

## The Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Media Operations in Rwanda

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### ABSTRACT

*On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization designated COVID-19 as a worldwide pandemic, the first of its kind since H1N1 influenza was categorized as a pandemic in 2009. The pandemic has caused unprecedented economic challenges globally across various sectors, including the media. Media organizations heavily rely on advertising revenue, which took a hit during the pandemic. Media organizations have had to drastically adjust to new ways of operating to align with the untold consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, there has been a scarcity of scholarly research exploring the effect of the pandemic on how different media houses managed to overcome and adjust to the changing operating environment. To address this research gap, this research project took the case study of Rwanda and explored how the pandemic has affected the different media houses in different aspects of their operations. The study sheds light on how the pandemic has affected Rwandan media operations and how they have responded to the new operating environment. The specific objectives of the study were as follows: to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected media production routines; to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic affected media revenues; to find out how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the welfare of journalists in Rwandan media houses; and to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the way media houses in Rwanda engaged with their audience. To achieve the research goals, the study employed the explanatory sequential research design, which is a mixed research approach that incorporated a survey and interviews. The survey targeted 85 accredited journalists, sampled from a population of 568 journalists. The study focused on media houses operating in the three districts of the City of Kigali: Kicukiro, Gasabo, and Nyarugenge Districts. To select the sample of respondents, a simple random approach was used, considering gender balance. In relation to the study, political economy theory was used to place the research within a broader context by connecting it to existing knowledge. The research revealed that Rwandan journalists encountered difficulties in gathering and producing news, prompting a move towards remote reporting and dependence on citizen journalism. Decreased media revenues, attributed to event cancellations and reduced advertising, resulted in job losses and salary reductions. Journalists also had challenges in obtaining sources and negative consequences for their well-being. Media organizations need to protect journalists, challenge false information, and diversify their funding streams in order to increase their efficiency in times of crisis. While media groups should train journalists to be flexible in every situation and support press freedom, the Rwandan government should facilitate the flow of information and offer financial support to media outlets during times of crisis.*

**Keywords:** Audience Engagement, Citizen Journalism, COVID-19 Pandemic, Journalist Welfare, Media Organizations

### I. INTRODUCTION

The global health crisis has led to significant economic challenges for several industries, including the media (Deloitte, 2020). The pandemic has affected businesses in various ways, including supply chain disruptions, workforce shortages, reduced consumer spending, and business closures. According to a report by the International Labor Organization (2020), the pandemic had a substantial influence on global employment, resulting in an estimated 25 million job losses by 2020.

In many countries, advertising is the primary source of revenue for the media through which it is carried out (Karlidağ, 2019). Given the financial obstacles linked to COVID-19 for businesses, one of the first items to be lowered or halted was advertising expenditures. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, 81% of US advertisers decided to cut back on their advertising budgets, while 56% of brands in the country experienced a decline in sales for the rest of 2020 (Casero-Ripollés, 2021).

In the United Kingdom, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation or postponement of numerous media events, conferences, games, and festivals, and many events moved to virtual formats, utilizing online platforms for presentations and discussions (Nielsen, 2020). According to Waterson and Sweney (2020), print media advertising

revenue has dropped by almost 80% and 40% for broadcast in England since the start of the pandemic, as large corporations cut funding for advertising ahead of the economic downturn.

Media companies reacted differently to the loss of earnings from advertising. Some media outlets in Uganda and Ethiopia have gone out of business, causing the loss of jobs for reporters and other media personnel. Two media organizations in Ethiopia had to close their doors and fire their workers as a result of the effects of COVID-19. JTV was one of the closed media channels, having been on the air for more than three years, while other outlets, including Ghion Journals, Sheger Times, and Berera Journal, temporarily ceased publishing (Salemot, 2020). Many media organizations faced disruptions in their day-to-day operations due to lockdowns, social distancing measures, and other restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus.

The *Orumuri*, *Etop*, and *Rupiny* regional newspapers in Uganda, which were produced in local languages, have been shut down by the partially state-owned Vision Group, which also dismissed off staff, while The Observer, another independently owned weekly, was also forced to end operations (Walulya & Moges, 2022).

Another challenge faced by media organizations is the difficulty of accessing accurate information and sources during the pandemic. The pandemic made it difficult for journalists to conduct on-the-field reporting, as many areas have been inaccessible due to lockdowns or travel restrictions. Misinformation and fake news have proliferated, making it challenging for media outlets to provide reliable information to their audience (Abbas et al., 2021).

Because of the growing competition in the digital media space, new business models have surfaced to protect the media industry. The media was crucial in informing the public during the pandemic about the virus's spread, the safety measures being taken to contain it, and how the epidemic affected many facets of daily life. This includes providing updates on the number of cases, deaths, and recoveries, as well as information on public health guidelines and recommendations for staying safe.

As literature shows, media production routines, media revenues, the welfare of journalists, and audience engagement are indeed key media operations. Media production routines are designed to ensure efficient and organized content production workflows, maintain quality standards, and meet deadlines, and they may vary depending on the type of media house (Albarran, 2010). The welfare of journalists plays a crucial role in producing quality content and shaping their work. Journalists operate in demanding and often dangerous environments, and their well-being directly affects their ability to gather information, report objectively, and maintain their professional standards (International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], 2019).

Engaging with the audience is crucial for any media organization to build a loyal audience. When a media organization actively interacts with their audience, responds to their comments, and addresses their concerns, it fosters a sense of community and can lead to increased consumption of news content (Napoli, 2017). Any media house has to generate revenues to sustain its business. The main media revenue sources are: advertising, subscriptions, events and sponsorships, e-commerce, partnerships, and collaboration (Picard, 2014).

Despite the vital function of the media in educating the public, influencing public perceptions, and driving policy decisions during the crisis, there is no research on COVID-19's effect on media operations in Rwanda that has been conducted to date. The study addressed this vacuum by contributing to a greater comprehension of the implications of COVID-19 on media operations in Rwanda. Moreover, the findings provided policymakers with insights into the difficulties that the media encountered during the pandemic and strategies used to cope with those challenges, allowing them to develop policies and interventions that support the media in crisis situations and beyond.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

On March 14, 2020, Rwanda disclosed the first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in a person who had arrived in the country from Mumbai, India, and the virus thereafter spread all over the country, with the government implementing various measures to contain its spread, including restrictions on movement, social distancing, and widespread use of masks (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a).

The pandemic demolished the business sector, bringing stock markets to collapse and businesses to shut down, causing the world's economy to be on the verge of collapse (Powell, 2020). The financial implications of the coronavirus were tough in the media sector, where advertising is the backbone. The advertising revenues had been reduced further because several businesses from which media houses earned income through advertising were also struggling to keep in business due to the pandemic. Due to the substantive decline in revenues from sales and advertisement, some media houses have experienced financial difficulties that led to their business closure or staff layoffs (Casero-Ripollés, 2021).

The same trend has been observed in Rwanda. Besides the economic effect of the pandemic, the evolution of technology has seen advertisements, tenders, and job openings published on specialized government web portals instead of being channeled to media houses. Since the Government of Rwanda is the biggest advertiser, the shift has further reduced the meager advertising revenues for the media in Rwanda (Rwanda Media Baromete [RMB], 2021).

The African Centre for Media Excellence released an assessment of freedom of the press in Rwanda in March 2021, examining the threats to journalistic rights, with a particular focus on what happened to the reporters during the lockdowns. The report's conclusions showed that during the pandemic, movement limitations threatened journalistic freedom since they made it difficult for many reporters who had to be on the front lines of news events, mainly those connected to the pandemic (African Centre for Media Excellence, 2021). In 2021, the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research did a study on the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan business, focusing on how COVID-19 affected businesses in Kigali and the secondary cities, but the report didn't specifically indicate the effects on media (International Advertising Bureau, 2020). A report on the effects of COVID-19 on Rwanda's media sector by Nsengimana (2020) discussed the challenges faced by the entire media sector as a whole rather than specific operations within individual media houses. The report discussed media regulations and the Rwandan government's involvement in assisting the media business during the pandemic, but it did not address the specific issues in regular media operations.

As the literature showed, there was no research demonstrating exactly COVID-19's effects on specific Rwandan media operations, including media production routines, media revenues, journalists' welfare, and media engagement with audiences. Therefore, the study's goal was to look into the effects of the coronavirus on the media's operations in Rwanda, emphasizing the issues that media organizations faced, changes in media production routines, the effect on media revenues, the effect on the welfare of journalists, the way media houses in Rwanda engaged with their audience, and the strategies adopted by media in Rwanda to cope with the virus. The results of the present research serve to improve knowledge of how COVID-19 has affected Rwandan media operations and inform policy and practice to support a resilient and vibrant media sector in the country.

## 1.2 Research Objective

The objective of this study was to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Rwandan media operations. The specific objectives were as follows:

- i. To assess how COVID-19 affected media production routines in the Rwandan media houses
- ii. To examine how COVID-19 affected the media revenues in the Rwandan media houses
- iii. To evaluate how COVID-19 affected the welfare of journalists in the Rwandan media houses

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Political Economy Theory of Media. Scholars like Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller established the Political Economy Theory of Media in the 1970s and 1980s. They concentrated on how political and economic systems affect media representation and how it functions in society. According to the theory, media outlets are shaped by the political and economic forces surrounding them, such as government regulations, ownership structures, and advertising revenue. It also views media as a byproduct of the financial system as a whole and the political forces that shape society (Smythe, 1977). According to this notion, the messages that media outlets broadcast to the public are also influenced by ownership structures, laws, and market forces. One might apply the notion to the manner in which media organizations handled the COVID-19 outbreak.

As the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way news was gathered and reported, as well as the way media houses interacted with their audience, many media houses had to adapt to the new reality of remote work, social distancing, and quarantine measures by shifting to digital platforms and remote work arrangements (Silverman & Stelter, 2020). However, the theory advises that the response of media companies to the pandemic is influenced by their ownership structures and the economic pressures they faced. Smythe (1977) argued that media is a commodity that is sold to an audience and that the primary goal of media owners is to generate profits. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020b), media houses that were publicly funded or owned by nonprofit organizations or government entities may have been better able to survive the economic storm of the pandemic, as they were not as reliant on advertising revenues and were better able to maintain their staffing levels and continue to provide comprehensive coverage of the pandemic.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

While some companies have been able to adapt to remote working and even thrive during this time, others have struggled to stay afloat in the face of declining revenue and have shut down. According to Wolf (2020), in the United States of America, major studios such as Warner Bros., Disney, and NBC Universal suspended production on their 35 TV shows and movies, which led to delays in the release of highly anticipated movies such as "Black Widow"

and "No Time to Die." Wolf (2020) further explained that the shutdown of production and changes in production processes led to delays in the release of TV shows and movies. For example, the seventh season of "The Flash" was delayed from its original expected release date of October 2020 to March 2021 (Wolf, 2020).

The pandemic has disrupted media production patterns in Africa, as it has everywhere in the world. As a result of the pandemic, journalists lost aspects like interacting with news sources due to restrictions connected to COVID-19 that outlined social separation (Mugisha, 2020). Matsilele et al. (2022) demonstrated that pandemic limitations forced journalists in Botswana to work remotely as it was not possible to meet the news sources as before.

In their publication, they revealed an interview they had with the experienced reporter from the Daily Newspaper of Botswana, who stated that since there were few occurrences during the pandemic where journalists could gather information, it was challenging for them to provide news during that time. He also stated that the sports desk was the hardest hit because there was a complete halt to all sporting events, and because there were no diary meetings, it was difficult to come up with news story ideas, especially for newer professionals who were unaccustomed to doing so without the assistance of more experienced reporters or editors. The East African, a weekly regional newspaper published by Nation Media Group, suspended print publication in April 2020 due to the pandemic (Uwitonze, 2020). The newspaper continued to publish online, but its print operations have not yet resumed. The media production routines in Rwanda have also experienced disruptions since the pandemic's beginning. According to the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC) (2020), the pandemic has dominated news coverage in Rwanda, leading to a reduction in coverage of other important issues. According to the Rwanda Media Commission analysis, the diversity of news reporting in the country, which normally relies on new content to attract viewers or listeners and generate revenue, has been disrupted by the pandemic.

Many media outlets in Rwanda have had to invest in technology infrastructure to facilitate remote working arrangements and comply with the government's social distancing directives (Rwanda Media Commission, 2020). Besides, the pandemic accelerated the shift towards digital media and highlighted the importance of media in delivering trustworthy and reliable news to the public. This has led to increased expenses for media houses, which has further strained their finances. In Rwanda, the pandemic has also had an effect on the delivery of newspapers and other publications. According to Nsengimana (2020), the circulation of print media was affected by restrictions the government placed on the movement of people and products. As a result, the circulation of newspapers and periodicals has decreased, which has affected the revenue streams for print media. To fulfill their obligation of informing, educating, and entertaining their audience, the changes in media consumption forced the media to adapt to changing audience behavior. According to a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021b), misinformation and fake news have increased as a result of the pandemic, and they have eroded public trust in the media. The same study highlighted the need for media literacy programs to help the public distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

The general framework or structure of the study's effort is known as the research design (De Vaus, 2001). Research design provides the plan to collect, analyze, interpret, and present the data. The current study used the explanatory sequential mixed research design, which is a mixed-methods approach whereby the researcher gathers quantitative data in the first phase, interprets the findings, and then uses the findings to conduct the second phase, which is qualitative (Creswell 2018). The reasoning behind employing mixed-methods approaches relies on the belief that gathering different kinds of data leads to a deeper and more thorough understanding of the subject being researched. Quantitative data was collected from journalists, while qualitative data was collected from selected media managers to help explain the results. The findings of the research were subjected to a correlational analysis where the independent variables were correlated with the dependent variables.

#### 3.2 Target population

The research about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on media operations in Rwanda targeted journalists and media managers. According to the Rwanda Utility Regulatory Authority (2023), there were 66 licensed media houses as of July 2023, while the accredited journalists with valid press cards issued by the Rwanda Media Council (2023) as of May 2023 were 568. This was the most updated and trustworthy data from the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority and the Rwanda Self-Regulatory Body.





### 3.3 Sample size for Journalists

Using the Taro Yamane formula (1967), the sample size for journalists was calculated scientifically as follows:  
 $n = N / (1 + N * e^2)$

The sample size for journalists is calculated where  $n$  represents the sample size,  $N$  is the total population size, and  $e$  is the margin of error. For this calculation,  $N$  is the total population size of 568 journalists, with a margin of error  $e$  of 10%, equivalent to 0.10, and a confidence level of 90%, equivalent to 0.90.

$$\text{Therefore } n = \frac{568}{(1 + 568 * (0.10^2))} = 85.03$$

The sample size for the present research was therefore 85 journalists selected from a population of 568 accredited journalists. These journalists were randomly selected by gender, proportionally by media type as follows:

**Table 1**  
*Journalists' Sample Size*

Type	Sample	Male	Female
Radio stations	41	21	20
Print media	8	4	4
TV stations	28	14	14
Online media houses	8	4	4
<b>Total Journalists</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>

#### 3.3.1 Sample size for key informants

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) involve selecting individuals with deep subject knowledge based on their expertise, experience, or managerial roles (Kassiani, 2022). The sample for key informants was chosen purposively using critical sampling, a type of purposive sampling that selects cases to explain comparable situations. Believing that the COVID-19 pandemic affected all Rwandan media, the researcher selected 66 media managers with at least five years of experience across various media types to achieve the study's objectives.

**Table 2**  
*Key Informant Sample Size*

Type	Number	Sample
Radio stations	32	5
Print media	6	5
TV stations	22	5
Online media houses	6	5
<b>Total KIIs</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>20</b>

#### 3.3.2 Sampling Technique

The media industry in Rwanda is male-dominated, with a long history of gender inequality that creates a gap in female representation in media management (RMB, 2021). To select the population of journalists and media managers, the researcher used simple random sampling where gender balance was considered and individuals were chosen randomly to prevent a bias that would have negatively affected the study's reliability.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

#### 3.4.1 Survey

Bhat (2023) defines a survey as a way of getting data from a group of people through questions posed to them. A survey can be carried out using a variety of approaches, including paper and pencil, electronic forms, phone calls, or in-person conversations. To get quantitative data about COVID-19's effect on media operations, a survey was administered to 85 journalists selected from a population of 568 accredited journalists, using written questionnaires.

#### 3.4.2 Key Informants Interview (KIIs)

A key informant interview is a technique used to collect qualitative data that involves interacting with a person or individuals who are knowledgeable about the issue that is being studied (Ann-Murray, 2020). A series of open-ended questions or themes were included in the interview guide the researcher created to guide KIIs. The guide was

flexible enough to allow follow-up questions and exploration of new ideas during the interview. Qualitative data was gathered from KIIs and literature review. Using interview guide, KIIs were conducted face to face to 20 media managers representing a target population of 66 media managers.

### 3.5 Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire was used to gather primary information from 85 journalists, featuring both open and closed-ended questions. The researcher assisted in completing the questionnaire to ensure accuracy and consistency. Face-to-face interactions increased respondent comfort and honesty, reducing potential errors. Additionally, an interview guide was developed for key informant interviews (KIIs) with 20 media managers, whose responses were recorded. The researcher refined data collection tools with a small sample before the main survey and obtained an introduction letter from the university to facilitate respondent engagement. Informed consent was ensured, and data was systematically recorded and validated for accuracy and reliability.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The Statistical Software for Social Sciences was applied to generate a specific data entry template before gathering data. Following data collection, quantitative data was entered into the template for cleaning, and on the basis of the tabulation and data analysis plan, figures were automatically generated. Descriptive statistical tools were used to analyze quantitative data while descriptive tools were supplemented by qualitative analytical methods like interpretation of various opinions and views collected from qualitative data. The survey results underwent a correlational analysis, in which the independent variables were correlated with the dependent variables.

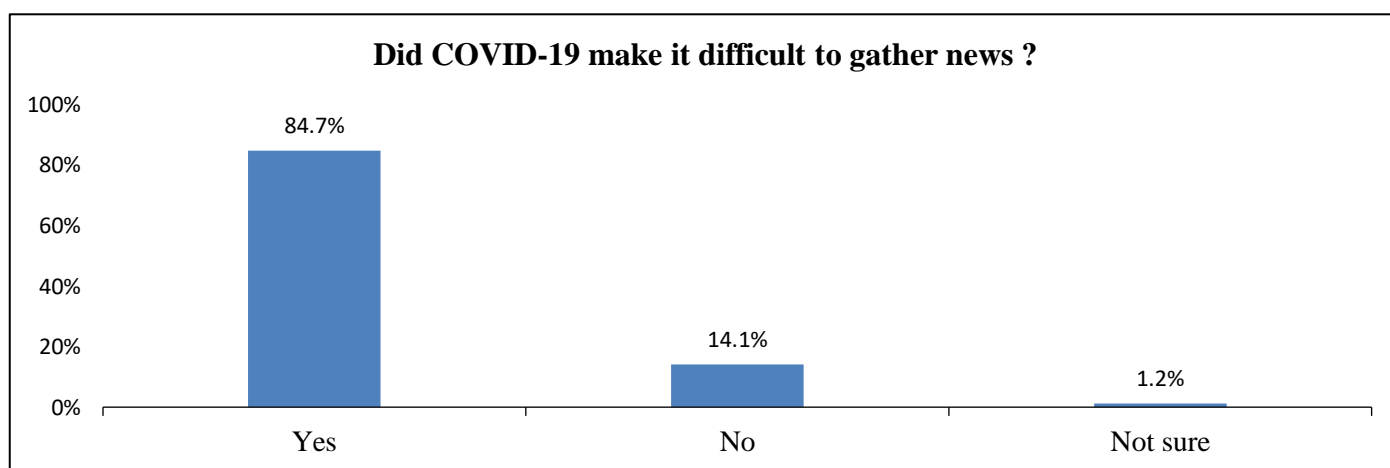
## FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Response Rate

The response rate of 100% indicates that all targeted respondents completed and returned the survey or questionnaire, which is an exceptionally high rate of participation. Achieving a 100% response rate suggests effective engagement strategies and possibly high interest or investment in the research topic among participants. According to Babbie (2016), high response rates help to reduce sampling bias and enhance the reliability of the survey results.

### 4.2 The Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Media Production Routines

The first research objective was to examine the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on media production routines. First of all, respondents were asked to confirm if the pandemic made it difficult to gather news and the findings are as reflected in the following figure.



**Figure 1**

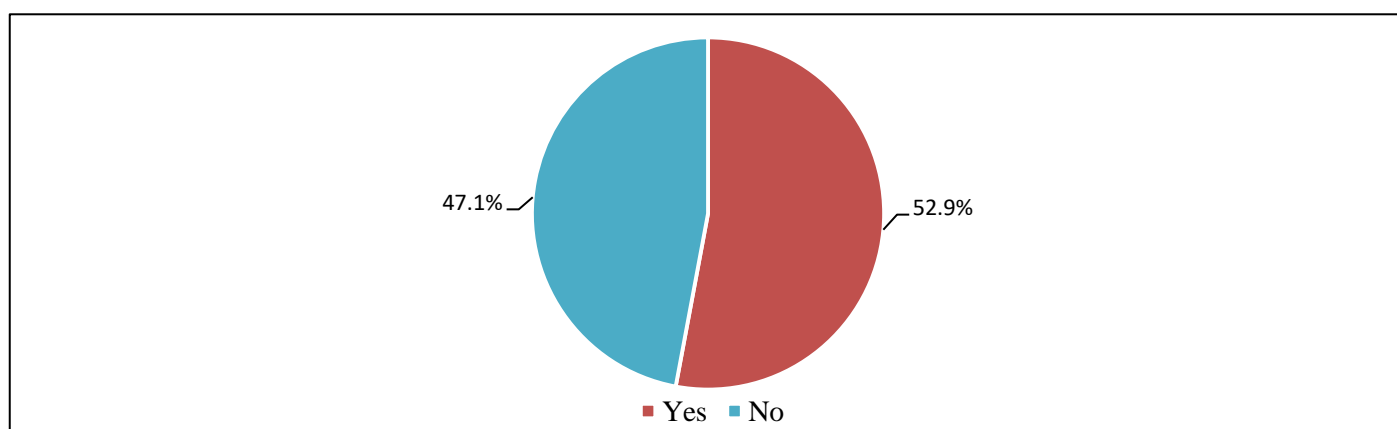
*Effect of COVID-19 on News Gathering*

When asked about the effect of the pandemic on news gathering, 84.7% of respondents admitted that it posed difficulties, while 14.1% disagreed. In an interview, one media manager noted that the social distancing measures and lockdowns in Rwanda have restricted journalists from physically attending events and gathering on-site news, affecting their ability to report on live events and acquire firsthand information. Another media manager acknowledged that travel restrictions have hindered journalists' mobility, making it challenging to reach locations and cover stories in person, thus limiting their capacity to deliver comprehensive and varied news coverage.

#### 4.2 News Gathering and Reporting during COVID-19 times

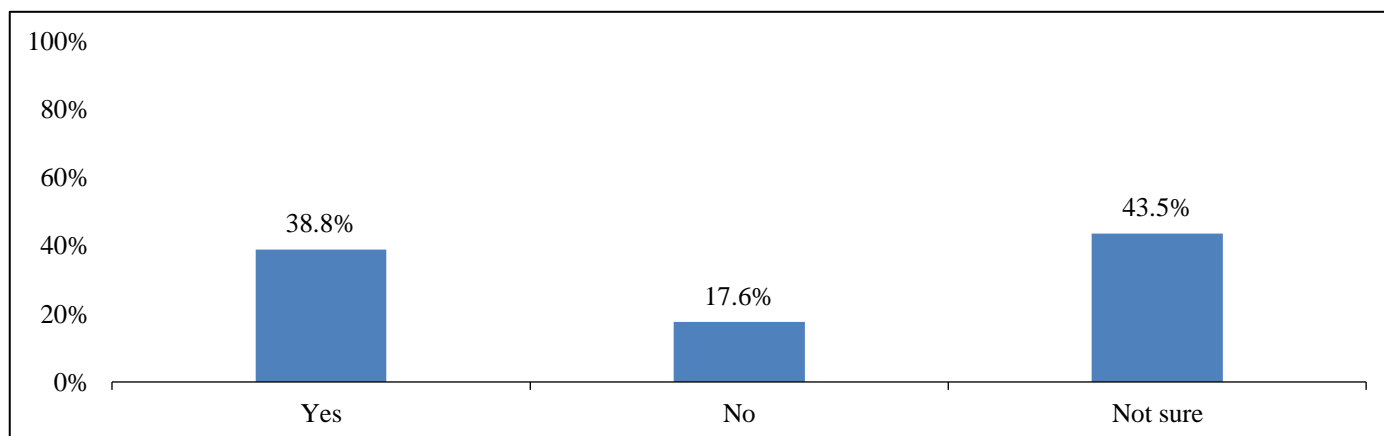
The respondents were asked to say how news gathering and reporting underwent during COVID-19 in Rwanda. The research revealed some ways in which news was gathered in Rwanda during that time. Journalists who participated in the research confirmed that during the travel restrictions posed by COVID-19 they have adapted to innovative methods and strategies to continue gathering news. According to key informants, journalists have adapted to limitations caused by the pandemic through the following strategies:

Journalists adapted to remote reporting by using phone calls, video conferencing, and online platforms to conduct interviews and gather information without being physically present. Citizen journalism also emerged as a significant tool, with individuals using smartphones and social media to capture and share news events, videos, and firsthand accounts, which journalists could then verify and incorporate into their reports. Additionally, journalists turned to data analysis, leveraging official statistics and scientific research to uncover and report on COVID-19 trends, ensuring their stories were factual and data-driven. Despite these innovative approaches, challenges remained in accessing certain locations, verifying information remotely, and maintaining the depth of reporting seen before the pandemic, as noted by media managers.



**Figure 2**  
*Programs Suspension due to COVID-19*

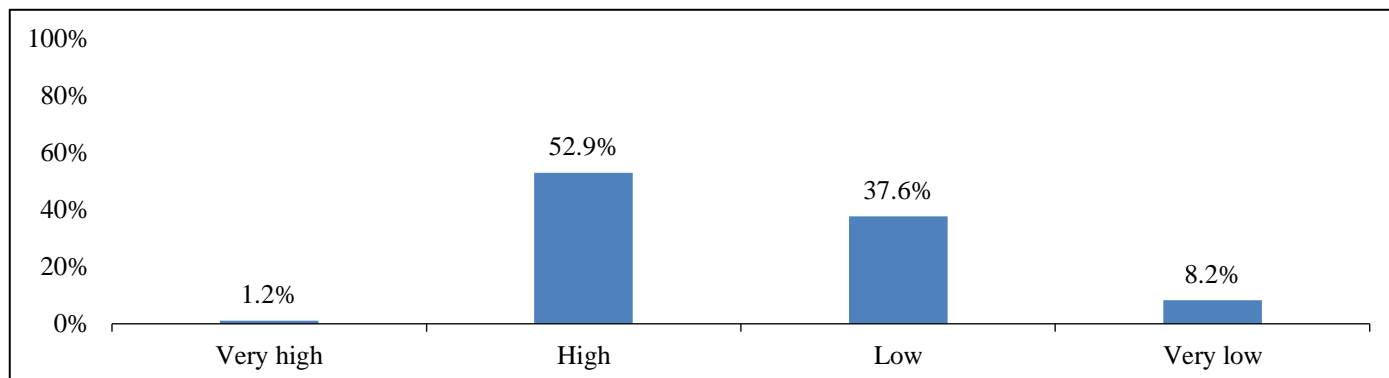
Journalists were questioned about whether their typical programs had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 2 illustrates that 52.9% acknowledged that some programs were suspended, while 47.1% denied the claim. When asked to specify the affected programs, most cited coverage of live events such as sports, concerts, films, music festivals, and meetings.



**Figure 3**  
*The Use of Digital Media and Video Streaming Services*

Survey participants were questioned about whether the presence of COVID-19 led to heightened usage of digital media and video streaming services. As indicated in Figure 3, 38.8% affirmed an increase in the use of digital media and video streaming services during COVID-19, while 17.6% opposed the notion.

The results of this study align with those of a 2020 Nielsen report, which demonstrated a 60% surge in global streaming activity at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nielsen, 2020). Similarly, a 2020 study by the Global Web Index revealed that 87% of internet users were engaging with more content during the pandemic (Jason et al., 2020).



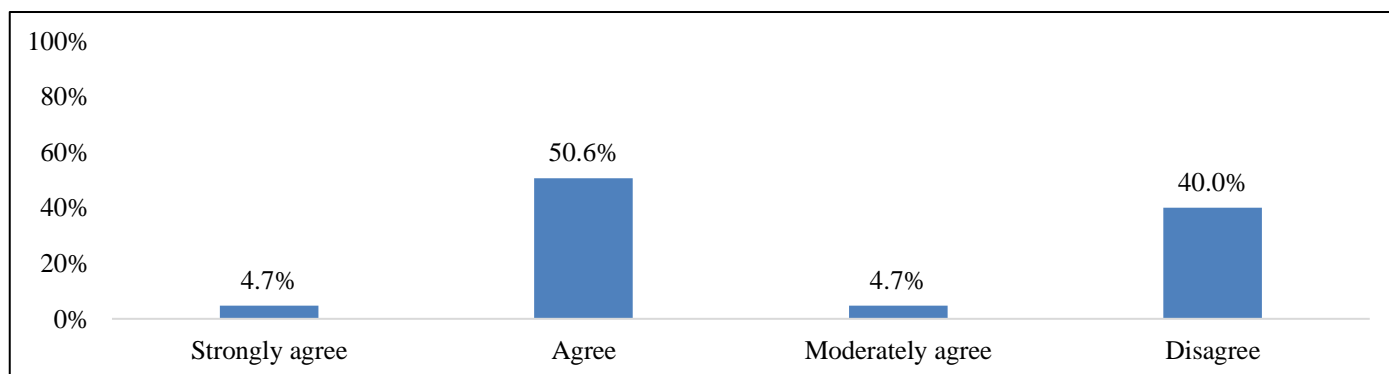
**Figure 4**  
*Ability to Provide Newsworthy Stories*

The researcher asked respondents whether COVID-19 had affected media outlets' ability to deliver newsworthy stories. As indicated in Figure 4, a significant 52.9% confirmed that COVID-19 had indeed degraded media outlets' capacity to provide newsworthy stories. Media managers involved in the research emphasized that the all-encompassing nature of the pandemic had resulted in an imbalanced focus on COVID-19-related news. According to them, the extensive repercussions of illness, mortality, and the overarching health emergency have redirected the attention of news reporting. They argued that the media prioritized pandemic coverage over other critical news stories, such as political developments, societal issues, and international events, thereby adversely affecting the diversity and equilibrium of news content.

The study's findings align with Mugisha's research, which highlighted the pandemic's effect on media outlets, leading to a focus on COVID-19 stories at the expense of other important topics (Mugisha, 2020). Additionally, the media manager highlighted the challenge posed by the proliferation of false or misleading information circulating through various online platforms during the COVID-19 period. For them, this made it difficult for the media to distinguish fact from fiction and present accurate news to the public. Similarly, these findings resonate with a 2021 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study, which outlined the increase in misinformation and fake news due to the pandemic, contributing to a decline in public trust in the media (UNDP, 2021b).

#### 4.3 Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Media Revenues in the Rwandan Media Houses

The second objective of the research was to examine the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on media revenues in the Rwandan media houses.



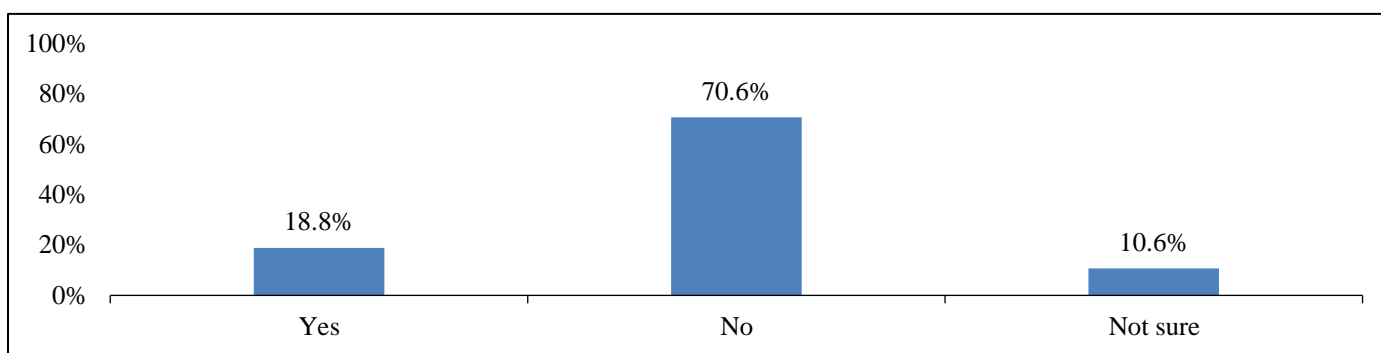
**Figure 5**  
*Media Revenues*

In the study, respondents were asked to confirm if media revenues had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As depicted in Figure 5, out of the 85 participants, 50.6% acknowledged a reduction in media revenues due to COVID-19, with 40% expressing disagreement.



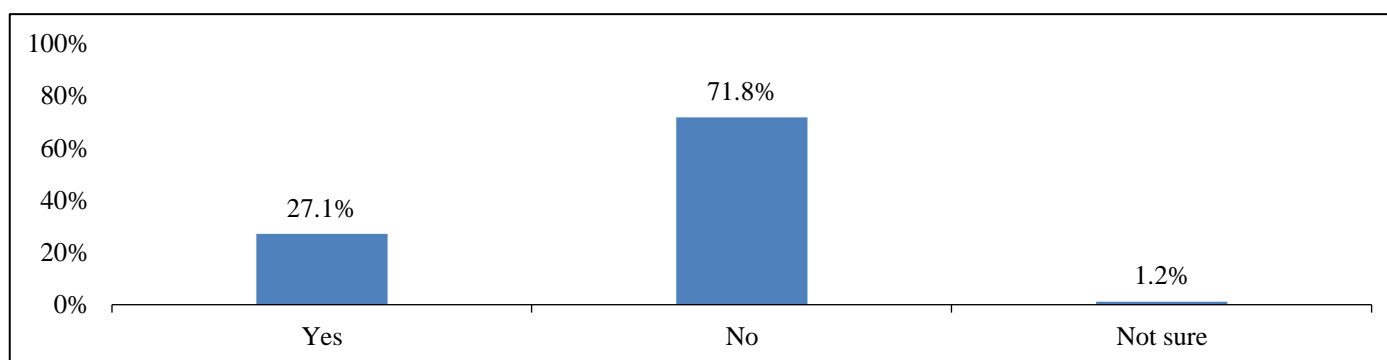
Media managers who affirmed the decrease in media revenues cited reasons such as the cancellation or postponement of events, including sports tournaments, concerts, and industry conferences, resulting in lost revenue from broadcasting rights, event sponsorships, and advertisements. They also noted a substantial decline in advertising spending across various businesses, directly affecting media revenues. These conclusions mirror the findings of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, which verified that as a result of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses largely reduced or suspended their media advertising expenditures, thereby affecting the revenue streams of media companies (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2020a).

Conversely, some respondents reported an increase in media revenues. According to these media managers, the surge is attributed to heightened digital media consumption as people spent more time at home seeking information and entertainment during the pandemic. According to these respondents, the boost in revenue stems from the rise in online subscriptions, viewership, streaming services, and digital advertising, which is advantageous for digital media platforms such as YouTube. This contrasts with a report from the International Federation of Journalists, which indicated that despite the accelerated shift to digital media consumption due to lockdowns and social distancing measures during the pandemic, it has not translated to increased profits for media companies. This is because online advertising revenues have been affected by the decrease in advertising spending (IFJ, 2019).



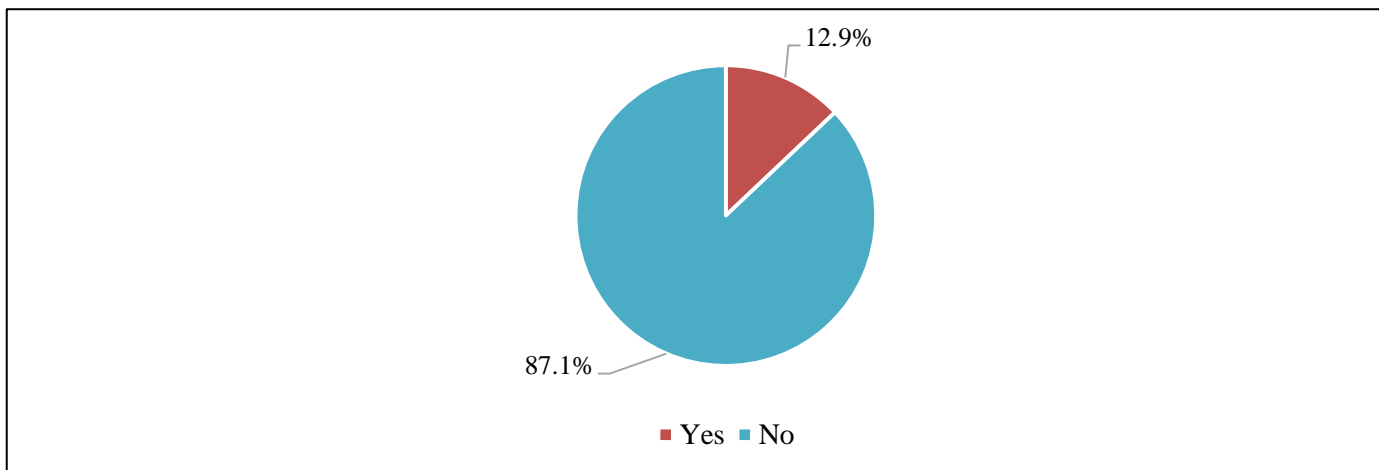
**Figure 6**  
*Journalist Wages*

According to the findings, 18.8% of the surveyed journalists confirmed that their wages were reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority, comprising 76.6% of respondents, reported that they continued to receive their full remuneration. According to key informants, the COVID-19 epidemic resulted in a reduction in journalists' pay because of financial restrictions stemming from a decline in advertising revenue and other sources of income. They noted explicitly that a decline in media organizations' earnings was caused by event cancellations, businesses cutting back on their advertising budgets, and the pandemic's overall economic effects. The media bosses said they slashed costs in order to deal with these financial difficulties. According to media managers who were contacted as key sources for the study, one tactic to lessen the financial impact and preserve operational stability during this difficult time was to reduce the pay of journalists.



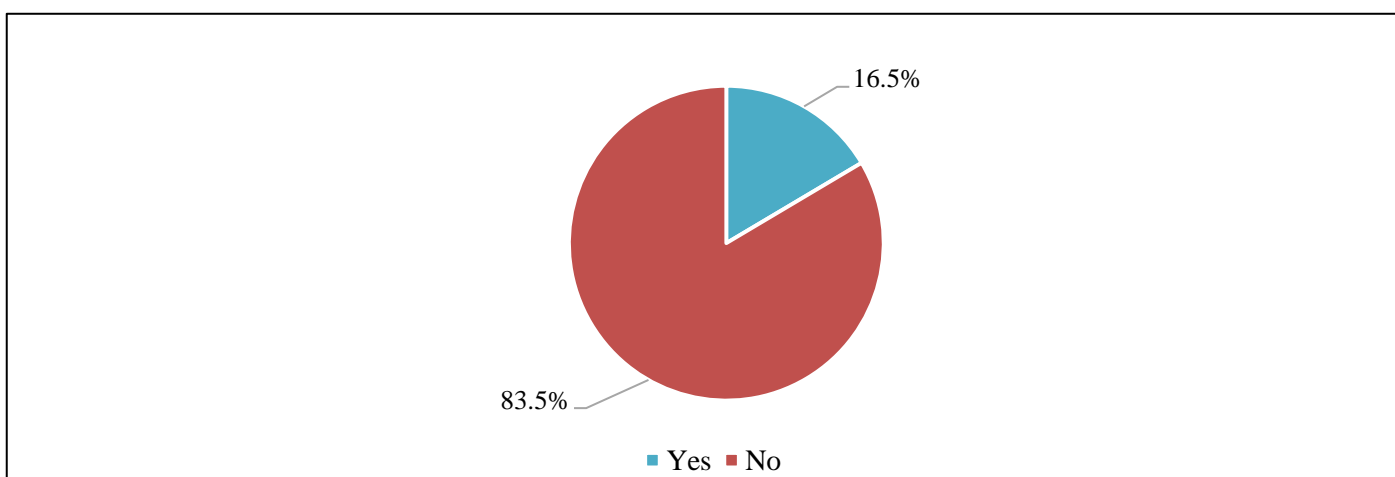
**Figure 7**  
*Staff Lay Off*

The study found that 23 journalists, or 27.1% of the 85 respondents, admitted that media companies have let go of employees as a result of the epidemic. However, as shown in Figure 7, 61 respondents, or 71.8% of the sample, claimed not to have witnessed staff layoffs related to the COVID-19 outbreak.



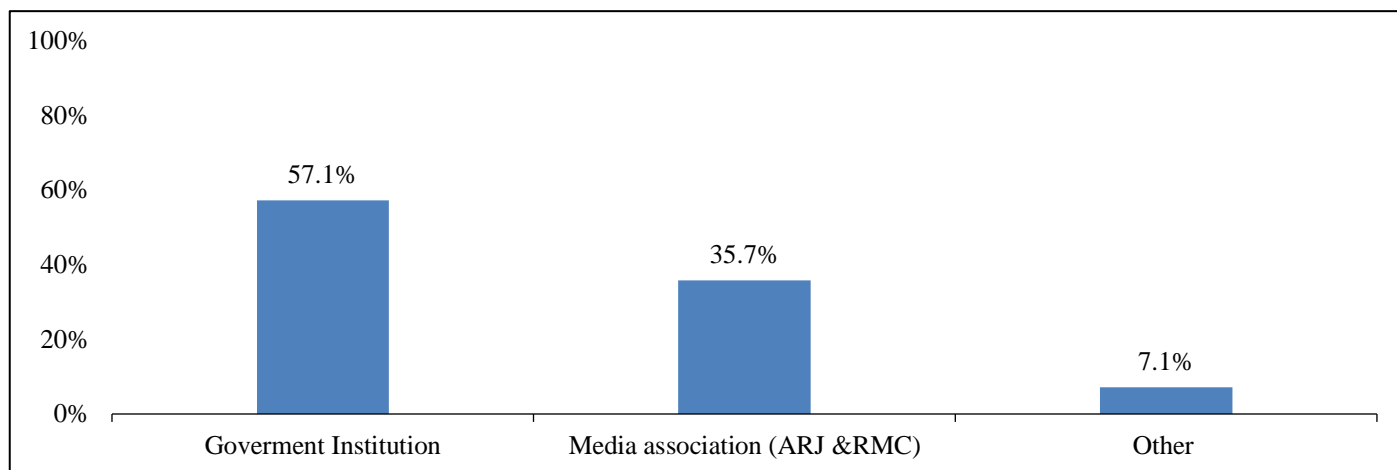
**Figure 8**  
*Job Loss*

Based on a sample of 85 journalists, the study found that 11.9% of them—or 11 people—lost their employment as a result of the pandemic. Key informants cited a number of variables, such as budgetary limitations and media companies' diminishing advertising revenues that were contributing to these employment losses. Events that were canceled or postponed also resulted in less opportunities for coverage, and media corporations were further impacted by businesses that slashed their advertising budgets and economic instability. Consistent with the outcomes of the investigation into the impact of COVID-19 on media operations in Rwanda, Nsengiyumva Emmanuel's 2020 study on the COVID-19 pandemic's aftermath on Rwanda's media sector disclosed extensive layoffs and salary reductions for journalists. It was confirmed that the decline in media revenues has presented serious difficulties for media companies, particularly those that mostly depend on advertising revenue. As a result, many media outlets have been forced to cut expenses by hiring fewer people and offering lower salaries, all the while looking for creative ways to make money during these difficult times (Nsengimana, 2020).



**Figure 9**  
*Support to Media Houses to Mitigate the Effect of the Pandemic*

A minority of respondents, comprising 16.5%, reported receiving support to alleviate the effect of COVID-19 pandemic, as depicted in Figure 9. This highlights the perceived neglect of media houses by government and other relevant institutions responsible for media development. The key informant lamented the lack of eligibility of media houses for the established fund aimed at supporting businesses by the Government of Rwanda.



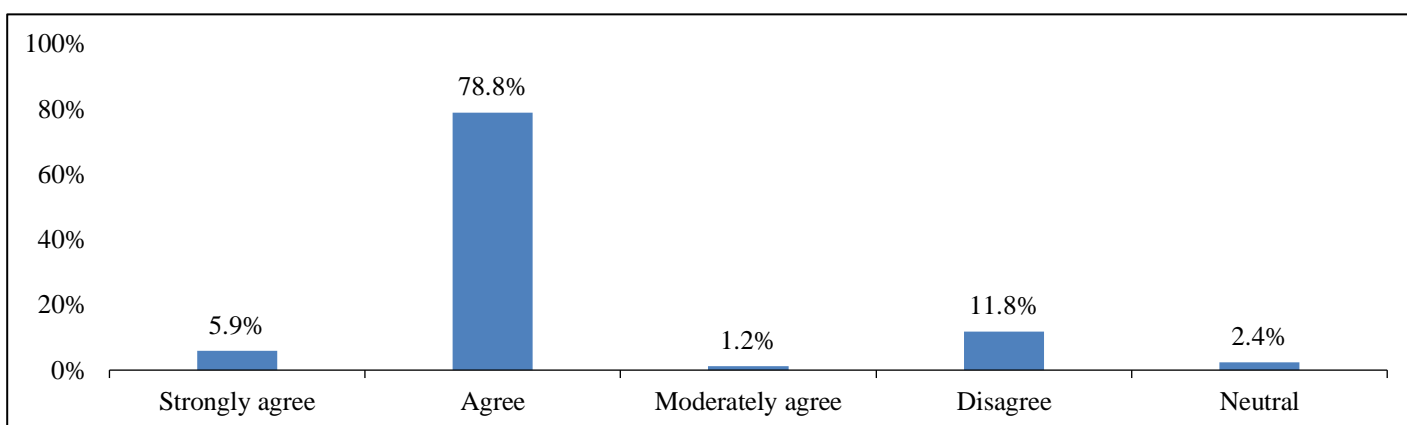
**Figure 10**

*Source of Support for Media Houses*

As per the research respondents who confirmed receiving support, government institutions were the primary source at 57.1%, followed by two media associations - Rwanda Media Association and Rwanda Media Commission - at 35.7%, as depicted in Figure 10. The key informant noted that the government support was competitive, and many media houses did not meet the criteria for eligibility. Additionally, they highlighted that government support was financial in nature, while support from the associations comprised provisions such as food, training, and equipment. The Interactive Advertising Bureau reported that governments worldwide rolled out incentive packages to support businesses, including media organizations and individuals, affected by the pandemic (IAB ,2020a). In Rwanda, similar initiatives were observed, but the support from the Government of Rwanda and media associations was deemed insufficient to sustain all affected media houses.

#### 4.4 The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the welfare of journalists in the Rwandan media houses

The third research objective was to examine the effect of COVID-19 on the welfare of journalists in the Rwandan media houses.



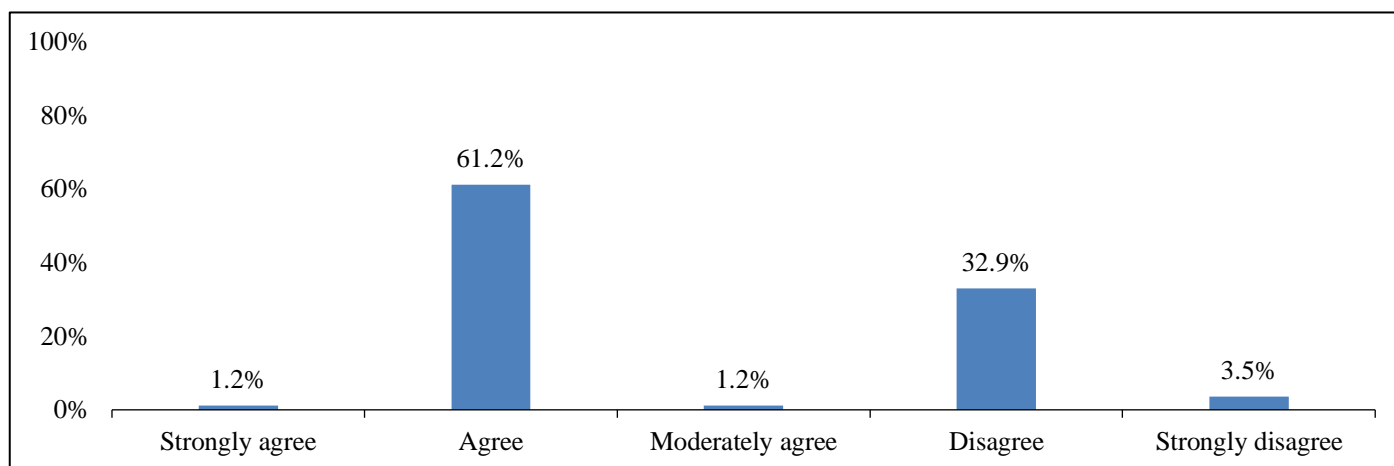
**Figure 11**

*Effect of COVID-19 on Welfare of Journalists*

Journalists were asked whether COVID-19 had a negative effect on their welfare. As shown in Figure 11, the findings indicated that the majority of journalists, equivalent to 78.8%, believe that COVID-19 had a negative effect on journalists. The research respondents acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, social distancing measures, quarantine protocols, and travel restrictions have significantly affected the welfare of journalists in numerous ways. The information obtained from key informants indicated the pandemic caused economic uncertainty, resulting in budget cuts and layoffs in media organizations. They confirmed that many journalists have lost their jobs or experienced reduced salaries, leaving them with financial stress and job insecurity. They also added

that covering distressing news, witnessing suffering, and dealing with misinformation caused long-lasting psychological effects for some media professionals.

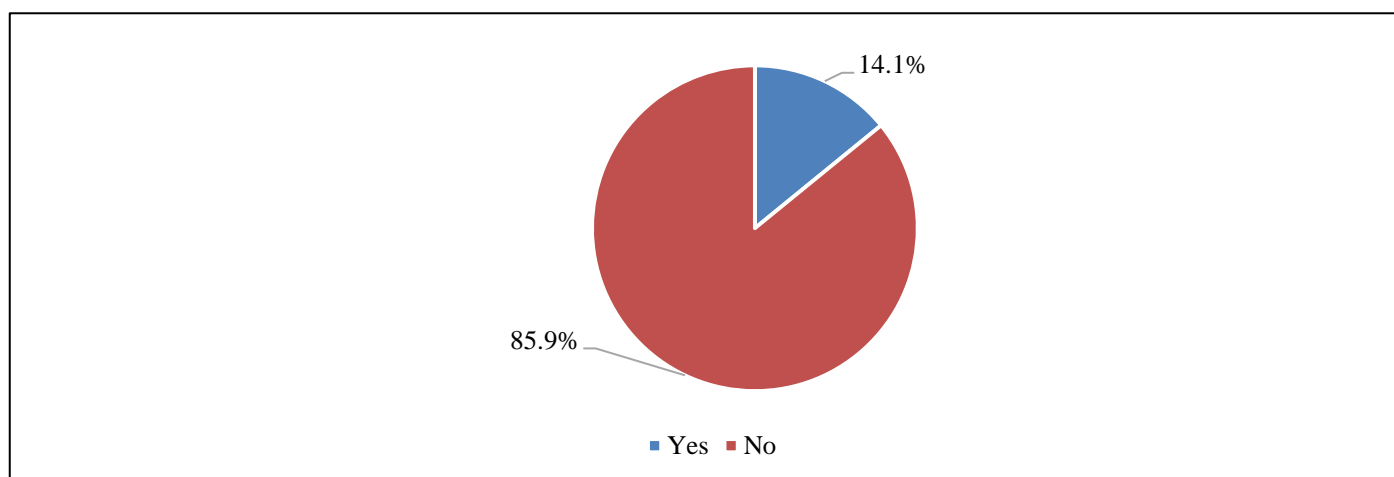
The results of this study on the effects of COVID-19 on media operations in Rwanda are consistent with research conducted in other regions. In the United States, a similar pattern was noticed, with many journalists losing their jobs, experiencing salary reductions, and facing increased health and safety risks while reporting on the pandemic and protests against police brutality during the COVID-19 pandemic (RMB, 2021). Furthermore, the African Media Barometer (2020) also highlighted comparable findings across multiple African countries, where journalists encountered decreased salaries, pay cuts, and staff layoffs due to a decline in advertising revenue precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Figure 12**  
*Safety of Journalists during COVID-19*

Journalists were asked about their ability to practice their profession without encountering threats, harassment, physical attacks, or unlawful detention. The survey results illustrated in Figure 12 revealed that while the majority of journalists were able to work safely, 32.9% of the 85 respondents reported not enjoying that freedom. Key informants cited incidents in which journalists were assaulted, harassed, or detained while trying to gather news in restricted areas.

The results are consistent with the findings in the 2020 Reporters Without Borders report, which revealed that journalists faced frequent targeting for their reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in countries with limited press freedom. As a result, many journalists experienced threats, intimidation, and violence, significantly affecting their well-being. This highlights that the organization overseeing media freedom documented violations in 90 states during the first half of 2020, with more than 130 journalists unlawfully affected in relation to their coverage of the pandemic (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

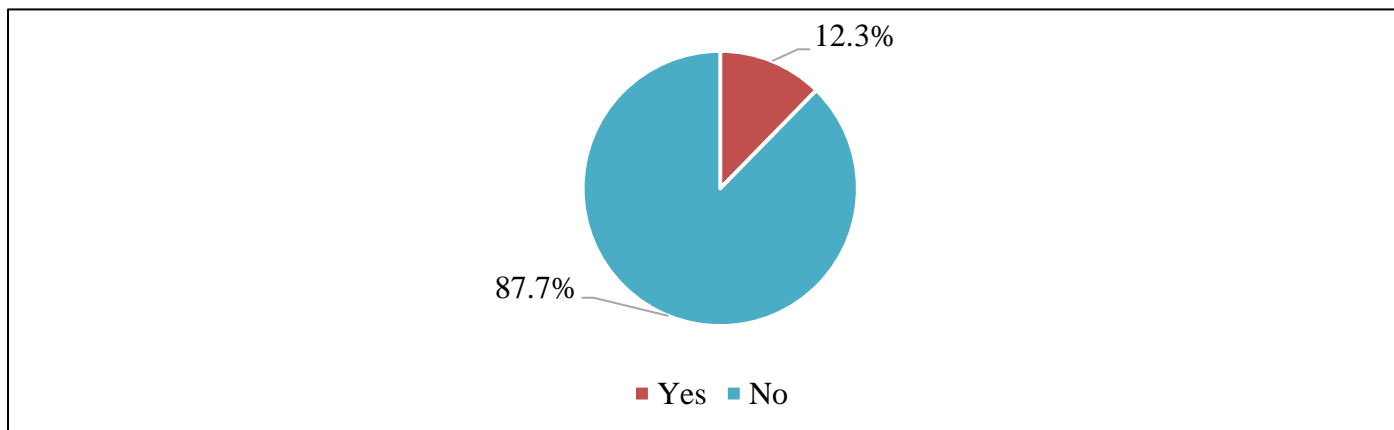


**Figure 13**  
*Journalists' Receipt of Protective Equipment from Employers*

When asked if they were provided with COVID-19 protective equipment by the media outlets they were affiliated with, only a small percentage (14.1%) of journalists confirmed receiving such equipment, as depicted in Figure 13. Key informants attributed the lack of provision of COVID-19 protective equipment by media outlets to budget constraints resulting from the pandemic's effect on their revenues.

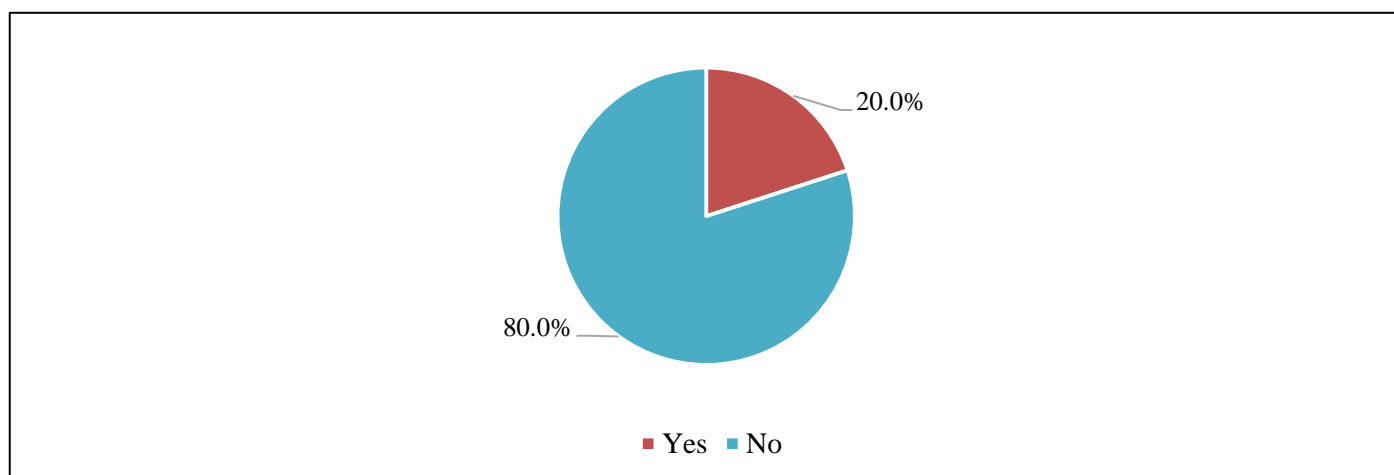
Continuing the inquiry, the researcher sought to determine whether journalists who did not receive protective equipment had contracted COVID-19 as a result of this absence. Out of 73 journalists who did not receive protective equipment, 9 of them (12.3% of the total) reported being infected by the pandemic, as indicated in Figure 14.

These findings are consistent with a global survey of journalists conducted by the International Centre for Journalists in 2020 across 125 countries. The survey revealed that a significant number of journalists did not receive adequate protective equipment while on the job, and many reported experiencing increasingly severe online hate attacks during the pandemic (African Center for Media Excellence [ACME], 2021).



**Figure 14**  
*COVID-19 Cases among Journalists*

According to media managers contacted as key informants, the potential reasons why some journalists may have been infected by COVID-19 while carrying out their professional duties include working in close proximity to others during interviews and events, operating in public spaces with potential exposure to non-compliant individuals, frequent travel requirements, and the nature of their work requiring visits to high-risk locations. They added that budget constraints have hindered some media outlets from providing adequate protective equipment to their journalists.



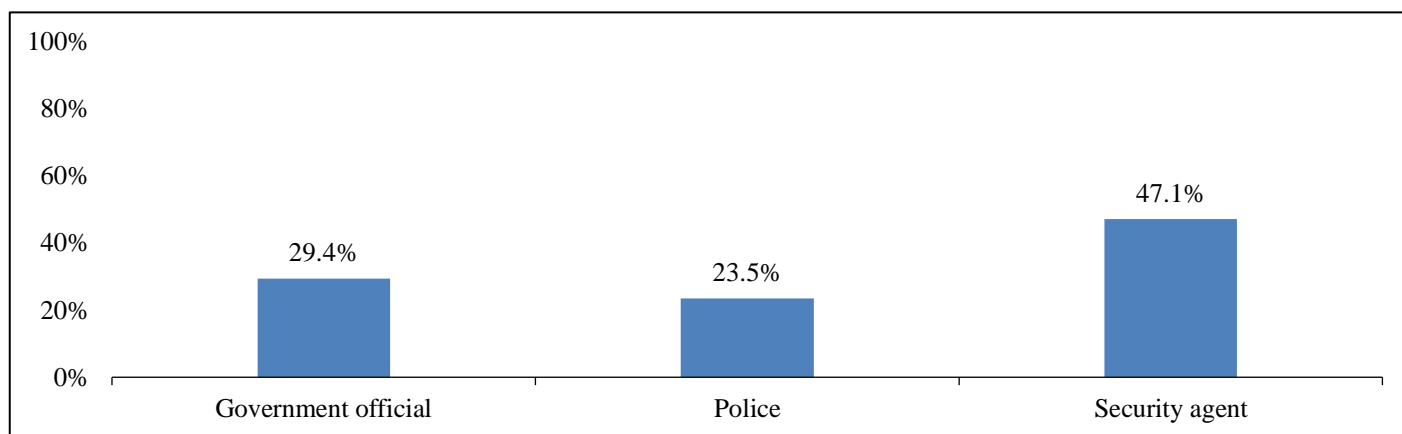
**Figure 15**  
*Access to Information*

Journalists were surveyed about whether they faced restrictions on accessing information because of travel limitations. According to the findings 20, out of 85 participating journalists, 17 of them, constituting 20% of the group, reported being denied access to sources of information.



The study also identified possible reasons for journalists encountering barriers to accessing information during the COVID-19 pandemic. These reasons included concerns about controlling information, preventing virus transmission, shaping public perception, and a lack of understanding of the media's role. These factors were determined based on inputs from key informants involved in the research.

The results align with a study conducted by the Africa Center for Media Excellence in 2021, which revealed the challenges faced by Rwandan journalists in accessing information and reporting on events due to the COVID-19 restrictions on movement and gatherings in the country (ACME, 2021).



**Figure 16**  
*Entities / Individuals That Denied Journalists to Access Source of Information*

As part of the study, journalists were requested to specify the organizations or individuals responsible for denying them access to information sources. Among the journalists who experienced denial of access, 47.1% pointed to security agencies as the main culprits, as illustrated in Figure 16. Government officials and the police were also identified by the remainder of the journalists.

Key informants emphasized that while certain individuals denied information to journalists, the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC) played a significant role in aiding journalists in accessing information during the COVID-19 period. In our literature review, we discovered that other studies did not uncover the individuals or institutions that denied journalists access to information during the COVID-19 pandemic, a revelation brought to light by the research on the effect of COVID-19 on media operations in Rwanda.

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

The research examined the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on media activities in Rwanda and found notable ramifications for the sector. Since most journalists had trouble obtaining and producing news, there was a trend toward remote reporting and a greater dependence on data analysis and citizen journalism. The study also examined the impact of the pandemic on media revenues in Rwanda and discovered that a large number of respondents had their earnings diminish as a result of canceled events, lower advertising, and lower corporate spending.

The study also looked at how the pandemic affected the health of journalists working for Rwandan media outlets. It found that there were many negative consequences, including job loss, lower pay, financial stress, and employment insecurity, as a result of layoffs and budget cuts. Travel restrictions made it difficult for many journalists to reach sources, which had an impact on information access as well. Finally, the study looked at how the epidemic changed how Rwandan media outlets interacted with their audiences, and a sizable majority of respondents noted a negative impact on customary approaches to audience engagement.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations stemming from research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on media operations in Rwanda aim to inform strategies, policies, and interventions to fortify and enhance the efficacy of media organizations during crises. These proposals, addressed to various stakeholders, including media organizations, the Government of Rwanda, media associations, and other stakeholders, emphasize actions such as diversifying

information sources and revenue streams, ensuring journalist welfare, facilitating access to trustworthy information, providing financial support, and offering extensive training programs for journalists focusing on digital storytelling tools and press freedom advocacy to improve news quality during crises.

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