

# *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*



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Press News Narratives: Covering the Final Phase of the War in Sri Lanka

# Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

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2. Dr. Patrick Vyncke, Professor of Communication Management, Department of Communication Sciences, Ghent University, Belgium.

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The current issue is the second of the ninth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)*, published by the [\*Mass Media & Communication Unit\*](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
ATINER



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#### **21<sup>st</sup> Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 8-11 May 2023, Athens, Greece**

The [Mass Media & Communication Unit](#) of ATINER organizes its 20<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 9-12 May 2022, Athens, Greece sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Communications, Mass Media and other related disciplines. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2022/FORM-MED.doc>).

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- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **10 April 2023**

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## **Foreign-born Faculty Members' Teaching Experience in U.S. Mass Communication and Journalism Programs: How They Navigate Challenges**

*By Masudul Biswas\**

This study has explored pedagogical challenges that international faculty confront teaching in U.S. journalism and mass communication programs, the strategies they adopt to address some of those challenges and what roles an institution and campus diversity play as they navigate challenges. By interviewing 12 foreign-born journalism and mass communication faculty, this study has identified prejudices and misperceptions about international faculty, their accent and lack of teaching preparedness can emerge as pedagogical challenges. This research also documents the strategies that international faculty adopt to navigate these pedagogical challenges. Foreign-born faculty members also think that student diversity in the classrooms positively impacts their teaching experience on a campus.

*Keywords:* foreign-born faculty, global diversity, pedagogy, communication education, U.S. universities

### **Introduction**

International faculty in U.S. universities not only brings global perspectives to their teaching and research but also contributes to institutional diversity as well as global competitiveness of a university (Munene, 2014; Webber & Yang, 2014). Simultaneously, international faculty members confront a unique set of challenges and adjustment issues in a new work environment outside their home countries (Herget, 2016; Duru & Akinro, 2020). Past research delves into institutional support as well as the strategies that international faculty can adopt for adjustments to a new work environment and address challenges (Kim et al., 2012; Munene, 2014).

Foreign-born faculty members can be an asset for a journalism and communication program that wishes to achieve an accreditation standard focusing on global diversity. One of the nine accreditation standards set by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) is, "The unit has an inclusive program that values domestic and global diversity, and serves and reflects society" (ACEJMC, n.d.). International faculty members can enrich global diversity education in communication programs. Therefore, research in this paper examines the challenges international faculty encounter when they

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\*Associate Professor, Loyola University Maryland, USA.

teach in journalism and communication programs in U.S. universities and how they navigate those challenges.

In the U.S., the foreign-born population is anyone who is “not a U.S. citizen by birth,” including naturalized U.S. citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). International faculty who over the time become U.S. citizens are considered as foreign-born U.S. citizens. Therefore, in this paper two terms – international faculty and foreign-born faculty – are used interchangeably.

### Foreign-born Faculty Experience in U.S. Universities

Foreign-born faculty contribute to the internationalization of higher education in U.S. that enhances the breadth of student learning (Webber & Yang, 2014; Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015). In addition to their contribution to student learning, foreign-born faculty who completed their undergraduate education in another country are generally more productive in terms of research and publications than their U.S.-born peers and foreign-born professors who earned their undergraduate degrees from U.S. universities (Kim et al., 2011; Webber, 2012; Mamiseishvili, 2010). Despite their contribution to U.S. academia, foreign-born faculty confront more challenges and adjustment issues in the beginning of their teaching career compared to their pre-tenured U.S.-born counterparts (Alberts, 2008).

A number of past studies have identified these pedagogical challenges that international faculty need to deal with when they teach: their accent and language issue, prejudices and biases against them, and adjustment to U.S. academic system (Duru & Akinro, 2020; Herget, 2016; Kim et al., 2011; Manrique and Manrique, 1999). Though a non-teaching experience is not the focus of this paper, dealing with immigration process and experience of social exclusion in the academic department could add additional stress for some international faculty members that may indirectly impact their academic activities (Theobald, 2013; Corley & Sabharwal, 2007; Gahungu, 2007). International faculty experience also depends on geographic location of the campus and diversity on campus. Herget (2016) argues that teaching undergraduate students on non-urban, less diverse campuses could be more challenging for international faculty as students may not have much exposure to *foreign accent* (Herget, 2016). Therefore, international faculty often receive low score in students' course evaluation mainly because of their accent. In some cases, as Herget (2016) argues, students blame international faculty member's accent even for not doing their part in a class, such as asking the instructor questions for clarification and working on their assignments properly. Lee and Janda (2006) argue that foreign-born and minority faculty are not well-accepted by some students in less-diverse campuses where faculty and students are predominantly white.

Past research also recognized that skewed perceptions of U.S.-born students, faculty and administrators can impact international faculty experience. *Stereotypes and prejudices* about international faculty such less credible based on their nationality, race and accent can impact their work (Manrique and Manrique, 1999;

Kim et al., 2011; Duru & Akinro, 2020). Some students evaluate international lecturers based on their prejudices (Omiteru et al., 2018; Lee and Janda, 2006). Munene (2014) brings up the double standard of U.S. academia that appreciates international faculty for institution's global competitiveness and, simultaneously, overlooks the prevailing perception of international faculty as outsiders. Such experience of bias is also documented in research on faculty of color or minority faculty's academic experience. Sue et al. (2011) in their interview research reported that White students sometimes challenge the authority and knowledge of faculty of color in the classrooms. Similarly, past research also exposed biases against scholarly work by faculty of color. Some practices around tenure and promotion tends to delegitimize diversity-focused and interdisciplinary nature of research by faculty of color (Settles et al., 2022; Dotson, 2012; Bernal and Villalpando, 2002).

Additionally, in their beginning years of teaching, international faculty need to go through an adjustment process, such as navigating undergraduate student expectations and grading system and culture (Alberts, 2008; Corley & Sabharwal, 2007). In some countries, 70 – 80 percent on an assignment could be a higher grade, which is not a case in U.S. universities. Some international faculty members struggle to grapple with the situation when they find some undergraduate students expect higher grade compared to their level of efforts in an assignment (Alberts, 2008). Since students compare them with their U.S.-born peers they felt the pressure (Alberts, 2008; Corley and Sabharwal, 2007). In addition to preparing for teaching and designing and planning for courses and conducting research, such adjustment to new academic culture could be an added work for an international faculty member.

An international faculty member's job satisfaction and retention also depends on their overall experience on campus and in an academic department. Because of job dissatisfaction, more foreign-born U.S. faculty than U.S.-born faculty tend to leave their institution within five years after they get tenure (Kim et al., 2012). Therefore, it is recommended in a past study that the university administrators recognize the realities and professional interests of their international faculty, which can be different from U.S.-born faculty (Kim et al., 2012; Munene, 2014). Given the importance of such faculty experience and the fact that no past research reviewed for this study has explored international faculty experience in the context of communication and media discipline, this study seeks to explore:

**RQ 1:** What are the pedagogical challenges that foreign-born faculty members encounter while teaching at U.S. journalism and mass communication programs?

Some universities offer programs that can help international faculty members with some pedagogical challenges they encounter, such as accent reduction courses for foreign-born faculty (Herget, 2016). Some universities tailor pedagogical training sessions for non-native English speakers (Omiteru et al., 2018). Additionally, mentorship program and support from U.S. peers and administrators could be helpful in the adjustment of international faculty to a new campus and a new academic system (Foote, 2013). A department chairperson's role is key as a chair can guide a new international faculty members' faculty development process and set a tone for departmental culture of inclusion (Foote, 2013). A department

chair aware of an international faculty member's adjustment process can assign fewer new courses and less-involved committee assignments in the beginning years (Munene, 2020). Therefore, this study seeks to know:

**RQ 2:** How do international faculty navigate pedagogical challenges?

**RQ 3:** What roles an institution (i.e., university, academic unit) can play in supporting international faculty navigate challenges?

## **Method**

This study uses interview method to identify responses to three research questions -- pedagogical challenges of foreign-born faculty members teaching in journalism and mass communication programs and how they go about addressing those challenges. A semi-structured interview format was used for this study to gather rich data and nuances about international faculty experiences. Following this interview format, the researcher uses a same set of open-ended questions to gather information from the respondents (Appendix I) and asks additional or follow-up questions during interviews for the purpose of clarification and further explanation on an observation or comment made by an interviewee.

Fourteen foreign-born faculty members teaching in 12 different journalism or mass communication programs in U.S. were interviewed for this study. A past research on the experience of faculty of color in Predominantly White institution (PWI) that also used a similar qualitative interview method recruited eight faculty of color (Sue et al., 2011). This study uses two criteria for recruiting faculty members for interviews – completion of their undergraduate education outside the U.S. and their obtaining of graduate degrees (including Ph.D.) from a U.S. university. Foreign-born faculty who had gone through undergraduate education in U.S. universities became more Americanized than those who have just graduate school experience in U.S. (Kim et al., 2012). In selecting interviewees, a snowball technique was used. Author of this paper reached out to a member of academic association's international communication division. With the help of that member, author gathered a list of international faculty. During the interviews, two interviewees shared more names of international faculty that also can be interviewed.

Since there may have prejudices among some members of university community about certain countries or regions (Duru and Akinro, 2020; Omiteru et al., 2018; Lee and Janda, 2006), it is important to listen to the experiences of a diverse group of international faculty members. Purposefully-selected interviewees in this study are originally from these global regions and continents – Africa, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, and South Asia. Of these 14 interviewees, two faculty were from Africa, two faculty from East Asia, two faculty from Europe, two faculty from Latin America, two faculty from Middle East, and four faculty from South Asia. Snowball technique was also used purposefully to identify interviewees from various regions.

In accordance with the informed consent agreement, this paper will not include interview participants' names and institutional affiliations. A number of

interviewees became naturalized U.S. citizens. They were working either as a tenured or a tenure-track faculty member in the universities located in South, Midwest and Northeast. Of them, 10 faculty taught in public universities and four faculty taught in private universities during the time of interviews between 2020 - 2022. Eight of these faculty were teaching at institutions that were located in urban and demographically diverse areas. The interview pool was consisted of eight male and six female faculty members. Four of these faculty members were teaching at a program accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC). Interviewees in this research had a different level of teaching experience in U.S. universities. During the time of the interview, 10 out of 14 interviewees were teaching at a U.S. university for 5 – 15 years. Three interviewees were within first and second years of teaching as tenure-track faculty who previously taught as a doctoral student in their degree-granting institutions. One faculty member was teaching over 20 years at a U.S. university.

A thematic content analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the interview transcripts in two themes -- pedagogical challenges and pedagogical strategies. Scope of *pedagogical challenges* theme includes information about faculty experience with difficult situations, biases against them and adjustment struggle. Information such as how foreign-born faculty address those challenges, such as pedagogical techniques and utilization of institutional support, was grouped under *pedagogical strategies* theme.

## Findings

### Pedagogical Challenges

Identifying pedagogical challenges that international faculty encounter was the focus of RQ 1. Based on the interviews, this research has identified these pedagogical challenges that foreign-born faculty need to deal with while teaching at a U.S. university: lack of preparedness for undergraduate teaching, accent, experience of social exclusion and loneliness, prejudices and biases, and lack of college preparedness among students.

### Teaching Training

A faculty member observed that teaching undergraduate classes is one of the major responsibilities for a new faculty member in U.S. universities, but not all international faculty members always get enough teaching experience at their doctoral-granting institutions. In some programs, unlike U.S.-born doctoral students, international doctoral students do not get enough opportunities to teach a variety of undergraduate courses. International faculty can be familiar with graduate class environment because of their graduate education in U.S. universities; however, teaching undergraduate students can pose newer challenges for them.

***Accent***

Another common challenge that international faculty confront is with their accent or how they speak English. Five faculty members interviewed in this research mentioned that they had some difficulty communicating with students because of their pronunciation in their beginning years of teaching. One faculty member specifically mentioned that she received low score in course evaluation in her first year because of her accent. Another faculty member who later became a department chair on a less-diverse campus sees negative comments about international faculty members' accent in course evaluation. Remaining faculty members brought up the accent issue, but they did not find it a challenge for communicating with students at a relatively more diverse college campus and a campus in urban setting.

***Lack of College Preparedness among Students***

International faculty members find lack of college preparedness among undergraduate students another challenge that they share with their U.S.-born counterparts. Foreign-born faculty in their beginning semesters of teaching do not know how to manage expectations for academically struggling students. Simultaneously, they worry about poor course evaluation since course evaluation and maintaining a full-time faculty position and immigration status are interconnected. One faulty member had to lower her standards in terms of expectations in an assignment, e.g. requiring students to include two sources instead of four sources in a news writing class. She also criticized the teaching techniques advanced by her university's Center for Teaching and Learning. She observed that some of the Center's suggested strategies are to please students and make them comfortable while taking the attention away from the substance. It is important to note that faculty experience with quality of students can vary campus to campus.

***Prejudices***

International faculty members experience prejudices about them. While teaching news writing and media writing courses, two faculty members received negative comments from the students in the course evaluation as well as in the classrooms for correcting students' grammar and writing. They both felt that some students were offended since foreign-born professors had to correct their English writing. Such reaction comes from some students' misperception that foreign-born faculty may not be good in English.

Prejudices about international faculty is also connected with another student perception that they may not be a credible professor. An international faculty member commented that "Students do not expect from you much as you are an international [faculty]." He thinks that some students, particularly on a less diverse campus, tend to think that an international lecturer is not knowledgeable enough. Some students may not know that an international faculty member's native

language could be English. Another faculty member received a negative feedback on his teaching of cross-cultural journalism course because of his Middle Eastern heritage. This same faculty member also experienced an implicit bias on a more diverse campus. For example, though he made it clear to a student to address him as “Dr.” multiple times, that student keeps calling him “Mr.” From his colleagues and students he often hears, “I do not understand what you are you trying to say” though his English accent is very clear. His department chair “jokingly” told him “We do not want ISIS to recruit you” when he sought immigration support from the department.

Such student perception and implicit bias against certain foreign-born faculty members can cause stress, anxieties and job dissatisfaction among international faculty. For example, a dissatisfied faculty interviewed in this study left her former university within two years after receiving tenure and promotion. She kept doing more research to keep herself employable. At the end, she was offered a faculty position at a more-diverse institution.

### **Strategies to Address Challenges**

RQ 2 was asked to identify strategies that international faculty adopt to address pedagogical challenges. In interviews, international faculty shared their strategies in addressing some of the pedagogical challenges they encounter such as how they deal with their accent when they teach and how they navigate prejudices about them.

#### ***Dealing with Accent***

Foreign-born faculty themselves take various other approaches to make their communication and lecture understandable to students. After receiving some negative feedbacks in the beginning semester of her full-time teaching career, a faculty member would proactively read students’ nonverbal cues, e.g. facial expression, to get an idea when her instruction is not clear to the students. She would then repeat the instruction again or write the terms on PowerPoint slides or white board. In addition to these strategies, another foreign-born faculty would ask his students to repeat in American accent what he has said. Four foreign-born faculty mentioned that even after teaching for several years they still inform their students about accent on the first day of a semester and advise them to ask questions if the instruction is not clear. An experienced faculty member reflects on this accent issue differently. He thinks that orientation with his accent is an important skill for U.S. students to work in a globalized society.

#### ***Countering the Perception of Being Less Credible***

Being perceived as “less credible” educator, mainly because of their country of origin and distinct accent, is a common feeling or experience many foreign-born faculty members encounter, particularly on a less diverse, conservative campus. Some international faculty think that they need to prove their expertise

and credibility to the students even they have been teaching for several years. Taking such prevailing perception into consideration, a faculty member teaching at a less diverse campus shares his strategy to demonstrate his credibility to the students. His strategy is aligned with how some other faculty members prepare for teaching a topic/course on diversity to avoid biases. He brings in "a lot of context" which includes additional historical background to the discussion of religion and media. Despite not being a Christian, he shares his knowledge on Christianity with the students. For example, in his lecture, he tells his students that it is very common in U.S. to hear the use of Christians and Catholics separately; both are forms of Christianity and the Catholics were there for over 1000 years before reformers like Martin Luther came around. He said, "I bring in [this type of] knowledge so that [students] understand this guy is not talking trash." He wants his students to recognize that he is a knowledgeable person, and he does not always need to refer to a textbook.

Another faculty member, who grew up in India and had journalism experience in both India and U.S., finds that some students at a university in South did not find her journalism experience in India credible enough for a news writing course instructor. In her first semester of teaching news writing course, several students challenged her teaching of a storytelling structure when she was using the common textbook used by a U.S.-born faculty member in another section of news writing class. Since she had some journalism experience in U.S. between her masters and doctoral education, she began to highlight her U.S. journalism experience to present herself credible to the students.

International faculty members teaching diversity and cultural studies courses in mass communication programs feel that sometimes some students do not think that they have enough lived experience to teach such courses. In teaching a diversity course, these faculty members also face accusation of being biased by white students. Two international faculty members who teach diversity courses in journalism programs said that they spent more time preparing for their course or topic on diversity than other types of courses and topics to avoid any form of cultural biases. They incorporate research and additional background information into their lectures and presentation while sharing contemporary examples to explain the quality of cultural and racial representation. One faculty member mentioned, she thinks a lot before how she will articulate a response to a question on race and cultural difference. Another faculty member, who teaches cultural difference between Eastern and Western Cultures in an advertising class, trains her students with evidence-based approach, such as use of wide range of reference materials, to avoid cultural bias in classroom discussion and assignments on cultural differences. She thinks that her lecture on cultural differences, based statistics, research and industry reports, is a model for her students to replicate. No student had questioned her for being a culturally biased.

One faculty member mentioned that *teaching innovations* such as creating a new course and reviving an existing course in department's curriculum can get an international faculty member noticed in the department. Teaching innovation shows a faculty member's strength or expertise in the curriculum.



### **Institutional Support**

Through RQ 3, this study sought to know about the institutional support international faculty can receive to navigate pedagogical challenges. According to the interviews, international faculty members' adjustment to U.S. academic system depends on institutional support and culture. Faculty interviewees appreciated mentorship, collegiality in the department, and pedagogical training programs on campus.

### ***Mentoring Program***

Not all faculty members interviewed had a mentor assigned to him or her when they first began a full-time faculty position. For other faculty members, their departments or colleges assigned a mentor for them to offer guidance on first-year experience, tenure and promotion expectations, and teaching. Faculty members who did not have official mentors had to find a colleague or multiple colleagues in and outside their departments to seek advice and feedbacks on teaching approaches, advising, and course materials. Additionally, one faculty member sought mentoring from his professional association.

### ***Departmental Support***

All faculty interviewees, except one faculty member, experienced supportive colleagues in their departments, which was helpful for their transition into a new place. A faculty member said that his colleagues shared their syllabi with him and emailed him with their offer and availability for any assistance. A faculty member who did not have a pleasant experience with her first institution described her sentiment, "No support or guidance . . . Being international was adding insult to an injury. Chair was not helpful." One time when she brought her course evaluation to the chair's attention, she did not receive much help. Instead, her chair pointed out that her teaching score is one of the two lowest scores in the department.

### ***University-Level Programming***

About the institutional support they receive on pedagogical training, three faculty members were happy with the programs offered by their universities' professional development entities such as the Center for Faculty Success and the Teaching and Learning Center. They found these pedagogical training helpful for them as they were able to get insights on how to effectively administer both online and in-person classes and how to write a detailed class assignment clearly. One faculty member found new faculty orientation week sessions on grading, course material development and virtual class design very helpful.

## Conclusions

Similar to past research this study has identified prejudices among some students about faculty competence and accent issues as pedagogical challenges for foreign-born faculty members. Additionally, this research reveals another pedagogical challenge for international faculty teaching in a journalism and mass communication program – lack of teaching preparedness at undergraduate level. Some foreign-born doctoral students do not get as much opportunity to teach as their U.S.-born peers to gain a wide range of undergraduate teaching experience. Some of the challenges that international faculty encounter on U.S. college campuses are similar to the experiences by U.S.-born faculty of color, such as prejudices about their authority on the subject matter.

Additionally, a number of faculty, who taught in universities in rural areas and small towns, felt the pressure to *prove* their expertise and competence to the students every semester regardless of how long they have been teaching. This finding about international faculty experience is similar to experiences reported in past research, such as questioning faculty of color's authority on a subject matter (Sue et al., 2011) and scholarly devaluation (Settles et al., 2022). However, majority of the interviewees, who taught in universities located in urban and more diverse campuses, did not feel that way. Geographic location of college campuses (urban vs. rural) and level of student diversity might have influenced varied level of experiences as international faculty. Eight faculty interviewed in this research were teaching in universities located in urban areas and college campuses with more diversity.

Though an association between faculty members' racial identity and country of origin and their academic experience at a U.S. university was not one of the main areas of investigation in this study, it is alluded in the interviews how the experience of some non-European international faculty was different from a white international faculty with a country of origin in Europe. A faculty member with a country of origin in Middle East, two faculty members from countries in Africa and one South Asian faculty member shared their bias examples that had to do with their race/ethnicity and country of origin.

The idea behind ACEJMC's diversity standards as well as global diversity on campus is university community, particularly the students, will benefit from foreign-born faculty members' global perspectives. But when a faculty member feels not credible to the students for their international professional experience in a developing or least developed country, it fails the purpose of global diversity on campus. In such cases, support from the department and mentorship could be helpful. But faculty mentorship is a formal program on all college campuses.

Foreign-born faculty adopt various strategies to address pedagogical challenges with accent and misperceptions about them among some students. They also utilize institutional resources such as the teaching and faculty development centers. In the process, they also find mentoring in the department, department chair's guidance and advice from supportive colleagues helpful in their adjustment as a new faculty member.

Not necessarily a foreign-born faculty needs to teach a global communication class or global diversity topic to share firsthand international professional experience with students. Rather, having a foreign-born faculty in classrooms can itself be an international experience for students. Sometimes orientation with a foreign accent can be an important skill and experience to have to work in a globalized world.

If universities truly care about sustaining international diversity on campus, its retention plan and professional development programs should recognize the situation and realities of foreign-born faculty. A welcoming environment in the department is important for the retention of an international faculty member, too.

### Future Research

A future expansion of this research can focus on how diversity on campus and multicultural initiatives on campus can impact international faculty experience. A university with strong study abroad programs, higher level of student and faculty diversity and vibrant affinity groups programming could positively impact international faculty experience. Foreign-born faculty have more positive experience in a more diverse campus than a less diverse campus (Herget, 2016; Nealy, 2009). As it is alluded in various interviews conducted for this research, foreign-born faculty experiences on U.S. college campuses are not always negative and their teaching experience can be positive on a diverse campus. Expansion of this research could also explore the support foreign-born and educated faculty receive from other foreign-born and American-born tenured faculty members.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Interview Question Guide**

Please respond to the following questions on your teaching experience as an international faculty (i.e., foreign-born academic) in a communication and journalism discipline at a U.S. University/College. If a question does not apply to you, please respond with “Not Applicable or N/A.” A number of past research (Duru and Akinro, 2020; Omiteru et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2011; Munene, 2014) informed the development of the following question guide:

#### **Questions on Interviewee’s/Participant’s Backgrounds**

1. Institutional Affiliation?
2. Is it a public or private institution?
3. Academic Rank (e.g. Associate Professor)?
4. Gender?
5. Country of Origin?
6. Academic discipline (e.g. Journalism)?
7. Is it an ACEJMC-accredited program? ACEJMC stands for Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
8. How long have you lived in the United States?
9. How long have you been a full-time university faculty?
10. Did you earn your graduate education from a U.S. university? If so, what is/are the name(s) of the university/universities?
11. How many institutions have you worked for thus far as a full-time faculty? How long have you been working in your current institution?
12. What did you use to do professionally before moving to U.S.?

#### **Teaching and Career-focused Questions:**

13. Can you explain some of the challenges you have encountered teaching as an international faculty at a U.S. university?

14. Were you able to address the challenges you mentioned in response to Q.13? If yes, how did you resolve them? If no, how do you cope with such challenges?
  15. Did you teach a course on diversity or global issues in communication or media? If so, what was your experience of teaching that course in terms of student evaluation and your personal satisfaction?
- If it is applicable in your case, how do you bring in your professional experience of working in another country to U.S. students?
16. How diverse is your major's student body and faculty? Depending on how diverse your program is, how did it impact your teaching and other academic activities on campus?
  17. What were the roles of your department colleagues and the university to help with your transition to teaching at a new institution?
  18. As an international faculty member, did you feel you were treated differently from other faculty members who are not international? If so, how?
  19. Did your university/department assign a mentor? Or did you seek mentoring from somewhere else? Are/were you happy with the guidance you received on how to be successful with teaching and tenure and promotion process?

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## **Understanding How News Content Utilizes Experiential Media (AR, VR, and 360° Video) in COVID-19 Storytelling**

*By Shravan Regret Iyer\**

A growing body of research indicates how experiential media (EM) technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and 360° video are diffusing widely around the world, thereby transforming media practices and the user experience. The current study looks at immersive news content production (EM stories) that seek to inform the public on how the COVID-19 virus spreads, the precautions required to protect from getting infected by the virus, and a general understanding of COVID-19 as a pandemic. Based on a list of six criteria, a total of six EM stories (two AR stories by the New York Times (NYT), two 360° video stories by National Geographic (Nat Geo), and two VR stories by Meta's Oculus App in collaboration with other media organizations) were identified for the study. This exploratory study uses qualitative research methodology and the Experiential Media theoretical framework to understand to 1) what extent such immersive news content production utilizes the six EM qualities in COVID-19 storytelling? 2) what themes do such EM stories and the accompanying static news story reported online cover? 3) what new knowledge, if any, do such EM stories provide compared to the accompanying static news story online? The findings from the study offer a theoretical understanding of the role EM technologies play in highlighting global health crisis such as COVID-19, particularly through immersive 3D visualizations, and provides practical implications for EM content producers.

*Keywords:* experiential media, augmented reality, virtual reality, 360° video, COVID-19, news

### **Introduction**

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been a deadly pandemic in history, infecting close to 540.9 million people and claiming the lives of around 6.3 million people worldwide since December 2019 (CNN, 2022). Furthermore, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the media has played a critical role in keeping people connected and well-informed about the disease and how it spreads. While traditional media and text-based news content online play an important role in creating awareness, an emerging form of media known as experiential media (EM) – which refers to communication platforms or technical interfaces such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and 360° video – through its various multisensory and immersive qualities – enables users to make practical contact or experience with the phenomena virtually. Further, the potential to put the user as part of the story

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\*PhD Candidate, Rutgers University, USA.

or journey in the first-person point of view instead of passively watching, listening, or reading a narrative from a third-person point of view is also being used in COVID-19 storytelling. This study examines such immersive news content production (henceforth called EM stories in this paper) that seeks to inform the public on how the virus spreads, the precautions required to protect from getting infected by the virus, and a general understanding of COVID-19 as a pandemic. The study seeks to understand how and to what extent such immersive stories utilize qualities of EM in COVID-19 storytelling and what themes and new knowledge such content production provides.

## **Review of Literature**

A growing body of research indicates that EM technologies such as AR, VR, and 360° video are transforming media practices, content, and the user experience. Today, through multisensory qualities, EM technologies offer the user the potential to replace real-world experiences, including sight, sound, and haptics, through computer-generated illusions where the user can navigate and interact (Bates-Brkljac, 2011). In explaining how the user is not passive but can be interactive in such a digital sphere, Domínguez (2017) writes:

“Currently, immersive technologies give a sensory quality to the metaphors of literary immersion: the sensation of feeling oneself transported to the narrative world and being able to perform within it. To be inside the image, move around it, hear the sounds of the scene in three-dimensional quality, and choose what to see at every moment are the most developed expressive characteristics so far, and of these, immersive VR is their maximum component” (p. 9).

Further, studies have explored how such EM technologies are transforming user experience by increasing the sense of presence and empathy. In exploring this phenomenon, Sundar et al. (2017) in the study showed how participants indicated stories experienced in VR significantly outperformed text-based articles in several categories, such as giving them a sense of presence or the feeling of being there and increasing their empathy for the story’s characters. Similarly, Archer and Finger (2018), in a study to understand whether 360° video news stories generate empathy in viewers, examined how particular audiences are likely to respond empathetically to certain narratives and analyzed the component parts of immersive experiences – comfort level, interactivity, and perceived amount of user agency – that contribute to producing an empathetic response. Archer and Finger (2018) highlighted what might be the advantage of such a response, including improvement in a viewer’s ability to recall the content over time or a resulting behavioral change. Furthermore, studies have also explored how users respond to 360° video news and investigate what 360° video as a means for conveying news stories might add to traditional 2D video. Vettehen et al. (2019) found that 360° video was evaluated higher in terms of presence, enjoyment, and credibility, while there were no negative effects of 360° video on recognition and understanding. The researchers found that the effects on enjoyment and credibility are mediated by the presence and indicated



that the 360° video form of news reporting has the potential to involve audiences as never before. Such studies also offer practical implications on how EM technologies like VR may help journalists pull an audience into their stories.

Meanwhile, scholarly work in health science also indicates the increase in the use of such EM technologies for a better understanding of COVID-19, considering the novelty of such a pandemic. Calvelo et al. (2020) used VR to visualize the three-dimensional biomolecular structures of SARS-CoV-2 to open the possibilities for significant advances in understanding the disease-associated mechanisms and to boost new therapies and treatments. Calvelo et al. (2020) reviewed software implementations currently available for VR visualization of SARS-CoV-2 molecular structures, covering a range of virtual environments, including desktop and web-based software such as VRmol, ProteinVR, Molecular Rift, Nanome, Autodesk Molecular Viewer, iview, etc., that allows users for VR visualization of the virus using virtual reality headsets such as HTC Vive, Vive Pro, Oculus Rift, etc., and cell phone applications such as PROteinVR and Corona VRus Coaster that allows users for VR visualization of the virus using iPhone, and Android smartphones. Similarly, Pears et al. (2020) examined the role of immersive technologies in healthcare education during the COVID-19 pandemic. They identified the innovative uses of immersive media technologies to deliver medical education while maintaining the safety of residents and educators. Furthermore, studies though not related to COVID-19, such as Nowak et al. (2020), showed how using immersive VR improved the beliefs and intentions of influenza vaccine-avoidant 18-to-49-year-olds. Nowak et al. (2020) found that the VR intervention created a stronger perception of presence (i.e., a feeling of “being there” in the story), which, in turn, increased participants’ concern about transmitting influenza to others and raised vaccination intention.

While a large body of studies has continued to explore the role of EM technologies in generating empathy, increasing a sense of presence, and driving behavioral changes, a growing body of research has also explored the role of EM technologies in the 3D visualization of abstract topics that are psychologically distant such as raise in sea-level, greenhouse gas emissions or climate change more broadly (Calil et al., 2021; O'Neill and Smith, 2014).

Considering the role of EM technologies in addressing the challenges in science communication and the fact that there is limited scholarly work, particularly exploring EM and COVID-19 storytelling, this study attempts to fill the research gap by examining how and to what extent EM qualities are utilized by immersive news content production; to identify important themes and new knowledge such immersive experiences provide compared to the liner/static text online. This exploratory study will use a qualitative research methodology and is guided by the following research question:

**RQ1:** *To what extent do immersive news content production (experiential media stories) utilize qualities of experiential media (i.e., interaction, immersion, multi-sensory presentation, algorithm and data, first-person perspective, and the natural user interface) in COVID-19 storytelling?*

**RQ2:** *What themes do such experiential media stories and the accompanying static news story online cover?*

**RQ3:** *What new knowledge, if any, do such experiential media stories provide compared to the accompanying static news story online?*

## Theoretical Foundations

This study builds on Pavlik's (2018) model of experiential media, which focuses on six primary qualities of the digital environment, namely: (1) interactivity, (2) immersion, (3) multi-sensory presentation, (4) algorithm and data, (5) first-person perspective, and (6) a natural user interface. The EM model provides a framework to understand how EM is transforming the role of the audience to be more of an active user who experiences stories as a participant rather than an audience member who tend to passively watch, listen or read the narrative from a third-person's perspective, i.e., how "experiential media enables the user not just to experience the medium, but also to participate or engage in a story or content itself" (Pavlik, 2018, p. 49).

## Methodology

This part of the study was conducted in four steps, namely: (Step 1) to identify immersive news stories (EM stories and the accompanying static news story online); (Step 2) to identify important themes covered by the static online news story that accompanies the EM story; (Step 3) to understand how such EM stories utilize qualities of EM; and (Step 4) to understand what new knowledge such EM stories provide compared to that of the accompanying static online news story reporting on the same topic by the same organization. The study involved line-by-line coding and memo-writing technique (Charmaz, 2014) for data collection and analysis. A line-by-line coding method was used to look for codes and derive important themes/categories from the static online news stories.

"Line-by-line coding is a heuristic device to bring researchers into the data, interact with them, and study each fragment. Such a coding approach helps to define implicit meanings and actions, gives researchers directions to explore and spurs in making comparisons between data, and suggests emergent links between processes in the data to pursue and check. The codes also illuminate the situations in which these events occur; readers gain a sense of what is happening in this statement and how it happens" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 222).

Further, pullout or illustrative quotes were identified as important data during line-by-line coding and analysis of the static online news story/text. A pull quote, also known as a lift-out pull quote in journalism/media studies, is a key phrase, quotation, or excerpt that has been pulled from an article to highlight a key topic. Further, the memo-writing process was adopted throughout the experience and observation of EM stories – where memo writing constitutes an important method in this study as it prompts the analysis of the data and codes. This process helped define each code or category by its analytic properties, comparing codes and codes, codes and categories, and categories and categories. The Memo-writing

process also helped sort and order codes and categories as part of data analysis. The data collection and analysis of EM stories were conducted between March and May 2021.

## **Research Tools**

This study involved research tools, including an iPhone 12 Pro Max with light detection and ranging (LiDAR) sensor for AR content experience, and an Oculus Quest 2, VR head-mounted display (HMD) with touch controllers and 3D positional audio for VR and 360° video experience. Further, qualitative data in the form of memos were gathered from observation of the AR, VR, and 360° video immersive news content pertaining to COVID-19.

## **Step 1 - Identifying EM Stories and the Accompanying Static News Story Online**

A list of six criteria to identify EM stories (AR, VR, and 360° video immersive news content) and the accompanying static news story online (i.e., non-interactive and without having to be generated, modified, or processed) was developed considering the scope and significance of the current study which includes the role of EM news stories in informing about COVID-19 virus, health risks and precautionary measures. The six criteria include: (1) the news contents should relate to the COVID-19 pandemic, and reporting should involve experiential media as an accompanying storytelling component to the static online news content; (2) the news contents/stories should seek to inform the public on how the virus spreads; (3) the precautions required to protect from getting infected with the virus; (4) should inform about the lockdown during COVID-19; (5) the point of view of first responders; (6) any general guidelines (by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and/or World Health Organization) on the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

Three important media platforms were considered for the study to identify EM stories. The platforms include (1) New York Times (NYT), (2) National Geographic (Nat Geo), and (3) Meta's Oculus. The above three media organizations were chosen for the study as they are active producers of EM content production on various journalism beats, including health. Hence as part of this Step 1 of the methodology, a total of six EM stories (two AR stories by the New York Times (NYT), two 360° video stories by National Geographic (Nat Geo), and two VR stories by Meta's Oculus App in collaboration with other media organizations) were identified for the study based on the above criteria.

## **AR Stories Identified for the Study**

The search for AR stories on *New York Times* official website (nytimes.com) revealed 14 AR stories, of which only three were related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the three stories, only two AR stories met the study criteria for

selecting news content/stories for this study, as highlighted in Table 1. The two AR stories selected for this study are: (1) ‘Masks Work. Really. We’ll Show You How’, published/produced by NYT in Oct 2020; and (2) ‘Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools’, published/produced by NYT in Feb 2021.

*Table 1.* List of Augmented Reality (AR) Stories Identified for the Study

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Publisher/Producer</b>
Masks Work. Really. We’ll Show You How	October, 2020	New York Times
Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools	February, 2021	New York Times

### **VR Stories Identified for the Study**

The search for VR stories on Meta’s Oculus App revealed a total of 25 VR experiences, of which only seven VR experiences met the criteria for selecting stories for this study. Of the seven VR experiences, five stories were related to ‘Inside COVID-19’, a four-part series produced by Meta’s Oculus in collaboration with Wisdom VR Project for Oculus Mobile Application. A full-length version of the ‘Inside COVID-19’ VR experiences/content was available along with the four-part series. Hence the full-length Inside COVID-19 VR experience/content was considered for the study. Meanwhile, the other two VR experiences were related to the ‘COVID-19 Mystery’, a two-part series produced by Explore Media for the Oculus app. Only Part One of the series was considered for this study based on the broader criteria set for the selection of stories and considering the limit (set by the researcher) to select only two EM stories per EM technology (i.e., AR, VR, and 360° videos) for this study.

The two VR stories (highlighted in Table 2) selected for this study are: (1) Inside COVID-19, produced by Meta’s Oculus in collaboration with Wisdom VR Project in Nov 2020; and (2) The COVID-19 Mystery, produced by Explore Media in Dec 2020.

*Table 2.* List of Virtual Reality (VR) Stories Identified for the Study

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Publisher/Producer</b>
Inside COVID-19	November, 2020	35.37 mins	Meta’s Oculus in collaboration with Wisdom VR Project
The COVID-19 Mystery – Part One	December, 2020	8.05 mins	Explore Media

### **360° Video Stories Identified for the Study**

The search for 360° videos on National Geographic’s official website (nationalgeographic.com) revealed only two 360° videos (highlighted in Table 3) related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both stories met the criteria and were considered for this study. The two 360° video stories selected are (1) Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy – 360, produced by National Geographic in Nov 2020,

and (2) Lockdown Around the World, produced by National Geographic in May 2020.

**Table 3.** *List of 360° Videos Identified for the Study*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Publisher/Producer</b>
Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy – 360	November, 2020	3:14 mins	National Geographic
Lockdown Around the World	May, 2020	7:40 mins	National Geographic

Meanwhile, all the six EM stories identified for this study were produced in the time frame of December 2019 till March 2021.

## Findings

### Step 2 - Identifying Important Themes Covered by the Static Online News Content Accompanying the EM Story

As part of this Step 2 to identify the important themes covered by the static online news stories/text that accompanied the EM stories (i.e., news content/immersive experience), a line-by-line coding method was adopted to look for codes and derive important themes/categories from the static online news stories. Based on findings from line-by-line coding and the list of important pull quotes/illustrative quotes, and from the memo-writing process, a list of codes and their definitions, pull quotes/illustrative quotes (without any names or designations and used only to highlight the importance of the topic), and categories/themes generated from the overall data was created both to present the findings from Step 2 and to guide the researcher in Step 3 and Step 4 of the analysis process. The Codebook (Appendix 1) with findings from Step 2 and Step 3 is included in the Appendix section of this paper.

Findings from Step 2 i.e., thematic analysis of all six static online news stories/text

#### *(1) Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How*

The static online news story/text titled “Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How,” revealed important themes and categories/codes including: Public Debate on masks - to protect oneself and others; Effectiveness of Masks – fighting the pandemic and reduce the transmission; Masks (styles and materials); Materials (woven) such as cotton and other fabrics; Materials (non-woven) - materials N95 masks made of synthetic materials; N95 effectiveness - to reduce respiratory droplets; Aerosols - Coronavirus airborne particles; Filtration efficiency – Woven and non-woven materials used in masks; N95 - electrostatic charge to attract and capture particles; Laws of Physics - influence how particles interact with the fiber; COVID-19 (small particle) - not easy to trap/filter, air molecules, zigzag pattern; COVID-19 (large particles) - easy to trap/filter; COVID-19 (medium size particles) - hardest to trap/filter; N95 filters - at least 95 percent of elusive medium particles

and even large and small particles; Masks (shapes and sizes) defines efficiency; Bad Masks - loose-fitting masks allow aerosols to leak; Good Masks with small breathing zone - tight fit with edges and shape that leaves space around nostrils and mouth; Masks (everyone wearing a mask) increases the combined filtration efficiency; Good Ventilation - reduce transmission of COVID-19; and finally Social Distancing (six feet distance) - reduces transmission of COVID-19.

*Illustrative quotes identified from 'Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How'*

Effectiveness of Masks:

"It's become clear that cloth masks, even though they're not as effective as the N95s, are still effective at reducing transmission. Even if you're not achieving that 95 percent reduction, something is better than nothing."

Protecting the Community, and Moral:

"When you wear a mask, you protect yourself, you protect others, you prevent yourself from touching your face, and you signal that wearing a mask is the right thing to do."

*(2) Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools*

The static online news story/text titled "*Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools*" revealed important themes and categories/codes including:

Concerns and Questions: by Parents and Teacher on School reopening; Quality of Ventilation – in the Public School Classrooms to protect students against the coronavirus; Importance of Building Engineering - specializing in building systems; Pre-COVID Classroom– classroom occupants i.e., 30 students in a classroom; Classroom During COVID-19 – limited classroom seats i.e., nine students; Importance of Wearing Masks - all students should wear typical cloth face masks, facing forward and sitting six feet apart; Lack of Ventilation - With all of the windows closed, the room would lack sufficient ventilation; Protocols - strict protocols in place for reopening schools, and to reduce in-school transmission and classrooms must have windows that open; Social Distancing (six feet distance) - Students must practice social distancing and wear masks; COVID-19 is Airborne - problems with an airborne virus; Masks Not Sufficient - While students wear masks, their breath still circulates and mixes around the room; Virus Transmission In-doors - about 3 percent of the air each person in the room breathes will be exhaled by other people; Asymptomatic - Even students who look healthy may be asymptomatic carriers who can transmit the virus; Infected Students (windows closed) - the student's warm breath as it rises, begins to disperse contaminated respiratory aerosols throughout the room; Infected Students (windows open): The fresh air dilutes the contaminants as they move around the room; Good ventilation - Good ventilation is the most effective and practical way to rid a space of contaminants. Reopening Schools Recommendations - The Healthy Buildings program recommends four to six air exchanges per hour in classrooms through any

combination of ventilation and filtration; Fan and Air Cleaner - increased fresh air blowing into the room and the filtered air coming from the air cleaner help to further dilute the contaminants as they spread in the space.

*Illustrative quotes identified from 'Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools'*

Transmission of Virus:

“While we still do not know exactly what level of contamination presents, the greatest risk of infection exposure is a function of concentration and time.”

Good Ventilation and Use of Fans and Air Cleaners:

“Simple and inexpensive measures can make schools much safer.”

*(3) Inside COVID-19*

The static online news story/text titled “*Inside COVID-19*” revealed important themes and categories/codes, including Frontline Workers - working to prepare the emergency departments at hospitals to weather the impending storm/pandemic; Struggles - of Medical, political and societal responses to COVID-19; 3D visualization - 3D animations that reveal the microscopic layer of the virus's spread through the body and our population; Importance of 3D COVID-19 Visualization - A virus is invisible to the eye, but 3D animation is perfect for illustrating exactly COVID-19; Breaking the Fourth Wall - The ability to break the fourth wall (traditional media) and share stories directly with the users using VR; Global Urgency - the global tragedy of the pandemic.

*Illustrative quotes identified from Inside COVID-19*

Immersive:

“When a viewer is experiencing a dramatic story in a headset, completely surrounded by hyper-real stereoscopic 360° imagery, this feeling is heightened even further. We make sure that every shot being experienced belongs in the story and is filmed in a way that is heightened by being in a headset. This technique gives us a way to cut through the confusion we all have about the pandemic.”

Empathy and Awareness:

“Many people might not know someone who's been so deeply affected by COVID-19, but after watching our piece you'll come away from it feeling that you do. Our goal is to orient viewers more deeply into the human scale of the pandemic and help them to stay safe.”



*(4) The COVID-19 Mystery*

The static online news story/text titled “*The COVID-19 Mystery*” revealed important themes and categories/codes including COVID-19 - the global pandemic that ranges on unrelenting; Mystery - how some countries rank higher in controlling the pandemic compared to other countries; COVID-19 statistics - The number of COVID-19 cases; Controlling the Pandemic - Factors surrounding the remarkable medical achievements; Solutions - Attempt to bring reduce the COVID-19 crisis.

*Illustrative quotes identified from The COVID-19 Mystery**Mystery of COVID-19:*

“How did Thailand rank second only to New Zealand in controlling the spread of Covid-19? We will look at the factors surrounding this remarkable medical achievement and attempt to solve the Covid-19 Mystery of How Did Thailand Do It?”

*(5) Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy – 360*

The static online news story/text titled “*Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy*” revealed important themes and categories/codes, including Art and COVID-19 - How art helps us make sense of COVID-19 incomprehensible toll; Creative and Symbolic Ways - to come to terms with the tragic milestone (COVID-19 Deaths); Art Installations - a field of more than 248,000 white flags rippling in the breeze in Washington, D.C.,— one for each person who has died from COVID-19 in America; Humanizing the Statistics - as the death toll becomes increasingly difficult to comprehend, people across the country, including artists are doing what they can to humanize the statistics and create spaces for mourning; Planting Flags - artists and volunteers have planted roughly a thousand small surveyor flags daily to keep up with the rising number of deaths.

*Illustrative quotes identified from Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy**Humanizing the Statistics:*

“Look at a single flag. Now conjure up a story. Think of it as a schoolteacher who just lost her life. Try to hold all that grief—and then look up and multiply.”

*Embodying Grief:*

“People needed a place to come. Even if they couldn’t come here physically, they needed an emotional place to understand that their loved one was acknowledged.”

*Planting Flags:*

“This is my way of saying, We miss you. We are still going to live on, but you’re not forgotten. That’s why I plant flags every day.”



*(6) Lockdown Around the World*

The static online news story/text titled “Lockdown Around the World” revealed important themes and categories/codes, including Lockdown - amidst the pandemic, many cities and countries around the world went into lockdown, attempting to combat the COVID-19 pandemic; Restricting movements – as an impact of lockdown; Social Distancing – following six feet distance; Worldwide Solutions – lockdown as an attempt to bring down COVID-19 pandemic.

*Illustrative quotes identified from Lockdown Around the World***Lockdown:**

“In March 2020, many cities and countries around the world went into lockdown, restricting movement and encouraging social distancing in an attempt to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.”

**Step 3 - Understanding How Each EM Story Utilize Qualities of EM (EM Model)**

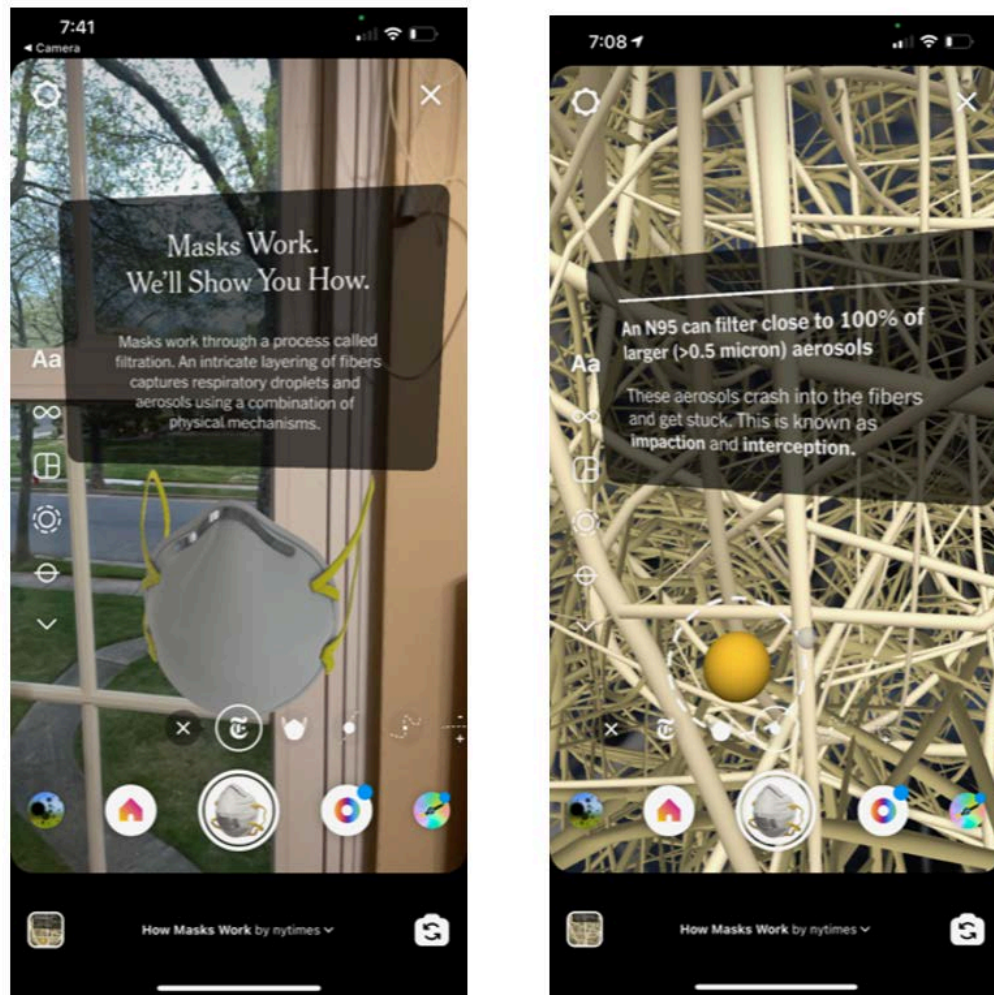
To understand to what extent the six EM stories identified for the study utilize qualities of experiential media (the six qualities identified in the EM model are namely: (1) interaction; (2) immersion; (3) multi-sensory presentation; (4) algorithm and data; (5) first-person perspective; (6) and the natural user interface), each story was experienced using EM tools such as iPhone 12 Pro Max with LiDAR sensor for AR news content production; Oculus Quest 2, a VR Head Mounted Display (HMD) used for VR and 360° video news content experience; and observations were recorded in the form of memos. The EM stories were experienced in a closed environment free of any distraction and examined each story for the six EM qualities (identified in the experiential media model and stated above). A list of important codes; definitions; pull quotes/illustrative quotes; etic/theoretical codes (codes identified in the data that connect to the theoretical foundations of this study, i.e., experiential media model); and important categories/themes from each EM story were noted as part of this Step 3 methodology, and the same has been included in the Codebook in the Appendix section of this paper.

**Findings from the Analysis of Augmented Reality (AR) Stories:*****Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How***

This AR story published/produced by the New York Times in October 2020 highlights the importance of wearing a mask during the COVID-19 pandemic. This AR story, that can be experienced on a smartphone through Meta's Instagram app, allows the user to take a deeper look at the inner workings of the N95 respirator/masks – where the AR experience provides a magnified view of the synthetic fibers of N95 and how such fibers filters aerosols. The AR experience is

not timed, and the user can switch back and forth between different stages or chapters during the immersive experience. At first, the user is given a quick look at how an N95 respirator looks, along with a description of its high efficiency in filtering microscopic airborne droplets, which can carry the coronavirus. Upon a touch/tap on the screen, the user is given a perspective on the size of an aerosol compared to that of a human, where the text on the screen reads, “if you were a human-size aerosol, you would have to travel through about 1.7 miles of fibers to reach the other side of the N95 respirator.” In terms of the EM qualities this immersive experience utilizes, the observations showed that the storyline was from the first-person perspective, as if the user was inside the N95 respirator, exploring the inner workings of the fibers and how it filters microscopic droplets that cause COVID-19. In terms of *immersion*, the researcher observed the 6 Degrees of Freedom (DOF), where the user had an opportunity to walk around (forward and step back) to take a closer look at the fibers and particles inside the respirator and also look up, down, left and right. In terms of the use of *multisensory engagement*, the researcher did not notice any haptic feedback, despite the actual experience requiring a touch/tap on the screen to proceed to the next stage of the immersive journey/experience. The researcher also observed that overall, there was zero latency (i.e., no delay) in terms of consumption of the content; this was possibly due to the advanced LiDAR sensor used in the iPhone 12 Pro Max that has the potential to trigger AR content faster and provide a seamless AR experience. The observation also showed no use of gaze or voice commands as use of a natural user interface. The researcher also did not notice any sound effects or background music, which helped heighten the sense of presence as the researcher was experiencing the AR content in his living space, i.e., where the AR overlays were triggered. Figure 1 highlights screenshots from ‘Masks Work. Really. We’ll Show You How’ AR experience.

Figure 1. Screenshots of 'Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How' AR Experience



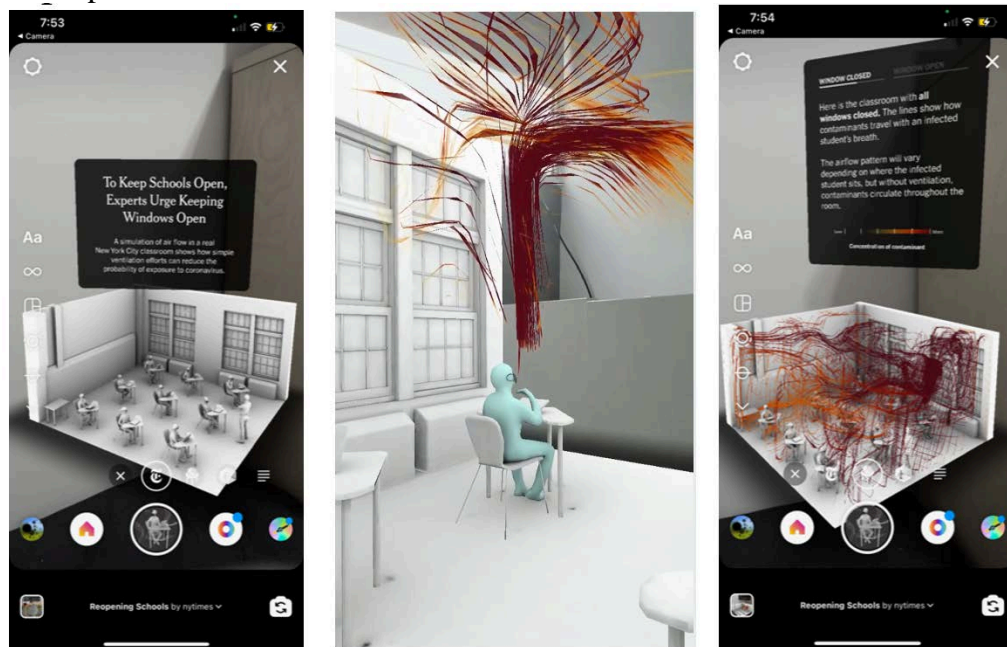
### ***Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools***

This AR story, published/produced by the New York Times in February 2021, highlights the importance of ventilation in a classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. This AR story that can be experienced in the living space of the user on a smartphone through Meta's Instagram app allows the user to step inside a classroom to understand how the coronavirus/contaminants spread indoors. Similar to the 'Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How' AR experience, 'Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools' is also not timed, and the user can switch back and forth between different stages or scenarios during the immersive experience journey. In this AR experience, the user is shown a simulation of airflow in a real New York City classroom, showing how simple ventilation efforts can reduce the probability of coronavirus exposure. At first, the user, from a bird's eye view, is shown a scenario where the classroom windows are closed. At this stage of the AR experience, the user can see how the contaminants travel with an

infected student's breath. The graphical illustration of the airflow pattern shows how the airflow pattern varies depending on where the infected student sits. In another scenario, the windows of the classroom are kept open, and here due to the fresh flow of air, there is a drastic drop in overall contamination.

In terms of the EM qualities this immersive experience utilizes, the researcher observed the storyline to be from the first-person perspective as if the user was inside the New York City classroom, understanding how the coronavirus/contaminants spread with windows closed, thereby infecting more students in the classroom, and how with proper ventilation this spread of the COVID-19 can be prevented. In terms of *immersion*, the researcher *observed* 6 DOF, where the user had an opportunity to walk around (forward and step-back) to take a closer look at the classroom, and also look up, down, left, and right. In terms of the use of *multisensory engagement*, the researcher did not notice any haptic feedback, despite the experience requiring a touch/tap on the screen to proceed to the next stage of the immersive journey/experience. The researcher also observed that overall, there was zero latency (i.e., no delay) in terms of consumption of the content. The observation also showed no use of gaze or voice commands as use of a natural user interface. The researcher also did not notice any sound effects or background music, which helped heighten the sense of presence as the researcher was experiencing the AR content in his living space, i.e., where the AR overlays were triggered. Figure 2 highlights screenshots from 'Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools' AR experience.

Figure 2. Screenshots of 'Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools' AR Experience





## Findings from the Analysis of Virtual Reality (VR) Stories

### *Inside COVID-19*

The VR experience opens with the sound of a person inhaling and exhaling deep breaths and the 3D animation of particles that follow the rhythm of the breath. This scene is followed by a family sitting in their living room watching the news of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The scene transitions to Dr. Josiah Child, a physician and a frontline healthcare personnel whom the VR experience/content follows as he goes through the challenges of the pandemic and even getting infected. The VR experience uses real-world 360° footage and artistic impression of a novel coronavirus and other graphical illustrations throughout the VR experience. In terms of the EM qualities this immersive experience utilizes, the researcher observed the storyline to be from both the first-person and third-person perspectives narrative. Dr. Child is sometimes seen explaining the gravity of the problem directly to the 360° camera, sometimes making it feel both as if the doctor is talking directly to the user and sometimes from a 3rd-person point of view when the doctor is in conversation with the patients in the care unit and other staff in the hospital.

In terms of *immersion*, the researcher observed that though the actual content is a 360° video with 3 DOF, the sudden movement of the visuals from the birds-eye-view of the earth or the 3D visualization of the coronavirus itself made the researcher feel 6 DOF, although the movement was restricted. In terms of the use of *multisensory engagement*, since the researcher experienced the content on Oculus Quest 2 HMD, the process of viewing the 360° VR content involved the use of haptic-enabled controllers to pause, play, forward, rewind, etc., where the controllers made vibrations (i.e., send haptic feedback every time the controller buttons were triggered). The fact that Quest 2 has inbuilt speakers with 3D sound enhanced the overall immersive experience with a sense of multisensory engagement. Meta's Oculus App with Oculus Quest HMD is the only platform where this VR content can be experienced. The researcher observed that overall, there was zero latency (i.e., no delay) in terms of content consumption. But the observation showed that there was no use of touch, gaze, or voice commands as use of a natural user interface. In terms of the duration of the content, this immersive experience was about 35.37 mins long. The researcher felt the sense of presence heightened through the VR experience and the ambiance sound of the hospital, living room, forests, etc., added to the sense of presence. Figure 3 highlights screenshots from 'Inside COVID-19' VR experience.

Figure 3. Screenshots of Inside COVID-19 VR Experience



### ***The COVID-19 Mystery – Part One***

The COVID-19 Mystery VR experience opens with a view of the user as a patient on the bed inside the hospital with friends, and family members gathered around to help the user relieve pain and suffering. The scene transitions to the user on the same bed, but this time with no family members or friends around to talk to; this shows the novelty of the pandemic and the grave threat it poses. The scene gets even more complicated with the hospital room filled with COVID-19 particles and the patient alone in the isolation ward. This transitions to the heart rate and monitors sound danger warnings, and then the patient, i.e., the user, takes the last breath before death. The VR experience shows this as the unimaginable way more than 1.4 million people who lost their lives since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the EM qualities this immersive experience utilizes, the researcher found the opening few scenarios to be from the first-person narrative while most of the experience/content was in the third-person perspective.

In terms of *immersion*, the researcher observed only 3 DOF. Further, similar to the Inside COVID-19 VR experience, in terms of the use of *multisensory engagement*, since the researcher experienced the content on Oculus Quest 2 HMD, the process of viewing the 360° VR content involved the use of haptic-enabled controllers to pause, play, forward, rewind, etc., where the controllers made vibrations (i.e., send haptic feedback every time the controller buttons were triggered). The fact that Quest 2 has inbuilt speakers with 3D sound enhanced the overall immersive experience with a sense of multisensory engagement. The researcher observed that overall, there was zero latency (i.e., no delay) in terms of content consumption. However, the observation showed that there was no use of touch, gaze, or voice commands as use of a natural user interface.

In terms of the duration of the content, this immersive experience was about 8.05 mins long. The researcher felt the sense of presence heightened through the VR experience and the ambient sound of the hospital, which added to the sense of presence. Figure 4 highlights screenshots from 'The COVID-19 Mystery – Part One' VR experience.

*Figure 4. Screenshots of the COVID-19 Mystery – Part One VR Experience*



### **Findings from the Analysis of 360° Video EM Stories**

#### ***Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy – 360***

Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy is a 360° immersive video produced by National Geographic in Nov 2020. This 360° video highlights the use of art as a creative and symbolic way to come to terms with the tragic milestone, i.e., 250,000 deaths in the United States due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the EM qualities this immersive experience utilizes, the researcher observed the storyline to be from the first-person perspective as if the user was present at the art installation and saw the artist and the volunteers updating the installation, i.e., plating of flags to reflect the rising death count, by changing the numbers and adding more flags in Washington, D.C. In terms of immersion, the researcher observed only 3 DOF, i.e., (up/down, left/right, and forward/back), but with different camera angles such as the birds-eye view, ground-level view, and human-eye level view of the art installation.

In terms of the use of multisensory engagement, since the researcher experienced the content on Oculus Quest 2 HMD, the process of viewing the 360° video content involved the use of haptic-enabled controllers to pause, play, forward, rewind, etc., where the controllers made vibrations (i.e., send haptic feedback every time the controller buttons were triggered). The fact that Quest 2 has inbuilt speakers with 3D sound enhanced the overall immersive experience with a sense of multisensory

engagement. This might not be an immersive experience for those who view this 360° content on a smartphone or a laptop. The researchers observed that overall, there was zero latency (i.e., no delay) in terms of content consumption. However, the observation showed that there was no use of touch, gaze, or voice commands as use of a natural user interface. In terms of the duration of the content, this immersive experience is timed and is 3:14 mins long. Using a first-person narrative storyline and the wide array of visual/camera angles made it a memorable virtual experience. This immersive 360° video experience did heighten the sense of presence, considering the use of the first-person point of view. The researcher also noticed the use of the artists' voices in the background (with ambiance sound) explaining their art installation, which makes the user again feel a heightened sense of presence. Figure 5 highlights screenshots from 'Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy', 360° experience.

Figure 5. Screenshot of Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy, 360° Experience



### ***Lockdown around the World***

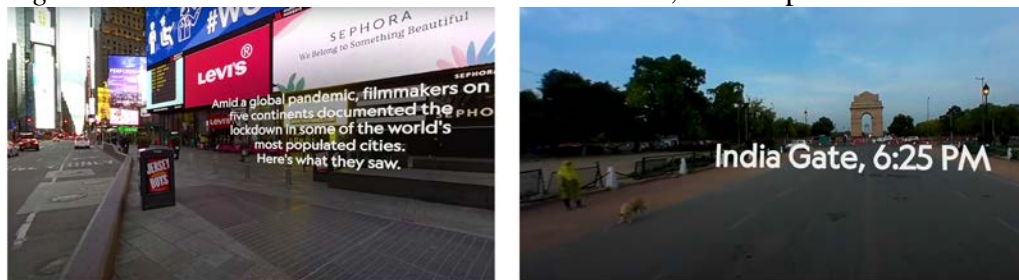
Lockdown around the World is a 360° immersive video produced by National Geographic in May 2020. This 360° video highlighted the impact of COVID-19 in early 2020 when many cities and countries worldwide went into lockdown, restricting movement and encouraging social distancing to bring down the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the EM qualities this immersive experience utilizes, the researcher observed the storyline to be from the first-person perspective as if the user was present with those actual locations witnessing the impact of lockdown. In the opening scene of the 360° video, the user can feel standing on the empty streets and footpath of Times Square, which is arguably the busiest street in the world pre-pandemic. In the later part of the 360° video, the researcher felt experienced lockdown in the first-person perspective in other countries such as Australia, India, South Africa, and Germany. The voiceover of the filmmakers from respective countries explaining the impact of COVID-19 added more to the experience, including additional knowledge.

In terms of immersion, the researcher observed only 3 DOF, but with different camera angles such as the birds-eye view, ground-level view, and human-eye level view of the art installation. Further, similar to the "Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy" 360° video experience, in terms of the use of multisensory engagement, since the researcher experienced the content on Oculus Quest 2 HMD, the process of viewing the 360° video content involved the use of haptic-enabled controllers to pause, play, forward, rewind, etc., where the controllers made vibrations (i.e., send



haptic feedback every time the controller buttons were triggered). The fact that Quest 2 has inbuilt speakers with 3D sound enhanced the overall immersive experience with a sense of multisensory engagement. This might not be an immersive experience for those who view this 360° content on a smartphone or a laptop. The researcher observed that overall, there was zero latency (i.e., no delay) in terms of content consumption. But the observation showed that there was no use of touch, gaze, or voice commands as use of a natural user interface. In terms of the duration of the content, this immersive experience is timed and is 7:40 mins long. The use of a first-person narrative storyline and the wide array of visual/camera angles made it a memorable virtual experience. Figure 6 highlights screenshots from 'Lockdown Around the World' 360° experience.

*Figure 6. Screenshot of Lockdown Around the World, 360° Experience*



#### **Step 4 - Understanding What New Knowledge Such EM Stories Provide Compared to That of the Accompanying Static Online News Story Reporting on the Same Topic by the Same Organization**

To understand what new knowledge such EM stories provide compared to that of the accompanying static online news story reporting on the same topic by the same organization, the researcher experienced all six EM stories again, this time to look for important themes/categories and to identify whether the EM stories provide any new knowledge on the topic reported in the accompanying static online news story. The Codebook from Step 2 was used as a guide for this part of the analysis – where the themes derived from the line-by-line coding scheme, memo-writing, and pull quotes/illustrative quotes gathered from the static online news stories were compared with the findings from Step 3 and to see if such ‘themes’ were captured in those EM stories as well. This part of the process also helped understand whether EM stories provide any new knowledge compared to the topic reported in the accompanying static online news story. Table 4 illustrates the list of themes/new knowledge EM stories add compared to its accompanying static online news story/text.

Table 4. List of Themes/New Knowledge EM Stories Added Compared to its Accompanying Static Online News Story/Text

<b>Masks Work. Really. We'll Show You How</b>	<b>Themes/New Knowledge</b>
	Effectiveness of Masks; Filtration efficiency; Synthetic fibers; Impaction and Interception; COVID-19 (small particle); COVID-19 (large particles); COVID-19 (medium size particles); ZigZag motion of the particles; Diffusion; Masks (shapes and sizes); Social Distancing.
<b>Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools</b>	<b>Themes/New Knowledge</b>
	Quality of Ventilation; Importance of Building Engineering; Classroom During COVID-19; Importance of Wearing Masks; Lack of Ventilation; Protocols; Social Distancing (six feet distance); COVID-19 is Airborne; Concentration of the Contaminant; Masks Not Sufficient; Virus Transmission In-doors; Asymptomatic; Infected Students (windows closed); Infected Students (windows open); Good ventilation.
<b>Inside COVID-19</b>	<b>Themes/New Knowledge</b>
	Frontline Workers; Struggles; Doctor-Patient Interaction; Emergency Care; National Emergency; For-Profit Health Care Systems; Global Urgency; Protocols; Isolation; Social Distancing and Surviving COVID-19; Lockdown; Ventilators; COVID-19 Testing.
<b>The COVID-19 Mystery</b>	<b>Themes/New Knowledge</b>
	COVID-19; Mystery; COVID-19 statistics; Controlling the Pandemic; Hospitals and Care Units, Doctors, Patients, Isolation, COVID-19 Particles, 3D Visualization; Solutions; Social Distancing.
<b>Visualizing the COVID-19 Tragedy – 360</b>	<b>Themes/New Knowledge</b>
	Art and COVID-19; Creative and Symbolic Ways; Art Installations; Humanizing the Statistics; Planting Flags; Making Numbers Comprehensible; Public Participation; Personalize Flags with Messages, Names; Embodying Grief, Bill-Board with Numbers.
<b>Lockdown Around the World</b>	<b>Themes/New Knowledge</b>
	Lockdown; Feeling of Apocalypse; Economic impact; Not real; Restricting movements; No Public Transports; Hard to find Food and Shelter; Essential Workers; Small Businesses; Daily Labours; Stress; Hope; Social Distancing; Worldwide Solutions.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Although the six EM stories captured the main themes reported in their accompanying static news story (text-based news), experiencing the EM stories (with most using the first-person narrative, varied camera angles, and the use of narration to present facts in the background in the immersive content), the researcher observed new knowledge presented at various stages of the immersive experiences and the new knowledge ranged on various topic and added more meaning to the overall stories reported/produced. For instance, the use of the filmmakers' voice as narration, along with the immersive visuals in the 360° video of the lockdown around the world, gave new knowledge in terms of how the lockdown felt like an Apocalypse; the Economic impact; Not feeling real; Restricting movements; No Public Transports; Hard to find Food and Shelter for many including Essential Workers; hardship for Small Businesses; Daily Labours; Stress; Hope; Social Distancing as the only solution. These new insights added more meaning to the overall immersive experience. The illustrative quotes identified during the study also highlighted key themes such as the Effectiveness of Masks; Protecting the Community; and Moral Responsibility; Transmission of the Virus; Good Ventilation and Use of Fans and Air Cleaners; Empathy and Awareness; Mystery of COVID-19; Humanizing the Statistics; Embodying Grief; and Lockdown.

In terms of the use of EM qualities, the majority of the EM stories only used certain qualities of EM and did not include all six qualities, i.e., 1) interactivity, (2) immersion, (3) multi-sensory presentation, (4) algorithm and data, (5) first-person perspective, and (6) natural user interface. These six EM qualities were also noted as etic/theoretical codes during the coding process of EM stories.

In terms of the implications of the current study, considering how EM technologies are transforming media practices, content, and the user experience (as highlighted in the review of literature section) and the fact that EM offers users the potential to visualize and experience challenging topics such as the COVID-19 through the multi-sensory presentation, there is a need for immersive news content producers to more fully utilize the qualities of EM, including the 6DOF with haptics, touch, gaze, and voice commands to enhance the overall immersive experience and inform the users about such health crisis and beyond. Further, in terms of the contribution to the growing scholarship on AR, VR, and 360° video in health communication (Cheng et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2020; Matamala-Gomez et al., 2021), the current study extends the theoretical understanding on the role EM technologies play in health crisis communication, particularly in 3D visualization of complex topics such as COVID-19 to help understand how the virus spreads, the health risks involved, and precautions required to mitigate the spread of the virus.

To conclude, this study provides a better understanding of how and to what extent immersive news content production utilizes the qualities of experiential media in COVID-19 storytelling. The findings also highlight important themes EM stories and the accompanying static news story online offer; and new knowledge such EM stories provide compared to the accompanying text story online.

### Future Research Directions

Considering the increasing number of AR, VR, and 360° video immersive news production and to address and potentially overcome communication challenges in future pandemics or any health crisis, there is a need to further explore the role of EM in health communication, including challenging topics such as the COVID-19 communication through participant observation and surveys.

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## Appendix

### Codebook with the List of Important Codes, Definitions, Pull Quotes/Data, and Important Categories/Themes Identified from Step 2 i.e., Analysis of the Static Online News Stories, and Step 3 i.e., Analysis of the EM Stories

Coding Scheme for Augmented Reality (AR) stories		
Code#	Code or Category/Theme	Description
1	Public Debate	Relating to masks - to protecting oneself and others
2	Effectiveness of Masks	Fighting the pandemic and reduce the transmission
3	Materials (woven materials)	Such as Cotton and other fabrics;
4	Materials (non-woven)	Materials N95 masks made of synthetic materials
5	N95 effectiveness	To reduce respiratory droplets; Aerosols - Coronavirus airborne particles
6	Filtration efficiency	Woven and non-woven materials used in masks; N95 - electrostatic charge to attract and capture particles
7	Laws of Physics	Influence how particles interact with the fiber
8	COVID-19 (small particle)	Not easy to trap/filter, air molecules, zig-zag pattern
9	COVID-19 (large particles)	Easy to trap/filter
10	COVID-19 (medium size particles)	Hardest to trap/filter
11	N95 filters and Masks (shapes and sizes)	At least 95 percent of elusive medium particles and even large and small particles, shapes and sizes defines efficiency.
12	Bad Masks	Loose-fitting masks allow aerosols to leak
13	Good Masks	With small breathing zone - tight fit with edges and shape that leaves space around nostrils and mouth
14	Masks (everyone wearing a mask)	Increases the combined filtration efficiency
15	Good Ventilation or Quality of Ventilation	Reduce transmission of COVID-19
16	Social Distancing	Maintaining six feet distance
17	Concerns and Questions	Relating to concerns and questions by parents and teachers on school reopening
18	Importance of Building Engineering	All students should wear typical cloth face masks, facing forward and sitting six feet apart
19	Classroom During COVID-19	Limited classroom seats i.e., nine students per class (NYC Classroom)
20	Importance of Wearing Masks	All students should wear typical cloth face masks, facing forward and sitting six feet apart
21	Lack of Ventilation	With all of the windows closed, the room would lack sufficient ventilation
22	Protocols	Strict protocols in place for reopening schools, and to reduce in-school transmission and classrooms must have windows that open
23	Asymptomatic	Even students who look healthy may be asymptomatic carriers who can transmit the virus

24	Infected Students (windows closed)	The student's warm breath as it rises, begins to disperse contaminated respiratory aerosols throughout the room
25	Infected Students (windows open)	The flow of fresh air dilutes the contaminants as they move around the room
26	Reopening Schools Recommendations	The Healthy Buildings program recommends four to six air exchanges per hour in classrooms, through any combination of ventilation and filtration
27	Illustrative Quote (Effectiveness of Masks)	"It's become clear that cloth masks, even though they're not as effective as the N95s, are still effective at reducing transmission. Even if you're not achieving that 95 percent reduction, something is better than nothing."
28	Illustrative Quote (Protecting the community, and moral)	"When you wear a mask you protect yourself, you protect others, you prevent yourself from touching your face, and you signal that wearing a mask is the right thing to do."
29	Illustrative Quote (Transmission of Virus)	"While we still do not know exactly what level of contamination presents, the greatest risk of infection exposure is a function of concentration and time."
30	Illustrative Quote (Good Ventilation and Use of Fans and Air Cleaners)	"Simple and inexpensive measures can make schools much safer."
31	Synthetic fibers	Relates to the material/fiber used in N95 masks
32	Impaction and Interception	Aerosols crash into the fibers (materials used in the masks) and get stuck. This is known as Impaction and Interception.
33	ZigZag motion of the particles, and Diffusion	Aerosols zigzag along airstreams because of a principle called Brownian motion. This is known as Diffusion.
<b>Coding scheme for Virtual Reality (VR) stories</b>		
<b>Code#</b>	<b>Code or Category/Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Frontline Workers	Working to prepare the emergency departments at hospitals to weather the impending storm/pandemic
2	Struggles	Relates to struggles of medical, political and societal responses to COVID-19
3	Hospitals and Care Units	Relates to hospitals and special care units to treat COVID-19 patients
4	3D Visualization of COVID-19	3D animations that reveal the microscopic layer of the virus's spread through the body and our population
5	Breaking the Fourth Wall	The ability to break the fourth wall (traditional media) and share stories directly with our viewers in headsets guides much of our process in the medium of VR
6	Global Urgency	The global tragedy of the pandemic that filled with urgency that this is a transformative moment.
7	Mystery of COVID-19	How some countries rank higher in controlling the pandemic compared to other countries.

8	COVID-19 statistics	The number of COVID-19 cases
9	Controlling the Pandemic or Solutions	Attempt to bring solutions to the COVID-19 crisis
10	Illustrative Quote (immersive)	"When a viewer is experiencing a dramatic story in a headset, completely surrounded by hyper-real stereoscopic 360° imagery, this feeling is heightened even further. We make sure that every shot being experienced belongs in the story and is filmed in a way that is heightened by being in a headset. This technique gives us a way to cut through the confusion we all have about the pandemic."
11	Illustrative Quote (empathy and awareness)	"Many people might not know someone who's been so deeply affected by COVID-19, but after watching our piece you'll come away from it feeling that you do. Our goal is to orient viewers more deeply into the human scale of the pandemic and help them to stay safe."
12	Illustrative Quote (Mystery of COVID-19)	How did Thailand rank second only to New Zealand in controlling the spread of Covid-19? We will look at the factors surrounding this remarkable medical achievement and attempt to solve the Covid-19 Mystery of How Did Thailand Do It?
13	Doctor Patient Interaction	Communication between doctor and patient
14	Emergency Care	Both inpatient and outpatient hospital services necessary to prevent the death or serious impairment of the health of the recipient
15	National Emergency	Relates to COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency Declaration
16	For-Profit Health Care Systems	For-profit Health Care Systems or hospitals are investor-owned
<b>Coding scheme for 360° video stories</b>		
<b>Code#</b>	<b>Code or Category/Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Art and COVID-19	How art helps us make sense of COVID-19's incomprehensible toll
2	Creative and Symbolic Ways	To come to terms with the tragic milestone (COVID-19 Deaths)
3	Art Installations	A field of more than 248,000 white flags rippling in the breeze in Washington, D.C – one for each person who has died from COVID-19 in America
4	Humanizing the Statistics	As the death toll becomes increasingly difficult to comprehend, people across the country, including artists are doing what they can to humanize the statistics and create spaces for mourning
5	Planting Flags	Artists and volunteers have planted roughly a thousand small surveyor flags daily to keep up with the rising number of deaths
6	Making Numbers Comprehensible	Relates to helping public understand the growing number of COVID-19 cases and deaths.



7	Personalize Flags with Messages	Relates to personalized messages (including name of the deceased and date of death) written on the flags planted as part of the art installation.
8	Bill-Board with Numbers	Relates to the number of COVID-19 deaths displayed on a billboard
9	Illustrative Quote (Humanizing the Statistics)	“Look at a single flag, Now conjure up a story. Think of it as a school teacher who just lost her life. Try to hold all that grief—and then look up and multiply.”
10	Illustrative Quote (Embodying Grief)	People needed a place to come. Even if they couldn’t come here physically, they needed an emotional place to understand that their loved one was acknowledged.”
11	Illustrative Quote (Planting Flags)	“This is my way of saying, we miss you. We are still going to live on, but you’re not forgotten. That’s why I plant flags every day.”
12	Illustrative quote (Lockdown)	In March 2020, many cities and countries around the world went into lockdown, restricting movement and encouraging social distancing in an attempt to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Five filmmakers documented their cities under lockdown in 360. This is what they saw.
13	Feeling of Apocalypse	Relates to COVID-19 as an event involving destruction or damage on a catastrophic scale
14	Economic impact	Relates to economic impact both national and worldwide due to COVID-19 pandemic
15	No Public Transports	Relates to lack of public transport during COVID-19
<b>Etic or Theoretical Codes (Experiential Media Model)</b>		
1	Interactivity	Interactivity is defined here as a form of exchange or communication dialog between users and the content experience or with others simultaneously (or asynchronously) engaged in the experience, whether remotely or in physical proximity.
2	Immersion	Immersion refers to the envelopment of the user, whether visually, aurally or via other senses (e.g., haptic).
3	Multi-Sensory Presentation	Multi-sensory communication typically takes the form of visual and aural. But with newer VR platforms haptic, or tactile, user engagement is also available. Taste and smell are also possible in a virtual environment although most current VR platforms do not include technology to enable user taste or smell experiences.
4	Algorithmic and Data-Driven	Data-driven AI takes the form of advanced algorithms (programmed instructions or coding) and sensors that track user actions (e.g., gestures, eye movement) and support the generation of an experience with near-zero latency. This means the delay between a user action and a response from the system or virtual experience is imperceptible to the user.

5	First-Person Perspective	First-person perspective means the user enters the virtual experience as if present as a participant or virtual witness to events or experiences.
6	Natural User Interface	The natural user interface (NUI) means that the user engages the system and interacts using intuitive means of communication, including voice, gesture, touch or gaze (Marcus, 2015). This enhances the user's sense of presence within the virtual environment and enables participation without the need for training, literacy or other more technical means of interaction and experience navigation.

## **Child Abusing News: Episodic and Thematic Media Framing Adapting the Children Act and UNICEF's Principles in Bangladesh**

*By Nusrat Jahan\* & Mehedy Hassan Razib<sup>±</sup>*

Media is the principal channel of communication that structures people's consciousness. Such influence of media is often constructed through particular framing which reaches powerful organizations and encourages them to work on different social issues like child abuse. The present study is designed to assess the trend of episodic and thematic media framing on child-abusing news and its relation with the adaptation of The Children Act along with UNICEF's reporting principles. With media framing theory this paper executed a quantitative study through content analysis. A total of 1091 news articles were studied from two broadsheets and one tabloid newspaper within a timeline of one year. Results revealed that episodic news has a higher tendency of violating reporting principles than thematic. Incidents of sexual abuse received most of the coverage in Bangladeshi newspapers where girls were found most likely to be the victims of misrepresentation. Finally, the tabloid newspaper was found guiltier of unethical reporting than the broadsheets which established a significant connection between the tendency of principles violation and newspaper type. The paper recommended policymakers, child welfare institutes, and mass media promote children's rights to decrease the rate of abuse cases in Bangladesh.

*Keywords:* child abuse, media framing, children act, UNICEF, Bangladesh

### **Introduction**

Children are recognized as the future of a country. They are valued as assets and investments of a nation. But the cruel reality is that child abuse is a very prominent and common social issue around the world. Children get exposed to various kinds of maltreatment like physical, sexual, and emotional which hampers their social and psychological development (Mason and Purdue, 2000). Between 1980 and 2008, the practice of sexual abuse toward children was found at 12.7 percent all over the world (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011).

In twenty-first society, the role of media in communication has become more prominent than ever. Media structures the social contexts and decides the priorities of mass people (McCartan et al., 2015). It plays a significant role in developing discussion on social problems among mass people and public authorities (Wallack and Dorfman, 1996). That is why the media needs to promote social issues more to

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\*Graduate Student, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Bangladesh.

<sup>±</sup>Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Bangladesh.

direct policymakers and people's attention towards its solutions (Weatherred, 2015). But because of social stigma and shame, the media ignores these issues sometimes (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Newspapers were found to violate victims' privacy and publish news with unnecessary information which threatened child's social dignity (Collings, 2002). Media misrepresentation leads victims toward a traumatic experience where they often attempt to suicide (Chilton, 2012).

### **Operational Definitions**

**Child:** The paper considered those news articles where a child's maximum age was up to 18 (eighteen) years old according to the definition of The Children Act (The Children Act, 2013). News articles sometimes define the word "child" with like "shishu" (baby/child), "balok-balika" (pre-adolescent), and "kishore-kishori" (adolescent). These terms describe a child's development stages in Bengali culture (Blanchet, 2008).

**Child Abuse:** Actions according to the WHO's sheet of definition were recognized as child abuse in this study. World Health Organization defined child abuse as physical, emotional, and sexual maltreatment, negligence, and commercial ill-treatment of children (WHO, 2016). This paper particularly focused on sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of children.

**Dignity:** A child's dignity is ensured when United Nations' "Universally Recognized Standards" have proper implications (ACECQA, 2018). This study focused on The Children Act (2013) and UNICEF's (2018) given standards for the dignity of children.

**Right:** The rights of children are defined in this paper as the protection of the best interest of those children who are featured in newspapers and advocates of their issues (UNICEF, 2018).

**Issues:** In this paper, the context of the sample news from which children appear as victims and culprits are mentioned as issues.

**Privacy:** By privacy, this paper means the media protection of any victim/culprit child's photograph or any personal information that helps to identify him/her. This definition includes both victims' and juvenile offenders' privacy.

### **Bangladesh's Profile on Child Abuse**

After Western- Central Africa and Eastern-Southern Africa, South Asia was found as the third largest region for abuses against children (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017). In Bangladesh, child abuse is a common incident. As Bangladesh always suffers from different natural disasters like floods and cyclones, the risk of child abuse like separation from family, premature laboring, and trafficking became very predictable for this country (Mohajan, 2012). The International Conventions on Child Protection also experienced a blurred implementation in Bangladesh (AITPN Report, 2003). In 2019, Human Rights Support Society revealed that more than half of the rape cases in Bangladesh include children under the age of 16 as victims (Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2020).

A study by Bangladesh ShishuAdhikar Forum (BSAF) reveals that in 2018, 812 children were maltreated and suffered from at least ten various types of abuse. Previously in 2017 and 2018, the numbers were 894 and 686 respectively. On average around 48 children were raped per month in 2018 (BSAF, 2018). In the next year 2019, 164 children were found gang-raped and 27 were sexually harassed only between January to March. The total number of abused children in 2019 was 4,381 whereas the number was 4,566 in 2018 (Anadolu Agency, 2020). Only in 2020, 1,718 cases of violence against children have been identified by Ain o ShalishKendro (Ain o ShalishKendro, 2020). A report from 2020 by Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) showed a 17 percent of the increased practice of child abuse by comparing previous timelines (The Financial Express, 2020). The cases of violence make children vulnerable and risk their prospects for the future (The Daily Star, 2021). ManusherJonno Foundation (MJF) published a report “Bangladesh Child Situation 2020” describing that the number of early marriages rose 60 percent more in the COVID-19 pandemic. Also during the pandemic, 145 children died from rape (ProthomAlo, 2021) and the cases of child abuse in Bangladesh are raising day by day (Save the Children, 2020). Even with this scenario, Haque et al., (2020) claimed that Bangladesh has a shortage of information on child abuse. Shortage of information leads to minimum media coverage. According to Khair et al., (2002), the reason behind the minimal portrayal is also the existing social stigma in Bangladesh.

### **Framing Theory**

Gregory Bateson incepted the primary idea of framing as a “spatial and temporary boundary of a set of interactive messages” in 1972 (Bateson, 1972). Within the set-theoretical diagram, Bateson drew attention to the double framing. Through the concept of “frames within frames”, he illustrated the requirement of framing for the mental process of accepting reasoning spontaneously. Later Goffman (1974) put forth a sociological analysis of framing theory. He introduced a Primary framework that influences people to interpret their circumstances. Primary framework functions within two broad classes: natural and social concepts. The natural framework explains occurrences in tedious and purely physical structure. Distinctly, a social framework helps people to interpret data by providing proper context and background of a scenario. Similarly, the spinning framing technique frames issues with an intentional positive or negative value, which shapes people’s judgment (Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996).

Iyengar labeled media framing theory with two broad angles: Episodic and Thematic Framing (Iyengar, 1991). The episodic frame structures articles in a way that prioritizes an individual character (Barnes et al., 2008). Episodic framing attracts readers with different visual alluring components (Iyengar and Simon, 1993). It symbolizes human interest details by which readers empathize with the story easily (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). To trigger human emotion, episodic news framing centralizes a human character in most linear storylines (Zillmann, 2002). With personification, episodic news framing energizes audience media attention and fulfills profit-oriented demands for the media outlets (Kim et al.,

2011). This framing approach occasionally describes anecdotal events by using character, plot, conflict, and resolution to appeal audience's human interest.

Conversely, thematic news focuses on those issues which can be described from a large perspective in a social context. Thematic news framing discusses impactful issues that are most of the time policy-intended (Barnes et al., 2008). Thematic framing most of the time concerns political or social issues. These types of articles contain in-depth background analysis (Iyengar and Simon, 1993). With impersonal figures, thematic news framing includes large population data. That is why generally readers' emotional attachments remain diffused in these articles. The thematic presentation has less record of clinching human affective emotion (Gross, 2008). Instead, this alerts readers' attention to the issue (Coleman et al., 2011). Thematic framing has a record of reducing the disgrace of sufferers, providing a better understanding of systemic regulation, and energizing people to participate in drawing solutions (Read and Law, 1999).

### **Media Framing and Children's Privacy**

Asian media has often been seen violating children's privacy by putting their sensitive information in front of mass people (Maharani, 2018). South Asian countries reveal the actual situation of unethical reporting of child news (Goonasekera, 2001). According to theories, sensational news mostly gets coverage in the media (Naylor and Lecturer, 2001). Thilakarathne (2016) found Sri Lankan media violating privacy rules of abused children. Over the years, Sri Lanka portrayed an insufficient level of interest in reporting children's issues on mainstream media (Amarakoon, 2003). Gunasekera et al. (2021) acclaimed that majority of the society depends on only media to get insights into child sex crime. But while reporting, generally media did not protect the victim's privacy. Media coverage of child sex crimes disclosed the victim's name, family background, age, gender, religion, race, photos, video, audio, etc. A report of UNICEF found Bangladeshi media representing victims of sexually and physically abused girls within framing that discloses their privacy (UNICEF, 2010).

The media purposefully frames child abuse issues in people's consciousness (Nair, 2019). Media often creates this awareness by setting political and social agendas with sensational content. During sensitization media often release child abuse victims' sensitive information including the victim's family details. Saint-Jacques et al., (2012) identified that no matter how much the media pretends to be concerned about child protection, they do not publish as many articles as it needs to influence child protection services. Lonne and Parton (2014) disclosed that newspapers often carry unnecessary information which causes a violation of victims' privacy. Though the media played an important role in creating public concern over the child abuse issue at the same time media fabricated and politicized this news. Most of the reports ignored emotional abuse while prioritizing physical abuse.

Niner et al., (2013) provided an overview of the Malaysian print media's tendency of revealing victims' identities in child abuse reports. According to the study, the media frames child abuse news more episodically than thematically

way. Episodic framing disclosed the victim's identity and influenced readers' opinions more than thematically framed articles. Thailand's media were found to reveal children's identities who were mostly victims (UNICEF, 2014). Weathered (2017) studied individual and societal media frames of child sexual abuse in the context of constructing public opinion. Episodic framing prioritizes the individual approach whereas thematic framing focuses on the societal approach (Barnes et al., 2008; Iyengar and Simon, 1993). News framing of two significant scandals: Catholic Church and Pennsylvania State University have been examined along with a decade of newspaper contents in this paper. The study found a notable shift in the framing approach from societal-level solutions to the individual level over the decade.

US newspapers frame child abuse cases more from a thematic perspective rather than an episodic one (Thomas et al., 2013). The study found that treatment of child abuse news depended on the types of the abuse. All together these thematically framed articles mostly protected privacy and focused on societal causes and solutions. Kunkel et al., (2006) revealed a consistent pattern of media framing of child-related articles. The paper studied television and newspaper coverage of children and found the media preferred child's crime and violence-related stories more than others. Singh et al., (2014) expressed concerns over the limited coverage of juvenile crime and his study found girls facing more cases of media maltreatment than boys. Same gender-based media victimization was echoed in the studies of Haque et al., (2020) and Merchant (2010). Also, studies from western countries found that newspapers prioritize cases of childhood abuse and their participation in crime more than the promotion of their rights (Foley et al. 2007).

### **Guidelines for Media Representation**

In 1924 the League of Nations for the first time declared 5 articles promoting child rights (Humanium, 2015). Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989) instructs mass media to ensure that regardless of their ethnic identity every child will receive a similar level of access to information and media will promote their rights. International Federation of Journalists (International Federation of Journalists, 1998) published a set of guidelines instructing the media to be cautious regarding child protection and not to violate their rights. It forbids the media to practice sensational representation of children and violating their privacy. In 2002, it updated its guidelines with the tagline "Putting Children in the Right", the guidebook advocates for children's privacy, rights, and respect in the media (International Federation of Journalists, 2002). Terre des Hommes International Federation stands on zero tolerance for child maltreatment in media (Terre des Hommes International Federation, 2014). Their principles include using fair and straightforward methods of collecting children's information and pictures. The second edition of the guideline also echoed almost the same principles. The principles further include guarding children's privacy in the media on controversial issues. The media needs to give thought to the consequences of the child's information before publication to minimize the harm (Terre des Hommes International Federation, 2016).

In 2005, UNICEF released a handbook on Media and Children's rights. The guidelines were made thinking of the challenges the media face in children's representation. It encourages the media to preserve children's rights and to include maximum children's views (UNICEF, 2005). UNICEF 2018 came up with a set of recommendations for media professionals regarding children's representation, interview, and reporting style. "Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on children" included six principles for media reporting on children (UNICEF, 2018).

In the constitution of Bangladesh, article 28 sub-section four made sure that the legislation has the authority to enact special provisions for the betterment of children and women (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). The Children Act, 2013 from Bangladesh also instructs media not to disclose children's privacy on controversial issues. Section 81 describes, that any photograph or information relating to a child's case which is under proceedings in the court shall not be published in the media as it violates the child's privacy (The Children Act, 2013). This act protects both victims' and juvenile offenders' privacy.

### **Significance of the Study**

This paper finds out about the practice of protecting children's privacy through child abuse news in Bangladesh. Previously, researchers have only focused on media representation of child sexual abuse and emphasized the culprits more than the victims (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995). Bangladesh's social context demands a balanced study on other kinds of child abusive acts and media representation of victims and convicts. In this study, the child abuse cases not only focused the sexual abuse but also studied physical and psychological maltreatment. Till now, formerly no research has compared episodic and thematic framing's adaptive relation with The Children Act of Bangladesh and UNICEF's media guidelines. Also previously no research has measured newspaper houses' business models with their tendency of revealing privacy.

### **Research Questions**

To explain the media framing of child abuse news in Bangladesh, this paper particularly formulated some questions. These are;

**RQ1.** What is the trend of using the episodic and thematic frame in child-abusing news in Bangladesh?

**RQ2.** Which media framing is more susceptible to violating section 81 of The Children Act, 2013?

**RQ3.** Which media framing is more complying with UNICEF's principles for reporting on children?

To answer this question, this paper particularly focused on the latest six principles for media reporting on children given by UNICEF in 2018. According to the guidelines formulated sub-questions are;

1. Does the report respect the dignity and rights of the child?



2. Does the report protect children's rights and privacy?
3. Does the report advocate for child issues and rights?
4. Does the report include the child's view in accordance with their age and maturity?
5. Has the report been done assessing the political, social, and cultural impact of it?
6. Does the report protect the child's family and peers' safety?

**RQ4.** Does the tendency of law and principles violation depend on newspaper types?

### **Methodology**

A quantitative study through the content analysis procedure from Berelson has been followed in this paper (Bengtsson, 2016). The study purposefully selected the top three circulated Bangladeshi newspapers according to the Department of Films and Publication Bangladesh (2021). These three newspapers included two broadsheets (one in the Bengali language and one in the English language) and a Tabloid. Regardless of the small circulation compared to Bangla newspapers, an English newspaper was studied as it is read by a particularly educated group of upper-class people in the society. The tabloid paper was studied to investigate the influence of money-making policy on news presentation. The chosen Bengali newspaper is ProthomAlo with 5, 01,800 circulation/day, the English paper is Daily Star with 44,814 circulation/day, and the tabloid newspaper is ManabZamin with 1, 51,950 circulation/day (Department of Film and Publication Bangladesh, 2021). The categorical unit of analysis is individual news articles through purposive sampling where articles related to child abuse and juvenile crimes were selected. These news articles were collected between the timeline of July 2020 to June 2021.

### **Sample Size**

News articles related to child abuse and juvenile crime have been included in the sample size. Using these criteria, the study found a total of 1091 news concerning child abuse and crime issue. 190 news articles were found from ProthomAlo, 296 were found from The Daily Star and lastly, 605 news articles were found from ManabZamin. Of a total of 1091 child abuse news, 1011 were from the cases which were under court proceedings. These news articles fall under the judgment of the Children Act (2013).

## Results

### Framing Trend of Child Abusing News in Newspapers

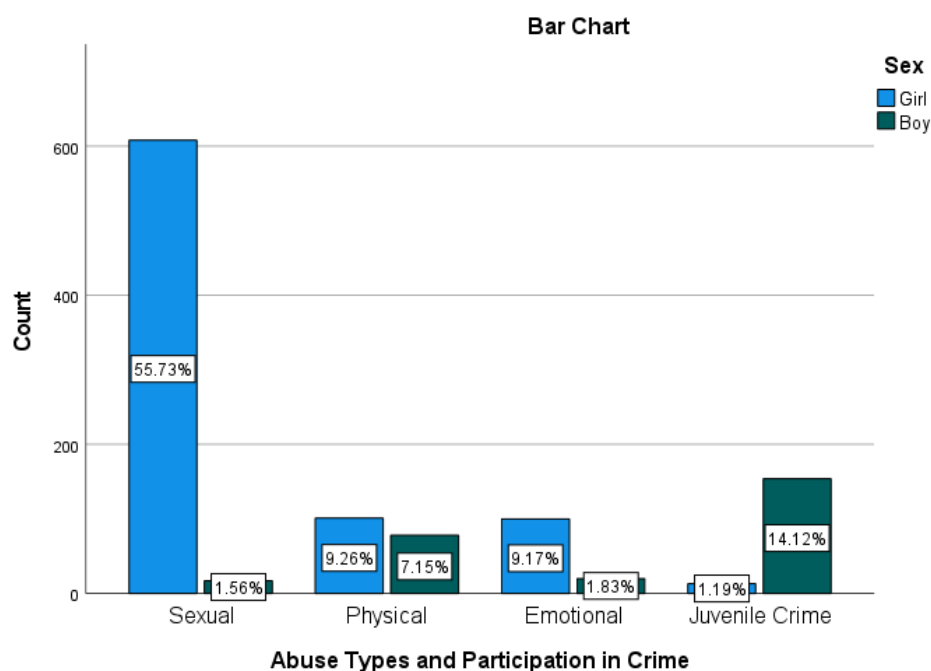
The first research question investigates the trend of episodic and thematic framing of child-abusing news. Table 1 shows, newspapers followed episodic framing 82.1% of the time. On the other hand, only 17.9% of the stories were framed in a thematic framework. Therefore in Bangladeshi newspapers, the use of episodic framing in child abuse news has been found more prominent than thematic framing.

Table 1. Frequency of the Episodic and Thematic Framing in Child-abusing News

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Episodic	896	82.1	82.1	82.1
	Thematic	195	17.9	17.9	100.0
	Total	1091	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1 shows incidents of sexual abuse are mostly featured in Bangladeshi newspapers among all other types of child abuse. Girls received 55.73% of coverage in the news articles on sexual abuse, whereas boys received only 1.56%. On the other hand, boys have a larger participation in juvenile crimes and receive more cases of coverage through news articles than girls. Convicted boys were featured 14.12% of the time in the articles on juvenile crimes, whereas convicted girls were featured only 1.19% of the time.

Figure 1. Percentages of Abuse Types and Participation in Crime with the Sex of the Children

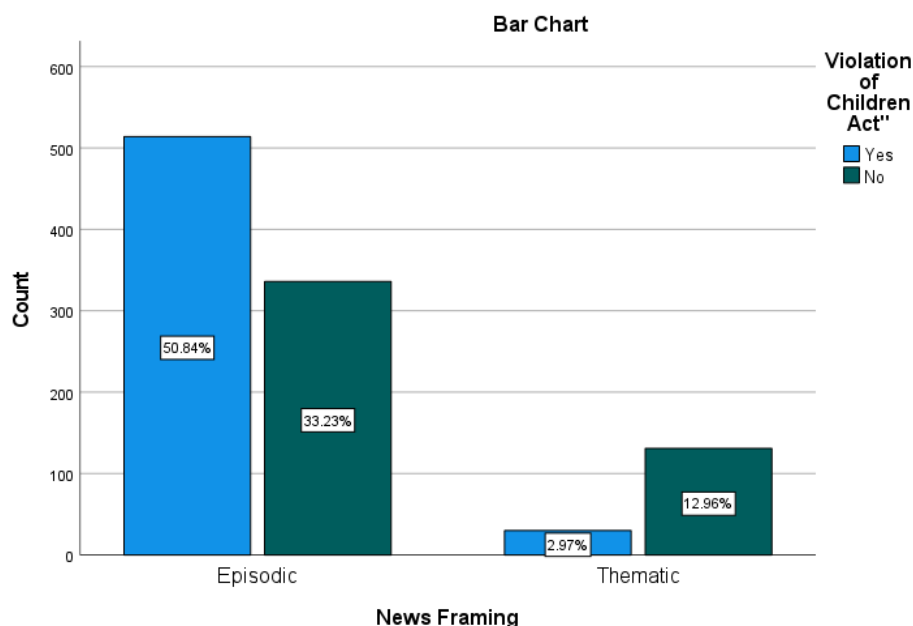


Through Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis it was found that between news framing and abuse type true correlation is not equal to 0. Under  $df = 1089$ , the p-value is 0.4594 which is less than the alpha value. The correlation was 0.02242047.

### Implementation of Children Act, 2013 in Newspapers

The second research question suspects the potential news framing which violates section 81 of the Children Act (2013) more often. Section 81 advocates the protection of privacy for those cases which are under court prosecution. The law promotes the protection of privacy for both victim and convict. Figure 2 found episodic framing was guiltier of violating a child's privacy than thematic framing. 50.84% of the time act was violated by episodic framing and thematic framing was found as guilty only in 2.97% of the news.

Figure 2. Percentages of Children Act Implementation with News Framing Types



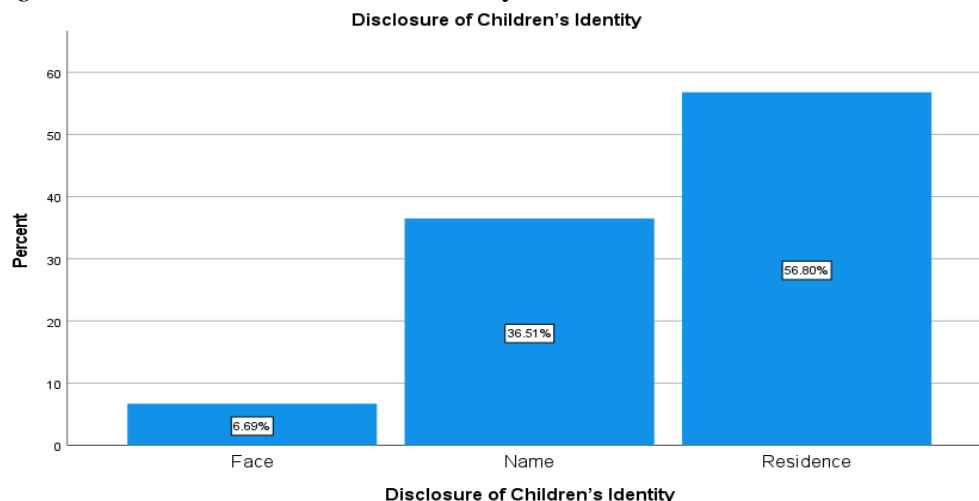
In the preservation of victim and juvenile convicts' privacy, newspapers were found episodic framing mostly guilty for both sections. Table 2 shows, that episodically framed 702 articles covered victims and 400 articles violated their privacy. In the same media framing, 148 articles were found on juvenile convicts. 114 articles violated convicts' privacy in episodic media framing.

Table 2. Implementation of Children Act on Abused and Convicted Children

News Framing			Violation of Children Act				Total	
			Yes		No			
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Episodic	Child Type	Victim	400	77.8	302	89.9	702	82.6
		Convict	114	22.2	34	10.1	148	17.4
	Total		514	100.0	336	100.0	850	100.0
Thematic	Child Type	Victim	23	76.7	121	92.4	144	89.4
		Convict	07	23.3	10	7.6	17	10.6
	Total		30	100.0	131	100.0	161	100.0

In thematic news framing from a total of 161 news articles, 144 were done on the victims of abuse. Among these only 23 cases revealed the child's identity and 121 protected their identity. 17 news articles were focused on juvenile crimes. Around 10 of these articles maintained the children act and only 07 violated it. Figure 3 shows, that 56.8% of the time the newspapers revealed the abused or convicted child's residence-related information like the town/village name. 36.5% of the time names of the children came in the mainstream newspapers. Around 6.7% of the time newspaper published unfiltered pictures of these children.

Figure 3. Disclosure of Children's Identity



### Newspapers Complying with UNICEF's Reporting Principles

The third research question wanted to know which media framing was more complying with UNICEF's reporting principles on children. The thematic framework is more effective than the episodic framework in Bangladeshi newspapers for the implementation of six reporting principles. The percentages of the principles in Table 3 indicate that, how frequently that particular principle was maintained from the total episodically and thematically framed news sample.

Table 3 shows that the dignity and rights of the children were maintained more in thematic framing than episodic. 84.3% of thematically framed news maintained this principle, whereas 52.4% of the episodic news did it. A child's

dignity is ensured when United Nations' "Universally Recognized Standards" have proper implications (ACECQA, 2018). Almost similarly thematic framing maintained the 2nd principle, 84.3% of the time thematic framing was protecting child privacy. Here episodic framing worked 52.1% of the time. While maintaining the 3rd principle, 92.7% of the thematic news advocated for child issues and rights in the news stories and only 7.6% of episodic news did the same.

Contrarily episodic news has included more children's views in the news stories than thematic news. 75.6% of the time episodic framing maintained principle four and 74.9% of the time thematic framing maintained it. The thematic framework maintained principle five more than the episodic framework did. 84.8% of thematic news assessed the political, social, and cultural impact of the report while 52.5% of episodic news assessed these. Lastly, the sixth principle about the protection of the child's family and peers' safety was maintained 84.3% of the time in thematic framing and on the other hand 52.1% of the time in episodic news.

Table 3. UNICEF's Reporting Principles and Media Framing

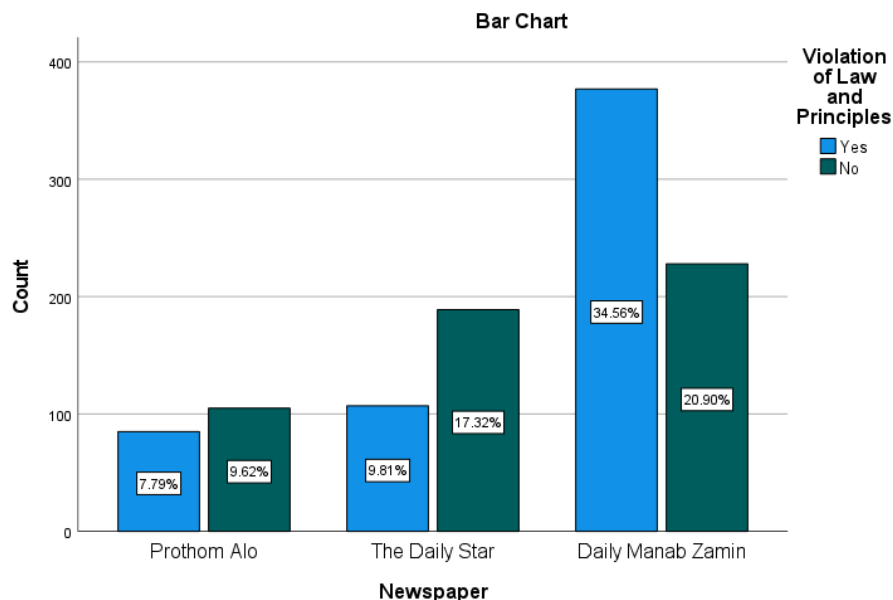
			News Framing		Total
			Episodic	Thematic	
UNICEF Reporting Principles	Maintaining dignity and rights of the child	Count	365	161	526
		% within News frame	52.4	84.3	
	Protecting child's privacy	Count	363	161	524
		% within News frame	52.1	84.3	
	Advocating child issues and rights	Count	53	177	230
		% within News frame	7.6	92.7	
	Including child's view in accordance with age and maturity	Count	527	143	670
		% within News frame	75.6	74.9	
	Assessing the political, the social and cultural impact of the report	Count	366	162	528
		% within News frame	52.5	84.8	
	Protecting child's family and peers' safety	Count	363	161	524
		% within News frame	52.1	84.3	

### The Tendency of Law and Principles Violation among Newspaper Types

The last research question wanted to investigate if the tendency of law and principles violation depends on newspaper types or not. Three different types of newspapers represented three different types of nature in the maintenance of law and reporting principles. Figure 4 shows ProthomAlo (Bengali broadsheet) protected privacy in 9.62% of the total news and violated in 7.79% of the stories. The

tendency of obeying the law and principles is more visible in Daily Star than in ProthomAlo. 17.32% of the articles from Daily Star (English broadsheet) protected privacy and only 9.81% violated this. Daily ManabZamin (Bengali tabloid) violated children's law and UNICEF's principles more than it was conserved. Altogether 34.56% of the ManabZamin news revealed sensitive information and only 20.9% protected it. So there is a significant relationship between the tendency of law and principles violation and the newspaper types.

Figure 4. Law and Principles Violation among Newspaper Types



The  $r$  coefficient derived from the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis for Correlation between newspaper and news framing was  $-0.2478632$ ,  $df = 1089$ ,  $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ , and was not significant at the 0.05 level. So the true correlation is not equal to 0.

## Discussion

This study agrees with Naylor and Lecturer (2001) as the result shows that sensational news mostly gets coverage in the media. Studies from western countries found that newspapers prioritize cases of childhood abuse and their participation in crime more than the promotion of their rights (Foley et al., 2007). The findings of this research also indicate a similar attitude of Bangladeshi media. A social issue like child abuse deserves appropriate public attention to draw solutions through public policy discussion and regulatory efforts. But episodic framing distracts people's attention from the systematic flaws of socio-political and economic issues (Kim et al., 2010). Table 1 shows that Bangladeshi newspapers prefer to use episodic framing more than thematic in the news contents. As a result, they fail to raise legitimate consciousness among mass people on the child abuse issue.

The findings suggest that emotional abuse gets the least media attention than any other form of abuse. It is similar to the analysis of news stories by Hove et al., (2013) and Niner et al., (2013). Only 11% (Figure 1) of the stories featured emotional abuse. This paper further included that sexual abuse received the highest coverage in Bangladeshi newspapers among all other types. The result of the representation of juvenile crime also came out close to the discussion of Singh et al., (2014). He expressed concerns over the limited coverage of juvenile crime. This paper also found a poor amount of data which is only 15.3% (Figure 1) of the stories on juvenile convicts. Findings from Figure 1 show that girls faced more cases of maltreatment than boys. This is similar to the analysis of Singh et al., (2014). According to his study girls were found mostly the victim of sexual abuse and faced most of the unethical reporting. The result of gender-based media victimization is relevant to studies by Haque et al., (2020) and Merchant (2010). A report by UNICEF also showed that Bangladeshi media represents victims of sexually, and physically abused girls within an unethical structure (UNICEF, 2010).

Like Saint-Jacques et al., (2012) analyzed, this paper also found similarities between the number of child abuse incidents in society and the number of media reports on that. Stoltenberg stated low and middle-income countries suffer from a fragile system of recording abuse cases (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). This study found 1091 stories of child abuse in media where 1011 stories were done under court proceedings. In other words, the media mostly produces news on those incidents which have been reported legally before. Agreeing with these Haque et al., (2020) also claimed that Bangladesh has a shortage of information on child abuse. Besides due to social stigma in Bangladesh, the victim and victim's family prefer to maintain quietness on abusive issues (Khair et al., 2002). This means most of the time media cannot report on a child abuse incident until a complaint is legally filed against it.

Asian media has often been seen violating children's privacy by putting their sensitive information in front of mass people (Maharani, 2018). The result of this study also shows most of the news from the sample size has violated Children Act and UNICEF's reporting principles. The findings of this research about revealing victims' identities also match with the discussion of Thailand's media performance of protecting children's identity by UNICEF (2014). By violating victims' rights, media fuels social stigmas and prejudices. When media violates juvenile convicts' privacy rights it risks their social acceptance. According to Iyengar and Simon's (1993) discussion, media attracts readers with different visual alluring components. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) said it symbolizes human interest details by which readers empathize with the story easily. Figure 3 shows, that different component like the victim's face, name, and residence information were disclosed to the public to capture their interest. Episodic framing has been found mostly guilty for these presentations. Gross (2008) described that thematic framing has less record of clinching human interest with potential elements. This study shows thematic framing avoided unnecessary fabrication of information. That is why Figure 2 and Table 3 of this paper found thematic framing less guilty in the accusation of violation of the Children Act and UNICEF's reporting principles.

Table 3 indicates thematic framing advocates on children policy 92.7% of the time. Barnes et al. (2008) also found a similar result where thematically framed news mostly discussed impactful policy intended issues. Table 3 also shows that thematic framing protects children, their families, and their peers' privacy more vigilantly than the episodic framework. Also, thematic framing judges the aftermath of every news report. Almost identical results were found in Read and Law's (1999) study of reducing the disgrace of sufferers and providing a better understanding of systemic regulation by thematic framing. The result of the relation between newspaper types and rules violation tendency is similar to the study by Kim et al., (2011). He added that with personification episodic news framing fulfills profit-oriented demands for the media outlets. This paper found tabloid newspapers use episodic framing more often which results in rules violation. Figure 4 shows ManabZamin newspaper caused the highest percentage of privacy disclosure.

### Conclusion

Bangladesh practices a culture where victims of abuse go through intense societal blame games. Children Act, 2013 and UNICEF's reporting principles instructed the media to be sensitive about revealing such information which can risk children's identity. But newspapers were found violating these conventions and acting more with episodic framing in Bangladesh. This fuels the existing culture of victim-blaming and stigmatizes it further.

Different welfare organizations and academicians recommended media look into the root reasons for child abuse (Kitzinger, 1996). The media works as social advocates. If the policymakers want to work on the issue of child abuse, the media will have to represent the underlying reasons first. Bangladesh Press Council can play an important role in ensuring ethical media performance. Bangladesh government, policymakers, and child welfare institutes should be more vigilant and should introduce updated media guidelines on child reporting. By representing child abuse incidents accurately and responsibly media can decline the rate of child abuse cases and ensure a healthy environment for the children.

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## **Press News Narratives: Covering the Final Phase of the War in Sri Lanka**

*By Pradeep N' Weerasinghe\**

The impact of the shock waves of thought sent by mass media through society, on the consciousness, mind, feelings, and behavior of individuals has been argued. The ethnic conflict has been given first priority in the national agenda of Sri Lanka for the last few decades. The role of the news media in the ethnic conflict is something that has not been identified. This study investigates whether the newspapers that targeted the Sinhala population which is the ethnic majority in Sri Lanka did perform professional news functions in covering the final phase of the war in Sri Lanka and what factors affected the situation. For this purpose, news professionalism theory, narratology theory, and structuralism theory were employed. In a society where conflicts occur based on ethnic diversity, this study found that newspapers that target the ethnic majority which possesses the monopoly, engage in covering war using the construction of narrative function instead of professional news reporting. The paper argues that the influence exercised upon the mentality of readers by narratives constructed by the news genre of newspapers in a society facing an armed conflict based on ethnic differences obstructs the ability to look at the ethnic conflict critically.

*Keywords:* Sri Lanka, ethnic conflict, newspapers, news professionalism, narratives

### **Introduction**

The ethnic conflict has been given first priority in the national agenda of Sri Lanka for the last few decades. The division in the island state of Sri Lanka between the Sinhala majority and Tamil minority has already taken a heavy toll. The role of the news media in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is something that has not been identified. Some media theorists and practitioners have argued that an answer to this can be found through the analysis of newspaper content on the ethnic conflict (Demarest, 2021; Ishaku, 2021; Adisa et al., 2016; Ratnam, 2014; Gannaseelan, 2011). This study investigates how the news genre of the newspapers which targeted the readers of the Sinhalese ethnic majority behaved in covering the conflicts during the final months of the war.

The content analysis of the behavior of mass media on the ethnic conflicts through structural and narratives has been an academic concern for a very long time (Orand, 2022; Amna et al., 2021; Berhe, 2021; Demarest, 2021; Shwetangbhai et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Omandi, 2016). In these studies, it has not been much attention on whether the newspaper in their news coverage utilized professional principles for news reporting or else, they employed the construction of narratives

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\*Senior Lecturer, Department of Mass Media, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

which is used in creative works. Thus, the study focusses on how the ideology of the dominant ethnic group among the ethnic groups involved in the war affects the professionalism of newspaper news.

There are studies on the role of mass media in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, relatively less attention had been devoted to investigating whether the newspapers abided by the professional news principles in covering the war news during the last critical months of the war. In a society where ethnic conflicts are prevalent based on ethnic diversity, news media possesses the feasibility to enhance the tension animosity, and suspicion among the stakeholders to the conflict or to strengthen ethnic cohesion, integration, and mutual understanding. Whether the media's feasibility to influence society is used for the good of humanity or not is determined by whether or not the professionalism of news is maintained. The professionalism of news depends on the editorial independence of the newsroom. Editorial independence relies on the ownership agenda of the newspaper, market demands, and the dominant ideology prevalent in society. In a context of ethnic and war conflict, the dominant ideology of society overriding professionalism seems to influence the newsroom to construct narratives for hegemonic purposes instead of practicing professionalism in reporting. The study focuses primarily on two questions: "how the Sinhala language newspapers covered the last months of the war against the terrorism in Sri Lanka?" and "Do newspapers concern the journalism ethics, news professionalism, objective reporting when covering war."

### **Literature Review**

The consciousness of the mass, the physiological characteristics and the situation would be changed due to the impact of the media. All in all, the current mass media has become a strong tool that plays in shaping the thinking, actions, and decisions of the public (Weerasinghe, 2016). Meanwhile, David (2004) suggests that mass media depictions of fear, patriotism, consumption, and victimization contributed to the emergence of a "national identity" and collective action that was fostered by elite "decision makers' propaganda". Focusing on the situation in Sri Lanka, Desapriya (2003) argues that when a society is ethically divided, that division and ethnic bias could be perceived in the news media content. The editorial policy is ethnic-centric and ownership runs a monopoly in the society for ideology with ethnic dominance. Hattotuwa (2004) suggests that when politicians emphasize ethnic fear, dread, and stress that the response to such a situation is a requirement the news media falls in line with such requirement. Then the news media becomes a voice of that ideology. Added Media Monitor (2006) proposed that eighty-seven percent (87%) of Sri Lankan journalists believe that the Sri Lankan media is failing to provide accurate, balanced and fair information. Further Desapriya (2007) noted that Sri Lankan mainstream mass media is market-driven, subject to political control, covert censorship, and ethnic biases.

The historical role of the media in Sri Lanka was to disseminate the ideological messages of ethnic racism to its audience daily. Political and religious leaders, citizens, and the media seek during crises to create narratives, or stories that explain and assign meaning to events or issues. Language is integral to the construction of social realities (Ryan, 2004; Lind and Salo, 2002). When analyzing the way of reporting the massacre at Bindunuwawa<sup>1</sup>, in Sri Lanka it is seen that the reporters have created the hero and the villain as their own wish (Jayaratne, 2001). Lévi-Strauss argues that within a culture “analogical thought” leads to some oppositions (such as *edible/inedible*) being perceived as metaphorically resembling the “similar differences” of other oppositions (such as *native/foreign*) (Lévi-Strauss, 1967). There are considerable analytical uses of such oppositions in relation to mass media texts (Fiske, 1987). Eco (1966) analyzed the James Bond novels in terms of a series of oppositions: *Bond/villain*, *West/Soviet Union*, *anglo-saxon/other countries*, *ideals/cupidity*, *chance/planning*, *excess/moderation*, *perversion/innocence*, *loyalty/disloyalty*. In constructive and creative fields (novels, film, etc.) binary polarities are made used to construct wider narratives within the popular genre of fiction construction. Yet does print media communication differ from this? The information media, too, deploys these figurative fictions and rapidly creates simplistic binaries in order to construct a hegemonic position for particular people and particular groups by focusing on certain incidents (Jayaratne, 2001). This, in turn, requires a better understanding of the role that press news narratives in general play in public life.

Narratives can be approached as causal and controlling factors in social life. Such a position is strongly implied in the political and administrative culture works of literature where narratives take on determinative roles by shaping the realities, values, and premises that form attitudes, decisions, and behaviors (Callahan et al., 2006, p. 11). Today, there is growing literature documenting the efforts to establish narratives that defined the nation’s enemies and the threats they posed. Some of these studies focus on the mass media helping set the public mood for war (Doherty, 1999). The concept of narratives has a long history of its own within sociology, anthropology, and socio-psychology. As Callahan et al. (2006) observe Narratives have taken on considerable importance in the social sciences in recent years. It has been used for discourse analysis (Gee, 1999; Schiffrin et al., 2001). Political scientists have addressed narratives through the study of political culture and rhetoric (in the form of symbols, ideology, and myths) and public policymaking (Callahan et al., 2006, p. 8). Robertson (1980) notes mythical narratives were part of the political reality and should be treated as such. Roelofs (1976) emphasizes a distinction between national ideology and national myth, noting that while ideology provides the country with a model of how things operationally are done, myth provided the cohesion and legitimacy for those government operations. Flood (1996) posited the concept of “mythopoeic narrative” to stress the role that stories and storytelling play in all political cultures

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<sup>1</sup>The massacre took place on 25th October 2000 at a camp in Bindunuwawa. The detainees at the Bindunuwawa detention camp included suspected Tamil terrorists who had left the LTTE and surrendered to the government. On the day of the incidents, there were 41 inmates of whom 27 were massacred.

in support of ideological positions. The common thread of these and related political science perspectives is the view of narratives as the tools and reflection of political power (as cited in Callahan et al., 2006, p. 9). Ryan (2004) argues that the creation of the war narrative clearly was an exercise of power. Levi-Strauss notes that the concept of language is activated within the structure and assemblage of a narrative, and depends on the impact of the binary opposition. Many scholars have been involved in this aspect of structural and narrative analysis (Berhe, 2021, Boyd and Blackburn, 2020; Venkateswaran, 2020; Barthes, 1988; Hendricks, 1973; Propp, 1970; Lévi-Strauss, 1967).

### **Ethnic Conflict and War against Terror in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has been progressing as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country for a long time. The failure to address the identities and special needs of the minorities affected directly by the ethnic conflict. The ethnic conflict originated because the minority (Tamils) challenged the majority (Sinhalese) administrative, cultural and military rule.

The Tamil Eelam campaign to establish a homeland for Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka started at Wadukkodei summit in 1976. This was the crucial turning point of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The conflict and the peace talk existed for about two decades between the government and the Liberation Tamil Tigers for Eelam (LTTE). Decades of war in Sri Lanka resulted in tension between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities (MiCT, 2016). The Sri Lankan Government which represents the ideology of the majority Sinhalese the final war to defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which was engaged in a war against government forces on behalf of the liberation of the Tamil ethnic minority community, during the early part of 2009. With the killing of the LTTE leader in May 2009, the war ended. United Nations claimed that during the final war, around 40,000 civilians were killed.

### **The Newspapers in the Context of Ethnic Conflict**

Sinhala medium newspapers in Sri Lanka originated as a part of the campaign of the Sinhala national movement and the Buddhist enlighten movement. Sinhala newspapers and magazines became a strong weapon in the propaganda campaign during the British colonial period to awaken Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka. Some media have been criticized by journalists and politicians alike for sensationalist coverage, unprofessional use of sources, unreliable research, and lack of accuracy (Secretariat for Media Reform, 2016, p. 30). Further Rao and Weerasinghe (2012) write that reporter was allowed to go to the war front along with paramilitary units. These news reports contained visuals, images, and phrases that depict the bravery and heroism of the government forces.

Weerasinghe (2019) suggests that at critical moments on questions regarding ethnicity, it was observed that mass media used the same tactics to popularize the myths. That is to promote society's preference towards authoritarianism. Ayub (2018) added, if a foreigner who can read both Sinhala and Tamil go through the



newspapers published in Sri Lanka in those two languages, he might conclude that he was reading newspapers published in two countries. There is such a vast and strange gap between the priorities of Sinhala and Tamil newspapers. In addition, MiCT discourse analysis report findings strongly suggest that differences between nationalist and government-supporting Sinhalese media are more far-reaching than differences between Tamil and Sinhalese media (2016).

Jayaratne (2001) who studied the massacre at Bindunuwewa in Sri Lanka, suggests the newspapers' trend construct genre surpassing the factual truth within the context of ethnic conflict and it has further been neglecting objective reporting and journalism ethics. He further argues that a distance between Sinhala and Tamil has been created through reporting. In the past, it had been useful for people to live without unnecessary desperation by creating myths and genres in order to overcome defeats directed by the environment. The people understand the world through binary –oppositions. The reading of the world through binary- opposition such as; good and bad, man and woman, sea and land, and hero and villain man does not understand the world in its real nature. Jayaratne's (2001) Bidunuwawa case study suggests that the newspapers in Sri Lanka have created a genre equal to western cowboy films which have a hero and a villain. Bidunuwawa newspapers' genre proposed to annihilate the villains or components.

Sri Lankan newspapers are divided linguistically into Sinhala, Tamil and English. Capital Colombo's Sinhalese newspapers dominate the Sri Lankan newspaper industry. Tamil newspapers are mostly published in the Northern Province where Tamils are abundant. During the final phase of the war four Sinhala dailies, seven Sinhala weeklies, four Tamil dailies, Seven Tamil weeklies, three English dailies, and three English weeklies were published. It is common to see reading newspapers in urban areas, in offices, and the public places. During the final phase of the war, it was noticed that there was a remarkable development of circulation of newspapers which were in a position of Sinhala nationalism. The public trended towards the electronic media to access the instant and sensational news of the war and access newspapers for descriptive and analytical facts.

### **Methodology**

For this study, mix methods qualitative approach is employed. In the studies pertaining to social sciences and behavioral sciences mixed methods are utilized extensively. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) noted that reflexivity and revision are involved in the qualitative research process. The qualitative approach is employed to understand those involved and the content to which they liaise and to explore the relevant process and untapped phenomenon. Thus, the qualitative mixed methodology was applied to systematically analyze how newspapers reported war-related incidents. Further, qualitative content analysis of news of newspapers was integrated with semi-structured interviews with news editors, reporters, and media critics. News reported by selected newspapers during this period was selected under the keyword "war news". Many scholars have been involved in this aspect of structural and narrative analysis (Berhe, 2021, Boyd and

Blackburn, 2020; Venkateswaran, 2020; Barthes, 1988; Hendricks, 1973; Propp, 1970; Lévi-Strauss, 1967). Thus, in this study news content was analyzed through narrative and structural methods.

This research focuses on the front-page news and news photographs of Sri Lanka's three largest newspapers in the last months of the war against terror in Sri Lanka. The study does not focus on editorials, letters to editors, columns, features, or other commentaries. The front page of each issue was searched for news about the war against terrorism. The criteria were (1) objective reporting (2) the news build-up narratives support or neutrality toward military operations (3) understanding the narrative imagery built up by the Sri Lankan print media's news genre.

The contents of three Sinhala newspapers were analyzed. Thus, "Dinamina" was owned by the government, neutral "Lankadeepa" was owned by the private sector and "Divaina" was published by the private sector with the sense of Sinhala Buddhist ideology during the final phase of the war from 18.04.2009 to 18. 05. 2009 and data taken from the interviews with 24 media critics, newspaper editors, and reporters are analyzed in this context. In the field of journalism, this methodology has been used by Jayaratne (2001) to study Bindunuwawa media narratives.

In this study, semi-structured interviews have been used as non-literacy sources. Non-literacy is the society, people who interview have obtained, and research issues have been discussed. The relevant methodology adopted and research conducted regarding the knowledge, opinion, observation, comments, and experience on covering the war against terror in Sri Lanka. For this purpose, the researcher has conducted semi-structured interviews with media critics, newspaper editors, and reporters. Based on an interview schedule the researcher was to break down each interviewee's questions and guidelines. The analysis which follows is based on interviews with 24 media critics, editors, and reporters. All the interviewees interviewed were based in the capital and worked for either state-run or privately owned Sinhala national newspapers, universities, and the cultural industry. A majority of reporters and editors have covered the war. The interview data were collected over a period of three months. Although questions were guided during the interview, it was flexible and adopted specific questions to the flow of the interview. The interviews were deep conversations because the researcher uses special techniques which was instead of asking standard questions, the researcher was trying to explore experiences and understanding of his focus topic in indirect ways. At the same time noted the researcher's impressions and observations during the interview. These notes were guided for later stages to transcribing the interviews as well as for the overall analysis.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of the study analyze the factors of the narratives being constructed surpassing the factual truth and going away from objective reporting by Sri

Lankan Sinhala newspapers and also analyses how a distance is built between Sinhalese and Tamils through reporting.

The same incident has appeared in the newspapers from different angles. In general military spokesman has become the source of news and no clear source could be seen in most reports (NR and WT, personal communication, 2011). Media genre has been created by the newspapers and the headlines and content neglecting generally accepted journalism theories such as “objective reporting”, “balance”, “truthfulness”, “accuracy”, “fairness”, “social well-being” and “impartiality” (RK and SK, personal communication, 2011). Jayaratne (2001) notes that genres are created in the field of the cultural creative industry such as novels and films. In constructive and creative fields (novels, film, etc.) binary polarities are made used to construct wider narratives within the popular genre of fiction construction. Yet does print media communication differ from this? The information media, too, deploys these figurative fictions and rapidly creates simplistic binaries in order to construct a hegemonic position for particular people and particular groups by focusing on certain incidents.

From the news in the Sinhalese newspapers during the final phase of the war, the researcher observes a building up of a certain narrative that is not based on factual evidence. In the final month of the war the way of the narrative was constructed in the news of newspapers by using a binary-opposition narrative style as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Press Narratives: Binary-Opposition*

<b>Hero</b>	<b>Villain</b>
President Mahinda	LTTE leader Prabakaran
Defense Secretary/ General Sarath/ Major general Shavindra	LTTE Leaders
Gamunu/ Gajaba Regiments	Tigers/Ferocious terrorists
Hostages	Tamil people faithful to tigers
Innocent civilians	Tiger committed suicides
Warrior	Gaspings tigers
Patriots	Traitors
Rajapaksha Government	Opposition Leader Ranil, NGO's, Peace activists
Human	Inhuman

The majority of news the details submitted subsequently were not based on facts. Also, what was done, as usual, amounted to the construction of the newspapers' own heroes and villains. If one of the roles of the media is to enable the people to participate in the political processes by making relevant information available, then the role played by the mass media is more difficult to understand. Clearly, the presentation of incidents and the actors behind those incidents diverge from reality (Jayaratne, 2001; SW and DL, personal communication, 2011).

In this narrative, the hero-villain concept is created according to the style of binary opposition and it was suggested by the newspapers that since the tiger terrorists were not a human being and subsequently, they should be destroyed (SK and SW, personal communication, 2011). In general, it was seen that all three

newspapers which did the content analysis have been maintaining their reporting in a way of constructing genre related to the war. Thus, the newspapers have taken sides with the government in the stance of implementing repudiating, detesting, and defeating the LTTE. In all occasions when both sides are mentioned, the separation could be seen as calling “others’ side” as villains and “our side” as heroes. It can also be seen that the image of the government, ministers, and government military leaders is built within the underline meaning of the genres indicating Rajapaksha government was belong to “our side”. The “other side” of the government, the opposition and opposition leader has been included in the villains’ side in order to build the government image within the war process and to justify military operations. Jayaratne (2001) suggests that the narrative demands the villain be destroyed by the hero. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, the way these conflicts are resolved in narratives cannot be replicated in the real world. The role of the myths is to symbolically resolve conflicts, which may not be actually resolvable. Yet the above binaries suggest an “annihilation of the other”.

When publishing the statistics of deaths, contradictory statistics have been presented by the three newspapers (RK and MR, personal communication, 2011). It can be seen abundantly where clear news sources were not mentioned. However, the numbers of LTTE deaths have been mentioned in the comprised analysis of three newspapers commonly yet nothing was mentioned about the number of deaths of the government soldiers. Genres have been created in order to appease the Sinhalese readers who have been in hopes of a military win. One-sided opinions and conclusions have been presented leaving nothing for the readers to think (DP and AJ, personal communication, 2011). Idiomatic phrases and clauses have been used to make it easy to construct genres in the use of language. Adjectives and words which get hints for the expected conclusion can be seen abundantly. For instance, “Lankadeepa” newspaper reported an incident removing a dyke, by government forces, which was built by LTTE as the “devastation of the biggest dyke”. In order to show the brutality of the ferocity of LTTE special words such as, “black tigers” and “brutal terrorists” have been used. The nature of binary opposition can also be seen in the words which were used to report the war (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Press Narratives: Binary-Opposition*

<b>Hero</b>	<b>Villain</b>
Caught	Destroyed
Scarified the life	Killed
Minor casualties	Major casualties
Confirmed the power	Escape
Went forward	Hidden
Human operation	Suicider
War front	Being caged
Wipe out of terrorists	Battle pause
Operation to catch Prabakaran	Gasping tigers
Sinhala nation	Tamil suspects
Annihilate	In a vain attempt
Innocent/supporters	Brutal punishment given

Motherland	Separatists
Sri Lankan proud son	Traitor/ raged
March forward fearlessly	Retreating
Patriot	South Sinhala tigers
Recue civilians' victory	Tiger Child soldiers
Victory	Sad ending

These adjectives and phrases to show the destruction of the villains have been used to describe with a pre-conclusion presuming that it would be demanded by the readers of Sinhalese newspapers. Instead of describing the facts of the war between LTTE and government forces, attractive phrases have been used; “severe fight”, “heavy casualties”, and “huge attacks” (AJ, personal communication, 2011). It is a feature of constructing genres when one is not in a position to define something accurately. Here contradictions are used symbolically to solve puzzles that have doubt and uncertainty. The hero created by the news would never die. It is shown how the villain is gradually defeated and finally destroyed. Editorials have been used in order to justify the things taking place at present. For this purpose, myths have been used. Publishing the front-page news editorial by “Divaina” newspaper on the last day of the war of “King Elara and King Dutugamunu” which is considered a past war between Sinhalese and Tamils indicated that president Rajapaksha won the war in the same way how King Dutugamunu had. As Barthe observes:

If stated simply, myth is the language of a nation. Contemporary myth is a mode of communication. It has a communicative system with a message. A myth is neither a thing, nor a concept, nor or an idea. It is a type of semiotics. This type of language is a message. Therefore, it is not merely a verbalization. It can be written. It can occur through pictures, film or any other medium. All these assists in conveying the dialogue of the mythical language (Barthes 1988, p. 109).

Publishing photographs referenced to news is also seen as a way of binary opposition. Hero and the villain can easily be identified through the content of the photographs (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *Photograph Narratives: Binary-Opposition*

<b>Hero of the photograph</b>	<b>Villain of photograph</b>
Government soldiers well dress with uniform and arms	Fallen LTTE members discolored and naked
Smiling and Proud faces	Wounded, died and desperate or violent faces of LTTE members
Sri Lankan national flag and military flags	Devastated buildings and ruins
Assist the Tamil civilians	Aimed the arms at Tamil civilians
Facilities in government run refugee camps	Hard life in LTTE camps
Modern arms	Captured arms

Sinhalese newspapers acted in a way of not harm the government's military actions. The reason for them to think so is that it might harm their business and professional existence if they go against government militarization (NR, personal

communication, 2011). In addition, a media critic believed that the Sinhalese newspapers functioned partially for the government but disadvantages to the LTTE (JP, personal communication, 2011). A journalist stated that Sri Lankan newspapers acted dominantly towards the ethnic crisis. He further argued that newspapers functioned themselves on behalf of the feelings of the ethnic groups that they represent (CW, personal communication, 2011). Refusing this argument, the Chief Editor (Lankadeepa) said that the task of the newspapers was to fulfill the expectation of the people as they were anxiously waiting for the victory of the war (SR, personal communication, 2011). The Chief Editor (Dinamina) took a similar approach noting that the war reporting was very successful (MA, personal communication, 2011). A study of the war in Kosovo, for example, suggested that 'Serbian media have nationalized, mobilized and emotionalized the public sphere by the use of techniques of so-called "patriotic journalism" and by making historical myths a topical subject' (Hrvatín and Trampuz, 2000, p. 77). A media critic expressed that there is nothing as public opinion and he headed that if an idea is delivered to them by the media it would form public opinion. He further suggests that the government constructed a partial opinion about the war by controlling the media (WJ, personal communication, 2011). As Rao and Weerasinghe (2011) suggested Sri Lankan journalists come forward willing to help the government to combat terrorism. They fulfilled the demands of the government disregarding professionalism. Journalists said that they were under pressure for that.

A media critic described the narrative style that the Sinhalese newspapers reported the war:

The newspapers constructed the stories. In spite of the ability of a crime to be reported concomitantly, a story being written was a way of narrating genres. There was war news as well in the genres of the war in society. The reason was a competition between the newspapers. The genres are things that cannot be ignored by humans. The consent of the people to write stories is used here. The desire was more to construct genre within a war. Indecent actions of government forces were not revealed because of this usage (N.R, personal communication, 2011).

An editor of a newspaper expressed, the protest of the readers might be aimed unless the genres were constructed in the narrative style of creating images of the government forces (S.R, personal communication, 2011). However, a sub-editor refused the claim of constructing genres in Sinhalese newspapers. She further argued that a writing style for the readers to understand easily was used (C.P, personal communication, 2011).

### **Conclusions**

This paper methodologically analyses and describes whether the news genre published in the Sinhala language newspapers which is the language of the majority ethnic community in Sri Lanka, used professional news coverage to report the final military operation by government forces to defeat the LTTE, which was fighting for the liberation of the Tamil minority. This study was done under the

hypothesis that the news reports on a war based on ethnic diversity could enhance the conflict between relevant stakeholders or would reconciliation those involved in the conflict. Thus, it is argued that the media can influence the public to understand the reality of war as well as mislead the public through a false reality. The news reports with the “war news” indicator published in three mainstream newspapers targeting the majority Sinhala population during the final phase of the war were subjected to qualitative content analysis to ascertain whether the newspapers employed professional news reporting principles such as accuracy, impartiality, objectivity, and balance in their reporting. Further, it was also measured whether, instead of the said principles some factors which are not used in professional news reporting such as conclusions, recommendations, ideologies, and narratives were not included in the news reporting. The findings included in the analysis were contextualized through the semi-structured interviews held with editors, reporters, and media critics.

The limitation of this study is that the newspaper sample selected for this study is only newspapers targeted at the majority ethnic group. The study did not focus on newspapers targeting the Tamil minority. Further, the study has not given the consideration to the issue of to what degree newspaper news reports influence its readers in making their own decisions.

The findings of the study indicate that within the context of war conflicts, news reporting construct narratives instead of factual reporting on professional ethics and code of conduct. This seems to be influenced by the relationship between the dominant ideology of society and newspaper ownership. The use of narrative construction strategies in the news ignores the main role of news to report the factual truth. This situation can adversely affect ethnic cohesion and integration in a war-torn society. Fulton et al. (2005) argued that the construction of narratives in news reporting instead of factual reporting of truth will have an unfavorable influence over the social role of the news. There have been arguments for a long time that news reporting should not construct narratives instead of facts (BBC, 2019; Probuska, 2018; Albright, 2017; Mary, 2010; Koch, 1990). The credibility of news media is established through reporting of the factual truths. In news reporting, information should not be structured as a narrative. The main news principles, namely accuracy, balance, impartiality, and objectivity should be applied in the information with factual truth. Conclusions, ideologies, recommendations, or constructed narratives should not be presented to the readers through the news. Constructing news as narratives involves pre-conclusions, interpretations, opinions, and fabricated stories in news reports that make recommendations to the reader for decision-making. Thus, the reader loses the opportunity to make critical decisions empowered by all the factual truths. This leads to an increasing rivalry between stakeholders in a conflict environment and imposes the monopoly of the major ethnic community on the minor ethnic communities. In such a situation, constructed narratives in the newspaper’s news could act as a weapon to enhance hate, take suspicions, and make anger. The construction of news as narratives denies the sovereignty of the readers. The reader who has lost his sovereignty loses the opportunity to make the right decision in a democratic society.

In the sphere of ethnic conflict, the role of media was challenging, complicated, and crucial. The war between the two sides in Sri Lanka was understood by the people through the media. The news narratives published by the newspapers were not accepted by the public, but also it is believed since the characteristics and the attraction towards them can be noticed in newspapers. This acceptance and belief are used strategically to form a public opinion by the media. The war, while arousing the racial feelings of the people, demanded the newspaper consumer goods with genre and information suited to its own ideology from the newspaper. Journalists are asked to identify and highlight news that infotainment, gossip, and “shock and awe” events related to terror rather than to provide critical and analytical coverage (Booth and Dunne, 2003, p. 14). War news of a wide range has been transformed into the genre by newspapers because of the urge by the government military mechanism, being pulled out to the competition of their own business aims and being partial to the ethnic group in which they represented. The belief of the desire and myth of the public towards the narrative style of the war was confirmed by newspapers through the existence of the genre. This study has shown that the news narrative of Sinhalese newspapers gave a monopoly to Sinhala racism ideology as their own within the society creating the hero and villain in the war. It is argued that the readings and understandings of the war against LTTE by the public were not realistic and uncompleted.

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