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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

**PLACE OF SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM IN COVERAGE OF A CRISIS:
EXAMINING REPORTING OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KENYAN
NEWSPAPERS**

By

REBECCA MUTISO
543831

A research thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Digital Journalism

Nairobi, Kenya

May, 2021
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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in Digital Journalism

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of
REBECCA MUTHEU MUTISO-543831, find it satisfactory and recommended that it be
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DECLARATION

PLACE OF SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM IN COVERAGE OF A CRISIS: EXAMINING REPORTING OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KENYAN NEWSPAPERS

I, **REBECCA MUTHEU MUTISO-543831**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my research endeavours.

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, James, children, Peter, Grace and Agnes for their love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank God for giving me the strength to complete this thesis. Words don't do justice to the contribution of the following individuals who have been of great help and support throughout my studies and making this thesis possible. I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Sam Kamau and Dr. Samuel Ngigi, for their undivided guidance throughout the journey towards the completion of this thesis. Without their help, this research could not be possible. Special thanks to the editors and journalists from the Daily Nation and Standard Group who gladly enriched my knowledge with their exceptional insights in the sector and for their generosity and patience. I appreciate all the support I got from Hesbon Owilla, Henry Kibira, Paul Kimweli, and the entire AKU-GSMC faculty during the writing of this research project.

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya in March 2020 created an unprecedented challenge to media houses. Media coverage of the disease raised questions on the best approach that can be used for reporting the Covid-19 crisis and whether journalists should only report the reality of the social and economic impact of the pandemic or they have a duty to also tell stories on the responses to the crisis, an approach referred to as solutions journalism. The study's objectives were: - (i) examine the major themes in the coverage of Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya's media, (ii) to explore the extent to which stories in the Daily Nation and Standard newspapers incorporated solutions journalism approaches in the coverage of Covid-19 pandemic, (iii) to assess the level of awareness of solutions journalism among editors in the Daily Nation and Standard newspaper, and (iv) establish the challenges journalists from Daily Nation and the Standard Newspaper encountered in covering stories of the pandemic from a solutions journalism lens. The researcher adopted normative social responsibility theory as theoretical framework. The study employed mixed methods approach and descriptive research design to assess whether the solutions journalism approach was adopted in the coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya. The researcher carried out quantitative content analysis of stories published in the Daily Nation and Standard Newspapers between March 14 and May 14, 2020. Data was collected through code sheet, key informant interview, and focus group discussion. The findings denote low awareness of solution journalism among the journalists from the two media stations resulting to 15% application in the coverage of Covid-19 pandemic. The reportage around Covid-19 focused on the statistics of the cases, health guidelines and protocols, government restrictions and the impacts of the pandemic. Most of the Covid-19 news was presented in a negative manner thereby creating fear and panic among the readers. The Covid-19 pandemic created a new norm in which journalists had to conform to which created challenges in gathering and reportage of the pandemic. The study concluded that although the media played a role in creating awareness on the pandemic, most of the coverage was negative. The study further, established that there is low awareness on solutions journalism, with only 16 per cent of stories on covid taking a solutions approach. The study recommended that there is need to train journalists and editors on solutions journalism, develop policies that encourage adoption of solutions journalism and forge partnerships with stakeholders who support the development of a solutions approach. The researcher suggested further investigation on whether other mediums such as radio, TV and digital platforms incorporate solutions journalism in their reportage.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AKU-GSMC:	Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBVA:	Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria
CJN:	Constructive Journalism Network
CNN:	Cable News Network
COVID-19:	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
H1N1:	Swine Flu
HIV/AIDS:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IJNET:	International Journalists Network
KII:	Key Informant Interviews
MERS:	Middle East Respiratory syndrome
NYT:	New York Times
SARS:	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SJN:	Solutions Journalism Network
SJP:	Catalyst Journalism Project
SPSS:	Statistical Package for the Social Science.
SOJO:	Solution Journalism
UN:	United Nations
WEF:	World Economic Forum
WHO:	World Health Organisation