

## "Ink on the Pandemic in Ghana": A Qualitative Analysis of How the Ghana News Agency and Joy Online News Covered COVID-19

Lawrence Naaikuur<sup>1</sup>  
Samuel Adadi Akapule<sup>2\*</sup>  
Thomas Aazagsiba Agana<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>lnaaikuur@ubids.edu.gh  
<sup>2\*</sup>sakapule@bolgatu.edu.gh  
<sup>3</sup>tagana@ubids.edu.gh

<sup>2</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6641-0965>

<sup>3</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0694-554X>

<sup>1,3</sup>Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (SDD UBIDS), Upper West Region,  
<sup>2</sup>Bolgatanga Technical University, Upper East Region, <sup>1,2,3</sup>Ghana

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.6.2.5>

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates how the Ghana News Agency (GNA) and Joy News Online covered the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2020 to December 2021, using a qualitative content analysis approach informed by Framing Theory. The research analyzed news articles from both outlets, focusing on themes such as public health, economic impacts, government responses, and social consequences of the pandemic. The study found that while both outlets addressed similar core issues, Joy Online emphasized government accountability and transparency more strongly, whereas the GNA's coverage was more focused on factual updates and promoting government measures without extensive critique. Data was gathered through content analysis, with inclusion criteria that focused on articles directly related to COVID-19 and exclusion criteria that filtered out unrelated content. The analysis revealed that the framing strategies used by both platforms influenced public perception, emotional engagement, and behavior during the pandemic. The findings suggest the importance of balanced and accurate media coverage in health crises. The study recommends that media outlets strive for balanced framing, collaborate with health experts, and actively combat misinformation to enhance public health communication and foster informed decision-making. This research emphasizes the need for transparent and consistent messaging, with a call for further studies on the role of media in framing future health crises.*

**Keywords:** COVID 19, Framing Strategies, Ghana News Agency (GNA), Joy News Online, Media Framing

### I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged as a global health crisis in late 2019 due to the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, had profound impacts worldwide (Peeri et al., 2020). Ghana as a country was not spared from this disaster (Nkrumah, 2022). The pandemic eventually collapsed many sectors including the healthcare, education, and the economy. For instance, due the pandemic, the tourism and hospitality industry, the major source of revenues for the government, suffered a loss of \$171 million (Annoh, 2020). The healthcare facilities encountered several challenges including inadequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the capacity for testing, leading to the adjustments in operational protocols as well as sample transportation (Mintah, 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2020).

In terms of disseminating information, the Media outlets played very critical role in awareness creation and contributing to the shaping of public perceptions about the pandemic (Atukunda, 2024; Africa-China Reporting, 2020). One of the state media houses in Ghana that focuses on delivering accurate and timely information is the Ghana News Agency, established in 1957 under the umbrella of the Ministry of Information (Amankona, 2018). In the contrary, Joy News Online, a renowned private news outlet, provides comprehensive coverage and in-depth reporting on current events and public health issues (Avle, 2011.).

In responding to the crisis, the government of Ghana implemented a range of measures including a state of emergency, lockdowns in major cities, travel restrictions, and the promotion of public health protocols (World Bank, 2022). Additionally, Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans (EPRPs) were put in place by the government to mitigate the pandemic (Adu, 2025).

Globally, it is very significant to stress that the pandemic prompted varied media responses, with different media organizations using specific framing techniques to influence public perception and behavior (Ogbodo et al., 2020). For instance, Boukes (2021) in his comparative analysis, identified various framing strategies, including episodic, thematic,

and responsibility frames, that have been employed across different regions. In his study he emphasizes the significance of considering the socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts when evaluating media portrayals of health crises. Also, Gupta et al. (2020) further explore how media framing affects public understanding and responses during pandemics, impacting risk perception, compliance with health guidelines, and trust in government actions. On the other hand, Odionye et al. (2024) point out that state-owned and private media outlets adopt different approaches due to their organizational values, editorial policies, and audience preferences (Bennett, 2012).

Media framing of health crises in the African context is influenced by unique socio-political and communication challenges (Adekunle et al., 2021). According to Adekunle and Mohammed (2022), the importance of cultural values, government messaging, and media ownership in shaping how health crises are depicted across the continent. Biyogo and Ong'ong'a (2024) in their study, investigate how government communications impact media narratives, revealing a complex interplay between government messaging, media framing, and public perceptions. Additionally, state-owned media in Africa are often accused and perceived as government propaganda tools, while private media outlets are viewed as being more independent and critical in media coverage (Kalyango & Vultee, 2012).

While previous studies have explored media framing in health crises globally and in the African context, there remains a notable empirical research gap, specifically focusing on COVID-19 in Ghana. By critically examining the framing strategies of the Ghana News Agency (GNA) and Joy News Online, this gap can be addressed because the finding would enhance our understanding of media dynamics during the pandemic in Ghana. The GNA, a state-owned outlet, often aligns with government narratives, while Joy News Online, a private media platform, enjoys greater editorial freedom (Owusu, 2012). Comparing these contrasting media sources offers valuable insights into how media influences public discourse and policy. Given the significant role media coverage has played in shaping public awareness, influencing policy debates, and holding the government accountable within Ghana's unique socio-economic and healthcare context (Diedong, 2013), this study seeks to analyze the impact of these media outlets on public perceptions during the COVID-19 crisis.

## 1.1 Research Objectives

The study is underpinned by the following research objectives:

- i. To identify the media frames used by GNA and Joy Online in their coverage of COVID-19 from March 2020 to December 2021.
- ii. To compare the differences and similarities between Ghana News Agency Online((state-owned) and Joy Online (private media) framing of the COVID -19 pandemic.
- iii. To explore the implications of Ghana News Agency Online and Joy Online framing of the COVID -19 pandemic.

## II LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Framing Theory

News framing theory exerts a communicative power in the process of selecting and making salient aspects of a main issue other than the issue in communicative texts (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). This line of thought is deduced from Entman's (1993) conceptualization of what framing involves and what work frames do. "Framing, essentially involves the selection of information and its salience. Frames highlight certain aspects of a subject in communication, thereby elevating their salience" (Entman, 1993). Furthermore, this communicative power is exerted through the employment of news framing devices (Simon & Xenos, 2000). While Entman (1993) notes that, "the text contains frames which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts and judgment", D'Angelo (2002) sums up the list and conceptualizes it into framing devices. These framing devices are what help in the process of selecting and making salient an aspect of a news story (De Vreese, 2005). Scheufele (1999) explicates Entman (1993) by delineating the news frame theory from other theories such as agenda setting and gate keeping. This delineation is what makes this theory suitable for this study.

Framing theory, as articulated by Entman (1993), suggests that media organizations shape public understanding by emphasizing certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others. Based on sociology and communication studies, media framing theory holds the belief that news organizations selectively highlight some aspects of a story while downplaying others, influencing the public's opinions and perceptions (Entman, 1993). Reese et al. (2001), explained framing as the process of creating stories, definition, and interpretations that affect how audiences perceive and discuss events. Various framing strategies including public health, economic, and political frames were employed during the COVID-19 crisis to influence audience perceptions and responses (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

### 2.1.2 Positive and Negative Aspects of Media Framing in Health Communication

During health emergencies, Media framing plays very critical role in shaping public perceptions and responses to health emergencies (Glik, 2007). Some scholars (Reese et al., 2001) underscore the significance of media's influence on public understanding, policy making and reactions, and societal cohesion. According to other authors (Entman, 1993) media framing impacts public comprehension by emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others. The author, Prosser (2021), describes how COVID-19 media framing balanced public education on the pandemic's seriousness with encouraging preventive measures, without inciting undue fear.

Johnson-Cartee (2005) argues that media framing is crucial when it comes to the contextualization of news, influencing how events are perceived and understood. The media as the primary source of health-related information, have the influence to significantly affect public opinion and decision-making (Chen et al., 2018). This influence is often seen in media's role especially during pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, where extensive coverage prompted health authorities and governments to implement effective policies (Bardhan, 2001).

The New York Times' investigation into fraudulent activities by Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp., which led to federal scrutiny (Gottlieb et al., 2025) also provides another classical example of positive media framing. The Washington Post's coverage of a gene therapy trial death improved federal patient rights (King & Cohen-Haguenaer, 2008). and the Boston Globe's reporting on placebo-control trials in psychiatry which led to procedural reforms (Rezendes, 2004) also falls under positive media framing.

However, it also very important to indicated that media framing can also have detrimental effects by misrepresenting facts and skewing public perceptions as Gilliam et al (2022) found that excessive crime coverage led Americans to view crime as a major national issue, influencing negative perceptions of offenders and criminal justice policies. Altheide (2003) argues that media framing of crime and violence distorts public perceptions, leading to increased anxiety about personal safety. They advocate for reporting methods that address violence from a public health perspective, aiming to reduce fear and enhance understanding.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

### 2.2.1 Global, Africa and Ghanaian Context: Media Framing and Health Crises

Globally, scholars have discussed widely the role of media framing in shaping public understanding and response to health emergencies (Elbanna et al., 2019). According to these scholars, during global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, media outlets play central roles in public health communication. Glik (2007) suggests that media framing plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of health risks and responses to health advisories.

In furtherance, Reese et al. (2001) underscore the significant role of the media in influencing the formation of public opinion, policy making, and societal responses to health emergencies. The framing of health-related issues by media outlets can directly affect how the public perceives risks, interprets health guidelines, and adopts preventive measures (Chang, 2012). The Media has the ability to either amplify or downplay the severity of health crises influences not only the public's emotional response but also the effectiveness of government interventions (Atkin & Wallack, 1990).

In the context of Africa, media framing has also been recognized as a major tool in influencing public health responses during crises (Oladiran, 2023). Many scholars have investigated how the African media shaped public perceptions during the outbreak of the Ebola pandemic and other health emergencies (Garfin et al., 2022). For instance, Chen et al. (2018) also found that the framing of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa played a major role in guiding public understanding and compliance with health measures. Similarly, Glik (2007) points out how the media's role in framing the Ebola outbreak in Africa influenced both individual and societal responses, including adherence to quarantine measures and preventive actions. Media outlets in Africa serve as key communicators of health information, and their framing has a direct impact on how the public responds to government policies and health interventions (Adekunle, 2017).

In Ghana, the situation is not all that different in media's role in framing health emergencies, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, is of particular significance given the centrality of media in the country's public health communication strategy (McCarthy et al., 2023). Studies conducted during the Ebola crisis in West Africa suggest that Ghana's media outlets played a significant role in mitigating the spread of infectious diseases by providing clear and informative health messaging (Bardhan, 2001). In the case of COVID-19, Waldman et al. (2025) note that media outlets like Joy Online News and the Ghana News Agency (GNA) played integral role in disseminating information about the virus, preventive measures, and government actions. These outlets helped balance the need for public education on the seriousness of the pandemic with the goal of avoiding panic (Asimah, 2023). The media's role in shaping public response and government policy during the COVID-19 pandemic is widely recognized (Apriliyanti et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding the critical role media framing plays in public health communication, there is a notable empirical literature gap in relating to how specific media outlets in Ghana, particularly the Ghana News Agency (GNA) and Joy Online News, framed the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing studies on media framing in health crises tend to focus on general trends or other regions, with limited attention given to the framing techniques of Ghanaian media during the

pandemic (Dralega et al., 2022). This gap in research hinders the understanding of how media outlets in Ghana influenced public perceptions of COVID-19, public adherence to health guidelines, and the overall effectiveness of government health policies. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing a qualitative analysis of how GNA and Joy Online News covered COVID-19, focusing on their framing strategies and the impact of their coverage on public health outcomes and government responses.

### 2.2.2 A Brief on Ghana's Media Landscape

History has it that the media in Ghana began in 1822 when Sir Charles MacCarthy established the Royal Gold Coast, marking it the early beginning of journalism in the country (Abaka & Owusu-Ansah, 2024). However, it very critical to point it out that it was not until 1857 that the Ghanaian native became involved in journalism when Charles and Edmund Bannerman founded the Accra Herald (Mitton et al., 2023). This led to establishment of more African-owned newspapers including the Gold Coast Times and the Western Echo (Hargrove, 2022). Professional journalism training became more after Ghana had gained independence in 1957 thereby the establishment of modern press which began to take shape, initially serving as an advocacy tool against colonial injustices (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Ghana's media landscape since the 1990s, has seen significant transformation with the repeal of restrictive laws including the Newspaper License Law (1991) and the Criminal Libel Law (2001) (Ahmed et al., 2012). At the close of 2020, Ghana could boast of a vibrant media scene, with over 400 radio stations, and 100 TV stations as well as hundreds of newspapers (Avle, 2011). With this growth, Ghana as a country, enjoys media diversity, including news broadcasts in regional languages (Akpojivi & Fosu, 2016). The media in Ghana has been playing significant roles in addressing critical national issues including the COVID-19 pandemic (Antwi-Boasiako & Nyarkoh, 2021). Amongst the country's most influential media outlets include the Ghana News Agency and the Joy online, which are the focus of the study (Avle, 2011).

### 2.2.3 Ghana News Agency in

The Ghana News Agency (GNA) as an online news media was established in Ghana 1957 to serves as Ghana's primary news source and to provide extensive coverage through local correspondents across all regions It was made to employ both domestic and international journalists (Tuurosong, 2013). The GNA plays very crucial role in disseminating news and health-related information, especially when it comes to crises (Sikanku, 2014). GNA also supplies content to both regional and international media (Jones, 2015).

### 2.2.4 Joy Online

Joy News Online is one of the wings of the Multimedia Group Limited (MGL), a prominent private media organization in Ghana founded in 1995 (Avle, 2011). The English-language radio station, initially launched as Joy FM, later expanded into internet and television broadcasting (Opere-Henaku, 2016). Joy News, a 24-hour news and current affairs channel, is accessible online through the MGL website, offering news articles, live streaming, and video archives (Kim, 2020).

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study employed qualitative content analysis to examine how Joy Online and the Ghana News Agency framed COVID-19 coverage from March 2020 to December 2021. Through the content analysis approach, the study examined headlines and news contents of articles related to COVID-19 published in the Joy Online and the Ghana News Agency from March 2020 to December 2021 in the perspective of media framing. Qualitative content analysis creates the suitable environment for studying frames in media texts (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This approach allowed in-depth examination of framing techniques.

### 3.2 Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling selected a representative set of news articles related to COVID-19 from both Joy Online and GNA. Articles were chosen from key periods and significant events during the pandemic.

### 3.3 Unit of Analysis

The analysis focused on individual news articles from Joy Online and GNA published during the study period. Each article was examined for its content, themes, and framing.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Articles were retrieved from the websites of Joy Online and GNA using search terms related to COVID-19. The collected articles were organized for analysis.



### 3.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis examined the context and presentation of themes to understand framing nuances. A coding scheme was developed to categorize the content based on themes (e.g., public health measures, government pronouncements, economic impacts), framing techniques (e.g., risk emphasis, human interest), and source of information (e.g., government officials, health experts). Data analysis involved qualitative analysis to explore the framing techniques employed by the newspapers.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Response Rate

The study sought to identify the media frames used by GNA and Joy Online in their coverage of COVID-19 from March 2020 to December 2021, to compare the differences and similarities between Ghana News Agency Online (state-owned) and Joy Online (private media) framing of the COVID-19 pandemic and to explore the implications of Ghana News Agency Online and Joy Online framing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 4.1.1 Types of framings GNA and Joy Online employed in the coverage of COVID-19 from March 2020 to December 2021.

The major headlines and content analysis of news stories on COVID-19 published by the Ghana News Agency online and Joy Online or websites from March 2020--December 2021, the peak of the pandemic were used as the basis for assessing the types of framings. Four different framing themes emerged from the finding and they include: Health Crisis, Economic impact, Government Response and unpreparedness, and Lack of Accountability and Transparency.

*Health crisis:* The two online media houses framed the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Health Crisis. Countless of the two media houses headlines portrayed this fact. Among some of the headlines include "COVID-19, Ghana moves from vaccine hesitancy among health workers to acceptability", "COVID-19: Tackling misinformation and hesitancy through vaccination campaign", "GHS declared 2021 as a month of COVID 19 Vaccination", "Social Distancing – the ignored saviour of COVID-19", "Ghana records 1,462 Covid-19 related deaths in three years"(GNA Online(2021) and "Covid-19 Vaccination: Ignore the conspiracy theories – Akufo-Addo", "GHS revises Covid-19 travel guidelines for Ghanaian travelers at KIA", "789 nurses and midwives test positive for Covid-19 in 2021 – General Secretary GRNMA", and "Fight against Covid-19 has not ended; let's continue adhering to protocols – Pharmacist warns"(Joyonline, 2021).

From the analysis, it can be observed that in terms of health framing, the Ghana News Agency (GNA) online, as a state-owned media outlet, placed notable emphasis on COVID-19, featuring several stories, while Joy Online demonstrated an even broader focus by highlighting more in-depth coverage on the health impacts of the pandemic." In framing the pandemic as health crisis, the two online media houses emphasized the impact of COVID-19 on public health, including infection rates, healthcare systems, and medical responses.

*Economic impact:* The two media houses also framed their coverage of the pandemic in the context of the economic impact. Among them include "COVID 19 and its impact on MMDAs Internally generated funds", "Government Rolls Out Economic Stimulus Package to Aid Businesses Affected by Pandemic", Covid-19 Ravages: An almost deserted beach with an unusually empty Calabash"(GNA Online, 2020) and "Ghana's economic downturn not only due to COVID-19 but also excessive spending – IMF", "Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine war not the sole causes of current economic crisis – Finance Committee Chairman", "Covid-19 forced us to abandon Sky Train project - Joe Ghartey", "Ghana's economy gradually returning to pre-Covid-19 era - NPP Communicator", "The trend of jobs has changed due to COVID-19 pandemic - Jobberman Ghana CEO", "Government to embark on aggressive domestic revenue mobilization drive to mitigate Covid-19 impact", "Visually impaired petty trader struggles to recover from impact of coronavirus pandemic", "Traders unhappy about low sales in COVID-19 era", (Joy online, 2021).

The two media houses through their economic impact framing angle of the COVID-19, highlighted the economic repercussions caused by the pandemic, such as job losses, business closures, and government interventions to mitigate the economic crisis. When it comes to economic impact framing, the Ghana News Agency online touched on some key economic implications of COVID-19, while Joy Online provided a more in-depth exploration of the economic challenges and responses.

*Government response and unpreparedness:* The two media outlets also framed the COVID-19 on the theme "Government Response and Unpreparedness". Excerpts from the two media that proved so include "Government is determined to protect Ghanaians against COVID-19", "COVID-19: Ghana needs to prepare for Epidemics", "Minority recommends measures to address increasing COVID-19 cases", "President Addresses Nation on Latest COVID-19 Measures and Vaccination Progress", "Government applauded for prompt supply of Covid-19 logistics", "Opposition Criticizes Government's Preparedness for Second Wave of COVID-19"(GNA Online, 2021), "Opposition Raises

Concerns Over Government's Readiness for COVID-19 Resurgence", "Kwabena Mintah Akandoh: Government's incompetence in the management of Covid-19" "COVID-19 pandemic: a call to build long-term resilience of the vulnerable", "Government to embark on aggressive domestic revenue mobilization drive to mitigate Covid-19 impact" (Joy Online, 2021).

Here in their framing, the two media houses revealed how government responded in dealing with the pandemic by focusing on the actions taken by the government in response to the pandemic, including policies, regulations, and public health measures implemented). However, the two media houses revealed that though government was committed to dealing with the crisis, it was also unprepared towards dealing with it.

On the theme of government response and unpreparedness before the pandemic, Ghana News Online provided significant attention, covering various key aspects, while Joy Online demonstrated a broader and more comprehensive approach with even greater focus on the issue.

*Lack of accountability and transparency:* The two also framed the coverage of the pandemic in the context of transparency and accountability. Example include "Minority calls for probe into COVID expenditure", "Opposition Criticizes Government's Preparedness for Second Wave of COVID-19", (GNA Online, 2021), and "Public Demands Accountability Amidst Vaccine Distribution Hurdles", "Some people wanted to set me up in the Sputnik V scandal - Agyeman Manu", "COVID-19 expenditure probe: Ato Forson accuses Ayew Afriyie of sabotage", "It's laughable for BoG to attribute GH¢60b loss to Covid-19 and Russia-Ukraine war - Mahama Ayariga", "Frontiers Healthcare Services debunks corruption allegation", "GHS refutes allegation of fake Covid-19 test at KIA", "Parliament's Health Committee Chairman dismisses claims that Ghana is buying Sputnik V vaccines at inflated price", "Ghana Health Service begins inquiry into alleged theft of Covid-19 vaccines" (Joy Online, 2021).

In covering issues of accountability and transparency, the Ghana News Agency online provided several reports highlighting the theme, while Joy Online offered even more extensive coverage, delving deeper into the subject. This theme emphasized the importance of transparent communication from authorities regarding case numbers, vaccination progress, and public health guidelines.

#### **4.2 Differences and Similarities of Framing: the State-Owned Media (GNA) and Joy Online News (Private)**

The findings portray clear distinction and variations of how the Ghana News Agency (GNA) and Joy News Online framed their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistently Joy News Online provided broader and more in-depth coverage across all the thematic frames, particularly on health, economic impacts, government responses, and accountability.

On the health crisis theme, Joy News Online demonstrated a stronger focus and provided more detailed reports on the public health implications of the pandemic compared to the Ghana News Agency. In this regard, it may be suggested that Joy News Online placed greater emphasis on the health-related challenges posed by the pandemic while the Ghana News Agency play less attention to the economic consequences of the pandemic.

Regarding government responses and preparedness, both media outlets covered this theme relatively evenly. However, Joy News Online slightly surpassed the Ghana News Agency in reporting on government actions and their adequacy in dealing with the pandemic, signaling a more critical stance.

Another notable difference that emerged from the findings is the theme of accountability and transparency. While Joy News Online took a more investigative and critical approach, placing a stronger emphasis on scrutinizing government actions, particularly in how resources were managed during the pandemic, the Ghana News Agency was less critical, focusing less on holding the government to account and more on reporting official narratives.

In summary, while both outlets provided coverage on key aspects of the pandemic, Joy News Online offered a more critical and comprehensive approach, especially in areas concerning government accountability and economic impacts. The Ghana News Agency's coverage was more measured and aligned with official perspectives, especially regarding transparency and accountability.

#### **4.3 Implications of Ghana News Agency Online and Joy Online framing of the COVID -19 Pandemic**

The findings of this investigation have multiple ramifications. Regarding the dominance frames of the two media outlets, they were: Health; Economic Impact; Government Response; and Unpreparedness prior to the pandemic's hit and Lack of Accountability and Transparency. The news headlines and contents of the two online media outlets vividly display all of these dominating framings.

However, compared to the Ghana News Agency, the state-owned media, Joy Online has more reports regarding the COVID 19 in the aforementioned major themes. It is possible that people would believe that because Ghana News Agency Online is a state-owned media outlet, it acts as a government auxiliary and is unable to hold the government responsible for the outbreak, unlike Joy Online, which is privately held

There are widespread perceptions that government-owned media outlets serve as the government's mouthpiece, only showcasing its good aspects while downplaying its negative ones ((Kumar ,2010) This was reflected in the study as the Ghana News Agency Online in its framing on accountability and transparency related to the COVID-19, reported

on few stories while the Joy Online which are very critical on government, framed more stories on accountability and transparency related to the COVID-19 funding.

Inadequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) was another issue during the pandemic's height, in addition to the limited number of medical facilities that struggled to contain the disease. The fear that patients potentially carry the virus caused the facility's clinicians to be reluctant to perform thorough examinations on them. Some laboratories in the nation were unable to take blood samples from people suspected of having contracted the virus, forcing such facilities to transport blood samples to facilities that have such facilities to test blood samples for many days. It was expected that the Ghana News Agency could have partnered with Joy Online News by expanding its health framing and writing more stories on the dire circumstances to draw duty bearers' attention to act.

#### 4.4 Discussion

From the above analysis, it can be seen that in the context of COVID-19 in Ghana, the media played a major role by framing a balance between informing the public about the severity of the pandemic and promoting preventive measures without inducing panic. Classic examples found in this study include headlines such as "US Ambassador to Ghana appeals to Ghanaians to get vaccinated (Joy online, 2021) and "Face mask: An important but almost a neglected Covid-19 Protocol in Wa" (Ghana News Agency online, 2021). This resonates with Reese et al. (2001), who highlight the significant role of media in framing public life and influencing societal responses to crises. In other words, notwithstanding the challenges during the pandemic, the media framing played a critical role in shaping public understanding, policy responses, and social cohesion.

Additionally, during the pandemic, media framing brought to the light the economic impact about the outbreak of COVID 19 on Ghanaian citizens. Headlines such as "COVID 19 and its impact on MMDAs Internally generated funds" (Ghana News Agency Online) and "The trend of jobs has changed due to COVID-19 pandemic - Jobberman Ghana CEO" (Joy Online) are classical examples demonstrated by this finding. This finding falls in line with other scholars who are of the view that news framing theory exerts a communicative power in the process of selecting and making salient aspects of a main issue other than the issue in communicative texts (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). This communicative power is exerted through the employment of news framing devices (Simon & Xenos, 2000). This paper revealed the frame devices deployed by the Ghana News Agency Online and Joy Online News during the COVID-19 Pandemic to include Health Crisis, Economic impact, Government Response and unpreparedness and Lack of Accountability and Transparency.

Besides the above, media framing played a significant role by exposing the lack of pre- preparedness plans put in place by Government to deal with crisis and disasters when they occur. The headline "COVID-19 pandemic: a call to build long-term resilience of the vulnerable (Joy Online, 2021) and "Epidemic preparedness financing and response: Can amending and broadening the scope of the COVID-19 Health Recovery Levy Act be the solution?" (Joy online, 2021) form part of the classical examples of the government lack of pre- preparedness plans put in place by to deal with crisis and disasters when they occur. This finding also resonates with previous literature which emphasize that the media as the primary source of health-related information, have the influence to significantly affect public opinion and decision-making (Chen, et al., 2018). This influence is often seen in media's role especially during pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, where extensive coverage prompted health authorities and governments to implement effective policies (Bardhan, 2001).

Another critical media framing role was ensuring accountability and transparency in the disbursement of the COVID 19 resources or funds. The media framed government officials who allegedly either spent COVID 19 funds or were attempting to spend the funds for their own selfish interest. The Headlines such as "Minority calls for probe into COVID expenditure" (Joy Online, 2021) and "GHS refutes allegation of fake Covid-19 test at KIA" (Joy Online ,2021) depict this fact. This finding resonates with some scholars who argue that media framing is crucial when it comes to the contextualization of news, influencing how events are perceived and understood (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). During health emergencies, Media framing plays very critical role in shaping public perceptions and responses to health emergencies (Glik, 2007).

Again, media finding revealed that the two online media houses used as a case study for this study had common dominance framing such as Health, Economic Impact, Government Response and Unpreparedness, lack of transparency and accountability. Various framing strategies including public health, economic, and political frames were employed during the COVID-19 crisis to influence audience perceptions and responses (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

However, Joy Online features more stories about the COVID 19 in the above -mentioned dominant framing themes than the Ghana News Agency, the State-owned Media. Perhaps it might be perceived that because of the fact the Ghana News Agency on line is state-owned media house, it becomes the appendage of the government and could not hold the government accountable on the issue of the pandemic like the Joy Online which is a Private owned did.

Already there is a general perception that state-owned media houses are the praise singers of the government and will always highlight the positive sides of the government leaving the bad sides (Mkandawire, 2015). This reflected in this study as on issues relating to Accountability and Transparency of the COVID-19, as the State-owned Media,



Ghana News Agency could not carry more stories on accountability and transparency of duty bearers and government but rather Joy online.

Again, one would have expected that the Ghana News Agency the state-owned media could have joined hands with Joy online News by expanding its health framing and writing more stories on the plight of the situation to draw duty bearers' attention to that fact to response or react. For instance, at the peak of the pandemic, apart from the few health facilities which could contain the pandemic, there were also inadequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). This made clinicians in the facilities afraid to examine patients properly as they think they could be infected with the virus. Some of the laboratories in the country did not have the capacity to take blood samples of people suspected to have contracted the virus compelling such facilities to transport blood samples to far distances to facilities which have such facilities to test blood samples with many days (WHO, 2020). Ghana News Agency online did not do much framing on this but rather Joy online, the private media house. Media framing of health crises in the African context is influenced by unique socio-political and communication challenges (Adekunle, 2017). According to Norris (2009), the importance of cultural values, government messaging, and media ownership in shaping how health crises are depicted across the continent. Simon and Xenos (2000) as part of their study, investigate how government communications impact media narratives, revealing a complex interplay between government messaging, media framing, and public perceptions. Additionally, state-owned media in Africa are often accused and perceived government propaganda tools, while private media outlets are viewed as being more independent and critical in media coverage (Kalyango Jr. & Vultee, 2012). Furthermore, there was a shift in focus by the online media houses from initial awareness campaigns to reporting on case updates and the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

In summary, media framing has a significant influence on public opinion, agenda-setting, and political decision-making. McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study showed that media coverage shapes the topics legislators prioritize, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, media portrayal of the virus affected public opinion and pressured politicians to act. Framing theory suggests that how issues are presented in the media impacts policymakers' perceptions and decisions, as seen when governments prioritized economic reopening based on media focus on economic impacts over health risks further highlights that media framing influences international responses, as countries adopt strategies based on the media portrayal of other nations' pandemic management. Overall, media framing plays a crucial role in shaping the actions of governments, policymakers, and the international community during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic by influencing public opinion and guiding decision-making.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The findings can inform future research on media and public health communication in Ghana. However, the study advocates balanced framing, collaboration with health experts and government entities, and initiatives to combat misinformation while fostering health literacy.

While the researchers are recommending a future study to be conducted in the area of exploring the impact of media coverage on public behavior and adherence to health protocols, they also advocate for a study in analyzing how the media landscape in Ghana can be strengthened to ensure effective communication during future public health crises.

## REFERENCES

- Abaka, E., & Owusu-Ansah, D. (2024). *Historical dictionary of Ghana* (5th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield. <https://www.rarewaves.com/products/9781538145241-historical-dictionary-of-ghana>
- Adekunle, P., Nwachukwu, U., & Betsy, O. (2021). Assessing the response of Nigeria's capital market to the COVID-19 pandemic. *West African Journal of Monetary and Economic Integration*, 21(2), 1–24.
- Adekunle, T. B., & Mohammed, W. F. (2022). Communication in context: How culture, structure, and agency shape health and risk communication about COVID-19 in Ghana. *National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9347881/>
- Adu, P. (2025). Ghana's COVID-19 response through the lens of the IPOG framework. In *Effective pandemic response: Linking evidence, intervention, politics, organization, and governance. A World Scientific Reference on Pandemics: Volume 3: The impact of institutions, politics, organizations, and governance on pandemic response: Jurisdictional case studies* (pp. 177–193).
- Africa-China Report. (2020). *Africa-China relations in the age of COVID-19: Impact and opportunities*. Africa-China Report. <https://www.africa-china-report.com>
- Ahmad, M. B., Pride, C., & Corsy, A. K. (2019). Free speech, press freedom, and democracy in Ghana. In *Media controversy: Breakthroughs in research and practice* (p. 418). IGI Global.



- Ahmed, S., Chen, V. H. H., & Chib, A. I. (2021). Xenophobia in the time of a pandemic: Social media use, stereotypes, and prejudice against immigrants during the COVID-19 crisis. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 33(3), 637–653.
- Akpojivi, U., & Fosu, M. (2016). Indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana: Retrospect and prospect. In *Indigenous language media, language politics and democracy in Africa* (pp. 121–150). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Altheide, D. L. (2003). The mass media. In *Handbook of symbolic interactionism* (pp. 657–684).
- Amankona, D. (2018). Public policy making in Ghana: The role of politics and the media. [https://www.academia.edu/37693756/Public\\_Policy\\_Making\\_in\\_Ghana\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Politics\\_and\\_the\\_media?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.academia.edu/37693756/Public_Policy_Making_in_Ghana_The_Role_of_Politics_and_the_media?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- Amoh Junior, J. (2020, October). COVID-19 ravages: An almost deserted beach with an unusually empty calabash. *Ghana News Agency*. <https://gna.org.gh/2020/10/covid-19-ravages-an-almost-deserted-beach-with-an-unusually-empty-calabash/>
- Annoh, A. (2020). Tourism, hospitality industry loses \$171m due to COVID-19... Tourism Ministry. *Ghanaian Times*. <https://ghanaiantimes.com.gh/tourism-hospitality-industry-loses-171m-due-to-covid-19-tourism-ministry/>
- Antwi-Boasiako, J., & Nyarkoh, E. (2021). Government communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(13), 1175–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2021.1916843>
- Apriliyanti, I. D., Utomo, W. P., & Purwanto, E. A. (2022). Examining the policy narratives and the role of the media in policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis in Indonesia. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 15(3), 541–557.
- Asharley, M. P. (2021). US Ambassador to Ghana appeals to Ghanaians to get vaccinated. *Joy News Online*. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/us-ambassador-to-ghana-appeals-to-ghanaians-to-get-vaccinated/>
- Asimah, V., Hurriyati, R., Gaffar, V., & Wibowo, L. A. (2023). Visitor emotional solidarity, segmentation, and revisit intentions amidst COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from Panafest and Emancipation Festivals in Ghana. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 14(4), 381.
- Atkin, C. K., & Wallack, L. (1990). *Mass communication and public health: Complexities and conflicts* (Vol. 121). Sage.
- Atukunda, E. (2024). *Media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic: A case of New Vision and Daily Monitor in Uganda* (Master's thesis, Aga Khan University, Nairobi, Kenya).
- Avle, S. (2011). Global flows, media, and developing democracies: The Ghanaian case. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 3(1), 7–23. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.3.1.7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.3.1.7_1)
- Bardhan, N. (2001). The role of media in shaping public health responses: Case studies from Africa. *Health Communication*, 15(2), 147–159. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327027HC1502\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327027HC1502_02)
- Bennett, W. L. (2012). The personalization of politics: Political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 644(1), 20–39.
- Biyogo, E. N., & Ong'ong'a, D. O. (2024). The effect of media framing on public perception of political financing in Kisii County, Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 5(4), 1453–1468. <https://ajernet.net>
- Boukes, M. (2021). Episodic and thematic framing effects on the attribution of responsibility: The effects of personalized and contextualized news on perceptions of individual and political responsibility for causing the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Health Communication*, 26(8), 597–608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2021.1932445>
- Chang, C. (2012). News coverage of health-related issues and its impacts on perceptions: Taiwan as an example. *Health Communication*, 27(2), 111–123.
- Chen, Y. Y., Li, H., & Zong, X. (2018). Health communication and its influence on public response during health crises. *International Journal of Health Communication*, 33(5), 50–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2018.1482806>
- Dadzie, P. S., & Ansong, A. (2018). Journalism in Ghana: History, development, and practice. *African Journalism Studies*, 39(2), 1–16.
- D'Angelo, P. (2002). News framing as a multiparadigmatic research program: A response to Entman. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4), 870–888.
- De Vreese, C. H. (2005). The spiral of cynicism reconsidered. *European Journal of Communication*, 20(3), 283–301.
- Diedong, A. L. (2013). Covering health issues: The role of newspapers in Ghana. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(12), 46. [https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_3\\_No\\_12\\_Special\\_Issue\\_June\\_2013/5.pdf](https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_12_Special_Issue_June_2013/5.pdf)
- Dralega, C. A. (2022). Media viability, COVID-19 and the 'Darwinian' experience in Southern Africa: Glimpses from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In *Health crises and media discourses in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 53–72). Springer International Publishing.
- Elbanna, A., Bunker, D., Levine, L., & Sleigh, A. (2019). Emergency management in the changing world of social media: Framing the research agenda with the stakeholders through engaged scholarship. *International Journal of Information Management*, 47(1), 112–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.12.004>

- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Garfin, D. R., Djokovic, L., Silver, R. C., & Holman, E. A. (2022). Acute stress, worry, and impairment in health care and non-health care essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 14(8), 1304.
- Ghana News Agency. (2021). Face mask: An important but almost a neglected Covid-19 protocol in Wa. *Ghana News Agency*. <https://www.gna.org.gh>
- Gilliam, A., Schwartz, D. B., Godoy, R., Boduroglu, A., & Gutchess, A. (2022). Does state tightness-looseness predict behavior and attitudes early in the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 53(5), 522–542.
- Glik, D. C. (2007). Risk communication for public health emergencies. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 28, 33–54.
- Gottlieb, M., Jakanovski, P., Harding-Forrester, S., Mitchell, A., Liu, S., Zhang, E., Al-Ani, A., Segal, J., & Christensen, B. (2025). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospital presentations in adults with gastrointestinal infections at a tertiary centre in Australia. *Internal Medicine Journal*, 55(3), 290–296. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imj.16597>
- Gupta, R., et al. (2021). Understanding the impact of media framing on public perceptions and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Health Communication*, 25(6), 456–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2021.1872543>
- Hargrove, J. L. (2022). Nationalism in print: British attempts to control the West African and Gold Coast newspapers. In *Ghana's Ashanti Pioneer newspaper: Aim high, strive hard, go forward* (pp. 51–68). Springer International Publishing.
- Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J., & Ecker, U. K. (2021). Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00726-3>
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S. (2005). *News narratives and news framing: Constructing political reality*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Jones, B. (2015). *Social media @ global news agencies: News(s) technology in a professional culture of practice* (Doctoral dissertation, Liverpool John Moores University). Retrieved from <https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/5457/3/2016Jonesphd.pdf>
- Joy FM Online. (2021). *Pharmacist warns fight against COVID-19 has not ended; let's continue adhering to protocols*. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/fight-against-covid-19-has-not-ended-lets-continue-adhering-to-protocols-pharmacist-warns/>
- Kalyango Jr., Y., & Vultee, F. (2012). Public attitudes toward media control and incitement of conflicts in Eastern Africa. *Media, War & Conflict*, 5(2), 119–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635212440920>
- Kim, J., & Lee, J. C. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on preferences for private dining facilities in restaurants. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 45, 67–70.
- King, N. M., & Cohen-Haguenauer, O. (2008). En route to ethical recommendations for gene transfer clinical trials. *Molecular Therapy*, 16(3), 432–438.
- Kumar, S. (2010). Google Earth and the nation state: Sovereignty in the age of new media. *Global Media and Communication*, 6(2), 154–176.
- McCarthy, R. N. E., Donkoh, E. T., DeGraft Arthur, D., Dassah, E. T., Boadu, K. O., Otoo, J. E., Ofori Boadu, I. W., & Gyasi, S. F. (2023). Public relations strategies employed by the Ghana Health Service to address COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy: A qualitative inquiry. *Tropical Medicine and Health*, 51, Article 26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41182-023-00519-7>
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187.
- Mintah, G. N. (2021). Ghana's stand on COVID-19 cases over health and economic growth. *Ghanaian Times*. <https://ghanaiantimes.com.gh/ghanas-stand-on-covid-19-cases-over-health-and-economic-growth/>
- Mitton, T., Atwood, C., Kennee, P., Wynings, E., & Tibbetts, K. M. (2023). Predictors of mortality in patients with COVID-19 undergoing tracheotomy. *Annals of Otolaryngology, Rhinology & Laryngology*, 132(7), 763–769.
- Mkandawire, H. (2013). 'You can cage the singer but not the song' – Press freedom and the role of the state in Zambia (Master's thesis). University of Oslo. <https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/35149/Mkandawire-Master.pdf?sequence=1>
- Mkandawire, T. (2015). Neopatrimonialism and the political economy of economic performance in Africa: Critical reflections. *World Politics*, 67(3), 563–612.
- Nkrumah, B. (2022). The (Il) legality of Ghana's COVID-19 emergency response: A commentary. In *Constitutional Resilience and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perspectives from Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 311–339). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06401-2\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06401-2_10)

- Norris, P. (Ed.). (2009). *Public sentinel: News media and governance reform*. World Bank Publications. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2687>
- Odionye, J. C., Emmanuel O, N., Odo, A. C., Ugwuegbe, U. S., & Uba, C. N. (2024). Asymmetric impact of multifarious exchange rate shocks on stock prices: Fresh insights from multiple thresholds nonlinear autoregressive distributed-lag approach. *The Journal of International Trade & Economic Development*, 33(5), 868-902.
- Ogbodo, J. N., Onwe, E. C., Chukwu, J., Nwasum, C. J., Nwakpu, E. S., Nwankwo, S. U., Nwamini, S., Elem, S., & Iroabuchi Ogbaeja, N. (2020). Communicating health crisis: A content analysis of global media framing of COVID-19. *Health Promotion Perspectives*, 10(3), 257–269. <https://doi.org/10.34172/hpp.2020.40>
- Oladiran, O., Hallam, P., & Elliot, L. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and office space demand dynamics. *International Journal of Strategic Property Management*, 27(1), 35-49.
- Opape-Henaku, J. (2016). An exploratory study of news routines of local and English language radio stations: The case of Adom FM and Joy FM (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ghana).
- Owusu, W. Y. (2012). The Ghanaian media landscape: How unethical practices of journalists undermine progress. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford*. [https://ghana.mom-gmr.org/uploads/tx\\_lfrogmom/documents/18-476\\_import.pdf](https://ghana.mom-gmr.org/uploads/tx_lfrogmom/documents/18-476_import.pdf)
- Peeri, N. C., Shrestha, N., Rahman, M. S., Zaki, R., Tan, Z., Bibi, S., ... & Haque, U. (2020). The SARS, MERS and novel coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemics, the newest and biggest global health threats: What lessons have we learned? *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 49(3), 717-726.
- Prosser, M. (2021). Media framing of the COVID-19 pandemic: A global perspective. *Journal of Global Health*, 11(2), 29–45. <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.11.02001>
- Reese, S. D., Gandy Jr, O. H., & Grant, A. E. (2001). *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Routledge.
- Rezendes, M. (2004). Scandal: The Boston Globe and sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. In *Sin Against the Innocents: Sexual Abuse by Priests and the Role of the Catholic Church* (pp. 1-12).
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103–122.
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93-109.
- Sikanku, G. E. (2014). Consolidating inter-media agenda-setting research in Ghana: A study of associational relationships among wire, online, and print news media. *Journal of Black Studies*, 45(5), 396-414.
- Simon, A., & Xenos, M. (2000). Media framing and effective public deliberation. *Political Communication*, 17(4), 363-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600050178957>
- Tewksbury, D., & Scheufele, D. A. (2019). News framing theory and research. In *Media effects* (pp. 51–68). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367337535-4>
- Tuurosong, D. (2013). Mass media coverage of development issues in northern Ghana (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Coast). *University of Cape Coast Institutional Repository*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/5048>
- Waldman, J. S., Alonzo, J., Mann-Jackson, L., Aguilar-Palma, S. K., Garcia, M., Smart, B. D., & Rhodes, S. D. (2025). Perspectives of the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination among racially and ethnically diverse gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men with and without HIV in the US South: Findings from qualitative individual in-depth interviews. *BMC Infectious Diseases*, 25(1), 193.
- World Bank. (2022). *Pandemic preparedness assessment in Ghana*. Retrieved from <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099510106132239405/pdf/P1753530e2bb160c10b1f101f1f958a0732.pdf>
- World Health Organization. (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. World Health Organization. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>