



## Print Media and Global Pandemics: A Look at the News Reports in the Kenyan Press during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

This paper sets out to gain insight into the reporting by print media during a period of a global pandemic. Print media has long been described as powerful based on its potential to bring about desirable change in our societies—especially by how it presents its news. However, even though various commentaries acknowledge this power, there are growing concerns that this news media is failing to meet this potential, more so during an event of a large-scale outbreak of an infectious disease. The core text of this paper explores these concerns based on the kind of reporting of the coronavirus pandemic in Kenya, by the country's leading newspaper: The Daily Nation. It focuses on two copies of this newspaper which were published on July 16 and 19, 2020. These newspapers are selected based on having several news articles on the impact of this pandemic in the country. These articles are analysed by way of qualitative content analysis, where the theorisation of what media ought to be and how it should function, which forms a part of this paper's core text, provides a vital backdrop for conducting it. This analysis establishes that these news articles tend to generate a lot of fear and uncertainty, and for this reason, are thought to be mostly sensationalist in their reports about the pandemic. These reports are by large developed from the government's official statements on the pandemic and interviews with high ranking government officials and other prominent individuals in the civil society. It is proposed, in light of such findings, that Kenya's print media should uphold objectivity in the presentation of its news, especially at a time of a global pandemic. This can be achieved, in part, when it organises frequent workshops where its journalists are trained in the area of health reporting. Its editorial team should also encourage its journalists to conduct extensive research in the build-up of news stories, which would mean

avoiding overreliance on official statements and interviews with prominent individuals. It is assumed that insights from the not so prominent can also be illuminating, and should therefore be considered in the production of news at a time of a pandemic..

**Keywords:** Pandemic; Sensationalist reporting; News media

### Introduction

As has been established in the abstract, this study seeks to gain insight into the way the Kenyan press conducted its news coverage of the spread of COVID-19 in the country, which was first declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organisation. It mainly focuses on this coverage on July 16 and 19, 2020, which is about four months after the first case of coronavirus disease was confirmed in the country. This study focuses on the way the news coverage was conducted in these two days as a way of ensuring that the analysis of news reports does not become unwieldy. To further achieve this objective, the scope for this analysis is narrowed down to one newspaper, namely the daily nation. The selection of this newspaper gives this study impetus in the sense that it is a popular newspaper in Kenya which is owned by one of the biggest media houses in the country. This study applies qualitative content analysis in evaluating this newspaper's news reports on COVID-19 as published on July 16 and 19, 2020.

In order to achieve a very detailed analysis, this study begins by articulating terms of reference for discussing ideas regarding the way mass media operates within specific social contexts. It will be argued that an understanding of the social contexts that media emerge from and the norms that inform them represents a vital backdrop against which to articulate such a discussion. As part of presenting this argument, the first section of this study

establishes the context of the discussion by outlining the general understanding of a pandemic. The second section then deals with the scholarship that engages with the relationship between the media's normative standpoints and the social contexts from which they emerge. This section explores the value of this scholarship for making sense of how mass media functions within different social contexts. This section provides a framework for articulating the next discussion, in Section Four, regarding the explanation and interpretation of the way the daily nation reported the COVID-19 pandemic on July 16 and 19, 2020.

## Literature Review

### Broad-stroke conceptualisation of a pandemic

The definition of a pandemic has always been a subject of debate in several published research articles. These debates are, in particular, understood to have generated confusion in its conceptual definition. This confusion is also exacerbated by the failure of many official health agencies, scientists, and the media, in particular, to display an understanding that is shared and agreed-upon [1-3]. However, amid all these confusions, it is still possible to identify within some authoritative texts, an understanding that seems to attract minimal disagreement. This understanding suggests that a pandemic is a form of an infectious disease that spreads and affects a large proportion of a population that is widely distributed across the entire world [4-8].

It is perceived in the reviewed literature that this population can be adversely affected by a pandemic in many different ways. Evidence shows that one of these is the potential of a pandemic to cause mortality on a significant scale. It is argued that with the lack of adequate and sufficient control and management mechanisms in place, an epidemic can easily claim millions of lives of the affected population [9,10]. In addition to this massive loss of lives, a pandemic is most likely to cause a significant and widespread increase in morbidity globally. Such an increase can easily and quickly overwhelm public health and health care delivery systems throughout the world. In this regard, the established institutions of authority must develop a useful and broad set of protocols to mitigate a pandemic to reduce the strain on healthcare systems. Unfortunately, it is always expected that these protocols will harm many countries' economies, which will inevitably lead to the unprecedented levels of unemployment and job cuts [11,12].

Indeed, the histories of the most notable pandemics across the world provide a perfect scenario for understanding these adverse effects in detail. Some of these most referred to pandemics include viral infections, namely smallpox, influenza, and AIDS. Others are bacterial infections, including the plague, syphilis, cholera, tuberculosis, and typhus. The other infection that is repeatedly mentioned in literature is malaria, which is a protozoan infection [7]. The most recent and an ongoing one at the time of writing this paper is the COVID-19, which is described as a highly communicable respiratory disease [13,14].

Many research studies have analyzed the way conventional media has, in different social contexts, responded to some of these past pandemics. There seems to be a consensus that such media and newspaper media, in particular, play a central role in the coverage of pandemics [15-17]. It is for this reason that newspapers are thought to be especially crucial in the framing of public and policy debates at a time of a disease pandemic [18-20]. However, there is an argument that this can only happen when a newspaper medium is not sensationalist but objective in its coverage [21]. Several studies in various social contexts, which have analyzed the role of newspaper media in the coverage of previous pandemics, indicate that many of them tended to gravitate towards sensationalist reporting [21-23]. It is for this reason that they were seen to be ineffective at generating robust debates, particularly on national televisions, which would have been vital in initiating reforms that would have in turn strengthened the fight against those respective pandemics [22].

Based on such findings, there is a need to conduct further research, in various social contexts, on the way conventional forms of mass media are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Granted that this is the most recent pandemic that is ongoing at the time of writing this paper, it is almost certain that little has been done by way of research, especially on how media in different parts of the world are responding to it. This is, in particular, assumed to be the case in the Kenyan localised context. It is based on this assumption, therefore, that this paper is conceived to examine the way the daily Nation is reporting on this infectious disease, which is arguably representative of how the entire Kenyan newspapers are generally writing on it. It is anticipated that by the end of this study, essential insights on how print media can best respond to the future pandemics would have been generated. The next section establishes the theoretical context, which identifies terms of reference that will help in the generation of such insights.

### Theorising the relationship between media, context and norms

The review, in this section, of theorisations of the relationship between social context and normative conceptualisations of the media, is presented in two parts. The first part focuses on scholarship dealing broadly with media systems, as they exist in different social contexts. The second part looks at studies of traditions of media practice, as these exist within such contexts.

Theorising media systems: In discussions of the history of theorisation of the relationship between social context and media systems, it is usually explained that the earliest examples of such work can be traced to mass communication scholarship of the mid twentieth century. Of particular importance, in this respect, is *Four Theories of the Press*, by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm. This book dealt with theorisation of the role that mass media assumed globally after World War II [24]. By tracing a correspondence between the mass media of this time and their political contexts, the authors identify four types of media systems. They refer to these systems, respectively, as informed

by an 'authoritarian', 'libertarian', 'social responsibility' and 'soviet communist' theory of the press. A 'theory of the press' is understood, within their analysis, to refer to a particular conceptualisation of the social purpose of journalism and of the media more generally. Based on description of media systems as informed by these four 'theories', the authors attempt to demonstrate that media are shaped by the social and political structures within which they are embedded [24].

According to Siebert et al, the authoritarian conceptualisation of the media emerged in Europe in the 16th and 17th century just after the invention of print technology and with this the establishment of mass media production [24]. Within this context, the press existed under an oppressive regime where freedom of information was non-existent and the media was strictly controlled by the state. The media acted as the mouthpiece of this state, and served a top-down model of communication [24].

The libertarian concept, in contrast, emerged in England in the 18th century and flourished in the 19th century [24]. Siebert et al point out that a far more democratic context existed at this moment in European history. Within this context, citizens were more able to participate in decision-making processes that affected them directly. In this environment, the media was able to adopt a very different conceptualisation of its own social purpose than was possible within the authoritarian moment. The notion of the media as government's mouthpiece was challenged, and instead, a shared ideal emerged of media that exists in service of citizens. It was also increasingly understood that in order to achieve this purpose, the media needed to establish its own independence from government control [24].

The social responsibility concept is understood to have emerged in America in the mid-20th century as a modification of the libertarian concept. As such, it emerged within a society that upheld equal rights and freedom of speech. These conditions are understood to have resulted to a form of media that was free of influence by government. However, even with this privileged environment, this media failed to carry out essential functions of mass communication and instead, abused its freedom by being overly sensational and commercial. There was concern about this problem and the need for its resolution. For that reason, there was a need for self-regulation within the media, which included the adherence of agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct [24]. It was further understood that media would carry out functions associated with social responsibility when regulation that protected it from control by commercial or political interests was applied [24].

The soviet communist conceptualization, according to Siebert et al, emerged in Soviet Union in the early 20th century. Siebert et al point out that in this context, media came into being within a regime that was defined by its absolute authority. This media was owned by the state and it strictly operated as a tool of the ruling power. This concept is seen to relate closely with the authoritarian concept [24].

Indeed, we have seen that Siebert et al's framework of

analysis is cognisant of the idea of a media system that is defined by social responsibility. This could be taken to mean that ordinary citizens are by design the main beneficiaries of a given print media's news reports. In this sense, it is most likely that this print media will better address the needs of these citizens, in its news reports, if it is protected from commercial interests and political interference. However, what is missing within Siebert et al's framework is the editors' and reporters' choice of how to report such news. Instead, this framework offers a description of journalists' professional conduct in their responsibilities.

And in fact, other scholars have over the years continued to limit Siebert et al's framework of analysis. One of such limitations is the difficulty to satisfactorily use the framework to analyse contemporary media due to the changing times [25]. This framework is particularly challenged because it presents an analysis of media that existed in the mid-twentieth century in America and Europe. The location of the authors within this socio-historical moment is understood to have limited their awareness of the diversity of social contexts that may exist in different parts of the world at different times. As such, their framework has little room for the actual analysis of contemporary media environments [25,26].

This criticism and others promoted a number of advanced attempts of modifying and extending the framework of analysis put forward in the Four Theories of the Press [25,27,28]. A part of this extension is contributed by Hallin and Mancini's empirical research on the specifics of media systems [27]. Their analysis is based on fourteen countries from the Northern Europe, Southern Europe and North America. Hallin and Mancini designed a far more detailed analytical framework for making sense of the normative conceptualisations of the media in these spaces [29,30]. This led to the classification of media systems based on three different models namely Polarised Pluralist model, the Democratic Corporatist and the liberal model [27].

The rigour of Hallin and Mancini's framework of analysis can be observed from the detailed identification of indicators that enable them to draw distinctions between the models. One such indicator is understood by Hallin and Mancini to be the degree and shape of the media markets. They understood the reach of newspapers to be fundamentally crucial in assessing a media system. In Order to assess the reach of newspaper industry, the authors proposed the need for assessing newspapers' rate of circulation and readership [27]. Another indicator that they refer to is that of 'political parallelism', which they describe as the extent and the nature of relationship between political parties and the media. Their interrogation of this relationship was based on the examination of media content and the extent to which media reflected political divisions [27]. A third indicator was understood by them to be the degree of 'professionalism' in journalism. They describe journalistic professionalism as an approach, which is based in a commitment to serving the public. They also point out that professionalism can only be achieved depending on the extent to which journalists are able to claim independence for themselves in executing their work. Furthermore, such

professionalism depends on journalists' adherence to ethical values and norms of their journalistic practice [27,31]. The last indicator is understood to be represented by the nature of the state's intervention. This included the role of the state in the regulation of the media through licensing, generation of laws, media censorship and ownership of the media [27].

Hallin and Mancini display the usefulness of these four indicators through the naming of their ideal 'models' of media systems. The authors use the concept of a model here as a representative of the 'ideal types' which is referred to as a methodological tool used for understanding and analyzing social reality within a specific historical example. It is in this way that Hallin and Mancini identified the three models, which they refer to as concepts that may change over time [27].

The polarised pluralist model is characterised by a media platform that is elite-oriented due to its control by a small group of people [27]. The small groups that take control of such media include the government, political parties and/or industrialists that portray same political ties [27]. Since such groups take control of the media, the media is understood to lay more emphasis on political life through its content [27]. In fact, Hallin and Mancini argue that journalism can hardly be differentiated from political activism. This is seen to be one of the reasons behind the conclusion that professionalism of journalism is less developed [27]. Furthermore, within the polarised model, there is a delay in the growth of commercial media and media freedom. This model is closely associated with the Southern Europe countries including France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece [27].

The second model that is described as the democratic corporatist is diametrically opposed to the polarised model. Within this model, there is an existence of media freedom and a higher circulation of the media's content. According to Hallin and Mancini, the higher circulation of the media's content is an indication that such media covers a relatively bigger audience [27]. This media is further characterised by a close-knit connection to organised social groups. It is understood that such groups play a crucial role in the media's governance. Within this model, we see a strong emphasis on what is referred to as the level of journalistic professionalism [27]. At the same time, the extent of political parallelism within the media content and the media audience's partisanship is quite high [27]. Furthermore, considering that the mass media is described as a social institution, the state is mandated with regulating and supporting the media. One way in which the state achieves this is by respecting and upholding the freedom of the media. The democratic corporatist model can be observed in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland [27].

The liberal model shares some similarities with the democratic corporatist. The liberal model is characterised by a well-established media freedom and a bigger press market. The bigger press market, as described by Hallin and Mancini, applies to the dominance of the media platforms that are highly market driven [27]. Furthermore, within this model, media platforms exude a lower politicisation. Perhaps this acknowledgement

could be one of the reasons behind the notion of the model's high levels of journalistic professionalism [27]. In fact, on its part, public broadcasting is based on professional basis devoid of any political interference [27]. The lack of political interference could well be summarised by the authors' thought that the model exudes a lower state's intervention. While comparing it with other models, Hallin and Mancini suggest that the state's role is limited. The state's limited role is particularly understood to be more predominant in the United States. This model is observed in the Anglophone countries on both sides of the Atlantic, which include the United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, and Canada [27].

Although Hallin and Mancini's [27] tradition of comparative media analysis offers more significant insights, the authors received criticisms for not having samples of new democracies and developing countries in their study [30]. In response to this, they recently presented a collection of studies that have further used their previous dimensions in comparing media systems beyond their earlier scope of Western countries [27,30]. For instance, these dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini were used in Brazil, a developing country to explore the characteristics of its media systems [29]. It is understood that the Brazilian media system has a number of traits similar to the Polarised Pluralist Model [32,33]. Another fundamental addition that used Hallin and Mancini's paradigm was Hadland's [30] evaluation of South Africa's political and media systems. The study established that the country exhibited features of all the three models, particularly the polarised pluralist model [30].

Indeed, it is possible to see in this discussion that the articulation of the Four Theories of the Press and the Three Media Models provide a perfect framework for understanding the way a print medium may be functioning within a particular social context and why it could be operating in such manner. Such an understanding can be arrived at, in no small extent, from this print medium's content such as news articles that it conveys to its readers frequently. It is possible to recognise in this discussion that production of such reports may be influenced, in most part, by this print medium's independence, political conditions upon which it is established and professionalism of its writers. These factors are essential terms of reference that will be kept in mind in the analysis of the Daily Nation's selected news articles on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya.

### Theorising media practice

Within the scholarship about the normative underpinnings of journalism, Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, and White analytically distinguish the traditions of the media practice in different social contexts. These authors' analysis is significantly based on the roles that media platforms may assume in a democratic society [34]. They argue that it is possible to identify four distinct media roles, which are based on their relation to the dominant political-economic powers on the one side of the spectrum and the civil society on the other. The authors identify such roles as 'facilitative', 'collaborative', 'radical' and 'monitorial' [34].

Christians et al.'s facilitative role of the media refers to the need for allowing ordinary people to work together to achieve the common good. They argue, in more precise terms, that this objective can be realised when these people are given a platform to air their views by way of deliberations. The media urges these individuals to participate in such deliberations as it regards them highly when it comes to identifying, clarifying and resolving problems in the society [34]. It is argued that finding solutions to these problems becomes easily attainable because the media facilitates these deliberations in ways that enable the accommodation of different viewpoints as well as the exploration of alternative possibilities. By way of conducting deliberations in such manner, the authors argue that the mass media plays a central role in the realisation of various vital objectives in a given society that cut across social, political and cultural domains [34].

The other role of the media known as the collaborative role refers to the partnership that the media forges with the government. Christians et al. suggest that a media platform develops this collaboration at different levels including local, regional, national and transnational. This collaboration seeks to acknowledge the government's interests, especially those of improving the wellbeing of the general public through the media's content [34]. Given that the media fulfils such interests of the government, the government is also obligated to meet the needs and expectations of the media. It is in this vein that the authors argue that the partnership between the media and the state can only bring about desirable outcomes if it is built on mutual trust and shared commitment to mutually agreeable terms [34].

Christian et al.'s radical role of the media speaks of the media's responsibility to uphold absolute equality among all individuals through fighting against any forms of injustices through its products. It is understood that several of these injustices stem from the social concentration of power among a few individuals in society. These authors argue, in this sense, that one of the main ways in which the media is expected to fight such injustices in society is by helping, primarily through its content, in the dismantling of this social power concentration. They argue that if media manages to dismantle it successfully, it would have then succeeded in creating a platform where every individual can partake in all decision making processes in their society [34]. In other words, the media would have succeeded in bringing about an unfettered flow and access to information by everyone where even those who are thought to be the most marginalised can give their views on important issues including that of the agitation for democratic governance [34].

Lastly, Christians et al.'s monitorial role of the media refers to the media's commitment to meet all the informational needs of its audience. They claim that a media platform that achieves this objective successfully is the one that mainly invests in the acquisition of its audience's views and considering them in the presentation of its future content [34,35]. In addition to the factoring in of its audience's feedback, this media is also expected to factor in other issues such as those of relevance, significance,

and the reigning normative frameworks for the public, in the presentation of its content [34].

The articulation of the Christian et al.'s normative roles of the media provides essential insights for analysing the Daily Nation's selected news articles on COVID-19. More specifically, it provides an excellent framework for interpreting and understanding which of the four normative roles of the media this newspaper is portraying by the way it has presented these articles. It will be essential to establish the extent to which these exhibited roles are helping in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The next section demonstrates, in detail, how this investigation was accomplished.

## Methodology – Qualitative Research Design

As already established, this study aimed to gain insight into the way the Kenyan press is presenting its news reports regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. To achieve this aim, the first task included purposively identifying one newspaper for analysis as there are several that are circulating in Kenya. It was proposed that the one to be selected would be used as a true representation of 'the Kenyan press.' It was thought that the one that would best bring about this representation was the daily nation as it is one of the country's oldest newspapers and also popular in this country's contemporary moment given its broad reach in terms of distribution and readership. Because of this broader reach, it was assumed that this newspaper has a huge potential, more than the rest, of impacting the more general population in profound ways by way of its news reports.

Having identified the daily nation as the most preferred newspaper for analysis, the second task involved identifying which issues of this newspaper were most suitable for this analysis. This suitability was mostly dependent on the number of stories that each issue of the daily nation had published on the subject of COVID-19, in Kenya, from the time that the first case of this disease was reported in the country. It was proposed that the issues that had several of such stories would be selected. In this regard, it was established that two issues, of July 16 and 19, 2020, satisfied this criterion. These two issues were therefore picked for this study as they were considered to be the most appropriate.

After settling on these two issues, the main task of identifying and analyzing all stories on the subject of COVID-19: by way of directed qualitative content analysis began. It was anticipated that the framework of analysis that had already been built in the previous discussion would play an instrumental role in this task. In more general terms, this framework would offer essential terms of reference for interpreting and understanding why these stories were presented in the way they had been delivered. More particularly, the articulation of Siebert et al.'s Four Theories of the Press and Hallin and Mancini's Three Media Models would provide a better way for analyzing these stories and with this, being able to tell the kind of social context in which the writing and publishing of these stories were taking place. This would

entail understanding, in more particular terms, how factors such as political conditions, market interests, and levels of journalistic professionalism were influencing the way these stories were turning out. By considering all these perspectives, it would be possible to identify, in this analysis, which of the Christian et al.'s normative roles of the media 'the Kenyan press' was fulfilling.

With these essential terms of reference in mind, the most crucial task of reading and rereading these articles to gain a general understanding of what the reporters were talking about began. As this process went on, it was possible to see the main ideas that these reporters had expressed in their articles. It was then decided that the texts in these articles had to be divided up into smaller parts referred to as the meaning units. It was important to condense these units further. This was done while ensuring that the core meaning was still retained. These condensed meaning units were labelled by way of formulating codes and then grouping them into categories. Once this process was complete, the main task of analysing and drawing conclusions in response to this study's objective took shape [36,37]. The next section presents the outcome of this task.

## Results and Discussion

This section represents the core area of this study as it presents the findings of the analysis that was conducted on the selected newspaper articles around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya (see Appendix A). For analytical clarity, it deals firstly with the kind of political context in which the Daily Nation is operating, followed by its selected news article's sources of information. It then moves to a more detailed examination of the way such information is presented in its news articles on COVID-19. It finally attempts to locate how such findings resonate with the discussion in Section Two of this paper, of the theorisation of media, and in particular, how such media ought to function within specified social contexts.

At the very outset, it is noticeable from the analyses of the selected news articles that the daily nation seems to be operating within a democratic context, which arguably provides an enabling environment for the practice of journalism. The presence of such conducive environment can be identified from the contents of this newspaper's news reports on COVID-19, which demonstrates that this print medium is not acting at the behest of the federal government of Kenya as its mouthpiece or a publicity arm. An example can be obtained from one of the articles on the subject of "tough times for investors..." which demonstrates that this newspaper is indeed not working for the government as its mouthpiece. This is the case given that in this very article, a variety of statements from different actors regarding their displeasure at the government's stringent directives on the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic are published. Some of the statements that are made in this regard, for example, are that the "... [government] should reconsider" [its stringent measures] because "fighting [this pandemic] is a personal responsibility" and for this reason, everyone should take "it upon themselves to stay safe." The publication of such sentiments questioning

the government's COVID-19 restrictions suggests, then, that the Kenyan press does not work as a government's mouthpiece but rather, as an independent entity that is guaranteed of its freedom to journalistic practice.

It is because of such freedom that it is possible to recognise from the reviewed articles that this newspaper is not working as a government's mouthpiece but rather as its partner in informing and updating the general public about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and measures that the government has put in place to contain its devastation. Some of these guidelines as obtained from the reviewed news articles include consistent washing of hands with soap in clean running water, sanitisation of hands in the event than one cannot access clean running water, a thorough screening of people, social distancing and the imposition of travel restrictions in and out of the country, among many more. Further to the conveyance of such information, the government collaborates with the daily nation to inform the general citizenry about some of the strict guidelines that the former has mainly imposed on religious and education institutions, as part of the pandemic's containment measures. For instance, measures for religious organisations as reported in an article on "Low turnout as churches reopen..." includes faithful streaming in "one by one and [undergoing] thorough screening." On the part of the educational institutions, it is pointed out that they will only be allowed to operate by the government if and when they are better equipped to manage social distancing in their premises.

The analysis of the selected news articles indicates that such information and others regarding the effects of the pandemic in the country are generally obtained from press releases by the government and interviews with its senior employees. It can be realised that many of these senior government officials belong to the most critical ministries in Kenya, which mainly include those of health and education. This is demonstrated through an article entitled "KNH yet to lower cost of..." which refers to what the cabinet secretary in the ministry of health and the chief executive of the Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) are saying regarding the impact of the COVID-19 in the country. Another article on the "vulnerable citizens get..." cites the statement of the acting ministry of health director on the way the government is intensifying its fight against the pandemic in the country. Similar statements are also obtained from state officials in the education sector, such as the education cabinet secretary, as demonstrated in an article by the title "universities to be inspected." One broad pattern that emerges from this analysis is the tendency of the news reporters to foreground the statements of these government officials in their reports.

The analysed news articles suggest, also, that these news reporters tend to foreground the views and opinions of the influential people in the civil society in their reports about the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence of this can be seen from an article on the "Low turnout as churches..." where reporters use the views of an influential figure from a faith-based organisation in compiling their report. Another example can be obtained in an

article by the title “pandemic hits schools...” where its writers tend to mainly use the statements of a prominent individual who chairs a professional association in the area of privately owned schools.

It is also possible to recognise in the analysed news articles that the views of the less influential are used in their production as well. These views are, however, not given much prominence in these articles as compared to the views of the influential figures that we have encountered above. The less influential persons that are given this platform to express their general views about the pandemic and the way it has impacted on their lives include small-scale traders, teachers and other ordinary Kenyans. Reference for this can be drawn from an article about the difficulties of keeping social distance in informal settlements where two ordinary Kenyans living in such settlements are quoted for decrying such difficulties. Another reference can be found from the article on “pandemic hits schools...” where teachers who have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic express their predicaments. Another example can be found in an article about “tough times for investors...” where small traders talk about the way this pandemic has affected their various businesses.

As we have seen in this discussion, so far, it is possible to recognise that the reporters of the selected news articles tended to rely on press releases by government, interviews with influential persons both in government and the civil society and other ordinary Kenyans, in the production of these articles. One other thing that can be seen from the analysis of this study's selected news articles is the way these reporters presented the information they got from these sources in these very articles. They tended to present such information sensationally and in this way, creating possibilities for fear and uncertainties among the readers and by extension, the Kenyan general public. Evidence of such presentation can be demonstrated by an article with the title “688 more test positive for virus as 52 patients die in ten days.” It is possible to notice that the way this title reads, and the way the content therein is packaged, stands to generate much fear among Kenyans as they are very expressive of the deadly impact of the COVID-19 disease in the country. The writer of this article seems invested on this angle of reporting by concentrating on the projection of the daily new figures of those who have been infected, those that are dying after every twenty-four hours and those that are critically ill at the intensive care unit (ICU). The writer sums up these events as “a cause for alarm” suggesting that an increase in the number of fatalities is inevitable going forward.

It is anticipated that such reporting will most likely create anxiety, especially among Kenyans living with HIV and who are virally suppressed and are unable to access medication as COVID-19 poses an increased risk towards such people due to their weakened immune system. In fact, it is possible to pick one article from the selected ones for this study that mostly speaks about the negative impact of COVID-19 in the supply of HIV drugs to those living with HIV in the country. This article, which is headlined “alarm as HIV drugs run low due to COVID-19

disruptions”, is alarmist both by its headline and through its content as it implies that the number of HIV related deaths is likely to increase soon because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

Apart from this specific group of Kenyans, those living with HIV, the analysis of the selected news articles indicate that their sensational reporting has, also, the potential of awakening fear and trepidation among the plebeians in Kenya who include the small business owners, the proletariat and those in the middle class. An article with the title “tough times for investors...” demonstrates this claim explicitly by explaining how the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted on these groups of Kenyans economically. It goes further to show that this situation may not improve in the near future as the pandemic continues to bite. Such articles, including the one titled “pandemic, hits schools...” and another one on “agony of hostel owners...” reinforces the gravity of the situation by publishing, in no small extent, the views of the hoi polloi who have lost their jobs and those whose businesses have collapsed due to the COVID-19's financial implications.

This kind of sensationalist reporting is, undoubtedly, driven by some interests or forces. One such interest could be market-driven, given that the daily nation is run as a business enterprise that is geared towards generating profits. It is based on such reasoning, therefore, that this print medium could have gravitated towards this kind of reporting in order to increase the sale of its newspaper copies and in so doing, generate more revenue. This scenario finds purchase within Siebert et al.'s articulation of the social responsibility theory of the media and Hallin and Mancini's articulation of the liberal model as presented in Section Two of this paper. Another force behind such sensationalism may have to do with the lower levels of journalistic professionalism in this media platform, which is captured in Hallin and Mancini's articulation of the polarised pluralist model in the second section of this paper.

It is demonstrated in this discussion that such sensational reporting by the daily nation is taking place within a democratic context which is in most part, construed to be an environment that provides for the freedom of journalistic practice. Such freedom, as we saw, receives purchase within the articulation of the concepts of social responsibility and libertarian by Siebert et al., and democratist corporatist and liberal models by Hallin and Mancini, as shown in Section Two of this paper. It is perhaps, based on this kind of context, that we can witness the kind of collaboration between the daily nation and the Kenyan government in informing the public about the measures that the government has taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 disease. This, as we saw in the second section of this paper, represents the collaborative role of the media as articulated by Christians and his colleagues. Another normative role of the media that can be seen in this discussion is that of facilitative role where the views of the ordinary citizens regarding the implications of this disease on their livelihoods are presented, however, this approach, as we saw, was minimised. How such

views and those of the influential persons are published, as shown in this discussion, also demonstrates the inadequacy of the daily nation to fully realise the potential of the Christians et al.'s monitorial and radical roles of the media in their COVID-19 news reports. The next section presents recommendations based on these findings.

## Conclusion

It is demonstrated in this paper that the two copies of the Kenyan newspaper that were selected for analysis relied heavily on the state agencies' official statements in the formulation of their news stories about the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. It is, furthermore, demonstrated that these stories were developed mainly from interviews with officials in these agencies, which primarily included those in the health and education sectors. The production of news stories about the COVID-19 pandemic in these two main ways was indicative of the great extent of collaboration between the Kenyan press and the government particularly in informing the general public about the pandemic and the latter's efforts in mitigating its spread and effects in the country. This kind of partnership, as we saw, was practical of the Christians et al.'s collaborative normative role of the media that was discussed in Section Two of this paper.

This paper's findings show, further, how the Kenyan press took up the Christians et al.'s facilitative role of the media through its news stories on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. It establishes more particularly that some of these stories contain some views of the prominent individuals in the civil society and other ordinary Kenyans. We saw, however, that the opinions of the latter group in these stories were fewer as compared to those of the prominent individuals in the civil society and those within the government agencies. It was further established that there was a tendency of foregrounding the views of these prominent individuals in these news stories. In contrast, the few of those who were not prominent would appear at the middle or tail end of these stories.

Despite this imbalance, it can be assumed that the use of these two sets of voices, in these news stories, could have been an attempt that was targeted at meeting all the COVID-19 related information needs of the Kenyan general public. However, it can be argued, basing on a critical look of these stories, that their presentation was not sufficient enough to address all of these informational needs. This may be the case as several of these reports tended to present this pandemic in a sensational way and in this way, creating a possibility for generating fear and uncertainty among the Kenyan public. It was proposed that one possible explanation for this kind of reporting could have been that of increasing the circulation of newspapers in the Kenyan media market in order to generate more revenue. We saw how this scenario resonated with Siebert et al.'s articulation of the social responsibility concept, as presented in Section Two of this paper.

Given that these news reports gravitated towards sensationalism of the pandemic, and that they could fail, in this

regard, to sufficiently meet all the informational needs of the Kenyan audience, it was concluded that the Kenyan press seemed not to be doing enough to fully realise the monitorial role of the media as articulated in the second section of this paper. It is because of this inadequacy that this paper proposes the need for the Kenyan press to invest more on the monitorial functions of the media at a time of a pandemic. This can be achieved, mainly, if this press succeeds in upholding the other normative roles of the media that are collaborative, facilitative and radical, which can be realised by way of accommodating, in equal measure, the views and actions of the influential and the less influential people in their news products.

It is feasible for the Kenyan press to accommodate such views and actions in their news reports-as the analysis of the selected news articles in this study suggest that this press is operating within a democratic context, which is reminiscent of the one that Hallin and Mancini described in their articulation of the liberal and democratic corporatist media models. By operating in such context, which guarantees media freedom, it is incumbent upon the Kenyan press to exercise social responsibility as informed by Siebert et al., when producing news reports about a pandemic. This can be achieved, in part, when the Kenyan press encourages its journalists to carry out extensive research in the build-up of responsible, balanced and objective reports. The Kenyan press should further, in keeping up to this objective, conduct frequent workshops where these journalists can be trained on how to produce news reports on a pandemic.

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