



LUND UNIVERSITY

The Other Side of the Pandemic Reportage

Audience Perception of COVID-19 Media Framing and its Influence
on Social Polarization

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MSc in Media and Communication

Lund University

2022

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the experiences of Lagos State residents during COVID-19 and the relationship between COVID-19 reportage in Lagos State and ethnic inter-relationship. The goal is to understand media influence in a society from the perspectives of people directly influenced by the COVID-19 media frames. This thesis is the first research to explore ethnic polarization in Lagos State within the context of media and COVID-19. It is significant for researchers and decision-makers in the media to fully grasp what media audiences think about health reportage and how it influences them. It will help direct researchers on the way for further research and help the media decision-makers know what needs to be the focus of improvement for health reportage in Lagos State.

The research adopted a non-media centric approach to study mediatization from below. A non-media centric approach means studying subjects in the lower part of the power relations in a mediatized society. The focus is shifted from what the media says to what the audiences perceive from the media and how it shapes their perception of a topic and their everyday actions. The theories of Mediatization and Framing were adopted to understand the power of media and the process of shaping the audience's perception through media frames. Furthermore, Contact Theory was used to explain the relationship between the pandemic situation and ethnic polarization in Lagos State.

COVID-19 changed Lagosians' everyday lives, and amid these changes, there is an increased level of Lagosians' independence on the media for information about the pandemic. Research findings show that COVID-19 reportage created and increased the fear and anxiety of Lagosians all through the pandemic period. This influence is attributed to the daily media report of COVID-19 confirmed cases and the lack of news about other phenomena in the media. However, these reportages also helped Lagosians stay aware of the preventive measures to take, and some interviewees affirmed that it was an essential factor that gave them confidence and helped reduce their anxiety.

During COVID-19, social relationships were negatively affected as people could not physically meet with their friends, families, and colleagues. Furthermore, the research analysis showed that even though social relationships were affected, and ethnic relationships and contact were reduced, it yielded a good result for Lagos State. Unlike before COVID-19, ethnic conflicts drastically reduced while social cohesion and peace were promoted. However, there were other

tragic happenings, such as palliatives looting and warehouse robbery. The media also did not report on ethnic conflicts and polarization as there was nothing to report on that. Therefore, this research concludes that ethnic conflicts were reduced during COVID-19 due to a lack of contact between individuals from different ethnic groups.

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Keywords: COVID-19, ethnic polarization, prejudice, media frames, ethnic conflicts, Lagos State, non-media centric, stereotypes.

Acknowledgement

I thank the Almighty God for guiding me through my master's program. I dedicate this Master's Thesis to my parents, my lovely daddy and my sweet mummy. Despite the odds, they readily took up the challenge to sponsor my master's education at Lund University. I appreciate every effort made by them all through the two years journey. I want to be able to make them proud every single day.

This master's thesis was partially supported by Crafoord Foundation Travel Grant, Lund University. I want to thank my supervisor, Michael Bossetta, for the guidance and support throughout the thesis process. I am glad I got to be supervised by an intelligent and supporting person like him.

I would also like to show my gratitude to Tobi Oladiran, Kennedy Akinloye, Ebitanmi Taiwo, my fellow course mates; Bolaji Daramola, Danicius Kaihenneh Sengbeh, Hamzah Dzikri Fadliansyah and the Discord gang for their regular support and encouragement that kept me going despite the challenges and stress.

There is also an extraordinary person to appreciate, and that is me. I give myself a big accolade for remaining strong and completing my thesis despite my health challenges and tight schedule. Girl, you did amazingly well.

Finally, I would like to appreciate every other person that helped through the research process. I might not mention you all, but I remember your help. To my research participants and to those who helped share my social media post about needing research participants, I say thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A virus outbreak catches the attention of everyone in a society, and they all turn to the media for adequate information on the best ways they can keep safe amidst fear and confusion. Communication plays a pivotal role in reducing the spread of a virus (Nwakpu et al., 2020). It shows how important the media is during a health crisis, and it is not only about communicating to the public but also about how the communication is made and its influence on the public perception and behavioral change during this specific crisis period.

The COVID-19 outbreak left severe consequences on institutions and businesses worldwide, and Nigeria is no exception (Ozili, 2020). The media, the disseminating vehicle of mass information on the very outbreak (Olatunji et al., 2020), is itself not left out of the fray. COVID-19 has dramatically affected the media, raising eyebrows and many questions about the media's narration, reportage, expertise, and transparency in adequately communicating disease outbreaks and other vital information to the public (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2020; Olatunji et al., 2020). The media is an essential player in reporting health crises and outbreaks to the public and an influencer on the public's behaviour towards preventing the spread of a viral infection (Laidlaw, 2013; Wogu et al., 2020a). Therefore, the media is as significant as the health officials in ensuring the public understand and take preventive health crisis measures in their locales.

The influence of media on society is a fundamental aspect of Media and Communication Studies. Media is far-reaching and influential in several aspects of the society and media audiences (Cotter, 2005). A study of audiences' experience with media cannot encapsulate its entire discourse, and then, there is the need for each research to have a specific area of focus in exploring media audiences. Therefore, this research applied an audience reception approach to examine the influence of media reportage in Nigeria during COVID-19. Considering how broad audiences' study can be, this research narrows down to the audiences' social experience and ethnic polarization.

The COVID-19 outbreak is one of the most significant events in 2019, and it is becoming challenging to ignore the need for efficient media in reporting health crises in Nigeria. As with past outbreaks in Nigeria (Wogu et al., 2020a; Wogu et al., 2020b), this seeming controversial media performance brings the media's efficiency and reliability of health reports into question. Because of what might come in the future, there is an urgent need to explore this kind of media performance and its subsequent public reactions and influence on society. However, as this

research will argue, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to social cohesion in the society in the face of the fears and anxiety that affected media audiences' social wellness. In addition, media played a significant role in how COVID-19 was perceived in the society and how it influenced individuals differently. Media also contributed to the experience of ethnic polarization mainly with how it shapes people's perception of other ethnic groups.

Research Aims and Objectives

Health communication by the media is one of the cores that affect most of Africa's population concerning existing health needs (Mano and Milton, 2021). This research aims to explore the relationship between ethnic groups during COVID-19 using Lagos State as a case study. The first objective of this thesis is to study the experience of Lagos residents during the pandemic as influenced by the media. Secondly, the research examined how the framing of COVID-19 by the media influenced audience behaviors, perception, and ethnic polarization in this society.

Critically studying the audience's perception will help researchers, policymakers, and media organizations understand news from the angle of those mainly affected by them (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Harding, 2008) and improve Nigeria's media communication. It is essential to explore what happens when public health knowledge is constructed through mediated communication (Couldry and Hepp, 2017) and the media's influence on social health as it tries to protect our public health. These are some of the critical and interesting angles this research stands to explore. Therefore, the research questions for this research are as follows:

- (1) What perception does the audience have about the media framing of COVID-19?
- (2) What was the media's role in influencing people's attitudes toward other ethnic groups in Lagos State during COVID-19?

Significance of the Topic

The audience study of this topic enables an understanding that goes beyond the institution of media to incorporate the context and everyday experiences of the media audience. The study of media audiences makes a complete analysis (Kitzinger, 2004), without which assumptions are only made about the power of the media. Media texts cannot be separated from their broader cultural significance (Kitzinger, 2004). This can only be achieved with the use of an audience study approach. Moreover, to fully understand the role of media among the audiences, a close study of their everyday life is needed.

In mediatization, audiences are the less influential actors in this power play, and studies like this give a better chance of studying mediatization from below. As research should be, the less powerful actors should also be given a chance to be understood and analyzed as much as the more powerful actors are studied. Mediatization from below affords the researcher a bottom-up approach guided by contextualization to focus on the social aspects of media studies (Andersson, 2017). Therefore, this research studies mediatization from below, focusing on ethnic polarization and the role of media within the COVID-19 context.

Considering the limitation of the methodology used by past research in this research area, a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews is, therefore, more effective for delving deeper and exploring this topic further. Whereas most studies have focused on the media framing differences between the various Nigerian media, very few studies have been done on the possible polarizing effect of news media, which this research aims to study. Furthermore, research has been done to explore the health messages that were reported by the media in Nigeria during the pandemic, the effects of COVID-19 on the media, the economic implications of the pandemic, and audience responses to the frames used by the media (Bolaji et al., 2021; Ohia et al., 2020). However, no research has been done to explore the audience's perception of the possible influence the media framing of COVID-19 has on social and ethnic activities. The research will step forward from previous research by filling this gap. The continued existence of this virus is a huge concern, and there is a need to explore the possible effects it might be having on our country's social cohesion.

Research Structure

This thesis is structured into five chapters. After an introductory first chapter, Chapter 2 positions the research within current academic arguments by reviewing works of literature and existing empirical research related to this research. In chapter 2, the researcher explains the core concepts of this study, such as social polarization, ethnic conflicts, mediatization, framing, and health communication, and their relevance to this study. Previous studies are also reviewed and discussed within this chapter.

Chapter 3 focuses mainly on the methodology design, including the sampling, piloting, and data collection process. As further explained in Chapter 3, this research adopts the non-media centric approach to mediatization for this study and qualitative semi-structured interviews for collecting data. The next chapter, Chapter 4, explains the research analysis, building on the data collected in Chapter 3. To this end, the chapter focuses on four main themes, which are

COVID-19 perception, media reportage, personal relationship, and ethnicity. The concluding chapter, chapter five, includes a summary of the research's findings, explanations to answer the research questions, and a critical reflection of the research and its contribution to the field of knowledge.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This research adopts a non-mediated approach to study audience perception of media framing of COVID-19 and its potential to polarize ethnic groups in Nigeria. Whereas studies of COVID-19 focus on media messages, there is a lack of critical focus on social polarization. Studying the audience's reception of media frames will provide a critical understanding of how the audience interprets media frames and acts with them in the society. Since polarization ultimately concerns the perception of social groups, and media frames can shape public perception, there is a need to understand how the link between media frames and audience reception may drive ethnic polarization. To understand this, a study focusing on audience reception can better explain the relationship between audience reception, media frames, and its polarizing effects on ethnic socialization.

This literature review argues that the media frames and audience perception of them play a significant role in the polarization of ethnic groups. Prior research shows that there was rising polarization among ethnic groups during the pandemic (Gottlieb and LeBas, 2020). This thesis will lean on mediatization, framing, contact, and conflict theories to explain the role of media and the significance of audience perception in exploring ethnic polarization during a health crisis. Contact theory explains the role of social contact in reducing or increasing prejudice among social groups, leading to polarization. To further explain possible increased prejudice during a health crisis, the researcher adopts the Conflict theory to this end. Conflict theory studies the existence of conflicts between two or more groups in a society. Mediatization theory argues that the media influences and shapes other sectors of the society, such as health and ethnicity. The media's influence on society can be explored and understood through the media frames used and the audience influenced by it. Framing as a theory emphasizes the media process through which specific messages are communicated to the audience.

Polarization and Ethnic conflict

"A sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy but also of strength and confidence... And yet identity can also kill-and kill with abandon. A strong-and exclusive-sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord" (Sen, 2007, pp. 1-2).

Polarization is the division of individuals into groups, where members of one group are homogenous by having common attributes while members of different groups have dissimilar attributes resulting in intergroup heterogeneity (Esteban and Ray, 1994). Several characteristics define these groups. There are social groups, political groups, religious groups, ethnic groups, and ideological groups. Furthermore, a group can also be formed on the foundation of shared characteristics like educational level, social structure, language, age, and culture (Gu, 2001; Gradín, 2000). Moreover, polarization has roots in people's makeup, believing that their way and culture are the right way of doing things. There are different forms of polarization; affective, ideological, and social polarization, indicating that polarization can be explored in any of these forms.

The affective form of polarization studies the difference between the people's positive attitudes and support within their group and negative attitude towards other groups (ECPR, 2022). Ideological polarization studies the level of differences people have about ideological issues, and it is more relevant and used when exploring political phenomena (Clark, 2009). An example of an ideological issue can be people's conservative and liberal opinions about abortion. Social polarization stems from the perception individuals have about other social groups in their society, resulting in prejudice, misconceptions, hatred, conflicts, and segregation of social groups.

Social Polarization

Research argues that social polarization highly correlates with conflicts, thus making it the best approach to study conflicts (Cárdenas, 2013). Additionally, to study ethnic polarization, the affective form of polarization is too shallow to comprehend such a process fully. Ethnic conflict is a very touchy subject whereby people agree that there is ethnic prejudice and discrimination but will not readily agree that they are part of the prejudice, even when they are. Also, ideological polarization is not sufficient to understand the social context of ethnic polarization, which is one of this research aims.

Furthermore, understanding that an ethnic group is mainly characterized by its social activities and the relationship between ethnic groups is substantiated by how they relate to each other socially, social polarization stands as the best form to study ethnic conflicts. Social conflict occurs among ethnic groups where concerned groups struggle over values, status, and power to achieve their desires over the other groups (Cosser, 1967). An ethnic group is a social group

defined by the interactions and relationships between people who share similar characteristics, language, and culture. The foundation of an ethnic group is built on its social existence, whereby the members similarly do things differentiating them from other groups (Lucy and Díaz-Andreu, 2005).

Social relationship is crucial to an individual's health and development and the general public's health and cohesion (House et al., 1988). Research has shown that our identity is influenced not only by our genetic and hormonal makeup but also by our social environment, relationships, and interactions (Rothschild, n.d.). Therefore, social polarization deserves as much attention as affective and ideological polarization gets, especially in social science and audience study, considering its direct impact on the social development of a community. Social polarization is the segregation that occurs within a society which can emerge from several factors (Hamnett, 2001). An example of social polarization that can occur in the society is the polarization of the majority and the minority. As Kubin and von Sikorski (2021) explained, polarization comes from building opponents, and these impressions of opponents are mostly built through the media.

Polarization, Ethnic Conflict, and Contact Theory

One of such groups is characterized by ethnicity. Ethnicity is derived from the ancient Greek 'ethnos', which refers to a range of occurrences where humans collectively live and act together (Østergård and Bilde, 1992). Ethnicity is defined as peoplehood and social identity where the members collectively believe that they are of common descent (Jenkins, 2008). Ethnicity is group-oriented, and therefore, polarization can occur within the context of ethnicity. It is also argued that a polarized society will reflect social tension and unrest and the possibility of revolt occurring between these heterogenous ethnic groups (Esteban and Ray, 1994). However, it is argued that contact influences friendship between ethnic groups in the society (Brubaker, 2004) and reduces the conflict between ethnic groups, which should also reduce polarization. Therefore, one of the effective ways to study ethnic polarization in a society is to understand the contact that exists therein, which can be enabled either by physical contact or mediated contact.

Contact theory hypothesizes that social contact between different social groups reduces the prejudice between majority and minority groups in that social circle (Allport et al., 1954; Nickerson, 2021). This theory was initially studied in the context of race and ethnic relations,

and it has been used to explain social conflicts and proffer ways to reduce such ethnic and racial conflicts.

Furthermore, the relationship between physical contact and polarization of social groups is not so linear that it cannot be influenced by other significant factors, such as the media and mediated contact. O'Connor (2017) postulated that prejudice results from the human brain trying to take a shortcut to process the vast amount of information it takes in. Therefore, a relationship exists between what the human brain takes in and what it acts out. As such, ethnic conflict is significantly tied to the information the individuals in these groups access. The media is considered a significant source of information in the society. Therefore, studying the recipients of the information media passes, which heavily increased during physical isolation. Focusing on media, mainly how groups are represented and perceived by the other groups, is vital for effectively exploring this subject area.

Contact theory is not always adequate for explaining the relationship between social groups, their contact, and levels of prejudice. Considering the increased attention given to media during this period, mediatization theory provides a further step to contact theory to explore this study extensively. This is to consider other significant factors outside social contact. Contact theory fails to consider other factors that significantly reduce or increase social polarization, such as the media. Another form of contact that exists is called mediated contact. Mediated contact exposes people to others from different social groups through a channel (Joyce, 2017). Therefore, mediated contact is a potential factor to be considered a significant factor in studying ethnic relationships during the pandemic.

Mediated Contact: Ethnic Representation in the Media and Social Polarization

“Communication powered by media channels has proved to be the pivot on which society develops and rests, and Nigeria is not an exception in this regard” (Mano, 2015, p. 117).

Media may not always have a polarizing effect on the audience, scholars have argued for and against it. As much as media polarizes, it can also depolarize (Kubin and von Sikorski, 2021). However, COVID-19 presents a quite controversial case. Kubin and von Sikorski (2021) said ‘hearing from fact-checkers and counter-attitudinal content reduces polarization’ (p. 9). In this research, the media reports factual news and emphasizes the social distancing protocol among the other preventive measures, there could be a social effect from these health-related

preventive measures resulting in social polarization. This presents the research the need to critically look at how polarization happens during health crisis.

The widening gap in public discourse within a multicultural society is of serious concern, and one of the many factors to consider is the ethnic discourse in the media industries (Yu, 2016). Often, there is an underrepresentation of the minorities within such a society, mainly attributed to the ‘instrumentalization of ethnic media’ where the stakeholders strategically use media to serve their interests (Yu, 2016). This underrepresentation of minor ethnic groups causes division in the society. This is a discourse that calls for attention from researchers and policymakers.

Research has established that responses to crises and conflicts contribute to centuries of racial profiling and othering (Said 1978, Mudimbe 1988 as cited in Mano, 2015). The representation performed by the media matters because representation influences perception (Mano, 2015). Ekanem, 2003 as cited in Mano (2015), says that Nigerian media is known in all of Africa for being very vocal, unrelenting, and dogged in their pursuit of social justice and political equality. However, research has shown that media plays a significant role and hugely contributes to ethnic polarization, with the majority ethnic groups acting xenophobic and hatefully toward the minority ethnic groups (Akpan et al., 2013; Adisa, 2016; Kizito and Ogbu, 2017). Research has also shown that polarization comes in the form of hate speech, name-calling, prejudice, and stereotypes against ethnic communities (Omoke et al., 2020).

Researchers have argued for and against the power media exercises on polarizing society. However, the polarizing power of the media can only be adequately explained from the standpoint of the people who are subjected to this power. Furthermore, media disseminate the same message to its heterogeneous audience. Many factors influence the interpretation of such a message by the audience. The encoding/decoding model by Hall et al. (2003) describes the audience of media messages as active meaning-makers capable of interpreting messages in several ways, even as oppositional to the intended meaning. As Reinhard (2007a) explained, audiences can be passive and active, and the media they select, pay attention to, and interpret its messages varies. This is also reflected in the different influences media exhibits in each audience, thereby making the research of audience perception a better way to study the various factors that shape the influence of media on social polarization. The relationship between media and social polarization is not a linear one, and this audience research will help discover the other possible factors, mediators, or influencers.

During social isolation during a pandemic, there will be less social contact and potentially more in-group solidarity between community members to overcome the challenges of the pandemic. Although physical contact was reduced during COVID-19, mediated contact between groups was not completely non-existent. There is a high possibility that mediated contact increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mediated contact can occur through various forms of digital communication between people, but this form of contact will likely replicate existing relationships. Fostering new relationships and contacts through digital communication within a society can be impossible, considering contact is mainly formed physically and then transferred to digital for further contact. This research then argues that due to physical isolation during COVID-19, the mainstream media played a heightened role in brokering contact and audience perceptions of contact. Perception is also influenced by personal relationships, which cannot be studied with a media study but with an audience study. There is a need to explore the different forms of contact people have when discussing media frames, which is a substantial contributing factor to building perceptions.

Conclusively, this research aims not to ascertain the prediction between media and social polarization but to understand how this relationship exists and the process that leads to it. This distinction is further explained by Reinhard (2007a) that the focus of communication and media studies is not driven by prediction but by the goal of understanding a phenomenon, why it exists, and the unknown processes behind it. Knowing that different contexts aid how audiences decode a media message, this research argues that studying the audience is the most feasible way to explore this phenomenon which any research has not done in Nigeria. Moreover, the social polarization of ethnic groups is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explored without an audience study.

Mediatization and Framing

Mediatization theory is a theoretical framework for media research used to describe the media's role in society. Theorized by Andreas Hepp, mediatization theory has significantly impacted the study of media and communication (Ampuja et al., 2014). Media has become an integral part of human lives, and theoretical frameworks like this help explain its influence on human lives. Mediatization tries to capture the long-term inter-relation processes between media change and social and cultural change (Hepp et al., 2010). However, it is also instrumental in exploring the short-term inter-relations. Using the second strand of research,

‘effect research’, helps analyze such short-term impact of media on the society (Hepp et al., 2010).

Media is an institution that has become so integrated into ethnicity, shown through how its institutional activities are performed and represented through mass and social media (Mano, 2015; Hjarvard, 2008). Hjarvard (2008) also claims that a significant part of media influence is attributed to how it is integrated into other societal institutions. Media does not stop at becoming integrated into its audiences’ lives, it also influences social actions. One of the several media influences is the social relationship between ethnic groups, which determines how others treat each ethnic group. To explain the critical role media plays in influencing social change, this research uses a strong form of mediatization. Using mediatization theory supports the argument that media exerts influence, one of which can be the possible polarization of ethnic groups in a community. As the theory then argues, the take-off point of this research is to explore the possible influence media has on ethnic polarization, using the perceptive lens of the media audience.

However, analyzing only media texts to determine the influence of media or what media audiences do with communication should not be accepted in the academic field, considering it tilts more to speculation than an empirically stated argument. Academic guesswork of what media messages do should be replaced or supplemented by fieldwork in the audience's real world (Schrøder, 1987). To understand and conceptualize the process of mediatization, an understanding of audiences’ acts of engagement is needed (Schrøder, 2019). Moreover, conducting audience research is the way to understand the audiences’ acts toward others in the society and the media's influence on it. Also, to understand this influence process, it is critical to look at how media frames the topics of interest in this research. The way media create frames, and the type of frames it creates differs depending on context. The context for this research is the health crisis of COVID-19 and it is expected that people unite more during crisis, this might be or not be the case during COVID-19.

Framing Theory was propounded to help explain how media frames are constructed and how those frames influence the public. Framing theory identifies media and audience frames and their effects (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). The media creates the frame of information it presents to the public, and the audience uses these frames to create expectations and make sense of their everyday lives (Baran and Davis, 2010).

Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) argues that the theory's foundation is rooted in people's interpretation of reality and everyday life, which significantly depend on the definition of situations. For instance, a public health crisis like COVID-19 defines a situation that plays a significant role in how the audience interprets the reality projected to them by the media. This projected reality then impacts how the people experience their everyday life with other ethnic groups. Just as Goffman in the 1970s empirically showed, the frames created by the media during COVID-19 determine the social environment of Lagos residents as it influences their thoughts, ideas, and attitudes toward other individuals (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015; Gottlieb and LeBas, 2020; and Nwakpu et al., 2020).

Framing theory encompasses both media and audience research. In a communication process, framing is located in four elements: the sender, receiver, message, and culture (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). An audience study primarily explores the receiver and cultural perspective, while a media study focuses on the sender and the message. It is not enough that most researchers conduct media studies with framing analysis. It is difficult to know where exactly framing starts from and ends. However, we know that it includes both the framing at the media level and the audience level. Furthermore, there is no way a framing analysis of media effect or influence is ascertained by only studying the media or audience framing. Research has established the frames created by media regarding different topics like COVID-19 and ethnicity. In this case, most research has done more media analysis and no audience analysis of the framing of ethnicity during COVID-19. Hence, this research strongly aims to fill such a gap with an understanding of how framing theory allows researchers to holistically examine media effects on audiences (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015)

Mediatization and Framing of Polarization and Ethnic Groups

Marozzo and Bessi (2018) studied the polarizing behavior exhibited on social media and news sites during political campaigns. The analysis shows that the most prevalent behavior on social media sites affects the popularity of opinion on news sites as well, such that most articles were close to the same position most popular on social media. This, to an extent, shows that audience/user behavior influences what news sites and articles report. It also emphasized how news sites' positions on politics are influenced by the editorial choices, thereby claiming that political position and polarization are affected by either editorial choices or readers/users/audiences.

This explains two factors that also influence polarization, although in the political setting. While reviewing this comprehensive research, an area that seems to be out of the picture is the factor(s) influencing the social media behavior of those users. Given what was done, one may suppose that it will be highly significant to look at the role of media in influencing polarization. Although, this study impressively explores the polarizing behavior of people on social media and news sites during political campaigns. It clearly shows another unique context for studying polarization and the different influencing factors that research can show. Polarization cannot be studied wholly; it must be situated within a context where situational factors define it.

Bosilkov (2021) argues that there is a consensus about the role of media in the process of mass polarization. Another researcher also argues that news consumption is crucial in embracing extreme attitudes (Prior, 2013). However, this media power is not a one-way process, the audience also plays an influential role in the polarization process. The audience has the power to self-select into news that agrees with their pre-existing beliefs (Gvirsman et al., 2016). Therefore, the news only serves as the source that reinforces the already existing views and beliefs. With this knowledge, it is important to not only explore polarization from the media approach but also from an audience approach.

One of the very few research that has been done to explore ethnic polarization is Omoke et al. (2020) study of ethnic polarization in Kenya and media framing. Using media framing as a theoretical framework, the study identified the media frames used in the news and how it impacts the audience. In framing media content, media personnel selects prominent and attractive news for broadcast (Omoke et al., 2020). Herein is a transparent process of how media framing occurs, with the media deciding what should be focused on or discarded for the audience. Media framing is an integral theory and player in identifying and explaining society's polarization. The media is an institution that reinforces polarization through its choice of news which is primarily divisive and stereotypical (Omoke et al., 2020). One of the critical considerations for news choice is the circumstance surrounding the news at that time. A clear case of this is the COVID-19 health crisis when what media mainly reported focused on this virus. The media frames created during this pandemic were determined by the crisis itself, thereby making health communication a subset under media coverage. This subset has become highly mediatized, and the media retains high sovereignty in deciding what to broadcast or not broadcast about COVID-19. And there is no longer a clear difference between the voice of media and the voice of health workers, leaving us with a highly mediatized society.

Health Communication

COVID-19 and the Mediatized Social World

Yaya et al. (2020) argue that a strong association exists between ethnicity, health outcomes, and mediated ethnic differences and conflicts, further exposed by COVID-19. Observation of the case suggests a pertinent relationship between less social contact, increased mediatization of social lives, and COVID-19. The increased mediatization of social lives results in different types of information and the frame that comes with each media message. There is also a clear indication that ethnic conflict increasingly changed in Lagos during COVID-19 (Gottlieb and LeBas, 2020). In a conflict-prone society, the media's conflict reportage can reinforce conflicts and make it difficult for the affected parties to reconcile (Akpan et al., 2013). Conflict is one of the dominant frames used by the media to report COVID-19 (Ogbodo et al., 2020). It created not only conflicts between countries (for instance, the travel ban on some countries) but also conflicts within countries (Ogbodo et al., 2020). COVID-19 is one factor that might be responsible for the heightened conflicts.

As Rothstein (2002) explained, studying the social context of public health using a social constructionism approach is more adequate than a public health approach. The social constructionism approach is significant for making sense of our social reality and understanding the reality of lived experiences from the subjective perspectives of the people living these experiences (Andrews, 2012). This research uses a social science approach to explore public health communication and its social context within a case study. Over the years, research has grown to recognize the inseparability of public health from its larger socioeconomic context (Meyer and Schwartz, 2000). The outbreak of COVID-19 remains a global public health concern, and the social context of COVID-19 is as vital as every other context. Understanding the social effect of mediatized public health is one of the various aspects that makes up the comprehensive management of public health in the society.

Just as Couldry and Hepp (2017) say that "the social world is not just mediated but mediatized: that is, changed in its dynamics and structure by the role that media continuously...play in its construction." (p. 27). Media is an essential player in the construction of our society, it is a social institution that wields enormous power over its audience (Baran and Davis, 2010), and central to constructionism is the interactions of individuals in a society, leading up to knowledge creation (Schwandt, 2003 as cited in Andrews, 2012). If a particular interaction in

a society increases during COVID-19 and not before the health crisis, it suggests a possible relationship between the health crisis and what it created in the lives of everyone. However, the relational link between these two concepts is health communication, the information media provides for its audience to learn about COVID-19. We call what the media passes to the individuals ‘media frames’ and to understand how polarization occurs, these concepts, including health communication, are vital. Also, media frames have to be studied within the subset ‘health communication’ because each frame created by the media is always for a subset. This subset can be entertainment, health, finances, and politics. The form of polarization this study aims to explore occurred during COVID-19 when most news was about the health sector; therefore, establishing health communication above others is the most relevant for this study.

Media framing of COVID-19

Health communication researchers usually overlook how people experience media reception while focusing more on the message effects of their communication Obregón (2005). However, the people’s experiences and perceptions result in the behavioral, cognitive, or emotional effect health communication has on them. Studying such an experience will give a better understanding than studying the effects of this field of knowledge.

Audiences are an integral part of health communication. They are referred to as ‘health decision-makers’, explaining that individuals and communities use health communication to make decisions about themselves, their families, and the space and activities they share with others within their community (WHO, 2017, p. 2). Audiences are essential in determining the success or failure of health communication. They are also crucial for determining the social healthiness of a community.

Mounting debates have persisted about how the media framed COVID-19 and how the news affected the befuddled population. The reportage of the pandemic and daily updates on COVID-19 cases caused a lot of fear and psychological stress among the public, claiming that there was inadequate reportage on how the government will care for the public during the lockdown (Adediran, 2020; Africa, 2020; Africanews and AFP, 2021; Lashitew, 2020).

Although there was a high reportage of COVID-19 in Nigeria across media where they disseminated useful information and facilitated decision-making, the reportage also accentuated public fear (Nwakpu et al., 2020). Though the media's work was to debunk misinformation, lies, and rumors, there was an increasingly high level of misinformation about

COVID-19, thereby adding to the public fear. Studies have shown that the framing of public discussion of health and illnesses affects people's behavior and attitude regarding the specific illness (Carter and Watney, 1989; Davis and Siu, 2007; Powers and Xiao, 2008; and Wald, 2008). This point affirms the theory of media framing. According to Nwakpu et al. (2020), one of the most dominant frames of COVID-19 media news is the fatality frame, which mainly increases fear and tension. This is attributed to the frequent reporting of COVID-19 cases and the death toll. Media reportage generated more fear and anxiety, as evidenced by a suspected case who committed suicide, possibly because of the fear of being killed by the virus as it has killed thousands of people, as portrayed in the media.

Anxiety and fear can either reinforce or diminish the polarization among the people within a society. A study shows that contrary to the normal polarizing expectations from the fear of death during COVID-19, the polarization in that society diminished (Pereira et al., 2020). Another study argues that when exploring fear and its influence on polarization, we should consider the source of the emotional response, not just the type of emotion (McLaughlin et al., 2020). However, we should consider not only the source but also the recipients of the source and exhibitors of the emotion, that is, the media audience. In considering both the source and the recipient, researchers better understand what media frames of fear can do to polarization to either diminish or reinforce it.

Overall, there is reason to fear that, aside from the more obvious implications of the pandemic related to the physical, fiscal, and emotional health of rural citizens, the pandemic and its reportage may have increased levels of polarization (Banack, 2021).

News Consumption Pattern in Lagos, Nigeria

Media is one of the major news providers in the society, and the attention people pay to the media primarily increases during special situations like war outbreaks, societal crises, or the COVID-19 pandemic. It is mainly attributed to the increased need for information during such an extraordinary situation. Ghersetti and Westlund (2018) use the term 'societal crises' to refer to events or situations that interrupt the everyday routines of a community or society, which in the worst case, threatens basic social functions. Media communication and news consumption have been found to occur in different forms, which are hugely determined by the type of media and the audience consumption behavior and pattern. The various forms of media are classified under mass and social media. Mass media majorly deals with producing and distributing

knowledge to a potentially large audience, while the decision to watch or read the information lies within the audience's power (McQuail, 2022). Commenting on the mediascape, Ghersetti and Westlund (2018) explain that:

“Some social media are mainly used for interpersonal updating, and keeping in touch with family and friends, while others are frequently used to access and share news and other media content. In such cases, the social media platform essentially functions as an interface between the media user and the news media.” (p.2).

Therefore, mass media and social media are linked, and one is not abandoned for the other as media users use each one depending on their needs at a particular time. Research has posited that during a social crisis, mass media importantly functions as a reporter of the situation while letting the people know what preventive measures need to be taken (Perreault and Perreault, 2021). Furthermore, previous research has established that the way audiences turn to news media and social media during societal crises depends on their everyday media habits (Ghersetti and Westlund, 2018). Similarly, this view is very relatable for this research as it explores the specific social crisis period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study done by Jóhannsdóttir (2021) concluded that news is still widely consumed by the public in their everyday lives. Although centered on Iceland, the study also concluded that online sites, followed by television and social media, are the most visited media forms as the primary news source. It is interesting to watch television ranked above social media, and it affirms the significant importance of mass media as the primary source of news. So also, understanding the pattern of media consumption in Lagos will provide insight into the media forms that are the most feasible for this research.

There are various mass media forms in Lagos, including newspapers, televisions, and radio stations. Olumuji (2021) research examined audience preference for both electronic and print newspapers in Lagos State. The research conclusively shows that The Punch Newspaper is the most preferred newspaper by the audience, both print and electronic. Furthermore, it implies that the consumption pattern is influenced by the audience preference saying, ‘the preference of a newspaper version affects readership pattern...’ (p. 220). This research argues that it is essential to focus more on the most consumed media and its audience. This is explained by the fact that the audiences of the most consumed media possibly make up the largest part of Lagos and hugely play a role in what goes on in the state.

For the broadcast media, television falls short behind radio for overall popularity in Nigeria. The largest broadcaster is the state-controlled television broadcaster known as the ‘Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)’ (Oxford et al., 2016). Common knowledge indicates that social media is more used in Nigeria. However, the data inputted into the Digital Report 2021 shows that only 15.8% of Nigerians actively use social media (John, 2021). This is not up to half of the population and possibly indicates that a considerable percentage uses mass media more. Conclusively, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (Broadcasting et al., 2014) analysis of news consumption patterns in Nigeria says two-thirds of the population consume the news at least once a day (66.6%), and radio happens to be the most dominant news platform in Nigeria with 77.4% saying they listen to the radio news at least weekly while the internet ranks fourth after word of mouth and television, with 28.2%. The research by Oxford Business School (Oxford et al., 2016) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (Broadcasting et al., 2014) affirms that radio is more consumed than other media forms by Nigerians. Lagos State is the most populated state in Nigeria and is a suitable representation of the media consumption pattern of Nigerians. An average Nigerian had a radio, television, or both to listen to the news during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The dissemination of health communication occurs both on mass and social media. Due to the increasing digitization of the media, it is becoming even harder to differentiate between old and new media (Lewis and Lewis, 2014), considering the easy access digital devices provide for mass and social media. In a developing country like Nigeria, a high percentage of the population access more traditional media for news despite the increasing digitization of media. There is also an increasing online presence for traditional media, such that newspapers now have online websites (Dare, 2011) and broadcast stations and social networking sites, YouTube channels, and blogs (Agboola, 2014). There is massive accessibility to news that comes with this merge of old and new media. It makes it easy for almost everyone to have access to news one way or the other.

Understandably, a part of health communication occurs on social media that cannot be controlled or managed by one individual or body. Despite the existence of social media, there is a huge part of Nigeria’s population that still relies heavily on traditional media (print and broadcast stations) (Odun and Utulu, 2016). Online media does not replace traditional media but rather stands as an extension. There are limiting factors for online media in developing countries, such as low internet connectivity, disrupted power supply, damaged digital

equipment maintenance, and low income (Odun and Utulu, 2016). All these make it impossible to dismiss the importance of traditional media for the emergence of online media. It is then critically crucial that health communication be carefully and considerably disseminated to the audience.

Research Gap to be Filled

Building on previous research and arguments, this research will fill a literature gap on COVID-19, framing mediated contact, and social polarization. Approaching the research field as a social construct, the research will use the structure of framing theory and mediatization theory to explain the aspect of the social world that results from health communication and mediatized society.

Furthermore, most studies have focused on the media framing differences between the various media, while very few studies have been done on audience perception and the possible polarizing effect of traditional news media.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach (Ritchie et al., 2013) to explore ethnic polarization in a mediated environment. Qualitative research provides researchers with the needed instrument to get closer to an individual's point of view and get an adequate understanding of authentic experiences (Seale et al., 2007).

Qualitative research takes the perspectives and accounts of research participants as its start point (Ritchie et al., 2013). There are several qualitative research methods to achieve the main aim of qualitative research. The research adopts a qualitative interview method, in which the human interest of the researcher is combined with in-depth interviews to get the close-up perspectives of the subject (Seale et al., 2007). Also, it involves going to the natural setting of the interviewees, asking participants questions, and directly collecting data through direct encounters (Mohajan, 2018).

Qualitative research offers an effective way to explore the views of diverse people and unpack the diverse perspectives within a community (Mohajan, 2018). It aids the researcher in focusing on the process and reasons why people behave in a particular way and not just on the effects of a specific phenomenon. This is advantageous considering the importance of process and explanation than numbers and effects in social science research (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research involves a systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to answer specific research questions (Rai and Thapa, 2015). This section addresses the research method and techniques used in gathering the primary data and information needed.

Audience Reception in Media Studies

Studying audiences in the social sciences allows researchers to understand the world and the media through the eyes of the people being researched (Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2017). In the early 20th century, there was a popular notion regarding audiences as passive subjects oppressed by production and media owners (Reinhard, 2007b). However, in the mid-20th century, this notion was challenged to not see media audiences as passive (Reinhard, 2007b). Media audiences are not as passive as the society might think. Understandably, the media has its power and agenda, however, the audience also has the power and choice to decide what to take, believe, and resist from the media. Research in critical audience studies is among the best possible way to explore and ascertain the concept of audience as active parties in media reception. With an audience reception study, the researcher can focus on interpreting the relationship between audience and media within a broad social context (Livingstone, 1998).

An audience reception study focuses not only on the relationship between media and audience; it also considers the context of this relationship, such as the social relations, cultural relations, and environmental factors. This broader context of studying audience reception in media studies is crucial to understanding how media audiences interpret, experience, and formulate their relationship with the media (Reinhard, 2007b).

This audience study critically considers the existence or non-existence of independency in their interaction with media and the polarisation of ethnic groups in Lagos State. Through this research design, audiences' voices about their media use, their perception of media and COVID-19, and the embedment of these structures in their social relationships and activities (Reinhard, 2007b). Therefore, all the questions and areas this research seeks to study cannot be effectively done without an audience study.

The Non-media Centric Approach to Mediatization

The non-media centric approach to mediatization helps to remove media from the central focus of the empirical case while conducting the study within its specific context. Inspired by Morley (2009), the non-media centric approach, also known as mediatization from below, looks like an oxymoron, considering the emphasis mediatization gives to power from above while the non-mediacentric approach explores everyday living, agency, and practices (Livingstone, 2019; Skey and Waliaula, 2021). However, it is possible to combine mediated and media-related social settings (Skey and Waliaula, 2021). This led to the existence of the non-media centric approach in media studies.

There is a new wave of mediatization research that takes a step beyond focusing on the significant influence media plays in people's everyday lives to explore social and cultural experiences. Such empirical studies both ground the concept of mediatization and consider the different social actors involved in the research analysis (Skey and Waliaula, 2021). Here is where the non-media centric approach comes into focus in media studies, as it is through this approach, research can look further than the media's power to explore the other significant factors contributing to the grounding of a particular phenomenon in the community. This study adopts the non-media centric approach to conduct such an empirical study.

This study adopts the non-media centric approach to explore how mediatization influences ethnicity's everyday living and social practices during COVID-19. The study focuses on the respondents' relationships with others in the community, their use of traditional media and

digital technologies during COVID-19, their perception of COVID-19 reportage, and their social activities geared towards other ethnic groups.

Mediatization should not just be about exploring media as a single causal agent but should also look at other social domains to better ground the concept of mediatization (Corner, 2018; Skey and Waliaula, 2021). Hence, the non-media centric approach was adopted to study mediatization from below and place people ‘media audience’ at the center of its research. Asking questions about the media is essential, however, it is more significant to set them in a broader frame (Krajina et al., 2014). Setting media studies in a broader frame requires exploring the social setting, social practices, everyday lives, and agency of the media audience. The non-media centric approach enables thorough and detailed analyses of social settings at the micro-level (Andersson, 2017). Furthermore, this approach is done within a context marked by various mediations (Andersson, 2017).

Focusing on the media for such a study will ignore the agency of ordinary social actors (Livingstone, 2019). Considering the growing importance of media in the society, studying how people engage with media is equally essential. Unlike studying mediatization from above, this approach enables the researcher to analyze the empirical case openly and abductively (Andersson, 2017). Furthermore, this helps to study how the mediatization process works for each individual while being influenced by other significant factors. Therefore, rather than focusing only on media content for mediatization, this research takes a step further to look at the context and agency surrounding the practice. It does not limit the research to only the results of media practice within this context but also to understand how the audiences conduct the practice themselves (Krajina et al., 2014).

Methodology Design

Critical audience research has several research designs, one of which is Participatory Action Research (PAR), where audiences are actively involved in the research process (Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2017). For this research, the audiences are interviewed for the data collection process, thereby bearing responsibilities as interviewees. PAR is a research design most useful when researching social groups such as ethnic groups (Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2017). The research conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with respondents who equally represented the diverse ethnic groups in Lagos State.

Sampling:

Selecting appropriate samples can be achieved through a random selection of subjects (Mohajan, 2018). This process effectively demonstrates a good representation of sample selection, whereby each subject is given an equal chance of being selected. Purposive sampling is used in narrowing down samples when the population number is vast (Rai and Thapa, 2015). According to United Nations data, Nigeria has a vast number of samples, with a population of 214 million (Worldometer, 2022). Hence, purposive sampling is used to narrow down sample selection to the people residing in Lagos State and to ensure that there is equal representation of both the major and minor ethnic groups in Lagos State (Bernard, 2002; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Patton and Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011).

The main parameters for selecting people as participants are their familiarity with COVID-19 reportage, ethnicity, and location. Some individuals were excluded from the study because of their friendship and familiarity with the interviewer. Considering the argument that interviewers, when overly familiar with interviewees, are biased toward seeking information from interviewees, the interviewer tried to avoid such a biased situation (Powell et al., 2012). This initially created an ethical dilemma for the researcher but understanding the conflict of interest and partiality friendship could create in this situation (Ritchie et al., 2013), strangers were selected over the researcher's friends.

The sample was recruited through social media as the researcher posted the need for research participants with a Google form link where interested parties did sign up. This request for interested people to sign up was posted on Facebook, WhatsApp status, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. My friends and connection on social media seeing my post also helped repost and share. After the initial process of collective recruitment, the researcher contacted each individual for further communication in preparation for the interviews. A sample of 14 interviewees was selected to represent the large population, thereby conducting semi-structured interviews with the 14 sample. Although there is no absolute accuracy in selecting samples, 95% relative accuracy is adequate in large scale studies (Rai and Thapa, 2015). Considering how transparent and meticulous the sampling selection process is for this research, the level of accuracy is suitable enough for the study.

A big challenge for qualitative research is the management of instruments and bias while conducting the research. One of the effective ways to manage bias while ensuring the data collection instrument is good enough is through piloting. Researchers use pilot tests to check

if the planned method is as good as envisioned (Chenail, 2011). A *pilot test* using two interviewees was conducted. As Bhattacharjee (2012) noted, these pilot tests helped the researcher examine and check if there could be potential problems with the research design, especially the interview questions.

Semi-Structured Interviews:

Interviews in qualitative research aid the production of cultural experiences and researcher's knowledge of the interviewees' personal, authentic lives (Rapley, 2007). It offers the best unique method to obtain information that might be difficult or impossible to obtain through other methods (Salazar, 1990).

Semi-Structured Interviews flexibly enabled the interviewer to ask questions and discuss topics without any pressure as each respondent's unique opinion came to light (Salazar, 1990). All interviews were conducted online due to COVID-19 precaution, inconvenience, and security challenges in Lagos State. "Semi-structured interviews are also usually based on a pre-established set of questions that are asked to all respondents." (Brennen, 2017, p. 29). The researcher interviewed **12 Lagos residents** familiar with the media and COVID-19 reportage. Each of these qualitative interviews lasted between *45 to 60 minutes*.

To ensure proper handling and management of data collected, every interview was recorded on two devices, a laptop via Zoom recording and a phone via voice recording. After recording, all recorded files were backed up on the researcher's google drive. Each recorded interview was transcribed manually due to the software's inability to transcribe Nigerian English adequately. Like the recordings, the transcriptions were backed up on Google Drive. Each transcription was named with a number such as 'Transcript 1' to ascertain the interviewees' anonymity. Going forward, the coding of data was aided by NVivo 12 software, after which the researcher did further thematic coding and analysis.

"Thematic content analysis involves looking across the data set rather than within one case." (Rivas, 2012, p. 367). This research adopted thematic content analysis for the empirical materials transcribed from the interviews. This enabled the study to identify how the phenomenon of COVID-19 reportage looks to the individuals of interest here (Rivas, 2012). These empirical materials were analyzed using both the inductive and deductive coding methods. The deductive coding was initially used to have pre-set codes, derived from the research questions and reviewed works of literature. However, this did not prevent the

researcher from inductively looking at the data to get more codes. Therefore, the codes are a combination of inductive and deductive coding. These practical materials will help the researcher understand the relationship between the media, media framing, the audience, and society.

For the analysis, the collected data was thoroughly read over two times to build categories using the function called 'subnodes'. This is after creating nodes to stand for the themes to be discussed, and the idea for these themes developed from transcribing and reading through the transcripts. However, the nodes I created for the themes were subject to change as I worked through the data. The subnode that falls under any of the themes was moved to its section. This is how the entire data was coded. For those with no theme yet, a theme was developed and created during the process. After this, the subnodes and nodes under each theme were printed for another review to ensure the categories were in the right theme. Furthermore, I created a mindmap using the nodes and subnodes I had created. After all these, the researcher could easily read the data under each theme and map out their relationships to discuss the findings.

Case Study

Qualitative studies require the use of one case study or a small group of cases that best represent the phenomenon the researcher intends to study (Reinhard, 2007). Researching institutional power, ethnic conflict and audience perception presents a complex issue. Using a case study in research provides an understanding of a complex topic that would not be provided otherwise (Flyvbjerg, 2007). Such knowledge is called context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2007). Using Lagos State as a case study for Nigeria provides a detailed examination of the research area and reliable information applicable to the broader setting of Nigeria. As Flyvbjerg (2007) argued, a case study can either be used to generalize in a broader setting or not. The decision to generalize is mainly determined by the concerned case study and how it was selected. Furthermore, a case study helps researchers' learning development and skills for conducting sound research, which is aided by the researcher's proximity to the reality and experience being studied (Flyvbjerg, 2007).

Lagos State in Nigeria provides an interestingly local context to study the process of ethnic polarization and the role media plays in this process during a health crisis. Nigeria is a highly multicultural society with more than 250 ethnic groups (Mustapha, 2005). Being the most populated and economic state in Nigeria, Lagos State has most of these ethnic groups living there. The ethnic groups in Lagos are divided into ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities, and

the major ethnic group of the southwest is the Yoruba. Lagos is a Southwestern state. There are many minority ethnic groups, including the Hausa, Igbo, and Fulani (World Population Review World et al., 2022).

Nigeria is characterized by intense ethnic polarization and conflict (Mustapha, 2005). Lagos is highly multicultural, and there are lots of ethnic groups living there. However, there is a high level of ethnic prejudice and discrimination, sometimes more than in the less multicultural states in Nigeria. Gottleib and LeBas (2020) research shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in Nigeria, there was an increasing hatred, xenophobic attitudes, and social polarization in Lagos State.

Reasons for selecting Lagos State:

Lagos State has witnessed urban growth over the years, both in its population and socioeconomic structure. Most of her population makes their daily living through informal economic activities, which were all halted during the COVID-19 lockdown (Olajide et al., 2018). Lagos State is known for the proliferation of informal settlements, overcrowding, and inadequate social infrastructures, all attributed to the state's urbanization (Morakinyo et al., 2012; Ilesanmi, 2010). It is the largest city and Nigeria's economic capital, so it is one of the most important cities in Nigeria, both economically and culturally (UIC, 2015).

According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the first COVID-19 case was reported in Lagos State on 27th February 2020 (Ehanire, 2020). As of 2020, Lagos was the epicenter of Nigeria's COVID-19 crisis (Amzat et al., 2020). This representativeness is appropriate for selecting the moving and populous city for this research.

Ethics and Reflections:

Research ethics is not limited to the fieldwork conducted for data collection, it encompasses every stage and process of the research. Ethics revolve around three main issues: trust, confidentiality, and consent (Punch, 1994; Thorne, 1998; Hammersley, 1998 as cited in Seale et al., 2007)). Good ethical qualitative research depends on the researcher's ability to anticipate what might arise, respond to the unexpected and thoughtfully work reflectively, ensuring that the participants' interests are at the center of every research decision (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Understanding the COVID-19 experience in Nigeria as I was also in Nigeria then, I understand how sensitive and emotionally draining it is to discuss. Therefore, the researcher ensured that

the interviewees were comfortable enough to talk and respected their wishes to not elaborate on some discussions. Also, there was an intermission between the open-ended questions where the researcher casually asked closed-ended questions about their choices for certain ethnic scenarios (*check Appendix 4 for the interview guide*).

Informed consent means that the research participants are aware of them being researched as they have the right to be informed about it and informing them about the research and their right to withdraw at any time (Seale et al., 2007). To this extent, each interviewee was sent a consent form before the interview to tell them about the nature of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, their right to choose to answer or not answer any question, and their consent to being interviewed. The consent form (*see Appendix 2*) provides signature spaces for the participants to indicate their consent to the interviews. Verbal approval was also confirmed at the beginning of each interview. For this, the researcher briefly introduced what the research was about and asked for consent to record the interviews.

Furthermore, it is the researcher's ethical responsibility to ensure that the name, identity, location and any form of identifying the participants are protected (Seale et al., 2007). Ethics codes clearly state that researchers should maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants in research by not disclosing who has taken part or what they have said in a way that they can be identified (Ritchie et al., 2013). There is no such ethical dilemma of people recognizing the research participants. Lagos State is a big community, and no one can easily know who the participants are, except they have access to personal details, which are inaccessible as far as this research is concerned. Assuring the participants of anonymity and carefully explaining the nature of the research while giving them a choice to consent or not helped build trust. A good rapport was also built between interviewer and interviewee before each interview, mainly to help the interviewees feel comfortable and trusting enough to provide as much information as needed. The research process heavily depends on how the researcher can build effective relationships to gather good data (Ritchie et al., 2013). The researcher was even more careful not to build a forceful relationship with the participants. All through, the participants freely agreed to answer or not answer the questions.

Conducting interviews via Zoom has limitations regarding internet connectivity, background noises, and lack of face-to-face interactions where body language could have been studied. COVID-19 started some years ago in 2019; however, the topic remains very fresh and sensitive to talk about. The researcher ensured that each interviewee was not pushed beyond their limit

in answering the interview questions. There were a few cases where interviewees asked not to answer some questions or explain further when asked to, which the researcher highly respected.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter explains the analysis of the codes and themes that emerged from the research's data collection process. Four broad themes from the data analysis were identified: COVID-19 Perception, Media Reportage, Ethnic Polarization, and Personal Relationship and Ethnicity. In studying the participants' everyday lives and personal relationships, the researcher aimed to explore the possible connection between these themes and ethnic polarization.

This analysis will argue that, unlike popular belief, the COVID-19 crisis did not contribute to ethnic polarization but minimally contributed to the cohesion among Lagos residents. Also, it will ascertain that the media contributes to ethnic polarization within and outside the COVID-19 period, rendering the pandemic almost insignificant as the cause of ethnic polarization. Furthermore, the cause of ethnic polarization is not limited to the media, as other societal and individual factors also significantly shape people's perception of other ethnicities in Lagos. Therefore, this analysis examined the connection between COVID-19 reportage and ethnic polarization and a more extensive connection between COVID-19, social contact, media reportage, and ethnic polarization. Unlike Amir (1969) and Gottlieb and LeBas (2020) argued that COVID-19 as an unfavorable condition increases tension, hatred, and xenophobic attitudes among ethnic groups, this analysis suggests that ethnic polarization in Lagos is a phenomenon influenced by several factors, few of which is related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Reportage Perception

Lagos State experienced a lockdown for one month, this lockdown period and years of having to live with COVID-19 led to more dependence on the media. This experience has shaped the perception of Lagos residents about COVID-19 and, more importantly, the media's capability, competency, and trustworthiness. These concepts are reflected in the daily experience of Lagos residents, their social well-being, and media usage. Media frames influence the public on what to think and do concerning a phenomenon. In this case, most participants indicated that the media frames on COVID-19 did contribute to what and how they felt. In talking about their views about the pandemic, most participants expressed how scared and anxious they became due to COVID-19, which is mainly ascribed to how the media reported. As it will be discussed further, the perception Lagos residents have about COVID-19, and the way it made them feel is not independent of the media's role. The comment below by Interviewee 2 illustrates the relationship between the participants' perception and the media reportage:

“For me, it was really frightening. I was really scared at some point because the way media was reporting, it seems like the world was coming to an end.”

One major issue was the lack of trust in what the media reported regarding COVID-19 cases, furthering people's in-depth and extra effort to corroborate what the media tells them. Particularly, Interviewee 8 did further research about COVID-19 by checking international media channels such as CNN and BBC. This is one way that shows how international media contributes to perception building (Irwin, 2020). Thereby constituting another influencing factor outside the domestic media channels. It can be attributed to the argument that there is no one direct relationship between COVID-19 perception and domestic media channels, as other factors also contribute to it. Furthermore, those who had close relations testing positive, like Interviewee 6, were more scared and believed the media better about the existence of COVID-19.

While asking the interviewees about their experience and perception of COVID-19 reportage, a recurring issue is a change in their everyday lives during COVID-19 and how the new way of living during COVID-19 became the new everydayness for them. A closer look at this theme creates several categories detailing the everyday experience of Lagos residents, their social well-being, and media reportage of COVID-19. Furthermore, the analysis shows the other factors that contributed to shaping their perception, such as close relations of participants getting COVID-19 and having friends and families working in health care, corroborate what the media says about COVID-19.

The Everyday Experience Of COVID-19 and the Media’s Role in it

The perception people have about a phenomenon shapes their everyday lives. It means that having a perception of COVID-19 did not stop at that, it went further to reflect on the attitude, feelings, and actions, as well as how people relate with one another within the society. Therefore, these developed perceptions reflect in everyday life situations of people, and the prominent role media plays in dominating this field is recognized (Baran and Davis, 2010; Goffman, 1974). Furthermore, studying people’s daily experiences during COVID-19 provides an exemplary layout of these people’s lived realities and not just as portrayed in the media (Manderson et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, considering the restriction of movements and social distancing protocol, the social life and communication in Lagos State were highly affected. Online communication via phone calls and social media channels became the order of the day.

The everyday experience of Lagos residents during COVID-19 was highly mediatized. In the narration of individual experiences, there is a link between what they do and what the media tells them to do. Interviewee 10 took garlic and ginger tea every day due to what he/she had gotten from the media. Such action is dependent on what the media has said about the resistance to COVID-19 through constant drinking of herbal teas. People mainly act based on what is gotten from their source of information, which is the media, including both mass and social media.

There is no universally known approach for understanding everyday lives within and outside crisis, and trying to specify where the everyday lives stop is impossible. However, Helliker et al. (2021); and Herndl (1996) explained two conceptions relevant to studying the everyday life of people involved and living in crisis. During the pandemic, Lagos residents lived their daily lives as quotidian and tactics, where there are the actions taken for granted and the ones employed by the people to cope with the pandemic. Amid all these, some participants resisted the media reportage of COVID-19 while others did not.

Living their lives as the quotidian includes the activities taken for granted, the banal, the convivial, the ordinary, the trivial, and the mundane (Helliker et al., 2021). The continuous going of these activities formed the basis of their everyday life, thereby going further to shape their perception. Interviewees 10, 11, and 12 explained how new daily activities were established during the pandemic. These activities include frequently taking garlic and ginger tea, some staying indoors while others broke the COVID-19 protocol by going out, and employers sharing nose masks daily in their workplaces. These practices became routine for them, as they continued to do them during the pandemic. One profound tactic that stood out among the participants was the breaking of protocols by some residents. There was a break of COVID-19 protocols where people went out during the lockdown against the government's order. According to Interviewee 10, people could not get food as the market-places were on lockdown and the government did not give out palliatives, therefore, people went out to source food in other ways possible. Interviewee 11 also corroborated this, saying that some people broke the COVID-19 lockdown protocol and went out to find their means of survival. These activities clearly show how everyday life is shaped by societal factors (Helliker et al., 2021). All these tactics of breaking protocols and finding means of survival significantly show how Lagos residents negotiate the crisis protocol set by the Federal and State Governments in their everyday lives. These tactics led to banditry and tension in Lagos State. Therefore, adopting

tactics in everyday life can either be positive or negative, which is usually determined by what the tactic yields. In this case, the tactics mostly yielded conflicts, tension, banditry, and invasion of private and public properties, among other conflicts. As Interviewee 3 puts it, ‘...*some people went straight to the Oba of Lagos, they went to warehouses where they store the food and were able to get lots of food for the masses...*’.

In summary, the participants' everyday life, both the quotidian and tactics, entails activities aimed at observing and not observing COVID-19 protocols to survive. The daily activities of the participants who observed protocols are attributed to the role media played in educating them on what to do and not do. However, for those who did not observe, the analysis shows it is attributed to societal factors and the government's inability to care for its citizens. These results suggest that the negative actions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic are not entirely caused or influenced by the media. However, the media did contribute to it. Another common view among the participants deals with their social well-being during this period. Studying their everyday lives also showed how they were socially affected by the pandemic and its daily reportage. Most people were scared and highly anxious, while very few who were not scared attributed it to their adherence to the safety measures. Talking about this, Interviewee 2 said,

“For me, it was really frightening. I was really scared at some point because the way media was reporting it seems like the world was coming to an end and considering the fact that we live in Nigeria, we don't have a very good health care system and it seems like we had a disadvantage compared to other countries that had a very good medical system. I was really frightened at a point I had anxiety.”

Most interviewees attest to this state of fear and anxiety, although each interviewee had different reasons for getting into such a state. Furthermore, the central elements causing their fear and anxiety are the media and COVID-19. The perception Lagos residents have about COVID-19 is reflected in their everyday lives, where they believe that the best way to live above the crisis is to adhere to safety measures. While some did this, others had a different perception heavily influenced by their need to survive. They would rather go out and find something to eat than die in their houses due to the fear of COVID-19. Therefore, the death of hunger is more potent for them than the death of COVID-19. Their social state of being scared, anxious, depressed, and worried also reflected what they think about COVID-19. As most claim to doubt the existence of COVID-19, their actions and feelings say otherwise.

Media Role for Social Wellbeing During COVID-19

Scientists have emphasized the importance of institutions in reducing or intensifying conflicts in an ethnically diverse society (García Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2002). One such important institution is the media. In this research, participants show their perception of media reportage of COVID 19 regarding ethnic conflicts. They also expressly talked about how it influenced them one way or the other.

Interestingly, people claim they do not entirely trust the media's reportage of COVID-19. However, the data also shows that people's reduction of fear and anxiety is tied to their adherence to the media's report on safety measures. For instance, interviewee 10 says, *"I wasn't really scared per se of COVID because I was very cautious and I tried to guide myself based on the instructions given by the agencies; the government agencies, about staying safe..."* It is almost like people do not want to trust the media, but subconsciously, they rely on the media to help alleviate their fear and anxiety regarding COVID-19.

The participants attributed the cause of their fear and anxiety to several things but in no way blamed themselves except for interviewee 9. In social relations, there is what we call 'other blame', which highly occurred among Lagos State residents during the pandemic. The concept of other blame occurs when the reason for an error or negative consequence is attributed to one person (Dickey et al., 2003). Blame culture mainly occurs in health organizations and health-related situations like COVID-19 (Khatri et al., 2009). Furthermore, the media happens to be one institution mainly blamed for occurrences in the society (Scharrer et al., 2003). The participants blamed the media and other people in the society for exaggerating COVID-19 but did not acknowledge any personal factor that might have contributed to their feelings. Interviewee 9, the exception, acknowledged how in addition to what the media reported, their medical condition and attitude to multiply the COVID-19 cases the media reported scared them and made them lose sleep and focus. They did not deny the role media played in this but further acknowledged the additional factors that contributed to their mental wellbeing. In the words of Interviewee 12, COVID-19 doesn't even exist, it is just like a normal cold which the media has exaggerated about. Interviewee 8 further said COVID-19 reportage is a strategy used by the media to feed them with information from the west.

As much as the media was blamed for exaggerating COVID-19 reportage and reporting false facts which affected their mental state, the media, however, helped participants improve their social state. Due to this improved social state, their mental health became better. As much as

they blame the media for negative impacts, they also acknowledge it for helping them survive the COVID-19 period. Participants used social media platforms to stay in contact with friends and families as they were on lockdown and social distancing. They also relied on the media for information regarding the safety measures to take, the curfew time, and cities where COVID-19 cases are rising. Therefore, media reportage created fear and anxiety and helped some participants like Interviewee 10 keep safe and helped alleviate their fears because the safety instructions guided them right. Participants like Interviewee 2 believed that the virus is not as bad as the media presented it to be. The media's usefulness during the pandemic cannot be discarded in the face of the adverse effects it had on media audiences and vice versa.

The time spent on the media listening to COVID-19 news increased fear and anxiety. However, the time spent on media communicating with friends and families helped reduce the loneliness most people experienced during that period. In this case, the use of media to listen to news about COVID-19 can be referred to as passive media use, while communication with people is the active use of media (Pennington, 2021). Active media use refers to behaviors and acts that enhance direct communication and information exchange between media users, while passive media use is when there is no direct engagement in using a medium (Trifiro and Gerson, 2019). This research affirms that active use of media increases social well-being and passive use of media decreases social media (Thorisdottir et al., 2019; Valkenburg et al., 2021). The research participants confirmed their anxiety and stress levels increased in their passive use of media to listen to COVID-19 news and updates (Interviewees 1, 10, 11, 2, 4, and 5).

On the other hand, the active use of media helped them stay happy with good well-being despite the health crisis as they could keep in touch with their loved ones. COVID-19 pandemic now presents a case where both passive and active use of media existed side by side and increasingly so than before the pandemic. Therefore, the active and passive media use is interwoven in this research. Sometimes the active media use is dependent on what the audience gets from the passive media use. For instance, Interviewee 1 confirmed that they discuss the news with their friends, which depends on what is trending. They talk about the situation in their environment, and they exchange information on what is obtainable. COVID-19 was indeed a trending topic during the pandemic, and most people found themselves discussing what they got from the news with their friends. This explains why there might be no clear distinction between how much the audience passively or actively takes in what the media produces. In media research, audiences are popularly described as very passive subjects that take in the news as they are

reported (Rubin, 1993). Other research tries to argue the opposite creating an image of very active audiences who decide what to accept and refuse from the media (Rubin, 1993). However, the audience's real media use only lies between these two points (Rubin, 1993). That is, audiences cannot be wholly passive or active to media influence. The research participants, on one part, took in what the media told them about COVID-19. However, they questioned the media reportage in various ways, such as doing further research independently or discussing with friends to corroborate what the media has said. Therefore, the power of media cannot be said not to exist at all. It does exist but is not entirely supreme. In a bid to not passively take in the media news, some participants questioned the existence of COVID-19.

COVID-19 started some years ago, in 2019, and findings show that till now, there are people who do not believe that COVID-19 truly exists despite the lots of news and information the media provides. Furthermore, this shows that disinformation has eaten deep into the community, caused by not only the media's poor performance but also by the community residents themselves, through the information they pass to each other via social media and word of mouth. However, the primary reason for disinformation started from a lack of trust in the media. As interviewee 5 said, *'Well, as usual, you will hear covid is a scam, it is a rich man's sickness, it doesn't affect the poor and to an extent, yes and no.'* whereby the person's primary sources of news are social media, broadcast media; Channel Television and print media; Sahara Reporters. Therefore, the people hear from the media and circulate the information they get to others within the same society. There is also the urge to want to corroborate every story a medium tells by checking other media. Interviewee 9, who did not have access to other media like television or radio but only his phone, was depressed because of his inability to access other forms of media. They also sought corroboration from friends, families, and their personal experiences.

Media and Inter-ethnic Relationship in Lagos State

The media has become highly embedded into every part of the society. It is essential to explore the representation of ethnicity as done by the media, it will help us better understand the role it plays in influencing people's attitudes towards others. The media can either help promote or hinder diversity in the society (Fürsich, 2010). One example of diversity is the ethnic diversity in Lagos State, where several ethnic groups coexist together. Research shows that the media has the power to influence, from shaping opinions to creating stereotypes (Nikuradze, 2019). Therefore, media is one of the significant factors shaping the type of ethnic relationship in

Lagos State. Furthermore, it is essential to explore media representation of ethnic groups and conflicts in Lagos State to understand better. When asked about media representation of ethnicity during the pandemic, Interviewee 11 had this to say:

“The media mostly concentrated more on the pandemic than all the issues that were prevalent before then like ethnic crisis. There was a lot of silence on all of those concerns during that period of COVID-19”.

The response above shows that the media reduced its reporting of ethnic conflicts during COVID-19, but also ethnic conflict was more of an issue before than during the pandemic. Interviewee 3 also indicated that they did not encounter any news about ethnic conflicts during the pandemic. During COVID-19, the representation of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in the media was reduced a lot. This can be attributed to the fact that there was no ethnic conflict to report, and at that time, COVID-19 was more salient than any type of ethnic conflict. However, the media reported other conflicts. According to Interviewees 7 and 9, the media reported the boys who robbed people and were later arrested. This grounds the research finding that the media did not report on ethnic conflicts mainly because there were no such conflicts during that period. Even though COVID-19 was the most important news, the media would have reported if there had been an ethnic conflict. The media is the watchdog of society (Francke, 1995); it reports to its audience what happens in their society. Although, the power relations of the institution will shape and frame the way the news will be reported (McQuail, 1997). Media being a watchdog of the society is not only limited to democracy and governance, it also includes responsibly reporting what concerns the public. Issues like health crises and ethnic conflicts concern the public, and the media is accountable to this effect.

Interviewees further explained the role media plays in influencing how they think about other ethnic groups. Mass media portrays more about the major ethnic groups, but despite the mass media’s focus on major ethnic groups, social media has helped bring minor ethnic groups into the limelight (Interviewee 10). This is attributed to the active use of media where people on social media talk about their ethnic groups and culture (Thorisdottir et al., 2019). Interviewee 5 explains how the media create untrue pictures about ethnic groups, making them biased toward other ethnic groups. This was corroborated by Interviewees 6 and 8, they also went further to agree that it is the personal experiences they had with people from other ethnic groups that made them realize the media has not been giving the proper representation of ethnicity in Lagos State. Considering the research focuses on the pandemic period, there was indeed little talk about ethnic conflicts and relationships in the media. Although the media played a minimal

role, the participants discussed other factors influencing their relationship with other ethnic groups. In addition to media, they also ascertained these factors as other sources of information from which they learned about other ethnic groups.

Personal Relationship Between Ethnic Groups Before and During COVID-19

To better understand the concept of ethnic conflict and polarization during the pandemic, it is vital to explore their relationships and how they shaped the participants to act toward other ethnicities. A personal relationship is a word used every day to refer to people we spend much time with, with whom we become a unit and influences one another (Kelley, 2013). Personal relationships are a key part of social and ethnic life in Lagos State (de Tormes Eby and Allen, 2012). The decisions we make and the way we act toward people of other ethnic groups are influenced by our relationship with them. The type of relationship that can shape ethnic polarization is divided into two ways: the relationship with people within our ethnic group and the relationship with people outside our ethnic group. Furthermore, the COVID-19 convivial activities of Lagos residents center around the relationship they had before, maintained, and created during the pandemic.

The participants had friends from different ethnic groups, although they tilted more towards some ethnic groups than others. As interviewee 11 puts it, they have friends from the Eastern and Western parts, while they have one or two friends only from the Northern part of Nigeria. Additionally, this research shows that most of the participants create personal relationships with their work colleagues, and they mostly had few friends. Whereas most of them tagged their colleagues as their friends, Interviewee 1 claims friends are different from acquaintances and his/her colleagues are acquaintances, not friends. In Interviewee 1's words, '*I have acquaintance and so on, I have close friends, yeah, just few of them*'. While the participants talk about their friends, it is observed that most of them had friends from different ethnic groups and not only their ethnic group. The exception is Interviewee 6, who has a group of 10 friends, all of whom belong to the same ethnic group, Yoruba, as him. According to him, this was influenced by the environment where he studied for his Bachelor's degree, a State that the Yorubas mostly dominate. This explains the relationship between one's choice of friends from different ethnic groups and locations. The environment a person finds themselves in also shapes the type of ethnic groups friends are made from, thereby limiting the freedom of choice in whom to be friends with. This is also affirmed by another participant who said:

“In that period of time, I realized that the bulk of my friends have actually been Yoruba people. And, that would probably be because I lived the bulk of my life in Yoruba land, and most people around me were Yoruba. And I served in the East (National Youth Service) where there were far less Yoruba people, and I had to make friends with other people and I realized that it was good. So, I have, I mean, the bulk of my friends are Yoruba or somewhere around Edo, Delta. I mean, somewhere close to Yoruba land. And then I have some Igbo friends, I met from service here. And I have some Hausa friends. Really awesome people actually. Um, yeah, I have some Hausa friends. I think that's about it. Oh, I have, um, a part of my family is Ibibio so I wouldn't call them friends. They are family.” (Interviewee 9).

Furthermore, such environmental factors can subconsciously reinforce ethnic bias within the society. This also shows that Lagos, a highly diverse State, reduces the reinforcement of ethnic bias within the State. As explained by Contact Theory, Lagos, a highly multi-ethnic city, reduces prejudice and conflict between the major and minor ethnic groups (Allport et al., 1954). Of the interviewees, most only maintained contact with the same set of people they knew and had as friends before the pandemic. They did not make new friends, limiting their ethnic interrelationship to what it was before COVID-19 and what the media afforded them. Furthermore, despite the increased media use during the pandemic, the participants did not make new friends except for two. The two participants who made new friends did so physically and not via mediated communication. Thereby, it is safe to affirm that the relationships they had before COVID-19 are what were maintained during the pandemic.

All these examples show that if a person was ethnically biased in the selection of friends before the pandemic, it possibly remains the same unless the use of media makes it different. Furthermore, those who had friends from diverse ethnic groups before COVID-19 also maintained their position of ethnic tolerance, acceptance, and exposure. Therefore, each person remained within the same circle he/she had before the pandemic. If a person's ethnic hatred and polarization increased during the pandemic, it was not reflected in friendship and personal relationships within their community.

As intergroup contact seen in these relationships can reduce tension, conflicts, and prejudice, it can also increase conflict in certain situations. In such situations, the arising conflict is fueled by the underlying presumptions and thoughts each party had about the other ethnic group. These presumptions are called stereotypical perceptions (Ramasubramanian, 2010), and they can be shaped by several factors such as word of mouth, media, and personal experiences. These factors all contribute to the existence of ethnic prejudice/polarization in the State, and the responsibility can not be attributed to only one factor. Also, as Amir (1969) explained,

ethnic attitudes can change, and such change is not general but specific to certain areas of the ethnic attitude, which then can not be generalized to other aspects of ethnic relationships. This research showed some practical instances of this explanation which brings us to the next analysis section on ethnic polarization.

Other Factors Influencing Ethnic Polarization in Lagos State

Ethnic polarization is more probable in an ethnically diverse society (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005). Ethnic attitudes and prejudice do not happen in general, as this research has shown. Depending on cognition, situations, and relationships, individuals determine the action to take, which could reinforce ethnic polarization or cohesion.

In analyzing media's influence on ethnic polarization in Lagos State during the pandemic, a sub-theme that stood out is the feelings and actions of each ethnic group toward the others. This sub-theme is also referred to as the majority versus the minority. In exploring the relationship between the major and minor ethnic groups, it is crucial to differentiate the concept of cognition and affect (Ramasubramanian, 2010), even though there is a connection between both. Cognition (stereotypes) is one major underlying cause of affect (prejudice). Just like there are preexisting cognitive factors, earlier called 'presumptions', there are also preexisting affective dispositions like hate, love, and contempt (Ramasubramanian, 2010). These affects are factors that can also influence the relationship between these two groups which was explored within the context of the COVID-19 period. These affects, that is, the perception, feelings, and actions, can either be negative or positive from each group towards the other.

Stereotypes between the major and minor ethnic group

Stereotypes are beliefs we have about a certain group regarding their characteristics, attributes, and behaviors (Hilton and Von Hippel, 1996). Stereotype explains the perceptions that exist for these groups from each end which the research explores within the COVID-19 context. When stereotyping, subjects depend on previously stored information to act (Hilton and Von Hippel, 1996). As seen in this research, stereotypes, mainly caused by previous information, can be from various sources such as the media, personal experiences, word of mouth from families and friends, past conflicts, and societal structure. The knowledge of other ethnic groups emerged from personal contacts for Interviewee 1. They know about other ethnic groups through the media and their friends who tell them about their experiences with people from other ethnicities. On this, Interviewee 8 said most of what they know about the North and the

ethnic groups there is from the media, which has built the image of associating the North with insecurity and blaming them for the insecurity issue the society faces. Taking a step further, some of them explained that these presumptions are different from what they experience when they make friends from such ethnic groups. Interviewee 5, on getting to the university, made friends with some Yoruba, Hausa, and Idoma people, and this experience showed that people from these groups are not what the media has portrayed them to be. The personal encounter reduced the negative stereotype of the Yorubas and the other ethnic groups for Interviewee 5. Besides from a personal encounter, in this case, a positive inter-ethnic relationship can also be attributed to an individual's personal motivation to like a particular person (Klein and Kunda, 1992; Pendry and Macrae, 1994). There is no certainty that this participant will act positively toward another person from the same ethnic group who is not a friend. This shows that in addition to media influence, an ethnic relationship can be influenced by emotions, motivation, and the context within which it is happening. And in most cases, these stereotypes lead to the prejudice that exists between the major and minor ethnic groups in Lagos State. Stereotypes set by the media and personal experiences, both positive and negative, can be dangerous as not everyone will fall within the preconceived notions and beliefs. Subjecting a person to such a stereotype leads to prejudice and polarization within the society.

Prejudice between the major and minor ethnic group

Now we look at the prejudice that results from the stereotypes mainly created by the media. Prejudice is popularly interpreted to mean bias towards a particular group which could lead to injury (Pettigrew et al., 1982; Hurd and Moore, 2003). However, social science has further defined prejudice to include having an opinion for or against something without a proper basis of judgment (Pettigrew et al., 1982). Though determining if the opinion is on a proper basis can be challenging (Pettigrew et al., 1982). For this research, an adequate basis of judgment can be the opinions shaped by personal experiences, whereas an inadequate basis can be the opinions shaped by the media, word of mouth heard from families and friends, and other secondary sources of information. According to what this research has found, media is not adequate for learning about other ethnic groups, it creates stereotypes. However, it is impossible to ignore how blurry the lines between adequate and inadequate can get. This makes it very challenging to determine if a form prejudice is adequately justified or not. But what is certain is that there is prejudice in Lagos State among the various ethnic groups.

Another social factor that influences ethnic prejudice is the context within which it occurs

(Dustmann and Preston, 2001). As explained earlier, the ethnic prejudice exhibited in Lagos State differs in situations. With a focus on the context of the COVID-19 experience to study how it might influence ethnic bias, this research shows that ethnic bias, prejudice, and polarization reduced during the pandemic. During COVID-19, ethnic conflicts in Lagos State were reduced drastically. As interviewee 11 puts it:

“...since there was lockdown, it was mostly a family thing. So it was more of everybody with their family so there wasn't really that much of cultural interactions between different ethnic places. Everyone was either in their family or in their homes and the ethnic diversity was not really promoted by the lockdown.”

This was further corroborated by Interviewee 6 who said conflicts reduced because they were all at home, and there was no means for different ethnic group members to meet, converse, or argue. Interactions lead to conflicts, and with little to no interaction, ethnic groups' conflicts are reduced. Within the context of COVID-19, social contact was reduced among the different ethnic groups, except for those who had friends from diverse ethnic groups. For these people, they maintained their contact via social media. However, there was no new or increased contact between these ethnic groups. The frequency of social contact shapes the basis for ethnic hostility (Dustmann and Preston, 2001). This is because interaction is a social force that structures ethnic interrelationships within a society (Rothbart and John, 1993). Unlike the hypothesis that says social contact between different social groups reduces the prejudice between them (Allport et al., 1954; Nickerson, 2021), this case proved otherwise. Due to the situation, people had to distance themselves socially, and within this period, ethnic conflicts drastically reduced. As Dustmann and Preston (2001) argued, there is no certainty of how the effects of reduced social contact will go, it can go one way or another. There is indeed a relationship between the pandemic crisis and the level of ethnic polarization in Lagos State as COVID-19 reduced ethnic prejudice and conflicts. The media representation of ethnic conflicts also reduced during the pandemic.

In discussing the stereotypes and prejudice in Lagos State and how it was formed, the participants acknowledged the media as one source of information. Other sources were also mentioned. Therefore, media cannot be removed from the factors that contribute to the type of relationship that exists/will exist between the ethnic groups in Lagos State. Conclusively, it is interesting to see the different perspectives media audiences have about the media and the everyday process where these perceptions become more rooted and used. COVID-19 was the media's focus during the pandemic while the representation of ethnic conflicts was reduced. It

was also interesting to see the different factors contributing to ethnic polarization in the society. Finally, ethnic polarization did not increase during the pandemic but was relatively reduced as against what previous research established.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion, this research set out to explore the perception of Lagos residents about the media framing of COVID-19. The researcher studied the experience Lagos residents had during the pandemic and the dependency on media for information. The second aim of this research was to examine the media framing of COVID-19 and how it influenced audience behaviors and ethnic relationships within the community.

This research argues that COVID-19 reportage did not increasingly report about ethnic conflicts, and rather than creating an increased level of ethnic polarization, it reduced it. In a way, it minimally contributed to ethnic cohesion. It also confirms that the media always contribute to ethnic relationships. Therefore, the media's influence on ethnicity is not limited to the health crisis period.

The findings of this research also suggest that mediatization increases during a health crisis that necessitates social distancing among community members. It also shows that the media frames created around that time centered more on the health crisis, and the effect it has on audiences varies. However, media influence on each audience is reinforced by other factors. Media audiences are not passive subjects that take in what the media says directly (Hall et al., 2003). There is often a form of negotiation where each audience determines and accepts parts of the media news that they agree with (Murphy, 2005). Such negotiation occurs between what the media says, what the audience already knows from other sources, what the audience agrees with, and what they disagree with. As this research took the non-media centric approach, it clearly shows how the media is not all overly powerful like a gun that shoots bullet down to its target with no resistance or fight from the target.

Audience's Perception of COVID-19 Media Framing

The way people think, see and act during the COVID-19 pandemic largely depended on how the media, the primary source of information, reported it. Therefore, people's perception of COVID-19 is mainly based on and shaped by the information communicated to them through the media. Despite their increased dependency on the media, they did not accept COVID-19 reportage at face value. They relied on corroboration from other sources such as international media organizations and confirmation from health workers. This shows the perception these participants had about the media's report on COVID-19. The participants' trust in the media is

shaky, which can easily crumble if not for further confirmations and corroborations by other sources.

Their perception of COVID-19 reportage is primarily determined by how it affected their daily lives. Due to the restriction of movements, the participants did more online communication. As acknowledged by them, this would have been worse without the existence of online communication channels that helped them cope better with the pandemic. On the other hand, this increased use of online communication negatively impacted their social life and physical interactions. The pandemic media framing also affected their social well-being as there was an increased level of fear and anxiety, attributed to the media's constant reporting of increasing COVID-19 cases in the country and the world. Past research established that there exists a relationship between COVID-19 and ethnic polarization in Lagos State (Gottlieb and LeBas, 2020). While discussing their experiences during COVID-19, the participants affirmed the existence of a relationship, however, in a different way from what Gottlieb and LeBas (2020) established. The media framing of ethnic conflicts reduced during the pandemic because the media focused more on reporting COVID-19, and people had little to no contact with other ethnicities. All of these reduced the level of ethnic polarization as there was little to no ethnic conflict, hatred, or prejudice during the pandemic period. Some participants believed what the media told them about COVID-19, but others did not. Also, while some prioritized keeping to the safety measures the media informed them about, others did not. To the latter, the fear of hunger was higher than the fear media created about COVID-19.

Conclusively, this research has shown that Lagos residents have varying perceptions about the role media played in their experience of COVID-19. While some participants blamed the media for all that went wrong during the pandemic, others acknowledged the influence of media while addressing other situational factors that contributed to their experience. Situational factors like health problems and personal relationships with doctors and COVID-19 patients. Furthermore, the research ascertains that the level of media representation of COVID-19 and audiences' dependency on media increased during the pandemic. While some participants see this increased mediatization as beneficial, helping them stay abreast of the safety precautions they need to take, others see media as a tool that reinforces their fear and anxiety, causing them a poor mental state.

During the pandemic, media reportage centered more on COVID-19 and little about other happenings. Besides COVID-19 reportage, there was also more news about conflicts as

conflicts increased during this period. However, none of the conflicts that occurred in Lagos State was ethnic-related. As much as people socially distanced themselves and stayed more at home, neither ethnic prejudice, hatred, nor conflict increased.

Ethnicity in Lagos State

This research shows that the representation of ethnic conflicts drastically reduced during the pandemic. This can be attributed to the lack of ethnic conflicts to report, as the media's frames are determined by the level of importance of societal occurrences. This affirms the concept of media as the watchdog of the society. Although media organizations mostly face the challenge of swinging between political and economic interests (McQuail, 1997), there is still a part of the media that responsibly prioritize reporting happenings in the society. We cannot deny that such reportage might not be reported as it is but tailored to suit the interests of the media's power-to-be. The power-to-be in this context refers to the media ownership and the nation's ruling government (McQuail, 1997).

Therefore, since there were little to no ethnic conflicts during the pandemic, the media did not report news related to that. However, news about other conflicts, like the invasion of warehouses and shopping malls by thugs and the rampant stealing in neighborhoods were reported. Most importantly, the media mostly talked about COVID-19 all through that period.

Unlike Amir (1969) argued that unfavorable conditions increase intergroup tension and prejudice, this research has shown that despite the unfavorable condition of COVID-19 in Lagos State, ethnic intergroup tension and prejudice did not increase. There is also an assumption that increased contact between groups will result in a better relationship between the groups (Amir, 1969). The opposite is the case in this research. This research supports the idea that reduced contact between ethnic groups leads to reduced communication opportunities and platforms, which usually results in arguments and then maybe a huge ethnic fight.

Finally, the prejudice and stereotype that exist between ethnic groups are caused by various factors. As explained above, media can be one such cause. In addition to the media, the personal experiences people have had with another ethnic group as well as what they hear around them from friends and families hugely contribute to how they feel and think about other ethnic groups. There is a relationship between media and ethnicity, but this relationship is not linear. Several contexts and factors impact this relationship to determine if it will be positive (ethnic cohesion) or negative (ethnic polarization).

Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis contributes to knowledge on how ethnic polarization might not increase in the society during a health crisis while emphasizing the role media plays in it. A non-media centric approach was adopted to explore the social dynamics of media studies. Overall, this research has provided deeper insights into how Contact Theory might not be completely correct in saying that contact between groups reduces the level of prejudice that will exist between them. As explained, the main hypothesis of the Contact Theory clearly says that social contact between social groups reduces the prejudice between them (Allport et al., 1954; Nickerson, 2021).

Social contact can be achieved both online and offline (Wellman, 2004). Contact Theory does not clearly explain if it refers to either or both forms of social contact. There needs to be a clear definition of the theory's form of social contact. Social contact can either be friendly or unfriendly (Uvnäs-Moberg, 1997). Likewise, a lack of social contact can be more useful than existing social contact in certain contexts. An example of such context is this research. Regarding this, the research clearly explains the relationship that exists between ethnic relationships and these two forms of social contact. The participants rarely made new friendships with people either from their ethnic group or others in the online world. They only used the online world to connect with the friends they already have, indicating that if there is ethnic polarization, it is more prevalent offline than in the online world. Moving to the offline world during a time when there were reduced physical interactions and more online interactions, ethnic polarization was reduced. This is connected to the earlier stated fact that online communication experiences less ethnic bias. Possibly, ethnic bias will increase in Lagos State when physical interactions increase. Therefore, in the offline world where there is social contact between groups, prejudice might not reduce. In everyday life, contact might lead to increased prejudice rather than reduce it (McKeown and Dixon, 2017). Contact theory is therefore not completely right in saying it will reduce and its level of practicality is questioned. This theory can be improved by incorporating these other elements into its hypothesis: the different forms of social contacts that exist and the importance of context in applying the theory. It is not right to think contact is all we need to reduce prejudice and bias between ethnic groups in this case. Conclusively, based on this research, Contact Theory needs to be improved on and until then should not be generalized in research.

Research Reflection and Limitations

The research was majorly limited by the absence of face-to-face interviews. While recruiting participants, they all were given the choice of picking where to do the interview, whether online or physical. This is due to insecurity and the remaining effects of COVID-19 in the country. All participants agreed to online interviews, mainly due to the level of insecurity in Lagos State which makes almost everyone wary of meeting strangers physically. Online interviews have their limitations which cannot be ignored in this research. First of all, an online interview requires literate participants with internet access (Kendall, 2008). Some participants could not participate because they could not speak the English Language, and the researcher had to personally buy an internet subscription for participants who could not afford it. Unlike face-to-face interviews, online interviews take longer time and produce fewer texts (Salmons, 2009). However, the researcher tried to reduce the effect of this limitation while getting as much information as possible even though the interviews were online.

Furthermore, COVID-19 is a sensitive case for some people, and a researcher's physical presence might help comfort the participants and help them in sharing their difficult experiences (Salmons, 2009). Therefore, the researcher's lack of physical presence during the interviews might have influenced the quality of information gotten from the participants. Qualitative research is subjective and in addressing the limitations of this research, the bias that might come from the researcher's subjectivity, environmental, and socio-cultural context cannot be ignored (Pascale, 2010; Chenail, 2011). The researcher's possible subjectivity is embedded in their interaction with the entire research process. As a citizen of Nigeria, the researcher has resided in the country for more than 20 years with little time spent in Lagos State, the case study used in this research. However, the researcher tried to minimize bias by not interviewing friends for this research though friends showed interest to participate.

A greater focus can explore the other social effects of COVID-19 reportage beyond what this research establishes regarding ethnic polarization and social health. Considering the little to no influence COVID-19 and its reportage had on ethnic polarization in Lagos State, further research can also use face-to-face qualitative interviews for a longer period to study the media influence on ethnic polarization before or beyond the COVID-19 period.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research Timeline

Weeks	Tasks
Jan. 18- Feb. 13	Literature Review
Mar. 24- April 10, 2022	Methodology (Data Collection)
April 11- May 3, 2022	Analysis (Coding and Writing)
April 31- May 3	Conclusion
April 14- April 18	Introduction
April 15 – May 5	Overall Thesis Writing and Structuring
May 9- May 16	Final Edit + Submission

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Research Title: Audience Perception of COVID-19 Media Framing and its Influence on Social Polarization of Ethnic Groups in Lagos, Nigeria

I am Oladiran Titilope Racheal, a Master’s student of Media and Communication Studies at Lund University, Sweden. I am researching COVID-19 media framing and ethnic polarization using Lagos State as a case study.

This research seeks to explore the perception you have about media in Lagos, how you used media during the pandemic and how ethnic groups act towards other each other in Lagos State. The interview will last around 45 minutes, and the data gathered from it will only be used for the data analysis and discussion of findings. Kindly refer to the information below regarding the rules for this research. If you understand and agree to take part in this study, please sign below.

Name

Age

Ethnicity

RESEARCH RULES

- Your identity will be anonymous, and all information provided by you will be confidential.
- Even though you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question.
- You understand that participation involves being interviewed by the researcher.
- You agree that the interview be audio-recorded.
- Disguised extracts from your interview may be quoted in the thesis.
- The signed consent form, original audio recording and interview transcript will be retained in the researcher's google drive until the result of the thesis is confirmed. After which, every data will be completely deleted for security.

Signature of participant

Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study



11-03-2022

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix 3: Research Sample

Interviewees	Occupation	Age	Interview Date
Interviewee 1	Music Educator	35	March 25, 2022
Interviewee 2	Realtor	27	March 26, 2022
Interviewee 3	Data Entry Personnel	33	March 27, 2022
Interviewee 4	Job Hazard Analyst	30	March 28, 2022
Interviewee 5	Salesclerk	30	March 29, 2022
Interviewee 6	National Youth Service Corper	23	March 30, 2022
Interviewee 7	Mobile app developer	26	March 30, 2022
Interviewee 8	National Youth Service Corper	24	April 3, 2022
Interviewee 9	Salesclerk	24	April 3, 2022
Interviewee 10	Dangote Refinery Project	26	April 4, 2022
Interviewee 11	Assembly plant for automobile company	35	April 6, 2022
Interviewee 12	Construction Worker	41	April 2, 2022

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

Topic Area	Questions
<p>Personal relationships</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where do you work/study? 2. Can you tell me about your friends? <p>Follow-up: What ethnic groups do these people belong to?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Do you discuss news with your friends? <p>Follow-up: If yes, how well do you do this? What type of news did you discuss mostly?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What type of media did you use during isolation? 5. Who were you in contact with during isolation? <p>Follow-up: How did you keep in contact with them during isolation?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Did you make new friends during the pandemic? <p>Follow-up: If yes, how?</p>

<p>Audience perception of COVID-19 media framing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does COVID-19 reportage influence your response to the preventive measures? 2. How did COVID-19 reportage increase or decrease your fear and anxiety? Follow-up: How do you think the media could have done better to reduce the fear and anxiety it created? 3. What caused your trust or mistrust in the media's reportage of COVID-19? 4. What part of the reportage influenced you positively? Follow-up: Can you tell me about this positive influence? 5. What part of the reportage influenced you negatively? Follow-up: What is the influence? 6. What are the things the media mostly talked about regarding COVID-19? 7. What other topics do you think the media should have included and talked more about? 8. How do you think the media reportage helped you during the pandemic? 9. How does the media reportage influence or not influence how you feel towards the other ethnic groups? 10. What relationship do you see between media reportage and your attitude towards other ethnic groups?
<p>Close-ended questions to help interviewees ascertain how they feel about other ethnic groups?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you are a landlord in Lagos, will you rent your apartment out to someone from another ethnic group? 2. Will you want to rent an apartment from a landlord who belongs to another ethnic group? 3. Will you allow your friend from another ethnic group to have a romantic relationship with your sister? 4. As an employer, will you employ people from different ethnic groups other than yours?

	<p>5. As an employee, if you have the option to choose between two jobs, will you choose an employer who is from the same ethnicity as you or someone who isn't?</p> <p>6. Do you think having other ethnic groups in Lagos reduces your chance of success (career or business)? If yes, how?</p>
<p>Media representation of conflicts and ethnic polarization</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What other type of media news did you experience during COVID-19? 2. What are the conflicts that happened in Lagos during COVID-19? 3. There were ethnic conflicts, what part did you experience physically? Follow-up: what do you think about how the media reported it? 4. What conflicts did you only see in the media? 5. How has the media resolved or not resolved ethnic conflicts in Lagos State? 6. How did media representation of ethnic conflicts increase or decrease during the pandemic? 7. Watching the news about conflicts during COVID-19, what effects did it have on you? Follow-up: should the media not have reported these conflicts at that time? 8. How do you think the pandemic contributed to increased conflicts at that time? Follow-up: What do you think is the role of media in this? 9. How is the media representation of conflicts during the pandemic, compared to before or after the pandemic? 10. How do you feel about other ethnic groups in Lagos State? 11. As a minority group, how do the Lagosians from the majority group act towards you? <p>OR</p>

	<p>As a majority group, how do the Lagosians from the minority group act towards you?</p> <p>12. As a minority group, what type of threatening or unthreatening feelings do you have for the majority group?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>As a majority group, what type of threatening or unthreatening feelings do you have for the minority group?</p> <p>Follow up: How do they make you feel threatened/unthreatened?</p> <p>13. In learning about other ethnic groups, what is your major source of information?</p> <p>14. How do you see the information provided by the media about your ethnicity?</p> <p>15. What is the relationship between this representation of conflicts and your reaction to other ethnic groups?</p> <p>16. Apart from the media, what other way do you get informed about other ethnic groups?</p> <p>17. What other factors contribute to how you feel, act, and view other ethnic groups?</p>
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Appendix 5: Transcription Sample

Interviewer: My name is Titilope, I am a master’s student of media and communication studies in Lund university, Sweden. I am doing a master thesis related to covid 19 reportage in Lagos and its potential to influence ethnic polarization which is the basis for this interview. Can you introduce yourself

Interviewee: My name is ----. I am based in Lagos Nigeria. I am 27 years old and I am into real estate. I used to work for a real estate company but for now I am just a realtor and into freelance and at the verge of getting an admission to study ER and HRM in the university of Ibadan.

Interviewer: thank you. That's an interesting profile. My next question was going to be where do you study or work but you already answered that so we move on to the next question.

Can you tell me a little about your friends, like your closest friends.

Interviewee: Ok I don't have so many friends, I am the typical Nigerian girl. I am someone who will rather watch a movie on my PC than go to the cinema, so I'm not so much of an outing person but then I'll say I have just a couple of friends. I currently live with my friends and I have some friends I get to see once in a while at most twice a week, once a week or on a bad day let's say three times a month.

Interviewer: ok, thank you. These friends can you tell me what ethnic group they belong to. Are you from the same ethnic group?

Interviewee: We belong to different ethnic groups like my closest friends. Or are you talking about friends I relate with on social media or the friends I relate with here in Lagos?

Interviewer: Both actually, the physical one that you relate with and the one you relate with on social media.

Interviewee: Ok. So, I have, I would say I have about three close friends, a guy and two ladies I am pretty close to. Let's start with the guy. His name is Isaac Yusuf he lives in Lagos state and his ethnic group is Kebbi. The second is Ann and I am not so sure of her ethnic group it's not so familiar and she lives in Ogun state and she works in Covenant university. The guy is into cyber security and he works in FCMB. The other friend is Joy Abba she is based in Abuja and she is also Edoma as well, that's her ethnic group and she works in a media company in Abuja. So, what more will you like to know about them.

Interviewer: It's basically about the ethnic group. About Anne, you said you don't know her ethnic group, is it that you guys never talked about that?

Interviewee: We talk about it but like I said it's something that is very rare it's a kind of ethnic group that is very rare, something that I am not so familiar with. She has told me on two different occasions but I can't remember. I grew up in the north, like when you tell me an ethnic group that I am familiar with it sticks compared to when you tell me something I am not so familiar with it does not stick. And ethnic group is not something we usually discuss about because I am the kind of person that believes irrespective of their ethnic groups, we are one.

With my friends we don't really talk about ethnicity so it is not like something that I keep at the back of my memory.

Interviewer: ok. I understand that. So do you discuss news with your friends.

Interviewee: Yes. Once in a while depending on the news

Interviewer: Ok. What type of news do you guys usually talk about?

Interviewee: Trends on social media. I studied political science but I am not someone who is that passionate about politics. The only reason I studied political science was cos I got admission in 2013 when ASUU was on strike. I studied the course because I had very little choice then. But the major reason why I went for it was because I believe in Nigeria what you study does not matter so far as you are ready to go into any profession that is in line with your study. Like I wanted to go into social science but political science is a part of social science. I was convinced that the course I study was not going to be a problem so I am not so passionate about politic as regardless of the fact that I studied political science but when it is like an important aspect of politics I get involved and we talk about it. Let's say it has to do with the president, police brutality, conflict and when the issue of covid was going on we talk about that and the trend that was going on recently, we spoke about that. Just normal celebrity gist. Those are basically the thing we talk about.

Interviewer: ok, thank you. You mentioned that during the covid 19 you guys discussed about covid. During this period, you know we had the 14 days lockdown...

Interviewee: It was not 14 days. It was about a month.

Interviewer: ok. Thank you. So, during this one month of isolation who were you in contact with and how were you in contact with your friends.

Interviewee: Via social media basically. And when covid initially started people did not really take it seriously not until the government issued a lockdown so during that time the only means of communication was social media or phone call. Though my friend Isaac did come to see me one time and that is because he was opportune to move around because he was working with a bank at that time. He works in cyber security which is a sensitive job and during that time there was the issue of inflation, money was not flowing in as much and internet crime rose to and increase. And he had to be on deck and most of their jobs involved going to the office. He was given a pass signed by the governor to move around freely so he came on some occasions to visit me.

And for my other friends like I said I am not so much of an outing type I do have colleagues. Even before covid we were communicating via social media. I stopped going out even before covid so it was just communication on social media.

Interviewer: ok. Were you able to make new friends during the isolation?

Interviewee: I was not able to make new friends I was however I got to bond with some of my colleagues and we grew from the stage of been colleague to friends.

Interviewer: thank you. For the covid 19 reportage. How did it increase or decrease your fear and anxiety during that period?

Interviewee: How did covid increase or decrease my anxiety?

Interviewer: not covid itself but the report that the media gave.

Interviewee: ok the report. For me it was really frightening. I was really scared at some point because the way the media was reporting it seems like the world was coming to an end and considering the fact that we live in Nigeria, we don't have a very good health care system and it seems like we had a disadvantage compared to other countries that had a very good medical system. I was really frightened at a point that I had anxiety. But considering the fact that I had family, like I said I live with friends who I consider as family, I had them during that period. Everywhere was on lockdown and though we had fear and anxiety about going out. At a point I was beginning to reasoning quitting my job and it had been on month and cases of covid were still coming in and I was really freaking out. When the lockdown was lifted and my boss asked me to resume, I was really contemplating and a couple of persons were really contemplating. But when I saw how everything was going, I was really scared. But eventually when I saw how everything was going, I did realize that it was serious in some western states compared to here in Africa because I think our immune system could fight the bacteria better.

I live in Ajah and it's not that bad. Though the way people do transport social distance was not taken seriously like that. Most of the bus drivers did not care, they still pack people on the same bus. And another thing is the way we make payment for goods. We exchange cash that you don't know who had touched it. It was not just comfortable.

I will say we were not maintaining social distancing but I also did not see anyone drop dead around me, there close to no case of covid 19 around me. I did not get any report of covid 19. Even those who tested positive, the symptoms were not high. Like my friend Isaac tested

positive he was practically fine. I was with him the day after he got tested and I did not know. In fact, we were very close to each other. The result came out positive and I thought it was in my best interest to inform my colleagues cos I had resumed work. Everybody just seems fine though we were scared for a bit but we took drugs.

I came to the conclusion that we were scared for nothing because the virus was not as bad as the media presented it to be then. I was scared at first though it got better with time. Now if someone says they have covid I don't take it seriously.

Interviewer: hmm. Ok. Do you think that maybe the media kind of exaggerate about the virus or painted a very bad or deadly virus.

Interviewee: Yes. The media did over exaggerate about the virus especially on twitter. Most people were carrying false info about how people contract the virus and how people were reacting to it and there was like you now assumptions here and there and people were just using that to clout chase. You would see a person drop dead.

There was a time on the mainland the guy dropped dead on the ground and people concluded it was covid and it was not just the news sector on social media it was more of we the citizens. People just use that opportunity for clout, they just over exaggerated the whole thing. I think what the media did was just to put out the info the way they say it fit. I don't think the issue was from them, and I think most people was scared because we did not totally understand but my fear had more to do with the way people over exaggerated the whole thing.

Interviewer: yeah. Ok, thank you. Do you think this case of covid 19, what the media reported and all the issues that happened on twitter, do you think it has infested your trust or mistrust in the media?

Interviewee: I will say I am indifferent about that. Ok, I would say there was a time I was going through a particular news and most people did believe that covid was not real and I think there was a president of an African country, he sent samples of animals, fake samples to the lab to see if they were positive and then those results came out positive but it was just like a test. I feel when the covid thing started people became greedy and over exaggerated the whole issue and they were lying about it. Putting false info and corruption just took over the whole thing. Regardless, I understand that here in Nigeria corruption is on the high side but then I did not just rely on the info receive here in Nigeria. I did other researches, I went to some media channel on social media aboard like CNN, BBC, I was following up on some of their things.

And most persons really come to say their family was affected by covid and they had lost someone. There it seems so real, the media presented it I felt I was genuine, but here it was treated like a joke. I would not say the media influenced me I will just say I am indifferent. That's to say I believe and I don't totally believe, I allow my instinct to just decide.

Interviewer: ok. During this covid 19 period correctly there was some conflicts which the media reported like palliative, looting, conflicts and some tribal clashes in some part of the country.

Interviewee: yes, there was that.

Interviewer: did you follow the media reportage on these conflicts?

Interviewee: Yes. I followed the mdi report. In Lagos state like I said, Nigeria is still like a developing country and then there were news about crime on the high side. People were hungry the government had issued a lockdown and they had not provided a means of feeding and I think there were these set of boys that came out, the one million boys gang that were disturbing the peace of neighborhood during this covid time but that was actually on the mainland I live on the island but I did not have to deal with that but on the news they were going around with weapons looting shops.

And the issue with this palliative thing came about, I think the palliative was not like a crime perse. I feel like the government were the once to blame because international bodies had come together to see how they could provide feeding for the less privilege and they were supposed to share those palliatives to people who were in need instead they kept it for their own personal gain.

At a point there was even a news about a politician that did a video and pictures she took those palliatives and shared it as souvenirs to guests who had come for her birthday. Like that was actually insane so I won't think that was actually a crime. Those things were meant for them and I would say it was there right.

I don't see it as a crime if there was anybody that needs to be held responsible, I would say it was a government in charge of those palliative that failed to distribute them.

At a point some of the things that were in store at gotten rotten. So I would think the government were the one to blame there was no report about incidents where people were looting so those things did belong to the citizens and the took it i wont refer to it as a crime but the only crime

that did or call during the lockdown was those 1 million boys gang looting shops and in their own defense they said the government had not provided a means of feeding so their only alternative was to go about looting shops and scaring people into giving them what they want and I don't think the government did provide the security agents to tackle that matter. The boys that did come out during that Were so many but I don't think that reported in cases of death and injury but the only information I did get on social media and for persons who do live on the mainland were just that they stole and looted things and I think it lasted for some couple of days after a while everything just died down and went back to normal.

Interviewer: Ok but before we go on, I just want to punch something out like you said you did not experience like any of this physically which means that all the information you had was gotten through the media.

Interviewee: All the information I had was gotten through the media and it was gotten from some of my friends who experienced it.

Interviewer: ok, yeah. Thank you.

Interviewee: You're welcome

Interviewer: so aside the media reportage during the covid 19. Was there any other news that's the media reported about that is outside covid 19?

Interviewee: I don't think so during that time it was just about covid and I think they touched like some sectors like healthcare in Nigeria corrupt politicians and all. The fact that money was given for healthcare to be built I think that was supposed to be in Abuja but instead the money was looted and squandered by politicians and the building was not there so those covid did really bring out some things like the issue of corruption because people got to see how corrupt the government were and that was basically just it, I think.

Interviewer: okay like you said that covid brought out key issues like corruption problem do you think because I mean during that that period there was an increase in the number of conflicts in different parts of the country like in different states do you think this is also like another issue that covid-19 brought out or is it always been like that having many conflicts?

Interviewee: I think it was before or after covid where we had the end Sars, there has always been the issue of conflict and I don't think like covid really did have like a positive impact on this conflict it has always been conflicts even before covid-19. I don't think covered had any

major role to play in the conflict that did occur but then I will also say something. The covid really did affect a lot of business and at a point when the lockdown was lifted, I can't really recall there was issues about robbery in Ajah and I think that was just basically it's just issues of stealing and all that was the only conflict but regardless of covid 19 there had always been conflict in this part of the world.

Interviewer: ok you said most of the I'm in the media basically reported about covered during that period there wasn't any other key issues that they talked about what is your opinion about this do you think it's like personally for you watching the news or reading news online do you think it's better that the media just focused only on covid-19 or do you think if they had who did all the news like talking about other things like taking the people's minds away from the bad things that was happening is that kind of relieving or much better to them just focusing on that virus.

Interviewee: I think it would have helped if they are focused on some other things but I won't blame them per say because during covid everybody was on lockdown like businesses were not moving nothing was functioning so there was literally nothing for the media to talk about then. So, it actually does make sense that 90% of the information that was shared by the media was surrounding covid-19 because there was nothing everything was on lockdown so they had absolutely nothing to talk about.

Interviewer: Ok yeah if you can remember correctly the conflicts that happened during this. You said you got to know some through the media and you got to know about the others through your friends that physically witnessed those events do you think there is like any significant difference between what your friends said happened and what the media reported

Interviewee: No. I would say there was no real difference at all. The media reported that there were boys going around looting shops and houses and that was practically the same thing that my friends reported the ones who stayed at Ikorodu like a social media friend I would say she's more like an acquaintance more than a friend another one leaves at Festas.

Interviewer: ok. How do you think media representation of ethnic conflicts increase or decrease during the pandemic?

Interviewee: How did it increase or decrease during the pandemic? I would say it did decrease during the pandemic because during the pandemic people were only concerned about surviving

so I would say there was basically nothing like any conflict during the covid-19 and most people were more focused on that particular issue as at then.

Interviewer: ok watching the news and reading about conflicts during overnight thing you just said covid-19 so this question does not apply.

How is the media representation of conflict I mean you said there was always been conflict even before covid-19 so about the media representation of this conflict how do you think like it's it was like a comparison between before pandemic and during pandemic was there a difference between how they reported conflicts in Nigeria.

Interviewee: There was no conflict I will just say that during covid 19 when the lockdown was issued everything came to a standstill and after covid-19 everything just went back to how it was so I don't think of it as a positive or negative influence everything was just on a standstill and after covid everything went back to normal.

Interviewer: OK how do you feel about other ethnic groups in Lagos state

Interviewee: Other ethnic groups in Lagos state I have some reserved notions about some ethnic groups but like I am basically somebody who actually believes that irrespective of our ethnic groups we are basically one I did not judge a person based on their ethnic groups totally but they are just sometimes that they do things and you just come to a conclusion like this is your ethnic groups and this is how you are sometimes I say Muslims and there is an ethnic group that is called I also in Lagos state there was an event that happened recently and that just made me to start seeing them in a way we had gotten into an accident and let's just say it was not our fault it was nobody's fault we got into an accident with a bad guy and the way they decided to resolve the conflict was bad because they smashed our glass which they had to change and all.

So when you ask me how I see the Muslim people I feel like because it was that was out they were brought up basically Hausa people are naturally same as people who are from a poor state most of them and not expose academically so the way they reason is beneath our a person who has gone through school behaves and again I just have this notion that Igbos are people when they go into business with you there's try as much as possible to see how they can maximize profit and the time to try to cheat you but that is just basically it's the way I see these two ethnic groups.

Interviewer: ok you said you have reserve notions about some ethnic groups what will you say formed this notion is it because of your own personal experiences?

Interviewee: That was my own personal experience with them like I said I grew up in Kaduna and growing up in Kaduna I experienced some conflict that my parents experienced first-hand there was issues about Sharia and I see the way Muslims behave the way they Hausa boys do behave when it comes to schooling they will rather bed than go through the academic process of becoming financially stable for themselves they will rather go through the process of I'm begging just to earn a living down to go through school to get a certificate get a job and earn a living so I grew up in Kaduna I know the way they think and I feel like religion plays like a negative impact on the way they actually do things.

Growing up in Kaduna there was the issue of conflict why the issue of conflict arise was because of religion Christian this Muslim that it was basically because of religion I can remember the period of miss world I think in 2001 there was a miss world and they said the miss world had insulted their god. That was even the major reason why I left Kaduna and why I am currently in Lagos I feel compared to other places Lagos is safe like in the north now they currently have issues about kidnapping it might be about Sharia about Fulani herdsmen try to slaughter Christian it might be boko haram trying to fight for a lost cause.

So when I see most other person's do I have few friends that are educated I just feel like most of these people tend to behave the way they are because they are not socially and academically exposed so that is just what is to blame and I think it has to be with their background and I think the people they are surrounded by and that is how I feel about also guys basically and the issue that happened recently about them getting into a fight and smashing our screen for no just reason, that made no sense made me conclude that that is how majority of them are.

Interviewer: ok aside these personal experiences do you think maybe do you discuss with your friends about other ethnic groups and does it sound as a basic for forming the notions that you have?

Interviewee: Yes. I do discuss with my friends about ethnic groups most times it usually comes as a joke I don't know I just have this feeling that for Igbos when it comes to when it comes to handling business most times they are usually focused on profit they tend to make an at times they end up cheating you. This is a conversation I have with people, when you ask people around, they tell you Igbos are too money conscious that is how I see them people who are very money conscious.

Interviewer: okay do you have any close friend that is a Hausa or Igbo

Interviewee: Yes. I have a couple of friends that are Hausa but I won't call them friends per say I'm the kind of friend who likely need to define the people in my corner. I would say majority of people I have in my contact our acquaintance and I have acquaintance probably secondary school mates colleague from work NYSC colleagues so I just different people like that and I do have people that are like my colleague at the place of work she really did make me conclude on that particular notion I had because there was an issue I had and I was not really pleased about it so we were giving funds by the management of my company to go shop for a particular outfit and she had given us price for that particular outfit and she because she has like a side business she sells clothes and the management has offered to get us those clothes for free but since she was a member of a staff and she has access to those items we were in need of we decided to go through her but later we discovered that our prices were too outrageous we went online and when we compared the price we discovered that she was trying to make double profit which was crazy.

Interviewer: based on research do you know that the major ethnic group in Lagos are Yoruba and their other ethnic groups are under the minority groups. Belonging to the minority groups how do you think the Lagosian from the majority group acts towards you.

Interviewee: Regardless of that I understand that mood Lagos is mostly dominated by Yoruba and that is because Lagos is a Yoruba state but Lagos as varieties compared to other States and it is one of the most developed state and Lagos is one is was one of the federal capital Territory before it was moved to Abuja and if it is a federal territory it's doesn't belong to any ethnic group until after it was moved to Abuja so that was when people did come to say Lagos is my ethnic group but then at that particular point it means Lagos is a state that belongs to no man but the major reasons we do have Yoruba is because they are the major indigenes. But when you come to Lagos, you'll find out they are so many people especially on this part of the island. The island is not very much dominated by the Yoruba.

But when you come to Lagos you find out that many of those around you and not even your tribe like many of those I work with. I have worked with different companies when I come to Lagos. And the first company I worked with we had just one Yoruba staff and that was the MD then the second company I worked with there was literally no Yoruba person the third company I did working we had just 2 Yoruba out of like about 10. The last place I did working we are just one Yoruba.

So, think about that that is what I am drawing my conclusion from do you get so I don't want to hundred percent believe that Lagos is mostly dominated by the Yoruba with the way people make it seem. I understand that yes, we have so many you about you just because the initial forefathers are Yoruba. I believe that Lagos is a state that belongs to no ethnic group it is a state that belongs to no tribe it is a state that belongs to all so when it comes to certain things, I don't think they have the issue of discrimination here I don't see people so different like say ok this is your state I don't have that feeling towards them.

Interviewer: in learning about other ethnic groups what would you say is your major source of information

Interviewee: World of the mouths I am not so much of a reader so just when I get to hear about different ethnic groups but I have never heard about before it is usually word of the mouth when someone tells me. I am the kind of person that I care very little about this kind of things I feel like the world is evolving.

there was a time when your parents will tell you, you have to marry someone from your tribe. I feel like the world is changing in this contemporary age you don't find people linking up with other persons because of their tribe and religion so I am the kind of person who have not dated someone who is from the same tribe as me. So, what I am trying to say is that those things are not things that I try to concern myself with I don't really make it my business to go so much to know or to enquire. Most times when I make conversations with person the last thing I ask is their ethnic group where are you from and most times we know that we have like the political zones are you from the North are you Igbo. That is just the way people make it seem like we have the three major ethnic groups like they try to divide all the minor ethnic groups into this major ethnic groups.

Interviewer: ok. Have you noticed if the media talks a lot or little about your own ethnic group?

Interviewee: The media doesn't really talk much about my ethnic group I feel like the only ethnic group that they do focus on are the major ethnic groups and I feel like because they are mostly populated compared to other ethnic groups. they are mostly dominated compared to other ethnic groups so I hardly hear about my ethnic groups on TV or the news the ethnic groups that you get to hear about are majorly Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Interviewer: thank you. So to wrap up I'll just like to ask some yes or no questions.

If you are a landlord in Lagos, will you rent out your apartment to someone from other ethnic groups

Interviewee: Yes I can rent my apartment to someone who is not from my ethnic group I can rent my apartment to anybody but they are some background check that I will probably do before I go ahead to rent my apartment like I would not like to rent out my apartment to someone who probably do not have a corporate job I would not want to rent my apartment depending on the apartments if I was a landlord living in a particular house or probably I was living in a two-bedroom apartment and then I have a two-bedroom apartment and I see a family of six coming to living that two bedroom apartment I won't be comfortable renting that apartment to them because I would believe.

There are so many factors that come into renting apartment I'm the kind of person that I like to get full information and detail because I've heard so many stories here in Lagos and I understand that it should not be an issue...

Interviewer: does this also applied your down around if you are the person wanting to rent an apartment and the owner of the house is from another ethnic group.

Interviewee: Yes. if the reason he gives is reasonable I won't mind if it does not rent the apartment to me.

Interviewer: let's paint a picture that you have a younger sister and the younger sister wants to have a romantic relationship with someone from another ethnic group will you be in support of that or not.

Interviewee: I will be in support of any ethnic group except Hausa. I am scared of them like they are so obsessed with religion they are so obsessed with religion so I will not want my younger sister marrying any person who is from the North who is Hausa. I am dating someone from the North but is not Hausa. He is a Christian.

So, I will not be in support of any of my friends in fact who are not Muslims going ahead to date somebody.

Interviewer: as an employer will you employ someone from different ethnic group other than yours.

Interviewee: Yes, so far you meet the qualifications I will employ anyone from any ethnic group.

Interviewer: an employee let's say you have two options like you're looking for a job then you have the option to choose between two jobs, then one employer is from your ethnic group then the other one is from another ethnic group and let's say the two jobs have the same benefits which one will you choose?

Interviewee: I will pick the job with someone that is not from my ethnic group there is something I do not like it is over familiarity. people tend to over reason things when they see you, they are like you graduated from the same school they will refer to you like my sister when you people are from the same ethnic group, they refer to you as my brother.

Interviewer: thank you. Do you think having other ethnic groups in Lagos reduces your chance of succeeding in your career.

Interviewee: no. As a matter of fact, I feel like having so many ethnic groups in Lagos state increasing my chance of succeeding.

I have heard stories of people that are from the North and they will tell you this person did not get this job because it's not a Northerner. But in Lagos those cases you hardly hear cases like that because there are so many ethnic groups and people have that Lagos to be a state that is for everyone. In Lagos as compared to other States it would have disadvantage on me being successful but here I think I have a higher advantage of having a successful career in Lagos state.

Interviewer: So, if I get that correctly that means Lagos has lesser ethnic bias compared to other States in Nigeria.

Interviewee: yes.

Interviewer: is there any other thing you like to add.

Interviewee: not that I can think of now I can't think of anything so I am good.

Interviewer: we have come to the end of the interview thank you so much for your time it means a lot.

Appendix 6: Coding and Analysis

6.1 Open Coding

The screenshot shows the NVivo interface with the 'Ethnic Polarization' node selected. The 'Nodes' panel on the left lists 'COVID', 'Ethnic', 'Media', and 'Person'. The main window displays three references:

- Reference 1 - 1.78% Coverage**
ahem, contact, maybe through friends, people telling you their audio, people telling you things you've gone through, it's just from people, not from the social media, not from a media, not from mass media but what people have experienced, people experiences yeah
- Reference 2 - 2.12% Coverage**
Yeah, we are... I'll use the word; we're co-habiting. You know, when you're different from... in a way when your ethnic background is different from your host community, you tend to learn the language by hook or crook. So, when you go to a typical Yoruba market and they start speaking the dialect and, you tell them you're not from Yoruba, the person in question will happily ask you to learn or... yeah, she will revert to English or Pidgin-as to communicate effectively.
- Reference 3 - 1.46% Coverage**
Yeah, people are beginning to embrace social media in varieties of ways; we have them try to propagate our culture. People say we are of the minority. But, with the aid of social media, and the various platforms, most of those that are into show-biz tend to portray our own community-my own ethnic group, in time-line

The screenshot shows the NVivo interface with the 'Personal Relationship & ethnicity' node selected. The 'Nodes' panel on the left lists 'COVID', 'Ethnic', 'Media', and 'Person'. The main window displays three references:

- Reference 5 - 1.51% Coverage**
One of my friend is a Yoruba person, from the Yoruba land, from my state also. And that is Oyo state. So, I have enough friend which we are bit far from each other. He's from Kogi State. And we're doing well. We communicate from time to time but not everytime. We only see each other when need be.
- Reference 6 - 1.05% Coverage**
Social media, WhatsApp and Facebook. Yeah, WhatsApp and Facebook. Just WhatsApp and Facebook and I think text messaging added up to that. Then through calls too. That's how we stayed in touch with each other.
- Reference 7 - 0.20% Coverage**

6.2 Hierarchy chart for measuring the most and least prominent theme



