

Reactions to the Coronavirus: A Content Analysis Examining the Extent to Which Media Shapes Public Reactions in Response to COVID-19

Tyler Kachulak

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the extent to which mass media exposure shapes public reactions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A purposive sampling procedure was used to employ a content analysis on a sample of 100 of the most recent comments that included reactions towards COVID-19 from a *CBC* news article. An open-coding procedure was utilized to examine any themes or categories present in the comments and the frequency of occurrence of any themes or categories was recorded. Results showed that eight categories of reactions were present: Fear, Warnings, Frivolous, Anger, Hope, Inevitable, Science, and Environment. Further sub-categories were identified within the overarching themes of Fear, Warnings, Frivolous, and Anger. This study demonstrated that fear is the most prevalent reaction towards COVID-19, keeping in line with existing research that media exposure and its use of fear-mongering tactics play a central role in shaping public reactions in response to pandemics.

Keywords: Mass media, pandemic, MERS, fear, coronavirus, H1N1, public reaction, SARS.

Introduction

The media is the largest avenue through which information reaches the general public today. Social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, newspapers, news sites and news channels such as *CTV* or *Global*, blogs, radio, and more all keep society informed about relevant, current events from around the globe. Although mass media serves as an informational tool for the general public, it also plays a significant role in influencing the views and actions of the public. Opinions, voices, and actions are shaped through the fear-mongering tactics of the media (Crossman, 2019), and this is apparent within the current coronavirus pandemic – more commonly known as COVID-19.

Existing literature has explored the ways in which mass media influenced the actions and perceptions of the general public during previous pandemics. Specifically, Ludolph et al. (2018) investigated the effects of mass media exposure and interpersonal communication on the uptake of preventative measures in Hong Kong residents during the MERS outbreak in 2015. They found that mass media itself did not have a direct influence on the uptake of preventative measures. However, media had a direct influence on interpersonal communication and as a result, interpersonal communication had a direct effect on the uptake of preventative measures. This study emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication and its subsequent effects on the uptake of preventative measures within the realm of mass media.

Moreover, Mesch et al. (2013) examined the extent to which media exposure translated into growing levels of fear over becoming infected during the 2009 H1N1 influenza outbreak. They found that as media coverage became more centered around the H1N1 pandemic, fear levels grew over becoming infected with H1N1. However, they could not directly demonstrate a causal relationship between whether increased media consumption led to higher fear levels over becoming infected, or whether growing fears over becoming infected translated into increased media consumption surrounding the H1N1 pandemic. Nonetheless, this study demonstrates a relationship between mass media exposure and fear levels over becoming infected with an illness.

Furthermore, Davis et al. (2014) conducted focus groups and qualitative interviews in Australia and the UK to determine why respondents reacted in a complacent manner towards the H1N1 pandemic. That being said, do people lack concern over the health and safety of themselves and others, or is it the result of disinterest and lack of trust over the media? They found that respondents were not complacent in their view towards the pandemic, but they were complacent towards the media and the messages that were provided by media outlets. Davis et al. (2018) utilized the term “pandemia” (p. 514) to express the power media outlets hold over shaping public reactions towards pandemics. This demonstrates not a complacent attitude towards the pandemic, rather it highlights the lack of credibility held by the public towards media outlets simply due to the fact that media hype generates mass hysteria, thus leading to widespread panic and frenzy.

Additionally, Pieri (2018) analyzed the relationship between Western media outlets and its subsequent effect on public perception of risk contagion and policy discourse in the UK as a result of the Ebola crisis in 2014 – 2015. The results yielded interesting findings in that when the outbreak began in December of 2013 in Guinea, Pieri (2018) found that 31 news outlets dated from January 2014 – May 2014 classified the outbreak as a localised African crisis, as opposed to a global pandemic. This resulted in sparse UK media coverage and policy reform, with Pieri (2018) even noting that one French politician stated that this localised African crisis may actually help with the “overpopulation issues in Africa and alleviating Europe’s migration problems” (p. 80). However, by June 2014, Pieri (2018) collected 15 UK articles that expressed the Ebola crisis as a regional crisis and “out of control” (p. 81). It was not until August 2014 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Ebola outbreak as an epidemic that is of international concern, thus prompting US president at the time, Barack Obama, to come out and publicly declare the outbreak as a global security threat in September of 2014. Following Obama’s public speech on the outbreak, 824 articles on the Ebola crisis emerged from various media outlets, compared to the 225 articles that emerged in response to WHO’s declaration of the outbreak as an epidemic of international concern. As a result, panic and frenzy over contracting Ebola swept over the UK. In turn, the UK implemented heavy screening measures at their ports of entry along the border. This time frame of events during the Ebola outbreak clearly exemplifies the power that Western media outlets hold on public perception of risk contagion and subsequently, public policy reform in the UK. Moreover, it is important to note who is the face of media outlets during times of crisis. Therefore, why did the UK react with such panic when Obama publicly declared the Ebola outbreak as a global security threat, despite the WHO declaring the outbreak as an epidemic one month prior? Not only does this study outline the

effects of Western media outlets and its effect on the UK's public perception of risk contagion and public policy, but also the importance of who and where the message originates from.

Hegemony is a term used to describe the manner in which "certain ways of life and thoughts are dominant, in which one concept is diffused throughout public society in all its institutions and private manifestations" ("Fear of Crime and Media Exposure," 2016, p.4, as cited in Altheide, 1985, p. 57). The media is one of the most convenient and fastest ways to reach public masses and uses its credibility to navigate through the lives of people, ultimately securing some level of control over the public during times of crisis, especially during a pandemic. ("Fear of Crime and Media Exposure," 2016). As a result, the term "media hegemony" ("Fear of Crime and Media Exposure, 2016, as cited in Altheide, 1985, p. 57) has been coined to describe the media and its efforts in conveying dominant discourses or ways of life to the public masses.

One of the ways in which mass media contributes to shaping public reactions is through a fear-mongering tactic known as moral panic. Stanley Cohen introduced this concept of moral panic, outlining that mass media exposure creates levels of fear that spread throughout society in response to a perceived threat to the well-being of societal values and norms (Crossman, 2019). This process carries out through 5 stages: first, something or someone is perceived as a threat to societal norms and values, and ultimately viewed as a threat to the well-being of society. Second, the media relays this perceived threat to community members in a simplistic, recognizable manner. Next, public arousal ignites as a result of this symbolic representation of the perceived threat provided by the media. Fourth, political authorities and policymakers attempt to enact policy reform and new laws in response to this perceived threat. Last, moral panic and subsequent actions of political authorities and policymakers lead to social change in response to the perceived threat (Crossman, 2019, para. 4). These five stages ultimately reflect the power mass media exposure has on shaping public perceptions and actions towards a given threat in society.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a content analysis on a news article and explore the extent to which mass media exposure shapes public reactions in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Previous research and theoretical concepts have already demonstrated a relationship between media exposure and its effects on public reactions to pandemics, however, no previous research has centered around COVID-19. This content analysis is important because it will add to previous knowledge surrounding the power mass media holds in shaping public reactions. Moreover, the results of this content analysis will demonstrate whether or not these findings are in line with previous research findings – confirming that fear is a common reaction to pandemics perpetuated by media exposure.

Method

Sample

The sample for this content analysis includes 100 of the most recent comments, out of a total of 5,741 comments, related to reactions towards COVID-19 from the *CBC* news article titled "Go home and stay home, Trudeau tells Canadians as government warns of COVID-19 enforcement measures," posted on March 23, 2020.

Sample Selection

CBC news is accessible online to the general public, containing hundreds of different news articles available to read and examine. *CBC* was selected on the basis for being one of Canada's leading national news outlets. For the purpose of this study, a purposive sampling method was utilized to gather articles centered around the COVID-19 pandemic using keywords such as coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, and media. From there, this article was selected because it contained the highest number of comments compared to other articles shared by *CBC* – indicating that a great amount of discussion took place.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This content analysis is conducted for the purpose of examining the extent to which media exposure shapes public reactions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Comments that included reactions to COVID-19 were selected for analysis. Replies to comments are also included as they provided for additional discussion to take place between respondents. All other comments and replies that did not include reactions to COVID-19 were excluded from analysis.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study are themes as evident in salient meanings and key words present in the 100 most recent comments related to reactions towards COVID-19 from the *CBC* news article titled "Go home and stay home, Trudeau tells Canadians as government warns of COVID-19 enforcement measures" (n=100).

Settings and Materials

Data collection and the coding procedure were carried out at the principal researcher's area of residence. Necessary materials included a laptop and internet access to locate the news article and units of analysis, as well as an iPhone to take screenshots for data collection and analysis.

Coding Procedure

Each of the 100 comments were individually examined for any salient meanings or keywords. Once the initial codes were developed, the comments were re-evaluated for any present themes or patterns that could be coded into categories. Further sub-categories were identified based on overarching themes or categories that were present.

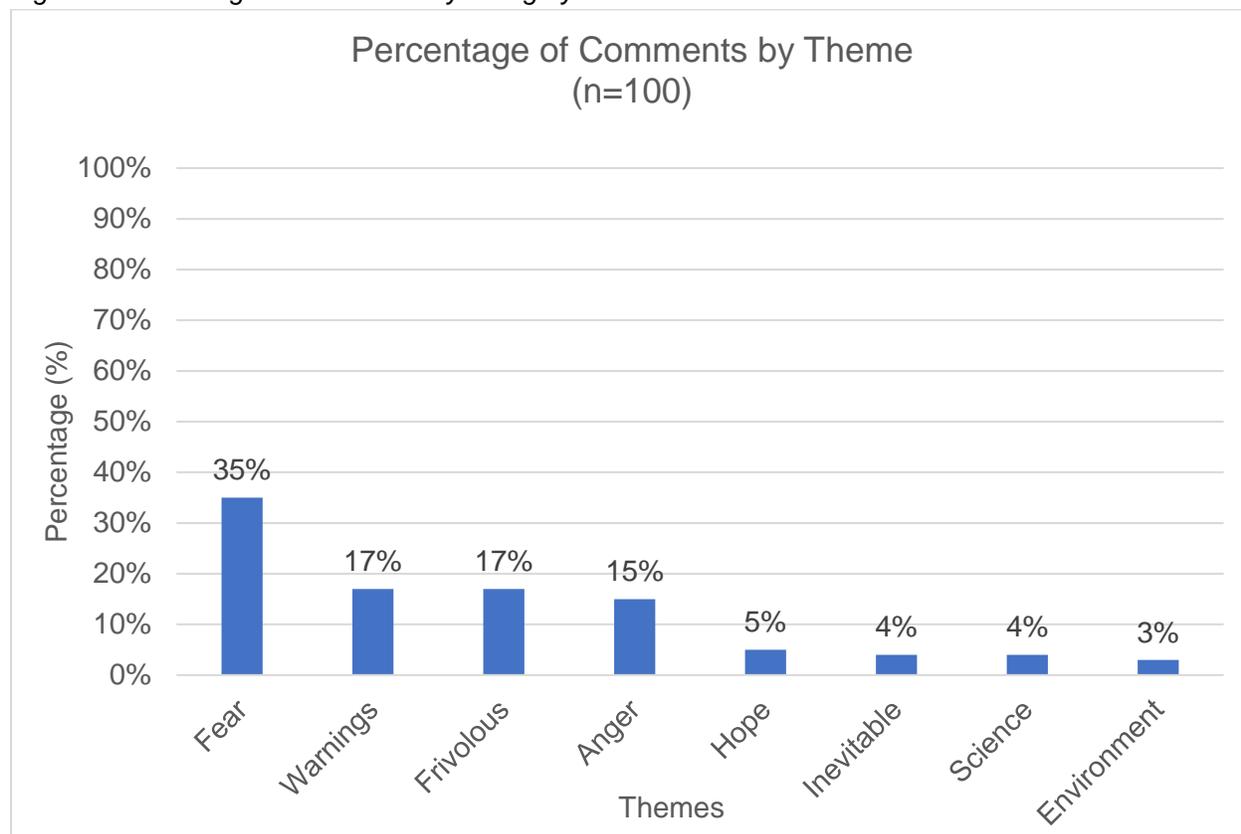
Design

A content analysis of the themes in 100 of the most recent comments related to public reactions in response to COVID – 19 from the *CBC* news article titled "Go home and stay home, Trudeau tells Canadians as government warns of COVID-19 enforcement measures."

Results

Results revealed 8 main themes: 1) Fear, 2) Warnings, 3) Frivolous, 4) Anger, 5) Hope, 6) Inevitable, 7) Science, and 8) Environment (see Figure 1). The overarching themes identified were Fear, Warnings, Frivolous, and Anger, and as a result, sub-categories were identified within these themes.

Figure 1. Percentage of Comments by Category.



Fear

Fear refers to comments that indicated any fear in relation to the COVID-19 virus. Fear was the most prevalent theme, as 35% of the sample was classified within this category (see Figure 1). Within this category, 4 more sub-categories were identified: a) Becoming Infected, b) General Fearful Comments, c) Economy, and d) Conspiracy Theories.

Becoming Infected refers to comments representing fear over becoming infected with the COVID-19 virus. This was the most prevalent sub-category, with 23% of the sample representing fear over becoming infected with COVID-19 (see Figure 2). For example, one comment stated, "I have started to conserve food. Now that community transmission is official, I do not want to go shopping again."

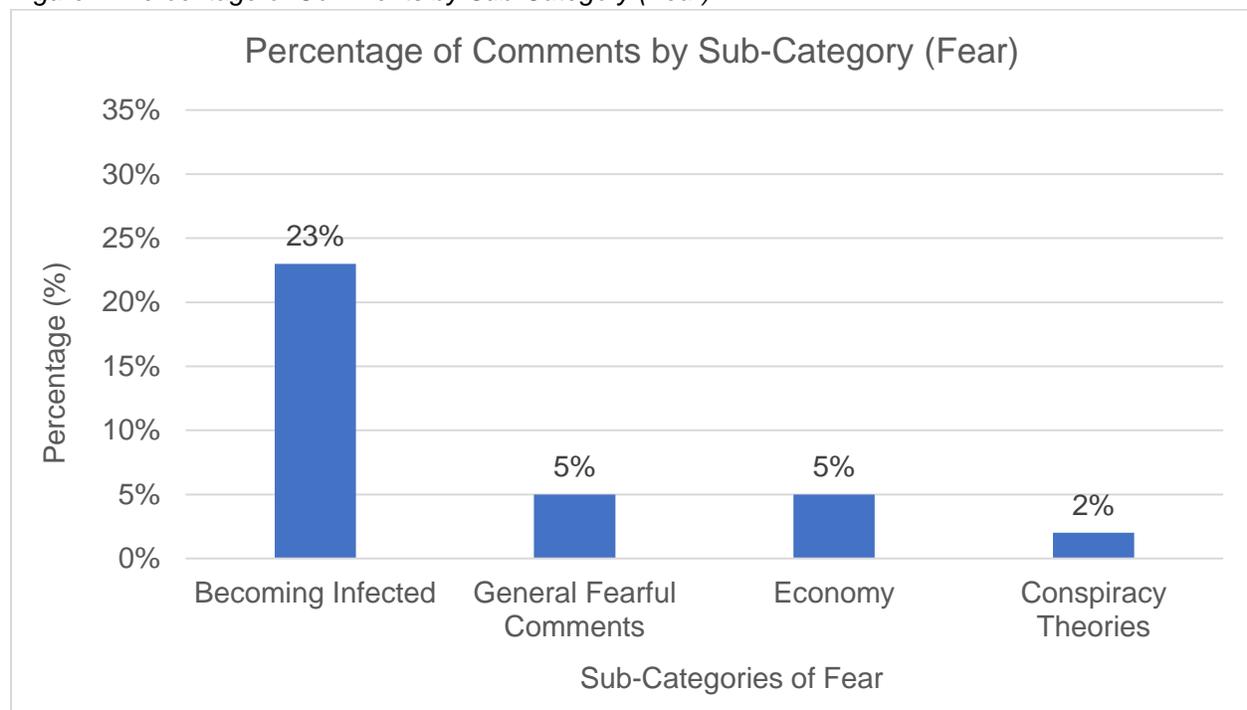
General Fearful Comments refers to comments indicating general fear in relation to COVID-19. This was the second most prevalent sub-category as it encompasses 5% of the

sample (see Figure 2). One comment stated: “We don’t even know how many Canadians are infected...the number is probably 10x higher than reported.”

Economy refers to any comments in relation to fear over Canada’s economic decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. This sub-category placed third in prevalence within the overall category of fear, with 5% of comments being classified as economic fear (see Figure 2). An example of these comments includes “We cannot keep business shuttered without destroying our economy.”

Conspiracy Theories include comments that indicated any fear over conspiracy theories in relation to COVID-19. This sub-category was the least prevalent as only 2% of the sample were related to conspiracy theories (see Figure 2). One example includes, “Anyone get the feeling we’re being robbed, and this virus is just a cover story?”

Figure 2. Percentage of Comments by Sub-Category (Fear).



Warnings

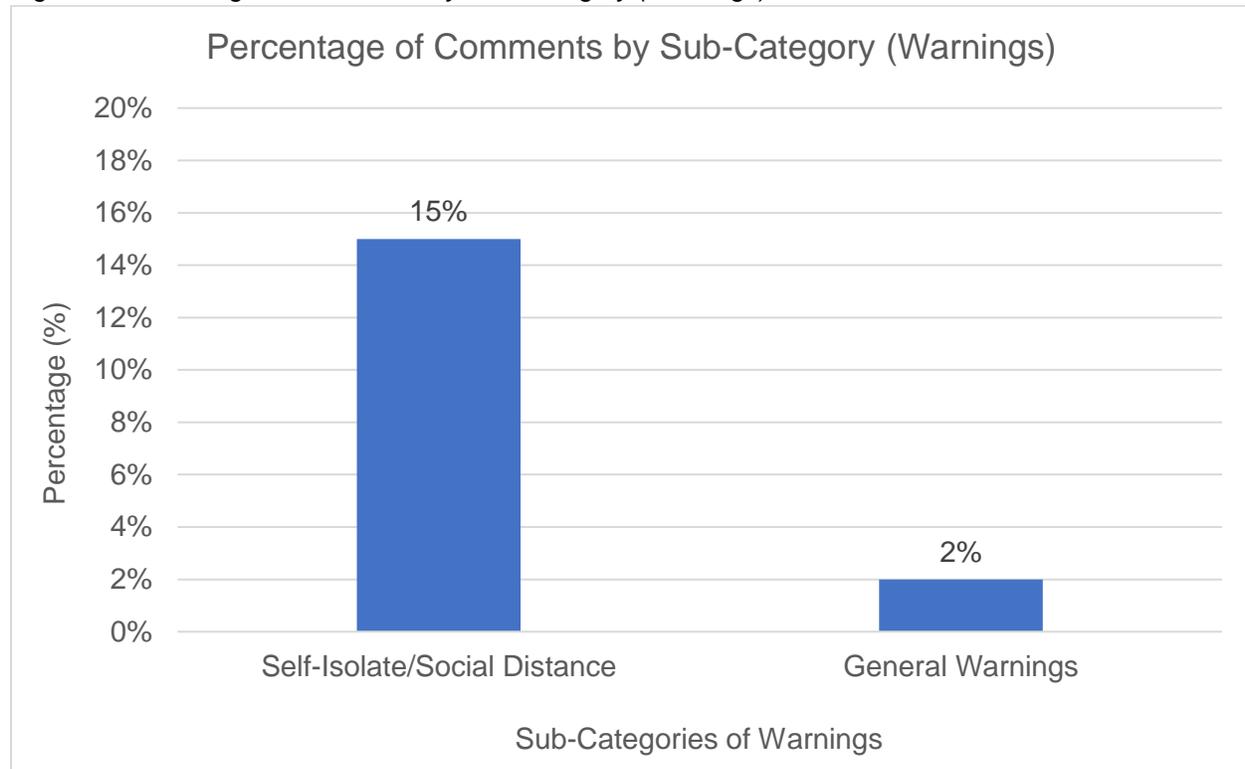
Warnings includes any comments that displayed any cautions or threats to the general public in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This tied for the second most prevalent theme that was identified, as 17% of the sample was comprised of comments representing warnings to the public (see Figure 1). Within this category, 2 more sub-categories were identified: a) Self-Isolate/Social Distance, and b) General Warnings.

Self-Isolate/Social Distance refers to any comments that warned the public to self-isolate, practice social distancing, and to stay safe in order to protect themselves and others who are at risk. This sub-category was the most prevalent of the 2 sub-categories, given that 15% of respondents were classified under self-isolate/social distance (see Figure 3). For

example, one comment stated that “People need to stay home for a while and only go outside if they can do things far enough apart from each other...”

General Warnings refers to comments that represented any general warnings to the public in relation to the virus. Only 2% of the sample comprised of this sub-category, making it the least prevalent of the 2 sub-categories (see Figure 3). An example of these comments includes, “In a couple of weeks, a lot of people will be in trouble.”

Figure 3. Percentage of Comments by Sub-Category (Warnings)



Frivolous

Frivolous refers to any comments that indicated the COVID-19 pandemic is an event that should not be taken as seriously as it currently is. This theme tied as the second most prevalent category since 17% of respondents were categorized as being frivolous (see Figure 1). Within this theme, 3 further sub-categories were identified: a) Sarcasm, b) Media Hype, and c) General Frivolous Comments.

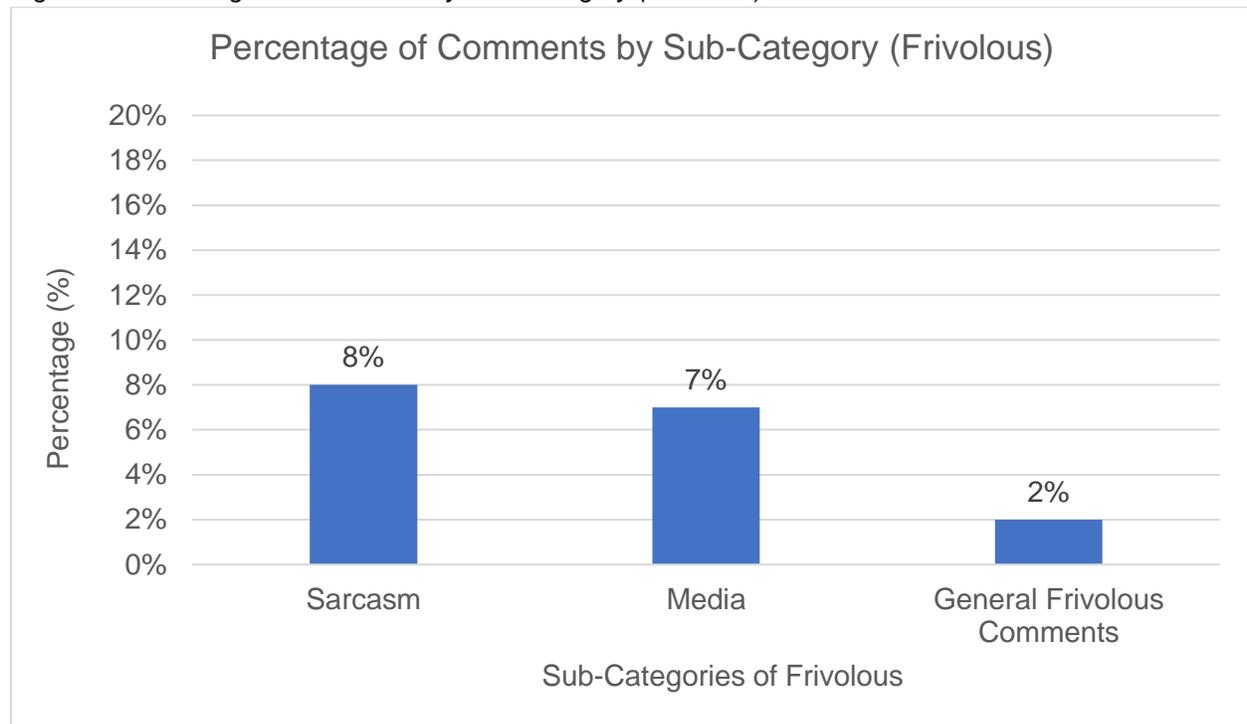
Sarcasm refers to any comments that indicated any satire or mockery in relation to COVID-19. This was the most frequently occurring sub-category under this theme, with 8% of the comments classified as sarcastic (see Figure 4). These comments include ones similar to, “Toilet paper, shipped by mail, would be a thoughtful Easter gift this year instead of chocolate eggs.”

Media includes comments that indicated the pandemic as being blown out of proportion as a result of extensive media coverage centered around the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven

percent of the sample comprised of media hype comments, making it the second most prevalent sub-category under this theme (see Figure 4). For example, comments such as, “The media drives this show folks, not science” were classified under this sub-category.

General Frivolous Comments refers to any comments that demonstrated people not taking the overall COVID-19 pandemic seriously. Only 2% of the comments were classified under this sub-category, making it the least prevalent under this theme (see Figure 4). One example includes, “A harm reduction approach is needed and so far, it’s working. 1550 cases, 20 deaths of 37,590,000 people is really not that bad at all.”

Figure 4. Percentage of Comments by Sub-Category (Frivolous)



Anger

Anger refers to comments that indicated a degree of animosity or anger towards the public as a reaction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Anger was the fourth most prevalent theme identified, with 15% of the sample exhibiting a degree of anger or animosity in their comments (see Figure 1). Within this theme, 4 further sub-categories were also identified: a) Generational Divide, b) Lack of Seriousness, c) Rights and Freedoms, and d) Racism

Generational Divide refers to any angry comments made by one cohort or age group towards another cohort or age group in response to COVID-19. This sub-category tied for being the most prevalent within this theme since it comprised of 5% of the sample (see Figure 5). For example, comments such as, “I have a trip planned in December...those pesky kids better not ruin it for me!” were coded within this sub-category.

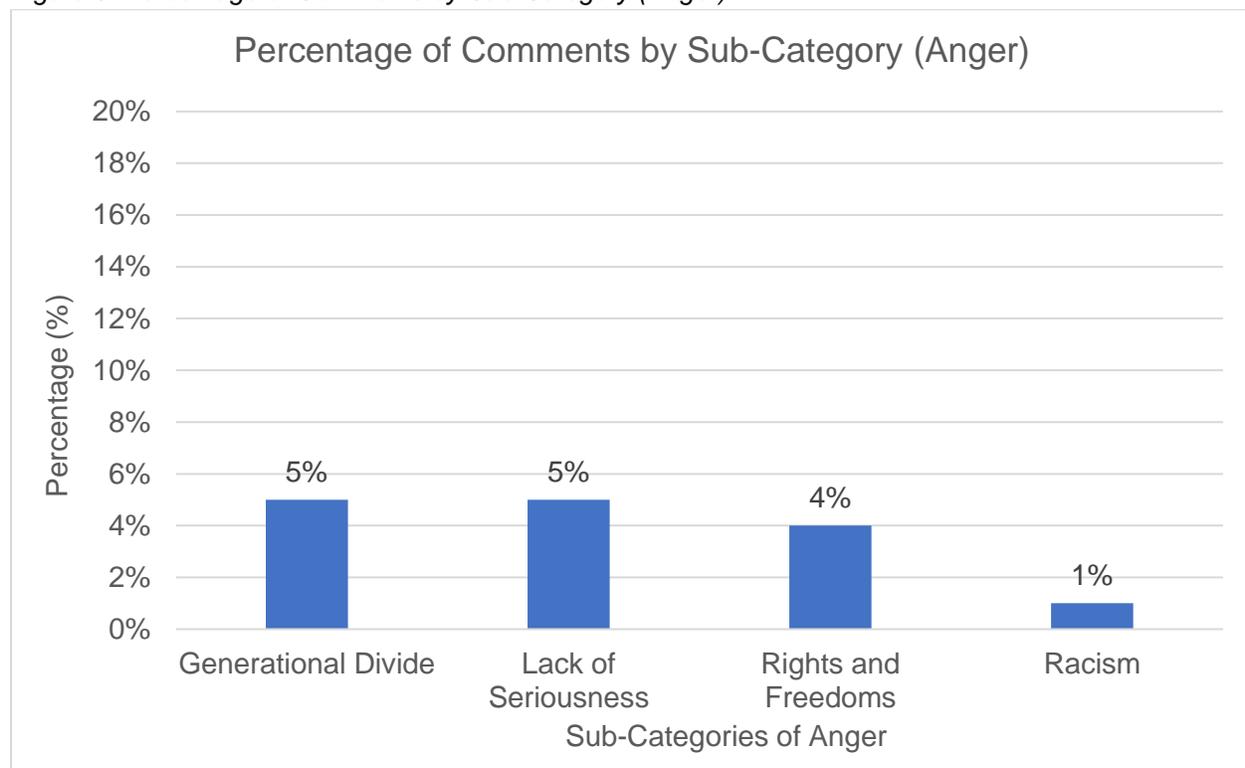
Lack of Seriousness refers to comments that displayed anger as a result of the general public lacking seriousness in response to COVID-19. This is the second most prevalent sub-

category under this theme as it makes up 5% of the sample (see Figure 5). One comment stated, “People have a duty now to not put others at risk. No government can stop people from being selfish...too many selfish people here...”

Rights and Freedoms refers to comments that displayed anger towards the restriction of rights and freedoms in response to COVID-19. Four percent of the sample were classified within this sub-category, making it the third most prevalent under this theme (see Figure 5). For example, one comment said, “There is supposed to be proportionality when it comes to international laws. How does a virus, given the death toll is 20 people, warrant taking away fundamental rights and freedoms in Canada? How can all of the established laws and basic rights for 38 million people be abolished over a handful of deaths?”

Racism refers to any comments that displayed anger towards another race, ultimately blaming them for the COVID-19 outbreak. Only 1% of the sample demonstrated this level of animosity (see Figure 5), with the one comment stating, “We should just stop dealing with China all together, period. There’s no benefit there.”

Figure 5. Percentage of Comments by Sub-Category (Anger).



Hope

Hope includes comments that indicated some degree of hope or optimism in combatting the COVID-19 virus. Hope was identified as the fifth most prevalent theme with 5% of respondents being classified within this category (see Figure 1). For example, one comment read, “This

situation isn't out of control yet...yet...let's just bite the bullet and get through this. Past generations have survived worst."

Inevitable

Inevitable includes comments directed at the virus being viewed as inevitable and, regardless of preventative measures taken to combat it, as an event that is going to occur anyways. This theme is the sixth most prevalent category identified, as 4% of the sample perceived the virus as inevitable despite protective measures (see Figure 1). One comment included, "It is a VERY interconnected world. There is absolutely no way that the arrival of COVID-19 in Canada could have been prevented."

Science

Science includes comments that were directed towards the science behind the COVID-19 virus, including those who agreed, refuted, or determined more science or factual evidence is needed behind the virus. Four percent of respondents made up this category, making it the seventh most prevalent theme identified (see Figure 1). One comment stated, "More science on filter face masks. The coronavirus particle size is of an average of 0.1 microns. Even a 3m N95 mask is only good for particles 0.3 microns and up. The science is debatable."

Environment

Environment includes comments that were directed towards the overall environmental impact of COVID-19. This is the eighth and least prevalent theme to be identified, with only 3% of the comments being classified within this category (see Figure 1). For example, one respondent stated, "Look how great this is for environmental alarmists. Planes are grounded, people are forced to stay at home...most businesses are closing down so no need to go to work. CO² emissions are on their way down."

Table 1. Examples of Comments by Each Category and Sub-Category.

1. Fear	
a) Becoming Infected	<p>"Wash hands please...stop the spread of the virus."</p> <p>"House arrest for everyone...I wish they would have contained this when they saw this spread some months ago..."</p>
b) General Fearful Comments	<p>"How do we survive this pandemic?"</p> <p>"I keep wanting to say ok, I am done with this now...but it's real, people are dying and health care professionals are at risk."</p>

c) Economy	<p>“We need to take steps to bring this to a close asap...month after month of isolation will be the end of our economy.”</p> <p>“I looked into moving away in October 2015...turns out I should’ve to get away from Canada’s economic decline.”</p>
d) Conspiracy Theories	“Something to keep in mind, a virus is the most cost-effective way to wipe a population.”
2. Warnings	
a) Self-Isolate/Social Distance	<p>“Go home and stay home.”</p> <p>“Just stay home...if you don’t have it you will be OK and if you do then you won’t give it to people around you.”</p>
b) General Warnings	“Be smart, stay safe, and keep others safe.”
3. Frivolous	
a) Sarcasm	<p>“Does this mean my face-licking party is cancelled?”</p> <p>“With all this in mind, do I really have to keep a social distance from my cat? He is very concerned.”</p>
b) Media	<p>“We have to avoid media hype...stick to the facts and keep it simple.”</p> <p>“Keep the media hysteria coming.”</p>
c) General Frivolous Comments	“I had a great day today...all fine until I listened the news. Am I the only person whose life doesn’t match the news?”
4. Anger	
a) Generational Divide	<p>“Millennials can’t stop being self-absorbed and entitled...the same as narcissistic sheep refusing to help mitigate the virus.”</p> <p>“This was supposed to last 3-4 weeks...now we might be into this for 2-3 months because self-centered millennials finally decided to stay home.”</p>
b) Lack of Seriousness	<p>“I wonder at what point people will be more concerned about staying alive than insulting political leaders...cases of the virus in Canada have doubled in the past three days.”</p> <p>“Shame on all of you neglecting to educate yourselves and for spreading fear...people need to take this seriously and stay 2m away from others. Calm. Simple.”</p>

c) Rights and Freedoms	<p>"I will do what I want...if I want to have a house party, I will...The Constitution's Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees me that right."</p> <p>"How do you enforce a ban on something protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?"</p>
d) Racism	"We should just stop dealing with China all together, period. There's no benefit there."
5. Hope	<p>"CBC should report the several clinical trials underway to see if existing medications can treat COVID-19...I'm trying to remain optimistic."</p> <p>"Come on everyone, where's the Canadian spirit of everyone pulling together and helping each other get through this?"</p>
6. Inevitable	<p>"There is absolutely nothing that the US or Canada could have done to prevent this virus from infiltrating our masses...the virus is infecting the globe."</p> <p>"The virus is going to run through Canada and the USA...they can't do anything else but prepare."</p>
7. Science	<p>"More science to social distancing of 6ft (2m)...studies on coughing by the CDC suggests viruses and bacteria can travel more than 30ft or 10m!"</p> <p>"Since science is so important by this current federal government. This social distancing by 6 feet or 2m is not in line with the study by MIT on sneezes that were recorded to go 200 feet or 60m!!"</p>
8. Environment	<p>"Some people think this self-isolation is a bad thing...the way I see it...less cars on the road means less CO² and that would save the world."</p> <p>"On the positive side of things, at least the earth and environment is healing since no one can do anything."</p>

Discussion

This content analysis was conducted for the purpose of analyzing the extent to which media exposure shapes public reactions, specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon analyzing 100 of the most recent comments from the *CBC* news article titled, "Go home and stay home, Trudeau tells Canadians as government warns of COVID-19 enforcement measures," the following themes and categories were identified: 1) Fear, 2) Warnings, 3) Frivolous, 4) Anger, 5) Hope, 6) Inevitable, 7) Science, and 8) Environment. Further sub-

categories were identified within the overarching themes of Fear, Warnings, Frivolous, and Anger.

The results indicated that fear was the most prevalent category identified – in other words, fear was the most prevalent reaction in response to COVID-19. This finding highlights the importance of fear-mongering tactics framed by the media and its subsequent effect on public reactions to pandemics, suggesting that findings of this current study are in line with existing literature on the topic. According to Pieri (2018), “newspaper media coverage remains central to the framing of public and policy debates on pandemics in the West...Western media framing of risk of contagion is key to the manner in which a crisis can be perceived as a major pandemic” (p. 88). This demonstrates that fear, primarily within news media outlets, drives the perceptions and reactions of the general public in the midst of pandemics, giving the media a sense of control over the public in terms of how they should engage in the uptake of preventative measures. As a result, it comes as no surprise that fear in response to COVID-19 was the most common reaction in this current study. Furthermore, fear over becoming infected was the most prevalent sub-category identified. Again, this demonstrates that these findings are in line with previous research on media exposure and its use of fear, therefore, translating into public fear over pandemics.

One of the more interesting findings in this content analysis was the prevalence of frivolous comments. Not only that, but this category was identified as the second most prevalent theme. This stands in stark contrast of existing literature and its findings on the relationship between the fear created by media exposure and the power it holds over public reactions. However, Davis et al. (2014) stated that “respondents who did not see the virus as serious – an evident majority – may not lack motivation and be complacent, rather, they may have been skeptical” (p. 514) to reflect that the general public became skeptical over the ways in which media outlets portray pandemics. This knowledge could explain the frequency of such frivolous comments, as well as the frequency of media-related frivolous comments found within the current study in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although, upon comparison between the H1N1 pandemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) stated that the H1N1 virus yielded almost 60.8 million cases and 12,469 deaths in the United States alone between April 12, 2009 – April 10, 2010 (para. 2). However, H1N1 led to anywhere from 151,700 – 575,400 deaths worldwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019, para. 3). In contrast, Romero (2020) notes that as of March 23, 2020, only 2,091 cases have been reported in Canada, and 24 deaths as a result of COVID-19 (Text 4 Hope section, para. 4). Moreover, Lynch (2020) reported that the United States, as of March 23, 2020, has at least 34,354 cases of COVID-19 and 414 deaths. As a result, people may act more complacent or frivolous in their response towards COVID-19 due to the low-scale numbers in terms of infection and deaths when compared to the H1N1 pandemic in 2009. Therefore, the prevalence of frivolous comments can be justified given that Davis et al. (2014) already discovered that UK residents were already complacent towards the UK media outlets. As a result, maybe frivolous comments should have been expected, especially given how weak the number of infection and deaths are resulting from COVID-19 compared to H1N1. However, as the stages of the COVID-19 pandemic progress, it will be interesting to analyze whether a fearful response would remain as the most prevalent response generated by the public, or not.

Last, various media outlets display headlines that are fear-based and driven to control the perceptions, and subsequently, the actions of the public. For example, the source used for the current study contained the words “Go home and stay home,” “government,” “COVID-19,” and “enforcement measures” within the headline. Moreover, the words “quarantine,” “social distancing,” “self-isolate,” and “pandemic” are all terms found within the source to instill fear, and ultimately were used to gain a sense of control over the public in how they should react to the COVID-19 pandemic. Clearly, the hegemonic view provided by the media, or media hegemony, implies that pandemics are something to be fearful of, and anyone who goes against this hegemonic view is punished: “Images, symbols, and news expressed by the media are controlled by a privileged few...and have the power and authority to shape the news” (“Fear of Crime and Media Exposure,” 2016, pp. 4 – 5). Therefore, the concept of media hegemony could explain the overall prevalence of fear as the number one theme identified within the current study – implying that the results of this current study fall in line with existing literature and consequently, maintaining that fear is still very much an aspect of media hegemony during a pandemic.

Limitations

There are a few limitations within the current study. First, the sample size only included 100 of the most recent comments about reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic out of a total of 5,741 comments found in the source. This has negative implications for external validity in that the findings cannot be generalized to the greater population. Second, *CBC* holds the right to remove any comments that are derogatory or negative in any way, and this could have impacted the identification of other themes and categories that may have been present in the comments. Furthermore, the coding procedure may contain bias as the principal researcher interpreted comments from their own perspective, resulting in the current categories present within the findings. This brings up another limitation: inter-coder reliability was not utilized in this study. This holds negative implications for the reliability of this study as another researcher may have interpreted comments differently than the principal researcher, and this could have resulted in different categories or even more categories than what was presented in the findings. Additionally, data collection only included comments from one article posted by *CBC*. This hinders the findings to be generalizable to the greater population as well. Finally, *CBC* has a history of accusations related to being liberally biased in their coverage of news stories. With Trudeau being the current Prime Minister of Canada and leader of the Liberal party urging people to stay home and threatening the public over enforcement measures, this could have prompted respondents to comment in a certain manner, thereby influencing the validity of the study.

Given the limitations discussed above, future studies examining the extent to which media shapes public reactions towards pandemics should consider the following suggestions to ensure greater validity and reliability within their findings. First, future researchers should utilize bigger sample sizes. This would contribute to the generalizability of the findings and thus, would be more representative of the greater population. Furthermore, future studies on this topic should utilize inter-coder reliability in order to increase the reliability of the study. Last,

researchers should conduct a content analysis on multiple news sources as there may be different categories or themes present within the comments in other articles. Following that, it would be interesting to carry out a compare-and-contrast analysis among different news articles to examine which reactions are more frequently occurring in comparison to other articles and sources.

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