



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

FACULTY OF COMPUTING AND INFORMATICS

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATICS, JOURNALISM AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

**FRAMING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NAMIBIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS: AN ANALYSIS
OF THE NAMIBIAN, NAMIBIAN SUN AND NEW ERA**

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**THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AT NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY (NUST)**

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JANUARY 2022

DECLARATION

I, Kudakwashe Mushayavanhu, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis entitled: *Framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibian National Newspapers: An analysis of The Namibian, Namibian Sun and New Era* is my original work, and that I have not previously, in its entirety or part, submitted it to any other university or Higher Education Institution for the award of a degree.

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ABSTRACT

Media plays a central role in communicating risks to the public during outbreaks of infectious diseases. Since Covid-19 was first discovered, media has played a critical role in providing health information and people have relied on the media for information about Covid-19. While much of what the public knows about COVID-19 and ways to prevent infection has come through various media platforms, the framing or how such messages were presented, to some extent, influenced public's understanding, perception and behaviours in light of the pandemic. The aim of this study was to determine how newspapers in Namibia reported on the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of three (3) national daily newspapers were selected for the study namely, *The Namibian*, *New Era* and *Namibian Sun* newspapers. The study was anchored on the framing theory and a qualitative research design was used for the study. The study focused on selected articles which were written between 13 March 2020 and 31 December 2020. Findings of the study reveal that newspapers used different frames to report on COVID-19. Specifically, the frames that were employed by the Namibian print media include, among others, the alarming frame, the social frame, the recovery and the assurance frame. It was found that newspapers mainly utilised war terminology and pessimistic language in their reporting. The themes that emerged in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic focused on crime-related issues, the impact of the pandemic and the medical-related issues. The study argues that media frames, which were used by the three newspapers can influence public's understanding and response to Covid-19 interventions. It is therefore imperative for the media to consider the frames or ways in which messages are packaged as frames of media messages could have serious implications on how messages are received and acted upon.

Key Words/Concepts: Framing; Pandemic; Covid-19; Namibia; Newspaper

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been completed were it not for the help and encouragement I got from many people and various institutions in Namibia. My profound appreciation goes to my supervisor Dr Nkosinotando Mpofu, for taking me through this journey. Many thanks go to my family and friends. Their unending motivation, encouragement and support will always be cherished and remembered.

DEDICATION

To my mother: Thus far has the Lord helped me. May the ceiling of my academic exploits be your footholds!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the study. It provides the background of the study, the problem statement as well as the research questions. The chapter further focuses on the significance and scope of the study and provides definition for key terms in the context of the study. Lastly, the chapter also provides an overall outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Study

Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 that emerged in Wuhan, China towards the end of 2019 (Huang, Wang, Li, Ren, Zhao, Hu, Zhang, Fan, Xu, & Gu, 2020). On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic (WHO, 2020) after 114 countries had recorded 118 000 COVID-19 cases and over 4000 deaths. Resultantly, the United Nations warned that the world was facing the most challenging crisis since World War II (Associated Press, 2020). Since March 2020, there has been a continued increase in infections and deaths and the COVID-19 narrative has arguably monopolised media coverage, thereby raising public concern and interest in the pandemic.

Globally, as of the 24th of January 2021, there have been a total estimate of more than 350 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including around 5,5 million deaths reported to WHO (WHO, 2022). In the first year of the pandemic, the situation was worsened by the absence of a cure against COVID-19 as well as the rate at which the virus was mutating. This meant that communication had to play a critical role in sharing information and mitigating the spread of the pandemic. Nelkin (1991) has argued that during pandemics, people often turn to the mass media for answers (Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017). Towards the end of 2020, the first vaccines against Covid-19 were approved. Although COVID-19 vaccines have been developed, the efficacy of such vaccines as well as vaccine hesitancy remains a major challenge (Mahase, 2021). Again, this

places media and communication at the centre of efforts directed towards encouraging the use of the vaccines. Bukhari (2020) contends that much of what the public knows about COVID-19 and ways to prevent infection has come through various media platforms. Similarly, Reynolds & Seeger (2014) believe that the media plays a central role in communicating risks to the public during outbreaks of infectious diseases.

The first case of COVID-19 in Namibia was reported on the 13th of March 2020 and upon confirmation a series of preventive measures to contain the virus were adopted. These measures which include contact tracing, suspension of public gatherings for 30 days, travel restrictions into and out of the country and a 14-day mandatory quarantine for all returning to Namibia were implemented. On the 24th March, a state of emergency was declared and borders were closed. The government introduced the state of emergency which came in four stages: stages one to four with different intensity of lockdown. Full lockdown under stage one was characterised by closure of all points of entry, public gatherings not exceeding 10 persons, personal movements restricted and comprehensive restrictions on cross-border, domestic travel and movement with exemption for only essential goods transportation. Stage two lockdown was characterised by restaurants operating on a take-away basis, gradual relaxation of measures which were mandatory, government supervised quarantine for returning Namibians, permanent residents and those providing humanitarian assistance. The third stage saw the lifting of restrictions which allowed non-essential businesses to resume and the partial opening of the borders. In the final stage, The Ministry of Health and Social Services formed a Rapid Response Team to attend to pressing needs such as preparation of isolation wards for admission of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. A toll-free line for those with symptoms was set up by the Health Ministry. On the 2nd of April 2020, the COVID-19 Communication Centre was launched as a platform for all sectors to engage the public on developments surrounding the pandemic. The centre was interactive, providing journalists with an opportunity to ask questions during the daily live press conference hosted by the Minister of Health and Social Services and representatives from the government. Mobilisation and awareness campaigns were carried out through local media (TV, radio, print and electronics) in order to increase access to accurate information for every citizen. In order to support COVID-19 initiatives and help curb its spread, donations from private organisations were received. These donations were useful in addressing needs brought about by the rising COVID-19 cases.

Through partnerships with various bodies such as Centre for Disease Control, WHO, Ministry of Health and Social Services, the Namibian government has been pivotal in educating people in previous pandemics (Foster, Mchombu, Haendler, & Gorelick, 2004) and even during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Namibia government was able to communicate various messages and these were framed differently for community members. In addition, the media also played a crucial role in conveying government messages to the public. According to Ducharme (2020), the novel COVID-19 resulted in massive media coverage and newspapers were an important source of disseminating information to conscientise the public about the COVID-19 pandemic. McNair (2000:136) argues that “newspapers, as opposed to television and radio, can “communicate more complex ideas”.

In Namibia, print media played a significant role in communicating information/knowledge about the pandemic. While there are numerous newspapers in Namibia, three newspapers are considered as dominant as they have a national footprint and what one can arguably call an ‘authoritative status’. The three newspapers include *The Namibian* (a privately-owned daily newspaper), *Namibian Sun* (a privately-owned daily newspaper) and *New Era* (a government-owned daily newspaper).

The *New Era* newspaper is owned and operated by the Namibian government and was founded in 1992 under the New Era Publications Corporation Act 1 of 1992 and is financed by government subsidies. At the beginning it was run weekly and has been publishing daily since 2004 (Larsen, 2004). As a result of its ownership, it is more limited in its reportage and is mainly pro government (Njuguna, 2004). However, it has been criticised several times and threatened with funding cuts by government which complained about the compromised and biased reporting. Apart from this, interference has taken a rather subtle form (Titus & Brombart, 2015) such as the Minister of Information and Communication Technology having the ability to appoint and discharge members of the board of directors. The *New Era* has a print run of around 40,000 per edition (Titus & Brombart, 2015). This huge circulation was pivotal in promoting hand hygiene as well as other preventive measures as ways to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The Namibian was founded in 1985 with financial aid of donors and the European Union (Larsen, 2007). It was very critical of the South African backed colonial government and has continued to

be critical of shortcomings of post-independence governments. It is published daily in English with a print run of around 40,000 with an additional 20,000 on Fridays (Tjitemisa, 2017). *The Namibian* has been pivotal in providing an access to objective sources of health information surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Namibian Sun* is published daily. It was introduced firstly as a weekly tabloid newspaper on the 20th of September 2007 that was published on Thursdays (Rothe, 2011) and from 2010 it has been published daily with a print run of 30,000 copies (Titus & Brombart, 2015). It is a privately owned newspaper. The *Namibian Sun* was a key component in the dissemination of knowledge about the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has attracted scholarly attention across the world (Huang et al., 2020), however few studies have focused on the coverage of the crisis and its influence on public perception of the pandemic, more especially in the Namibian context. Communication is vital during a health crisis; therefore, it is imperative to interrogate how the media has reported on COVID-19 given that frames of media messages could have serious implications on how messages are received and acted upon. Thus, leaning on the framing theoretical framework, this study examined the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in three (3) Namibian dominant newspapers (*The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*). Various factors led to the choice of the selected newspapers. First, is the fact that they are published in English, which is the official language in Namibia. Secondly, as for circulation and reach, these newspapers have high print runs and are influential, reaching almost all parts of the Republic of Namibia (Magadza, 2016). Additionally, the presence of well managed online archives through their websites, made it possible to access articles for this study.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Research on the role of media in health communication dates back to the 1960-1980s (Schlinger, 1976). Much of the research has shown that a lot of patients rely on news media more than other sources for general health information (Dolan, Iredale, Williams, Ameen, 2004). While media is seen as essential in disseminating crucial information during a pandemic, it has also been accused of contributing to more health problems such as mental health problems (Houston & First, 2021). Houston and First (2021) further argue that watching too much COVID-19

coverage has led to fear and anxiety. This raises questions around the framing of COVID-19 media reports. Frames or the packaging of media messages could have serious implications on how messages are received and acted upon (Schnepper, Blechert, & Stok, 2021). Thus, the framing of health-related information can have public health consequences (Links, 2020). Since communication is important during a health crisis, it is imperative to interrogate how the media has reported on a public health crisis. Such an analysis on the coverage of the pandemic leads to an understanding of how the public may possibly perceive health issues and how their understanding may influence behaviour in the midst of a pandemic. Although, the COVID-19 has generated a lot of scholarly interest, it remains unknown how the Namibian press framed the crisis and what could have been the possible implications of such framing. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* framed the COVID-19 pandemic in their news reporting. Specifically, the study looked at the words and phrases used, the frames and themes that were dominant in the reporting of Covid-19 by the three newspapers.

1.3 Research questions

The study sought to answer the question on how the Namibian national newspapers, with particular reference to *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*, framed the COVID-19 pandemic in their reportage. The following sub-questions were answered:

1. What are the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?
2. What were the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* in their reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are the major themes emerging in the framing of COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

1.4 Delimitation of the study

The study is limited to hard news about COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *New Era* and *Namibian Sun* from March 2020 to December 2020 only. Moreover, 425 new articles were used in this study.

The news articles allowed the researcher to carry out an in-depth analysis and discussion on the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories, the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *New Era* and *Namibian Sun* and the major themes that emerged in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*.

1.5 Significance of the study

The research highlights the manner in which the COVID-19 pandemic was framed by the Namibian print media. An analysis on the coverage of the pandemic leads to an understanding of how the media decide what is newsworthy and what is not. Thus, emphasising the need for media organisations to consider how they cover issues such as pandemics. Findings may highlight the need for journalists training in health reporting and science reporting in order to improve their reporting on such matters.

1.6 Definition of terms

Framing is a way of organising a story in order to provide meaning to it in such a way that unfolding events have a connection with each other (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). As a result, frames are created when news organisations give prominence to an issue by choosing to cover it and by highlighting “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Pandemic, according to this study is an “epidemic that has spread over several countries and continents” (CDC, 2012). According to the CDC (2020), “pandemics happen when a new virus emerges to infect people and can spread between people sustainably.”

Covid-19 (Corona Virus Disease of 2019) is a highly transmittable disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (Huang et al 2020). The virus emerged in Wuhan, China towards the end of 2019. On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic (WHO 2020).

1.7 Thesis structure

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of the study. It provides the background of the study, the problem statement as well as the research questions. The chapter further focuses on the significance and scope of the study and provides definition for key terms in the context of the study. Lastly, the chapter also provides an overall outline of the thesis.

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature on the role of the media during pandemics. It outlines a global, regional, and local perspective on the role of the media in health communication and mass media as a source of health information. The chapter also discusses Framing Theory as a theoretical framework guiding this study. It examines the key concepts on the Framing Theory as postulated by Bateson and scholars such as Gamson and Modigliani (1989).

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology that was used in addressing the research objectives of this study. The chapter describes the research design, philosophy, data collection and analysis techniques and procedures, as well as issues relating to ethics and trustworthiness of findings.

Chapter 4 presents, analyses, and discusses the study's findings. Findings of the study focus on the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories, the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* in their reporting of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the major themes emerging in the framing of COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions on the study's findings in line with the research questions of the study. It also provides recommendations regarding the framing of pandemics.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature on the role of the media during pandemics. It outlines a global, regional, and local perspective on the role of the media in health communication and mass media as a source of health information. The chapter also discusses Framing Theory as a theoretical framework guiding this study. It examines the key concepts on the Framing Theory as postulated by Bateson and scholars such as Gamson and Modigliani.

2.2 Literature Review

The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with quality information that allows them to form an opinion (Kovach & Rosenfield, 2007). Thus, mass media plays an unparalleled role as a communication mechanism (Gunther, 1998) and a source of various kinds of information. Several studies have tried to understand how news coverage has been influenced by journalists (see Basynyat & TingLee, 2015; Gans, 1979; Hodgetts, 2008; Larsson, Oxman, Carling, & Herrin, 2003; Piere, 2019). This is because, the public looks to the media.

The media acts as a key source of information, including health information (Duhe & Cho, 2009). The audience makes informed decisions regarding health issues from information derived from the mass media (Dudo, Dahlstorm & Brossard, 2007). Thus, journalists are assigned to health beats (Otten, 1992) as diseases spark public interests and capture people's attention (Armstrong, Rose, Peters, Long, McMurphy & Shea, 2006). The purpose of this review is to look, not only at the role of media in communicating about disease but to also review previous research on how health messages have been framed in the media and what are the implications of such framing.

2.2.1 Role of media during pandemics

The role of the mass media during a crisis or disaster cannot be overemphasised given that media facilitates access to information that is relevant towards handling of the crisis (Ghassavi &

Zare-Farashbandi, 2015). Thus, communication of health information during times of communicable disease epidemics or pandemics is key to educating the public (Naik, Vagi, Uzicanim & Dopson, 2019; US Department of Health and Human Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018 Edition). WHO (2017) argue that it is expected that health entities will supply vital information to the public during a pandemic. Naik et al. (2019) examined influenza-related communication and community strategies in which they reported that effective communication helps the public, media and health care providers to tackle outbreak situations and comply with public health measures. Bukhari (2020) concludes that the media has the ability to convey a sense of unity among the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The media plays a critical role in a pandemic and Bukhari (2020) is of the view that people can utilise the flexibility and pervasiveness of social media technologies to increase the public's adherence to the safety measures suggested by global health organisations during pandemics. In a study on the role of mass media and public health communication in the Covid-19 pandemic, Anwar, Malik, Raees and Anwar (2020), are of the view that the pivotal roles that the media can play in a pandemic is promoting physical and psychological health messages and ensuring resilience in people belonging to different age groups and socio-economic conditions. Oyama and Okpara (2017) argue that the media sets the agenda during a pandemic and they concluded that during the Ebola outbreak, newspapers and television stations made Ebola stories their headlines. Shalvee and Sambhav (2020), based on their study on the role of the mass media and communication during pandemics, concluded that the media won the battle of providing health information to the people. In the same light, Dhanashree, Garg, Chauhan, Bhatia, Gaurav and Chauhan (2020) assert that the mass media has played a very important role in the dissemination of Covid 19 related information to the general public and to follow safe practices.

In addition, research has shown that with the emergency of a novel health risk, the public often seek non-medical sources of information (Anwar, et al., 2020; Ophir, 2018; Ophir & Jamieson, 2018). Ophir and Jamieson (2018) carried out a study on the effects of Zika virus risk coverage in which they concluded that the mass media serve as an 'amplification status' that spread organisational messages thereby increasing awareness among the audiences. The authors also suggest that the mass media remains an important instrument in propagating health information and this can influence familiarity and knowledge. Pieri (2019) analysed media framing and the threat of global pandemics in which he concludes that the threat over pandemics generates

intense media coverage and newspaper coverage remains in control for the framing of public debates.

2.2.2 Role of media in health communication

Research on the role of media in health communication dates back to the 1960-1980s (see Griffiths & Knutson, 1960; Mendelsohn, 1968; Schlinger, 1976; Quesada & Gustavo, 1977). Griffiths & Knutson (1960) posit that health communication is likely to be effective if the person communicating the messages is perceived as one who can be trusted and is an expert in health matters. Research has also focused on how the media promotes public health (see Schlinger, 1976; Quesada & Gustavo, 1977). Schlinger (1976) espouse that mass media campaigns in public health are best suited to achieve intermediate goals such as the increased salience of health issue.

There has been extensive research on the role of the media in health communication that shows that the amount of health information obtained from the media can lead to behaviour change. In a study conducted by De Jesus (2012) the amount of health information obtained from media channels matters above and beyond literacy and English and Spanish language proficiency in predicting medical advice seeking behaviour. De Jesus concluded that exposure to a lot of mass media-based health information serves as an influential cue to action for Hispanic adults to make certain health related decisions. In the same light Bukhari (2020) asserts that mass communication promotes adaptive responses to foster positive health attitudes as well as adherence to preventive measures. The institute of medicine committee on assuring the health of the public in the 21st Century contends that the media can be used to inform and create more positive attitudes toward health behaviours and lead to behavioural change among audience members. Similarly, Liu, Xie, Li and Ji (2020) asserts that mass media exposure could significantly enhance preventive behaviour through subjective norms and social networking.

Much of the research on health communication has focused on the capacity of mass media in changing behaviour (see Bello, 2015; Bukhari, 2020; Gantiva, Jimenez-Leal & Urriago-Rayo, 2021; Griffiths & Kutson, 1960; Mendelsohn, 1968). Gantiva et al. (2021) analysed the framing messages to deal with COVID-19. The results showed that gain-framed health messages increased intention to adopt self-care behaviours. Dhanashree et al. (2020) examined the role of the mass media during the COVID-19 pandemic. They concluded that the mass media had played

a great role in encouraging the general public to safe practices. Bello (2015) argues that newspapers disseminate information to influence health attitudes and change the behaviour. Thus, the media can contribute to change of behaviour among the audience.

Much of the research on health reporting has focused on the power of the mass media in imparting latest scientific information (Bukhari, 2020; Dhanashree et al., 2020; Shakeel, Nesar, Rahim, Iffat, Ahmed & Rizvi, 2018). Bukhari (2020) analysed the role of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic and concluded that media technologies can lead to the public's adherence to health safety measures through disseminating information approved by world health bodies in an effort to combat the pandemic. In a study conducted by Shakee et al. (2018) print media is considered a productive resource to argument awareness among patients. Dhanashree et al. (2020) study on the role of the media during COVID-19 pandemic in North India showed that the mass media has played a very important role in dissemination of COVID-19 related information to the general public.

The media plays an important role in influencing government responses (Siddiqua, Shabir, Ashraf & Khalid, 2020; CNN Editorial Research, 2020). Siddiqua et al (2020) reported that effective and timely newspaper communication strategies by government departments to the public play an essential role of educating the public during a pandemic. Chipidza, Akbaripourdidazar, Gwanzura and Gatto (2020) set out to examine traditional and social media news coverage of COVID-19 reported during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant news events focused on the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by WHO (CNN, Editorial Research, 2020). This marked the announcement of travel restrictions into the US (CNN, Editorial Research, 2020).

2.2.3 Mass media as source of health information

News media are an important source of health information (Chang 2012) and the way they report helps the public understand about health issues. Through news media, Berry, Wharf-Higgins and Naylor (2009) believe that the salience of the health issue, the perception of the health issue and solutions of the health issue can be addressed. Researchers have tried to generate meaning on the effects of exposure to media content on the audiences (see Comstock, Chaffee & Katzman, 1978; Klapper, 1960; McLeod, Atkin & Chaffee, 1972). To date, these studies continue for example, Sontag (1989) asserts that discussions on illness are often characterised by war metaphors to justify public health policies that curb individual rights as necessary for

national security (Anorid, 1993; Porter 1999). Basynyat and TingLee (2015) used the Framing Theory as the basis of their study to investigate on the framing of a pandemic in a Singaporean Newspaper. They concluded that four major themes emerged that are war metaphors, social responsibility, lockdown policies and imported disease. Most recently, Piere (2019) applied framing analysis to explore United Kingdom media framing of the Ebola crisis, in which they derived the conclusion that while some framing was recurrent than others, others happen to shift throughout the course of the same crisis.

Media has great influence in shaping public knowledge of a health issue (see Catalan-Matamoros, 2011; Gallegher and Updegraff, 2012; Liu, et al., 2020; McAuthor, 1976; Odorume, 2015). Catalan-Matamoros (2011) is of the view that mass media health campaigns clearly can be an effective tool for health promotion whether the effort is on a national or local scale. In a study on role of Health Journalism in Promoting Communication among Stakeholders in Healthcare Sector, Bishwajit (2016) asserts that health journalists communicate to inform and educate people about ways to enhance healthy living in all sorts of countries – developed, developing or undeveloped. Yanivitzy (2000) further contends that that mass media and physician advice complement one another in persuading individuals to adopt preventive health behaviour. Yaya, Uthman, Amouzou, Ekholuenetale and Bishwajit (2018) conclude that television and radio were the most commonly reported sources of malaria information after direct communication.

Research has shown that patients rely on news media more than other sources for general health information (De Jesus, 2013; Ahmed & Bates, 2013 and Anwar et al. 2020). In a study aimed to examine whether exposure to mass media health information impacts on health decisions, De Jesus (2013) concluded that exposure to a lot of mass media-based information serves as an influential cue to action for Hispanic adults to seek medical advice. Anwar et al (2020) in their analysis of the role of the media during the COVID-19 pandemic concluded that whenever there is an outbreak, people turn to the media for information. Ahmed and Bates (2013) in their analysis of free media as the social determinants of health, discovered that the media facilitates knowledge construction and knowledge dissemination. Ngwira, Mkandawire and Kondowe (2019) set out to examine media coverage of cancer related newspapers in Malawi and found out that mass media can play an important role in influencing the public awareness and perception of cancer.

2.2.4 Role of print media in health communication

Despite the prominence of health information online, traditional media such as print remain vital for disseminating information to the public (Young, Willis, Stemmler & Rodgers, 2015). This is because newspapers are regarded as a reliable source of health information (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). According to the National Newspaper Association (2014) citizens rank the credibility of print media highly thereby strengthening the trust the audience has on the print media. Data has shown that community newspapers are a pivotal source for health information for many rural residents.

Newspapers therefore remain a key resource in society since their emergence in the 17th century (Bello, 2015; Weber, 2006) and the print media is regarded as the best avenue for taking information to the public (Parvin, Ahsen, Rahman & Abedin, 2020). The evolution of health communication researches have been conducted to show that newspapers disseminate information on various health issues in society (see Muslim, Bhatti & Mahmood, 2020; Shakeel, et al., 2018; Siddiqua 2020; Uwom & Oloyede, 2014). Gomes, Ahmed and Barua (2014) posit that the majority of the people's only access to HIV/AIDS information is through the print media such as newspapers. Australian Journalism (2014) states that newspapers are influential because news stories that appear in print or online are frequently used by radio and television news editors to provide background, and often actual content, for their daily broadcast news services. Thus, media can be productive resources to augment awareness among patients (Shakeel, et al., 2018). Pandey and Kumar (2020) set out to examine the role of print media in spreading awareness on the Coronavirus Disease. The authors discovered that print media has been playing a vital role in spreading awareness on the dangers of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

Anwar, Malik, Raees and Anwar (2020) believe that print media, in particular, has played a critical role during the pandemic. In a study on the role of print media and public health communication in the Covid-19 pandemic, Anwar et al. (2020) concluded that print media played a pivotal role in promoting physical and psychological health messages and ensuring resilience in people belonging to different age groups and socio-economic conditions. Ophir (2018) employed a content analysis to examine how American Newspapers covered epidemics and their effects on audiences and the results emphasised the importance of crisis communication during epidemics,

the different effects of different coverage patterns and the emergency risk communication framework.

Health communication in print media has shown the potential to inform the public perception (Adjah, 2017; Dixon & Clarke, 2013; Gounder & Ameer, 2018). Gounder and Ameer (2018) analysis of framing of the diabetes within New Zealand metropolitan newspapers showed that messages about ways to address diabetes focused on lifestyle changes involving diet and exercises. Adjah (2017) conducted a quantitative content analysis of daily newspapers in Ghana to investigate how cervical cancer was covered. Results from the study revealed that the media's coverage of cervical cancer sought to educate and inform as indicated by the dominance of awareness creation and education subject matters of the news articles of cervical cancer.

Print media coverage of health issue has the potential to influence policy makers (El-Jardali, Karroum, Bawab, Kdouh, El-Sayed, Rachidi & Malaki, 2015; Ologoke, Lavis & Hoskins, 2015). El-Jardali et al. (2015) set out to examine how health reporting in Lebanon print media influenced policy making. The authors concluded that policy makers and researchers viewed print media as an essential tool for evidence-informed health policy. This is in line with Ologoke et al. (2015) conclusions that an understanding of the coverage of health research evidence could be key in supporting a platform for evidence informed health policy making. Niederdeppe, Shapiro, Kim, Bartolo and Porticella (2014) in an analysis on inoculation in competitive framing suggests that framed messages influence public thereby affecting healthy policy outcomes. Lancaster (2011) in his study focusing on the media effects for use in drug policy research reported that the media contributes in setting the agenda for the public and policy makers through highlighting newsworthy issues.

Newspapers play an important role in society through improving public health literacy (Zare-Farashband, Amini, Rahimi & Kelishadi 2017). This is mainly attributed to its high coverage in comparison to other forms of media due to lower distribution costs (Capon & Capon, 2009). Ashorkani (2012) posits that the general populace relies on the mass media for health-related information. Thus, newspapers act as an essential communication channel when it comes to health matters. During pandemic health institutions provide information through the media to the public and then fact check previously published information (Vince & Tinker, 2009; WHO, 2017). Muslim et al. (2020) in an analysis of the coverage of health issues in Pakistan discovered

that most articles discussed the health education while specific diseases were given little coverage.

In addition, newspapers have been found to serve as reliable sources of information where the public knows about prevalent health problems in society (Atkin & Walllack, 1990; DuttaBergman, 2004 ;). Naveena (2015) examined the importance of print media in communicating health messages and concluded that health authorities educate and entrust the media with essential information. Yaya et al. (2018) analysed mass media exposure and its impact on malaria prevention. The authors reported that the percentage of women sleeping under insecticide treated bed nets and taking anti-malarial drugs were higher among participants who reported receiving malaria information via the media. Bello (2015) analysed newspaper coverage on health issues in Nigeria and reported that one key importance of newspapers as a medium of mass communication in all societies is the dissemination of information on various issues that affect the public.

Newspapers can be an effective instrument in dissemination of information on certain diseases (Miyawaki, Shibata, Ishii & Oka, 2017; Sanchez-Sabate, Zunin, Badilla-Briones, Celis & Saldias, 2021; WHO, 2013 ;). WHO (2013) posits that the media can be a key component in the dissemination of knowledge about mental health. Sanchez-Sabate et al. (2021) examined Chilean digital press' coverage of the relation between diet and mental health. He reported that the Chilean press contributed to improving society's well-being through communicating the benefits and harms a diet can have on people's mental health. Miyawaki, Shibata, Ishii and Oka (2017) examined news coverage of cancer in Japanese Newspapers. The study identified that the Japanese print media published cancer-related articles on a regular basis and through-out the year.

Health information in the print media is regularly presented as straight news (Apuka & Omar, 2020; Smith 2016). Apuke and Omar (2020) conducted a study to examine media coverage of COVID-19. In respect to story format, the authors found that more than half of the stories were presented as straight news. Smith (2016) espouses that this outcome is consistent with an investigation on the coverage of Ebola in Nigerian newspapers. The reason for this format is based on the need to deliver first-hand information about the infection to the public (Apuke & Omar, 2020).

2.2.5 Framing of health issues

The way health issues are framed is key to how the messages are received (see Chang, 2007; Riet, 2009; Schnepfer, Blechert & Stok 2021 Updegraff, 2013). This is because media framing creates a powerful force among the public (Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman & Abedin, 2020). Matthes (2008) in his study on media frames and political judgements asserts that the impact of the loss framed messages was much stronger than the impact of the gain-framed messages. This notion was supported by Updegraff (2013) who asserted that people high in self-efficacy are more persuaded by loss-framed information compared to gain-framed information. Lopes, Ruao, Marinho and Araujo (2012) in a study on media pandemic named 'Influenza A, H1N1' in Portuguese newspapers, contend that risk communication is an important instrument to support public health policy. Sesenu (2016) set out to examine the pattern and frames of HIV/AIDS press coverage in Ghana and the findings pointed to a dominance of prevention issue-frame in news stories.

Research has also shown the power of gain framed messages in influencing the public into taking action (see Gallagher & Updegraff, 2012; Gantiva, et al., 2021; Kristel, 2012; Masumoto, Shiozaki & Tashi 2020). In a study on health message framing effects on attitudes and behaviour, Gallagher and Updegraff (2012) are of the view that gain framed messages were significantly more likely than loss-framed messages to lead to illness prevention behaviours with the effects more apparent in the domains of skin cancer prevention and smoking cessation. This is supported by Gantiva et al. (2021) who assert that gain-frame health messages increased intention to adopt self-care behaviour and were judged to be stronger with loss-framed health messages increasing risk perception. Apanovitch, McCarthy and Araujo (2003) conclude that women who viewed HIV testing as having a certain outcome (with low risk of testing positive) view gain-framed messages better at encouraging self-reported HIV testing than loss- framed messages. Chang (2007) argues that a mixed-framed message (combining gain and loss) could enhance message effectiveness.

2.2.6 Methodological Approaches

Much of the research that has been conducted on media coverage of health issues has employed a qualitative content analysis approach (see Dudo, Dahlstorm & Brossard, 2007; Mutz, 1997; Ophir, 2018; Shih, Wijaya & Brossard, 2008). Shih et al. (2008) applied a qualitative content analysis to examine how mad cow disease, West Nile virus, and avian flu viruses were

framed in print news coverage and how coverage evolved over time. They concluded that media coverage of epidemic hazards followed patterns of media attention that were different from those observed for the coverage of environmental issues. Ophir (2018) employed a mixed method of automated and manual content analysis to analyse how American Newspapers covered epidemics and their effects on audiences. The results of the experiment demonstrate the importance of crisis communication during epidemics, the different effects of different coverage patterns and the emergency risk communication framework. The study employed a qualitative content analysis in order to analyse the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Namibian press.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework refers to the application of a theory as the foundation of a study. Lier and Smith (1999) assert that a theoretical framework provides a researcher with the guidance for the study objectives and ways of selecting measurable variables. Therefore, the theoretical framework acts as the, “the structure, the scaffolding, the frame for your study” (Merriam, 2001:85). This study is informed by the Framing Theory.

2.3.1 ORIGINS OF FRAMING THEORY

The origins of framing can be traced to Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Bateson, 1972) and he is regarded as a champion in the introduction of framing as a means by which the human mind understands the world (Hallahan, 1999). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) asserted that a frame is a “schema of interpretation” that allows individuals “to locate, perceive, identify and label information”. To frame is to make continual “selection, emphasis and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980, p.7) or as Entman 1993, p.52) argues, “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text”. Thus, the frame suggests what the controversy is about and the essence of an issue” (p 143). Tuchman (1978) espouses that news frame organises reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality, an important feature of news. Therefore, media frames act as a guide for journalists allowing them to identify information with ease and “to package it for efficient relay to the audiences” (Gitlin, 1980:7).

In the *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson (1972) speaks of what occurs in the context of play and relationship with a therapist, where information is exchanged within frames of psychology defined as “a spatial temporal bounding” (Bateson, 1972) which signalled the lens to interpret accurately what is being said. This has led to two approaches to framing that is, the psychological one and the sociological one. The psychological approach to framing is concerned with the way the media frames impacts those who consume the information while the sociological one focuses more on the producer rather than on the audience of the text (Druckman 2002). The sociologist Erving Goffman further developed the Framing Theory in his *Frame Analysis* which was published in 1974. The theory has continued to develop over the years and is central to communication studies community (Devereux, 2009). That is, it can be used to explore the ways in which frames operate as a means to interpret, react to and communicate reality that surrounds us (Goffman, 2002).

Elaborating on Bateson’s maiden ideas, Goffman (1974) points out that frames have a variety of uses, providing a context which enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label the information necessary to interpret events. That is, the Framing Theory is fundamental in the presentation and interpretation of news stories. Goffman came up with key components of framing which are keying, anchoring and fabrication. According to Hallahan (1999) keying is concerned with recreating a meaningful aspect of everyday experience and an excellent example is a movie. Anchoring is involved with the fixing of ideas within various frames of meaning. Fabrication implies intentional efforts to reference an event in order to mislead the audience about its true nature (Hallahan 1999).

2.3.2 Framing in communication studies

In communication studies, the term ‘frame’ is used in two ways (Bruchman, 2001; Scheufele, 1991); namely as media frames and individual frames (Scheufele, 1999). Firstly, a media frame focuses on words, images, phrases and presentation styles that a particular speaker makes use of when disseminating information (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989). Media frames result from the news production process hence media framing can be regarded as not necessarily intentional (Gamson, 1989). In contrast, to the frames in the mass media, an individual frame is the “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individual's processing of information” (Entman, 1993: 53). Kinder and Sanders (1990) posit that individual frames are the internal structures of the mind. Therefore, individual frames can be regarded as schema that people use to interpret

news events. These frames are usually as a result of personal experiences and socialisation. Thus, individual frames focus on how messages are received by the audiences (Yang, Atkin & Lau, 2010). That is what the audience see as the most salient aspect of an issue.

Framing as a communication theory shows how the media has influence on the audiences. The frame is mainly concerned with the presentation of issues in the media (De Vreese, 2005). Mass media frame “images of reality in a predictable and patterned way” (McQuail, 1994: 331). Thus, framing influences the audience as it highlights certain parts of an issue thereby allowing the selected elements to become key in influencing the audience’s judgments (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

According to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) framing techniques include metaphor, stories, tradition, slogan or jargon, artefact, contrast and spin. Framing is closely related to the Agenda Setting Theory. Both theories focus on how media draws the public’s eye to specific topics. Thus, the basis of the Framing Theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning (Mass Communication Theory (online), 2017). Framing is usually referred to as the ‘second level’ agenda setting that analyses the relative salience of attributes of issues (Ghanem, 1997; McCombs, 2005).

The Framing Theory is closely linked to effects studies. This is in line with the notion of the power of the media on its audience. McQuail (1994:327) asserts that “the entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects”. The study focuses on the framing of COVID-19 in the Namibian press and linking it to the study of media effects on the audience.

Gamson and Modigliani’s (1987) analysis of the framing process described packages that the media uses to characterise an issue. This is made up of arguments, images, metaphors, symbols and information (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Therefore, a frame unifies information and influences audiences with the framing effects most visible in what the audiences think is relevant to their understanding (Kinder & Sanders, 1990).

A key component in established framing literature is Iyengar’s (1991) distinction between thematic and episodic frames. A thematic frame refers to news articles that place “public issues in some more general/ abstract context and takes the form of a ‘take out’, or ‘backgrounder’ report directed at general outcomes or directions” (Iyengar, 1991: 14). In contrast, episodic framing is a way of reporting that takes “the form of a case study or event-oriented report and

depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances” (Iyengar, 1941:41). Episodically framed news stories mostly employ human exemplars to demonstrate broader issues through the appearance of unknown and ordinary citizens (Peter & Zerback, 2020). Thus, journalists make use of episodic frames to illustrate wider issues that humanise their topic (De Swert & Kaypes, 2020).

Thematic framing is the presentation of text through its systematic causes, trends and consequences (Iyengar, 1991). In health reporting, thematic framing includes expert analysis, statistical trends of morbidity intervention and treatment (Kim & Willis, 2007; Lawrence, 2004). Thus, studies show that thematic frames influence the audience’s thought about social issues (Coleman, Thorson & Wilkins, 2011; Iyengar, 1991; Major, 2009; Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1997; Shah, Kwak, Schmierbach & Zubric, 2004). However, it is important to note that episodic and thematic frames are not necessarily mutually exclusive and usually co-occur in the same news story.

Journalists are a key component of how news stories are framed. According to Scheufele (1999:109) factors that influence how a journalist frames an issue are societal norms and values, organisational constraints, pressure from interest groups, journalistic routines and the journalist’s ideological routines. Van Gorp (2007; 14) asserts that “there is an interaction between journalist’s (un)conscious selection of a frame as a result of the individual belief system, and the influence of additional factors inside and outside the media organisation”. Gans (1979) is of the view that framing becomes a valuable tool for journalists as they attempt to produce stories more efficiently under such organisational pressures as space constraints or airtime limits. Thus, journalists are primary to the framing process.

The Framing Theory speaks of the audiences’ attitudes on an issue being more aligned with framed information (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyanga, 2016). The theory can be further divided into two categories: emphasis and equivalent frames (Bullock & Shulman, 2021). Emphasis framing is concerned about differences in presented information whereas equivalency framing focuses on how information is disseminated (Cacciatore et al., 2016). Entman (1993) posits that emphasis framing occurs when a text includes certain pieces of information and omits the other in a news story. Thus, members of the public are likely to make judgements that are consistent with the frame emphasis. Both emphasis and equivalency have been widely used in health communication. For example, emphasis framing can portray public health as either a societal

problem or individual problem and then analyse the impact of the emphasis on ascribed responsibility (Sun et al., 2016). Hence, framing influences public opinion which in turn affects policy outcomes (Niederdeppe, Shapiro, Kim, Bartolo & Porticella, 2014). The inclusion of the Framing Theory within communication research remains essential and it is one of the most used theories in analysing media content (Borah, 2011; Golan, 2010).

2.3.3 LIMITATIONS

The nature of framing is difficult to identify in a text. Entman (1991) asserts that unless the narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully because many of the framed devices can appear as 'natural' unremarkable choices of words and images. Therefore, the limitation of Framing Theory is the lack of homogeneity when it comes to identifying the frames in news coverage (Mario and Rabadan 2009).

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on related literature in an attempt to position the current study within the existing body of knowledge. Concepts such as the role of media in health communication, the role of print media in health communication and mass media as a source of health information were discussed in the chapter. The chapter further discussed the Framing Theory, which guided the analysis of data within the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted by this study. The study aimed to analyse the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibian print media. The study focused on answering the following research questions:

- What are the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?
- What were the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* in their reporting of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
- What are the major themes emerging in the framing of COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

The research design, population, and sampling as well as the approach to data collection and analysis are further discussed in the chapter. The measures used to guarantee the trustworthiness of findings are also discussed. The ethical considerations the study adhered to are also explained.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

Leedy (1997:195) defines research design as a plan for a study, providing the overall framework for collecting data. Ram (2010) espouses that a research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose and procedure. It comprises the procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies (Cresswell & Clark, 2007: 58). It sets out the methods to be employed when analysing data and helps in answering research questions (Grey, 2014). Research designs include, among others, the descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. This study employed a descriptive research design as it seeks to explain how COVID-19 was framed in the selected newspapers.

A descriptive study sets out to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). This research is mainly concerned with what rather than how something has happened (Nassaji, 2015).

There are three popular approaches to carrying out research: quantitative methods, qualitative methods and mixed methods (Creswell, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This study followed a qualitative approach towards data collection and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) espouse that qualitative research is a “method in focus involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter”. Qualitative research allows for the interpretation of a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people attach to them. This approach was relevant to this study which sought to understand how the media framed the Covid-19 pandemic. This phenomenon was understood through the researcher’s reading and interpretation of selected texts. Qualitative research is inductive in nature and explores meanings in a given situation (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017). The inductive nature of qualitative research allows for the careful examination of data and leads to the generation of themes and categories describing the phenomenon under investigation. A qualitative approach supports the use of various methods of data collection and analysis which include semi-structured, open-ended interviews (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones, & Woolcock; Gopaldas, 2016), focus groups and observations, just to mention but a few. The study employed a qualitative approach to analyse the framing of news stories in Namibian national press using qualitative content analysis.

Content analysis is a method used when analysing written, verbal or visual communicative messages (Cole, 1988). Media content analysis is a method used to study media content. Macnamara (2018) describes media content analysis as a method for studying portrayals and representations of different messages in the media. Neuendorf (2002) cited in Macnamara (2018), sees content analysis as a message centred methodology which has grown in use over the years. Content analysis is used mainly to describe characteristics of message content; make inferences to producers of content; make inferences to audiences of content and predict the effects of content on audiences (Macnamara, 2018). There are mainly two forms of content analysis, namely quantitative and qualitative content analysis. This study focused on qualitative content analysis (QCA). Qualitative content analysis aims at analysing text data. Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967;

Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990). Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objects from texts to examining the meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in particular (Weber, 1990).

QCA is considered by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) as a method for subjective interpretation of texts and allows for systematic identification of themes or patterns. In qualitative content analysis data are organised using categories that are generated inductively and usually applied through close reading. Thus, it entails examining words or categories to detect patterns in order to derive meaning (Morgan, 1993; Sandelowski, 2000). Researchers generally support the relevance of qualitative procedure in scholarly inquiry as it been used when analysing media representations of significant historic events (Haller, 2005; Haller, Dorries & Rahn, 2006).

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Polit & Hungler (1999:37) suggest that “population is an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications”. Namibia has 5 daily newspapers, several weeklies to make it a total of 13 newspapers. *The Namibian*, *New Era* and *Namibia Sun* online newspapers were the focus of the study. The three newspapers were selected because of their national footprint and that they use English as a medium of communication. This implies that they are likely to reach a wider audience as English is the official language in Namibia.

In terms of sampling, purposive sampling was used. This study relied on a purposive sampling also known as judgemental sampling to select elements or articles that would be analysed from the population (Lavrakas, 2008). Tongco (2007:1) defines purposive sampling as “the deliberate choice of an informant or element due to the qualities it possesses” (p.1). The study first determined the type of articles to be collected and in this case, the Covid-19 articles. A time period for selecting these articles was also determined. The Covid-19 articles published between the 13th of March 2020 and 31st of December 2020 were searched for. The selected time frame marks the period when Namibia first recorded a Covid-19 case and also the time when narratives about the 2nd wave were emerging. This time period was important as media reporting set the tone on the pandemic and arguably influenced public perception and understanding.

The Covid-19 articles were written in different genres and thus the study purposively selected only hard news stories for analysis. The selection of these stories did not focus on where the articles were placed in the newspaper, but emphasis was on selecting hard news stories on Covid-19. The hard news stories on Covid-19 were selected and each story was the unit of analysis-focusing on headlines, words and phrases used. Thus, 789 Covid-19 articles were identified in the selected three newspapers. From the 789 articles, 425 Covid-19 articles were selected for analysis. These articles were selected as they met the criterion of selection that is discussed below under data collection procedure.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Kabir, 2016). As has been indicated above, data to be analysed was obtained from the three online newspaper archives namely *New Era*, *Namibian Sun* and *The Namibian*. An initial search of Covid-19 articles in the online archives of the three newspapers was done. The key word Covid-19 was used to search for the articles and the search yielded 789 articles. The articles were distributed among the newspapers as follows: 240 articles from *Namibian Sun*, 264 articles from *New Era* and 285 articles from *The Namibian*. The articles obtained included opinion articles, commentaries, and letters to the editor, hard news stories, among others. As indicated in the earlier discussion, the study chose hard news stories to conduct a qualitative content analysis. This means that from the 789 articles, a further step was taken to identify only the Covid-19 stories that were considered as hard stories. All opinion articles, commentaries, and letters to the editor were excluded. This process generated a total of 425 hard news stories. The distribution of the stories from the three newspapers is as follows: *The Namibian* 165 articles, *New Era* 148 articles and *Namibian Sun* 112 articles.

In selecting the hard news stories consideration was taken regarding articles that merely mentioned COVID-19 in passing. The researcher manually excluded those articles, and chose articles that had detailed information about COVID-19. These hard news stories were selected for deeper analysis grounded on qualitative content analysis. Articles that dealt with the COVID-

19 pandemic in other countries were excluded from the study sample. The utilisation of keywords in the search for articles was inspired by the proposal of Entman (1993).

3.5 APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

In carrying out the qualitative content analysis, framing analysis was employed. Wimmer and Dominick (2006: 152-153) are of the view that news frame analysis as a strategy of qualitative content analysis is conducted for the purpose of describing communication content. Frame analysis requires examining the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue such as keywords, sentences, metaphors, catch-phrases, stereo-typed images and depictions in headlines, source selection and concluding paragraphs in a text (De Vrese, 2005; Entman, 1993). Frames in the news can be analysed through two approaches, which are, inductive (qualitative) and deductive (quantitative). This study used an inductive approach in order to create themes and categories after careful examination of the articles.

According to Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2008: 369) “framing analysis involves repeated and extensive engagement with a text and looks holistically at the material to identify frames.” Framing analysis investigates the key words and metaphors in the text, recognises what was included in the frame, as well as what was left out. Thus, this study examined the words and phrases used, the frames employed and major themes emerging in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibian print media.

Since the study employed an inductive approach, an inductive qualitative coding method was used. This form of coding relies on the researcher creating categories as they emerge from the data rather than arranging content into predisposed categories. Inductive qualitative coding begins with an in-depth reading of the text. From there, the researcher identifies themes and categories apparent in the text and places the content into these categories. According to Thomas (2003), this method of coding has three main benefits to it. Firstly, it condenses a lot of text into a summary format. Second, it establishes links between the research objectives and finally, formulates a theory from the data. Each article was read, and themes were coded as they emerged from the text.

In qualitative research, coding is “how you define what the data you are analysing are about” (Gibbs, 2007). Coding was done in the last weeks of November 2021 and the unit of analysis was

the entire story. A code sheet was designed to obtain all the relevant story information, including; news organisation, the story heading, the story narrative, the definition of the frames, and the themes. The coding sheet also included aspects such as the date the article was published and the words used in the article. Two coders were involved in the coding process. The coders undertook a pilot coding exercise of 10% of the 425 articles to ensure consistency in the coding of all articles. A maximum of eight keywords in the article were coded for each story. As the coding continued, themes were sometimes repeated, and the same keyword was used. From there, the 10 most popular keywords were selected, and data was analysed using those. These are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is one way that researchers can persuade themselves and their audience that their research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Gaba, 1985). The process of trustworthiness includes the notion of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln & Gaba, 1985). This study made use of the criteria introduced by Lincoln and Gaba to show the trustworthiness of the study. The above-mentioned criteria are explored in relation to how the study was conducted. Dependability is mainly concerned with ensuring that the research process is logical, traceable and well documented (Tohin & Begley, 2004). This was demonstrated through auditing (Koch 1994). Research steps taken throughout the research were clearly described. Guba and Lincoln (1998) claim that the credibility of the research is determined when core-researchers are confronted with the experience and can recognise it. This study ensured transferability through thick description of the methodology.

3.7 ETHICS

Research ethics are focused on what is morally right and what is not in the process of conducting research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Ethical clearance for this study was granted by NUST's ethics committee. In conducting this research there was need to make sure that no plagiarism occurred hence the study acknowledged all sources used as per required standards of the institution (Namibia University of Science and Technology). This research upheld the integrity of the research process by avoiding manipulation of data, offering a correct interpretation of the findings and acknowledgement of biases that could influence how data is analysed. The data

collected was used only for the purpose of this study. Lastly, the study focused on news reports as they are the most objective type of content given their use of traditional news gathering standards.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The chapter discussed the methodology adopted by this study. Topics such as the design, sample, procedure, data analysis and the ethical considerations were elaborated upon. The research design used to analyse the framing of COVID-19 in the Namibian print media was justified. The ethical considerations that guided the research were also explained. The chapter also described the population of the study, the sampling techniques used, and the data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Presentation of findings

This chapter presents, analyses, and provides a discussion on the findings of the study. The study aimed at examining the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Namibian print media. The findings are presented through specific frames and themes that emerged in the process of data analysis. The findings of the study are presented following the sequence of research questions as indicated in chapter one.

4.2 Research Question 1: What are the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

4.2.1 War terminology

War related or military terminology and phrases were often employed in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in the three newspapers. Words such as *'fight'*, *'combat'*, *'threat'* and *'front line'* dominated the discourse. *The Namibian* (22 July 2020) had an article titled *'Lüderitz gears up to fight Covid-19'*. In this article words and phrases like *'in readiness to contain the Covid-19 outbreak'*, *'ensure the safety of the residents'* and *'determined to fight'* were used to convey a specific message on Covid-19. In another article titled *'Government praised on coronavirus fight'* (*The Namibian*, 11 August 2020), words such as *"to combat COVID-19"*, *"threats posed"* and *"coronavirus fight"* were also prevalent in the story. Furthermore, the use of war terminology was observed in an article published on the 27th of September 2020 by *The Namibian*. The article titled *'Frontliners risk Covid-19 infection'* had words and phrases such as *'appropriate personal protective equipment'*, *'comply with measures'*, *'we will not surrender'* and *'in the front line'*.

The use of war terminology was also evident in *Namibian Sun*. On the 9th of April 2020, *Namibian Sun* had an article titled *'Coronavirus battle intensifies'*. In this article war terminology and phrases such as *'to volunteer in the fight'*, *'are yet to be deployed'* and *'battle'* were prevalent. On the 17th of July 2020, *Namibian Sun* published a story under the heading *'Health recruiting 2*

000 for Covid-19 battle' and words and phrases such as 'we still need manpower', 'fight', 'threatening lives and livelihoods' and 'battle' were common in the article.

New Era also had a high frequency of war related words and phrases in COVID-19 stories. For example, an article published on 24 April 2020 under the heading 'EU grants Govt N\$172m to fight Covid-19' used words and phrases such as 'to combat the Covid-19 pandemic', 'to fight' and 'fight against the pandemic'. *New Era* also had an article titled 'Community helps tackle Covid-19 fight' (26 May 2020). Words and phrases such as 'fight', 'preventative measures', 'battle, and 'contain' were used to describe approaches used in dealing with Covid-19. On the 22nd of June 2020 *New Era* had an article titled *Covid-19 battle gets shot in the arm* which had words such as 'emergency operation centre' 'strengthen the fight' 'frontline workers'.

The description above clearly shows that print media, specifically *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*, used war or military terminology and phrases to explain the different approaches used in dealing with Covid 19 as well as reflecting a particular view of the pandemic.

4.2.2 Pessimistic words and phrases

Pessimistic wording and phrases were often used when delivering the news on the COVID-19 pandemic through words such as 'coronavirus worsening hunger', 'wreaks havoc', 'devastating' and 'ravage economy'. This trend was observed in all three newspapers. For example, *Namibian Sun* on 25 March 2020, ran an article titled 'Coronavirus could force boxers out of sport' which had the presence of words and phrases such as 'many boxers to leave the sport for financial reasons', 'face tough times' and 'heartbreaking'. Again, on 11 May 2020, *Namibian Sun* covered an article titled 'Corona bites big events' which aimed to highlight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on events. This was highlighted through the following words and phrases 'postponed the Totem Expo', 'until further notice' and 'huge financial losses.' The use of pessimistic wording and phrases was reiterated in *Namibian Sun* on 8 June 2020, in a news article titled 'Covid to ravage economy' where there was prevalence of words such as 'mass casualties in tourism', 'unprecedented hit' and 'hit hard'.

New Era also had a high frequency of pessimistic words and phrases regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. *New Era* on 16 March 2020, published an article titled 'Airline revenues could fall by more than N\$1.8 trillion due to Covid-19' which contained words such as 'hardest-hit by the Covid-19 outbreak' 'airline revenues could fall by 19%' and 'collapse in demand is

unprecedented'. Again, on the 15th of April 2020, *New Era* published an article titled '*Tourism plunges over coronavirus*' which had words such as '*brought the N\$26 billion local tourism and hospitality industry to its knees*', '*directly and indirectly affected about 125 000 workers*' and '*hard hit*'. The use of pessimistic terminology was also observed in an article which was published on the 11th of May 2020. The article titled '*Covid-19 wreaks havoc for Omagongo festival planners*' had the presence of the following words and phrases; '*called off indefinitely*', '*described the situation as unfortunate*' and '*it is a struggle and a big loss.*'

The use of pessimistic wording and phrases was quite evident in *The Namibian*, for example an article titled '*Covid-19 job cuts unavoidable*' (*The Namibian*, 19 May 2020) had words and phrases such as '*no choice but to reduce their staff complement*', '*led to 70% of its fleet being parked during the lockdown*' and '*take drastic measures*'. *The Namibian*, 26 June 2020, also had an article with a high frequency of pessimistic wording and phrases. The article titled '*Covid-19 hits fishing hard*' had words and phrases such as '*70 employees currently quarantined and awaiting test results*', '*community transmissions*' and '*calling for Tunacor to temporarily halt operations*'. In addition, on the 25th of September 2020, *The Namibian* had an article titled '*Covid-19's scar on economy*' which had words and phrases such as '*Economic activities in Namibia between April and June this year decreased by around N\$4 billion*' '*11,1% contraction*' and '*most severe blow ever to economic activities*'. What is evident from the above is that pessimistic terminology was used by the media in an effort to communicate about the impact or effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. While these pessimistic words and phrases were seen, it was not 'all gloom and doom' as the media, in some instances, also used words which could bring hope to society. The next section provides a description on the use of reassuring words and phrases by the media in their reporting on Covid-19.

4.2.3 Reassuring words and phrases

It is important to note that reassuring wording and phrases were also used in reporting about the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia. Words and phrases such as '*corona care campaign*', '*research task force launched*', '*assist*' and '*under control*' were observed in some news articles. A news article published on the 28th of April 2020, by *The Namibian* reported that '*Almost 500 youths for door-to-door Covid-19 education*'. The article used phrases such as '*volunteers will educate the public on Covid-19*' and '*they can still seek the health services they need*'. On the 12th of June 2020, *The Namibian* ran a story titled '*6 300 to get Covid-related stimulus on Monday*'

which had words and phrases like *'financial assistance'*, *'three-month stimulus package availed'*. Also, the use of reassuring words and phrases was evident in an article that stressed how the COVID-19 cases were on the decrease. The article was titled *'Covid-19 cases on the decrease – Shangula'* (*The Namibian*, 8 Sept 2020) and phrases such as *'cases in the country look encouraging'*, *'a decrease in the number of cases reported daily'* and *'20 recoveries'* were seen in the article.

Reassuring phrases and words were also visible in *Namibian Sun*. On the 17th of Sept 2020, *Namibian Sun* had an article that talked about life after the COVID-19 pandemic titled *'Government sees Covid silver lining'* which had wording and phrases such as *'to set the country on track towards a universal healthcare system'* and *'generous investments'*. 24 June 2020, *Namibian Sun* had an article under the solidarity frame that aimed to reassure citizens titled *'Banks will help with Covid band-aid'*. Phrases such as *'banks have taken the partnership with government very seriously to help distressed consumers'*, *'debt relief'*, *'debt holidays'* and *'joining the fight'* communicated hope to the reader.

There was also the presence of reassuring language in *New Era* regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. *New Era* ran an article on the 29th of May which highlighted issues around the testing of the COVID-19 pandemic which reiterated the government's position on clearing the COVID-19 backlog titled *Covid-19: NIP to test 327 samples per day* which had reassuring words and phrases like *'upscale its testing capacity'* and *'see an increase of 192 tests per day'*. The novelty of the virus resulted in the launch of a research task force to give confidence to the public on the various efforts adopted to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. And, on the 20th of April 2020, *New Era* published an article titled *'Covid-19: Inter-university research task force launched'* which had words and phrases such as *'united into forming a high-level research coordination task force'*, *'to generate evidence'*, *'make actionable recommendations to government and the private sector'*. The touting of remdesivir as making a difference in the management of severe COVID-19 cases was an encouragement in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, on the 1st of September 2020, *New Era* had an article titled *Covid treatment drug arrives... remdesivir stock now available at medical store* which had reassuring words and phrases like, *'making a difference in the management of severe Covid-19 cases'*, *'shortened recovery time'* and *'improved survival'* *'It is also used to treat Covid-19'*. The presence of reassuring words was

meant to assure the public that there was hope in the fight against the COVID-19 battle and that it was not a lost battle.

4.3 Research Question 2: What were the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* in their reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 1: Theme distribution across the news media organisations

NEWSPAPER	FRAME									
	Blame	Social	Alarming	Economic	Solidarity	Assurance	Recovery	War	Mis-Information	Outbreak
The Namibian	5	21	40	20	13	19	6	1	1	39
New Era	7	31	25	29	26	20	2	-	2	6
Namibian Sun	6	17	3	29	18	13	6	3	1	16
TOTAL	18	69	68	78	57	52	14	4	4	61
TOTAL	425									

Frames are created when news organisations give prominence to an issue by choosing to cover it and by highlighting “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The distribution of the frames across the three newspapers is presented in **Table 2** above. From the findings of the study, it can be deduced that the majority of the stories from the three selected newspapers included multiple news frames, which include the alarming frame, the social frame, economic consequence, blame attribution, solidarity, outbreak, assurance, recovery, war and misinformation.

While all newspapers used multiple news frames in their reporting on Covid-19, it is evident based on the findings that *The Namibian* frequently used the alarming frame, while the social

frame was dominant in *Namibian Sun*. The economic consequence frame was dominant in *New Era*.

Alarming Frame

The coverage of the pandemic was dominated by the use of the alarming frame and often sensationalism was used by focusing on the high infection figures. Increasing numbers of infections were used to portray a dire situation and create an impression of a serious threat in the minds of the reader. *The Namibian* focused on the high figures of COVID-19 positive cases.

A DIRE shortage of isolation facilities in the Khomas region has left 1 941 Covid-19 patients isolating at home as the virus spreads unabated. This means out of 2 050 active cases, only 109 are currently in isolation facilities. The total confirmed cases in the region stood at 2 563 on Wednesday, with 513 recoveries and 25 deaths. (*The Namibian*, 26 August 2020)

Minister of Health and Social Services Kalumbi Shangula yesterday during the daily Covid-19 briefing said out of the 9 818 confirmed cases the country has recorded, 732 which involves teachers, students and pupils in 12 regions. This accounts for 7% of the total number of confirmed cases. (*The Namibian*, 15 September 2020)

Namibian Sun's, coverage of the pandemic also highlighted the prevalence of the alarm frame. The newspaper published a story focusing on the number of deaths and admissions:

President Hage Geingob has also pleaded with Namibians to adhere to regulations and preventative measures and warned that a second wave of Covid-19 infections has officially hit the country. 'The number of Covid-19-related hospital admissions has sharply increased in different parts of the country. The number of Covid-19-related deaths has also increased in recent weeks. Covid-19 is fatal. Our actions over the next several weeks will determine the trajectory of our battle against this invisible enemy,' (*Namibian Sun*, 10 November 2020).

Namibia recorded a total of 133 coronavirus deaths in the first ten months of this year, out of about 13 000 confirmed cases. (*Namibian Sun*, 13 November 2020).

New Era used the alarming frame in their reporting and focused on transmission and fatalities. On the 8th of September 2020, a story was published on community transmissions as well as fatalities:

National Coordinating Committee Chairperson for the Covid-19 outbreak Dr Bernard Haufiku said he strongly suspects community transmission of Covid-19 and those spreading it are just not showing the symptoms yet ... He said it is just a matter of time before it is discovered, while it will be a pleasant surprise if the country goes until June without any new positive coronavirus case reported' (*New Era*, 8 September 2020).

The country's Covid-19 death toll continues to rise, with health minister Dr Kalumbi Shangula yesterday announcing that five more people have succumbed to the deadly virus. This brings the country's death toll to 27. Two deaths were reported at both Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, while Windhoek registered one." (*New Era*, 14 August 2020)

Social Frame

The other frame that emerged was the social frame which largely delved into the ramifications of shutdowns on everyday life. *The Namibian*, in the wake of the pandemic covered the detrimental effect of the pandemic on societal norms for instance changes in burial procedures.

Families of those who succumbed to the novel coronavirus may transport their loved ones' remains only if the deceased was cremated at their cost. In addition, the families would have to provide two caskets for cremation and burial purposes. The Ministry of Health and Social Services has compiled a document setting out procedures and legal requirements related to the burial of those who succumbed to Covid-19. (*The Namibian*, 31 August 2020)

The social frame was reiterated in *New Era* with the main emphasis being on the crippling of sporting events.

The outbreak of the deadly coronavirus, which has infected more than 132,000 people globally and spread to at least 120 countries worldwide, has also severely crippled sporting events in Namibia.... President Hage Geingob on Saturday announced that government would implement several strong measures to try and contain the epidemic....(*New Era*, 16 March 2020)

Whereas, *Namibia Sun* focused on the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human lives such as working from home and school shutdowns.

Covid-19 has changed the way organisations operate and the world of work has gone through a massive shift when it comes to work arrangements. Previously, working from home was something most Namibian organisations were reluctant to implement and a topic many were still debating on. (*Namibian Sun*, 30 September 2020)

Economic Consequence Frame

The economic consequence frame dominated the reporting in the Namibian press as it focused on the effect of COVID-19 on the nation's economy and its particular consequence on the citizenry's economic well-being. The economic consequence in *The Namibian* was reflected as disruption of economic activities brought out by the pandemic resulting in unemployment.

Namibian employers say they have no choice but to reduce their staff complement to protect their companies from huge financial losses. This was stated in an affidavit filed by the Namibian Employers' Federation (NEF), the Namibian Employers Association and five companies (*The Namibian*, 19 May 2020)

On the other hand, *New Era* reflected on the price increases brought about by the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia.

The Namibia Competition Commission (NaCC) has warned businesses not to take advantage of consumers by price gouging during the coronavirus outbreak. NaCC CEO Vitalis Ndalikokule has urged the general public to be vigilant and file complaints regarding price gouging related to the coronavirus pandemic. (*New Era*, 25 March 2020)

Economic consequence frame once again took centre stage in *Namibian Sun's* coverage of COVID-19 pandemic with a majority of stories focusing on the negative implications of the virus on people's economic well-being.

Small businesses in Namibia, especially bus and taxi drivers, as well as vendors, have been hit by a slash in demand as people fear the spread of Covid-19. Bus and taxi drivers are complaining of less and less clients due to coronavirus. Drivers this week said that

they have so far already lost over 80% of the irregular clients. (*Namibian Sun*, 25 March 2020)

Blame attribution Frame

All the print media organisations used the blame attribution frame in reporting on issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Blame was laid on either the government, the ministry or the citizenry.

Anger is boiling over in Walvis Bay, which has become the epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic in Namibia with 20 cases out of the country's current 55, over a 150-bed isolation facility that is yet to get off the ground since March this year. This delay has been laid firmly at the feet of the health ministry, with even Swapo representatives joining the chorus of those lambasting the ministry's representatives in the region. (*Namibian Sun*, 22 June 2020)

The Namibian on the other hand, focused on the issue of negligence surrounding COVID-19.

Inmates detained at the Windhoek Correctional Facility say there are no measures at the prison to protect them from the new coronavirus. "We are under threat. We have been on lockdown since March, but we don't even get soap," an inmate who contacted *The Namibian* anonymously, said. The inmate complained about overcrowding, a lack of temperature screening of prisoners, and no personal protective equipment for wardens and officers. (*The Namibian*, 24 June 2020)

New Era used the blame attribution frame with regards to organisations accusing each other of ill-treatment. "The Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) is accusing some mining houses in the country of taking advantage of the current vulnerability during the Covid-19 pandemic by victimising workers in the form of retrenchment." (*New Era*, 14 April 2020)

Solidarity Frame

Solidarity frame emerged as a key frame that was widely used by the three print media organisations while they reported on the COVID-19 pandemic. Solidarity refers to mutual support within a group especially among individuals with a common interest. Solidarity surfaced in the various measures adopted to tackle the pandemic. The article in *The Namibian* "Lüderitz geared up to fight COVID-19" focused on various efforts to contain the outbreak.

THE Lüderitz Town council has stepped up efforts in readiness to contain the Covid-19 outbreak. The council is currently reactivating its screening point at the entrance of the town as some of the stringent measures to ensure better case tracing and control of residents. According to Lüderitz mayor, Brigitte Frederick, residents who enter and leave the town will be screened and registered, in order to curb possible local transmission of Covid-19. (*The Namibian*, 22 July 2020)

Whilst, *New Era* also showed the solidarity frame in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and largely delved into donations towards the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Founding President Sam Nujoma last week donated food parcels and face masks with a combined value of N\$40 000 to the government as part of the country's fight against Covid-19. The donation was handed over by Nujoma's senior special assistant Paul Shipale to Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila last week Thursday. The donation included food parcels to the tune of N\$35 500 and face masks valued at N\$5 000. (*New Era*, 7 May 2020)

Namibian Sun covered the solidarity frame through encouragement that there is light at the end of the tunnel with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Karasburg East constituency councillor Dennis Coetzee has urged residents of Karasburg not to panic after the town recorded two positive Covid-19 cases last week. A teacher at a local school and a worker at a quarantine facility tested positive for Covid-19 at the southern town. Coetzee made the call at the Ernst Jager Secondary School on Wednesday during a visit by the deputy minister of education, arts and culture, Faustina Caley, and the director-general of the National Planning Commission, Obeth Kandjoze. "Let us not panic, let us follow the health protocols and let us wait on the Health Ministry on the way forward," said Coetzee. (*Namibian Sun*, 20 July 2020)

Outbreak Frame

The outbreak frame also emerged in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia. It comprised topics such as quarantine, online schooling, and ways to contain the pandemic as well as confirmed cases. In *Namibian Sun* it was highly prevalent and focused on confirmed cases. "A private guard of Founding President Sam Nujoma died from Covid-19 complications last week,

while the former president and his private nurse are among seven persons from his office to have tested positive for the virus.” (*Namibian Sun*, 8 December 2020)

Whereas, the main focus with regards to the outbreak in *New Era* was on the issue to do with isolation.

A Russian man, who is part of 126 foreign crew that arrived via a chartered plane in Windhoek last Friday, tested positive for Covid-19. The fishing sector, according to Erongo health director Anna Jonas, is being allowed to quarantine foreign crew on vessels as long as they receive prior approval from the relevant authorities and are tested to ascertain their virus status. The 127 foreign crewmembers boarded vessels to replace another group of foreign crews that departed for Europe on the same day. (*New Era*, 14 July 2020)

The Namibian largely portrayed the outbreak frame through issues to do with the testing of coronavirus as well as the regulations regarding the pandemic.

Refusing to be quarantined or tested for the novel coronavirus could earn those guilty of such conduct a fine of up to N\$2 000. Alternatively, such persons could be imprisoned for a period not exceeding six months, or get both punishments meted against them. This is according to the stage 3 exit plan of the state of emergency regulations, which has also made testing and quarantine mandatory for all persons entering Namibia. (*The Namibian*, 17 Aug 2020)

Assurance Frame

Results showed that the assurance frame was quite prevalent in all three newspapers. Assurance frame covered issues to do with positive declarations and promises surrounding COVID-19. For example, in the *Namibian Sun* assurance focused mainly on issues to do with pledges.

Local commercial banks have taken the partnership with government “very seriously” to help distressed consumers and businesses impacted by the lockdown and the Covid-19 pandemic, the new chair of the Bankers Association of Namibia (BAN), Ester Kali, has said. (*Namibian Sun*, 24 June 2020)

New Era emphasised on COVID-19 control measures.

The Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr Kalumbi Shangula, announced the government will strengthen control measures in Windhoek and all regions to curb the spread of Covid-19. He said this while giving an update on Covid-19 yesterday. Shangula said some of the strengthened measures would include increasing testing for the virus, increasing isolation and quarantine facilities, among other measures. (*New Era*, 11 Aug 2020)

The Namibian, on the other hand portrayed the assurance frame mainly through articles that showed positive declarations with respect to the pandemic.

Health minister, Kalumbi Shangula says there is no need for panic, as the country registered three new Coronavirus cases this week...The detection of the two cases, after a period of 45 days without new cases should rekindle our resolve to intensify the fight against Covid-19 in the country. I express my appreciation to the public for their cooperation, that we do not have a local transmission (*The Namibian*, 8 April 2020)

Recovery Frame

The recovery frame exhibited low salience in all the three newspapers. With a total of 14 articles under the recovery frame it was based on articles to do with recoveries, the discharged and the COVID-19 survivors sharing their experiences. *Namibian Sun* opted for news articles that focused on the discharged. "Namibian ambassador to France Albertus Aochamub says he has made a good recovery from coronavirus and may be discharged from hospital this week, having been admitted on 15 March." (*Namibian Sun*, 31 March 2020)

Whilst, *New Era* went the route of the number of recoveries when outlining issues under the recovery frame.

The number of patients who have recovered from the coronavirus in the country is on the up, with 1 648 given the all clear at the weekend, while the total recovery rate stood at 67%. According to the latest figures released by the health ministry yesterday, 6 543 patients have recovered from Covid-19, leaving the country with 3 075 active cases and 101 deaths. (*New Era*, 14 September 2020)

The Namibian, prioritised people sharing COVID-19 stories.

Labour expert Herbert Jauch has given a harrowing account of his battle against Covid-19, giving hope for many who have fallen victim to the ravaging pandemic. After being discharged from Lady Pohamba Private Hospital in Windhoek on Friday, Jauch recounted his experience, which he describes as near-death, on camera. (*The Namibian*, 31 Aug 2020)

War and Misinformation Frames

The war frame as well as the misinformation frame had the least salience as seen on Table: 2 above. The war frame focused on news articles littered with militaristic language and the impact of the pandemic on security. *Namibian Sun* highlighted the impact of the pandemic on security issues. “International relations minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah said the coronavirus pandemic will no doubt have a bearing on progress in the areas of democracy, peace and security, as election observations will not be feasible in some instances.” (*Namibian Sun*, 11 June 2020)

Whilst, the war frame in *The Namibian* was highlighted through the use of military language. For example,

The Ministry of Health and Social Services has appointed 2 627 more workers to help in the fight against Covid-19 as more healthcare workers test positive for the virus...At the front, middle and rear of this battle against Covid-19 are the frontline workers. With the increasing number of Covid-19 cases and even deaths in Namibia, as witnessed in the past days and weeks, the workload of our frontline workers has increased correspondingly,’ Shangula said (*The Namibian*, 27 Aug 2020)

On the other hand, the misinformation frame was reiterated in all the three newspapers as correction of misleading information being spread and the mainstream media taking the role of conveying reliable information.

Namibian police chief, Inspector-General Sebastian Ndeitunga, says the suspected coronavirus contact at the police national headquarters was a false alarm and caused the force embarrassment...the investigation revealed that the employee's aunt reportedly suffers from sinusitis and on 21 June jokingly informed her family that she tested positive

for the coronavirus. "This is the joke that was brought to the police national headquarters on Monday," (*Namibian Sun*, 2 July 2020)

4.4 Research Question 3: What are the major themes emerging in the framing of COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

The emergent themes were crime, medical theme and the impact of COVID-19.

Crime Related

All three print media outlets ran a crime story related to the COVID-19 outbreak. The stories ranged from price gouging of COVID-19 supplies to the selling of fake COVID-19 medicine. *The Namibian* ran a story where a Chinese national was selling a COVID-19 prevention formula.

On Monday afternoon, officers raided several shops and warehouses as well as a house owned by Chinese businessman Yu Simon who was selling the formula. According to an advert in one shop, the formula helps "improve the immunity of human body and adjust viscera function and achieve physiological state of balance of Yin and Yang of the body... (Sic)." "If the tests confirm that there is some medicinal value then he will definitely be charged under the Medical Act because he may not sell medicine without complying with the rules and regulations under that act. We don't really know if it has medicinal value or he is just trying to make money out of the (Covid-19) situation," he said. (*The Namibian*, 1 July 2020)

New Era, had the following story highlighting crime related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The story on how businesses were hiking prices for essential products against the COVID-19 pandemic.

With regards to masks (N95 and 3ply), the commission discovered that before the outbreak, 3-ply masks would retail for around N\$10 and N\$100 for the N95 masks. He said today, however, retailers are selling the masks at N\$75 (3-ply) and N\$230 (N95). Ndalikokule said the competition act, prohibits acts of excessive pricing and collusive behaviour through price-fixing by retailers and suppliers. "Penalties for such conduct are severe and may attract a fine of 10% of turnover. All retailers of these essential products are therefore warned against exploiting consumers through artificially inflated prices," he said. (*New Era*, 25 March 2020)

On the other hand, *Namibian Sun* ran a crime story about the increase of COVID-19 related scams.

There has been a spike in coronavirus-related scams in Namibia as fraudsters try to take advantage of people. Global information and insights company TransUnion has warned Namibians to be on their guard against these scams. According to a statement issued by the company, criminals are taking advantage of the financially vulnerable and people looking for information about the pandemic to defraud them or steal their personal details. (*Namibian Sun*, 15 Sept 2020)

Medical Theme

The medical theme also materialised in how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in the Namibian press. The theme comprised articles with health official advice, frontline workers experts searching for answers about COVID-19 news about shortage in supplies, procurement of vaccines and efficacy of preventative measures. *Namibian Sun* focused on the procurement of vaccines in portraying the medical theme.

Namibia is likely to be one of the first recipients of the Covid-19 vaccine, which is expected to reach our shores early next year, health minister Dr Kalumbi Shangula said yesterday. The country recently joined the Covax Facility to procure the vaccine and has since signed a committed purchase agreement with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. (*Namibian Sun*, 17 December 2020)

In *The Namibian* the medical theme materialised in an article that focused on the arrival of remdesivir a COVID-19 treatment drug.

Namibia received its first batch of remdesivir, an antiviral drug used in patients with severe Covid-19 symptoms, last week Monday...Health minister Kalumbi Shangula told *The Namibian* this morning that the government has received 1 000 ampoules of the drug and are still waiting for more. He noted that the drug can be used on patients with severe Covid-19 to improve recovery rate and lower the death rate. (*The Namibian*, 1 September 2020)

On the other hand, *New Era* also covered issues to do with the medical theme during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emphasis was on a research task force to give recommendations on how to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Institutions of higher learning have united into forming a high-level research coordination task force on Covid-19 meant to assist the ministry of health in its response to the global pandemic. The University of Namibia vice chancellor Kenneth Matengu said the task force will aim to generate evidence on which sectors of the economy will be most severely hit by the pandemic and make actionable recommendations to government and the private sector. (*New Era*, 20 April 2020)

Impact of COVID-19 Theme

COVID-19 created unprecedented challenges in Namibia and its impact was huge. The impact of the COVID-19 was another theme that emerged in how the COVID-19 stories were framed by the Namibian print media. *New Era* focused on how resorts and the tourism industry was losing revenue:

Like many other tourism establishments, resorts in the Etosha National Park have recorded a significant loss in revenue due to the Covid-19 outbreak. “If you look at the figures of both April 2019 and April 2020, last year, we recorded revenue of N\$2.6 million. But this year, we only received N\$26 000. For now, we are merely surviving from the previous financial year, but this loss in revenue will affect the next financial year and we are worried about how little we may receive from the central government,” said Evaristo Nghilai (*New Era*, 14 May 2020)

In *The Namibian*, the impact of COVID-19 materialised in an article that focused on the changes in burial arrangements of the deceased:

Families of those who succumbed to the novel coronavirus may transport their loved ones' remains only if the deceased was cremated at their cost. In addition, the families would have to provide two caskets for cremation and burial purposes. The Ministry of Health and Social Services has compiled a document setting out procedures and legal

requirements related to the burial of those who succumbed to Covid-19. (*The Namibian*, 8 April 2020)

Namibian Sun also covered issues to do with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and this was through a focus on how COVID-19 increased food insecurity fears:

Namibia last week participated in a Southern African Development Community (SADC) meeting of ministers responsible for agriculture, food security, fisheries and aquaculture, which highlighted that the impact of the coronavirus will lead to increased food insecurity and more morbidities in the region. (Namibian Sun, 27 May 2020)

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The aim of the study was to investigate how *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* framed the COVID-19 pandemic in their reporting. During epidemics and pandemics of the past, the media have played an important role in disseminating information that can promote preventative behaviours in a population (Zhou et al., 2019). Even during the Covid-19, media has played a significant role in communicating about COVID-19 as the media present information, they also promote dominant frames, which emphasise certain elements of a story to impact an audience's perception of reality (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Media can, in their presentation of information, also motivate or support the adoption of particular health behaviours, in light of a pandemic.

The findings in this study show that the three selected newspapers used war, pessimistic as well and reassuring words and phrases. Military metaphors are typically used in the news coverage of coverage of viruses (Chiang & Duann, 2007; Larson, Nerlich and Wallis, 2005). War related terminology and phrases were often employed in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia in three selected newspapers. Evidence from prior studies has shown that during pandemics discussions are often characterised by war metaphors (Sontag, 1989). De Souza (2007) also contends that the use of war language such as 'enemy', 'battle' and 'combat' is prevalent during pandemics. When media uses military terminology, they create what Altheide (2002) calls a "Discourse of Fear". In this instance an environment that depicts danger and risk everywhere is portrayed by the media.

Reassuring words were also prevalent in how the media framed the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of newspaper coverage of swine flu in Australia showed that the 'deadly swine flu' narrative prevailed with a combination of pessimistic and reassuring messages (Holland and Blood, 2010). The reassuring frame was meant to assure the public that there is hope in the efforts to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. Durkin et al. (2018) have argued that for health messages to have an impact on behavioural changes, there is a need to avoid messages that evoke fear and sadness and focus more on messages that evoke hope.

Findings also show that the economic consequence frame dominated the Covid-19 reporting although other frames such as the alarming frame, social frame, economic consequence frame, blame attribution frame, solidarity frame, outbreak frame, assurance frame, recovery frame, war frame and misinformation frame were also observed in the reporting done by the three newspapers. The impact of the pandemic on people's well-being as well as on the nation's economy dominated in the Namibian mass media than anything else. Iyengar (1990) asserts that the financial impact is what is regarded as the economic consequence frame. Mu'aza and Moses (2021) espouse that the economic consequence frame is given attention due to hardships people face due to restriction of movements necessitated by the inability of daily income earners to move and fend for themselves. COVID-19 indeed exasperated the economic conditions (Kunu, 2020). The World Health Organisation (2006) corroborates that health challenges have serious economic implications on nations' economies. The views emerging from literature are consistent with the study's observations. It is evident that the economic frame was used to demonstrate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy and livelihoods of people in different communities.

Health communication is often examined through framing. The media framing of the pandemic can be essential to the public adopting precautionary measures to control an outbreak along with limiting the infection and fatality rates (Siddiqua et al., 2020). The alarming frame was also prevalent in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Namibian print media. This is consistent with the coverage of avian flu and SARS which was largely sensationalist, focusing on worst case scenario (Berry, Wharf-Higgins & Naylor, 2007; Washer 2004). The adoption of this frame suggests that it was meant to portray a dire situation and the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Entman (1993) asserted that the issues which received more details were also regarded as more important by the members of the public as the media not only tells us what to think but also

how to think about an issue. The study analysed the emergent themes used in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Namibian print media. Three themes emerged which included the medical theme, crime related theme and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The medical theme was apparent in the analysed articles. Preventive measures such as the usage of face mask, regular and proper washing of hands, social distancing, were highly encouraged due to the novelty of the virus and the absence of any pharmaceutical treatment (Mu'aza & Moses, 2021). Existing literature is consistent with the study's findings. The prevalence of the medical theme can be attributed to the novelty of the pandemic and the fact that there is no known cure for COVID-19. The medical theme was identified in a study by Kott and Limaye (2016).

The impact of COVID-19 is another theme that emerged in the framing of the virus. The impact of the pandemic was either social or economic. Economists have highlighted the likelihood of economic devastation of maintaining a strict lockdown for too long (Rospigliosi, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 theme had a lot of prevalence due to the introduced anomic conditions that were impacting the way of life. The crime theme also emerged on how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in the Namibian print media. Lifestyle changes around contagion threats theoretically should have an effect on the volume and distribution of crime with quarantine, economic stress, and perhaps the most obvious crime threat of forced isolation (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020).

Consequently, the study confirms the view that it is through the process of framing that media attains the ability to attract attention towards a particular issue (Entman, 2007). In terms of health crisis especially in the scenario of COVID-19 pandemic media framing helped in imparting significance to the information regarding the pandemic (Liu & Kim, 2011).

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter focused on the data analysis, presentation and discussion. The chapter presented, provides a discussion on the study's findings which are presented following the sequence of research questions as indicated in chapter one. The words and phrases used, the frames employed and the themes emerging in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic were analysed.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This section discusses the summary of findings and provides a conclusion based on study findings as well as provide recommendations for future research. This study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- What are the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?
- What were the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* in their reporting of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
- What are the major themes emerging in the framing of COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

The chapter begins by providing a summary of findings, followed by conclusions based on the findings, recommendations, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and the chapter conclusion.

5.2 Summary of findings

This study provided key insights into how *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* covered the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was informed by the Framing Theory and a summary of findings presented in line with each research question.

5.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

The study found that the words and phrases used in the COVID-19 stories by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* can be categorised as pessimistic, in some cases assuring and as war terminology. Military words such as the 'enemy', 'battle' and 'combat' were quite common, while words and phrases such as '*wreaks havoc*', '*devastating*' and '*ravage economy*', '*face tough times*' and '*heartbreaking*' created a sombre and arguable pessimistic feeling about COVID-19. Some words also provided assurance that not all hope was lost and this was seen in words such as '*cases in the country looks encouraging*', '*a decrease in the number of cases*

reported daily, *'20 recoveries*' and *silver lining*. These words and phrases were prevalent in the three newspapers.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: What were the frames employed by *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era* in their reporting of the COVID-19 Pandemic?

A number of stories included multiple news frames such as the alarming frame, the social frame, the economic consequence frame, blame attribution, solidarity, outbreak, assurance, recovery, war and misinformation. The economic consequence frame was the most dominant frame in *New Era*. The regulations surrounding COVID-19 that is the lockdowns were a huge toll on the daily economic activities of the majority of the population. Rospigliosi (2020) highlighted the potential economic devastation of maintaining a strict quarantine for too long. The lockdown was quickly gazetted but the economic relief did not do much to save the Namibian economy from bleeding.

The alarming frame was dominant in *The Namibian* mainly meant to portray the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic with main focus on the high figures of COVID-19 positive cases, number of deaths and admissions. The social frame was dominant in *Namibian Sun* with the main focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on everyday life focusing on the changes in burial procedures, cancellation of sporting events and the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on everyday life such as remote working.

The other frames that materialised in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic include the recovery frame, the assurance frame, outbreak frame, the blame attribution frame, the war frame and misinformation frame. The war frame and misinformation had the least salience. The war frame focused on the impact of the pandemic on security while the misinformation frame was mainly focusing on the correction of misleading information being spread around the COVID-19 pandemic through social media. The mainstream had to set the record straight.

5.2.3 Research Question 3: What are the major themes emerging in the framing of COVID-19 in *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*?

The COVID-19 pandemic received high media coverage. The third research question analysed the themes employed by the Namibian press with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergent themes were the impact of COVID-19, crime and medical theme. The medical theme was the most dominant. This maybe be due to the constancy of the COVID-19 surges, the absence of a

non-cure and the state of the health facilities. The crime related theme focused on price gouging of COVID-19 supplies and the selling of fake COVID medicine. The other theme that emerged was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the unprecedented challenges created by the pandemic and its impact.

5.3 Conclusions based on the findings

This study sought to understand how three Namibian newspapers framed the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on articles written between 13th March 2020 and 31st December 2020. Evidently print media was selective in how they reported on COVID-19. Media chose specific words and frames to communicate a specific message to the public. In this instance war terminology was used to show gravity of the situation to the public. The use of such war terminology and in some cases terminology that can be considered pessimistic was used to compel the public to behave in a particular manner in light of the pandemic. Porter (1999) argues that when media uses war terminology during a pandemic, the effect is the justification of public health policies that curb individual rights as necessary for national security.

The use of the economic frame was to depict the impact of the pandemic on the livelihood of society. Previous studies have shown that economic frames can lead to attitude changes (Chong & Marshall, 1999; Malhotra & Newman, 2017). The blame attribution frame also materialised, resulting in finding something to blame. For example, issues to do with negligence surrounding COVID-19. Issues to blame are recurrently present during a health crisis as the public attempts to make sense of the catastrophe by analysing human actions that could have led to the spread of the disease (Farmer, 2006).

The war frame had the least salience. It was used to show the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings were reflected by some commentators that conclude that pandemics are discussed through a war frame (see Abraham, 2007 for SARS and Scoones and Forster 2010 for avian flu) where the medical personnel were viewed as army and the drugs deployed as weapons.

Through the qualitative content analysis methodology and with the application of the framing theory the study offered significant insights on the scholarly research of media framing during a public health crisis. Moreover, it enriched the literature on news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, moreover, gave an understanding of media content in Namibia during a

public health crisis, as there are limited studies in this area. Thus, this study offered valuable insight into the words used, frames employed and themes emerging in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. The media plays an essential role in providing information at the initial stages of a disease outbreak. Its function is crucial in influencing the public perceptions of the disease and also contributes to curbing the spread of the epidemic.

5.4 Recommendations

The study further recommends that the Namibian newspapers should learn more of their reportage of epidemics and pandemics towards positive direction of allaying fear rather than heightening it while trying to curb the spread of the virus. The reports should go beyond merely creating awareness to rally the people to be more proactive in combating the virus. COVID-19 also highlighted the country's economic fragility.

5.5 Limitations of the study

The coronavirus pandemic is an ongoing crisis and therefore this research was limited in its time frame. Employing a mixed methods approach, involving quantitative and qualitative research methods would broaden our understanding of the framing of the pandemics. The study is applicable in the context it was set. Its generalisation outside this backdrop is not known.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

This study examined the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in *The Namibian*, *New Era* and **Namibian Sun**. The chapter discussed the conclusion and recommendations. A summary of findings, conclusions based on the findings, recommendations and limitations of the study were discussed.

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7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THEMATIC CATEGORISATION	CODE	DATE	TOTAL
Blame	BL		
Social	SL		
Alarming	AG		
Economic	EC		
Solidarity	SY		
Assurance	AE		
Recovery	RY		
Mis-information	MN		
Outbreak	OK		



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (F-REC)
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DECISION: ETHICS EXEMPTION

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The Faculty of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (F-REC) of the Namibia University of Science and Technology reviewed an ethical clearance application of a Master in Journalism and Media Technology (MJMT) student and exempt the under listed student for ethical clearance requirement as the research as set out in the application is deemed as desktop study research.

No. Student Full Names Research Topic/ Title Supervisor

No.	Student	Full Names	Research Topic/ Title	Supervisor
1	220102821	Kudakwashe	FRAMING OF THE COVID-19	Dr

		Mushayavanhu	PANDEMIC IN NAMIBIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAMIBIAN, NAMIBIAN SUN AND NEW ERA	Nkosinethando Mpofu
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We would like to point out that, principal investigator (s), are obliged to:

- maintain the ethical integrity of your research,
- adhere to the Research policy and ethical guidelines of NUST, and
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Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the F-REC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to your supervisor or F-REC as applicable in writing. Should there be any uncertainty in this regard, you have to consult with the F-REC.

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at NUST.

Sincerely,

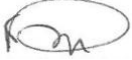


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3 February 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

I am writing to certify that a thesis entitled **FRAMING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NAMIBIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAMIBIAN, NAMIBIAN SUN AND NEW ERA** presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements **FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AT NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (NUST)** was presented to me by **KUDAKWASHE MUSHAYAVANHU** student number **220102821** for **LANGUAGE EDITING**.

I read through the entire thesis and did some track changes, which if carefully followed and implemented, will result in a thesis with an appropriate English language level for submission and examination.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries. Thank you.

Yours sincerely



Dr Max Mhene

(Lecturer-Literature, Linguistics and Communication)