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News reporting on the experiences of University students in South Africa during the COVID- 19 pandemic. A content analysis of *News24* and *TimesLive*

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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I,Zanele E. Nxumalo....., declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
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Signed

Zanele E.Nxumalo-206525988

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and special friends who have immensely supported me spiritually, financially, and otherwise during my study.

A special dedication goes to my mother Rebecca Thokozile Masina-Mgcina, who has been with me from the first day of my honors study to the submission day of my dissertation. You have given me unwavering love, support, and encouragement throughout the journey, and never tired in giving me the space to vent my frustrations and difficulties I experienced throughout the research. You have been my pillar of strength, and motivation to complete this research, if not for me, at the most for you. I will forever be grateful, and never forget the mother you have been to me during this time.

I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my research friends and work colleagues Michelle Mutandwa, Liberty Dube and Bongani Dube for the unwavering support, care, and motivation throughout my study period. May God bless you and help you achieve all your dreams and goals and continue with the loving spirit you have shown me.

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Abstract

This research was necessitated by the surge of the coronavirus pandemic that hit the globe in March 2020. Global media, including in South Africa, took on the role of informing and educating citizens on the virus from its discovery to continuous updates on the changing patterns. News media houses have been critiqued for a lack of adequate reporting on profound experiences of university students due to the lockdown (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe, 2020). Stiegler and Bouchard (2020) acknowledge that the response by South Africa towards the pandemic seemed organised and kept the population calm. However, they further elaborate that there might be some underlying experiences that were not adequately captured, robbing the country and the global village of an opportunity to learn about the significant effects of national lockdown.

This study is located within cultural and media studies to explore the experiences of university students in South Africa during the COVID- 19 induced national lockdown. News articles from two South-African based online publications *News24* and *TimesLive* published during lockdown level five to three (5 March to 30 April 2020) to (1 May 1 to 30 May 2020) and level three of the second wave (29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021) are studied. The study employs a qualitative research approach using the qualitative content analysis and the discursive approach by Bednarek & Caple (2014). The themes were interpreted using two principal theories namely Harcup and O'Neill's (2001: 2017) news values approach and Bednarek & Caple (2014) framework for the analysis of news discourse.

The themes which were dominant from this research are inequalities, digital migration, virtual graduation for students, mental health of students, staying at home, national level 3 lockdown – saving the calendar. The majority of news values that appeared to define the reporting include surprise, good news, magnitude, relevance and follow-ups. The discourses that revealed the news values include digital migration (news value: **relevance**) and mental health of students (news value: **bad news**). The discourse analysis has revealed that the majority of news values were construed through themes from stories/articles that were written during the first wave of the pandemic. These include surprise, good news, magnitude, relevance and follow-ups. During the second wave of the pandemic only one news value on bad news was construed according to my research.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CA	Content Analysis
GBV	Gender based violence
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SA	South Africa
WHO	World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is located within cultural and media studies to explore the experiences of university students in South Africa during the COVID- 19 induced national lockdown. News articles from two South-African based online publications *News24*¹ and *TimesLive*² published during lockdown level five (5 March to 30 April 2020) to level three (1 May to 30 May 2020)³ of the first wave and level three of the second wave (29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021) are studied.

Study background

This research was necessitated by the surge of the coronavirus pandemic⁴ that hit South Africa in March 2020. The media around the world, including in South Africa, took on the role of informing and educating citizens on the virus from its discovery to continuous updates on the changing patterns. The World Health Organisation (WHO 2020) states that the virus was first identified in Wuhan, China in late December 2019 and declared a pandemic by the organisation in January 2020. Following the declaration by the WHO, countries around the world, including South Africa, declared a State of Emergency followed by the beginning of periodical national lockdowns to curb the spread of the little-known disease at the time (SA, 2020). South African former Minister of Health, Dr. Zweli Mkhize reported the first case of imported COVID- 19 in South Africa on the 5th of March 2020, where a patient from KwaZulu-Natal (known as patient zero) had been discovered to have contracted the virus after travelling to Italy, one of the first severely impacted countries (SA, 2020). On 15 March 2020, South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, declared a national state of disaster, announcing a three-week national lockdown that came into effect on the 26th March and was further extended by an additional two weeks, ending the level five lockdown on the 30th of April 2020, then the second wave level three from the 29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021 (SA, 2020).

This pandemic defined the course of history in the year 2020, threatening economic, societal and health structures in many countries. The United Nations Trade and Development Secretary Mukhisa Kituyi attests to the above, stating that the pandemic has derailed the global sustainable

¹ Available at www.news24.com. Accessed on 15 October 2022

² Available at www.TimesLive.co.za Accessed on 19 October 2022

³ Available at www.gov.za. Accessed on 6 August 2022

⁴ According to Macintosh (1974), the coronavirus was firstly identified in Africa in 1930 and after three decades the virus was identified in humans. Coronaviruses are a family of hundreds of viruses (Broadbent, 2020).

development goals by gravely wounding the global community with rapid and serious consequences that impacted all communities and individuals because of national lockdowns (United Nations Trade and Development, 2020).

With an expected change in the way of life due to the pandemic, it was anticipated that the introduction of national lockdowns would bring on massive negative impacts to the South African population and the normal functioning of citizenry. The lockdowns in South Africa came in tier form, starting with the most stringent restrictions at level five, which were then adjusted as the levels moved downwards to level three (SA, 2020). Among other restrictions that came with each lockdown level, was prohibited movement outside homes, and gatherings which contributed to the disruption of the normal way of schooling (SA, 2020).

Media coverage on the pandemic thrived during the outbreak of the virus, and as the patterns, developments and behavior of the disease changed, various issues around it continued to make headlines around the globe (Ornico Media Monitoring, 2020). Given that it was relatively a new disease whose scientific inquiry was ongoing, online news outlets carried both factual and misinformed reports on the pandemic, particularly on issues of how the disease was spread from one person to another; the life expectancy of the virus outside a human host; how hot or cold weather influenced the behavior of the virus; age groups that were most vulnerable; among a host of other variables that had a direct bearing on social behavior (Lewis, Govender and Holland, 2021). These first few months were characterised by a combination of both factual news and fake news. It could be argued that some of the fake news that was peddled at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a result of genuine misrepresentation of the facts, given that facts were themselves unknown then (Wasserman, Chuma, Bosch, Uzuegbunam & Flynn, 2021). This urged the WHO's declaration of the Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, criminalising the spread of fake news.

While studies show how media consumption grew in South Africa because of the pandemic, US Pew Research Center, revealed that the number of people in the United States of America who consumed news when the pandemic broke out increased by 32 percent. However, throughout the developed and developing worlds, there were significant shifts towards consuming news electronically or digitally, resulting in some print media publications closing. In South Africa, for instance, several media houses announced the discontinuation of some of their publications or the physical copies of the same. The closure and/or merger of some of these publications meant traditional television and radio news became the immediate sources of news on COVID- 19, while

social media sites and other news websites such as the two under investigation for this research, also played the same role on the digital space (Matangira, 2020; Walker & Matsa 2021).

Although various sectors were greatly affected by the persisting virus, this study will investigate the ways in which online news media reported on South African university students' experiences during the first and second wave. The importance of which is explained below.

Problem Statement and Study Significance

News media houses have been critiqued for a lack of adequate reporting on profound experiences of university students due to the lockdown (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe, 2020). Stiegler and Bouchard (2020) acknowledge that the response by South Africa towards the pandemic seemed organised and kept the population calm. However, they further elaborate that there might be some underlying experiences that were not adequately captured, robbing the country and the global village of an opportunity to learn about the significant effects of national lockdown. The COVID-19 extended lockdown aggravated the disruption and uncertainty of education in universities both globally, and within South Africa. The Presidential Declaration on 26 March (2020) and subsequent lockdown came at a time when some of the universities in the country were already struggling to commence the 2020 academic year, as elaborated on below.

The reporting of South African university students' lockdown experiences is worthy of investigation because several of the country's 26 public universities were already struggling before the outbreak of the pandemic due to ongoing student protests over several issues. These included dissatisfaction with accommodation and student registration, inclusion, exclusion, and tuition debts among other issues (Meyer, 2020). During early 2020, some of the protests had become violent, leading to the temporary closure of some universities and the arrest of several students (Grobler & Kajee, 2020). Learning had not yet begun in various South African institutions during 2020, whereby COVID-19 required the closure of all campuses. According to Landa et al. (2021), the national lockdown did not cause the entire course of events; rather, it exacerbated a terrible situation. In essence, it revealed institutional inadequacies and national inequities that previously existed before to the start of the pandemic (Landa et al., 2021). The lockdown restrictions then merely exacerbated the woes already faced by students.

Wasserman et al. (2021) found that the majority of South African newspapers' coverage of COVID-19 was negative and alarmist. They add that the motive may have been to garner

audience attention and increase market share, but it also left little room for citizens' individual agency and self-efficacy in dealing with the pandemic. Their study was a quantitative content analysis based on a large sample of 681 front-page news stories across eleven English-language publications that provides rigorously generated data. Wasserman et al's findings support the significance of this study which extends their interest in news coverage of COVID- 19 in the country's mainstream media, focusing on the reporting of student experiences during the first wave and second wave of the COVID- 19 pandemic. This study addresses an aspect of what Wasserman et al. (2021: 337) acknowledge may be a limitation of their own study; being the use of "subjective and interpretive approaches such as discourse analysis" (Wasserman, 2021: 337). This study adopts an interpretive approach by combining a qualitative content analysis with a second level of analysis guided by Bednarek and Caple's (2014) discursive approach, to identify and analyse type of news values used in the reporting of student experiences (Harcup and O'Neill 2001; 2017). The significance here lies in the widely held idea that "news shapes the way we see the world, ourselves, and each other. It is the stories of journalists that construct and maintain our shared realities" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch 2009:23; see also Carey, 2008). In what ways then did *News 24* and *TimesLive* construct the realities of students who were already in the midst of learning challenges?

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the news coverage of the experiences of university students during the COVID- 19 induced lockdown in South Africa. More specifically its objectives are to :

1. Examine the main themes that emerge on the reporting of university students' experiences by the online published *News24* and *TimesLive* articles and editorials.
2. Identify the news values that can define aspects of these articles and the discourses that support them, therefore establishing the importance placed on specific experiences of university students during COVID- 19 lockdown.
3. Determine whether there have been any changes in news values from both sources reporting on university students 'experiences during the lockdown wave one and two, and the possible significance of this.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How were COVID- 19 student experiences reported on in online published News24 and *TimesLive* articles and editorials during level five and three of the national lockdowns?

- What main themes emerged from the sources?

2. Which news values have attributed to the reporting between level five to three and what does this signify in terms of the importance placed on specific experiences?

- What discourses signify these news values?

3. In what ways (if any) have news values attributed to reporting on student experiences changed from the first and second waves, and what does this signify?

Guiding the study: Theory and Methodology

As stated above, the study is situated in the interpretive paradigm as this paradigm concerns itself with identifying, documenting, and knowing, through the interpretation of world views, values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, and characteristics of life events under study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The primary mode of enquiry is a qualitative content analysis in order to systematically identify the patterns and themes of how student experiences were reported (see Schreier, 2012:172). A qualitative content analysis is conducted to identify the words, themes and discourses aligned to the news values theory put forward by Harcup and O'Neill (2001) and their updated version Harcup and O'Neill (2017), to ascertain which news values were most prominent in the selection of published news stories between the selected COVID- 19 waves and lockdown levels.

Signaling the media industry – centeredness of news values, Weaver et al. (2007) explain that they are less a reflection of the type of information citizens want or need, and more as a reflection of sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors (Weaver et al., 2007). Similarly, Harcup and O'Neill (2017) describe news values as providing a shared shorthand operational understanding of what working journalists are required to produce. They are also described by Bednarek & Caple (2014), as properties of events or stories or a criterion that is applied by news workers to select events or stories as news. The study also tends towards a constructivist paradigm in that the analysis will include a discussion on how a particular associative meaning of a news value is constructed through language. This is mobilised through considerations for Bednarek and Caple's (2014) constructivist/discursive approach.

Sampling

A purposeful sampling technique was used in the content selection because it assisted in identification and selection of information rich cases (Patton, 2000).

The selection of the two online publications, *News24* and *TimesLive*, is based on the breadth of their news coverage, accessibility, and language. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2020), *News24* and *TimesLive* have extensive coverage of breaking news in South Africa. They both produce news articles in English. While English is not the most widely spoken language in South Africa, it is one of the eleven official languages and is an urban language of public life; predominantly used in the media, business, and government. Although both sites have some news articles behind encrypted pay walls; much of the content is open access that is freely available to readers and researchers.

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2020), *News24* is one of South Africa's largest news brand that has been synonymous with breaking news, award-winning journalism, and pioneering multimedia since 1998. The website *News24* has built credibility on the back of investments in breaking news. As of the 4th of August 2021, *News24* had recorded 31 000 paying subscribers. The Narrative and IAB South Africa website traffic report (2021), reveals that *News24* and *TimesLive* are amongst the biggest news publications in South Africa. The report states that 24.com which publishes *News24* amongst four other publications, has 18.3 million readers, with 12.5 million of the monthly browsers trafficking *News24* news publications. *TimesLive* is also a well-established news brand amongst South Africans and as reported by The Narrative and IAB South Africa website traffic report (2021), is the second-largest news website in the country. *TimesLive* is housed under Arena Holdings which has a readership of 8.67 million readers, where *TimesLive* has a readership of 5.58 million readers (The Narrative and IAB South Africa website traffic report, 2021). The digital audiences of news media organisations are now larger than the print audiences, demonstrating a high appetite for news.

The temporal sampling is based on the dates of the level five to three lockdown of the first wave (March 5 to April 30, 2020, and May 1 to May 30, 2020) and level three of the second wave (29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021). The different date ranges enable a comparison of articles from both online newspapers and across the two lockdown levels to identify similarities and differences in the coverage of the pandemic. This allows for any changes in news values across the two levels to be identified. The discursive significance of any possible changes will be discussed. The dates were selected due to the intensity of the lockdown during this time. The first wave which was at

the onset of the COVID- 19 pandemic, was intense for the education fraternity in the country as there was much uncertainty for the students who were now seemingly facing indefinite schools' closure (SA, 2020). This was due to strict lockdown restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the disease. In the second wave, universities across South Africa had transitioned to online learning.

In terms of content sampling, the study engages with news reports/stories and editorials as they are guided by certain news values. As editorials are necessarily the views and opinions of the news agencies or the editor, they tend to reflect the ideological stance of the news agency or editors. Initially, the study aimed to get an equal representation of articles i.e., from each newspaper 15 news articles were to be selected, in the form of news stories (10 from each newspaper) and 10 editorials/opinions (5 from each newspaper), adding up the total number of stories and editorials used to 30. However, eight news reports from *TimesLive* and 22 news reports from *News24* were obtained. Additionally, five editorials from *News24* were obtained. The difference in the number of sources per news publication can be accounted for by reason of 'saturation sample'; i.e., all possible sources were used from both applicable sites. Furthermore, *News24* draws from a larger set of newspaper sources (they have more titles) and *News24* have dedicated enormous resources to their online presence. This resulted in *TimesLive* articles having fewer articles. Additionally, it may imply that the news values were associated towards a particular theme because of the search words that were used to search for articles.

Online Newspaper	News Reports	Editorials	Totals
www.News24.com	22	5	27
www.TimesLive.co.za	8	0	8
Total	30	5	35

Table 1:1 Sample size and news source

Date collection and analysis

This study employs a qualitative content analysis for its ability to examine and identify the publications' prominent news values within the context of reporting what experiences students faced during the selected period and to discover a data-context relationship among different variables. Content analysis was also chosen as the method for this study because it allows for the study, analysis, and interpretation of the stories in a quantitative, objective, and systematic

manner (Schreier, 2012). A discursive analysis, following the content analysis, enabled the researcher to make inferences about the messages within the texts and their related news values (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). The sample collection and schedule was conducted in a three-iteration structure, where the first iteration was the blunt search for the stories and editorials that related to the search words within the temporal sampling.

The search words, generated from previous literature and the study's objectives include, online-learning, staying at home, home schooling, experiences of students, new normal, COVID- 19 and national lockdown and digital communication. When a useful set from one set of search words was exhausted, another combination was used hence the term 'blunt search'. The news articles and editorials were a valuable resource for the entry level analysis and allowed the researcher to sift out the initial news values that were present in the data. As this study used content that is already published by the selected online news sites, it used the deductive reasoning approach first iteration in selecting the data, and inductively analysed the data. Under the deductive approach, the researcher approached the text with already existing theoretical assumption from the news values and existing literature (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Deductive themes existed prior to the study hence they are listed before inductive themes. In deductive reasoning approach, I placed the name of article and date and determined which sub-themes they belonged according to the search words.

The next stage/iteration used purposeful sampling distilled from the first set of news stories and editorials. It consists of articles relevant for the study for further coding and identifying themes for the study. From this set, codes were identified that were then developed into sub-themes and then to full themes. In the development of sub-themes and themes 'self-notes' were made, including, cross references with other articles or sub-themes; notes on sources or authors of the piece (for example, an expert in the field, a politician; or a journalist who has written other pieces worth discussing; the original newspaper in which the piece was published etc). These themes are then analysed according to Bednarek & Caple's (2014) discursive analysis to news values.

The news values theory by Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2017) is used to ascertain how stories relating to students' experiences were selected and what prominent features were identified by the news publications as worthy of news coverage. Using the discursive news values approach by Bednarek and Caple (2014), I analysed the text from the stories to see what discourses emanated from the news stories selected. From this perspective, news values can be seen as discursively constructed and newsworthiness becomes a quality of text (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). While not adopting this framework in its entirety, as a critical discourse analysis is beyond

the scope of this master's dissertation, it is a useful guide to include commentary on the discursive construction of newsworthiness on student experiences during COVID- 19. An inclusion of two waves in the temporal enables the investigation on any changes in news values and what discourses signify these news values.

Outline of the Study

There are seven different chapters in this study.

Chapter 1: The study's background, problem statement and significance of the study are presented in this first chapter. The chapter's objectives and key questions provide the related aims in addressing the problem. Additionally, it outlines the study's theoretical and methodological approaches that are situated in an interpretive paradigm. The data collection and sampling is introduced. It ends with a brief explanation of the qualitative content analysis and subsequent discursive analysis.

Chapter 2: The second chapter consists of a review of literature that contextualises the study. It is arranged thematically; impacts of COVID- 19 on tertiary education (globally, in Africa and South Africa), student experiences during COVID- 19 pandemic (learning, social and psychological), South African news coverage during COVID- 19 (tertiary education and human interest), news reporting and the role of news values (their role, ideological associations, influence and changes).

Chapter 3: The study's theoretical foundation is described in the third chapter. The News Value theory by Harcup and O'Neill (2001; 2017) and the Discursive news value technique by Bednareck and Caple (2014) are explained in light of the research questions and objectives of the study.

Chapter 4: The study's methodology begins by defining the interpretive paradigm in which the study is embedded (with a move to a constructive perspective), followed by a description of the hermeneutic design used in the textual analysis. The processes of sampling, data collection and analysis is explained.

Chapter 5: Data acquired from *News24* and *TimesLive* about the representation of university students during COVID- 19 is presented in the fifth chapter. Coding tables are supplied to show how codes are developed into themes as well as the logic and order of the qualitative content analysis.

Chapter 6: This chapter presents the second level involving a thematic and discursive analysis. It also includes a comparative element in identifying if and how there were any changes in discourses across the different waves.

Chapter 7: The study is concluded in the seventh chapter, which summarises and synthesises the primary conclusions in answer to each of the major research questions. It also suggests potential directions for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines previously published literature and scholarship that contextualises this study and identifies gaps which justifies the need for conducting the study. The discussion is structured according to the following themes; i) the impacts of COVID- 19 on university education, which includes some discussion from a global perspective, but with a particular focus on South African teaching and learning ((Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020; Landa et al., 2020; Dawadi et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020), ii) student experiences during the COVID- 19 pandemic (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020; Maliszewska, 2020; Schleicher, 2020), iii) news coverage of university students' experiences (Forrest, 2021; Kuliukas et al., 2021;Sonn et. al.,2021) and iv) news reporting and the role of news values (Brington & Foy 2007; Bednark & Caple 2014; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Lewis & Cushion, 2009).

It is imperative to review prior knowledge on student experiences during COVID- 19 for identification of areas considered in previous research. News media houses have been critiqued for a lack of adequate reporting on profound experiences of university students due to the lockdown (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe, 2020). Stiegler and Bouchard (2020), acknowledge that the response by South Africa towards the pandemic seemed organised and kept the population calm. However, they further elaborate that there might be some underlying experiences that have not been adequately captured, robbing the country and the global village of an opportunity to learn from some of the effects of lockdown. The COVID- 19 pandemic lockdown aggravated the disruption and uncertainty of education in universities both globally, and within South Africa. The focus of this study is on the particular news values that were used in reporting students' experiences during COVID- 19 pandemic in *News24* and *TimesLive*. Using the news values approach, the study will evaluate news values present in the reporting of these experiences. News values can be seen less as a reflection of what type of information citizens want or need, and more as a reflection of sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors (Weaver et al., 2007), allowing an analysis of what was deemed important by the news media.

Impacts of COVID- 19 on tertiary education

The COVID- 19 pandemic has affected every sphere of life and may forever change how people live and conduct business (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe, 2020). The purpose of this section is to review the impact of COVID- 19 on university education focusing on the economic impacts, teaching and learning impacts, and student well-being impacts from both a global and South African perspective. Landa, Zhou and Marongwe (2020) explain that it is important to explore the impact on student well-being particularly because it affected them in numerous ways, including mentally, and this has implications on the future.

Global impact

Andreas Schleicher (2020), led a study for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international organisation that works to build policies to improve lives. The study developed and analysed quantitative, internationally comparable indicators that are particularly relevant to the understanding of the environment in which the sanitary crisis has unfolded. While the indicators in the publication, “Education at a Glance” date from before the crisis, [the resulting] brochure places these indicators in the context of the pandemic. It provides insights into its economic consequences for education, but also the dynamics of reconciling public health with maintaining educational provision (Schleicher, 2020: 5).

On a macro-scale, Schleicher (2020) explains that the global economic changes motivated by the pandemic has implications for education due to the dependence on tax money which affects decisions concerning budget allocations including to the education sector. On a more pragmatic level, the study revealed that the crisis of shifting to online learning platform exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in society and the education system. This includes access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments required to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs. It further argues that, many universities struggled and lacked the experience and time needed to conceive new ways to deliver instruction and assignments (Schleicher, 2020). Examinations that were scheduled to take place during the pandemic were postponed, which affected the learning process and the students' progression.

However, in 2021 the same author published a study which revealed that mitigation measures were implemented for approximately 50% of the countries included in the study to reduce the impact on learners, particularly those from poor backgrounds (Schleicher, 2021). These mitigation measures included social distancing, hygiene practices, vaccination of teachers and capacity constraints prioritizing young children and students from marginalised backgrounds. Although my study timeline is 2020, it is important to include this 2021 report because it reflects back on what the actual experience was instead of indicators that date before the crisis. Many teachers who were unfamiliar with online learning formats found it difficult to make the shift to online or hybrid teacher professional learning (Schleicher, 2021). Prior to the pandemic, there was little teacher participation in online professional development, and teachers were less inclined than other professionals to learn by staying current with new goods and services. The Special Survey demonstrates how most nations made significant efforts to support teachers' online learning during the pandemic, such as providing access to and connectivity with Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) or by funding ICT-related professional development for teachers to increase their digital competence (Schleicher, 2021).

Physical access to information and communication technologies was not the only challenge faced by university students during the pandemic. Du Preez and Le Grange (2020) argue that global universities attract students from various demographic areas including rural and township areas, where students may lack digital fluency as they may not have prior and wider exposure to information and technologies. This poses an added challenge due to the lack of digital literacy, training or insufficient knowledge on how to use different online platforms and applications. This has been viewed as adding to the digital divide experienced by such students, leaving them in a disadvantaged position and affecting their learning endeavors. Du Preez and Le Grange (2020) label this lack of access to digital literacy as the knowledge divide.

Dawadi et al., (2020) argue that the existing system of education in Nepal and the uneven distribution of its resources have often been blamed for the widening gaps between the haves and have-nots. Moreover, the authors assert that due to the COVID- 19 pandemic, the digital divide and uneven access to e-learning and e-resources widened the gaps even further thereby increasing the inequalities between advantaged and disadvantaged learners.

Impact in Africa

The Association of African Universities (IAU) Global Impact Survey on COVID- 19 (2020), reveal that university closures in Africa in response to the pandemic were implemented: 77% of African universities were closed compared to around 55% in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. However, while the percentage of higher education institutions where teaching was entirely cancelled remains low in all other regions (3%), in 2020 it was reported to be at 24% in Africa (IAU, 2020). Furthermore, over 40% of institutions in Africa were still developing alternative solutions to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on education, while other regions had already implemented them (Koninckx, 2020). As stated by a study conducted by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) publication, at least 60% of the student population in Africa has been affected by a lack of means or tools to access online education during the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). According to the survey, although 96% of students reported that they had access to a computer and intermittent access to the internet through a computer, 85% reported that the lack of access to or quality of internet connection was a significant obstacle in completing remote work and fully participating with online learning activities (Koninckx, 2020). These technical difficulties led to significant impacts on students' psychological well-being (Koninckx, 2020).

Mukute et.al., (2020) explain that in Africa the COVID- 19 pandemics' most significant impacts on education have been identified as widening inequalities, increase in marginalisation and the inability of the most disadvantaged students to pursue their studies. Consequently, this affects attainment of knowledge and skills that support a healthy transition to adulthood. Koninckx (2020) stated that the COVID- 19 pandemic induced crisis has highlighted the weaknesses in higher education in Africa, indicating where governments, international institutions, NGOs, and the private sector should focus their efforts.

The global spread of the COVID- 19 pandemic severely affected international students, particularly at the start of lockdowns as universities closed their premises and countries shut their borders in response to lockdown measures, resulting in anxiety about their safety and legal status (Schleicher, 2020). This forced students to choose between staying in their host country with restricted work and educational prospects while their visa status was resolved or returning home with little information and an uncertain return date (Schleicher, 2020).

Impact in South Africa

The alarming spread of the virus caused disruptions in the South African educational system forcing educational institutions to shut down and an urgent call for a practical adaptive approach to learning (Dawadi, Giri, & Simkhadi, 2020). Dawadi et al. (2020) explain that to understand the impact of the closure of the educational sector during the COVID- 19 national lockdown and resultant digital education, it is important to understand the fundamental differences in what may be termed as the 'normal' education and the new socially and physically distanced education. Despite the many challenges following the onset of the pandemic, South African academic institutions were compelled to identify and implement various strategies that would contribute to sustaining the academic year (du Plessis et al., 2020). Higher education institutions familiar with online teaching and learning; for example UNISA, University of Cape Town and University of the Western Cape, swiftly shifted to online by employing the necessary tools such as google classroom and zoom (Du Plessis Mariet et al., 2022).) For some of these universities, the #FeesMustFall protests of 2015 may have prepared those faculties or universities hardest hit by earlier student protests for this transformation (Hedding et al., 2020). However, it presented unprecedented challenges for some universities, for example University of Cape Town and Rhodes University.

When South African universities transferred their teaching and learning activities to digital online platforms, many students residing in rural areas were severely affected due to lack of connectivity, stable electricity and digital literacy (Dlamini & Ndzinisa, 2020). As universities rallied to ensure that they saved the calendar year, students had to begin online learning without proper preparation. Their access to digital learning resources was minimal, affecting them to achieve their learning goals (Dlamini & Ndzinisa, 2020). This meant short term plans that cater to such students had to be developed. Their transition to online learning included, but was not limited to, engaging in emergency remote learning and teaching, working from home arrangements for staff, finding alternative ways to support students and reallocating budgets to address emerging needs (du Plessis et al., 2022).

Landa, Zhou and Marongwe (2020) conducted a qualitative case study on education emergencies and lessons from COVID- 19 in South Africa. They sought to document intervention strategies developed by two universities in the remote areas of the Eastern Cape. The results from interviewing 15 educators and 30 students revealed that there was inequitable access to online teaching and learning. Furthermore, students from rural communities were disadvantaged due to the lack of access to online learning resources resulting in them missing out on most lessons during the pandemic. Additionally, Dawadi et al., (2020) argues that this was compounded by

students experiencing varied access to information and support, given the inevitable differences in parents' socio-economic, linguistic, and educational backgrounds.

The lack of technology devices highlighted systemic inequities among South African institutions of higher learning, with political parties urging the Department of Higher Education and Training to provide digital learning devices such as laptops, and universities pleading with the public and private sectors to help by funding laptops and data for students who were unable to participate in remote learning (Du Plessis et al., 2022). Commendable efforts were made by the Department of Higher Education (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020) to meet the challenge of disparities to digital online platforms by launching initiatives to provide pre-paid data packages with leading service providers. The main service providers afforded students zero rates access to universities' primary websites, libraries and learning management systems. Some South African blue-chip or well-established institutions began to put in place digital infrastructure and channeling lectures to learning management systems to facilitate online learning and secure laptop loans to students to ensure they can access the online learning platforms (Dlamini & Ndzinisa, 2020). Some universities negotiated with several cellular networks to make data available to students at a cost to the university. This forced universities to reshuffle their financial budgets and/or asking the public to donate to discretionary funds, and various universities are already providing devices to disadvantaged students (Hedding et al., 2020). On a positive note, however, the global pandemic opened opportunities for the country to upgrade its educational mode of delivery and transfer its attention to emerging technologies (Toquero, 2020).

However, Mukute, Francis, Burt, and De Souza (2020) state that although the attempts to shift to a digital teaching platform was necessary for continued education and learning, not all homes across Southern Africa are suitable for student learning. Mukute, et al., (2020) further argue that in Southern Africa, digital learning challenges are more acute in rural communities with low material resources, lack of internet infrastructure and communications technology illiteracy (Mukute et al., 2020). Similarly, Hedding et al., (2020) state that in a country where a large percentage of students rely on government financial assistance to make ends meet, it is not surprising that contact universities have faced push-back from students who argue that universities cannot expect them to continue with online learning unless they provide the necessary resources. This is because data costs will be prohibitively expensive for students, and even a mobile connection may not be available to all, and devices such as laptops and computers are regarded as a luxury. Many students from disadvantaged backgrounds rely on limited state funding to finance their studies and lack the finances to maintain connectivity. In addition, students

in the most marginalised groups, who did not have access to digital learning resources or lacked the resilience and engagement to learn independently, were also at risk of falling behind (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020). To compound this even further, interrupting electricity supply also loomed large, with some areas suffering intermittent power cuts even before load-shedding⁵ resumed countrywide.

Student experiences during COVID- 19 pandemic

The national response to COVID- 19 in closing down economic sectors and widespread lockdown restrictions on mobility created a major economic crisis, which is expected to burden societies for years to come (Schleicher, 2020). The technological experiences have been discussed above. The following sections will, therefore, elaborate on the intersection of these technical experiences with the more personal learning, social and psychological impacts.

While health systems prepared for high infection rates and prioritisation of COVID- 19 cases, the community was suffering from strict lockdown measures which affected their mental health (Govender (2021), People had to work, live, and go to school from home in small spaces, there were serious economic repercussions that led to income loss in many households. Furthermore, there were technological barriers to working remotely and from home, and there was an increase in cases of gender-based violence (GBV), which lessened the urgency and focus of the public health pandemic response (Govender, 2021).

As stated by the Feenix Insights and Learning report (2020), the three primary challenges faced by university students due to COVID- 19, was i.) lack of access to resources as a result of being away from campus, ii.) increased stress and anxiety and iii.) and a home environment not conducive for studying (Sowetan Live, 2021).

Learning experiences

Previous research found that the lack of a conducive learning environment was a significant obstacle to online learning and self-management (O'Regan, 2021; Du Plessis Mariet et al., 2022). These challenges include finding a quiet space at home to study and carving out uninterrupted time between caring for children or other family members. Eliza Govender (2021) asserts that with there were challenges associated with the rising demands to work, home-school and study

⁵ The South African energy crisis, most notably resulting in the form of successive rounds of scheduled blackouts (known as loadshedding) began in 2007 and continues to the present. The South African government-owned national power utility and primary power generator, Eskom, attribute loadshedding to insufficient generation capacity (Rathi, 2022).

remotely, as many households in rural, informal and township settings witnessed occupancy of 6–12 persons per room. This was not an ideal situation considering that there was not enough working space for these individuals which led to frustration and poor academic performance. Additionally, there was lack of access to psychological assistance from trauma of the pandemic and losing loved ones.

The mandatory social distancing requirements also pose difficulties for post-graduate students in meeting research needs, particularly in areas requiring bench work and human subjects and fieldwork, causing significant losses to research studies (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). In addition, the career plans of many research students and postdoctoral researchers were at risk due to this sudden interruption in their research plan by the pandemic (Rashid & Yadav, 2020).

Students encountered difficulties with remote learning because face-to-face communication creates a more conducive environment for learning, providing a better opportunity to share knowledge and ask for assistance. Furthermore, it is less demanding for a student because it is simpler and more interactive (Maliszewska, 2020). In a virtual class, camaraderie and a sense of belonging were limited. Maliszewska (2020) goes on to say that students with less ability to self-regulate or study autonomously, particularly first-year students, face difficulties due to a lack of in-person support and adjusting to a rapidly changing environment.

A further disheartening impact of the COVID- 19 pandemic on graduating students' experiences was students' postponement, cancelation, or virtual graduation. This created a degree of dismay and frustration among many students, as graduation is a huge milestone in the academic journey (Schleicher, 2020).

Social experiences

Higher education has often been considered a refuge in periods of low employment, enabling adults to develop their skills, exposure to different cultures and developing their social skills and engagement (Schleicher, 2020). However, by being removed from campus, learning during a global pandemic 'robbed the students of these important social milestone (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020).

The difficulties with learning were exacerbated by looming social issues. There was a global increase in gender-based violence during COVID- 19 (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Rodriguez-Jimenez, Fares- Otero & García-Fernández, 2021). In South Africa the prevalence was severe (Govender, 2021; Dlamini 2021).

The COVID- 19 pandemic resulted in an imposed lockdown that gave freedom to domestic abusers. The living situation with potential GBV aggressors exacerbated abuse to their victims due to prolonged co-existence. Numerous nations from both developing and developed economies reported an increase in GBV during the lockdown. Below provides some examples.

In Australia, domestic abuse rates increased by 5% and China witnessed a three-fold increase in cases after the imposed quarantine (Mittal & Singh, 2020). Similarly in United States of America, there was a 21 – 35% increase in domestic violence cases (Mittal & Singh, 2020). In Spain, the COVID- 19 pandemic lockdown also resulted in anxiety, panic attacks and depressive symptoms due to the fear of the fatal virus (Rodriguez-Jimenez, Fares-Otero & García-Fernández, 2021). There was a slight increase in the number of calls to the GBV hotline in March 2020 when the lockdown was imposed, compared to March 2019 and March 2018 (Rodriguez-Jimenez et al., 2021).

“France reported an increase of 30% in domestic violence cases since the lockdown began on March 17; Cyprus and Singapore reported increases of 30% and 33% in helpline calls, respectively; emergency calls for domestic violence cases increased by 25% in Argentina since the lockdown began; government authorities in Canada, Germany, Spain, the UK, and the USA reported an increase of 20% in domestic violence cases since the lockdown began; and in Canada, Germany, Spain, the UK” (Dlamini, 2021: 585; see also UN Women, 2020). Various initiatives were implemented to address the gender-based violence. In Spain, women who experienced domestic violence were exempted from lockdowns. In Italy, perpetrators of GBV were told to leave the family home rather than the victim leaving the home. In the Canary Islands, Spain, women use a code called "Mask-19" to inform the pharmacist of abuse, which alerted the police to provide support (Dlamini, 2021; UN Women, 2020). In South Africa, the COVID- 19 pandemic resulted in a spike in GBV and femicide with one woman being killed every 3 hours (Dlamini, 2021).

Psychological experiences

Detrimental psychological experiences faced by university students during the lockdown included the resultant trauma of social ills such as gender-based violence, dissatisfaction with access to healthcare, decreased concentration, sleeping difficulties, and isolation which all led to a decline in mental well-being (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021).

The mental health impact due to COVID- 19 is a global crisis (Ornell et al., 2020). In the United Kingdom, postgraduate students experienced mental health problems including decreased

concentration, feelings of loneliness and lack of support (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021). Similarly, anecdotal evidence from South Africa showed that several patients who underwent psychotherapy sessions mentioned secondary effects of the coronavirus pandemic, including disturbed sleep, anxiety, depressive symptoms, unemployment, insufficient food, withdrawal symptoms from drugs, and increased abuse in their homes (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021:306). Although there was no data on patient incidents among patients in state/provincial long-term care facilities during the lockdown period, the authors claim that personal observation during clinical practice suggested that there was an increase in patient incident reports for a number of reasons, including irritability caused by the inability to access tobacco due to the lockdown regulations, discontinuation of patient visits and leaves of absence, and psychological distress (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021).

In another South African study Kim et al. (2020) found that adults who had experienced childhood trauma and other related adversities were at higher risk of developing depressive symptoms, which were triggered by the perceived risk of contracting COVID- 19. Their study examined the mental health effects of COVID- 19 on South Africans living in Soweto. Furthermore, according to Naidu (2020), the COVID- 19 may result in mental health manifestations such as post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorders due to societal, biological, psychological, and social predispositions in South Africa. According to a research by the Human Sciences Research Council (2020), 33% of South Africans were depressed during the first lockdown, while 45% were afraid and 29% felt lonely. On the contrary, O'Regan (2021) states that some students found that the lockdown and online learning were beneficial citing an increase in the free time that came with deviation from the strict regime of being on campus.

The above review of the scholarship that accounts for the impact of COVID- 19 on learning and the associated student experiences sets a benchmark against which to assess the way in which it was reported by the news media. The shift to this discussion emerges below, based on previous studies. It will also be threaded into the analysis of this study's findings.

South African news coverage during COVID- 19: tertiary education and human interest

Research shows that media coverage of the pandemic has been framed primarily as a government policy, health policy economic and security issues (Forrest, 2021). Ogbodo et al., (2020) however, argue that COVID- 19 reporting did include human interest reporting as a trend, alongside economic consequences, attribution of responsibility, politicisation, ethnicisation,

fear/scaremongering and hope. In fact they found human interest and fear/scaremongering to be the the two dominant frames (Ogbodo et al., 2020). Student experience can be deemed as part of human interest.

Lewis, Govender and Holland (2021) edited a book volume, *Communicating COVID- 19: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, that paints a global picture of how COVID- 19 was communicated, including but not limited to news reporting. Some chapters in the book deal with some issues that connect generally to the focus of my study including international and South African experience. For example, Chapter 16 (Afifi & Afifi, 2021) on uncertainty and coping conceptualises the pandemic as an event that was uncertain and brought chronic and multiplicative experiences of unpredictability into many people's lives including those of students. Similarly, Chapter Five (Dutta, 2021) discusses communication inequality, structural inequality, and COVID- 19. It outlines that culture-centered processes for responding to pandemics address communicative inequalities as anchors to building democratic infrastructures for community voice. This implies that it was necessary for culture-centered health communication to be used as a strategy for health communication to ensure that experiences of students were reported during the COVID- 19 pandemic. Eliza Govender's (2021) Chapter Six argues for the benefit of tailor-made context sensitive communication strategies. This argument is foundational in the rationalisation of this current study as it explores one group (students) in the context of COVID- 19, from the perspective of what the news media deemed newsworthy, where the analysis aims to reveal the appropriateness of such values and discourses.

None of the chapters in Lewis, Govender and Holland (2021) include students' experiences as a sole focus. This study therefore aims to address this gap. While there is a dearth of scholarship on student experiences, this chapter discusses available literature, on media reporting of tertiary education during COVID- 19, to develop a foundational review that will assist in the presentation and analysis of findings that are presented in Chapters Five and Six. The reason for this is that the analysis adopts a deductive approach which is influenced by topics that relate to student experiences of COVID- 19.

Although this study includes a sample of online news media sources, the discussion below will include a review of both print and online news media as "the news media play a key role in keeping the public informed during such health crises and potentially shape citizens' perceptions of the pandemic" (Wasserman, Chuma, Bosch, Uzuegbunam & Flynn, 2021:333). It is, therefore, important to include, in this literature review, studies based on both forms of mainstream news

reporting in order to comprehensively identify the main trends and discourses in South Africa's reporting.

Print news media reporting

According to Wasserman et al.(2021) the reporting of the COVID- 19 pandemic in South African news was alarmist, episodic, negative and sensationalist. The authors assert that reporting played on emotional appeals where nearly half of the reports (47%) were both alarmist and sensationalist. This can be attributed “to a combination of factors such as the conventions of hard news reporting of crises or conflicts and the attention grabbing motivations of front-page stories” (Wasserman et al., 2021:344). The authors conducted a quantitative content analysis on South African newspaper coverage of COVID- 19. Despite my study being qualitative and theirs being quantitative, its inclusion in this literature review is important as it used a large sample of 681 front-page news stories across eleven English-language publications that provides rigorously-generated data on how COVID- 19 was framed in the country's mainstream print media. It will thus assist in supporting or refuting my own findings of the news values and associated discourses identified in my own sample (to be discussed in Chapter Six). Noteworthy is that the authors are “aware of the shortcomings of this method – such as the neglect of latent meanings of texts, or the context of news production – as well as the possible benefits of other subjective and interpretive approaches such as discourse analysis” (Wasserman et al, 2021:337). Therefore, I aim to contribute an interpretive approach by combining a qualitative content analysis with a second level of analysis as guided by Bednarek & Caple's (2014) discursive approach.

In the alarmist narrative tone “more than a third (38.24%) of the reports used a mixed narrative with some alarmist and some non-alarmist language and the remaining 13.97% used a ‘hot crisis and containment’ narrative” (Wasserman et al., 2021: 339). This is relevant to my study because it may reflect how online news reporting used a mixed narrative approach to report university students' experiences during the COVID- 19 pandemic lockdown phases. According to the authors, “the alarmist tone is primarily used by news reporters due to the increased economic pressure that the pandemic and the lockdown brought upon news media” (Wasserman et al., 2021: 340).

Additionally, more than half (55%) of the front-page reports used a negative tone on the front-page reports. The negative tone used by the South African print media played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion about the pandemic. This included shaping “a discourse of the virus as

overwhelmingly negative, with little possibility for individual agency and self-efficacy” (Wasserman et al., 2021: 341). The majority (71.87%) of the front-page reports across different publications were episodic rather than thematic. Episodic reporting, as identified by the authors, implies a spike in reporting when a particular event occurs. Noteworthy is that “nearly half (41.26%) focused on the impact of the pandemic with only 30.69% of the reports proposing solutions and 22.32% highlighting citizen’s responsibilities” (Wasserman et al., 2021: 342). There was also a sensationalism tone used in news reporting for example “Coronavirus could sink Sudan” (Wasserman et al., 2021: 343). The findings of this study revealed that print media news reporting during the COVID- 19 pandemic was predominantly alarmist, negative, episodic and sensationalist. This is a reflection of how news values shape news worthiness.

Online news reporting

Online news media reports played a facilitative role in providing information to the higher education communities (Sonn, du Plessis, Van Vuuren, Marais, Wagener & Roman, 2021). For example, while science was catching up with the effects of the pandemic on society, online news media was ahead in raising awareness and advocating about the pandemic issues monitoring disease management and behavior of people during this time, monitoring people's disease management and behavior (Sonn et. al., 2021). Moreover, Sonn et al. (2021) argue that from online news media reports, events at higher education communities involving the staff, students and operations were made known, providing a different perspective on how all students are experiencing education. However, little has been published with student experiences as a focus.

The article by Ebrahim (2022: 1) is selected for its inclusion of human interest as it found that COVID- 19 was “internationally portrayed as a lethal pandemic that destroys and disrupts human life.” The study was a thematic content analysis and an epidemic framing typology of online news reporting from countries that had the highest incidence of COVID- 19 cases during the first wave of the pandemic. These countries included Italy, United States of America and South Afrtica. The predominant news value identified during news reporting was that of consequence to humans due to restriction to movements and impact of their work and home life. Furthermore, financial consequence to the government due to costs of fighting the pandemic was also cited. (Ebrahim, 2021).

Correspondingly, the article by Teer-Tomaselli (2021) was selected because it discusses the ban placed on alcohol and tobacco which also has a human interest aspect as it affected citizens in various ways. The article surveyed media reporting and representation of various controversies

in the initial months of the COVID- 19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa. Qualitative content analysis and inductive reasoning of online news articles was used from two online news reporting sites namely News24 and South African Independent Online (IOL). This methodology is similar to my study. Teer-Tomaselli (2021) found that there was significant law enforcement associated with the lockdown regulations under the disaster management act. This implied that there was restricted movement for citizens and anyone caught on the wrong side of the law, that is, moving around during curfew times would be subject to punishment by law (Teer-Tomaselli, 2021). Similarly, the study by Ebrahim (2021), asserts that restrictions on the movement was imposed and argued that this infringed on the human's rights of freedom of movement.

As noted earlier, the themes most identified in reporting by Ebrahim (2021) included consequences to humans due to death, staying at home and cost of COVID- 19. Similarly, Teer-Tomaselli (2021) reported that the ban on the sale of alcohol and tobacco resulted in an impact on the economy because of the large contribution that alcohol and tobacco sales make to the economy. Additionally, the ban resulted in black market sale of alcohol and tobacco as a result of organised crime and all this has an impact on humans and their survival (Teer-Tomaselli, 2021). Ebrahim (2021) further claims that uncertainty, reassurance, action and new evidence themes were identified in the online news reporting of COVID- 19 during the pandemic. The next section will discuss news reporting and the role of news values.

News reporting and the role of news values

There is a dearth in the literature pertaining to the news values attributed to the reporting between the different levels of the during the COVID- 19 pandemic. However, there are multiple studies that discuss how news values shape news reporting (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020; Caple, 2018; Cotter, 2012). This previous scholarship will be reviewed to contextualise this study.

Role/s of news values

News reporting holds a vital role in social life. Through its wide dissemination of information, the news can shape society's actions (Blaagaard, 2013). Scholars define news as information on any current event or that which is expected to happen (Hall, 1973; Brington & Foy 2007; Bednarek & Caple 2014). Most people's direct experience with the news comes from consuming the media through their various interests. A story like the COVID- 19 pandemic impacts everyone's increasing interest in news related to it and developments around the virus.

As the media has a role in informing and educating, deciding what to disseminate to audiences is at the discretion of editors and journalists' engagement after agreeing on what is newsworthy (Spencer-Thomas, 2008). These decisions are guided by a set of news values that help to shape events and news coverage choices that will capture the audiences' interest. A story that covers much of the news values compels coverage and it is editors and reporters that need a shared understanding of the values that matter to audiences. Harcup and O'Neill (2017) describe news values as providing a shared shorthand operational knowledge of what working journalists are required to produce. Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2020) stated that such news values operate in practice, as a system of criteria used to decide the inclusion and exclusion of the material and which aspects of selected stories are to be emphasised. They also help understand the focus and shape of news stories and the journalists' decisions as they shape texts by providing decision-making parameters and deciding which stories will appeal to each target audience. This makes it easier for the journalist to identify what stories to report. In addition, they explain why a story interests its audience, how editors and journalists decide that one piece of information is news, while another is not, and what will be of interest to the target audiences (Spencer-Thomas, 2008).

Ideological associations

News values are seen as one of the most important practice-based ideological factors in understanding the focus and shape of news stories and journalists' decisions. They are invoked unconsciously or explicitly at every step of the news process (Cotter, 2012).

Various researchers have pointed out to the "ideological nature" of news values. This suggests that news values are founded on the set of principles and views held by a person or group. Cited from Bednarek & Caple (2014: 137) news values are defined differently according to a scholar's ideology:

Fowler (1991) states that news values are culturally and socially constructed rather than 'natural' (pp. 13, 15). Bell stresses that 'these are values. They are not neutral, but reflect ideologies and priorities held in society' (Bell, 1991: 156, italics in original). Cotter (2010) calls news values important 'ideological factors' (pp. 8, 67) and points out that they reinforce or establish 'an "ideology" about what counts as news' (p. 67). News values are also ideological in the sense that they can work to reinforce other ideologies (rather than just an ideology of what is newsworth (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 137).

Bednarek & Caple (2014) introduce a new framework for the analysis of news discourse. The new methodological framework is situated within what the authors call a 'discursive' approach to news values. From this perspective, news values are thus defined as the 'newsworthy' aspects of actors, happenings and issues as existing in and constructed through discourse" (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 137), as associated with various ideologies.

Bednarek & Caple (2014: 136) state that news values that determine news worthiness include, "Proximity (geographical or cultural 'nearness'); Negativity (negative aspects, e.g. conflict, death, disaster, accidents, negative consequences); Eliteness (elite status); and Superlativeness ('the more X, the more newsworthy') to name but a few. These values are translated through text/writing.

According to Stuart Hall (in Fowler: 1991:12), news is the end result of a multi-step process that starts with the systematic grouping of events and themes into categories that have been created by society. Every day, editors and journalists search for news articles with a sizable readership or audience. To achieve this goal, "they must discover which information is newsworthy and filter out that which is of little interest by applying a set of guidelines or criteria, they can identify what material will make the best stories"⁶ This is how newsworthiness is created and it is dependent upon what the media/journalists/scholars deem as important or relevant or worthy of reporting, according to their ideology.

The aforementioned definitions make it clear that "ideology" has a significant impact on news values and hence establishes newsworthiness. Ideology, news values, and discourse are all intrinsically linked since the way news is reported varies between media outlets, and this is attributed to a person or group of individuals who evaluate a story in light of their own news values. Helen Caple (2018) argues that at any given moment in the production of news, there are a number of "values" at play that are likely to influence story selection. According to Caple (2018) these include the professional moral/ethical values that news workers adhere to and that are enshrined in codes of practice. Furthermore, commercial values relating to business models or economic conditions influence the selection of news. In addition, the rhetorical goals of news writing and editing, values in the news text, are also said to influence story selection. Moreover, other values in the news process, for example, the mix of different kinds of stories, the availability of reporters and photographers, or access to prefabricated press releases, all influence story

⁶ Available at <https://owenspencerthomas.com/journalism/newsvalues/>. Accessed on 16 November 2022

selection. In addition, there are the values in the news actors and events that influence the likelihood that they will register as newsworthy and therefore result in their selection for consideration of publication (Caple, 2018).

Discourse analysis helps readers understand how meaning is conveyed via the reading of texts, and it also reassembles the outside world through the use of language and symbolism (Smith, 2021). Bednarek and Caple (2014) make reference to this idea when they remark that language can be considered from a linguist viewpoint as expressing, suggesting, stressing, or highlighting news values, and that news values can be thought of as embedded in language. By conducting a discursive analysis, I was able to extract the discourses that refer to the news values included in the chosen news articles, which is how these discourses were derived from the themes.

Changes in news values

Harcup and O'Neill (2017) investigated the news values within mainstream journalism and considered the extent to which values may be changing since earlier landmark studies were undertaken (elaborated on in Chapter Three). They posit that a revised and updated set of contemporary news values were found. These include exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, goodnews and news organisation's agenda. The scholars assert that in the era of digital age and social media, relevance is a news value that dominates the most. Harcup and O'Neill (2017, cited in Phillips 2015:6) note that while hard news may be shared on social media platforms such as Twitter, it is Facebook that drives more traffic. The authors concur about this importance of Facebook over Twitter when it comes to driving traffic and it has been found in numerous studies (cited in Anderson & Caumont, 2014; Newman, 2011; and Olmstead, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel, 2011). Facebook creates an online mail of loyalty by giving readers what it already knows they want, namely 'relevance'. This highlights the importance of this study in considering contemporary news values in news reporting and how reporting of students' experiences during COVID- 19 pandemic might have been shaped by these news values via mass media.

In a study by Harcup and O'Neill (2017) they considered 711-page lead stories across 10 newspaper titles. Their findings revealed that bad news is the big winner, however, good news is still significant, and some stories fall into both categories. This implies that the news readers/viewers are more inclined to negativity hence bad news make headlines more often than good news. However, the authors argue that one story might tick several boxes, and how certain news values operate in different combinations might usefully be an issue for future research.

Correspondingly, breaking news makes headlines similar to bad news as stated by Lewis and Cushion (2009). The authors assert that the rush to be seen covering more breaking news stories combines the frantic experience in reporting with the ordinary. Furthermore, it takes place largely in the studio, as routine stories delivered by news agencies and releases are hastily processed, broadcast and tagged as breaking news. This aligns with the contemporary news value of news organisation's agenda as stated by Harcup and O'Neill (2017). It infers that news broadcast depends on which news value the organization categories as news which ultimately determines how the news is labelled. In comparison to exclusive news, breaking news is routinely produced and has a form of predictable punctuation (Lewis & Cushion, 2009). This is important to know for my study because it determines how COVID- 19 was reported in South Africa and how this ultimately impacted on the reporting of students' experiences during the pandemic and lockdown periods. In sum, reporting of news is shaped by what the news channels deems as newsworthy and this corresponds with studies conducted by Caple (2018) and Harcup and O'Neill (2017).

News values influence

Various studies have been conducted to measure the influence of news values on newsworthiness. According to Research Net (2021), five research designs have been applied to conduct the studies on news values. Significant studies are the content analysis of media output which were conducted by (Research Net, 2021 cited in Galtung & Ruge 1965; Schulz 1976; Staab 1990; Shoemaker & Cohen 2006). The five different content analysis revealed that the prominence of news values (space, time and placement) correlates with either single news factors in the articles or complex guides representing them. These are interpreted as evidence for the influence of news factors on news decisions. According to the scholars (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Schultz, 1976 and Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006) it implies that news stories not published have more news factors than news stories published. The authors cited above posit that that long articles might not necessarily include more news factors hence the number of news factors might not be a cause but a consequence of the long articles. In addition, some news factors in a news story might be the consequence of enhancing a news story to improve its newsworthiness. It is possible that this is the reason why there is circulation of 'fake news' because it has more news values which make the stories newsworthy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a literature review and identify the existing gaps in knowledge for how university student experiences were reported during COVID- 19. The chapter

discussed impacts of COVID- 19 on university education with a specific focus on South African universities, students' experiences during the COVID- 19 pandemic, news coverage of university students' experiences and news reporting and the role of news values.

The impact of COVID- 19 on the higher education sector in South Africa was discussed. The closure of campuses as a social distancing measure to prevent community transmission shifted face-to-face classes to online learning systems. This shifted the focus on utilising eLearning tools and platforms for student engagement which presented a challenge for students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Many universities struggled and lacked the experience and time needed to conceive new ways to deliver instruction and assignments (Schleicher, 2020). Du Preez and Le Grange (2020) argue that global universities attract students from various demographic areas including rural and township areas, where students may lack digital fluency as they may not have prior and wider exposure to information and technologies. The pandemic exposed the shortcomings of the current higher education system and the need for more education in digital technology to adapt to the rapidly changing education climate of the world (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). On a positive note, however, the global pandemic opened opportunities for the country to upgrade its educational mode of delivery and transfer its attention to emerging technologies (Toquero, 2020). Transition to online learning included, but was not limited to, engaging in emergency remote learning and teaching, working from home arrangements for staff, finding alternative ways to support students and reallocating budgets to address emerging needs (Du Plessis et al., 2020). Additionally, digital learning challenges are more acute in rural communities with low material resources, lack of internet infrastructure and communications technology illiteracy (Mukute et al., 2020).

Students' experiences during the COVID- 19 national lockdown were also discussed. Students faced a myriad of challenges emanating from their financial preparedness to participate, home environments, digital access, literacy and adjustment to all the changes that came with the transition to online learning. Detrimental psychological experiences faced by university students during the lockdown included the resultant trauma of social ills such as gender-based violence, dissatisfaction with access to healthcare, decreased concentration, sleeping difficulties, and isolation which all led to a decline in mental wellbeing (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021).

Additionally, news reporting and the role of news values and news reporting on students' experiences during the COVID- 19 national lockdown were also discussed, however, there are existing gaps in literature.

Finally, on the importance of news values in news reporting, the chapter discussed news values as playing an essential role in news reporting as they also help in understanding the focus and shape of news stories and the decisions of journalists as they shape texts by providing decision-making parameters and deciding which stories will appeal to each target audience. News values are seen as one of the most important practice-based ideological factors in understanding the focus and shape of news stories and journalists' decisions. Ogbodo et al., (2020), however argue that COVID- 19 reporting did include human interest reporting as a trend, alongside economic consequences, human interest, attribution of responsibility, politicisation, ethnicisation, fear/scaremongering and hope. In fact they found human interest and fear/scaremongering to be the the two dominant frames (Ogbodo et al., 2020). Student experience can be deemed as part of human interest. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical foundation and principles of news values and news worthiness.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical framework underpinning the study, namely news worthiness theory in the form of news values. The chapter will present the theories and concepts related to news values and how they relate to this study according to the following sections: the origin of news value; debates around news values and the news values applicable to the study. Throughout each of these sections, news values will be defined and conceptualised. A principal theory framing this research is Tony Harcup and Deidre O'Neill's (2001; 2017) news values approach. In 2001, Harcup and O'Neill updated Galtung and Ruge's influential 1965 taxonomy of news values and proposed a new set of news values that are more significant to contemporary society and reporting. In 2017, they explored the extent to which the 2001 revised list of news values remains relevant given the challenges and opportunities faced by journalism today, including the emergence of social media. The 2001 news values by Harcup and O'Neill informs the study's design and will be used to interpret the data from the selected *News24* and *TimesLive* reporting. The second principal approach informing this study is Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple's (2014) framework for the analysis of news discourse. The reason for this is that it encourages a constructivist approach to news values analysis with what the authors call a 'discursive' approach to news values" (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 135). It will therefore be discussed both in this theoretical framework chapter and the following chapter insofar as it influences the methodological process.

According to Bednarek and Caple (2014), news values are typically defined as properties of events or stories, or as criteria/principles used by journalists to select events or stories as news, or to determine the structure and order of reporting. The theory explains the selection of news for publication, as well as the prominence of news stories in newspapers and news programs, through professional criteria of news factors in news stories (aspects of events) and news values of news factors (selection criteria) (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). Non-professional influences such as individual journalist preferences, political leanings of news organisations, and pressures from their owners, advertisers, or other social forces, according to the authors, are ignored in the theory of news values. As a result, it only addresses a subset of the overall news making process.

Theoretical origins of news value

This section will present the origin of the news value concept by discussing its key theoretical foundations and the context of its application.

The term “news value” was introduced by American Journalist Walter Lippmann in 1922 to explain the newsworthiness of events. Walter Lippman was the first person to suggest attributes and conventions for the selection of news items to be published. Lippman proposed that despite journalists helping to distinguish between truth and fiction, there are some news values that could not be measured, quantified, or recorded but were, nonetheless, of importance to the people of a republic in United States of America.

It is widely accepted that the theory of news values was developed and popularised by Norwegians, Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge. In 1965, Galtung and Ruge published their seminal work on the structure of Norwegian news. Their list of news factors became the dominant conceptualisation of news values in journalism and communications studies. “Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) work was based on hypothesising selection criteria and formed part of a wider study on how foreign events were reported in the Norwegian press” (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017:1472). Their approach to news values was firmly centered on how events become news. They argued that an event either possesses the factors of newsworthiness or does not (Galtung & Ruge 1965:71). They suggested that 12 factors are at play any time an event is considered worthy of reporting as “news.” The first eight factors include frequency, threshold (absolute intensity, intensity increase), unambiguity, meaningfulness (cultural proximity, relevance), consonance (predictability, demand), unexpectedness (unpredictability, scarcity), continuity and composition. These factors are viewed as “culture-free,” as they are solely based on perception. The remaining four factors which are culture bound include reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons (personification), reference to something negative (negativity). Their list comprised a set of selections based on common-sense perception psychology, created through analogy to radio wave signals (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). Galtung and Ruge (1965:64-65) identified values that fell into three categories namely; impact, audience identification, and pragmatics of media coverage. Impact includes threshold; frequency; negativity; unambiguity and unexpectedness. The emergence of the COVID- 19 pandemic, for instance, had a high impact globally due to the magnitude of deaths, and due to economic repression, that was caused by the unprecedented lockdowns that most countries, including South Africa, effected in a bid to curb the spread of the virus. This pandemic was unexpected, given how scientists made frantic efforts in attempting to

develop vaccines; hence their work on the same made it to the news on a daily basis, even way after some of the vaccines had been eventually approved.

Audience identification, on the other hand, includes personalisation; meaningfulness, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, consonance, continuity, and composition (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The high number of deaths in elite countries like Italy, the United States of America, among others, saw local news publications referencing to these when reporting about COVID-19, particularly when comparing its impact. Even reference to politicians, sports people, and other celebrities who got infected with COVID-19 made it to main headlines; hence captivating their followers to read or listen to that news.

Pragmatics of media coverage refers to the deliberate media blackout by entities or individuals who control the media or the editorial at various countries. However, given the rise of citizen journalism, most news on COVID-19 was shared fast via social media, resulting in some social media sites like Facebook and Twitter moderating and/or verifying the validity of shared news. Galtung and Ruge argued that journalists tend to select stories with a high news value, that is, a high score on one or more of the news factors. It is unlikely that a story will exhibit all news values.

Since this original list, scholars and practitioners have debated the relevance and applicability of these news values.

Debates around news value

This section presents a conceptualisation of news values by discussing the different debates and perspectives on news values. It highlights some of the pertinent uses, extensions and adaptations of its initial definitions and theories.

While the news values list promulgated by Galtung and Ruge sets the basis for a formal way of formulating news, Stuart Hall argues that the aforesaid list is devoid of ideological perspectives. Hall (1973) suggested that news values themselves are part of an ideologically constructed way of perceiving the world that favours and “naturalises” the perspectives of powerful elites. “News values appear as a set of neutral, routine practices: but we need also to see formal news values as an ideological structure – to examine these rules as the formalization and operationalization of an ideology of news.” (Hall 1973: 235).

In essence, while Galtung and Ruge’s list of news values influence a predictive chain of thought in how news will be or will not be covered, Hall brings economic and political considerations as

quite integral in how news is formulated. This is best demonstrated by how glaringly different news articles on COVID- 19's source of origin if one considers western media and eastern media. The United States of America and China, for instance, have always had cold political ties – and the fierce nature of their competition even on the economy front aggravates the two countries' ideological differences. The former insists the virus emanated from China, while the latter carries a dismissive news narrative. This has left the third world or non-aligned countries like South Africa in a quagmire of sorts, as global media houses run by superpowers tend to control the global narrative. Hall further compounds that news values can be seen as a structure, or a cultural map, which journalists use to help them make sense of the world (Hall et al., 1978:54).

Rosengren (1970;1974) noted that research on gatekeeping and news selection would benefit from what he referred to as extra-media data or data gathered from outside and independent of news media such as official documents and databases. Rosengren argued that it is only then that it is possible to reflect on differences between reality and its mediated representation. This is in a direct response to one of the research hypotheses and conclusions of Galtung and Ruge (1965: 71) that the new factors “produce an image of the world different from “what really happened” (Joye et al., 2015).

Almost forty years later, Conley and Lambel (2006:42) consider the ‘longevity’ of news values. They argue that news values exist in the “chemistry of an event, comment or circumstance that combine to produce news”. Their determinist thesis is:

News values will determine whether stories are to be pursued. They will determine whether, if pursued, they will then be published. They will determine, if published, where the stories will be placed in news presentation. Having been placed, new values will determine to what extent the public will read them (Conley & Lambel 2006: 42).

Complimentary to Conley and Lambel is another determinist, Eilders (2006), who suggested seven news factors that continually influence journalistic judgments of newsworthiness. These are negativity, continuity, proximity (cultural, geographical, and/or economic ‘nearness’), eliteness, influence and relevance, personification, and conflict. While my study is greatly inclined towards this thesis promulgated by Eilders (2006), given that his factors are largely aligned with the Galtung and Ruge’s list of news values discussed above; it stands to reason that new perspectives brought by modern prononents of news values, Harcup and O’Neill, for example, present not just an augmentation of what existed in this knowledge realm, but a contrast (antithesis) to some extent to what had come to be conventional wisdom’ in the field of determining news values.

Modern theorists on news values have identified some structural flaws to the original values submitted by early scholars, particularly the notion that 'events' are the bases of news. My content analysis of *News24* and *TimesLive* media houses show that factors such as institutional policy (or editorial agenda) play a vital role in the determination of stories that make the news, and even more glaringly, or perhaps interestingly, how the same story can be presented from opposing angles all depending on the agenda. However, editorial agenda has also given rise to a broader media driven propaganda often referred to as 'media agenda'; wherein the broader media sector deliberately takes a stance to influence public opinion and/or action (Shaw and Martin, 2016).

According to Leung and Lee, (2014), journalists tend to cover mainly bad news because negative news is usually unexpected, unambiguous, has a higher frequency, and fits into most people's picture of the world (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Therefore, it generally tends to attract a larger audience than positive news. In addition, Shoemaker, and Cohen (2006) argue that negative news is newsworthy because it is 'deviant' and thus important to monitor. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) suggest that news values found in news articles can be analysed as an outcome of journalistic work routines. Consequently, the differences outlined above can be expected to be reflected in the presence or absence of news values. News values can be seen as properties of an event that explain to which extent it is considered newsworthy (Eilders (2006).

In 2001, Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill proposed a contemporary updated set of news values criteria in the selection of news, based on and adapted from Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal news values selection criteria. They critically analysed the former's news values and tested them against a significant sample of articles, wherein they discovered that most news stories were not actually event-based, and neither did they fulfill most of these earlier values. They discovered that Galtung and Ruge's news values selection criteria was oblivious to such elements as entertainment, public relations-oriented news; positive news; among others. Harcup and O'Neill generally attempted to strike a balance between the two sides of the debates, giving credence to both good news and bad news; surprise and humor; etc., whilst fellow contemporary news values protagonists Bednarek and Caple (2014) advance a selection of values that include timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, and negativity, amongst others.

Bednarek and Caple (2014), argue that news values can also be highlighted through language when viewed from a linguistic perspective, and this is aligned to Harcup and O'Neill's value of relevance. Language is a system of representation; a 'sign of our time'; hence language establishes culture and common understanding among people. For example, new terms like 'social distancing', among others, became common language during the reporting of COVID- 19

by all media, leading to the adaptation of these phrases in our day-to-day language. Bednarek and Caple (2014), further state that language can be seen as expressing, indicating, emphasising, or highlighting news values, as news values can also be described as embedded in language and can be construed in and through discourse. News values are central in news identification and production as they identify the ingredients of a story that will attract the attention of audiences and readers, whether it is deemed 'good' or 'bad', as discussed above.

According to Harcup and O'Neill (2017) approaching the issue of news values from observations of Danish TV journalists, argue that six news values dominate: timeliness, relevance, identification, conflict, sensation, and exclusivity. They state that being first with a story—exclusivity—adds value for producers who must attract audiences, and can override other news values, such as timeliness. Cable news networks, for instance, seemed to compete on breaking new information on COVID- 19, given its novelty; hence the tag 'Breaking news' became almost a permanent feature throughout 2020. Likewise, News24 and TimesLive also strived to break news relevant to South Africa, and they from time to time identified students (their experiences) as some of the key populations in their reporting.

News values applicable to the study

This section explains the list of news values to which this study subscribes, and these are taken from Harcup and O'Neill (2001). A more recent list from the same scholars; Harcup and O'Neill (2017) will also be summarily considered at instances where the writer seeks to amplify a certain value mentioned in Harcup and O'Neill (2001). Harcup and O'Neill (2017, cited in Schulz 2007:195-196) assert that a distinction can be drawn between three types of news value: undisputed, taken-for-granted and rarely articulated news values, which she calls doxic news values; and explicit news values: either dominant, undisputed orthodox values, or debatable, dominated (heterodox) news values. Correspondingly, O'Neill (2012) suggests a hierarchy of news values may exist, with celebrity dominating, not just in the popular press but also in "quality" UK newspapers.

This study aims to unearth the entrenched themes within the selected articles from the two online news publications through a content analysis. According to Cotter's (2010) approach, news values become 'embedded' in the text, but they are also frequently 'cited' or 'invoked' in discussions during or on news practice. Bednarek (2006) uses news values to explain why individual evaluations occur in news stories, noting how linguistic devices contribute to expressing or enhancing, or are related to news values. For example, using words such as reveal, revelation,

and disclose enhances the news value of unexpectedness by implying that new information has been uncovered. Likewise, evaluations of importance can make the eliteness of a source explicit.

As discussed above, different authors have given different lists so there is no 'official' set of factors. However, this study has selected Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) values as an empirical instrument.

These are:

"The power elite (Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions); **Celebrity** (Stories concerning people who are already famous); **Entertainment** (Stories concerning sex, showbusiness, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines; **Surprise** (Stories which have an element of surprise and/or contrast); **Bad news** (Stories with negative overtones such as conflict or tragedy; **Good news** (Stories with positive overtones such as rescues and cures); **Magnitude** (Stories which are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact); **Relevance** (Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience); **Follow-ups** (Stories about subjects already in the news) and **Newspaper agenda** (Stories which set or fit the news organisation's own agenda) (Harcup and O'Neill 2001: 278-279).

Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as death, injury, defeat, and loss, are examples of **bad news**. Similarly, Bednareck and Caple (2014) identify negativity as a news value. Negative aspects, such as conflict, death, disaster, accidents, and negative consequences, are, according to the authors, part of news values.

Harcup and O'Neill (2001) state that **surprise** includes stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them. Audio-visuals are stories that have eye-catching photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics. Share-ability includes stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via online publications and other forms of social media. It is evident that the authors have taken into consideration the digital age whereby news spreads faster via social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

Additionally, **entertainment** also forms part of news values which include soft stories concerning show-business, sport, lighter human-interest stories, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, witty headlines, or lists (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). The authors state that

follow-up are stories about subjects already in the news. The **power elite** include stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations, institutions, or corporations. Correspondingly, Bednareck and Caple (2014) state that eliteness is an example of news value which consider the elite status of the persons in society. This news value remains dominant in this century and was relevant in history as it was cited as one of the three factors which are culture bound as described by Galtung and Ruge (1965). The authors assert that the culture bound news values include reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons (Personification). It is evident how wealth is power in society and determines whether someone makes national or global headlines.

Relevance relates to stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential with, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001: 279). This implies that for news to be newsworthy people must resonate with what is being said or it should affect them directly or indirectly. This news value is similar to Meaningfulness (cultural proximity, relevance) by Galtung and Ruge (1965). It is evident that different expression has been used by the authors, however, the news values are similar. Harcup and O'Neill (2001) affirm that **magnitude** include stories perceived as sufficiently significant in the large numbers of people involved or in potential impact or involving a degree of extreme behavior or extreme occurrence. Additionally, **celebrity** are stories concerning people who are already famous. Moreover, **good news** includes stories with particularly positive overtones such as recoveries, breakthroughs, cures, wins and celebrations. Lastly, **news organisation's agenda** are stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda, whether ideological, commercial or as part of a specific campaign.

Caple (2018) argues that there has been a proliferation of lists of news values, many of which overlap with each other in terms of the aspects of newsworthiness they deal with and only differ in their labeling/naming practices. Likewise, new news values have been added, some of which point to different aspects of the news production process. She adds that the need for such changes or additions are rarely explained or justified.

Conclusion

The theory of news values by Harcup and O'Neill (2001) is the principal theory. The study seeks to ascertain the role that media played in unearthing the students' experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown. This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for this study. The news values theory in this study informs the response to the research question about how students' experiences during COVID-19 were reported in articles and editorials published by News24 and

TimesLive during the national lockdowns in South Africa in the years 2020 and 2021. Themes will be identified through a content analysis and the discourses aligned to these themes will signal the news value. The study will also elucidate the significance of this news value in the context of student experiences.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter delineates the adopted methodological process to analyse the reporting of university students' experiences during the COVID- 19 lockdown. It starts by locating the study in the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research approach. The data collection section describes the sampling procedure and explains the qualitative content analysis that guides the selection and coding of relevant news stories from *TimesLive* and *New24* during the levels five to four of the COVID- 19 national lockdown period. There are two levels of analysis in the study. The qualitative content analysis, as the first level, will be based on a hermeneutic textual analysis as the suitable research design that sharpens the research methods suitable for the subject matter. The purpose of the deductive content analysis is to examine the prominence placed on certain experiences by the two online news media sources, by establishing what set of news values were prominent in the selected news stories. In order to establish the ways in which news values exist in and are constructed through discourse, a second level of analysis is guided by Bednarek & Caple's (2014) discursive approach. While not adopting this framework in its entirety, as a critical discourse analysis is beyond the scope of this Masters' dissertation, it is a useful guide to include commentary on the discursive construction of newsworthiness on student experiences during COVID- 19. The analysis also provides a comparison of the reporting between the selected lockdown periods. The following section discusses the interpretive research paradigm.

Interpretive Research Paradigm

Paradigms are a set of beliefs that guide certain research actions to gain knowledge and better understand the nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study is located within the interpretive paradigm as integrates human interest into a study, and particularly in this case through an assessment of words (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Interpretivism seeks to explore peoples' experiences and their views, or perspectives of these experiences. This paradigm concerns itself with identifying, documenting, and knowing, through the interpretation of world views, values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, and characteristics of life events under study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Hence, the research seeks to understand the experiences of students during the COVID- 19 national lockdown, and how these experiences were relayed to the public by the media. Robson and McCartan (2016) state that to begin a research enquiry and for a successful

study the underlying assumptions must be the ontology, the epistemology, the methodology and axiology.

Ontology as concerned with the nature of social reality, set of beliefs or assumptions, whether it exists independently of human understanding and reality, or what kind of things exist (Rehman & Alharti, 2016). Within the interpretive paradigm, the ontological position is that reality is a social construction and is dependent on the meanings that people attach to their own experiences and interactions with others (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014) further state that for interpretivists, the social world is what people perceive it to be and is fluid and changes as peoples' perceptions change. Interpretivists believe that depending on the circumstances, culture and experiences, people may or may not experience reality in the same way (Cilliers et al., 2014). To mobilise this paradigmatic perspective in the current study, the analysis will be guided by Bednarek & Caple's (2014) discursive approach that allows for a discussion between language and the contexts in which it is used.

Epistemology relates to the nature of knowledge and the process involved in acquiring knowledge. The epistemological position of the interpretive paradigm is that facts are fluid and embedded within a system of meaning, where facts are not objective but subjective to the context and interpretation of people under study (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). They argue that truth is dependent on people's interpretation of facts and not generalisation. Under this paradigm, interpretivists argue that common sense guides people in their daily living, and if you therefore want to understand human behavior, you need to grasp what people view as common sense (Cilliers et al., 2014).

Methodology is associated with the theoretically informed approach that guides the manner in which the research is conducted. It is specifically concerned with collecting and analysing data and methods are defined by the researcher's belief system and theoretical basis (Rehman & Alharti 2016). It guides the researcher towards the type of data required for a study and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for the purpose of the study (Rehman and Alharti, 2016). The methodological position of the interpretive paradigm is that social reality is in a constant state of flux and dependent on the way in which individuals experience reality internally, and to gain an understanding of the multiple reality, the best suited methodology under this paradigm is the qualitative research method (Cilliers et al., 2014). As such, a qualitative content analysis is undertaken to investigate the themes and patterns that describe students' experiences under study and the news values present to describe these experiences.

Axiology refers to the focus on what one values in their research findings, which is the inclusion of the specific values that are upheld. The axiological position of interpretivism is the value placed on understanding the complex and unique realities. Under this paradigm, interpretivists believe in openly discussing the values that shape their research, including their own interpretations and those of participants (Cilliers et al., 2014). As a student and the researcher of the study, I also experienced learning challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown, gaining access to the reality under study. However, as the research is focused on media coverage of such experiences, the focus will be on the data generated from the selected online media only, to maintain validity and trustworthiness, without including personal views and experiences.

This paradigm was selected because the study investigates how journalists attach meanings to stories of students' experiences during lockdown. Although journalists are influenced by an established set of news values (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001), they make an active choice in how they position and describe these experiences thus contributing a level of interpretation. A study of news values therefore fits into an interpretive perspective as "they inform the mediated world what is presented to news audiences, providing a shared shorthand operational understanding of what working journalists are required to produce to deadlines" (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017: 1470).

According to Myers (2008), the disadvantage of this paradigm is the subjective nature which leaves room for bias on behalf of the researcher. Under this approach, the researcher can never assume a value-neutral stance and is always implicated in the phenomena under study as there is no direct access to reality unmediated by language and preconception (Robson & McCartan, 2016). For example, the way in which I set up the inclusion criteria for the sampling and content analysis serves as an act of interpretation of real-life events, and as a 'filter' for what will be considered as data and interpreted.

The reality under study and the individual who observes it, in this case the researchers' views on the subject matter, are linked. But the application of content analysis adds reliability and rigor to the study as it is widely accepted that this popular method of analysing written material requires a systematic approach to examining data, and proceeds from examining the raw data to coding, theme or pattern development and finally identifying relationships among themes (Creswell et al., 2014)

While the study is primarily guided by interpretivism, it also enters a constructionist paradigm insofar as the data analysis is concerned (and less so the study design). This is because the analysis will include discussion on how a particular associative meaning of how a news value is

constructed through language. This is mobilised through considerations for Bednarek & Caple's (2014) constructivist/discursive approach, as will be explained in more detail below. The reason for this is that this study subscribes to the paradigmatic thinking that "news values are culturally and socially constructed rather than 'natural'" (Fowler, 1991:13-15) and that they "reflect ideologies and priorities held in society" (Bell, 1991:156). There is value in straddling these separate yet related paradigms, as one needs to avoid "paradigm fundamentalism" in order to open up different avenues for interpretation and knowledge creation (Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis, 2008: 355).

Qualitative Research Approach

The research employs a qualitative research approach. It is used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups impute to a social or human challenge and provide a textual description of how people experience the challenge being researched (Cresswell, 2014). Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data such as texts, videos, and audio, to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences, or how people experience the world (Bhandari, 2020). This approach was selected for this study as the research focuses on understanding experiences of university students during the COVID- 19 lockdown, as mediated through two online news sources. Using a qualitative content analysis of news stories by the selected online newspapers with focus on the news values present in these stories, the researcher analyses the text by categorising common words and phrases, themes and patterns that relate to student experiences during the lockdown. This approach is suited for its flexibility, as data collection and analysis processes are not rigidly decided before hand but can be adapted as new ideas and patterns emerge (Bhandari, 2020).

Adhering to a qualitative research focus on human experience, qualitative content analysis provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences for verbal, visual or written text, to describe a specific phenomenon (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts. As an example, researchers can evaluate language used within a news article to search for bias or partiality. Through a discursive element added to the analysis, researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding the text (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Research design: Hermeneutic textual analysis

A research design is defined as a plan for study, providing the overall framework for collecting data (Leedy, 1997). More specifically, it is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research strategy (Durheim 2004). The research design selected for this study is the hermeneutics textual analysis. Hermeneutics can be described as a textual interpretation used to find meaning in texts or written word to expose hidden meanings (Bryne, 2001). The epistemological assumptions of hermeneutics connect with the constructivist paradigm in that humans experience the world through language and this language provides both understanding and knowledge (Bryne, 2001).

Textual analysis then is a methodology that involves understanding visual, written, or spoken language to make sense of life and life experiences (Allen, 2017). The purpose of a textual analysis is to describe the content structure and functions of the messages contained in the texts (Frey, Botton, and Kreps, 1999). Hermeneutic textual analysis then primarily focuses on texts as a research data source. These texts can be generated by stories, interviews, participant observations, diaries, literature, letters, or other relevant documents, which in turn are used to generate themes or categories from a group of texts.

For this study the text or “unit of meaning for interpretation and understanding” (Ouellette and Gray, 2017), are the news stories on university students’ experiences. Textual analysis is a method in cultural and media studies that critically examines and interprets the meanings of culture through texts by extracting meaning through the examination of intent and context in writing (Campbell, Martin and Fabos, 2017). In this study the intent is guided by a news values framework (Harcup and O’Neill, 2001), and the context will be considered through a discursive approach once the relevant news values are identified (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). A discursive approach, according to the scholars, emphasises the importance of news values for linguistic analysis. Furthermore, news values are viewed as values that exist in and are constructed by discourse, with the primary research interest being in how texts construct newsworthiness. The meanings of the analysis is construed through assumptions made (Ouellette and Gray, 2017).

This research design is suited for the study as it allows me to analyse the content of published news from *Timeslive* and *News24* online news, on the reporting of students’ experiences during the COVID- 19 national lockdown, before interpreting the meaning from the themes and patterns that emerge.

Data collection process

This research adopts a qualitative content analysis of online news reports content from *News24* and *TimesLive* on experiences of university students during the first and second wave of the South African COVID- 19 national lockdown. The search criteria was based on the dates of the level five to three lockdown of the first wave (5 March to 30 April 30, 2020, and 1 May to 30 May, 2020) and level three of the second wave (29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021). The content sourced included news stories, editors' opinions, and analysis of issues around education in South Africa by the editors and writers from *News24* and *TimesLive* online publications. The choice for the news stories was informed by the need to understand how university students' experiences during the COVID- 19 national lockdown were reported at a time when students were supposed to be attending school and others were preparing for graduation ceremony.

Sampling procedure

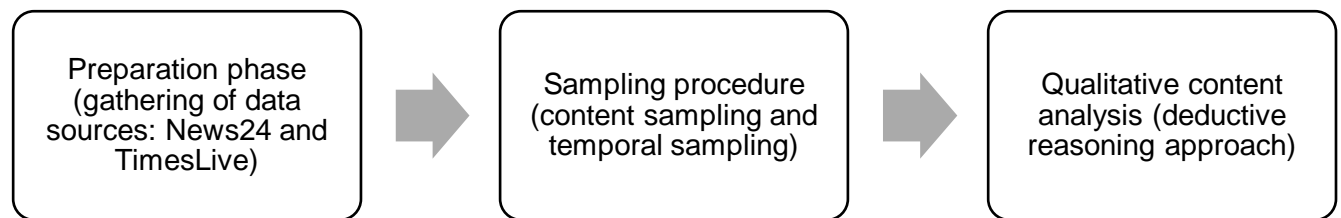
Purposeful sampling technique was used in the content selection. This technique was deemed appropriate because it assisted in identification and selection of information rich cases and limited resources. As stated by Patton (2000), purposeful sampling can compare, identify similarities and differences in a phenomenon of interest, and in this case the COVID- 19 pandemic and national lockdown between the selected waves. The content analysis was conducted via a three-iteration process.

The first iteration was the blunt search with as many stories available, as presented in the tables of Chapter 5. The selection of articles was collected by typing the selected dates from both the *News24* and *TimesLive* publications as is shown in Table 5.1 (the next chapter) from Google Advanced Search. This approach was used to identify the actual articles from within the level five to four COVID- 19 national lockdown. The next step was to gather each article from Google search manually for the articles' different titles, regarding the topic of COVID- 19 lockdown and university students. Each article was stored in a readable form in the relevant folder in my computer. With the assistance of the 'finder', I searched in each article (control F of my computer's keyboard) each code or theme one by one. If the code was in the text, it appeared within a yellow font inside the text. Once a code was identified, I evaluated to see the context within which the codes exist so as to identify any hidden contextual meaning and also to see if the sentence was expressing positive or negative experiences, in the meaning. I then counted the number of codes/themes that appeared, in the text or in the title. To collect the data, I created an excel file, with a separate sheet for each newspaper and table for each of the codes/themes. Each time a code appeared, I

added it in the table. If synonyms appeared in the search they were counted in the data, but they were not analysed as a separate category.

This chapter explains only the first iteration as it accounts for the initial sampling, and the other two iterations will be described in Chapter Six as it aligns to aspects of the data presentation and analysis. **Figure 4.1** below gives a snapshot of the process:

Figure 4.1 Summarised schematic of sampling and analytical approach



Content Sampling

The content sampled includes both news stories and editorials because they reflect the news values. “This was done in order to capture not only the events as they unfolded, but also the more discursive opinions and commentaries concerning the topics under discussion” (Teer-Tomaselli, 2021: 67). Editorials offered a bulk of perspective on the dominant discourses in a given setting. News editorials and news stories are rich sources for discourse analysis on particular events and often reveal ideological standpoints. Editorials are necessarily views and opinions of the news agencies or the columnist involved to that end, and therefore often reflect the ideological stance of the news agency or editors in question (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

I strived for an equal representation of content from both sources, but ultimately did not achieve this. The data set consists of eight news reports from *TimesLive* and 22 news reports and five editorials from *News 24*. The difference in the number of sources per news publication can be accounted for by reason of ‘saturation sample’; i.e., all possible sources were used from both applicable sites. Furthermore, *News24* draws from a larger set of newspaper sources (they have more titles) and *News24* have dedicated enormous resources to their online presence. The unequal representation in the news sources does not adversely affect the study as the comparison is not between the sources themselves, but rather the different COVID- 19 lockdown periods.

Table 4.1: Sample size and content

Newspaper	News Reports	Editorials	Totals
www.News24.com	22	5	27
www.timeslive.co.za	8	0	8
Total	30	5	35

Temporal Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used based on the dates of the level five to three lockdown of the first wave (5 March to 30 April 30, 2020 and 1 May 1 to 30 May 30, 2020) and level 3 of the second wave (29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021). These specific date ranges were selected in order to allow for an approximate 3 month period of stories per COVID- 19 wave to enable a large enough pool of published stories and editorials from which to source data. The first ever lockdown period in South Africa was selected in the temporal sampling as this was the first time university students were unable to attend classes on campus or have face-to-face interaction. The last date range is selected in order to enable a comparison in reporting between between the lockdown of the first wave and the lockdown of the second wave.

Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative content analysis method. Qualitative content analysis is a method for systematically unfolding the meaning of qualitative data (Schreier, 2014:172). This method was suitable for the research because it also aided in identifying the presence of certain words, or concepts, found in the published news stories that were then categorised and thematized according to how they may relate to specific news values.

Content Analysis

As the first stage of analysis the content analysis was used to ‘sift’ the data and generate codes and themes. A qualitative content analysis was chosen for its ability to examine and identify the publications’ prominent news values within the context of reporting what experiences students

faced during the selected period and to discover a data-context relationship among different variables. Content analysis was also because it allows for the study, analysis, and interpretation of the stories in a systematic manner (Schreier, 2014), even though the focus was on qualitative inferences.

Both a deductive and an inductive approach was used (see Schreier, 2014). A deductive reasoning approach was used in the first iteration. Search words were identified from the predominant key terms that featured in previously published literature. The search words used to select the articles are online-learning, staying at home, home schooling, experiences of students (including psychological experiences), new normal, COVID- 19 and national lockdown and digital communication as they reflected the experiences of students as they reflected the experiences of students.

For the deductive reasoning not only were search words developed from the research questions and the previous related literature, but it was influenced by Bingham and Witkowsky (2022) recommendation of operating from an existing theoretical assumption. In this case the assumption was that through the coding, categorising and thematic process I would be able to identify a corresponding news values (Harcup and O'Neill. 2001). Four stages of conducting deductive research were followed. These were starting with the existing theory, formulating a hypothesis based on the existing theory, collecting data to test the theory, and analysing the results. Deductive themes existed prior to the study hence they are listed before inductive themes.

I then inductively analysed the data. As an inductive approach is used to support or challenge theoretical assumptions (Merriam, 1998), this study adopted this reasoning in later iterations of the content analysis. In these iterations the themes emerge from what is found in the news stories and editorials. The coding tables (presented in the following chapter) for both deductive themes (terms and concepts from previous research on tertiary education in South Africa during Covid), as well as inductive themes that arose from the *News24* and *TimesLive* articles demonstrate how the study mixed a deductive and inductive approach.

Discursive analysis

The study's second stage of analysis is the discursive approach guided by Bednarek & Caple (2014). According to the authors, news values are described as properties of events or stories or a criterion that is applied by news workers to select events or stories as new. Bednarek & Caple (2014) address the discursive analysis of news values and propose the discursive news value analysis. The new methodological framework is situated within what the authors call a 'discursive'

approach to news values. From this perspective, news values are seen as values that exist in and are constructed through discourse, and the primary research interest is in how texts construct newsworthiness through multimodal resources (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). In this discursive approach, news values in a text are analysed through how an event is “sold to us as news(worthy) – how newsworthiness is created for the audience through language, image, layout, typography, and so on” (Bednarek & Caple, 2014:139). This means that I analysed the language used in the articles, including the headlines to determine the news values. I constructed sub-themes which enabled me to categorise the stories into themes for a detailed discursive analysis where I could then identify “news values.... foregrounded or backgrounded in [the] texts” (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 139).

This discursive approach thus allowed for inferences about the messages within the articles, and of the culture and time surrounding the article. During the analysis I paid close attention to, “the likely potential effect/function of the linguistic resource as it is used in the text” (Benarek and Caple, 2014: 140). The importance of the discursive approach is to ascertain the news values which have attributed to the reporting between the two waves and what they signify in terms of the importance placed on specific experiences. Additionally, it was done to ascertain what discourses these news values signify.

The comparative aspect of the analysis is across the different waves/lockdowns (and not the online sources themselves). The reason for this was to determine the ways (if any) in which the news values attributed to reporting on student experiences may have changed from the first and second waves of COVID- 19, and what they signify.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important part of research since it represents the quality and integrity of results (Ritchie et al., 2013). For this study, data to be presented in the next chapter, was collected from texts and did not involve human participants.. As such this study was approved as an ethical exemption by the Human Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) under this protocol reference number: 00016586.

However, the study still considered aspects of validity and reliability. In this process, principles adhered to were values of morality, sincerity, outcomes, data, and caution, to minimise the likelihood of inaccuracies. The use of content analysis ensures the credibility of the interpretation

as content analysis involves a “replicable and valid methods for making inferences from observed communications to their context” (Krippendorff, 1980:69).

All ideas which originate with a different source are given correct accreditation using in-text citations and a detailed bibliography. At any time, there has been a direct quote taken directly from another’s work quotation marks, in-text citations, and references are included. Where an idea has been paraphrased from another’s work, in-text citations and references are included.

Reliability and Validity

Content analysis entails reproducible and reliable techniques for inferring context from observed communications (Krippendorff, 1980). This study's content analysis process is explained in depth so that it can be applied to different sets of data. Both deductive and inductive ideas served as a guide for these actions.

Altheide and Johnson (1994) defined reliability as the consistency of the study's findings and validity as the veracity of the study's findings. Validity and reliability are used in this study because they can promote transparency and reduce potential for researcher bias in qualitative research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This study uses validity and reliability to guarantee correctness (Haradhan, 2017). The term dependability refers to a measurement that produces results that are consistent and have equal values (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2005). Dependability in my study is assured through reading all the selected articles word for word and determining how many paragraphs are in each article. This is shown in table 5.1 of the Data Presentation Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology of the research. This was done through explaining its location within the interpretive paradigm with a link to a constructionist paradigm due to its aim to identify the associative meaning of a news value as constructed through language. The qualitative approach and textual design is mobilised through a qualitative content analysis of news stories and editorials within the temporality of levels five to four of the COVID- 19 national lockdown. The content analysis is explained as starting with deductive reasoning in search words identified from previous relevant literature. The generated themes will then be associated to specific news values that will then be interpreted discursively and comparatively. The sampling process was explained. This will be further clarified according to a series of coding sheets in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation

Introduction

This chapter presents the data from the content analysis to reveal patterns in the content of reporting student experiences during the Covid 19 national lockdown five to three lockdown of the first wave (5 March to 30 April 30, 2020, and 1 May to 30 May, 2020) and level three of the second wave (29 December 2020 to 1 March 2021). More specifically, it codes the 35 online news reports and editorials from *TimesLive* and *News 24*. The data set consists of eight news reports from *TimesLive* and 22 news reports and five editorials from *News24*. The chapter is structured according to four coding tables. The first table starts by collecting the data, first iteration (blunt search). The second table develops the second iteration by purposeful sampling distilled from table one. The third table analyses the data and identifies codes (first iteration). Finally, the fourth table analyses the data as the second iteration and identifies themes.

There are different ways to conduct a content analysis. The coding instruments and process presented here was adapted from Jacob Nyarko (2015, see also Nyarko and Teer-Tomaselli 2018) and Elizabeth McDade-Montez et al. (2017) by Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (2021) who was the Principal Investigator for the Research Project, "Reporting of the South African COVID- 19 pandemic experience: A content analysis of news values in the selection of coverage on two online news sites, 23 March-17 August 2020". I was part of the first cohort of students to base their Honors study on this wider project, which has now been operational for the past 3 years. The method is thus founded on an established process, both by the scholars cited above and through its existence as a longitudinal research project within CCMS. This Masters study does, however, differ from what I wrote up in Honors as I have devised new research questions and focus, content and temporal sampling, and have supplemented the news value theoretical framework with a discursive approach (Bednarek & Caple, 2014).

Table One: Blunt search data collection - First iteration

The table below shows the first iteration of collecting the data, demonstrating the blunt search that resulted in the collection of 35 articles. The search words used to select the articles are online-learning, staying at home, home schooling, experiences of students (including psychological experiences), new normal, COVID- 19 and national lockdown and digital communication as they reflected the experiences of students. This is a list of the basic search

words entered into the advanced Google search (as elaborated on in the previous chapter). In order to facilitate the identification of applicable articles, slightly different word combinations were used, which can be seen below in the “search words” column. In the date column, the date of the article is first presented and then the associated lockdown wave and level as this will assist in tracking possible changes in the different lockdown periods, to be discussed in Chapter Six.

Table 5.1: Table One: Blunt search data collection - First iteration

No.	Search words	News source	Date: yymmdd	Headline article	Type: NA=News ED= Editorial, Column, Letter	Length of words in paragraphs	Does it speak to the theme?
1.	Lockdown: online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/16 Level 5 1 st wave	Universities prepare to switch to online learning from Monday	News article	29 paragraphs	YES
2.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/26 Level 5 1 st wave	COVID- 19 How it has affected the student population	Editorial	9 paragraphs	YES
3.	Mental health	www.news24.com	19/04/2020 Level 5 1 st wave	“We are in a catch 22 situation “Dealing with depression and anxiety during lockdown	Editorial	21 paragraphs	YES

4.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/30 Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown Fort Hare University to issue laptops, data as it moves to online learning	News article	13 paragraphs	YES
5.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/30 Level 5 1 st wave	Level 4 lockdown: Students won't return to campus; risk is too great - Blade Nzimande	News article	12 paragraphs	YES
6.	Mental health	www.timeslive.co.za	2021/05/05 Level 3 2 nd wave	How the pandemic is hurting university students' mental health	News article	19 paragraphs	YES
7.	Online learning	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/05/06 Level 5 1 st wave	Data problems stack up but lecturers push hard online to keep	News article	28 paragraphs	YES

				students on course			
8.	Lockdown: Experience s of students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/04/30 Level 5 1 st wave	Students and landlords struggle with rents during COVID- 19 lockdown	News article	17 paragraphs	YES
9.	Inequalities among students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/05/18 Level 5 1 st wave	Poorer institutions' limited access to tech platforms worries lecturers	News article	28 paragraphs	YES
10.	Lockdown: Experience s of students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/04/15 Level 5 1 st wave	COVID- 19: Universities prepare to switch to remote online learning	News article	19 paragraphs	YES
11	Lockdown: Experience s of students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/04/05 Level 5 1 st wave	Degree of dismay for many graduates missing ceremonies over COVID- 19	News article	15 paragraphs	YES

12.	Online learning Physically distanced learning	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/05/23 Level 5 1 st wave	This is how SA universities will reopen during the lockdown	News article	21 paragraphs	NO
13.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2021/01/06 Level 3 2 nd wave	Universities: 'No chance' of face-to-face classes in first quarter of 2021	News article	16 paragraphs	YES
14.	Online learning: Adjusting school calendars	www.news24.com	2021/02/20 Level 3 2 nd wave	ANALYSIS The hidden cost of remote university learning during COVID- 19	Editorial	17 paragraphs	YES
15.	Returning home for students	www.news24.com	2020/05/14 Level 5 1 st wave	TUT considers cancelling exams as varsities scramble to save academic year	News article	32 paragraphs	YES
16.	Level 3 lockdown:	www.news24.com	2020/03/24 Level 5 1 st wave	UCT assisting students to	News article	13 paragraphs	YES

	Return to universities			return home ahead of national lockdown			
17.	Level 3 lockdown: Student well-being	www.news24.com	2020/05/26 Level 5 1 st wave	IN QUOTES Blade Nzimande: those who are on course to graduate may return to university	News article	11 paragraphs	YES
18.	Level 3 lockdown	www.news24.com	2020/06/09 Level 3 2 nd wave	Ensuring students' safety key to reopening universities: Nzimande	News article	12 paragraphs	YES
19.	Online learning: Virtual graduation	www.news24.com	2020/01/03 Level 5 1 st wave	'All students must get fair chance to finish academic year': Buti Manamela	News article	12 paragraphs	YES
20.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/03 Level 5 1 st wave	'I had a virtual graduation ceremony because of	Editorial	9 paragraphs	YES

				coronavirus – and this is how it felt'			
21.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/03/18 Level 5 1 st wave	The effect is immense, say students scrambling to make adjustments over coronavirus	Editorial	15 paragraphs	YES
22.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/20 Level 5 1 st wave	'No student will be left behind' by e-learning: Universities SA	News article	15 paragraphs	YES
23	Online learning: Virtual graduation	www.news24.com	2020/03/14 Level 5 1 st wave	Coronavirus in SA: UCT graduations suspended amid COVID- 19 concerns	News article	10 paragraphs	YES
24	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/05/12 Level 5 1 st wave	Unisa students unhappy with online exams	News article	23 paragraphs	YES
25	Online learnings	www.news24.com	2020/03/28 Level 5 1 st wave	Motsepe Foundation donates R1	News article	25 paragraphs	NO

				billion to help students from poor background			
26	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/22 Level 5 1 st wave	Sifiso Skenjana Inequality in SA is about to get uglier	News article	15 paragraphs	NO
27	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/21 Level 5 1 st wave	UCT provides pre-paid data at no cost to students for online learning	News article	8 paragraphs	YES
28	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/15 Level 5 1 st wave	UKZN ponders online classes	News article	15 paragraphs	NO
29	Mental health	www.news24.com	2020/05/16 Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown: Calls to mental health and suicide helplines have more than doubled	News article	23 paragraphs	NO
30	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/08 Level 5	Education and	News article	33 paragraphs	NO

			1 st wave	learning in the time of COVID- 19			
31	National lockdown	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/12/31 Level 3 2 nd wave	Outgoing UCT ombud tells of threats, suspension and censorship in parting letter	News article	21 paragraphs	NO
32	National lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/19 Level 5 1 st wave	Give students who fail this year another chance, says student council body	News article	21 paragraphs	NO
33	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/03/15 Level 5 1 st wave	Varsities cancel graduations and travel over coronavirus fears	News article	24 paragraphs	YES
34	Virtual graduation	www.news24.com	2020/04/16 Level 5 1 st wave	Medical students want clarity on whether	News article	23 paragraphs	NO

				lockdown will cause graduation delays			
35	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/03/17 Level 5 1 st wave	Coronavirus : Two law students take Wits to court over residence evacuatuions	News article	18 paragraphs	NO

Table Two: Collecting the data - Second iteration

This section will select all articles viewed as relevant to the study. The collection of data at second iteration uses purposive sampling distilled from table 1, based on deductive applicability that aligns with the study's research questions. It consists of 14 news articles and five editorials from *News24* and six news articles from *TimesLive* news, resulting in 25 sources distilled from the initial data set of 35.

Table 5.2: Collecting the data - Second iteration

	Search words	Source: <i>TimesLive</i> <i>News24</i> = www.news24.com	Date: YYMMDD Lockdown level	Headline of article	Type: NA=News Ed=Editorial, Column or Letter
1.	Lockdown: online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/16 Level 5 1 st wave	Universities prepare to switch to online learning from Monday	News article
2.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/26 Level 5 1 st wave	COVID- 19 How it has affected the student population	Editorial

3.	Mental health	www.news24.com	2020/04/19 Level 5 1 st wave	"We are in a catch 22 situation "Dealing with depression and anxiety during lockdown	Editorial
4.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/30 Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown Fort Hare University to issue laptops, data as it moves to online learning	News article
5.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/30 Level 5 1 st wave	Level 4 lockdown: Students won't return to campus, risk is too great - Blade Nzimande	News article
6.	Mental health	www.timeslive.co.za	2021/05/05 Level 3 2 nd wave	How the pandemic is hurting university students' mental health	News article
7.	Online learning	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/05/06 Level 5 1 st wave	Data problems stack up but lecturers push hard online to keep students on course	News article
8.	Lockdown: Experiences of students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/04/30 Level 5 1 st wave	Students and landlords struggle with rents during	News article

				COVID- 19 lockdown	
9.	Inequalities among students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/05/18 Level 5 1 st wave	Poorer institutions' limited access to tech platforms worries lecturers	News article
10.	Lockdown: Experiences of students	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/04/05 Level 5 1 st wave	Degree of dismay for many graduates missing ceremonies over COVID- 19	News article
11.	Online learning Physically distanced learning	www.news24.com	2021/01/06 Level 3 2 nd wave	Universities: 'No chance' of face- to-face classes in first quarter of 2021	News article
12.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2021/02/20 Level 3 2 nd wave	ANALYSIS The hidden cost of remote university learning during COVID- 19	Editorial
13.	Online learning: Adjusting school calendars	www.news24.com	2020/05/14 Level 5 1 st wave	TUT considers cancelling exams as varsities scramble to save academic year	News article
14.	Returning home for students	www.news24.com	2020/03/24 Level 5 1 st wave	UCT assisting students to return home ahead of national lockdown	News article

15.	Level 3 lockdown: Return to universities	www.news24.com	2020/05/26 Level 5 1 st wave	IN QUOTES Blade Nzimande: those who are on course to graduate may return to university	News article
16.	Level 3 lockdown: Student well- being	www.news24.com	2020/06/09 Level 3 2 nd wave	Ensuring students' safety key to reopening universities: Nzimande	News article
17.	Level 5 lockdown	www.news24.com	2020/01/03 Level 5 1 st wave	'All students must get fair chance to finish academic year': Buti Manamela	News article
18.	Online learning: Virtual graduation	www.news24.com	2020/04/03 Level 5 1 st wave	'I had a virtual graduation ceremony because of coronavirus – and this is how it felt'	Editorial
19.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/03/18 Level 5 1 st wave	The effect is immense, say students scrambling to make adjustments over coronavirus	Editorial

20.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/20 Level 5 1 st wave	'No student will be left behind' by e-learning: Universities SA	News article
21.	Lockdown: Online learning	www.timeslive.co.za	2020/04/15 Level 5 1 st wave	COVID- 19: Universities prepare to switch to remote online learning	News article
22.	Online learning: Virtual graduation	www.news24.com	2020/03/14 Level 5 1 st wave	Coronavirus in SA: UCT graduations suspended amid COVID- 19 concerns	News article
23.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/05/12 Level 5 1 st wave	Unisa students unhappy with online exams	News article
24.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/04/21 Level 5 1 st wave	UCT provides pre-paid data at no cost to students for online learning	News article
25.	Online learning	www.news24.com	2020/03/15 Level 5 1 st wave	Varsities cancel graduations and travel over coronavirus fears	News article

Table Three: Identifying codes and categories – first iteration

This section starts the data analysis process as the first iteration in identifying codes and categories (or sub-themes), as a summary on each article's primary concerns/points. An elaboration is provided based on the terms in which the sub-themes were discussed or raised. Additional 'self-notes' are provided for purposes of later discussion of findings. They include cross references with other articles or sub-themes. These notes assist in making connections for a relational analysis that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table 5.3: Identifying codes and categories – first iteration

Article Headline and number from table 2	Lockdown level	Main Theme	Sub – theme	Elaboration	Additional notes
1. (1) Universities prepare to switch to online learning from Monday	Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown: Online learning	-Provision of resources to poor students -Sourcing resources for poor students - Adjusting of school calendar to ensure continuity of learning - Flexible online learning hours	Universities will source resources for impoverished students who cannot afford laptops and data to ensure equity of online learning	Article written by Sesona Ngqakamba (2020) from www.news24.com Cross reference with article 24
2. (3) we are in a catch 22 situation-dealing with depression	Level 5 1 st wave	Mental Health	- Depression - Loss of freedom and autonomy - Fear of the unknown - Feeling confined at home	People including university students have been forced to accept what is happening, and the	Cross reference with article (6) from www.timeslive.co.za

during lockdown				;lockdown, has brought about frustrations and losses that are out of their control, which leads to mental or emotional distress	
3. (4) Lockdown Fort Hare University to issue laptops, data as it moves to online learning	Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown: Online learning	-Provision of remote learning modalities -Fear of missing lessons by disadvantaged students	Universities are sourcing resources to ensure that students have access to online learning despite their financial backgrounds Some students express fear that the resources are insufficient due to their geographic and financial backgrounds	Article written by Sesona Ngqakamba (2020) News24. Cross reference with article 21 from www.timeslive.co.za by Amina Deka Asma (2020)
4. (5) Students won't return to campus, risk is too great -	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	-Not resuming physical learning -Prioritization of final year medical students	Final year students will resume physical learning but will adhere to COVID- 19 prevention measures.	Article written by Canny Maphanga (2020) www.news24.com

Blade Nzimande			-Multi-modal preparation for remote learning	Universities will continue to source resources for online learning	
5. (2) OPINION: COVID- 19 and how it has affected the student population	Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown and online learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of personal space -Lack of study space -Late study hours -Change of routine -Social media a source of comfort -Poor study motivation -Disturbed school calendar -Anxiety about academic future 	Students are finding it difficult to study at home because they do not have their personal space and some lack discipline to study and watch TV all day. There are concerns about when they will complete their academic year due to the disturbances caused by the lockdown.	Article by Nurjehan Emaran (2020) from www.news24.com
6. (6) How the pandemic is hurting university students'	Level 3 2 nd wave	Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Females at risk for poor online learning due to GBV -younger students more vulnerable to mental health problems -poor time management 	A study was conducted during lock down to ascertain how the lockdown has affected students. Several themes emerged and	Cross reference with article (3) from www.news24.com

mental health			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -poor internet connectivity -resource provision from government 	students are struggling with mental health issues particularly female and younger students. Studying at home is difficult because there are many distractions, and some family members are not supportive.	
7. (7) Data problems stack up but lecturers push hard online to keep students on course	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inequitable access to online learning -Lack of data -Consistency -Online tutoring videos 	Not all students have access to online services due to lack of data. However, some lecturers have improvised and provided online tutoring videos which can be accessed via whatsapp.	Cross reference with article (9) from www.timeslive.co.za
8. (8) Students and landlords struggle	Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown: Experiences of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Frozen rent payments -Lack of money -Overdue rent payments 	Many students cannot afford to pay rent and are struggling financially due to the	Article by Shonisani Tshikalange (2020) from www.timeslive.co.za

with rents during COVID- 19 lockdown			-Landlords urged to reduce rent payments	lockdown. Students left their belongings in their rented homes but are not staying there.	
9. (9) Poorer institutions' limited access to tech platforms worries lecturers	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning: Inequalities among students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inequitable access to online platform resources -Lecturers from HDI struggling to conduct online lessons -Advocacy to delay opening online schools -Disadvantaged students suffer 	Students from highly disadvantaged institutions will not be able to access internet due to data and network problems. Some lecturers will fail to provide e-learning because of lack of resources.	Cross reference with article (7) from www.timeslive.co.za
10. (21) COVID- 19: Universities prepare to switch to remote online learning	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Adapting academic programme to online learning -Preparation and training for e-learning -Resources for disadvantaged students -anxiety about the academic future 	Some universities are preparing and training for online teaching, however, stark inequalities exist with regard to access to resources. Some students expressed anxiety pertaining online learning and	Cross reference with article 4 by Sesona Ngqakamba (2020) from www.news24.com

			<p>Student loans for online resources</p> <p>-Sourcing of funding by universities</p>	completion of their degrees.	
11. (10) Degree of dismay for many graduates missing ceremonies over COVID- 19	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	<p>-Postponed graduation ceremonies</p> <p>-Virtual graduation</p>	Students were unable to have physical graduation ceremonies due to the pandemic. Some students conducted their own graduation ceremonies at home signifying how hard they had worked over the years.	Cross reference with article (18) from www.news24.com and article 25 from www.news24.com
12. (11) Universities: 'No chance' of face-to-face classes in first quarter of 2021	Level 3 2 nd wave	Online learning	<p>-No face-to-face interaction</p> <p>- Physically distanced learning</p> <p>-Online learning support</p> <p>-Adjusting of school calendars</p>	First year students to learn on campus so that they receive online learning support on how to use laptops, however, they will be practicing physically distanced learning.	Cross reference with article (13) from News24

13. (12) ANALYSIS The hidden cost of remote university learning during COVID- 19	Level 3 2 nd wave	Online learning	-Failure to form relationships -Lack of human interaction	Social capital is imperative for student life, and this has been affected by the lockdown due to the COVID 19 pandemic.	Article by James Lappeman (2020) from www.news24.com
14. (13) TUT considers cancelling exams as varsities scramble to save academic year	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	-Adjusting of school calendars -cancellation of exams -Accommodating all students -Permission of de- registration	Universities are considering cancelling examinations and proceed with online learning to save the school calendar	Cross reference with article (11) from www.news24.com
15. (14) UCT assisting students to return home ahead of	Level 5 1 st wave	Returning home for students	-Organised transport for students -Immediate payment of allowances	Universities will be arranging transport for students to return home safely due to the lockdown	Article by Azarrah Karrim (2020) from www.news24.com

national lockdown					
16. (15) IN QUOTES Blade Nzimande: those who are on course to graduate may return to university	Level 3 2 nd wave	Level 3 lockdown: Return to universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Final year students prioritized -Campuses to prepare for return of students -Provision of data bundles for online learners -Tentative academic year dates announced 	Final year students will be returning to campuses for completion of their studies. Online learners registered under NSFAS to receive data bundles from network providers.	Cross reference with article (16) from www.news24.com
17. (16) Ensuring students' safety key to reopening universities: Nzimande	Level 3 2 nd wave	Level 3 lockdown: student well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Specific categories of students to return to campus -Adhering to COVID- 19 prevention guidelines -Resources to be provided for online learners 	Universities will be allowed to develop additional categories of students who will return to campus during the level 3 lockdown	Cross reference with article (15) from www.news24.com
18. (17) 'All students must get fair chance	Level 3 2 nd wave	Level 3 lockdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Completion of academic year -Final year students to return to campus 	Final year students will be prioritized in the level 3 lockdown. There are concerns	Article by Nonkululeko Njilo (2020) from www.news24.com Cross reference with

to finish academic year': Buti Manamela			-Abiding to COVID- 19 IPC measures -	about inequalities as some students will be allowed to return school while others continue with online learning.	article (16) from www.news24.com
19. (18) 'I had a virtual graduation ceremony because of coronavirus – and this is how it felt'	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning: Virtual graduation	-Cancellation and postponement of graduation ceremonies	UWC was the first university to conduct a virtual graduation ceremony. Some universities cancelled their graduation ceremonies because of the COVID 19 restrictions.	Cross reference with article (10) from www.timeslive.co.za and article 25 from www.news24.com
20. (19) The effect is immense, say students scrambling to make adjustments	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	-Cancellation of lectures -Cancellation of graduation ceremonies	Some students were not completing their work on time due to lack of textbooks because the libraries were closed. A decision is yet to be made on how universities will be	Article by Cebelihle Mthethwaicle (2020) from www.news24.com

over coronavirus				operating during the COVID- 19 pandemic	
21. (20) 'No student will be left behind' by e-learning: Universities SA	Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown: Online learning	-Equality during online learning -Restructuring of academic year	Some students will not access online learning due to unavailability of resources.	Article by Amina Deka Asma (2020) from www.news24.com
22. (22) Coronavirus in SA: UCT graduations suspended amid COVID- 19 concerns	Level 5 1 st wave	Lockdown: Virtual graduation	-March graduations suspended -Postponement of tours to high-risk countries	All graduations to be suspended to curb the spread of the coronavirus	Article by Nicole McCain (2020) from www.news24.com
23. (23) Unisa students unhappy with online exams	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	-Open-book examinations -Disadvantaged students lack access to data -students express concern over accreditation of qualifications	Students from disadvantaged backgrounds expressed concern over lack of data to download examination and upload answers.	Article by Msindisi Fengu (2020) from www.news24.com

			-Permission granted to defer examinations	There is concern among students of stigmatization about qualifications if they are examinations are conducted online	
24. (24) UCT provides pre-paid data at no cost to students for online learning	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	-Online resources for students -Support for students to learn remotely	Data bundles, printed material and learning material on USB will be provided to students to ensure continuity of learning for all students	Cross reference with article 1 by Sesona Ngqakamba (2020) from www.news24.com
25. (25) Varsities cancel graduations and travel over coronavirus fears	Level 5 1 st wave	Online learning	-Cancellation of graduation ceremonies -Cancellation of conferences and international trips	Graduation ceremonies and international travel was cancelled to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus	Cross reference with article (18) from www.news24.com and article (10) from www.timeslive.co.za

Table 4: Main Themes

In this section, I narrow down the search to stories and articles that focus on the topics; 'online learning' and 'psychological and social experiences of students'. They have been selected on the rationale that these are the areas where there was the most prominent relations and linkages with recurring sub-themes. In essence, I identified these by collecting the sub-themes together and those with the highest number of commonalities were selected.

I start identifying my main themes as a subsection of 'online learning' and 'experiences of students', and in sub-themes provide the categories or ramifications of the main themes. I identify six main themes as: inequalities, digital migration, virtual graduation for students, mental health of students, staying at home, national level 3 lockdown – saving the calendar. Each of these are then illustrated with at least two or three sub-themes.

Table 5.4: Main Themes

TOPIC: ONLINE LEARNING				
Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Elaboration	References to articles	Additional notes
1. <i>Inequalities</i> Inequitable access to online resources	-Access to resources/Lack of data bundles and laptops - Learning environment/Inconsistency in studying	The digital and economic divide has put a strain on many students, mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result, not all students have	Ngqakamba. (2020). Lockdown: Universities prepare to switch to online learning from Monday	Students are forced to adjust to the new normal of online learning due to the

	<p>-Access to digital usage/Online tutoring videos availed for students</p>	<p>access to online services due to lack access or data. However, some lecturers have improvised and provided online tutoring videos which can be accessed via whatsapp.</p>	<p>Available at: www.news24.com</p> <p>Petersen. (2020). UCT provides pre-paid data at no cost to students for online learning. Available at: www.news24.com</p> <p>Asma. (2020). Data problems stack up but lecturers push hard online to keep students on course www.timeslive.co.za</p> <p>Koka. (2020). Poorer institutions' limited access to tech platforms worries lecturers.</p>	<p>COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.</p>
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			Available at: www.timeslive.com	
<p>2. <i>Digital Migration</i></p> <p>Universities prepare for remote learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Adjusting academic calendar -Resources for disadvantaged students -Anxiety about the academic future -Provision of student loans -Universities source funding and multi-sectoral support 	<p>Universities are loaning students' laptops so that they are able to participate in e-learning. Universities are source funding from mobile network providers so that there is provision of data bundles to students.</p>	<p>Asma. (2020). COVID-19: Universities prepare to switch to remote online learning. Available at: www.timeslive.co.za</p> <p>Ngqakamba. (2020). Lockdown Fort Hare University to issue laptops, data as it moves to online learning. Available at: www.news24.com</p>	<p>Universities move to the paperless classroom and made means to ensure that no student is left behind and afforded digital access to all. - -</p> <p>- Universities are preparing and training for online teaching; however, there are significant disparities in access to resources. This resulted in universities are</p>

				sourcing for funding and providing loans to disadvantaged students.
3. <i>Virtual graduation for students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cancellation of graduation ceremonies -Postponement of graduation ceremonies 	The COVID- 19 pandemic resulted in cancellation/postponement of graduation ceremonies and some universities improvised by conducting virtual graduation ceremonies.	<p>Mavuso. (2020). I had a virtual graduation ceremony because of coronavirus – and this is how it felt. Available at: www.news24.com</p> <p>Bhengu. (2020). Degree of dismay for many graduates missing ceremonies over COVID- 19. Available at: www.timeslive.com</p>	<p>Students express dismay and disappointment with regard to failing to graduate physically. However, some students conferred degrees to themselves and shared it via social media as a way of congratulating</p>

			Fengu. (2020). Varsities cancel graduations and travel over coronavirus fears. Available at: www.news24.com	themselves for the hard work done.
4. National level 3 lockdown- Saving the calendar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prioritization of final year students -Campuses to prepare for return of students -Provision of data bundles for online learners -Tentative academic year dates announced 	Students in their final year will return to campus to finish their studies. NSFAS – registered online learners will receive data bundles from network providers.	<p>Nkajeni. (2020). IN QUOTES Blade Nzimande: those who are on course to graduate may return to university. Available at: www.news24.com</p> <p>Mvumvu. (2020). Ensuring students' safety key to reopening universities: Nzimande. Available at: www.news24.com</p>	Some institutions have come up with tentative academic calendars during the level 3 lockdown.

TOPIC: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

5. <i>Mental health of students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Female students vulnerable to GBV -Younger students more vulnerable to mental health problems -Poor time management -Poor internet connectivity 	During the lockdown, a study was conducted to determine how the lockdown affected students. Several themes emerged, and students, particularly female and younger students, are dealing with mental health issues. It is difficult to study at home because there are many distractions, and some family members are not supportive.	<p>Ojo et al., (2021). How the pandemic is hurting students' mental health. Available at: www.timeslive.co.za</p> <p>Karrim. (2020). "We are in a catch 22 situation "Dealing with depression and anxiety during lockdown. Available at: www.news24.com</p>	Remote learning has proven to be difficult for students because there is no schedule for learning and discipline is required to keep up with the students. At times students have poor internet connectivity resulting in them failing to learn online.
6. <i>Staying at home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anxiety about the future -Lack of discipline to study 	Students find it difficult to study at home because	Emaran. (2020). COVID- 19 and how	Studying at home is difficult

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of study space -Late study hours -Change of routine -Social media a source of comfort -Poor study motivation -Disturbed school calendar 	they lack personal space, and some lack the discipline to study because of watching TV all day. The disruptions caused by the lockdown have resulted in concerns about when they will finish their academic year.	<p>it has affected the student population.</p> <p>Available at: www.news24.com</p> <p>Lapperman. (2021). ANALYSIS The hidden cost of remote university learning during COVID-19. Available at: www.news24.com</p>	<p>for most students.</p> <p>There is uncertainty about the academic future, and the only solace students have is from social media and mobile device chats with friends and family.</p>
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Conclusion

The chapter was structured according to four coding tables. The first one started by collecting the data, first iteration (blunt search). The second developed the second iteration by selecting articles from table 1, that were most applicable to take into the coding, categorising and thematising stages. The third table analysed the data and identified codes and sub-themes/ categories (first iteration). Finally, the fourth table analysed the data, second iteration and identified themes. The next chapter (6) will analyse the identified themes according to their relationship with news values. It will compare the prominence of these news values across the two different wave (and lockdown) periods. Following Bednarek & Caple's (2018) framework, this chapter will provide a discussion of how the identified news values are established in discourse, reflecting on the prominent ideologies or priorities of the two different COVID-19 waves

Chapter 6: Analytical Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents the interpretation of the themes (shown in tables 1 to table 4 in the preceding chapter) focusing mainly on table 4 which has the dominant themes that appeared in the news articles from both *News24* and *TimesLive*. The two theoretical principles framing this research which are used to interpret the final themes are Harcup and O'Neill's (2001, 2017) news values approach and Bednarek & Caple (2014) framework for the analysis of news discourse. Additionally, it will compare the prominence of news values across different lockdown periods. In doing so, the chapter will provide a discussion on how identified news values are established in discourse reflecting on the prominent ideologies or priorities of the two different lockdown periods.

Discussing Themes

The themes that emerged from the analysis of articles across both news networks are sub-sections of the main topics; "online learning" and "psychological and social experiences of students". The six main themes which emerged from this research are inequalities, digital migration, virtual graduation for students, mental health of students, staying at home, national level 3 lockdown – saving the calendar. The themes were selected on the rationale that these are the areas where there was the most prominent relations and linkages with recurring sub-themes. In essence, I identified these by collecting the sub-themes together and those with the highest number of commonalities were selected.

Inequalities

The two online newspaper articles cited inequitable access to online learning resources, particularly for students who were from disadvantaged backgrounds. The articles stated that the digital and economic divide put a strain on many students, mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result, not all students had access to online services due to lack of access to data. However, some universities developed and implemented mitigation strategies to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to online learning resources to ensure continuity of learning. This included provision of laptops and data bundles to access online lessons. Some lecturers improvised and provided online tutoring videos which could be accessed

via WhatsApp. Mukute et.al., (2020) state that in Africa, the COVID- 19 pandemics' most significant impacts on education have been identified as widening inequalities, increase in marginalisation and the inability of the most disadvantaged students to pursue their studies. Correspondingly, the Dlamini and Ndzinisa (2020) assert that many students residing in rural areas were severely affected due to lack of connectivity, stable electricity and digital literacy. The findings from the study at hand supports these previous findings, noting that the news sources provided details in their stories that illustrate this challenge faced by students. Data from *TimesLive* and *News24* revealed that there was a lack of access to data bundles and laptops and there was inconsistency of studying for some students due to limited access to online learning resources as a result of poor socio-economic status:

“However, some students from disadvantaged backgrounds may find access to these functions impossible given their socio-economic status” (*TimesLive*, 6 May 2020, Article 7)⁷

“There are students who do not have the necessary gadgets to access this online teaching and learning. Furthermore, some students do not have data or stay in far-flung areas where network connections are problematic. These are real challenges” (*TimesLive*, 18 May 2020, Article 9).

“The university said it has also put additional measures in place to address the challenges faced by students, such as the lack of access to devices and data by students. A contingency plan includes providing students with laptops” (*News24*, 16 April 2020, Article 1).

Digital Migration

This theme highlights that universities were moving to paperless classrooms, and they were preparing and training for online teaching. This included loaning students' laptops so that they were able to participate in e-learning. Universities also sourced funding from mobile network providers so that there was provision of data bundles to students. This could thus be considered part of what Du Preez and Le Grange, (2020) stated were the commendable efforts by the Department of Higher Education to meet the challenge of disparities to digital online platforms, by launching initiatives to provide pre-paid data packages with leading service providers. The main service providers afforded students zero rates access to universities' primary websites, libraries and learning management systems. According to Ngqakamba (2020), Fort Hare University was

⁷ The assigned article number is taken from table 2 in the Chapter 5: Data Presentation so that the reader knows to which article the quote refers.

one of the universities to issue laptops to students during the COVID- 19 pandemic. Below are direct quotes from the online newspaper articles that support this:

“The University of Fort Hare will make 12 000 laptops, along with modems and data, available to students for online learning while they are under lockdown as part of efforts to delay the spread of the novel coronavirus” (*News24*, 03 April 2020, Article 4).

“As a further attempt to support the move to online remote learning, institutions like the University of Pretoria and the University of Cape Town (UCT) have managed to secure zero-rated access for their respective teaching and learning and content” (*TimesLive*, 15 April 2020, Article 21).

Virtual graduation for students

This theme speaks to the prominence placed on the cancellation or postponement of graduation ceremonies due to the COVID- 19 pandemic. As a result, some universities improvised and conducted virtual graduation ceremonies. Students expressed dismay and disappointment with regard to failing to graduate physically. However, some students were innovative and ‘conferred degrees’ to themselves and shared it via social media as a way of congratulating themselves for the hard work done. Schleicher, (2020) asserts that students were disheartened when their graduation ceremonies were postponed, cancelled or shifted to be virtual. This is because graduation is a huge milestone in the academic journey. Below are some of the comments as expressed by the students in the online newspaper articles regarding virtual graduation:

“My graduation was initially supposed to take place on 6 April. To be honest, I felt disappointed in the beginning. Though this pandemic is terrifying, I found myself having to reconcile my pride on the situation,” Jarryd says (*News24*, 03 April 2020, Article 18).

“I felt a bit sad about it. I was looking forward to the ceremony because I worked towards it for three years so it was incredibly disappointing” he said (*TimesLive*, 05 April 2020, Article 10).

“Graduation is a huge milestone in the academic journey. It's a culmination of the years you worked in university, and even before that in high school, when you tried to achieve good marks so you could apply to do the degree that you want. When you get that degree, it's a really big achievement and graduation is a chance to celebrate that.” (*TimesLive*, 05 April 2020, Article 10)

National level 3 lockdown – saving the calendar year

This theme reveals the reporting focus on saving the academic calendar year through prioritisation of final year students, campuses to preparing for return of students through adhering

to COVID- 19 prevention measures, provision of data bundles for online learner and announcing tentative academic year dates. Universities were compelled to saving the academic calendar year through engaging in emergency remote learning and teaching, working from home arrangements for staff, finding alternative ways to support students and reallocating budgets to address emerging needs (du Plessis et al., 2020). News24 reported that students in their final year will return to campus to finish their studies and NSFAS – registered online learners will receive data bundles from network providers. Below are a couple of selected statements supporting this theme:

“In a statement issued by the department, Nzimande said that under level 3 lockdown, a maximum of 33% of students will be allowed to return to campuses, and final-year students would be prioritised” (*News24*, 26 May 2020, Article 15).

“Students who stay off-campus in privately rented accommodation close to their universities are also allowed to go back, as long as physical distancing is observed” (*News24*, 09 June 2020, Article 16).

Mental health of students

The theme on mental health of students was dominant in both newspaper sources. Remote learning was difficult for students because there was no schedule for learning and discipline required to keep up with the lessons. At times students had poor internet connectivity resulting in them failing to learn online. Additionally, during the lockdown, a study was conducted to determine how the lockdown affected students. Several sub-themes emerged, and these included female students’ vulnerability to GBV, younger students’ vulnerability to mental health problems, poor time management and poor internet connectivity. Some students interviewed by both *News24* and *TimesLive* expressed how difficult it was to study at home because of vast distractions, and some family members being unsupportive. Similarly, previous studies have cited the detrimental effects of COVID- 19 on university students which included the resultant trauma of social ills such as gender-based violence, dissatisfaction with access to healthcare, decreased concentration, sleeping difficulties, and isolation which cumulatively led to a decline in mental wellbeing (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021). Below are some of the statements from the newspaper articles regarding mental health of students:

“We found undergraduate and full-time students were approximately twice and four times, respectively, more likely than postgraduate and part-time students to indicate problems associated with mental health. Those aged between 18 and 24 were approximately 1.75 times

more likely than students older than 24 to present problems associated with mental health” (*TimesLive*, 05 May 2021, Article 6).

“The findings also reveal a gender dimension to mental health in our study. Specifically, female students were 1.83 times more likely than male students to indicate problems associated with mental health. These problems included stress, anxiety and depression.” *TimesLive*, 05 May 2021, Article 6 “Students expressed challenges with time management, distraction and problems associated with family members. These were situated in the notion of self-directed learning and self-management” (*TimesLive*, 05 May 2021, Article 6).

“For many, the lockdown feels as though they are not in control of their own actions and is accompanied by a constant worry over things, like physical distancing or that someone we love will become infected with COVID- 19” (*News24*, 19 April 2020, Article 3).

Staying at home

This theme illuminated sub-themes on anxiety about the future; lack of discipline to study; lack of study space; late study hours; change of routine; social media a source of comfort; poor study motivation and disturbed school calendar. The students who were interviewed by *News24* expressed that studying at home is difficult and there is uncertainty about the academic future, and the only solace students have is from social media and mobile device chats with friends and family. Research found that the lack of a conducive learning environment was a significant obstacle to online learning and self-management (O'Regan, 2021; Du Plessis Mariet et al., 2020). These challenges include finding a quiet space at home to study, and carving out uninterrupted time between caring for children or other family members.

“For me personally this lockdown has been both a blessing and a curse. I’ve gotten to spend more time with my family ... but there is only so much time a person can spend with their family before you start losing your mind.” (*News24*, 26 April 2020, Article 2)

Discursive and comparative analysis of the identified themes and news values

This section will discuss the identified themes from Table 5.4 in Chapter 5 and associate them with news values by Harcup and O'Neill (2001). Several news values were identified according to the news values theory by Harcup and O'Neill (2001). These included 'the power elite', 'surprise', 'bad news', 'good news', 'magnitude', 'relevance', and 'follow-ups'. However, this study found no associations with the following news values; 'celebrity', 'entertainment', and 'newspaper agenda'.

News values are viewed as values that exist in and are formed through discourse, according to Bednarek & Caple (2014). Discourse analysis reassembles the outside world via the use of language and symbolism while also assisting readers in understanding how meaning is communicated through the reading of texts (Smith, 2021). In their statement that language may be thought of from a linguist perspective as expressing, proposing, underlining, or highlighting news values and that news values can be thought of as embedded in language, Bednarek & Caple (2014) make reference to this theory. The following section identifies the discourses that correspond to the news values mentioned in the selected news stories by using discourse analysis, which is how these discourses were deduced from the themes.

The **Surprise** news value is described as stories which have an element of surprise and/or contrast. This was associated with the theme on virtual graduation of students. The sub-themes that emerged include "cancellation of graduation ceremonies" and "postponement of graduation ceremonies". According to both *News24* and *TimesLive*, students expressed dismay and disappointment with regard to failing to graduate physically. Students were discouraged, according to Schleicher (2020), when their graduation ceremonies were rescheduled, postponed, or changed to be virtual. This is due to the fact that graduating is a significant milestone. This theme appeared across both news sources during level 5 lockdown during the first wave of the pandemic, however, it did not appear during the second wave of the pandemic.

The news value on **bad news** are stories with negative overtones such as conflict or tragedy, and are suggested to be more likely newsworthy. It was associated with the theme on Mental health of students. The headline from *News24* read "We are in a catch 22 situation, Dealing with depression and anxiety during lockdown". The words 'Catch-22 situation' imply that a situation is problematic or something bad is happening. This is possibly the reason why this news article made the headline because it was reporting something with a negative undertone. Bednarek & Caple (2014) state that negativity is a significant news value because humans are wired to listen more to bad than good news. *TimesLive* headline read "How the pandemic is hurting students'

mental health”. The word used ‘hurting’ signifies that something bad is happening hence this was construed as bad news. The news value appeared in both *News24* and *TimesLive* throughout level five (first wave) to three (second wave). The theme was more prominent during the first wave of the pandemic possibly because it was when the country was still in level five lockdown and there were very strict measures that were put in place. It meant that students were always locked indoors but also had to continue learning, additionally, it was probably the first time some of them had to do online learning hence the pressure and anxiety may have affected their mental health more during the first wave compared to the second wave of the pandemic. Comparatively, during the second wave of the pandemic, the students may have adjusted to online learning and staying at home hence the news value on bad news featured less during the second wave compared to the first wave of the pandemic.

During both the first wave and the second wave of the pandemic, the newspaper articles revealed that female students were vulnerable to GBV, younger students more vulnerable to mental health problems, there was poor time management and poor internet connectivity while studying at home. Below I make reference to the headlines of some of the newspaper articles:

“We are in a catch 22 situation “Dealing with depression and anxiety during lockdown.” www.news24.co.za

“How the pandemic is hurting students’ mental health.” www.timeslive.co.za

The news value on **good news** implies stories with positive overtones such as rescues and cures. It was related to the theme on National level 3 lockdown – saving the calendar. In this theme, the newspaper articles from *News24* reported “that there was prioritization of final year students; campuses were preparing for return of students; there was provision of data bundles for online learners and tentative academic year dates were to be announced. The headline for this theme read, “IN QUOTES | Blade Nzimande: those who are on course to graduate may return to university”. The discourse here connotes good news because it reflected a positive undertone whereby students could return to some level of normalcy after the havoc and confusion the COVID- 19 pandemic had caused particularly during the first wave. Correspondingly, this may also be construed to have a news value of **the Power Elite** because it featured an important figure in global and cultural society. Blade Nzimande was the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology of South Africa during the COVID- 19 pandemic. This news value appeared in level five lockdown during the first wave of the pandemic, however it did not appear

during the second wave of the pandemic. This may be because some students had already returned to school hence despite it being construed as **good news**, it was now old news so less likely to make headlines.

The news value on **magnitude** implies stories which are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact. This was associated with the theme on inequitable access to online resources. The sub-themes that emerged included access to resources/Lack of data bundles and laptops; learning environment/Inconsistency in studying and access to digital usage/Online tutoring videos availed for students. The headline from TimesLive read, "Poorer institutions' limited access to tech platforms worries lecturers". A significant number of students were impacted by the limited availability of online learning tools, as indicated by the phrase 'poorer students,' to the degree that it 'worried lectures.' The word 'worry' implies that there was anxiety among lecturers about how students from a disadvantaged background would cope due to limited/no access to online learning resources. According to Bednarek & Caple (2014), there is a relationship between language use and perceived messages which creates newsworthiness. This means that "certain news values can be foregrounded or backgrounded in texts" (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 139). Correspondingly, the word 'worry' denotes that may have induced anxiety even to the readers and they were curious to find out what was happening to the university students that may have worried lecturers. This news value featured from 16 April 2020 to 8 May 2020 in level five lockdown during the first wave in both News24 and TimesLive. The fact that this was the first lockdown to ever disrupt learning in South Africa and that a large number of students were going to be affected suggests that the news value on magnitude was prominent during the first wave of the pandemic. The news value did not appear during the second wave possibly because both the universities' authorities and students had come up with mitigation strategies to ensure continuity of learning e.g. through provision/loaning of online resources and prioritising final year students for contact classes.

The news value on **relevance** means stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience and have societal or cultural connection to the audience. It was associated with the theme on Digital migration. The sub-themes that emerged included universities prepare for remote online learning; adjusting academic calendar; resources for disadvantaged students; anxiety about the academic future; provision of student loans and universities source funding and multi-sectoral support. The headline from *TimesLive* read, "Universities prepare to switch to remote online learning". The words 'switch to remote online learning' signify relevance of adjusting to the national lockdown. This meant that instead of face

to face interactions students were not going to learn online to avoid the physical classes, however, ensuring that learning continues. Similarly, the headline from *News24* read, “Lockdown | Fort Hare University to issue laptops, data as it moves to online learning”. The words ‘moves to online learning’ also imply that there was a shift from the ‘normal’ way of learning due to the stringent measures that were placed during the pandemic. This theme appeared in both *News24* and *TimesLive* during the level five lockdown, first wave of the pandemic. This may have been because contact classes were banned during the first wave of the pandemic.

Correspondingly, in this research, the theme on ‘digital migration’ construes the news value on relevance through the following sub-themes: ‘Universities prepare for remote online learning’, Adjusting academic calendar, Resources for disadvantaged students, Anxiety about the academic future, Provision of student loans, Universities source funding and multi-sectoral support. This was done in response to the COVID- 19 lockdown which occurred during the first and second wave of the pandemic. Additionally, during the first wave and the second wave of the COVID- 19 pandemic, newspaper articles’ headline made their stories newsworthy through construing the news value on relevance. Below are some of the headlines used:

“Lockdown | Fort Hare University to issue laptops, data as it moves to online learning”

www.news24.co.za

“Universities prepare to switch to remote online learning” www.timeslive.co.za

The news value on **Follow-ups** are stories about subjects already in the news. It was associated with the theme on staying at home. A research was conducted and reported by *News24* after the students were followed up as they were studying at home, to check on how they were adjusting to the new normal. The headline from the article read, “COVID- 19 and how it has affected the student population ANALYSIS | The hidden cost of remote university learning during COVID- 19.” The discursive phrase “how it has affected the student population” reflects how this story was a follow-up to news reported prior by news reporters. Furthermore, the word ‘hidden’ signals that the journalists may have found the truth and this encourages readership because people will want to know more about the story. The sub-themes that emerged from *News24* included anxiety about the future; lack of discipline to study; lack of study space; late study hours; change of routine; social media a source of comfort and poor study motivation. It clearly indicated that students were not coping with online learning. This theme appeared in *News24* during lockdown level five of the first wave of the pandemic. This is possibly because this was when the national lockdown commenced.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This study explored the experience of university students during the COVID- 19 pandemic as reported by online newspaper articles namely, *News24* and *TimesLive*. This chapter concludes the analysis of the study according to the following sub-sections; main themes that emerged from reporting of COVID- 19 student experiences during level five and three of national lockdowns; news values that attributed to the reporting between level five to three lockdown and how news values that attributed to reporting on student experiences changed from the first and second waves of the pandemic. Related discourses for the first wave of the pandemic (level five lockdown) and the second wave of the pandemic (level three lockdown) are also summarised.

Main themes that emerged from reporting of COVID- 19 student experiences during level five and three of national lockdowns

The main themes that emerged from this research are inequalities, digital migration, virtual graduation for students, mental health of students, staying at home, national level 3 lockdown – saving the calendar. These themes were dominant in both *News24* and *TimesLive* articles and stories. Inequitable access to online learning tools, particularly for pupils from poor families, was mentioned in the two online newspaper stories. According to the articles, many pupils, mostly those from disadvantaged homes, felt pressured by the digital and economic divide. The theme on digital migration emphasised how institutions were converting to paperless learning and becoming equipped for virtual learning. This included lending out laptops to pupils so they could engage in online learning. Virtual graduation of students took place because of the postponement and cancellation of the graduation ceremonies due to the COVID- 19 pandemic. Both *TimesLive* and *News24* reported how students experienced dismay over their cancelled graduation ceremonies. The focus of the national lockdown's "saving the calendar year" theme was on preserving the academic year by granting final-year students priority, requiring campuses to follow COVID- 19 prevention measures in order to welcome back students, providing data bundles for online learners, and announcing tentative academic year dates. In both newspaper sources, the theme of students' mental health predominated. As there was no set schedule for learning and discipline was required to keep up with the sessions, remote learning proved to be challenging for pupils. Students occasionally experienced bad internet connectivity, which prevented them

from learning online. The theme on staying at home illuminated sub-themes on anxiety about the future; lack of discipline to study; lack of study space; late study hours; change of routine; social media a source of comfort; poor study motivation and disturbed school calendar.

News values that attributed to the reporting between level five to three lockdown

Several news values were identified according to the news values theory by Harcup and O'Neill (2001). These included 'the power elite', 'surprise', 'bad news', 'good news', 'magnitude', 'relevance', and 'follow-ups'. However, there were no associations with the following news values; 'celebrity', 'entertainment', and 'newspaper agenda'. In the analysis, the news values were associated with the themes that emerged. for example, the news value on 'surprise' is described as stories which have an element of surprise and/or contrast. This was associated with the theme on virtual graduation of students which appeared across both news networks during the level five lockdown, first wave of the pandemic. This illuminates how articles are interpreted based on their newsworthiness and the role that the media played in unearthing the students' experiences during the COVID- 19 pandemic.

How news values that attributed to reporting on student experiences changed from the first and second waves of the pandemic

The discourse analysis has revealed that the majority of news values were construed through themes from stories/articles that were written during the first wave of the pandemic. These include 'the power elite', 'surprise', 'good news', 'magnitude', 'relevance' and 'follow-ups'. This might be because it was the first time that learning in South Africa was disrupted by a nationwide shutdown (SA, 2020). Secondly, the media reports news according to "values" at play that are likely to influence story selection (Caple, 2018, cited in Bednarek & Caple, 2017:41–42). This symbolises how the national lockdown was viewed by South Africans during the first wave and the second wave of the pandemic as something that was negative and how media outlets found it to be newsworthy in both the first wave and the second wave of the COVID- 19 pandemic (Bednarek & Caple, 2014). News values are construed from ideologies of media reporting the news and how they view a story as newsworthy (Bednarek & Caple, 2014).

Implication of findings

My research has revealed that the reporting of students' experiences during the first wave and the second wave of the pandemic was reported mainly using discourse of a negative undertone signifying the fear and anxiety that had gripped society during the COVID- 19 pandemic. News values include professional moral/ethical values that news workers adhere to and that are enshrined in codes of practice and commercial values relating to business models or economic conditions influence the selection of news (Caple, 2018). The lockdown during the first wave of the pandemic resulted in a lot of anxiety among South Africans regarding schools, businesses and health and this could have influenced how it was reported and the news values that were constructed during reporting. Comparatively, during the second wave of the pandemic only one news value on bad news was construed according to my research. This might be because of the few articles on students' experiences during the COVID- 19 pandemic because it was no longer a 'hot topic' and people were learning to live with the pandemic. It may also have been a result of some students having returned to school during the adjusted level 3 phase of the pandemic hence there was not much reporting done on students were unable to have physical classes.

Suggestions for future research

Future research could strengthen a discursive approach to news values using Bednarek and Caple (2014) framework for a larger sample, and across both print and online media. This would produce qualitative understanding of the news reporting agenda and how specific language is mobilised to support these values.

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