

This Is a Punishment to America Framing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe's Mainstream Media

Allen Munoriyarwa & Albert Chibuwe

Abstract

Drawing on framing, at both methodological and theoretical levels, this chapter examines the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in two mainstream Zimbabwean weekly newspapers. The chapter answers two questions: In what ways did the mainstream media in Zimbabwe frame the COVID-19 pandemic? To what extent did the coverage sync with the public sphere model of biocommunicability? We note that the private mainstream press largely adopted a thematic framing approach of the ruling regime's COVID-19 plan, by highlighting corruption, mismanagement, and overt politicisation of the pandemic. The state-controlled public press broadly adopted an episodic framing approach that focused on the state's COVID-19 intervention over time, mostly presenting these interventions as a success story. We argue that the episodic framing approach of the private press attempted to hold the state to account. The thematic framing approach of the state-controlled public press backgrounded the regime's failure to stem the pandemic tide and presented the intervention in 'sunshine journalism'. Both framing approaches violated established health reporting practices, as outlined in the biocommunicability model. We conclude that 'the hear, speak and see no evil news framing approach' of the public media and the anti-regime frames prevalent in the private press reflect prevalent media polarisation.

Keywords: Framing analysis, Zimbabwe mainstream media, COVID-19. Biocommunicability model. The Sunday Mail. Daily News on Sunday.