Service (GHS), and local health institutions, were also heavily dependent on the selected media for information during the pandemic.

Affected Communities were the third category of sources interviewed by the selected media for information during the pandemic. The affected communities include businesses, individuals, and organisations that have fallen victim to the pandemic, infected persons, relatives of infected persons, and the deceased.

Corporate Executives were another set of sources the media depended on for information. The media covered businesses and organisations that have supported vulnerable people in society and extended support to some institutions and people responsible for leading the fight against the pandemic. In the process, the media interviewed the leaders of those organisations to find out their motives behind those interventions. The last category of sources consulted by *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in reporting the coronavirus pandemic was the ""International media and other sources"" such as social media, religious leaders, and economists, collectively got 9% attribution.

This chapter also addresses the third research question of what the phases of media coverage of the pandemic were and the frames that characterise d them as far as the coverage of the pandemic was concerned by the *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh*. Through content analysis of the 200 stories selected for the study, it was observed that the four selected media adopted a five-phased approach in reporting the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. The phases that emerged from the data obtained are Early Responsiveness, Heightened Concern, Critique and Review, Community Activism, and Resilience and Recovery.

The first phase, which is Early Responsive, was characterise d by the frames of Politics and Public Health Crisis as the media at this stage focused on reporting the nature of the virus, its origin, and mode of transmission as well as initial measures

taken by the government to first control the virus from entering the country and later to contain the spread of the virus. The second phase of Heightened Concern adopted multiple frames of focus on the impact of the pandemic on lives and businesses. Characterise d by the Social Frame, Political Frame, Public Health Crisis Frame, and Economic Frame, this phase focused on how the virus has affected the socio-economic well-being of people. With lives lost, health affected, and money lost, the phase using data and statistics, communicated the pandemic's devastating nature and further steps the government to curtail it.

The third phase of Critique and Review was characterise d by the Political, Public Health Crisis, Social, Economic, and Social frames. The media scrutinised the government's interventions and measures as it reported on the appraisals of individuals, civil society organisations, and political players on the government's pandemic management. It also exposed some systemic failures that worsened the lives of Ghanaians. The fourth phase revealed was Community Activism, where the media reported on how individuals and groups come together to take collective actions in facing and addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. Characterise d by the Social Frame, Political Frame, and Public Health Crisis, news stories at this phase also include community sensitisation, compliance, and support for one another. The On-the-Brighter-Side Frame, Political Frame, Economic Frame, and Public Health Crisis also characterise d the last phase, Resilience and Recovery. The media at this phase concentrated on reporting the path to recovery as the pandemic started to recede, including the financial burden of the pandemic, the return to normalcy, and the initiatives being done to create a more resilient future. It was also revealed from the analysis that no theme is exclusive to any of the phases and that there have been at least two frames adopted by the media at each stage, with the Political Frame used at

each phase probably because of how deeply the issues of governance and politics were attached to the issues around the pandemic. The next chapter presents findings on how the media reportage influenced the understanding and behaviour ofmedia consumers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BEHIND THE LENS: UNCOVERING THE FACTORS SHAPING FRAME SELECTION AND CHALLENGES IN REPORTING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN GHANA (PHASE THREE)

7.0 Introduction

Presentations and discussions of the data gathered and analysed from this study's third data collection phase, which included in-depth interview sessions with one (1) health journalist each from the four selected online news media portals, have been covered in this chapter. To answer research question five (5), which sought to explore the factors that influenced the choice of news frames adopted by the journalist from *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic Face-to-face interviews were conducted with four health reporters selected from each media organisation under study. Using relevant theories and literature discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this study (See Chapters 2 & 3), data gathered has been thematised and presented in this chapter.

This chapter focuses keenly on presenting findings in line with the core factors that influenced journalists and news editors in the selection of some frames, news angles, and stories over others. The chapter thus discusses critical issues such as editorial policy, news sources, and news angles as some of the core influencing factors that had significant implications on the selection of news frames and stories.

Furthermore, the chapter also discusses the key challenges that hindered effective news coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in the country. The chapter highlights some key challenges journalists sampled for this study faced while reporting on the pandemic.

7.1 Factors that Affected the Selection of Frames and Stories

Different studies have shown that the media does not rely on using one frame while reporting on global health crisis situations and pandemics (Wilson et al., 2009; Oladepo et al., 2021). Hence, it is widely known that global media often uses multiple frames to cover pandemics (Dahal & Khatri, 2021). In some instances, as the literature has shown, the media uses a phase-to-phase framing strategy to frame issues differently as pandemics wear on. One of the core objectives of this study was to understand the key factors that influenced the selection of different frames while Ghanaian journalists reported on the novel coronavirus. The study collected data concerning this through in-depth interviews with selected journalists who were actively involved in the coverage of the pandemic in the country for their various news media organisations.

The study paid particular attention to understanding the practical issues that influenced why journalists selected some stories over others, why the stories were reported more frequently than others, and why they were framed for public consumption in a particular way. Furthermore, the study looked at understanding the core factors that influenced even the news angle selection of Ghanaian journalists while they reported on the pandemic in the country. The assessment of the data gathered proved that different factors were responsible for the different frames journalists adopted while reporting on the pandemic. These frames bothers on personal experience, organisational and/or editorial policies, house style, and some critical challenges associated with coverage of the pandemic that shaped reportage in a particular way or direction. More specifically, the study found that the influential factors that directed COVID-19 framing in the Ghanaian news media were systemic and structural and, to

some extent, followed a more pragmatic approach to reporting due to the nature of the pandemic and its effects on the country.

The study revealed four key factors that influenced the selection of frames and stories regarding the pandemic coverage. The study found that factors such as the implications of the virus and its global effects, editorial policies and house styles of the media organisations, the geographic perspective of issues concerning the pandemic, and the different information sources that the media used shaped how frames were developed, and which ones were adopted more often while four selected Ghanaian journalists were reporting on the pandemic in the country. These factors originate from the personal experiences of the journalists as well as the structural approaches media organisations in Ghana take while covering issues, they consider salient and want to emphasise.

7.1.1 Geographic Perspective

The study found that one of the key areas that journalists in Ghana looked at while framing the coronavirus reportage was the geographic implications or perspectives of the pandemic. Some of the research participants believed that their choice of frames was influenced by the pandemic's implications on other nations and how the pandemic was slowly spreading from nation to nation within a given time.

There was a critical focus on how the spread of the virus had taken a nation-by-nation approach, and this influenced the way that some of the frames with which the reporters reported their stories were developed. Hence, some frames, for instance, which focused on describing the virus as one that could spread only in the Western and Asian regions, were backed by the geographic perspectives of the pandemic.

In the extract below, for instance, one of the research participants claims that frames that looked at the virus as principally originating from the Western and Asian regions were informed by the fact that his reportage took a largely geographic approach. Thus, since his reportage looked at the geographic implications of the pandemic, the frames that were initially employed assumed a similar shape.

> *"If you look at it individually you will realise that aside from the collective damage that we all suffered globally, there were nation-specific implications. And that is where the whole thing starts from. Before it became widely spread, the reportage was distant… I mean you only focus on what is happening in Europe and Asia where the virus was spreading. So, the frames you can definitely use will be informed by the idea that you are looking at what is happening in China, in Italy, USA…and each of these at the beginning of the spread of the virus had their own implications and hence focus of reportage…" -Participant Journo04 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

The journalist's assertion points to the realisation that the initial nation-specific approach that characterise d the initial phases of the coverage of the pandemic led to the adoption and use of frames that looked at what was happening in other nations. This can be considered quite truthful as one would observe that initial reports on the coronavirus pandemic were more or less the coverage of a disease that had impacts on some geographical spaces and not others.

Gupta and Sinha (201) made similar findings in their study on newspaper coverage of health issues in India. The researchers found that media organisations and journalists focused on the geopolitical implications of issues when covering global health issues.

Thus, their study noted that coverage of health issues hinged on how Western nations experienced these issues and how they were experienced in other geographic regions as well. This study found similarly that geographic implications were critical to how journalists covered the pandemic in the country.

7.1.2 Editorial Policies

Editorial policies of the various media organisations in Ghana that were actively involved in the coverage of the pandemic in the country played crucial roles in the types of frames that journalists and editors adopted in reporting on the pandemic. The idea of editorial policy emanates from the thinking that some set of guiding principles and rules of thumb established by media organisations act on the way they cover, focus, and present the news. Editorial policies of media organisations, effectively, are guidelines that are given to journalists as well as news editors to control the way they cover the news. They include the media organisation's general attitudes toward social issues, the community, and the key information sources they cover (Kauffman, 1984).

The study found that the research participants believed that significant proportions of the frames they developed and adopted in covering the pandemic in Ghana were influenced by the editorial decisions of the organisations they worked for. Hence, the study found that, to a larger extent, editorial decision-making processes on the angles journalists were to tackle stories from, the information sources they accessed, and the frequency of reporting on some frames and angles had critical implications on the frames adopted and used.

The study found that media organisations in Ghana placed much emphasis on the ethical and professional development of frames and news angles to present healthy narratives on the pandemic in the country. The use of alarmist and sensational words

that denoted fear and was likely to lead to the social stigmatisation of coronavirus victims was strictly controlled by editorial policy guidelines in some media organisations. Thus, some journalists asserted receiving different forms of control from news editors on how they used words and phrases such as “deadly coronaviruses” to frame the virus as ‘deadly’. This was done to limit the extent of the effect of fear and death frames that the media reported the virus through.

> *“The newsroom is you have to be professional and ethical, don’t be overly alarmist, don't be sensational. So, we were guided by those professional principles in journalism.” - Participant Journ04 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

Some of the journalists affirmed that the entirety of the reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in the country was spearheaded and managed by editorial policy. This suggests, invariably, that the reportage of the pandemic was heavily guarded by strict policies managed by an editorial board. The participant explains more implicitly that this was owing mainly to the extent of prominence the entire media organisation attached to the reporting of the pandemic. The lengthy hours of reports and the change in programming provide a critical testament to this.

> *“So, the editorial policy played a key role and so I mean because in my station at the time we were running the 14-hour cycle when we come in there's a plan for the day where we all chip in the angles so for business today what was it that we're looking at for covid” - Participant Journo04 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

The extract provided above indicates that editorial policies were critical to informing the overall programming of the media organisation. Qureshi (2013) underscores that

editorial policies of media organisations are a critical perspective to contextualising the news and selecting critical news angles that shape the news. As Qureshi (2013) noted in his study, editorial policies are a critical element that influenced the selection of news angles and frames when journalists covered the pandemic. Therefore, the findings made in this study agree with Qureshi's findings as it also found that editorial policies of news media organisations are essential to the selection of frames and news angles.

From the above extract, for instance, the participant makes mention of the phrase "there is a plan for the day" to explain that as occasioned by the editorial policy of the organisation, the organisation heavily centred and planned all its activities on reporting on the pandemic. The word plan denotes a set and structured approach journalists were presented with to work. Some journalists largely institutionalised the roles of editors and editorial policy by referring to them as gatekeepers. In the extract below, for instance, the journalist refers to his news editors as gatekeepers and goes on to assign key responsibilities of the news editors through micro-management activities. Thus, the interviewee notes that the Editors acted as gatekeepers who paid critical attention to every little detail involved in the coverage of the pandemic. The extract presents that the gatekeepers not only filtered the news but also played key roles in the focus and themes of stories, which were influential in developing and adopting frames for the coverage of the pandemic in Ghana.

Aside from this, there is a passive reference of news editors as bosses to establish some form of power play and the dominance of editorial policies in the entire processes of news production and framing of the pandemic. This further shows how essential editors and editorial policies of the various news media were in developing and using specific frames while engaged in the coverage of the pandemic in the country.

> *"Well then when it started like I said I was in Kumasi and it was the bosses or the gatekeepers then who were calling the shots so they decided no from where it is coming from today can we check on they've mentioned hand sanitiser, that was when we started seeing the small sise of hand sanitisers hitting like GH25, GH50. So, can we check on that? Okay, can we do gloves? Long sleeves, how do they help? Okay, does it mean we will not sit in trotro? So, they were bringing out all those angles to enhance the reports we do. So, in as much as you are looking at the mode of transmission, how deadly it is, or the effects and impacts, we were looking at how it was strictly affecting people's lives, businesses, and others." - Participant Journo03 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

It is also essential to mention that a common practice the study found under this theme was the unification of frames across all segments of the various news departments. The study discovered that the editorial direction of the media organisations significantly impacted journalists' frames, regardless of the news departments in which they worked. In the extract above, for instance, the participant opines critically that even the business departments and segments of the news had to align with the editorial policies of the organisation while developing frames for their reportage. The participant mentions that there is a structured approach, and all angles and frames had to chip in from that perspective.

To further examine the influence of editorial policies on the framing and angling of news stories, the study found that some journalists were subject to frequent meetings with editors or editorial boards. The journalists constantly communicated with news

editors, who instructed and advised on the information sources to be used and the frames to look out for while interviewing them.

> *"We have to find new angles, have conversations with the editors and then begin to work on guests that we could come through with and then drive new content and to fuel the conversation all in explaining to the audience really what the virus was" - Participant Journo02 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

The relevance of editorial policies and the efforts of editors in ensuring that the editorial guidelines were adhered to were critical issues found in this study. For instance, the study found that journalists reported being bored and, in some instances, unchallenged as they kept working repeatedly with the same guidelines. These guidelines prevented journalists from taking initiatives and challenged the enterprising nature of journalists. Against this background, Qureshi (2023) argues that newsroom culture is an essential factor in journalists' selection of framer, the study also found that some editorial policies of some media organisations allowed for some levels of ingenuity in the development and use of frames. For instance, in using and developing impact frames, journalists asserted that editors advised that news stories look at how the pandemic had impacted local businesses, savings and loan companies, and insurance firms. Furthermore, to ensure that the news regarding impact frames was comprehensive and yet innovative, editors ensured that the conversation was extended to other industries with a critical focus on the changing phases of the pandemic from time to time.

> *"…how it was impacting, and how it will impact on businesses, savings, insurance companies, all of that, that complex web of the business*

industry, aviation, hospitality industry, we're looking at all of those angles from time to time...” - Participant Journo01 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)

7.1.3 News and Information Sources

Leask, Hooker and King (2010) account that a confounding element that often drives media personnel in their quest to bring us the news is the selection and use of the right information or news sources. Leask, Hooker and King (2010) argue that often, the news frames and news angles that journalists select while covering critical health crises are significantly influenced by the news sources that they contact for information. While researching the Avian Flu, the researchers discovered that the various information and news sources that the journalists relied on for information had a significant impact on the frames and news angles that the media had adopted to represent the global health issue. In synchrony with the findings made by Leask, Hooker and King (2010), the findings made in this study support the idea that frames adopted to report global health pandemics are often influenced by news sources that journalists select.

The study also found that information and news sources were some of the most prominent and key factors that influenced journalists’ framing tendencies during the coverage of the pandemic in Ghana. Journalists often derive information from news sources. Both documentary and human sources are critical elements of journalism (MacLeod, 2021). While they are fundamental to providing journalists with information and aiding in interpreting issues, sources are essential to leading the narratives of some social issues. They are crucial in forming or leading journalists to form certain frames while reporting issues (ibid). This study found that both human and

documentary sources that journalists sampled for this study used in their coverage of the coronavirus pandemic were key in influencing journalists to present the news in a particular manner. Their involvement in the production of news regarding the pandemic in the country was found to have highly impacted the frames that journalists adopted in the coverage of the pandemic.

> *"So it's mainly the sources or whatever we see on the occasion that's what influenced the stories we were doing." - Participant Journo02 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

The study had already found that key news and information sources such as health experts and professionals, government officials, international media outlets and the Ghana health service were some of the key sources of information that the media in Ghana relied on while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic and its implications. These news sources and many others had been impactful in the different frames and news angles that journalists in Ghana adopted for their reports. The findings made in this study suggest that due to the novelty of the pandemic, a majority of the frames and news angles that were adopted in the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic emanated from news sources more than any other factors. The study reveals that because the selected media relied on news sources such as health experts and the international news media for information and onward broadcast, the selected media in Ghana was highly influenced by these news sources in developing frames. This is supported by Qureshi (2023), who states that source availability is one of eight core issues journalists consider when selecting news frames and angles.

In exploring news media coverage of global health problems such as avian flu Leask, Hooker and King (2010), found that the types of news sources that journalist interview

or cover is essential in influencing their choice of frames and news angles. The study also cites professionalism, balanced reportage, and fairness as key considerations. This is almost the same for Participants Journo04, who asserts in the extract below that he believes news framing in Ghana concerning the pandemic was largely a result of the media's reliance on news sources for information. The journalist opines that as a result of the novel nature of the virus and concomitant restrictions that came with it, journalists were restricted in one way or another in their search for news and had to rely on secondary information from international media, World Health Organisation, the national news agency, and the Ghana Health Service for information.

> *"…If the figure is not there, we do not report it. And they update that figure every now and then. So as soon as they update, we use them. Then there was a, I forgot the gentleman's name, even his designation, but he was the one we quoted a lot of the times. So, it had to be him. If he didn't say it, then we cannot give it to the public. And then the president himself was also giving regular updates. So these are the sources of news. Then we had people at the various hospitals, so Ga East Hospital and then the UGMC, and then Kolebu Teaching. So we have doctors who are our sources. We have sources who are nurses. Some would say this to us on record. Some would say it to us off record. But we trusted the information because we were neck-deep involved, and we had multiple sources." - Participant Journo04 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

The extract further points to the realisation that there was a very high reliance on news sources to produce news and framing as well. In the extract, for instance, the journalist begins his discussion with a statement that suggests high levels of reliance,

which points to the development of some frames. The journalist mentions that unless the right document sources provide statistics on the pandemic, the organisation does not report or provide updates. The latent meanings embedded in this statement are that frames such as fear frames, death frames, and implications frames, which were highlighted by the provision of death tolls and extent of spread, were in a way developed because of journalists' reliance on statistics from official websites.

Thus, the fact that some of the most prominent frames that journalists adopted while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana concerned death and fear frames emanated, by and large, from the constant sourcing of information from the official websites that provided statistics on death tolls and spread rates in the country and globally. Authors such as MacLeod (2023) note that for frames to be effective, they must be pushed through the media for a period. Furthermore, they account that the more the media access information from some individuals or groups of persons, the higher the likelihood of certain forms of frames being developed and appearing more salient. Thus, as was found in this study, as journalists paid more attention to using information from official COVID-19 websites, which also highlighted infection and mortality rates, a good percentage of the frames identified in this study followed the death and fear frames.

In a different yet related dimension, the study found that using human expert sources was also crucial in developing and frequently using frames. Regarding the above extract, for instance, the journalist asserts some constant interaction with news sources. These sources were often used as reference points for most of the broadcasts from the media organisation. This implies that there is a constant source of information that provides some information in a particular way. As the media keeps

broadcasting information from the source, some prominent frames and news angles are developed and used often by the media organisation.

7.1. 4 Impacts of the Pandemic

The study further found that the impacts of the pandemic on various facets of social and economic lives led journalists to the development, adoption, and use of some news frames in reporting on the pandemic in Ghana. Thus, it was found that the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic in the country were a critical factor in the selection and use of frames in the reportage of the pandemic. The findings made in this study point to the realisation that journalists consistently covered the pandemic by inevitably focusing on the impacts of the virus on businesses, social and cultural life, and politics. Hence, due to the need to inform media consumers in Ghana about how the pandemic affected human lives, some keyframes were adopted and used to contextualise this information for the public.

Journalists sampled for this study agreed that most of the frames used in their news report were influenced by the perspectives of the impact that the journalists covered. For instance, it was found that journalists kept focusing on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on businesses. These frames emerged automatically and focused on highlighting the devastating effects of the pandemic on businesses and the entire economic landscape of the country. To substantiate this finding, a journalist mentions in the extract below that he was influenced to frame his stories around the closure and folding of Ghanaian businesses when he was reporting on the pandemic in the nation. The extract explains and reveals that as the journalist was constantly interacting with key business industry players and victims of the pandemic's effects, the frames established in most of his reports leaned towards economic impact frames.

> *"I looked at how it had affected business because businesses were shut at the time and so from the global perspective, from local perspective, I was speaking to industry players as to what it meant and how it was impacting on the Ghanaian economy because work and everything were shut down but for essential services, what it meant for our economy and up to this point 2023, it's been three years on and the conversations about the ripple effects of COVID continues to come up even when we're having conversations about the Ghanaian economy and all that. And so, yeah, I looked at the business.." - Participant Journo02 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

This response finds resonance in the theoretical framework, which this study is based on the Agenda Setting Theory, which states that "the mass media influence our perspectives of the world and focus our attention by selecting and displaying news on a daily basis, affecting our thoughts on what are the key subjects of the day" (McCombs, 1978, p. 90). In a similar dimension, the study found other frames that were dominant in the reportage, such as those that followed the human interest and impacts on human and social activities, were also influenced significantly by the pandemic's impacts on people and social life. Thus, frames such as fear and death, for instance, that highlighted the hiking numbers of deaths, and the rapid spread of the virus were influenced by the fact that journalists concentrated on broadcasting the impacts of the pandemic on human life, health, and social life.

Kitzinger (1999) suggests that the media can construct feelings and perceptions of risks among audiences during a health crisis by selecting and promoting news angles. This argument has also been supported by Dan and Raupp (2018), who argue that

framing offers journalists the opportunity to contextualise issues about occurrences through proper interpretation to the understanding of the consumers.

> *"..but there was a general angle how people were surviving, how the needs of persons, sick persons, how they were going about. There were different strands to it. Broadcasts every day mixed with help lines, providing updates as and when, picking news conferences when there were updates and all of that. It was an interesting time to be a journalist at that point…" - Participants Journo01 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

Given the extent to which frames define stories, and strongly impact how media consumers perceive the news, frames that media practitioners used in reporting the global health crisis in Ghana had crucial effects on the audiences. Ideally, frames have critical impacts on media audiences. Similarly, the frames adopted for the pandemic coverage ideally impacted media consumers (Entman, 1993). As has been shown from the findings in this study, journalists focused on the consequencies of the virus and hence developed some frames out of the impacts they had observed. Some participants, however, asserted that as a mechanism for reducing the impacts of the frames on audiences, some media organisations developed other frames to counter danger frames, such as fear and death. Thus, the study found that while some frames were developed out of journalists' concentration on the impacts of the coronavirus, some media organisations also developed frames to mitigate the extent of the influence of other frames.

Some journalists and media organisations developed frames to reduce the extent of fear and panic that media reportage was likely to create. The study found that such

frames were developed and used often, especially during the vaccination phases when hesitancy against vaccination programs was on the rise.

In the extract below, for instance, the journalist notes that because of the impact of the virus and the ensuing news angles and frames that had emerged, there were high levels of hesitancy against vaccination, as well as fear and panic during the coronavirus pandemic period. As a result, it was necessary to develop frames to mitigate panic and fear in society. Consequently, some frames were also developed to ensure some form of normalcy, to educate on vaccination programs, and to reduce hesitancy levels among the public.

> *"Again, the choice has to do with the fear and the panic. So we're going to approach it in an angle where we're going to beat down the fear and the panic. We're going to look at the hesitancy with which people were even believing that there was a virus in the first place and how to even take precautionary measures as individuals. So those were the two legs we were looking at it from, how to beat down fear and panic and how to get people to take precautionary measures because at the initial stage, we didn't even know whether there was a vaccine going to be available in the future and how people were going to be able to manage once they got the virus, how to manage it up until they are virus free and all of that" - Participants Journo03 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

The study notes that although these frames were developed due to the need to beat down fear and panic frames that had been propagated in the media for some time, the frames were also influenced by the impacts of the pandemic.

7.2 Key Challenges Journalists Faced While Reporting on the Pandemic

The findings of the study suggest that because the pandemic is novel and due to the drastic nature of the effects of the virus, journalists in Ghana faced diverse challenges. These challenges ranged from health-related issues to organisational and structural challenges that affected how journalists covered the pandemic in the country. The study found that Ghanaian journalists faced most of the critical challenges while reporting on the pandemic, which was borne out of the novel pandemic. Journalists had very little experience reporting global pandemics.

The study found that some of the core challenges that affected how journalists covered and framed the pandemic in the country included a lack of technical know-how, lack of training, and health risks associated with covering the pandemic. All the journalists interviewed for this study asserted that a combination of these technical, health, and structural factors culminated in journalists' inability to report and cover the pandemic effectively as they would have desired.

7.2.1 Inadequate Technical Know-How

To be specific, one of the critical elements of reporting on global health crises and pandemics is the lack of technical knowledge on such pandemics. Studies have shown that having a large pool of technical knowledge on some health issues is critical to mitigating the health crisis. The study found that a lack of technical know-how in dealing with the pandemic became a critical barrier to compelling reportage on the coronavirus pandemic. The study found that a critical element that gravely affected how the pandemic was covered in Ghana was the novel nature of the pandemic. Until the first reports of the first infections became known, the coronavirus was unknown. Hence, the virus was a novel one that even scientists across the globe had not heard

of. The data gathered from the interview sessions revealed that as a result of the lack of knowledge on the virus, there was a lack of accurate and truthful information. This had critical implications for how journalists covered the pandemic, especially during the early phases. Thus, the lack of adequate information on the pandemic became a setback to the accurate coverage of the pandemic. Some journalists opined that for journalists themselves, understanding the entirety of the pandemic even before transmitting it effectively to media consumers was a herculean task because the pandemic was novel, and there was little knowledge of the virus. In the extract below, for instance, the journalist posits that journalists had a difficult time understanding the virus and the processes to consider when reporting on a global health issue of such magnitude. Furthermore, the extract indicates that learning and correctly using new terminologies in reports posed one of the biggest challenges for journalists who may not have been health reporters during the pandemic. Therefore, Journalists had to learn new terminologies they were utterly alien to and try to interpret them to make sense for media consumers in Ghana.

> ***"****Yep, the initial stages, everything was really green and you had to cram a lot of info at a time to enable you to go about the work and so the initial stages were difficult cramming up the numbers and some of the new terminologies because I mean hell, not everybody was a health expert or was on the health desk and you quickly had to learn some of these things, terminologies, and some not readily come into mind" - Participant Journo 03 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

In the above extract, the participant refers to the fact that while this challenge was a critical element in journalists' inability to report on the pandemic in Ghana effectively, it was primarily prominent in the early phases of the pandemic. Hence, the participant

mentions ‘initial stages’ and ‘everything was green’ to signify that the most significant levels of the gap in knowledge on dealing with pandemics were felt more during the first phases of the pandemic. This definanitly may have impacted the quality and accuracy of stories they were publishing. To further exact the extent of lack of knowledge on the pandemic and its implications on reporting, one journalist described the situation as an ignorance of the pandemic. As presented in the extract below, the interviewee mentions that being ignorant of the pandemic was a critical challenge journalists faced while covering the pandemic. The journalist’s choice of the word ‘ignorance’ poses a critical point for reflection.

> *“I mean, so the ignorance was a challenge.” - Particioant Journo 03 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

This qualifies a state where journalists knew nothing about the virus and its potencies in infections and mortality rates. Furthermore, the use of the word or describing the state of journalists while reporting on the virus as a state of ignorance can be seen as having negative implications on how and how initial reports of the pandemic were carried out in the country. The interviewee follows up with information that implies some confusion created within the public and media spaces due to the ‘ignorance’ in reportage of the coronavirus pandemic. The extract below presents a critical picture of the confusion of information that occurred due to the ignorant nature of reports on the coronavirus during its initial phases.

> *“Remember when it came, they said, OK, let's lockdown. We locked down for two months. They said, no, let's open up. And people had all manner of explanations for what was happening. Some people said the black skin would not get coronavirus. Some said the temperature in*

Africa would not support coronavirus. And yet we saw people get coronavirus and they died." - Participant Journo 02 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)

In the extract, the interviewee identifies the impact of ignorance as a result of a lack of adequate knowledge of the pandemic. The extract supposes that media reports of racial immunity against the virus and lockdowns were actuated due to a lack of technical knowledge on the pandemic.

7.2.2 Lack of Training in Health Reporting and Communication

Aside from identifying a lack of technical knowledge on reporting health crises and pandemics, the study further found that no training programs conditioned journalists in Ghana to report on the pandemic adequately. The study found that most journalists interviewed for this study identified that the lack of training in health communication and reporting was a significant barrier to effective reporting. This finding is quite surprising and unsettling as one would envisage that for journalists to report on a pandemic of such gravity properly, training in health communication and reporting would be an essential and dominant feature in media activities in Ghana. However, the study's findings suggest that journalists did not receive any form of training either from governmental agencies in charge of health issues or institutions in charge of media activities in Ghana. Furthermore, there was no evidence of media training on reporting health issues from private organisations or media firms.

"For journalists, no, no, no, that's what I'm saying personally. I don't know of any except for those meant for the general public. Yes, so, and once it's for the public, yes the media will still be invited but for

say to train journalists? I don't remember." - Participant Journo 05

(Source: Field Interview, 2023)

From the above extract, it can be noted that there were no training programs organised to ensure that journalists were well-equipped to report on the pandemic or even protect themselves from contracting the virus. However, the interviewee in the above extract makes mention of a general forum for the public to which journalists were invited. However, it is essential also to note that these public were generalised and not meant to specifically train journalists on how to report on global pandemics such as the coronavirus. Aside from journalists identifying the lack of training on health reporting during the pandemic as a crucial challenge, latent analysis of the data gathered indicates that journalists expressed some disappointment for such an occurrence. This expression can be perceived from how one journalist answered the question of whether they received training or not. The journalist answered that training only occurred during stages of the pandemic where there were very few to no infection rates. The pandemic was in its receding or declining stages.

In other words, the journalist's answer supposes there was no relevance for the training as it had come when journalists were not reporting on the pandemic as it had receded significantly. This was found in the participant's use of the word "later" continually and repeatedly. This speaks directly to the supposition that the training occurred later when journalists saw little need for it.

No, not that I remember. There was one after the first year of the pandemic that was organised. I think MFWA, organised that was later later later later like a year and a half or so after

the pandemic but before the pandemic no..” - Participant Journo 03 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)

7.2.3 Health Risks and Trauma

Studies such as Perreault and Perreault (2021) acknowledge that health factors are among the most pertinent challenges journalists face while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. Similar findings were made in this study. The study found that one of the critical challenges journalists in Ghana faced while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic was the numerous health risks they were exposed to. The findings made from the interview sessions present that as a result of being engaged in active coverage of the reports, most journalists were exposed to different health-related risks. The study found that one of the critical challenges that was borne out of the coverage of the pandemic related to the mental health of the journalists. Thus, the study found that journalists experienced traumatic experiences and post-reportage depressive experiences while they covered the pandemic in the country. The study found that issues of trauma and depression because of constantly reporting on and seeing people die as a result of the pandemic were quite pertinent among journalists.

As Anson and Buatsi (2022) found in their study of Ghanaian journalists and their experiences with reportage on the pandemic, journalists were highly exposed to diverse health risk factors as they reported on the virus. Similar findings are made in this study. By the nature of their jobs, journalists were often exposed to seeing dead bodies, persons helplessly ill, and the families of deceased patients. This, coupled with often frequenting cemeteries and high infection zones in order to present adequate coverage of the pandemic and its implications, had dire impacts on the mental health of journalists. Interestingly, despite being exposed to most of these gruesome images

and information first, journalists had little or no psychological support to condition them for these experiences.

> *"I also had to say that it also had a toll on us, those who were reporting, who were seeing these victims and going there. And for those of us who saw those people for some time were broken, we could have also been given some psychological assistance to get out of the trauma that we face, because also we were going to the cemeteries where they were burying the dead from COVID and stuff like that an intensed period, but we did not have like psychological assistance or psychologists who were going to take us through overcoming that period." - Participant Journo01 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

In the extract above, the interviewee laments not receiving any form of psychological assistance to aid reporters who were often reporting from the field and were, hence, constantly exposed to traumatic experiences. It is essential to note critically the use of the term or word 'broken' to describe the extent of trauma that journalists experienced while they covered the pandemic. The interviewee asserts that as a result of constantly seeing sick people and large numbers of dead people for a long time, reporters became broken. This effectively describes the state of psychological trauma that journalists who reported on the pandemic experienced.

Furthermore, the interviewees asserted that the stereotype and representation of journalists in frequent contact with health facilities and frontrunners posed a crucial challenge during their reportage on the pandemic in Ghana. Hence, due to frequently contacting frontrunners for information and visiting health facilities, journalists became maligned in society and were often seen as infected persons, although they were not.

"…then the stereotypes that people had against you for simply reporting on COVID was also another issue. And I wrote an article on it. You could find it later online if you check." - Participant Journo04 (Source: Field Interview 2023)

Another dimension through which health implications became a critical challenge to journalists as they reported on the pandemic is linked to the lack of protective equipment. The study found that journalists perceived that they were at high risk of infection as a result of constantly reporting on victims and infected persons with very little protective equipment. According to the data gathered for this study, most journalists believed that the lack of adequate PPEs, other technical equipment, and knowledge of how to use them and protect themselves opens them up to high-risk factors. Hence, they believed that as they frequently visited COVID-19 centres and facilities and interviewed frontline workers, as well as families of victims regularly, all with very little protective equipment, they were at high risk of infection. Consequently, this posed a pivotal challenge to how journalists covered their stories on the pandemic. Knowledge of the high risk of infection due to regular reporting on COVID-19 centres and the lack of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) were hence perceived as key challenges that affected how journalists covered the pandemic in the country.

"So, and now it even became frightening going through public transport because who is coughing? Who is the next person sneezing? Where you are even sitting? Who sat there? Did a person cough? Did the person sneeze? You have no idea. So, , our main issue was access to PPEs, transporting ourselves to the various places and even having access to the various health facilities to speak to them, what they call,

health officers to better get us informed about what was really going on." - Participants Journo03 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)

Another journalist also presents that journalists were at even higher risk of contracting the disease due to inadequate PPEs, which affected how they covered their stories. In the extract below, the journalist decried the late access to PPEs and the lack of knowledge on using them as key challenges that impacted their reports health-wise.

"The PPEs were another challenge. I mean, at what point did we even get it? When I first did my first coronavirus interview, I thought I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt. I didn't have gloves on. I had a mask and that was it. I didn't wear any other protective stuff." - Participant Journo04 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)

7.2.4 Fake News

'Fake news' and the prevalence of misinformation was a critical challenge journalists faced during their coverage of the pandemic in Ghana. The findings made in this study point out that there were high levels of 'fake news' and misinformation within the public space during the coronavirus pandemic periods. The study found that journalists often had to reconstruct narratives about the pandemic with different mechanisms. The study found that because of the potency of 'fake news' about transmission, infection rates, mortality rates, cure, and prevention measures, framing new stories in a positive light and developing positive perspectives on the coverage of the entire pandemic was difficult. The findings indicated that 'fake news' stories concerning the pandemic sought to frame the virus as unable to infect black-skinned persons and unable to attack persons with certain blood types, among others. Furthermore, 'fake news' stories were highly prevalent during vaccination periods, with diverse story angles

seeking to frame vaccines as unhealthy and possessing dire consequences. The study found that journalists had to deal with these forms of 'fake news' while they sought accurate and truthful information to erase these narratives.

> *"It was tough. It was a thin line then because also around that time you know that a lot of fake news, you know, and spam messages were being circulated on WhatsApp platforms and Facebook and Twitter. And also around that time, there was heightened conversation about fake news" - Participant Journo02 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

For instance, the interviewee in the extract above claims that 'fake news' is a critical challenge because of its characteristics. Key in the extract is the mention of the means of transmission of fake news among media consumers. The interviewee notes that direct messaging systems effectively transmitting information straight to the consumer have very little gatekeeping tendencies. Hence, the interviewee mentions using WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter as the key means through which 'fake news' about the pandemic travelled. Unsuspecting victims often trust direct information, and media reportage that presents contradicting information is often difficult to believe.

In the extract below, a journalist narrates clearly how 'fake news', especially concerning the use of vaccines, posed a critical challenge to how journalists covered the pandemic in Ghana.

> *"So for example, if you had an inkling that in Jamestown or Chokor, the people do not understand what we are talking about in terms of COVID, there's like mass vaccine hesitancy around that place and you get there and you found a group of people who were, for example, leading and focusing the area, getting people to understand that, oh, this is not a*

death sentence. It is not a fertility-killing vaccine. And so people trying to get the buy-in of the local people who were doing the advocacy. Then we built a story around them. But in the newsroom going there, you would imagine that everybody in the neighbourhood would have said, no, we don't want them to throw us away. But there were times you went on location, and you got different perspectives. Of course, it shaped the stories because then it either brought a new angle to the conversation or debunked an earlier notion or opinion you had before you got there." - Participant Journo02 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)

The interviewee clearly shows how 'fake news' concerning vaccination programs or the pandemic in general affected newsroom organisations and how journalists covered stories regarding the pandemic. From the extract, it can be observed that 'fake news' redirects the angles of stories and even how journalists intend to frame and present their stories.

7.3 Chapter Summary

This section of the study was interested in understanding, particularly, the core factors that influenced Ghanaian journalists in selecting certain news frames and angles when they reported on the pandemic in the country. Literature suggests that the media actively frames issues while reporting them in the news to convey critical information to news consumers sufficiently. Within the space of health news reporting, framing of news is even more essential. As Leask, Hooker and King (2010) account, understanding the processes that journalists engage in and the factors they consider when selecting news frames while they report on health problems is crucial to understanding the frames themselves. The study found that various factors account

for influential factors that impact the frame selection processes journalists consider when reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The study reveals four key factors influencing the selection of frames and stories regarding the pandemic coverage. The study also found that factors such as the implications of the virus and its global effects, editorial policies and house styles of the media organisations, the geographic perspective of issues concerning the pandemic, and the different information sources that the media used shaped how frames were developed, and which ones were adopted more often when Ghanaian journalists reported on the pandemic in the country.

The findings lead to the conclusion that at least four core factors influence journalists in Ghana while they report on issues concerning the pandemic in the country. These included geographic implications of the pandemic, editorial policies, information sources that the journalists accessed and the overall implications of the pandemic on human life. The study concludes that journalists focused on the geographic perspective of issues and their interpretations to develop critical frames while they reported on the pandemic. Hence, the frames used to report the pandemic in Ghana were developed mainly from the geographic implications of the virus and how the media took a geographic interpretive approach to reporting the pandemic. Furthermore, as was primarily supported by the literature on factors that influence frame selection processes, the study found that the editorial policies that guided journalists were critical elements of influence regarding news angles and frame selection processes. Hence, the findings in this study further support the supposition that editorial policy is essential in news frame selection processes in global health issues such as pandemics.

Additionally, the study concludes that the impact of the pandemic on human and social lives was a key issue that journalists focused on while they selected frames and news angles. How the pandemic had affected social life, human lives, and businesses was critical to informing the forms of frames that journalists focused on. Focusing keenly on pandemic effects, such as the economic downturn and restrictions on social events and movements, this study concludes that journalists created and propagated certain frames influenced by these factors. The findings also indicate that the sources media personnel in Ghana covered while reporting on the pandemic shaped the forms of frames engaged during the coverage. Finally this chapter also present some challenges jounalisms were confronted with in their reportage of the coronavirus pandemic. Key among them were inadequate experience and technical know-how of pandemic coverage, lack of training and preparedness on health communication of global health crises, physical and psychological risks. The prevalnce of misinformation also also another challenge faced by journalists in reporting about the pandemic.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN GHANA (PHASE FOUR)

8.0 Introduction

This chapter is the final of four chapters that analyse the portrayal of the coronavirus pandemic in the four selected Ghanaian media platforms. The literature reviewed in chapters two and three revealed the media's important role in influencing the behaviour and understanding of the audience on matters including health issues. This justifies the need to investigate how the four select media portray the pandemic and how it has influenced audiences' understanding and perception of the coronavirus pandemic. This chapter presents and discusses findings from the fourth phase of data collection. It was concerned with focus group discussions with media and communication students and a participatory workshop that selected media consumers to find out their appreciation of the media frames and how those frames helped shape their understanding of the pandemic.

This chapter, therefore, attempts to answer research question six (6), which has been stated below.

> RQ6. How did the framing of the coronavirus in Ghana affect the perception and attitude of the Ghanaian public towards the virus?

Studies have shown quite clearly that how the media presents an issue has some critical implications on how people understand the issue and the kinds of perceptions and attitudes they develop concerning the issue (Lai & Po, 2015; Maurer, 2022). Thus, framing and priming of issues have been underscored by media studies as impactful

on how issues are perceived by media consumers (Scheufele & Tewskbury, 2007; Moy et al., 2016).

The study was also interested in understanding the impact of media coverage of the pandemic on regular media consumers in Ghana. Thus, the researcher sought to explore the lengths to which media coverage of the country's pandemic impacted Ghanaians' perceptions and attitudes toward the coronavirus disease. This was earmarked as one of the core objectives of this study. The researcher was hence keen on identifying how news media products from Ghana regarding the pandemic shaped Ghanaian media consumers' minds and the attitudes that Ghanaians had developed because of interactions with these news media products. To properly ascertain this, the researcher used participatory workshops to gather information from 30 participants sampled from different demographic backgrounds.

Furthermore, focus group discussions were used to collect information from 30 participants concerning their perceptions of the virus after encountering several news articles on the pandemic. The participants were asked mainly about their perceptions and attitudes of the pandemic in Ghana as it had been shaped by media reportage on the virus. The findings from the participatory workshops and the focus group discussions indicate that the media played a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards the pandemic. The thematic analysis technique was used to develop patterns and themes from respondents' opinions and perceptions concerning how Ghanaian media reported on the country's pandemic. Thus, the workshops and focus group discussions revealed that participants were quite heavily influenced by what they had encountered in the media so far as the framing of the pandemic in the country was concerned.

The study found diverse implications of the forms of reportage the selected media had engaged in for media consumers in the country. The findings in the study point out that both positive and negative implications existed of the nature of coverage that the selected media in Ghana had engaged in during the coronavirus pandemic era. These included the creation of fear and anxiety towards the virus and adherence to safety protocols. Critical issues concerning conspiracy theories that floated in the media are also discussed in this chapter as crucial implications of the forms of coverage that the media engaged in while they covered the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

8. 1 Impact of Media Coverage of the Pandemic on Perceptions and Attitudes of Ghanaians towards the Coronavirus

The research was focused on exploring the implications of media coverage of the pandemic on the perceptions and attitudes of Ghanaians towards the coronavirus pandemic in the country. The study was therefore interested in understanding, from the perspective of the sampled participants, how news media coverage of the pandemic in the country had influenced their thinking patterns of the pandemic in Ghana.

The findings revealed that the forms of media coverage that the media in Ghana had engaged in while covering the pandemic had critical implications on the attitudes of Ghanaians towards the virus. The study found that media coverage and framing of the virus had some implications on the levels of fear and anxiety among media consumers, heightened adherence to safety protocols, and increased vaccine hesitancy among Ghanaians. Furthermore, the study found that because of the forms of frames engaged by the media in Ghana, Ghanaians were made to develop some bad attitudes and believe some conspiracy theories concerning the virus. It is critical to include that while the analysis proved that many of the participants perceived that media coverage

of the pandemic had had more negative impacts on their perceptions of the pandemic, some of them believed that, to some extent, media coverage had positive influences on the way that they perceived or saw the virus. Thus, the findings suggest that some participants believed that the implications of media coverage of the virus were not negative in all spheres. However, some positive implications were attached to how the media covered the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

8.1.1 Fear and Panic towards the Coronavirus Pandemic

The findings indicate that key among the effects of media framing on public perceptions and attitudes toward the virus was the development of fear and anxiety within Ghanaian society. The study found that due to the types of frames adopted to cover the pandemic in the country, the participants had developed some levels of fear and panic towards the pandemic. That is to mention that, owing to how the pandemic was reported in the country, people developed some forms of fear. The findings made in this study agree with those of Ogbodo et al. (2020) as well as Mutua and Ong'ong'a (2020), who also found that the use of fear frames in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic had critical impacts on the levels of fear and anxiety that people felt towards the pandemic. The study notes high levels of death and infection perceptions among the sampled participants due to the forms of reportage they had interacted with during the pandemic periods. The study found that by consistently reporting on the rise in infections and mortality rates as well as the graphic representation of deaths, the media had successfully painted a picture of gloom that prompted participants to be anxious and fearful of the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Additionally, the frequency of such reports that captured death and speedy infection rates was instrumental in the creation of an atmosphere of fear and panic for most of

the participants. According to Nwaku, Evans and Ogbodo (2020), the frequency at which media consumers were exposed to death and infection rate frames had crucial impacts on how partcipants perceived and even reacted to the pandemic. Hence, exposure to the media's natural operations of frequently providing statistics of infections and death, reporting on policy development, and the like ensured participants developed an attitude of fear towards the pandemic. Some participants categorised the development of fear and panic of the virus as emanating from the 'negative' forms of news that the Ghanaian media churned out while covering the pandemic. In the extract below, for instance, the participants acknowledges the media's creation of a fearful environment due to the forms of frames they had employed in the reportage.

> *"So, the media space was flooded with a lot of information which caused fear and panic. They flooded us with a lot of negative information about the virus creating a negative environment and it caused a lot of fear and panic among citizens because all we kept on hearing was rising COVID numbers and then they were relating it to the epidemic during World War 2 where the rats killed over 45 million people. So, it was a lot of negative information. And they weren't talking about the positives. There was nothing encouraging about them." - WR03 (Source, Field Interviews, 2023)*

In the extract, the interviewee provides critical points of insight into understanding the intense nature of fear and panic created by the media due to what has been captured as 'negative information about the virus'. Firstly, the interviewee uses the phrases 'they flooded us' and 'we kept hearing' to indicate the rapidity of media coverage of the virus through fear and panic frames. Thus, it is essential to underscore that fear and panic

were developed due to the consistent and rapid use of fear frames within the media (McQuail, 2000; Coulthard & Caldas-Coulthard, 1996).

Additionally, it can be observed from the above extract that the participant repeatedly uses the word negative to describe the nature of reportage that the media had engaged in during their coverage of the pandemic in the country. This leads to the proposition that the media was engaged in a certain form of coverage that the participant perceived as toxic and creating a negative environment. Furthermore, to aid the participants in accurately describing the nature of the atmosphere created by the reportage and its intense nature, the participant makes an analogy of an environment akin to the grueling nature of deaths during the Second World War. This analogy typifies the intense nature of fear and panic that the media had created due to the effects of the pandemic coverage.

Furthermore, one of the participants added that the narrative within the media heightened levels of fear within society drastically. The partcipants opines indirectly that the media was the core agent of fear and panic during the pandemic because of how it covered the crisis. The participant (as presented in the extract below) notes that the media was the core reason the country had so much fear during the pandemic. Furthermore, the partcipants alludes to certain hypothetical scenarios that describe the fearful nature of the media's coverage.

> *"I would say one thing that they really put out there, or they really preached, was fear. Fear and panic. Because it was more like, at the initial stage of the virus, it was more like something is happening to the world. It is now in Ghana. So everyone should run and take a shield because this is what is happening. And there was no solution at the*

moment. And the media kept on digging, digging, digging deep to the extent that even a normal cough could be a symptom of you having the virus. So there was fear and panic everywhere. And I would say that it is the media that's disseminated that fear and panic." - FGR05 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

Careful analysis of the extract proved that the statement and the trajectory of the participant's submission cover an instance of heightened suspense created by the media as the virus entered the country's borders and started spreading. The participants mentions that the media created an atmosphere where consumers could feel like something strange was happening to the world. And then, this thing was rearing its head in Ghana gradually. The 'funnel' type trajectory of the submission, as presented by the participant, leads to the idea that the media intended to create a suspenseful atmosphere of fear where people were waiting for an imminent misfortune that had drastically hit other parts of the world. Additionally, the participant uses the phrase 'And there was no solution at the moment' to typify the intense nature of the reports that media consumers had encountered and the impacts it had on them. The phrase suggests that the media effectively shaped the minds of participants toward the acceptance of the fact that the virus was not curable, and that the pandemic was going to wipe out everyone.

Additionally, the last sentence in the extract suggests that the partcipants believes that the media is directly and solely responsible for the degrees of fear and panic in the country. The partcipants mentioned that the media disseminated the fear and panic felt across the country during the pandemic. This affirms the argument of Weinstein et al. (2020) that audiences' levels of perceived danger of health matters and vulnerability are affected by how the media reports on those issues.

To further establish the intense nature of fear and anxiety created by the media through their reports, one participant also gives an account of a real-life story they had encountered as a result of exposure to death-framing mechanisms employed by the media.

> *"So, you realise that they laid more emphasis on the fact that we should wash our hands under running water. So, I had an auntie, anytime she didn't wash her hands under running water she felt that she was going to die. So the emphasis they laid on how the precautions or the measures we should adopt, in keeping ourselves safe was too harsh." - WR07 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

In the extract, the participant explains, with a real-life example, the harsh nature of the forms of reportage adopted by the media. The participant recounts a family member's fear of death because of the representation of a lack of frequent washing of hands.

To add to the implications of the intense nature of fear and death frames that the selected media adopted while reporting on the pandemic, the analysis found that some partcipants perceived that the nature of reports was so intense that some deaths could be attributed to fear and panic caused by how the media covered the pandemic and not infections from the virus itself. Hence, the study found that some of the participants idealised that the media might be partly to blame for the high numbers of deaths, especially the mortality of older persons as a result of the intense nature of their coverage.

> *"I believe that, though the media community said to us the effects of COVID and everything, they still had instilled too much fear, especially in the elderly ones. So you go somewhere, you come, your mother*

would be coughing small and you start to suspect her of infecting COVID. I believe some of the elderly people died out of fear and not the COVID itself, because the fear was too much." - FGR03 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

Considering the information in the extract above, for instance, the interviewee notes and blames the media in Ghana for adopting reporting styles that were too harsh and intense to the extent that they could be considered responsible for causing the deaths of some elderly members of the country through fear and panic. The analysis further showed that while some participants had negative perceptions about how the Ghanaian media reported the news on the pandemic, other participants perceived such reportage as necessary. Studies such as Hilton and Hunt (2010) acknowledge that fear frames or fearful reporting of incidents during the coronavirus pandemic era were not intended to produce only negative outcomes or to scare media consumers.

Fogarty et al. (2011) and Holland and Blood (2010), while studying how Australian TV covered the Avian flu and Swine Flu, respectively, found that the media used fear frames to warn the public of the dire consequences of the disease. This was necessary to aid in reducing the spread of the disease in the country. Similarly, the findings made in this study suggest that, although the media had engaged in intense use of fear frames, which created fear and panic among media users, this was necessary. Some participants believed that the harsh tones and fear frames adopted by the media were necessary to control Ghanaians' perceptions of susceptibility to the virus and eventually reduce the rapidity of the spread of the virus. In agreement with this, Via et al. (2020) have already found that using such frames and coverage styles while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic was critical to making people realise they are highly susceptible to contracting and dying.

The extracts below, for example, give an account of the perceptions of the necessity for the media to have been intense and harsh during their reportage of the pandemic in the country. For instance, the second extract provides evidence that some participants perceived that the media is not to blame entirely for the levels of fear and panic within society. This is because the media only acted as a tool for information dissemination, and the media in Ghana was simply reporting on what they had observed and how they had observed it.

The extracts indicate that participants believed that while fear and panic frames and reporting styles were key elements in influencing how the public perceived the entire pandemic, these activities were normal and natural media functions that were inevitable. The participant, therefore, consider the intense nature of fear and death frames, exaggeration, and sensational reporting as unavoidable elements of the media's normative functions to keep the people informed and educated about the pandemic in the country.

> *"I don't blame the media. I would rather say the media did a very good job because it's a novel situation and they are also taking reports from the World Health Organisation and other experts. So the media is only trying to play its role as informing the general public as to what is going on and what we should do to keep safe and also reporting on the active cases and all other eventualities around the world as well." - WR09 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

> *"Alright, so I think it helped because naturally the fear that people keep talking about that the media was imposing on us, it came with the virus. The fear came with the virus. So it's not as if the media was*

trying to put a fear that wasn't available. The fear was already there. When it comes to Ghana like this, there were so many people who didn't believe in the coronavirus. With all the measures that were put in place, the wearing of nose masks, they didn't believe in that. So even though the media exaggerated it, I think it helped to a point because at a point people saw it be old. If I don't do this, it means definitely I'm going to control this virus." - FGR07 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

It was also found that the high level of fear and panic frames adopted by the media in reporting health crises such as the coronavirus pandemic helped in shaping people's perception of the severity of the virus, leading to positive protective actions (Melki et al., 2022; Leigh et al., 2020; Chang, 2011).

8.1.2 Adherence to Safety Protocols and Vaccination

The study found that participants perceived some positive implications attached to how the media in Ghana had reported on the pandemic in the country. Thus, some participants were convinced that, to some extent, the frames, tones, and narrative techniques adopted by the media while they covered the pandemic were not entirely negative. Some of the participants from the focus group discussions and the workshop asserted that educational and informational frames, assurance frames, narratives, and reporting styles focused on educating the public were essential in influencing positive behaviours and perceptions from the participants.

For instance, one participant from the focus group discussion opined that they had observed positive perceptions within themselves due to the kinds of media content they had encountered during the pandemic. The extract further implies that due to the

kinds of information the media had churned out about the virus, the sources of information they accessed, and the detailed interpretations they offered, the participants became highly knowledgeable in matters concerning the virus. This shaped how they perceived the virus in its entirety.

> *"I think it influenced me positively in the sense that I've got to know whatever I need to do in order not to get infected by the virus and what's happening around me, how it affects me because I was not going to school. So everything was explained in they interviewed stakeholders who had something to say about it. So the coverage was really comprehensive when I was listening to it." - FGR01 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

Some studies, such as Fawole, Thomas and Ibitade (2012) and Asaolu et al. (2016), indicate that the media's coverage while reporting on crucial health issues critically affects how media consumers perceive and behave towards health issues. The studies and many others found that the Nigerian media and the frames they adopted were crucial in influencing citizens' perceptions of the Ebola virus. Berry, Warf-Higgins and Naylor (2007) also found in their earlier study that the BBC and CNN adopted frames that pushed audiences into adopting favourable health behaviours during health crises. This study made similar findings.

As Via et al. (2020) found, how the media reported on the coronavirus pandemic was critical in informing media consumers of which vaccines to take and their potency in averting the pandemic. The findings made from the study indicate that the framing approaches adopted by the media in Ghana had critical implications on media consumers' adherence to safety protocols during the pandemic. Some of the

participants believed that the reportage engaged by the media was highly influential in educating the public about the safety protocols as well as preventive measures. Thus, as the media were consistent with their informational reporting styles and the use of the death frames, media consumers became more aware of COVID-19 safety protocols and preventive measures.

> *"I heard about educational information. We were educated on how to socially distance ourselves. And I was also informed or educated on how to socially distance ourselves and how to stay at home if you don't have any place to go in order not to mingle yourself. There was a particular week that nobody was supposed to go out just for one week but supposed to stay home." - WR12 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

> *"Avoiding crowded places, and washing your hands often. They actually taught us how to wash our hands very well with soap and under running water. And then effective wearing of nose masks" - WR09 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

The participant in the above extract notes that due to educational media information, they learned about critical safety protocols necessary for mitigating the pandemic in the country. The above extract thus affirms the finding and is also in consonance with the agenda-setting and framing theories. Media coverage of the pandemic, was done through the selection of stories and angles, which were considered newsworthy by the selected media in Ghana which were critical in shaping media consumers' knowledge and perceptions of the virus in the country (Govender, 2010)

Furthermore, the study found that media coverage of the pandemic was influential in improving adherence to vaccination programs nationwide. Some participants

acknowledged that due to the reporting strategies that the media in Ghana engaged in, the public felt more inclined to adhere to vaccination programs. One of the participants mentioned that because the media paid attention to celebrities taking vaccines when they reported on the pandemic, media consumers were also inclined to adhere to such news and take vaccines.

> *"So I also think the media did a good job in the sense that some celebrities during the vaccination when they were taking the COVID-19 vaccines, some celebrities availed themselves in taking the shots for us to know that it was safe. So if we also take it and maybe stick to the precautions, we'll be safe." - WR12 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

The extract above supports the idea that some participants believed that media reports on celebrities' engagement with vaccination programs were essential in influencing them to accept the vaccines. The participant asserts that through media reports on celebrities taking the vaccines, media consumers in Ghana were convinced that the vaccination program and processes were safe. As Griffin (2011) points, in setting a media agenda, the media's power is limited as the media consumers still possess the freedom of choice. As seen from the extract above, the media influences their behaviour to accept the vaccination but does not coerce them in any way.

8.1.3 Conspiracy Theories

The study further found that Ghana's media consumers were exposed to conspiracy theories concerning the pandemic and vaccination programs. The study found that due to the exaggeration of news within the media in Ghana and other seemingly

sensational forms of journalism, media consumers were exposed to some misinformation concerning the pandemic.

Berry, Wharf-Higgins and Naylor (2007) and Dudo, Dahlstrom and Brossard (2007) account that sensational reporting during times of global health crisis is likely to lead to the development of misinformation. This, in turn, is also likely to lead to audiences believing information about the health crisis that may not necessarily be true. The findings suggest that the media in Ghana engaged in diverse reports that misinformed audiences and led, gradually, to the development of unfounded theories about the origins of the virus and the purposes of vaccination programs.

One of the core 'comspiracy theories' that the study noted had been diffused within the media due to the coverage patterns Ghanaian media organisations engaged in concerned with how the virus emanated and spread. The study noted that participants perceived that they were influenced by media reports to believe that the virus was developed as a population management mechanism by scientists in the West and from China.

One participant mentions explicitly that they were made to believe that the virus was created in a laboratory in China to intentionally reduce the world's population so the Asian country could eventually become the world's economic giant. In the extract below, for instance, the interviewee alludes that they believed the virus originated from China in a move to secure economic dominance clandestinely due to how the selected media in Ghana framed the virus's origins.

> *"Okay, so one of the conspiracy theories we heard was that China intentionally manufactured the virus so that they could get rid of half*

of the world's population so that they would become a new world giant." - WR14 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

Information from another participant agrees with the finding that indeed, the media was critical in shaping the perceptions of media consumers especially in relation to misinformation concerning the origin of the virus. The participant notes that as a result of media information, they were made to believe that the virus was an experiment gone wrong in some laboratories in the Chinese regions.

"I heard it was something that was at a lab in China. And that it was an experiment that got out of hand that is the reason why today we have that virus." - WR11 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

To add more to the wide range of misconceptions about the virus that the selected media in Ghana had created due to their coverage of the pandemic, the study found that some participants believed that the virus was an element of warfare developed by the West. Thus, some other participants believed the virus was developed as a biological weapon for warfare. In the following extract, the participant gives a rather detailed account of what they had learned in the media concerning how the virus developed and evolved.

The detail in the narrative expresses the extent to which media framing from misinformation had informed the participant in depth, although the information cannot be verified in any way. The seeming worth of knowledge and connection further prove that the participant had been deeply impacted by the wrong narrative within the media on the pandemic's origins.

"So I heard coronavirus is a biological weapon and it first came into existence, during the SARS, when the SARS epidemic took place.

That was, I think, And when you look at the track record of all these epidemic diseases, something like Ebola. When Ebola first came about, it was in the 90s. And I think that the patent was taken from Africa by the whites. It was an ethnographer or something who went into the caves. A white man who got infected went into the villages, infected the local people. I think it first broke out in Congo. And after the virus had incubated. got infected. I think the doctor, the white people got a patent from an African doctor. That's how they got the patent for the Ebola virus. And how the virus was, it couldn't last that long to cause so much damage. If a person gets infected with it, the person dies within a week or so. So the virus doesn't live long enough to infect another person." - WR07 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

The study also found that conspiracy theories that were propagated within the media did not only concern the origins and evolution of the pandemic. The findings made in the study also suggest that participants also perceived that their perceptions of the vaccination programs had been impacted significantly due to the kinds of media reports they were exposed to. The study found, therefore, that participants held negative perceptions of vaccination programs in the country. Participants perceived that they had encountered stories in the media that enforced the narrative that the vaccination programs were doctored to reduce the population in Africa.

Thus, the findings indicate that some participants believed that the vaccines were made to kill Africans to reduce the African population. Some of the participants also believed that the vaccination programs were developed to alter the sex of Africans genetically. In contrast, others believed that the vaccines were made to alter reproductive tendencies in male Africans.

“Another one is, they said when you take the vaccine, gradually you become, some of you become gay. Yes, you work like, you behave like ladies. Okay. Say, I heard that” - WR09 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

“The conspiracy theory about the vaccines that were sent to Africa is to kill like half of the blacks because they said there are some vaccines that they said should be used in black communities only. So it's like it's a bad drug that they want to use to annihilate most blacks.” - WR02 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)

It is interesting to add that due to the different reported narratives within the media that fuelled unfounded perceptions and conspiracy theories about the pandemic, some participants perceived that the whole pandemic never existed. It was a scheme created within the media.

In postulating the three functions of the media frames, (Billings, 2004) underscores the media’s power of selection, emphasis, and exclusion. However, if not performed well, these three functions can affect the acceptability and believability of the media message (Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001).

Thus, some participants believed that they were not well convinced that the pandemic had either entered the country or existed at all, owing to the structure of media coverage of the pandemic that ensued within the Ghanaian media space. Some of the participants perceived that while the media was actively engaged in providing statistical data on infections and mortality rates, the inability of the media to properly show images of victims of the virus and dead persons raised huge question marks about the truth of the existence of the virus in the country and globally to a large extent.

For some participants, the lack of pictorial evidence to back infection and death claims within the media feeds even more to the assertion that the virus did not exist. Thus, there is no evidence to back the realism of the existence of the virus, its high rates of infections, and mortality rates.

> *"So when Ghana reported its first case, the media started reporting on COVID and all of a sudden, every death that occurred in our country was as a result of COVID. And meanwhile, they weren't giving us facts to make us really understand oh this person actually died of COVID because some relatives or family members of dead people came out to say that their relatives or a loved one actually died of something which was not COVID but these. There were hospitals that were denying postmortems to actually let the individuals know the course of the death of their loved ones or family members. So most of the pictures were…. like each day, let's ask ourselves how many Ghanaians do we have in our country? And from that day they reported some of them like the numbers are fake. Meanwhile the person could have died of asthma and blood pressure rising, all the other deaths. But all of a sudden, any death in Ghana was COVID. It wasn't accidents, it wasn't malaria, it wasn't cholera. And every death was centered on COVID. Meanwhile it's a lie, people actually died of other factors and not just COVID." - FGR11 (Source: Field Interview, 2023)*

In the extract provided above, the participant claims their inability to believe the existence of the virus in totality because of how the selected media in Ghana conducted their coverage of the pandemic. The participant also claims that as soon as

the virus emerged in the country, the media was highly centred on reporting every death caused by the coronavirus. Thus, the focus on the pandemic, how the media primed it, and all deaths associated with it to the extent that other killer diseases received very little coverage suddenly deemed us a critical point for discussion by the participant.

Some participants opined that because of the nature of media coverage in Ghana, they found it hard to believe the virus existed until they contracted it themselves. That suggests that the participants believed that media reports were not convincing enough to actuate the pandemic's existence and its implications. This was largely because while the media was reporting that the virus existed and the pandemic was real, it was also engaged in other forms of reporting and information sharing that pointed to other conspiracy theories.

> *"So I didn't believe when they publish the news and broadcast it that there is COVID-19 until tested positive. Yes, because actually they have to run a test before they can say that. So when I tested positive I had to stay away for like two months and wasn't taking lectures and just send the test together. Even though I didn't believe it, but when I tested for COVID-19, I realised the virus is there and it was too much."*
> *- FGR10 (Source: Field Interviews, 2023)*

These findings are like that of Faasse and Newby (2020) in their analysis of the consequences of media reportage on media consumers' perception of the coronavirus pandemic in Australia, where they found that the audience perceived the pandemic as considering misconceptions and misinformation. This finding also receives backing from Nagler et al. (2020), who argue that the different media chronicles within the

media space about the coronavirus pandemic caused the conspiracy theories and spread of falsehood about the pandemic.

Many other studies on the portrayal of the coronavirus pandemic and the frames employed by the media suggest that the media reportage influences the understanding of people about the pandemic as well as the hesitancy level of media consumers in accepting vaccination in the face of a multiplicity of media narratives (Machingaidze & Wiysonge, 2021; Wilson & Wiyosonge, 2020; Gershon & Gneezy, 2021).

8. 2 Chapter Summary

This section of the study was interested in analysing data collected from participatory workshops and focus group discussions. This section of the study was interested primarily in understanding the implications of the framing mechanisms and the style of reporting that the media adopted while reporting on the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. This section, thus, sought to understand how exposure to the different frames and coverage styles and patterns had influenced the perceptions of media users towards the virus. The findings made in this study show a high level of consistency with many studies that have been conducted with similar objectives. The findings made in the study point primarily to the idea that the frames adopted for coverage of the pandemic had critical implications on how media consumers perceived the pandemic. The study found that participants perceived that they had been impacted in three main dimensions. These include the feelings and perceptions of fear and anxiety towards the virus and perceptions of conspiracy theories about the virus and associated vaccination programs. First, the findings point out that the nature of reports that the media published during the pandemic era instilled some fear in media consumers. The study found that this had positive and negative outcomes, as

participants believed that the media over-sensationalised their reports, although this was necessary. Secondly, the findings show that participants were influenced by media reports to show higher levels of adherence to safety and prevention measures due to how the media framed the pandemic. Lastly, the study found that the nature of media coverage observed in Ghana might have enacted or propagated conspiracy theories among media consumers.

Finally, the study found that participants perceived heightened adherence to COVID-19 safety, prevention, and vaccination protocols and programs. The findings, therefore, lead to the conclusion that the frames and styles of reportage that media consumers had encountered during the coronavirus pandemic era critically impacted how they perceived the virus and other significant issues associated with it in the country.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.0 Introduction

This study investigated media coverage and framing of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. The core of the study was to understand how some selected online news portals in Ghana reported on and framed issues surrounding the pandemic in the country. The study adopted a holistic framing analysis technique and qualitative methodological approaches to understanding how issues were framed, and why the frames and coverage strategies that online media journalists and news editors adopted had impacted perceptions about the pandemic in the country.

This chapter of the study essentially concludes the study. The chapter looks critically at providing a summary of the key chapters that have been discussed in this study. Hence, the chapter presents a basic breakdown of the key issues discussed in the previous chapters of the study. Furthermore, the chapter also presents a summary of the key findings that were made in this study. Thus, the chapter presents crucial findings that the researcher made while studying media framing of issues regarding the pandemic in Ghana and related matters. The summary of the key findings has been presented as thematised in this chapter of the study in line with the core research objectives of the study.

Additionally, a general conclusion to the core arguments raised in this study is also discussed in this chapter. The chapter, therefore, draws from the core findings of this study to conclude on the core nature of media framing of the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on the country. Hence, a conclusion to the study is also contained in

this chapter. Furthermore, the study also considers the findings and the general conclusions of the study to develop some critical recommendations. The chapter discusses key suggestions to aid in improving media reportage and framing of crucial global or national health crises such as this pandemic. Furthermore, suggestions are discussed in line with key approaches the Ghanaian media (especially the online landscape) can consider when reporting on issues that border on framing in general. The chapter further discusses some suggestions for further research as well.

9.1 Summary of Chapters

The research is divided into nine chapters. The context, issue description, aims, and research questions are highlighted in the study's introduction, Chapter One (1). Furthermore, Chapter One of this research described the origins, development, and effects of the coronavirus pandemic on people and companies in Ghana as well as globally. A critical evaluation of empirical knowledge on media framing, media coverage and framing of health issues and the coronavirus pandemic was offered. Chapter Two (2) conducts a thorough literature review on how Ghanaian and global media outlets covered and reported on the COVID-19 pandemic. In essence, the second chapter critical analysis and shows the extent of knowledge on critical concepts and issues that undergird this study such as media coverage and framing of health issues and pandemics. Chapter Three (3) examined the study's theoretical foundation. The Media Framing and Agenda Setting theories of communication, which were used to develop the theoretical framework for this study, were discussed at length in this chapter. The researcher further engaged in an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of both theories to exact their relevance for this study

Chapter Four (4) describes the researcher's methodology for examining online media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana. The chapter discussed the research paradigm as well as the research approach which engraved this study in the interpretivist and qualitative research tradition. Hence, qualitative sampling approaches, data collection and analysis techniques were discussed in this chapter. These approaches allowed the researcher to collect the necessary data while applying the appropriate analytical and presentation tools to answer the research questions. Most importantly, there is great emphasis on the use of the thematic analysis approach to consolidate and analyse qualitative data from all the different data-gathering activities that the researcher adopted for the study.

Based on the data gathered in Phase One, the first two research questions are addressed and the results are presented in Chapter Five (5). The chapter used qualitative content analysis to analyse the four media outlets' most prominent issues reported about the coronavirus pandemic. The chapter again addressed the dominating frames used by the chosen media in reporting the pandemic to address the second research question, likewise based on a content analysis of sampled news articles published on the four news platforms during the study period.

The third and fourth research questions are addressed in Chapter Six (6). The chapter presents data on the principal news sources for news reports on the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, it contextualises the phases of news coverage about the pandemic and the news stories that characterised each phase. The results of the qualitative in-depth interviews with journalists on the key influencing factors that impacted their selection of reporting frames are presented in Chapter Seven (7). Chapter Eight (8) of this study presents looked at presenting and discussing data in line with answering the last research question of the study, which asked how the public

was impacted by how the coronavirus was framed. Chapter Nine (9) of this study looks critically at providing a summary and general conclusion to the key issues discussed in this study.

9.2 Summary of Key Findings

9.2.1 Main Issues that Dominated Coronavirus Reportage in Ghanaian Media

The study's first objective was to identify and understand the main issues that dominated Ghanaian media coverage of the pandemic in the country. From 208 examined stories, 2719 paragraphs in total were taken into consideration. As the themes of *Government Response, Covid Corporate Social Responsibility, Impact of the Pandemic, Scientific and Medical Information, Covid-Novation, Data, and statistics* were revealed from close reading and immersion into the obtained 208 news articles, the selected news media case studies helped define for the public what they should be thinking about concerning the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, the study found these six issues to dominate media coverage of the pandemic in the country.

The most prevalent issue covered by the chosen media outlets in their coverage of the virus in Ghana was *"Government Response*." Of all the news pieces examined throughout the pandemic, it had the highest percentage score of 31. Stories that focused on these issues discussed the core involvements of the government of Ghana in dealing with the pandemic and its effects on citizens. These stories were highly focused on issues concerning the Government’s response and mitigation strategies against the pandemic in general, response strategies in aiding businesses to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and on human lives as well. The study found that a significant proportion of the stories that focused on *government response* relied on the presidential addresses that the president delivered intermittently in response to the

health crisis. It is also worth noting that *government response* themes that emerged as the most prevalent issue that dominated the selected media space during pandemic coverage were heralded by partisan-political discussions about the Government's activities in mitigating the crisis.

By emphasising Government's response, the media sought to establish the role of the national government in mitigating the pandemic and its implications (Acharya, 2023). Furthermore, focusing on this issue has implications to present the government as being accountable and transparent. This further has implications for building public trust among citizens as the media continually projects the Government as making efforts to alleviate the crisis. Additionally, the focus on the Government's response and making it a dominant issue that the media focused on while it covered the pandemic implies that the media had shown a keen sense of responsibility in acting as an independent check on power in the Ghanaian society. Essentially, a critical linkage between media coverage of government activities during the pandemic and government tolerance for this is established in the extent of focus on the Government's response (Livingstone, 1994). This has critical implications for the advancement of media freedom and democracy in Ghana even in times of crucial health crisis situations.

Stories that focused on the *Impact of the Pandemic* came in second place with a percentage score of 26%. Authors such as Siddiquei and Khan (2020), undertaking a similar study, found that the media reported very extensively on the impact of the coronavirus more than any other issue. This implies, therefore, that the media are often focused on issues that cover the impacts of the pandemic on businesses and human life as they reported on the pandemic. This study made similar findings as it

identified that the pandemic's impacts were critical issues highlighted in media reportage of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana.

The *impact of the Pandemic* category of issues, as found in this study, comprises articles or subcategories of articles highlighting how the pandemic has affected the nation's economy and people's health. The media outlets chosen to cover this subject covered the pandemic's economic repercussions, including business closures, employment losses, attempts at economic recovery, etc.

Scientific and medical information issues ranked third with 16% of all sampled stories. This category covers all narratives that concentrate on the pandemic's scientific underpinnings, such as the virus's genesis and transmission, the creation of treatments and vaccinations, and the most recent developments in the field. This frame emphasised the biological nature of the virus, in line with Ophir et al.'s (2021) investigation of the framing of the new coronavirus pandemic in the Italian media, which showed that the scientific frames were critical highlights of the media narrative on the pandemic.

The fourth-placed *Covid-Novation*, with 12%, was a significant issue that also dominated the reportage by the four media outlets as mentioned in Chapter Three (3). This covered themes that concerned innovativeness that was witnessed during the COVID-19 period. The researcher combined the terms COVID-19 and innovation to represent news stories that focused on the positive issues that arose during the pandemic. Stories under this theme imply the positive connotations and implications realised due to the emergence of the pandemic.

Data and Statistics and *Covid Corporate Social Responsibility* issues ranked fifth and sixth, respectively, in terms of the percentage of coverage.

9.2.2 Dominant Frames Used to Report the Pandemic in Ghana

As Kafle (2014) notes, the relevance of media is engraved in the idea that frames contextualise news stories and give them the needed interpretations for media consumers to understand issues. Furthermore, Iyanger (2005) posits that framing concerns the selection and, in some instances, re-selection of critical issues to represent news stories for comprehension. This study was focused on understanding the key news frames that the selected online media in Ghana adopted while they reported on the pandemic in the country. The study's findings suggest that the selected media organisations adopted five different frames while they reported on the coronavirus pandemic. These include political, social, public health crises, on-the-brighter-side, and economic news frames. The study found that the most prevalent news frame adopted was the political frame. The data gathered indicated that 31% of the examined stories focused on reporting the pandemic from a political angle. Therefore, the implication is that a larger majority of the overall coverage of the pandemic over the period under review was reported through political lenses and with political implications. These stories focused on political angles while considering government policies and partisan political struggles during the pandemic. The dominant use of political frames in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic has significant implications for health communication and general reporting. Such forms of coverage, can erode trust in health experts, leading to skepticism and inconsistencies in health information dissemination (Misganaw, 2010). Political representations and interests around health concerns can give rise to political frameworks, which can aggravate public health issues and draw less attention to health-related issues. Public opinion on health problems can become polarised, as political identities are linked to health-related behaviours and attitudes.

This may worsen public disinterest in mitigating actions and reduce cooperation acro ss political parties (Solvoll & Hoiby, 2023). When employing political frames, reporters who lean toward particular political groupings may compromise their objectivity, ethical norms, and journalistic integrity. Consequently, while reporting on health-related topics, it is essential to take both national and objective viewpoints into account (Afrin et al., 2020).

Political frames that were adopted in reporting the pandemic were followed by the use of social frames. The data showed that 26% of the stories carried the social perspective of the pandemic. The Social Frame was used to report on the social repercussions of the pandemic, including how it impacts families, communities, and individuals, as well as how those affected were coping with the challenges and limitations that came along with the pandemic. Reports on the pandemic were focused on how it has impacted people's social lives and general wellbeing. Weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals are just a few examples of the many social events Ghanaians place a high value on since they provide an avenue for showing support and affection for the participants. The constraints brought on by the pandemic have destroyed them and several other things.

The study further found that the *Public Health Crisis frame* was also adopted to cover the pandemic. 24% of the total number of stories evaluated for this study was focused on depicting the pandemic significantly as a public health issue. The chosen media covered the coronavirus pandemic as a public health issue, revealing the virus as a critical social health problem. The media successfully achieved this by emphasising the pandemic's impact on health. By continuously informing and educating the public on the nature of the virus and its variants as they develop, the frame emphasised the potential harm and risk posed by the pandemic. Using this frame, information was

presented on recent discoveries relating to the causes and signs of COVID-19. As a result, the audience can feel afraid after hearing this frame.

It is essential to note that while most of the frames this study identified carried a more or less gloomy or negative connotation, the study found one positive-toned frame. The study identified the *On-the-brighter-side frame* as depicting or representing the positive implications of the coronavirus pandemic in the country. Although this made up just 12% of the total number of frames adopted during the research period, it contributed to the overall understanding to the overall nature of media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana. The *On-the-brighter-side* frame signifies frames, story angles, and media narratives that sought to, in a way, downplay the pandemic's negative impacts and severity while focusing on the positive implications of the pandemic.

The *Economic Frame* was the fifth most prevalent frame employed by the understudied news outlets to report on the coronavirus epidemic. This frame illustrates how the epidemic affected the economy of people, companies, organisations, and the government. Reports on job losses, company closures, and the repercussions on the wider economy are among the stories that might be framed using this framework. Additionally, anecdotes of gains and losses in money and business closures and their impacts are included. Even though the coronavirus pandemic is a health problem, many people's money and health were reportedly affected.

9.2.3 Major News Sources Used to Report the Pandemic in Ghana

The study was further interested in understanding the major news sources that journalists in Ghana had used while covering the pandemic in the country. Brodle et al. (2003) note that the sources of news that journalists access information from are critical in shaping the narratives behind the stories that the media present. The authors

further aver that the media tend to adopt a multiple-source approach when reporting on crucial health crises such as epidemics. Thus, the media tends to focus on collecting information from many news sources and not rely on single information sources. This study found that the selected media in Ghana also adopted multiple-source approaches while covering the pandemic. The study found that Ghana's media relied on five core news sources in collecting information and reporting the news to media consumers concerning the pandemic: *government officials and politicians, medical experts and health organisations affected community members, corporate executives, and the international media*. The analysis proved that government officials were the most frequently contacted news sources as journalists in Ghana covered the pandemic in the country. The study found that nearly half (45%) of the news stories on the pandemic were sourced from *government officials and politicians* in Ghana. This links quite well to the earlier finding that political frames and issues concerning government activities and interventions were some of the top frames and narrative issues that the media focused on while reporting on the pandemic. Thus, it becomes clear that while most of the stories were sourced from political elites and government officials in the country, most of the issues and frames that dominated media coverage aligned in that direction and covered government and political perspectives.

Furthermore, the findings affirmed many studies on coronavirus media coverage that the media relied on sourcing information from *medical experts and health organisations*. It is essential to note that up to 20% of the stories concerning the pandemic published by online media platforms were sourced from *medical experts and health organisations*. It is, therefore, not surprising that a significant portion of the dominant frames and issues that the media focused on covered scientific and technology-related issues. Thus, as the media focused quite keenly on reporting facts

and opinions from medical experts and health organisations, media coverage was highly likely to be dominated by scientific issues and frames.

It is worth noting further that the media also paid attention to sourcing information from *affected community* members. The *Affected Communities* are made up of companies, people, and organisations that have suffered as a result of the pandemic, as well as sick people, their families, and the deceased. The media relied on business executives and leaders for information when conveying the efforts made by corporate organisations to lessen the impact of the pandemic on their operations and finances. Additionally, as some companies and organisations decided to help afflicted individuals and provide assistance to pandemic victims, the media also brought attention to their good actions. They gave *corporate executives* a platform to explain how they supported those individuals and their motivations.

The *International Media and other sources*, such as social media, religious leaders, and economists, collectively got 9% attribution. Be it that the pandemic is a global crisis, *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* monitored and reported valuable information about the pandemic from the international media such as BBC and CNN when they deemed it necessary. This was for their readers to appreciate better the nature of the pandemic and compare the situations relative to how they occurred in Ghana. The four selected media monitored the social media platforms to observe public discussions and opinions about the pandemic and report things they found newsworthy regarding emerging trends and issues.

9.2.4 Key Phases of Media Coverage of the Pandemic in Ghana

As Downs (1972) puts it, media coverage of issues is transient. Thus, the media hardly focuses on one thing for a long time. Hence, more often than not, while the media covers critical health crises, the media does so in stages or phases. The results of this study show that *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* adopted a five-phased reporting strategy for the coronavirus epidemic in Ghana. The analysis corroborated literature suggesting that media coverage of health crises happens in stages, beginning with sporadic coverage of the pandemic, followed by peak reporting, and ending with declining reporting. The content analysis of news stories as part of this study revealed *Early Responsiveness, Heightened Concern, Critique, Review, Community Activism, and Resilience and Recovery* as the phases of media coverage of the pandemic by the four selected news platforms in Ghana.

9.2.5 Key Factors that Influenced the Selection of News Frames

To respond to research question number five, which examined the factors that affected the news framing decisions made by journalists for *myjoyonline.com, Citinewsroom.com, peacefmonline.com,* and *gna.org.gh* when reporting on the coronavirus epidemic, four health reporters from each of the media outlets under investigation were chosen for in-person interviews. The data analysis revealed that various factors contributed to the different angles journalists used when reporting on the pandemic. These frames were concerned with personal experience, organisational and/or editorial policies, house style, and significant difficulties related to pandemic coverage that influenced journalism in a specific way. To be precise, the study discovered that systemic, structural, and, to some extent, a more pragmatic approach to reporting, as a result of the nature of the pandemic and its repercussions on the

nation, were the key influencing elements that shaped how COVID-19 was framed in the Ghanaian news media.

The study identified four essential factors that affected the choice of frames and narratives for the pandemic coverage. According to the study, the pandemic in Ghana was covered by Ghanaian journalists in various ways. Certain frames were used more frequently than others depending on the implications of the virus and its global effects, editorial policies, house styles of the media organisations, the geographic perspective of the issues surrounding the pandemic, and the various information sources used. These factors result from the journalists' experiences and the institutional techniques Ghanaian media outlets use when reporting topics, they deem important and seek to emphasise.

9.2.6 Implications of Framing Techniques Adopted by Media Organisations on the Public

The study also sought to comprehend how typical Ghanaian media consumers were affected by the pandemic's media coverage. The researcher was hence keen on answering the question, 'To what extent did Ghanaians' perceptions and attitudes towards the coronavirus pandemic change due to the country's media coverage of the pandemic? The study's conclusions highlight that the type of coverage Ghanaian media outlets provided during the coronavirus pandemic period had positive and negative impacts. These included spreading fear and concern about the infection and education on following safety procedures. Furthermore, the study found that due to the nature of coverage that media consumers had been exposed to, some conspiracy theories regarding the origins and spread of the virus had emanated amongst media consumers in Ghana.

The results show that one of the most critical consequences of media framing on the public's perceptions and attitudes towards the virus was the emergence of fear and worry in Ghanaian society. The study discovered that the participants had experienced various degrees of anxiety and fear in response to the pandemic as a result of the frames that were used to cover it across the nation. In addition, people experienced various types of terror as a result of how the epidemic was covered in the nation.

According to the study's findings, some beneficial effects were recognised by participants due to the way Ghanaian media outlets covered the outbreak there. As a result, some participants were persuaded that the media's frames, tones, and narrative approaches to portray the pandemic were not wholly negative. Some participants in the focus group discussions and the workshop claimed that the public education-focused narratives, assurance frames, educational and informational frames, and reporting styles were crucial in influencing the participants' favourable behaviours and perceptions. The study discovered that media consumers were exposed to false information about the pandemic because of news amplification within the Ghanaian media and other supposedly dramatic kinds of journalism. According to the research, Ghana's media produced a variety of inaccurate claims or missinformation that eventually helped people establish incorrect notions about the causes of the virus and the goals of vaccination campaigns. This resulted in the development of different narratives and conspiracy theories surrounding the nature of the pandemic, its origins, spread, and vaccination programs and vaccines.

9.3 Conclusion

The core of this study was to investigate the overall nature of online media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. The study set out to understand the core frames adopted

to represent issues regarding the pandemic in Ghana. The study also sought to understand how these frames adopted by journalists were developed and how they impacted the perceptions and attitudes of Ghanaian media consumers regarding the pandemic. The study produced various findings and conclusions. First, the findings point to the conclusion that the media in Ghana focused on different issues while reporting on the pandemic. The findings point towards the conclusion that online media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana was not focused on singular issues. Instead, the reportage of the pandemic had taken a multiple-issues approach as is natural and regular of media coverage of crucial social problems within the society.

Furthermore, the study concludes that coverage of the pandemic in Ghana assumed a rather political outlook. The study's findings point out that the media in Ghana focused most of their stories on reporting on political and government issues. This is well highlighted in the large number of stories that focused on government response strategies, as well as partisan political debates about the pandemic and its impacts on Ghanaians. Thus, as the media focused a lot of their attention on these issues, the overall nature of coverage of the pandemic had become tilted more toward the political direction.

However, it is essential to note that this does not defeat the fact that the study found that the media had also shown significant interest in reporting the pandemic from different angles and perspectives. For instance, the study found that some significant levels of attention were paid by the media in Ghana in reporting the pandemic through coverage of the impacts of the pandemic. However, even in covering the impacts of the pandemic on Ghanaian businesses and human life, the media had assumed a more political approach in leading these discussions.

Furthermore, the nature of the adopted frames and the prevailing frames that dominated media coverage of the pandemic in the country prompted the acceptance of the conclusion that governmental and political lenses were the bedrock of the coverage of the pandemic in the country. The study found that political frames dominated media coverage of the pandemic. This indicates further and provides more evidence to suggest that while online media organisations in Ghana covered the pandemic in the country, they had taken a keener interest in representing issues through political perspectives. Again, other critical frames also point out a multi-frame approach that characterised overall media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in the country. The use of social frames and other frames observed in the study to be largely negative in nature also makes the case for adopting a more negative tone of coverage of the pandemic in the country. For instance, the study observed that while engaging other frames, such as social and economic frames, the media was more focused on depicting the virus as a destroyer – causing destruction to human lives, businesses, and properties and halting regular social activities. These frames that were engaged more often by the media suppose a gloomy and negative tone of coverage.

However, it goes without saying that the media had, in some instances, portrayed stories that sought to give hope and reduce levels of fear and anxiety within the Ghanaian citizenry. Thus, the study found that the On-the-brighter-side frame was also engaged as a positive frame to depict the positive implications of the pandemic and its impacts. Consequently, the findings aided the conclusion that while the frames adopted in representing the pandemic were political in nature, they were also highly negatively toned, with very little yet significant patches of positivity attached to them.

Additionally, the study concludes that the political nature of the coverage of the pandemic, as evidenced by the dominant issues and frames that the media had paid attention to, could be due to the news or information sources that the media paid attention to while covering the pandemic. The study found that the media relied highly on government and political elite sources as news and information when covering the pandemic. This could be translated as the reason behind the political nature of issues and frames that also dominated the media. Furthermore, the media relied on health experts and the international media as news sources to provide the needed education and interpretation of a somewhat unknown pandemic.

The study further concludes that news frames selected to depict and portray the coronavirus pandemic emanated from different reasons. Thus, the study notes that different factors accounted for the selection of news frames. This implies that different reasons influenced journalists who reported on the pandemic. The study identified four essential factors that affected the choice of frames and narratives for the pandemic coverage. According to the study, the pandemic in Ghana was covered by Ghanaian journalists in various ways. Certain frames were used more frequently than others depending on the implications of the virus and its global effects, editorial policies, house styles of the media organisations, the geographic perspective of the issues surrounding the pandemic, and the various information sources used.

Furthermore, the findings made in the study point out that the reportage engaged by online media in the country was strategic and followed a phase-by-phase approach. The study found that the nature of the coverage had assumed a stage-by-stage approach that covered the initial origination of the pandemic through to the spread, large-scale impact, and the resulting decline stage. Although identified within existing literature as standard or normative of media coverage of issues, the phase-to-phase

approach was identified as a novelty, and it was impactful in ensuring that the media in Ghana had accorded a more comprehensive reportage of the pandemic.

Again, the study was interested in understanding the overall impact of media coverage on media consumers in Ghana and their perceptions of the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana. The study's findings point out that the media was critical in shaping the perceptions of media consumers concerning the pandemic. However, the study concludes that as a result of the nature of media coverage of the pandemic, media consumers in Ghana developed high levels of fear and anxiety towards the disease.

9.4 Recommendations

The researcher suggests the following recommendations based on the findings made in this study.

- The researcher suggests that in order to improve the nature of reportage on such critical health crises as the pandemic, it is essential that journalists receive advanced levels of health reporting training. The study found that one of the key issues that impacted how journalists covered the pandemic in the country was the low levels of training in health reporting. It is therefore suggested that journalists who show interest in health reporting are trained through government grants and NGO aids to improve the general standards of health reporting.
- It is further suggested that media policymakers, enforcers, and government agencies responsible for media regulation formulation pay critical attention to the implications of ‘fake news’ and misinformation during the pandemic. The study noted some heightened levels of misinformation and disinformation within the media domain. Furthermore, the study found that fake news was critical in

shaping the narrative concerning the pandemic. Thus, 'fake news' was found to be a key challenge for journalists while they reported on the pandemic. Therefore, media policy and regulation must be directed towards regulating the flow of fake news during crucial times such as pandemics.

- Journalists, news editors and media practitioners, in general, are also advised to ensure a blend of both fear and positive frames to manage public behaviour during pandemics. The study found that media reportage leaned more towards the propagation of fear frames to ensure adherence towards prevention measures. However, it is essential to note that the propagation and promotion of fear frames also increased fear and anxiety within society. It is essential that journalists adopt critical strategies that blend both fear and positive frames to manage fear and yet keep health levels adherence to prevention measures.
- It is also essential that media organisations in Ghana, both private and state-owned, ensure the improvement in the general working conditions of journalists and news editors (especially health reporters). This is essential to properly condition such reporters and cushion them against health risks on the field. The study found that one of the key impediments to holistic media coverage during the pandemic was the lack of health-sensitive working environments that reduced health risks for journalists covering the pandemic. Hence, it is suggested that media organisation managers and the government ensure that the general working conditions of health reporters are improved significantly to aid them in avoiding crucial health risks while covering health crisis stories.

9.5 Suggestions for Further Research

- Other studies can consider focusing more directly on the direct implications of media coverage of the pandemic on Ghanaian media consumers. This study

was more focused on understanding the frames adopted by media organisations in the country and the possible implications on consumers' perceptions of the virus. The latter was, however, not considered in detail. It is suggested that other studies look more critically at understanding how media coverage of the pandemic impacted the perceptions of media consumers in the country. In this regard, the quantitative survey approach can be adopted to ensure the collection of data from a larger sample unit, while inferential statistical tools can be adapted to draw out more concrete findings that might link media coverage and exposure to certain health behaviours and perceptions concerning the pandemic.

- It is also suggested that other studies try to investigate, in detail, the key challenges that journalists faced while reporting on the pandemic. This study noted that media practitioners were plagued with diverse challenges. However, due to the nature of the study and the core objectives, the researcher was unable to explore those challenges at length and how they impacted media activities during the pandemic and beyond. Studies of this nature may be essential in aiding the development of policies that can improve the standards of health reporting and media activities in general in the country.
- Comparative media analysis can also be adopted by other studies to investigate differences between state-owned and privately owned media organisations and how they cover the pandemic in the country.
- Furthermore, other studies can also adopt a cross-regional approach to understanding the overall nature of online media coverage, as well as broadcast media coverage across Africa. Thus, while this study was focused on the nature of media coverage of the pandemic in Ghana, other studies can

expand the scope and investigate media coverage of the pandemic across Africa. Such studies can be critical to also understanding the differences in reportage across different nations on the African continent regarding the coronavirus pandemic.

- Other studies can dwell on news values and their implications for news coverage of health crisis. Thus, it is suggested that other studies engage a news values analysis of how the media covered the pandemic. This would be critical to understanding how journalists developed news and the main issues they considered in issues before presenting them as news. If done effectively , such studies can be crucial in providing further comprehension of how frames were developed and chosen to cover the pandemic.
- Again, other studies must pay critical focus to ethical dimensions of coverage of the pandemic. Hence, other studies can look at investigating the ethical challenges that journalists faced while engaged in the coverage of the pandemic. This could be key in developing a framework to guide ethical health reporting in the country.

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APPENDIX 1: PHASE 1 CODING PROTOCOL

News platform:

Headline:

Date of news story:

Number of Paragraph:

Author:

Issues categories:

Frames Category:

Instructions

Please, find below an explanation of expressions and symbols used for the different items on the coding sheet. Beside each item is a blank space which is an answer space. Please, indicate your answer in that space.

News platform: Choose the number beside the name of the news portal that is being coded. If you are coding for *Citififmonline.com* indicate the number "1" in the blank space, *myjoyonline.com* "2", *gna.org.gh* "3", and *peacefmonline.com* indicates "4".

Headline: Write down the title or headline of the article exactly as it appears in the newspaper.

Date of news story: This indicates the date the news article was published. The date should be designated as Day, followed by Month and followed by Year as in the sample below:

Date of news story: 01/12/2020

Total number of paragraphs: Indicate the number of paragraphs in the story in the space provided.

Issues categories: this refers to the various themes that are noted in the news story. Indicate in the blank space the digit that corresponds to the issue of choice. Indicate "1" for "Government Response"; "2" for Covid Corporate Social

Responsibility; “3” Impact of the pandemic; “4” for Data and Statistics; “5” for Scientific & Medical Information; “6” for Covid-Novation.

Please note that there may be more than one theme in a news story.

Issues	**Theme Description / Categories**	**Sub-categories**
Government Response	Government measures, politicisation, amendments and new laws, law enforcement, states and government agencies and departments Governance and Politics	• Restriction – social gatherings, Travel bans, funeral bans, • Police enforcement – arrest, Lockdown • State-sponsored educational and sensitisation campaigns • Mandatory quarantine, Closing & Reopening of schools. • Provision of PPEs etc. • Economic relief to individuals and SMMEs by government • President’s Nations Addresses and matters arising.
Covid Corporate Social Responsibility	The media also focused on interventions of private businesses non-governmental organisations and	• Supports of corporate organisations to public health institutions and frontline workers • Organisational measures taken by firms against the pandemic.

	individuals and their donations and supports. Corporate responses economic relief to individuals and small- and large-scale enterprises by the government. Charity, economic relief to individuals and SMMEs by government Organisational measures	• Corporate support and relief measures to their customers • Corporate supports and charity donations to affected communities.
Impact of the pandemic	The stories falling under the theme of social and economic impact comprised of the frame categories related to recommendations for reviving the economic crisis; social distancing; lockdown; charity; apathy; foreign help; the economic impact of the pandemic at domestic and	• Covid-restrictions- social distancing; lockdown; ban on mass gatherings, closure of schools and churches. • Impact of covid-restrictions • Economic impact of pandemic on business and livelihoods • The economic impact of the pandemic at domestic and international level • Impact of covid on education

	international level; Impact of covid on education	• Effect of the pandemic on religious lives of Ghanaians • Economic recovery, impact of lockdown, reliefs to individuals and organisation, impact on education, organisational measures, apathy and charity supports.
Data and Statistics	statistics, case counts, contract tracing, regional representation, facts and figures, domestics infection cases, mode of transmission, recovered patients and critically ill patients, death tolls.	• Stories related to mapping the evolving trends in domestic infection cases; facts and figures related to infected, recovered patients and critically ill patients. • Death toll counts - number of pandemic related deaths. • Global and international case counts • National and regional representation of cases
Scientific & Medical Information	Scientific & Medical Information incorporated frame categories related	• Preventive & protective measures such as; Recommendations for personal

	to mapping the evolving trends in domestic infection cases; facts and figures related to infected, recovered patients and critically ill patients; number of pandemic related deaths. It also includes preventive measures and protective measures to be adopted. Preventive & protective measures such as; Recommendations for personal protective actions, Washing of hands, Social distancing, Wearing masks.	protective actions, Washing of hands, Social distancing, Wearing masks • Education, warnings and recommendations from scientist, medical doctors, and health practitioners. • Medical updates; health related precautions, new findings regarding the causes and symptoms of pandemic • Treatment and Development of vaccines. • Scientific Development related to pandemic. • Regional representation of cases
Covid-Novation	The name Covid-Novation a coined term by the researcher combines "Covid" and "innovation" to represent news stories that focus on the positive	• Creative ways of fighting the pandemic: online schooling, virtual churches, using Zipline's network to deliver its COVID-19 vaccines.

	impacts of the pandemic. Stories under this theme imply the pandemic has stimulated new and creative solutions to existing problems.	• Opportunities that have characterise d the pandemic and how they have been ceased. • How the pandemic has accelerated digital innovations and transformations.

Frames Category: This item corresponds to the frame under which the thematic category is discussed. Once you have identified a thematic category, check the frame cluster to which the category belongs and indicate the frames by checking the choice listed. Indicate in the blank space the digit that corresponds to the frame of choice. In other words, for the frames of 'Public Health Crisis Frame'Protocol Reference indicate "1"; for Political Frame "2"; for Economic Crisis frame indicate "3" and for Social Frame "4"; for On-the-Brighter Side-Frame"5".

Issues	**Description / Categories**	**Sub-categories**
Public Health Crisis Frame	Recommendations for personal protective actions, statistics, case counts, contract tracing, regional representation, facts and figures, domestics infection cases, mode of transmission, recovered	• Up-to-date information about the virus and its transmission, as well as medical treatments and interventions. • Preventive measures: Covid safety protocols • Spread of the virus • Scale of pandemic: Statistics such as new cases, death toll, severe conditions, recovering rates, discharged rates.

	patients and critically ill patients, death tolls. Medical updates, medical updates; health related precautions; development of vaccines; new findings regarding the causes and symptoms of COVID-19.	• Contact tracing & Testing. • Prominence infection and deaths- Death of high-profile people because of covid • Adherence to protocols, public education, preparedness capabilities Preventive measures, washing of hands, protection by health agencies / workers, Wearing masks, Social distancing, Self-isolation.
Political Frame	Government measures, politicisation, amendments and new laws, law enforcement, states and government agencies and departments, Government interventions / responses	• Government interventions: relief packages to frontline workers, free water, and electricity • Government Policies & Restrictions: border closure, closing and reopening of schools, lockdown, Mandatory quarantine. • Ensuring compliance: Police enforcement – arrest, Executive instrument • Exposure of weak health and economic systems • Covid-related expenditure and corruption • Accusations and counter accusations of political players
Economic Crisis frame	Economic recovery, impact of lockdown, reliefs to individuals and organisation, impact on education, organisational	• Effect of pandemic on businesses and the effects on the overall economy: shutdown of businesses, shutdown of institutions

	measures, apathy and charity supports.	• Effect of pandemic restrictions to businesses: including job losses, business closures, low sales. • Financial loses and gains of individuals and businesses. • State revenue loss
Social Frame	Impact of lockdown, reliefs to individuals and organisation, impact on education, organisational measures, apathy, and charity supports.	• Pandemic's social consequences -challenges faced by individuals and marginalised groups, private or personal lives of individuals, personal stories of responders, individuals and groups are affected. • Illness, death, loss, and resilience • Emotional and psychological impact • Count of infested individuals / lives lost. • Show of support and care to individuals and affected persons
On-the-Brighter Side-Frame	As the name suggests this frame was used to frame the pandemic as a catalyst for positive transformation, innovation, and digitisation.	• Focus on the many ways in which novelty, adaptation. • Positive impact of the pandemic. • Promotion of hygienic living & positive social environmental changes • Business innovations as result of the pandemic

APPENDIX 2: PHASE 2 CODING PROTOCOL

News platform:

Headline:

Date of news story:

Number of Paragraph:

Author:

Sources / Attributions:

Instructions

Please, find below an explanation of expressions and symbols used for the different items on the coding sheet. Beside each item is a blank space which is an answer space. Please, indicate your answer in that space.

News platform: Choose the number beside the name of the news portal that is being coded. If you are coding for Graphic Online indicate the number "1" in the blank space, *Citifmonline.com* (2) *myjoyonline.com* (3), *gna.org.gh* (4), and *peacefmonline.com* indicates "5".

Headline: Write down the title of the article exactly as it appears in the newspaper.

Date of news story: This indicates the date the news article was published. The date should be designated as Day, followed by Month and followed by Year as in the sample below:

Date of news story: 01/12/18

Total number of paragraphs: Indicate the number of paragraphs in the story in the space provided

Sources: Indicate individuals or organisations who have been quoted in the story or to whom lines have been attributed to. Indicate in the blank space the digit that corresponds to the source. If the source is government, indicate "1", for Government officials and Politicians "2", for Medical Experts and Health Organisations "3" for Affected Communities, "4" for Corporate Executives and "5" for International media and others.

SOURCES	VARIABLES	NUMBER
Government officials and Politicians	The President, Information Minister, Presidential Spokesperson, Director of Communications at the Office of the President, Presidential adviser, First lady, Deputy Sports Minister, Presidential Advisor on Health, Deputy Health Minister, The Director-General of Ghana Maritime, Managing Director of the Ghana Airports Company Limited, Minister of Finance, Food and Drug Authority (FDA), Director of Public Affairs of the Service, The Motor, Transport, and Traffic Department, (MTTD) of the Ghana Police Service, National Commission for Civic Education, NPP and NDC manifesto, Former President, Former Flagbearer of the opposition NDC, Member of Parliament (MP), Former Deputy Minister of Communications etc.	
Medical Experts and Health Organisations	World Health Organisation (WHO), Ghana Health Service (GHS), Doctors, Urologist, Epidemiologists, Researchers, The Director of Public Health at the Ghana Health Service, Scientific Studies and Reports, Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS), Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS), Country Director for UNAIDS, Immunologist and Research Fellow at the West Africa Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens, University of Ghana, Pharmacist and a fellow at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana, Head of the West Africa Center for Cell Biology and Infectious Pathogens (WACCBIP) of the University of Ghana, Research conducted by Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) etc.	
Affected Communities	Recipients of donations, Business owners Ghana National Association of Private Schools, Secretary of the Ghana National Cashew Farmers Association, President of the Association of Cashew Processors Ghana etc.	
Corporate Executives	General Manager, CEO, Country Director, Managing Director etc.	

International media and others	CNN, BBC, social media, Religious Leaders, Economist, Country Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNFPA Executive Director, World Bank Country Director for Ghana, Chief Imam, undisclosed or unconfirmed sources.	

APPENDIX 3: PHASE 3 DETAILED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS

1. Please, kindly introduce yourself.
2. Specifically, what is your view on how the media covered the coronavirus pandemic, especially between March 200 to March 2021?
3. What news frames (an aspect of news given more prominence) did you employ most in reporting about the virus?
4. What factors did you consider when writing stories on the coronavirus pandemic?
5. Do you think that your reports portray a positive or negative aspect of the virus?
6. What in your view are the reasons for such frames?
7. To what extent were your frames influenced by news sources interviewed, organisational policy, and organisational constraints or limitations?
8. Do you think your selected frames influenced the understanding of the audience in any way?

APPENDIX 4: PHASE 4 DETAILED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE JOURNALISM STUDENTS

1. What do you know about the coronavirus pandemic?
2. What did you first know of the coronavirus?
3. During the pandemic what were your sources of information on the virus?
4. What were some things you heard about the virus?
5. How were you influenced by what you heard about the virus?
6. Which media (radio, tv, or print, social media) did you get your information from most?
7. What types of information or news did you get about the virus on the media?
8. How did that influence how you see the virus?
9. How did that influence your attitude about the virus
10. Is your perception about the various today different from what the media had portrayed earlier?

APPENDIX 5: PHASE 4 DETAILED PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP GUIDE FOR

1. What do you know about the coronavirus pandemic?
2. What did you first know of the coronavirus?
3. During the pandemic what were your sources of information on the virus?
4. What were some things you heard about the virus?
5. How were you influenced by what you heard about the virus?
6. Which media (radio, tv, or print, social media) did you get your information from most?
7. What types of information or news did you get about the virus on the media?
8. How did that influence how you see the virus?
9. How did that influence your attitude about the virus
10. Is your perception about the various today different from what the media had portrayed earlier?

APPENDIX 6: CATALOGUE OF STORIES

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APPENDIX 7: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(for the Journalist)

24/08/2023

Title: COVID-19 as we know it: portrayal of the pandemic in the Ghanaian media / Communicating health crises: Ghanaian media framing of COVID-19

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Martin Thompson Kwadzo Ntem and I am doing research with Prof. Tyali Siyasanga, a professor in the Department of Communication Science towards a Doctoral Degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled COVID-19 as we know it: portrayal of the pandemic in the Ghanaian media / Communicating health crises: Ghanaian media framing of COVID-19.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could lead to an appreciation of how five selected Ghanaian media portrayed the novel coronavirus pandemic and how that affected people's attitudes and perceptions of the virus.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate in this study as a very important person who can contribute to the study. As a journalist at Graphic Online, one of the selected news portals for the study, and as someone who has authored so many news stories about the coronavirus pandemic in Ghana, speaking to you will help uncover your motivations of factors that influence your choice of story angles and frames.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves an audio recording of your responses or answers to the study. You will be asked to introduce yourself as well as share your view generally on how the media covered the coronavirus pandemic between March 200 to March 2021. You will also be asked about the news frames or angles you used in reporting on the coronavirus pandemic. The researcher will also find out from you what factors you considered when writing stories on the pandemic and to what extent were your frames influenced by news sources interviewed, organisational policy, and organisational constraints or limitations. The interview is expected to last for twenty minutes.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. Once the interview has been conducted and data captured you will not be able to withdraw from the study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study will help understand the role of media reports about global crises such as the coronavirus pandemic in shaping people's attitudes and perceptions. It may also offer some suggestions for the industry by proffering ways news reportage can be framed in ‘abnormal times’ such as the outbreak of the pandemic and how cautiously news reports have to be written to generate a positive response from the public.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Data for this study is collected under very strict anonymity hence the researcher will not disclose the identity of the respondent to anyone. Hence contribution to this study poses the most minimalist danger to the respondents. Answering some of the follow-up questions from the interview might make the respondent a little uncomfortable but the respondent is at liberty to inform the researcher of any such discomfort and the question may be rephrased or changed entirely.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

A report of your responses will be submitted for the award of a Doctoral degree. It may also be submitted for publication. However, the names of no respondents will be recorded anywhere in the study and one else apart from the researcher will know about your involvement in this research.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Soft copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in locked cloud storage for academic purposes. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Audio responses of your interview will however be deleted permanently three months after successful transcription.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

This study is part of an academic exercise and has no major funding hence there will be no financial benefits to the respondent. The researcher will however reimburse respondents who may have to travel to meet the research at an agreed location as well as cater for the respondents' snack or meal if the duration of the interview is prolonged beyond what has been agreed.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Ethics and Scientific Review Committee of the Department of Communication Science Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Martin Thompson Kwadzo Ntem at 233543480553 or email martinntem@gmail.com. The findings are accessible for as long as the researcher could be reached Please do not use home telephone numbers. Departmental and/or mobile phone numbers are acceptable.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact tyalism@unisa.ac.za, or 012429876. Contact the same email and phone number should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted.

Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the Ethics and Scientific Review Committee via mfuphsm@unisa.ac.za or 012 429 6661 or Prof Khan (Chair of CREC) via Khankb@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Martin ThompsonKwadzo Ntem

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(for Focus group discussion)

24/08/2023

Title: COVID-19 as we know it: portrayal of the pandemic in the Ghanaian media / Communicating health crises: Ghanaian media framing of COVID-19

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Martin Thompson Kwadzo Ntem and I am doing research with Prof. Tyali Siyasanga, a professor in the Department of Communication Science towards a Doctoral Degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled COVID-19 as we know it: portrayal of the pandemic in the Ghanaian media / Communicating health crises: Ghanaian media framing of COVID-19.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could lead to an appreciation of how five selected Ghanaian media portrayed the novel coronavirus pandemic and how that affected people's attitudes and perceptions of the virus.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate in this study as a very important person who can contribute to the study. As an audience of at least one of the selected media portals understudy, and as someone who has read at least five stories published on the coronavirus pandemic, your experiences about what you have read about the pandemic and how that helped shape your understanding, of the nature of the pandemic and your attitude and behaviour. We also expect that as a media student with knowledge and understanding of media, you will be able to help us appreciate how news stories of the coronavirus influence your understanding and perception of the virus.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves an audio recording of your responses or answers to the study. You will be asked to introduce yourself and share what you know about the coronavirus pandemic. You will be asked when you first heard about the virus and your initial sources of information. You will also answer questions on how you were influenced by what you read about the virus in the media. You will amongst others tell whether the news you have read about the pandemic affected how you viewed the virus and your whole attitude towards it. The focus group discussion will be held with 6 other people and will last for about an hour.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. Once the discussion is concluded and recorded you will not be able to withdraw from the study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study will help understand the role of media reports about global crises such as the coronavirus pandemic in shaping people's attitudes and perceptions. It may also offer some suggestions for the industry by proffering ways news reportage can be framed in ‘abnormal times’ such as the outbreak of the pandemic and how cautiously news reports have to be written to generate a positive response from the public.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Data for this study is collected under very strict anonymity hence the researcher will not disclose the identity of the respondent to anyone. Hence contribution to this study poses the most minimalist danger to the respondents. Answering some of the follow-up questions from the discussion might make the respondent a little uncomfortable but the respondent is at liberty to inform the researcher of any such discomfort and the question may be rephrased or changed entirely.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

A report of your responses will be submitted for the award of a Doctoral degree. It may also be submitted for publication. However, the names of no respondents will be recorded anywhere in the study and one else apart from the researcher and the other members of the focus group will know about your involvement in this research.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Soft copies or transcripts of your responses will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in locked cloud storage for academic purposes. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Audio responses of your interview will however be deleted permanently three months after successful transcription.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

This study is part of an academic exercise and has no major funding hence there will be no financial benefits to the respondent. The researcher will however reimburse respondents the cost of their transportation to the located for the focus group discussion. The researcher shall also cater for the respondents' snack or meal if the duration of the discussion is prolonged beyond what has been agreed.

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Thank you.

Martin Thompson Kwadzo Ntem

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(for Workshop Participants)

24/08/2023

Title: COVID-19 as we know it: portrayal of the pandemic in the Ghanaian media / Communicating health crises: Ghanaian media framing of COVID-19

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Martin Thompson Kwadzo Ntem and I am doing research with Prof. Tyali Siyasanga, a professor in the Department of Communication Science towards a Doctoral Degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled COVID-19 as we know it: portrayal of the pandemic in the Ghanaian media / Communicating health crises: Ghanaian media framing of COVID-19.

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WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

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WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

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pandemic. You will be asked when you first heard about the virus and your initial sources of information. You will also answer questions on how you were influenced by what you read about the virus in the media. You will amongst others tell whether the news you have read about the pandemic affected how you viewed the virus and your whole attitude towards it. The focus group discussion will be held with 6 other people and will last for about an hour.

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