

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF COVID-19: A
STUDY OF THE DAILY GRAPHIC.**

BY

AMIDATU IBRAHIM

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(MADC19015)

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
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AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

OCTOBER 2020

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original research, and that no part has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's signature..... Date

AMIDATU IBRAHIM

MADC19015

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the presentation and preparation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines of supervision of dissertation laid down by the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism.

Supervisor's signature..... Date.....

Dr. EBO AFFUL

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty and the Ibrahim family.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The world has had its hit of another global health menace with the emergence of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The disease was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and was suspected of being zoonotic. On January 30, 2020 a month later, the novel virus was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020).

The newness of the disease and the rate of spread has become alarming and people are interested in gathering all information on the novel coronavirus. Public health officials are working to communicate crucial information to the public so that individuals can take the needed precautions and government plan and respond accordingly. Scientist have been working to clarify the characteristics of the virus, including transmissibility, death rate and origin (Perlman, 2020).

During a health crisis, the public depends on the media to convey accurate and up-to-date information in order to make informed decisions regarding health protective behaviors, in times of uncertainty and crisis, the public increases their reliance on the media (Ball-Rokeach & DeFluer, 1976) and it is important that trusted sources are available to provide risk assessments and recommendations (Lachlan et al., 2016). Decision science has revealed that people form accurate perceptions of risk when facts are known and communicated to the public effectively via the media (Fischhoff et al., 2018). In the absence of information-whether because the

information is unknown to officials or because it is ineffectively communicated-ambiguity can lead to heightened appraisals of threat (Matheson & Anisman 2014).

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The media plays an important role in every society, the role of the media is also heightened during a public health crisis. The media are important in promoting health messages because they serve as the primary carriers of health messages (Nelson et al., 2014). The media is expected to convey urgent information to the populace in real time, while simultaneously tempering untoward media exposure that can lead to traumatic stress responses and associated maladies (Hong & Collins 2016).

The role of journalists and public health officials are intertwined to help inform the public during a health crisis. Journalists and public health officials work to communicate critical information globally regarding risk assessments and recommendations and as well as dealing with the threat of audience having psychological distress resulting from repeated media exposure to the outbreak (Thompson & Holman 2019). The amount of media exposure as well as the content of the exposure matters as well. Beyond effects on physical health, repeated media exposure may lead to overtax health care facilities as they deal with an influx of concerned patients especially during epidemics (Nelson & Schunk 2012).

In the past decade, several studies have demonstrated that both the type and amount of media exposure affect psychological and physical responses to a community, the role of the media in public health crisis and how misinformation can spread perceived risk and health about health-related topics (Yang & Vishwanath 2018). A few studies have attempted to examine crisis or risk

communication strategies as well as media message design during health emergency (Atkin & Wallack, 1990; Cline & Haynes, 2001).

With all these researches, there has been very few studies on the importance of risk communication as a vehicle for covering a public health crisis in Ghana. This study therefore seeks to assess how the media in Ghana gave coverage to the novel coronavirus to establish if attention is given to the relevance of risk communication.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to assess the coverage of COVID-19 by *Daily Graphic*. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To examine the nature of reportage on COVID-19 by *Daily Graphic*.
2. To examine the extent of coverage given to COVID-19 by *Daily Graphic*.
3. To explore the framing techniques used by *Daily Graphic* in the coverage of COVID-19.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Globally, the health of citizens is a priority and the media have been considered as an effective tool in providing educative and informative news items on health and health related issues. Many studies have established the relevance of the media in health but little literature is available on the relevance of risk communication during reportage on public health crisis. This study thus seeks to examine the nature of reportage of the media in Ghana during a public health crisis so as to ascertain the importance of effective risk communication. This research will add to knowledge on media framing studies carried out in Ghana by helping to establish the relevance of effective risk communication when framing health stories.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1.2 Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Coronaviruses are zoonotic viruses responsible for mild respiratory tract infections and fatal pneumonia in humans (Su et al., 2016). The first trace of human coronavirus was identified in the 1960s, in the noses of people with common cold (Felman and White, 2020).

In recent times, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has identified seven coronaviruses that can affect humans as, 229E (alpha coronavirus), NL63 (alpha coronavirus), OC43 (beta coronavirus), HKU1 (beta coronavirus), MERS-CoV (the beta coronavirus that causes Middle East respiratory syndrome), SARS-CoV (the beta coronavirus that causes acute respiratory syndrome), SARS-CoV-2 (the novel coronavirus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19).

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a pandemic that has become a global public health concern. The symptoms of the novel coronavirus have been described to include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, and diarrhea (Chen et al., 2019) whereas cases of severe infection result in pneumonia, kidney failure and death (WHO, 2020).

2.1.3 Mass Media and its Functions

The mass media are all the channels used to communicate simultaneously with many people (Abdullah, 2014). They include radio, television, newspapers, magazines, billboards films, recordings, books, the internet and smart media (Abdullah, 2014).

Traditionally, the mass media are known to educate, entertain and inform society, with the information function considered as the media's core function. The media plays a major role in society and one of these roles is to keep the inform the audience about happenings in the world (Obukoadata & Abuah, 2014).

The mass media also performs the surveillance function, also called the news and information role of the media (Dominick, 2012). The surveillance function of the media is important in every society especially during disease control and prevention (Obukoadata & Abuah, 2014).

2.1.4 Types of Media – Traditional and Social Media

In the past, traditional forms of media were the only ways one could get a message out to the public. However, in today's digital landscape, there are a variety of new methods for reaching a mass (or niche) audience. Traditional media refers to forms of mass media that focus on delivering news to the general public or a targeted group of the public. It includes print publications (newspapers and magazines) and Broadcast (television and radio). (Lawlor, 2018)

Social media on the other hand has been used to describe various internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Over the past decade, the media landscape has dramatically changed with social media outlets such as blogs, online discussion forums and online communities now supplementing traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines and television programs (Stephen & Galak, 2010).

2.1.5 The Media Landscape in Ghana

Ghana has a thriving media environment, resulting from the liberalization of the media in 1992 (Ansu-Kyeremeh & Karikari, 1998). The media in Ghana are influential agenda setters,

influencing opinion formation and behaviour change (Leask et al., 2010; Thompson & Yeboah, 2013).

In Ghana the predominant traditional media platforms are radio, television and newspaper. This vibrant media landscape has about 356 operational FM radio stations, 51 TV stations and over 15 newspaper publications as per the National Communications Authority of Ghana 2017 report. Although print media have a strong agenda-setting function, they are limited in reach due to high illiteracy levels (Thompson & Yeboah 2013). Since the establishment of the first Ghanaian owned newspaper in 1857 to help educate and mobilize the people for the struggle of independence, there has been the radio and television broadcasting and now in the 21st century, the internet and digital media are serving the people with much information on diverse issues happening around the globe.

2.1.6 Media Coverage of Health Issues

The mass media are noted as being very influential in shaping discourse about health (Hyaes et al., 2007). The media is a source for health information for the lay people (Wade & Schramm, 1969) and in some cases physicians and scientists learn of developments in medicine through the media (Shuchman, 2014).

The media has been considered an important tool for communicating information about vaccines and increasing awareness and motivating the public to make important decisions about their health care (Casciotti & Klassen, 2014). The mass media constitutes the most accessible source of public health information for most people, especially in developing countries. The media enlighten the public about risk factors, methods of preventing diseases and available treatments

through news broadcast, editorials and other programs (Marks et al., 2007). News media coverage influences health behaviours and policies (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001).

As consumers of information the public is completely dependent on the mass media for the opinions, perceptions and judgments to form basis for their decisions (Blaine & Powell, 2001).

Media coverage of health issues shape the way individuals understand what should be done to prevent or treat a disease (Leask, Hooker & King, 2002). The relationship between the media and disease prevention and treatment is a natural one because communication is essential to any prevention effort, and the media are agents of mass communication (Saunders & Goddard, 2002). The media are understood to be a primary source and medical and health information- usually cited second only to an individual's doctor (Bactic & Greenberg, 1979).

Understanding media coverage of health-related issues is important for two reasons. First, media depictions of health issues are key influence on how a disease or illness is understood within a culture. Intertwined with the experience of a disease is the media's portrayal of disease. The media portrayal may affect the social relations, the self-images, the economic and political positions of persons with the disease (Clarke, 1992).

2.2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.2.1 Framing Theory

The concepts and theories of framing were recovered for the field of sociology by Erving Goffman under the title of frame analysis in 1974. The theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called the frame) influences the choices people make about how to process that information.

Goffman (1974) suggests that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. This powerful tool used by the media suggests how the public should think by putting the message out in a way which appeals to the audience. Thus, the way a message is presented influences the choice that people make about how to process the information.

Robert Entman is another researcher who contributes significantly to the framing theory. Entman (1993) adds that to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described. Thus, framing comes about when media choose some factors about an issue or event to emphasize over other factors. For Entman (1993), repetition, the different location of information in the texts, and the association with certain social and cultural symbols, are the strategies employed by the media to give greater or lesser emphasis to an aspect of reality.

Entman (1993) defined salience as making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audience. He went on to say an increase in salience enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it and store it in memory (Entman, 1993). When a certain factor is emphasized over and over, it will become more engrained in the audience's mind and be easier to recall in future instances that require an opinion about that issue or something related to it. Entman (1993) also suggested that frames in the news can be examined and identified by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgement.

Gitlin (1980) further elaborated on the concept of frame by observing that frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters. He also added that the mass media is a conscious distributor of ideology. These ideologies are created primarily through the way the information is packaged and presented. Every story has an angle or lens through which the events that are interpreted creates the frame, thus, when journalists are gathering information or covering the same event, whereas one journalist will report from a positive angle, another will report from a negative angle. Journalist reporting from different angles is what sometimes accounts for the difference in headlines and news stories of the same event.

Reese (2007) explained that frames are more than phrases. They are the organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world. When journalist attempt to present information in the form of news stories, the way they present the information is sometimes affected by their own biases and perceptions. Although the presentations and facts may be true, the elements the journalist chooses to include and emphasize can affect and shape reader's perception. Thus, news covered by journalists from different organisations which any can belong to an ethnic group, the stories may differ as they report differently.

Tankard et al. (2001) suggested eleven framing mechanisms or focal point for identifying and measuring news frames. These include subheads, photo captions, leads, source selection and quotes, pulls, logos, statics and charts, concluding statements and paragraphs.

The framing theory will be useful in confirming the research objective, to identify the major frames and tones used by the Daily Graphic in the coverage of Covid-19.

2.2.2 Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model (HBM) was first developed in the 1950s by social psychologists in the United States Public Health Service to explain the widespread failure of people to participate in programmes aimed at detecting and preventing diseases (Hochbaum, 1958; Rosenstock, 1960, 1974). Subsequently, the model was extended to study people's responses to symptoms and their behaviors in response to a diagnosed illness, particularly adherence to medical regimens (Becker, 1974).

According to the cognitive theories, which the Health Belief Model forms a part of, the role of subjective rationales for health-related behaviour are a function of the subjective values of an outcome and the subjective expectations that a particular action will achieve that outcome.

In its original formation, the HBM hypothesized that health related actions depend upon simultaneous occurrence of three classes of components: 1) the existence of sufficient motivation to make health salient; 2) the belief of a perceived threat to health; and 3) the belief that following a particular health recommendation will be beneficial in reducing the perceived threat (Rossential, 1996; Rossential, 1974; Becker, 1974; Rossential et al., 1998). The relationship between these components and behaviour is held to be mediated by demographic, structural and enabling factors.

These hypotheses in the HBM are operationalized by the explanatory factors (presented in parenthesis) is an illustration of factors related to audience response to coverage on COVID-19:

-perceived susceptibility of an individual to the health risk (one's perception of the possibility of contracting COVID-19);

-perceived severity of the illness if it is contracted (if COVID-19 is contracted, the likelihood of dying);

-perceived benefits of strategies for preventing the illness (social distancing, wearing of facemask, washing of hand with soap under running water constantly and the use of sanitizers prevents contracting COVID-19)

The HBM has been criticized for its inherent conceptual problems. Some of the most serious are: the failure to consider adequately the bases of variation in an individual's ability both to evaluate the potential consequences of behaviour and to utilize these evaluations; the cost-benefit perspectives and age-related benefits (Janz and Becker, 1984; Vanlandingham, 1993).

2.3 REVIEW OF RELEVANT AND RELATED WORKS

Some scholars have conducted research on the influence of media in the health sector. In their findings, some hinted at how the media positively influences health behaviours, making people take practical steps to improve their health whereas other studies focus on the type of information the media distributes on a health issue, other scholars also suggest that there is a relationship between the type of information on the particular issue and the perception of the audience on the health issue. In all these studies, there has been little research on the role the media plays in crisis communication during a disease outbreak.

In a study conducted by Asaolu et al. (2016), they examined newspaper coverage of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in Nigeria looking at its implication for prevention and control. Their objective for the research was to establish the role of the media in awareness, prevention and control of

Ebola virus disease by analyzing EVD themes coverage. The study employed content analysis of print editions of three Nigerian newspapers (*The Guardian, The Punch and Vanguard*) over a period of four months from the disease outbreak to the subsequent control of the disease. A total of 123 issues of each paper was used amounting to 369 issues. The newspapers yielded a total of 1118 articles and stories on Ebola virus disease.

The findings of the research showed that 230 articles of the newspapers' coverage on EVD were focused on public enlightenment. 275 of the stories (representing 24.6%) were from medical experts. In addition, 135 (representing 12.1%) articles were also sourced from the World Health Organization (WHO). The study also showed that newspaper articles centered more on cases of EVD (270) in the country, Government responses and measures (271), 93 articles covered funding that were put in fighting the epidemic. The study concludes by revealing the media in general and newspapers in particular created the needed awareness to deal with the EVD epidemic in Nigeria. The study thus establishes the relevance of the media in creating awareness during a public health crisis.

A study by Babalola and Babalola Y. (2013) looked at the economic effects of media campaigns during pandemic diseases looking at a case of bird flu on poultry business in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in Ogun state. Questionnaires were given to 84 farmers sampled across four poultry zones created by the state's veterinary department. Their findings revealed that 46% perceived that the reported outbreak of bird flu severely affected their business. Also, there was a drop in the prices of poultry product due to the pandemic episode. The study revealed that the average gross margin the season after the outbreak was lower than that recorded before the outbreak by about 67% indicating that the reported pandemic episode made a negative impact on the income of poultry farmers in the study area. The study concludes

by establishing that accounts of alleged health risks associated with bird flu resulted in sharp drop in demand and price of poultry and eggs and in the profit margin of poultry farmers and recommends the media to avoid risk amplification, misrepresentation and distortion of information to prevent potential risks and costs.

Adekunle (2017) undertook a study on media framing of Ebola outbreak in Nigerian newspapers. The study sought to establish the interest that newspapers most often protect while reporting health issues based on the proportion of salient news angles. The researcher employed a triangulation method to gather data. The study sampled reports of Ebola issues in two of the most popular daily newspapers in Nigeria (*The Sun and The Guardian*). The analysis was limited to the period of Ebola rampage in the country (July 20 to October 20, 2014). The two newspapers produced 840 stories on Ebola. In the researcher's findings, the newspapers used ten major frames out of which the containment frame was predominant. The survey method was also employed to measure audience perceptions and reactions to framed reports regarding Ebola and the aftermath effect on the containment of the virus. In administering the questionnaires, the researcher chose Lagos city and had an age barrier (18 years and above).

In the researcher's findings, these ten frames, awareness, containment, fatality, conspiracy, political influence, effect, mobilization, support/aid misinformation and boycott frames were constantly employed by the newspapers out of which containment and fatality frames were most predominant. Also, more attention was given to local news angles of report than foreign, reports of Ebola were framed as more important than other pressing issues (Boko-Haram and General Elections) and more spaces were allocated to some Ebola stories than usual ratio of health reports. A sample of 400 respondents were selected through cluster probability sampling technique. The findings of the survey also revealed a significant relationship (which is positive)

between the audience reading patterns of newspaper health reports. Also, the existence of a direct (from readership pattern to framing effect) as well as an indirect (from readership pattern through audience perceptions to framing effects) effects between the readership patterns and framing effects. The study concludes by establishing that there are significant relationships between newspaper framing, audience reading pattern, audience perceptions and audience reactions to Ebola outbreak. It also emphasized that audience reading habit of newspaper health reports during outbreaks and their perceptions of frame health reports are factors responsible for their reactions towards the health crisis. Also, audience reading habits of framed health reports has more significant influence on the audience reactions to the health outbreaks than their perceptions of the framing of the reports.

Another research carried out by Zhang et al. (2017) examined the differences between traditional and social media coverage of a disease outbreak by looking at how newspaper Ebola articles differ from twitter updates. The study sought to examine the manner in which media presented the 2014 Ebola outbreak, using a multimedia approach to decipher how the epidemic unfolded within the American media. The study in the methodology made use of purposive random sampling. Samples were collected from five newspapers (*The Wall Street Journal*, *USA today*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*) and their corresponding Twitter page based on their circulation and domestic influence. The study made use of news stories identified through a search in the online academic database ProQuest and on Twitter website within August 8, 2014 through to December 26, 2014. The researchers coded tweets and newspaper articles separately and making inputs based on publishing date, media, frames, tones and the discourse type. The findings from the study revealed that among the 1.029 news articles retrieved, the frame of updates (419, 40.7%) was most frequently used, followed by

consequences (374, 36.3 %) and action (364, 35.4 %). The study also revealed that both newspaper and Twitter coverage emphasized providing the latest news about the emergence of new cases, updating the situation of patients or the suspected, as well as the efforts paid to control the spread of the disease. However, consequence and responsibility frames were more prevalent within newspapers than Twitter updates. Again, focus was more on educating and updating with latest progress in disease prevention and potential cures were more prevalent in Twitter updates (Scientific frames) whereas newspapers used more action frames and described international aspects (human interest frames). The study concluded by establishing that overall, newspaper's' articles and Twitter updates showed similar trends in fluctuations of news frequencies following key events, yet did not correspond in terms of types of content forwarded to the masses and how regarding tone framing, newspaper articles used more alarming and reassuring tones whereas with Twitter posts, a significantly greater proportion of tweets contained a neutral tone.

Another research relevant to this study is by Ezegwu, Ezeonyejiak & Asokide (2018) on Newspaper framing of monkey pox outbreak and its influence on media audience perception. The objectives of the study were to find out dominant frames used by Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of monkey-pox outbreak and its influence on the perception of media audience in south east region of Nigeria. Three newspapers (*The Punch, The Guardian, Vanguard*) were purposively selected. The scope of the study was all editions of the newspapers from September 1st to December 31st 2017. In selecting the population, the research employed a multi-stage sampling technique and selected as sample size of 385.

In their findings, it was revealed out of the 138 stories, majority (51.4%) were mainly news story format and the least (0.7%) were editorials but prominence was not given to the disease as an

important health issue because majority of monkey pox reports in the newspapers were placed on the inside pages (72 stories representing 52%). Also, causes and transmission, solution/treatment/control, fear and death, political/government, rumour/misinformation and economic frames were identified out of which causes and transmission frames were dominant accounting 34% and economic frame less dominant (8%). On the influence of such frames on media audience, the findings revealed that out of the 379 respondents, 151 (40%) affirmed that they perceived the framing of monkey pox disease outbreak as frightening. The study concludes by stating that reportage of monkey pox outbreak was not in-depth, prominence was not given to the disease in terms of placement and the most dominant frame pattern in the coverage was transmission/causes and this frame made mass media audience in South East of Nigerian to be frightened about the disease.

Thompson (2019) also carried out study to explore how the experience of journalists influence coverage of a proximate epidemic. The purpose of the study was to examine the production process of a proximate crisis in a developing country. The study focused on individuals who work with legacy media organizations (newspaper, television and radio) as news gatherers, anchors, presenters, producers or editors. The researcher sampled 18 respondents (7 journalists/reporters, 5 senior journalists/ reporters and 6 producers/editors) and conducted a face-to-face in-depth interview during the field work period of August and September 2015. The scope of the study was specific to journalists who had published stories on Ebola. The interviews touched on journalists' knowledge about and experience with health reporting in Ghana, influences, practices, and motivation of journalists when reporting on Ebola and finally, the perceived impact of the coverage on Ghanaians.

The researcher in their findings, revealed that there was a low prominence of health reporting in Ghana and health reporting was not a specialized area of reporting in Ghana. Interviewees stressed the importance of health reporting but indicated that health was not a priority in many media houses, unless something out of the ordinary happened. The researcher also revealed that journalists viewed themselves as fulfilling the normative roles of educating and informing audiences about the Ebola outbreak but used different approaches. While reporting about the Ebola epidemic, some journalists were influenced by organizational or editorial constraints, others were constrained by their state affiliations, other journalists engaged in a journalism of conversations, in which journalists explored the crisis as representatives of their society and culture. Other journalists engaged in journalism of advocacy or mediation by keeping an eye on government and health agencies (non)response to the crisis. In addition, journalists resorted to reactionary sources where they respond to the agenda of officials and expert sources, or alternative sources where they depended on the internet or other known international media for news information. The author concludes by establishing the importance of journalistic routines for cross checking, verification, and multiplicity of sources especially in times of anxiety.

Another researcher Partoip (2016) looked at the economic implications of media coverage of a public health crisis. The main objective of the study was to examine the impact of Ebola virus on the performance of tourism industry in Kenya. The researcher's target sample were tour operators, hoteliers and airlines operators in Kenya. A sample size of 50 respondents were selected and the researcher used an open-ended questionnaire to collect data from respondents.

The findings of the study revealed that majority (75%) of the respondents indicated the outbreak of Ebola virus in West Africa had affected the Kenyan economy, while 25% were of a contrary opinion. Respondents who indicated that the outbreak had affected the Kenya economy revealed

that, the suspension of flights had also caused substantial revenue losses to the airline, many hotels had to lay-off some of their employees in order to cut off their operating costs. Also, the reduced number of tourist arrivals led to reduced foreign exchange, the reduced influx of tourists adversely affected other businesses related to tourism like hotel industry, tour companies and other informal sectors affiliated to tourism like curio business. The study also established that majority of the respondents agreed to media reports on Ebola outbreak scared potential foreign tourists to Kenya (mean of 4.19) and majority (81%) revealed that accessibility to healthcare facilities influences the growth of tourism sector in Kenya. The study concluded that there were economic implications of Ebola outbreak on Tourism industry, noting that tourism is a major contributor to Kenya's GDP.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design ensures that, evidence obtained enables the researcher to answer the research questions as unambiguously as possible (Bernard, 2000).

The study will employ content analysis in collecting and analyzing data. Content analysis is described as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger, 2000). Content analysis is used as a major method of analyzing media content. When employed appropriately, content analysis is a powerful data reduction technique. One of the major advantages of content analysis is that it is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing any words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rule of coding. It has the attractive feature of being unobtrusive, and being useful in dealing with large volumes of data (Berelson, 1952).

Content analysis is also referred to as a research methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These references are about sender(s) of message, the message itself, or the audience of message (Weber, 1990).

Content analysis even though is mostly quantitative, is qualitative as well. The qualitative content analysis usually starts with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the main aim of understanding the contextual uses of words or content. This is done not only to infer meaning but to rather explore usage. (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

Content analysis will be the appropriate research approach to the study because it has the advantage of allowing for one of its five purposes which are, describing communication content, testing hypothesis of message characteristics, comparing media content to the real world, assessing the image of particular groups in society and establishing a starting point for studies of media effects (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

Also, content analysis will be used in this study because it will help in achieving an objective of knowing the nature of media reportage on COVID-19 in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper from March through to June 2020. In addition, the use of content analysis will also help to know the extent of coverage on COVID-19 stories by the *Daily Graphic* newspaper so as to make inference on the reportage.

3.2 DATA AND SOURCE

Data will be collected from *Daily Graphic's* coverage of COVID-19 from March to June 2020. The *Daily Graphic* newspaper is a state-owned newspaper from the Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL). The Daily Graphic newspaper was chosen specifically because it has the widest coverage of readers and most read in the country. Four months issues of the newspaper covering the period of March-June 2020 will be used for the study. The period covers March when initial reports of COVID-19 were discovered in Ghana and June as the established month for the peak of cases of COVID-19 in Ghana.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE AND INSTRUMENT

The data collection technique will be a content analysis. Data will be collected from the Daily Graphic newspaper which will focus on placement of story, headline, tone, picture presentation, angle of reportage and frequency.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified the deductive and inductive techniques as possible approaches to content analyzing frames in a new story. The deductive approach will be used in this study. The deductive approach involves predefining certain frames as content analytical variables to verify the extent to which these frames occurred in the news (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) noted that the deductive approach makes it necessary for a researcher to have a clear idea of the kinds of frames that could be in the news.

Data will be collected using a coding guide developed based on the research objectives. The coding guide will contain certain variables which will be applied to the various content. The coding guide will be useful in classifying the data on the coding sheet by reading and placing the categories in their designated spaces based on the numbers to be assigned to them. For instance, under tone, number one may be assigned to positive, two to negative, three to neutral and selection will be made based on what the tone the content is identified as.

3.4 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Wimmer and Dominick (2011) point out that the unit of analysis in a written content could be a single word or symbol, a theme or an entire story or article. They maintained that the unit of analysis should be defined in a way that would make it clear as to what should or should not be included in the study. The unit of analysis for the study will be editorials, health news stories and feature articles on COVID-19 covered by the Daily Graphic newspaper from March through to June 2020.

An editorial is an article in a newspaper or other periodical, presenting the opinion on an issue.

It reflects the opinion of the editorial board, the governing body of the newspaper made up of

editors and business managers. It usually has an objective of explanation of an issue and a timely news angle.

Health news story is a news report of any length, that is concerned with physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual. It is usually presented in a straightforward style and without editorial comment.

A feature article is a special or prominent article in a newspaper or magazine that typically has a human-interest angle and deals in depth on a particular story.

3.4.1 CODING

Coding is the process of placing a unit of analysis into a content category (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). Two ways of establishing content categories are emergent coding and a priori coding. Emergent coding establishes categories after a preliminary examination of data whereas a priori coding establishes the categories before data are collected (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). This study will employ a priori coding. To help in categorization the following were used:

Frequency: the number of occurrences of a repeating event per unit time.

Tone/Nature of reportage: the nature of the story largely includes the tone of the story. It is a literary compound of composition, which encompasses the attitudes towards the subject and towards the audience implied in a literary work. It may be solemn, formal, informal, ironic, playful and sober or many other possible attitudes.

Angle of reportage: the direction or focus in which the media reports on issues to make it meaningful. It can also be described as the lens through which the media filters information gathered.

Placement: is location of a new item is placed in a newspaper. Placement of a story in a newspaper is very important because once a story is placed strategically and closer to the front page, it attracts a lot of readers to it.

Picture presentation: involves the type of pictures attached to a news item. Stories that have a lot of pictures attract a lot of audience to it. Photos have been identified as an important reference by which readers judge a news story (Matthews and Ruess, 1985).

CONCLUSION

The unfolding news coverage of the novel corona virus provides a good example of how an important health issue is invisible to the public eye until the media brings light to it. The level of media coverage about a particular health issue elicits public attention and concern.

The role the media plays in covering public health crisis is critical and studies have established the influence of media reportage on audience. Graham (1995) found that news attention to specific issues may distort public perceptions and change behaviour in diverse ways. Hartz and Chapel (1997) in a survey of scientists and journalists' help in understanding the attitudes of each other towards disseminating health information found that scientists complained of reporters not understanding many of their basic methods, including the proper interpretation of statistics, probabilities and risks whereas journalists viewed scientists as being too immersed in esoteric jargon and unable to explain their work simply and cogently. With all these, the media has however been criticised for disseminating fake news and misinformation, the inclusivity of its health coverage and the state of medical journalism in general.

The role the media plays in health reporting makes it expedient for studies to be done on whether the media, especially the media in Ghana considers the role it has to play in effective risk communication when covering public health issues. This study thus, acknowledges the relevance of risk communication and how it has become important in the coverage of public health crisis on the basis that risk communication provides knowledge on effective risk communication for prevention and control of communicable disease.

This study will add to knowledge on existing media frames studies by establishing how effective risk communication by the media during coverage of a public health crisis can guide audience

reaction and perception and ultimately help in addressing the public health issue. The originality of this study is on the basis that it focuses on coverage of the emergence of a novel virus by looking at how news items are framed and if attention is given to effective risk communication by the media in Ghana. Findings from this study will bring help highlight gaps in media coverage of public health crisis by ultimately establishing the relevance of effective and efficient risk communication.

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